

# The Matter of God's Character:

Creation, the Cross, and Why This  
Particular World

DRAFT

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## INTRODUCTION: The Question Under Consideration

*"The story is the thing."* Samuel Sidney McClure

Those of us who belong to one of the Christian faith communities are used to a certain approach, a particular framework for understanding the biblical story. In our churches, we have been taught to think in terms of the story outline as Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. God creates a perfect world. Humanity, exercising genuine free will, rebels against God and breaks what was good. God, in His mercy, eventually sends His Son to redeem what was lost. And one day, God will restore all things to their original perfection, or perhaps to something even better.

This framework has served Christian thought for centuries and is generally considered satisfactory. I have certainly found it so. It takes sin seriously. It honors the necessity of grace. It provides a coherent narrative structure for reading Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. And as far as it goes, I am persuaded that it is certainly correct.<sup>1</sup>

And yet I am dissatisfied with the story as far as it goes. For me, and I think for others, it doesn't answer the question of why God created anything in the first place. Or, having created the world, why is it as it is. It seems as if theologians and pastors just shrug, assume some divine purpose, and leave it at that. Of course, the naturalist, who holds that the material universe is all there is and processes already present are responsible for what exists, also just capitulates to the brute presence of what they see.<sup>2</sup>

I'm going to propose that the traditional framework positions God's activity in the world as fundamentally *reactive*. In this view, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ could be understood as "Plan B." An emergency intervention necessitated by a catastrophe. God created perfection, and humanity chose rebellion. In response, God implements damage control. The Cross becomes a rescue mission. Redemption a repair job. The Incarnation is God's response to a problem for which He didn't desire and wasn't in the original plan.

This raises significant questions. If God truly possesses perfect foreknowledge, and orthodox Christian theology insists that He does, then how could the Fall have happened? If God knew that Adam and Eve would rebel, why did He create *this* specific world, with these specific parameters, where such rebellion was not merely possible but, given His foreknowledge, certain to occur?

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<sup>1</sup> My reasons for being persuaded of the correctness of the story are numerous and are the result of philosophy, science, history, and the person of Jesus. To enter into my general thinking on the reasons for my apologetic, see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003). Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs* (B&H Studies in Christian Apologetics) (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016). Joshua Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith* (Lisle: IVP Academic, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> I'm reminded of Ayn Rand and her love of logic and reality. "The primacy of existence (of reality) is the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of any consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an identity. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists—and that man gains knowledge by looking outward." *The Ayn Rand Letter*, Vol. II, No. 9, January 29, 1973. Also Jerry Coyne, *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible* (London: Penguin Books, 2016)

A standard response, that God permits evil in order to preserve genuine human freedom provides a partial answer. But it doesn't quite address the deeper question: Why did God choose to create a world where the exercise of free will could result in *this much* suffering? Could He not have created a different world where free creatures would freely choose not to rebel? Or a world where rebellion would not cascade into such catastrophic consequences? The implication is that He should have done.

These are not new questions. Philosophers and theologians from Augustine to Plantinga have wrestled with various formulations of the problem of evil. But perhaps we have been asking the wrong question. Perhaps instead of asking, "Why did God *allow* the world to break?" we should be asking, "Why did God *create* this kind of world in the first place?" It does seem rather intentional.

### **A Different Starting Point**

What if we read the biblical story not forward from Genesis, but backward from Revelation? What if we begin not with creation, but with consummation? What picture emerges when we start our reflections at the *telos* (τέλος), the end or goal, rather than at the beginning?<sup>3</sup>

When we do this, we encounter something unexpected. We find a human being, bearing the permanent scars of execution, seated upon the throne of the universe. Psalm 110:1 declares, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand.'" Acts 2:33 confirms that Jesus occupies this position now, in the present age. Revelation portrays the Lamb who was slain, still marked by the wounds of Calvary, now exalted above all created things.

The scars remain. The wounds are not erased but glorified. They are permanent, eternal fixtures of the divine throne room. The Incarnation, that event in which God took on human flesh, suffered, died, and rose, is not a temporary measure but the permanent state of affairs. Humanity and deity are united forever in the person of Jesus Christ.

If this is true, then what does it tell us about God's original intention? Scripture itself provides clues. Revelation 13:8 speaks of Christ as "...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." First Peter 1:20 states that Christ "...was chosen before the creation of the world." Ephesians 1:4 declares that God "...chose us in him before the creation of the world." These passages suggest that the Incarnation, the Cross, and the redemption of humanity were not afterthoughts in the divine mind. They were *always* the plan.

If the Incarnation was Plan A rather than Plan B, then what does this imply about the world God chose to create? It suggests that the world as we know it, with all its potential for moral choice, suffering and redemption, death and resurrection, is not a repair project. It is the canvas God always intended to work upon.

### **From Permission to Purpose**

The various traditional theodicies ask: "Why does God *permit* evil?"<sup>4</sup> This assumes that evil is something God merely tolerates and wouldn't put up with if He could help it. It is an unfortunate

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<sup>3</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 347.

<sup>4</sup> A theodicy is a theological or philosophical attempt to justify the existence of an omnipotent and perfectly good God despite the presence of evil and suffering in the world. The term was famously coined by the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in 1710 to describe his efforts to resolve the logical tension between a benevolent creator and a world filled with hardship. Feeney, Thomas, "Leibniz on the Problem of Evil", *The*

but necessary consequence of granting genuine freedom to His creatures. The best that can be said is that God brings good out of evil, redemption out of rebellion, and resurrection out of death. God makes lemonade out of the lemons humanity has handed Him.

I would like to suggest that the question itself could be approached differently. What if, instead of asking why God permits evil, we should be asking what God intended to accomplish by creating a world where the possibility of moral evil exists? What if the world we inhabit, with all its complexity and moral ambiguities, is not just *permitted* by God but is in some sense *required* for His purposes?

This is not to suppose that God *causes* moral evil or that He delights in suffering. Scripture is clear that God is not the author of sin and that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.<sup>5</sup> Human and angelic beings who rebel bear full moral responsibility for their choices. But it is to suggest that God, in His freedom and foreknowledge, chose to create *this* world, knowing full well what would transpire, because only this kind of world could accomplish what He intended from eternity past.

So what did God intend? What purpose could possibly justify the existence of a world filled with the ambiguity of such nobility, perfidy, joy and suffering, evil, along with such apparent waste and tragedy?

### **The Demonstration Hypothesis**

In Romans 3:25-26, the Apostle Paul uses a word to describe God's purpose in presenting Christ crucified. The word is *ἐνδειξις* (*endeixis*), which means "demonstration," "showing forth," or "proof."<sup>6</sup> Paul writes that God presented Christ "...as a demonstration (*endeixis*) of His righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." It was these verses, along with several others we will look at, that started me on this study.

Paul is not just saying that Christ's death *accomplishes* propitiation or that it *secures* redemption, though it certainly does both. He also alludes to the fact that the Cross reveals something about God's character that cannot be adequately communicated in any other way. The Cross is revelatory. It shows divine attributes that require visibility rather than only declaration. Talk is cheap, and a picture is certainly worth a thousand words.<sup>7</sup>

This raises a provocative possibility. What if God created the world not *despite* the fact that it would require the Cross for the resolution of the issues, but *precisely because* only a world that includes genuine suffering, real moral evil, and actual death could adequately demonstrate the fullness of His character?

Consider the attributes of God that require demonstration if they are to be understood and appreciated. Mercy requires an offense to be forgiven. Justice requires that evil be judged. Forgiveness requires something and someone in need of forgiveness. Redemption requires someone needing rescue. Resurrection requires physical death. Comfort requires suffering. Victory requires an

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*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2026 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), forthcoming <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2026/entries/leibniz-evil/>.

<sup>5</sup> This concept seems to be lost on those accusing God of an Old Testament harshness. Ezekiel 18:23.

<sup>6</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 450.

<sup>7</sup> I can't, at certain points, help the clichés.

enemy. Reconciliation requires authentic alienation. Covenant faithfulness requires the possibility of covenant breaking.

If the entire world remained an Edenic-like garden, good, but without the experience of evil, death, suffering, and redemption, certain aspects of God's character simply would not be revealed. God's creative power can be displayed. His wisdom in ordering creation is evident. His generosity in providing for His creatures can be experienced. But His mercy, His redemptive love, His willingness to suffer alongside His creation, and His power to resurrect the dead, could only be known through experience.

The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has existed in perfect, eternal relationship characterized by *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις), the mutual indwelling of the three persons.<sup>8</sup> This God did not create because He was lonely or incomplete. He created because love, by its very nature, is *diffusivum sui* (self-diffusive).<sup>9</sup> Love desires to share itself, to invite others into relationship, to create a family.

I would contend that God revealed His desire for a family composed of both celestial (angels) and terrestrial beings (humans) who could truly know Him, truly love Him, truly participate in relationship with Him. For this to take place these creatures would need to see more than His creative power. They would need to witness the full complexity of His character. And certain aspects of that character could only be demonstrated through a particular kind of world, a world very much like the one we inhabit.

### **The World as Theatre**

To understand why God created the world He did, this book proposes what I call the "demonstration framework." The central thesis is that:

*God intentionally created the world as a stage (theatron, θέατρον)<sup>10</sup> upon which to reveal His full character to a watching audience of both angelic and human beings through His interaction with both throughout history. The drama of creation, fall, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and consummation is not God's emergency response to a crisis. It is the means by which the infinite complexity of the divine nature is made visible to finite creatures.*

In this framework, the Christ event, the Incarnation, life, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension, and session of Jesus the Messiah, stands as the fullest demonstration of God's character possible. It is here that divine justice and mercy meet. It is 'in Christ' that God demonstrates, once and for all, exactly who He is.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ioanna Sahinidou, "Christological Perichoresis," Open Journal of Philosophy: Vol.4 No.4, November 2014

<sup>9</sup> Blankenhorn, Bernhard-Thomas. "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas." *Angelicum* 79, no. 4 (2002): 803–37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44617042>.

<sup>10</sup> *Θέατρον* "the seeing place" of the Greek theatre). The audience sat in the *theatron* to watch a performance of a Greek play: alternate name, *koilon*, a hollow or cavity. The *theatron* originally referred to the audience space of the Greek theatre, but later became synonymous with the entire structure consisting of the spaces for both the audience as well as the performance; Roman spelling: *theatrum*. The Ancient Theatre Archive, blog article <https://ancienttheatrearchive.com/glossary-term/theatron-%CE%B8%CE%AD%CE%B1%CF%84%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BD/> Accessed 2/16/2026

<sup>11</sup> Jesus makes this amply clear when He responds to Philip in John 14:8

The framework draws on several theological and philosophical resources. From Molinist thought, it incorporates the concept of middle knowledge. That God's foreknows what free creatures would do in any possible circumstance. This allows us to say that God chose to actualize *this* particular world, from among all possible worlds, because this world best accomplishes His demonstrative purposes while preserving genuine creaturely freedom.

From biblical theology, the framework emphasizes the concept of divine glory (*doxa*, δόξα;<sup>12</sup> *kabod*, כְּבוֹד<sup>13</sup>) not merely as radiant splendor but as the revelation of God's character. When Scripture speaks of God's glory filling the earth, it envisions the full revelation of who He is, not just His power, but the complete range of His attributes, including those that can only be demonstrated through the drama of redemption.

The framework also incorporates the doctrine of divine passibility. The affirmation that God genuinely experiences emotion, grief, and suffering. This is not a departure from classical theism but a recognition that the God who is *impassible* in His essential being (He cannot be acted upon against His will) nevertheless chooses to make Himself vulnerable in relationship.<sup>14</sup> The Incarnation reveals a God who does not merely observe suffering from a distance but enters into it fully.

### **To Whom Is the Demonstration Directed?**

If the world is a theatre for divine self-revelation, then who comprises the audience? Scripture identifies two groups: celestial beings and humanity. Ephesians 3:10 states that "...through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." First Peter 1:12 notes that angels "...long to look into these things." The mysteries of salvation accomplished through Christ are of intense interest. The angelic realm is not merely observing human history; they are learning something about God through it. They are witnesses to a demonstration.

This makes sense of several biblical puzzles. Why does the book of Job open with a heavenly council scene where the Satan questions God's character and Job's faithfulness? Why does Jesus speak of "...joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7)? Why does Paul speak of being "...a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9)? These passages strongly suggest that the angelic realm has a vested interest in understanding God's character more fully, and that human history serves, in part, as the stage for that revelation.

While there is no explicit Biblical testimony of a celestial rebellion, or of a link between the New Testament depiction of the Satan and demons with 'fallen angels', there is evidence of supernatural unrest which required a fuller revelation of God's character. In Genesis 3, 6, and 11, rebellious activity does occur, which leads to the selection of Abraham to bless the world. That there is some sort of significant spiritual warfare is certainly evident in the New Testament. I will contend

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<sup>12</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 344.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 458.

<sup>14</sup> Simoni, Henry. "Divine Passibility and the Problem of Radical Particularity: Does God Feel Your Pain?" *Religious Studies* 33, no. 3 (1997): 327–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008109>. Anastasia Scrutton, "Divine Passibility: God and Emotion," *Journal - Philosophy Compass*. 2013. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263455390\\_Divine\\_Passibility\\_God\\_and\\_Emotion](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263455390_Divine_Passibility_God_and_Emotion)

that the angelic beings, whether in active rebellion or not, needed to see not just His creative might but His redemptive love, mercy, justice and grace, to understand and return His love as He desired.<sup>15</sup>

Humanity, of course, is the other primary audience. But we are not merely spectators; we are also participants. Through union with Christ, believers are incorporated into the demonstration itself. Our lives become living testimonies to God's transforming grace. Our suffering, when joined to Christ's, participates in the ongoing revelation of God's redemptive purposes. Our eventual resurrection will display God's power over death. Our forgiveness demonstrates His mercy. Our transformation demonstrates His ability to make all things new.

### **The Structure of This Book**

This book is divided into four parts. Part One examines the inadequacy of traditional reactive theodicies and introduces the demonstration framework as an alternative. We will survey the landscape of existing theodicy literature, and identify the common thread which is that the majority of approaches explain why God *permits* evil rather than exploring whether evil serves a divine *purpose* established before creation.

Part Two develops the theatrical metaphor in depth. Why does God need a stage to reveal Himself? What kind of world is required for comprehensive divine self-demonstration? We will explore the parameters of genuine moral agency, the necessity of real consequences, and the role of both natural and moral evil in creating the conditions for full revelation. We will also address the hardest objections: Why this much suffering? Could God not have demonstrated His character with less pain?

Part Three traces the six acts of divine demonstration through biblical history, moving from creation through the consummation of all things. Act One sets the stage in Genesis 1 and 2. Act Two traces the conflict that begins with the Fall. Act Three follows the drama through the patriarchs and the prophets. Act Four reaches the climax in the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection. Act Five continues the demonstration through the Church from Pentecost to the Parousia. Act Six brings the demonstration to completion in Christ's return and the new creation. Each act reveals further dimensions of God's character, building toward the final consummation.

The following diagram maps that structure at a glance, showing the biblical territory each act covers and the primary attributes of God demonstrated within it.

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<sup>15</sup> For an exposition of this viewpoint see Michael Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2025)

## The six acts of divine demonstration

The complete movement from creation to consummation — Chapters 5 through 10

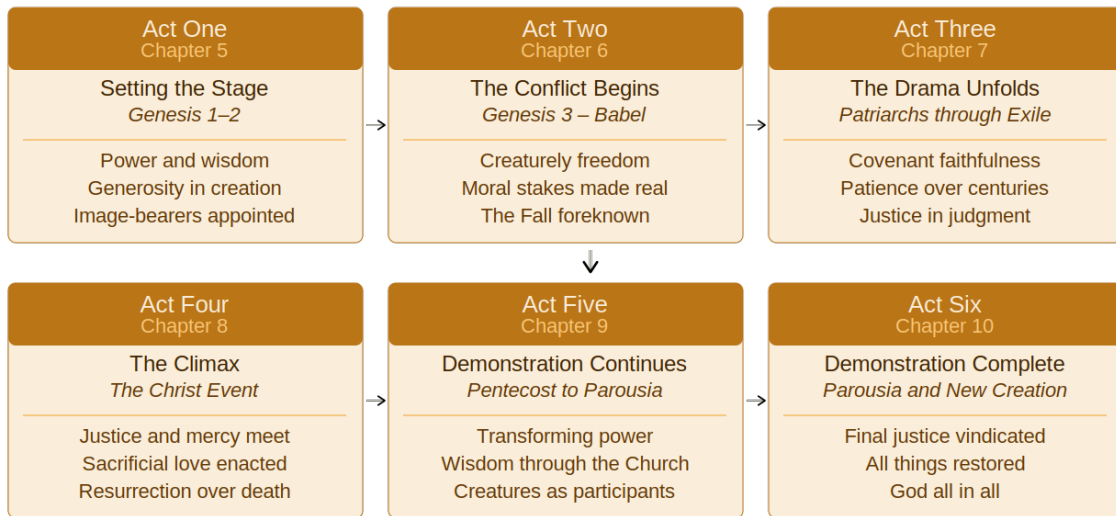


Figure I.1. The six acts of divine demonstration as traced in Chapters 5–10. Each act adds to the cumulative revelation, building toward the final consummation.

Part Four examines the practical implications of the demonstration framework for the Christian life. How could this perspective change our approach to prayer, suffering, evangelism, and worship? What does it mean to live as both audience and participants in God's ongoing demonstration? How do we maintain theological rigor while providing pastoral comfort to those who suffer?

### A Word About What This Framework Does Not Do

It is important to state clearly what the demonstration framework does not accomplish. It does not provide a specific explanation for every individual instance of suffering. It does not answer why this particular child contracts cancer, why that specific earthquake strikes, or why this marriage fails while another endures. The framework explains the *type* of world God chose to create, not every particular event within that world.

The framework also does not eliminate mystery. Significant tensions remain between divine sovereignty and human freedom, and between His omnipotence and His apparent restraint. The demonstration framework reframes these tensions but does not fully resolve them. A certain amount of humility remains appropriate and necessary for those of us attempting to comprehend infinite purposes.

What the framework provides is a way to understand God's purposes that gives meaning to suffering without requiring a specific explanation for each instance. It allows us to say that our pain is not meaningless. That we are participating in a larger story of divine self-revelation even when we cannot see exactly how or why in our particular circumstances.

Perhaps most importantly, the framework preserves both God's goodness and His sovereignty while taking evil seriously. God remains holy, loving, and just. He is not the author of sin, nor does He delight in our suffering. Human and angelic beings remain morally responsible for their choices. Evil remains, worthy of divine judgment. God has chosen to create a world where He can reveal Himself most fully. Where His creation can come to know Him as He truly is.

## **The Central Question Revisited**

We return to the question with which we began. Why did the God who reveals Himself through what He does (creation) and what He says (Scripture) create the kind of world He did? A world of choice, of goodness and evil, of life and death, and of pain and suffering and relief?

The traditional answer has been to permit human freedom while minimizing divine responsibility for evil. God wanted creatures capable of genuine love, and love requires freedom, and freedom necessarily includes the possibility of choosing evil.

I would agree that this answer is true as far as it goes. But the demonstration framework suggests a deeper, more comprehensive response. God created this world because only this kind of world, with all its moral complexity, as well as its potential for both great good and terrible evil, is adequate to reveal who He is. The world is not primarily a stage for human drama, though it is that. It is primarily a theatre for divine self-disclosure. And the central act, the climactic scene toward which all of history has been moving, is the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This was always the plan. Christ was always Plan A. The scars He bears on the throne of heaven are the permanent marks of a demonstration that began before the foundation of the world.

The chapters ahead explore this framework. Its biblical foundations, its theological implications, its philosophical coherence, and its pastoral application. The goal is not to eliminate all questions or resolve all mysteries. The goal is to provide a lens through which we might see both Scripture and our own experience more clearly, understanding that we live not in a cosmic accident but in a carefully designed demonstration of the character of the God who is love, who is just, who is merciful, who suffers with us, and who will one day make all things new.

## CHAPTER 1: The Story

*“The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.”*  
Brandon Sanderson

Those of us who regularly attend churches have learned to organize the biblical story according to a particular framework, a certain way of thinking: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. It seems to be almost like a play in four acts. The structure is easy to memorize and seems to fit the overall narrative quite well. The story begins in the Hebrew Scriptures with creation, the rebellion, and then the covenant. It continues through Exodus and exile, with repeated failure and forgiveness. It continues with the redeeming life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as Messiah. It then finds completion in John’s Revelation of the glorious city and the Tree of Life. This story is confessed in our creeds and rooted in Scripture, which Jews, Christians, and, with some exceptions, Muslims hold to be both accurate and inspired.

However, we understand that this four-act framework is an interpretive construction. It provides a lens through which believers have organized the narrative. Expanding on this a bit. The first two acts go like this. In the beginning, God created a perfect world. Eden was a place of unbroken fellowship between the Creator and His creation. A paradise unmarred by sin, suffering, or death. The first humans, Adam and Eve, lived in harmony with God, with each other, and with the created order. Everything was considered "very good" by God (Genesis 1:31). This was God's original intent, His perfect plan, the way things were supposed to be.

And then came the unintended rebellion, or Fall, described in Genesis 3. Tempted by the serpent creature, the first humans chose to disobey God's command. They ate from the forbidden tree. And in that single act of rebellion, everything changed. Sin entered the world, bringing with it death, suffering, and alienation from God. The results encompassed not just humanity but all of creation. Loss of a proper relationship with God. Thorns and thistles replacing abundance. Enhanced pain in childbirth. Death and misery were the result of their move to autonomy. A bad decision all around.

The third act is redemption. Recognizing the catastrophe that had befallen His creation, God enacted a plan to rescue humanity from the consequences of their rather short-sighted rebellion. He chose Abraham and his family for no apparent reason.<sup>16</sup> Later, He gave the family, which He had forged in a nation, His law, and when they demurred, sent prophets to call them back to faithfulness. Ultimately, in the fullness of time, He sent His Son via the Incarnation.<sup>17</sup> Jesus came to earth, lived a sinless life, died on a Roman cross to secure our redemption, and rose from the dead to conquer death

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<sup>16</sup> The call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 begins abruptly. The text provides no "background check" or list of Abraham's virtues. In fact, Joshua 24:2 clarifies that before God called him, Abraham's family lived "beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods." In Deuteronomy 7:7-8: "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors..." God further clarifies the situation in Deuteronomy 9:6: "Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." So God chooses not on the basis of some sort of merit, but rather in order to work out and demonstrate His character through those chosen.

<sup>17</sup> An allusion to Galatians 4:4 the fullness of the time—namely, “the time appointed by the Father” (Ga 4:2). see on Eph 1:10; Lu 1:57; Ac 2:1; Ez 5:2. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 332.

itself. Through a change in our thinking (repentance) and faith in Christ, sinful humans can be reconciled to God and given the hope of eternal life with Him.

The final act is restoration. One day, Christ has promised to return. Death will cease to have dominion over creation. God will dwell with His people in a new heaven and earth, and the original perfection of Eden will be restored, or perhaps even surpassed. The story will end where it began, in paradise with God and His imagers enjoying perfect fellowship.

This is the story we have been told, and I would hold that it is certainly true, as far as it goes. The biblical narrative moves from creation through a rebellion to redemption and ultimately to restoration. I do not doubt that Scripture presents these major turning points in God's relationship with His creation.

So I am in no way disagreeing with this interpretive framework. Rather, I am posing a question. Why did God create the world as He did? A world that is far from what we would initially expect from a good and supremely capable God. A world that includes both good and bad. Nobility and perfidy. A world with way too much pain and suffering and evil. I have become doubtful as to whether this interpretive framework tells enough of the story. Does it capture the full biblical picture? Or does it, perhaps inadvertently, shape our reading of Scripture in ways that obscure something important about God's character and purposes?

Keep in mind, I am not saying that the story found in Scripture, or the interpretation suggested above, is in any way wrong. It is certainly correct and helpful in systematically understanding God's revelation to us.<sup>18</sup> What I'm suggesting is that there is more to the story, and that the 'more' might provide greater explanatory satisfaction.

### **What the Traditional Framework Gets Right**

Before examining what I think are the limitations of the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration framework, I want to acknowledge its considerable strengths. This narrative structure has served the Christian community well for centuries, and it accurately captures genuine biblical truth.

First, the historic framework takes sin, suffering, and evil seriously. It does not minimize human rebellion or pretend that evil is some sort of an illusion. The Fall narrative affirms that something really did go wrong with God's creation. Human beings, exercising their volitional and moral capacities, chose to disobey their Creator. This choice had disastrous consequences, not just for the individuals involved but also for all their descendants and, indeed, for the entire created order. The framework does a good job of explaining the reality and consequences of sin.

Second, the framework emphasizes the necessity of grace. If humanity is estranged from God and the creation through willful rebellion, then the framework shows that humanity cannot, by itself, remedy the situation. We have shown repeatedly that we cannot and will not undo our own rebellious inclinations and actions. We cannot restore the paradise we lost. We are utterly dependent on God's mercy, on His initiative to rescue us from the predicament we created. The redemption narrative highlights God's love, His willingness to go to extraordinary lengths, even to the point of becoming human and dying on a cross, to bring us back to Himself. Grace is not peripheral to this story; it is central.

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<sup>18</sup> For an excellent exposition of scripture using this traditional framework approach see G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011)

Third, the framework provides a coherent narrative structure for reading the entire Bible. It gives us a way to understand how Genesis relates to Revelation, how the Old Testament anticipates the New, and how the various books and themes of Scripture fit together into a unified whole. The Bible is not, as some have maintained, a random collection of religious texts but a grand story with a beginning, middle, and an anticipated end. The four-part framework helps us see this unity.<sup>19</sup>

Fourth, the framework offers pastoral comfort. It tells us that the suffering and evil we experience are not the final chapter. This brokenness is not the way things are supposed to be, and in counseling the bereaved, we often invoke this truth in attempting to comfort them. God has a plan to fix what went wrong. One day, we say, He will restore all things. Our pain is temporary, and our hope is eternal. For those who are suffering, this is no small anchor to their hope.

These are significant strengths. The traditional framework is not wrong, rather I think it can be strengthened. There are certainly many ways of reading the biblical story that doesn't contradict this framework but expands and deepens it. Perhaps a repositioning of some of its elements in a way that addresses questions the traditional framework doesn't directly address.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Reactive Posture of Traditional Theodicy<sup>21</sup>**

The Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration framework, for all its strengths, positions God in a fundamentally reactive stance. By reactive, I mean that God created something good, humanity broke it, and God has been working to repair the damage ever since. The Incarnation becomes an emergency intervention. The Cross becomes damage control. Redemption becomes restoration of the original plan that was derailed by sin.

The reactive posture I'm suggesting seems to me to permeate Christian theology and apologetics. When we engage with the problem of evil, we find ourselves explaining why God "permits" or "allows" evil to exist. We develop theodicies (defenses of God's character and intentions), which attempt to justify God's decisions in light of the suffering and pain we experience. These theodicies have taken many forms, but they share a common feature: they explain what God tolerates rather than what God intended.

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<sup>19</sup> John Sailhamer argued extensively against the idea that the Bible (specifically the Pentateuch) is a haphazard or "random collection" of historical fragments and laws. Instead, he demonstrated through linguistic and structural analysis that the text is a carefully composed, unified narrative with a specific theological agenda. John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009. See also Brevard S. Childs: Known as the father of "Canonical Criticism." In his seminal work, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979), he argued that the final "canonical shape" of the Bible is an intentional theological product rather than a random historical accident. Gerald H. Wilson: In *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985), he famously demonstrated that the Book of Psalms is not a random hymnbook, but a highly structured five-book collection with a specific editorial framework centered on the Davidic covenant.

The works of several authors provided the impetus that moved my thinking in this direction. Among them were Scot McNight, John Peckham, Michael Heiser, Matthew Bates, Iain Provan, and Sandra Richter.

<sup>21</sup> The term *theodicy* was officially coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Work: *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (Essays on Theodicy on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil), published in 1710.

Consider the free will defense, certainly the most influential theodicy in contemporary Christian thought. Articulated in various forms by thinkers from Augustine<sup>22</sup> to Alvin Plantinga.<sup>23</sup> This approach argues that God created beings with libertarian free will because love requires freedom. You cannot program someone to love you; love must be freely given. The problem is that if creatures have this kind of freedom, they must have the power to choose evil as well as good. The possibility of sin is the inevitable price of genuine freedom. God could have created a world without evil by creating a world without freedom. But such a world would be populated by automatons, not persons capable of the authentic relationship desired.

This is a powerful and effective argument.<sup>24</sup> It explains why God might permit evil while maintaining His goodness and power. But notice the language. God "permits" evil. He "tolerates" it. He "allows" it as an unfortunate but necessary consequence of His decision to create free beings. In this framework, evil is something God puts up with, not something that serves His purposes in any direct sense.

The Irenaean theodicy, named after the second-century church father Irenaeus of Lyon, takes a somewhat different approach. Irenaeus suggested that humanity was created immature, like children who needed to grow into moral and spiritual perfection through experience. In his work *Against Heresies*, he argued that Adam and Eve were not created in a state of full maturity but were meant to develop through their choices and experiences. The world, with all its challenges and difficulties, becomes a kind of soul-making environment where humans grow into the intended *image of God*.<sup>25</sup>

This theodicy has been developed in various ways by later thinkers, most notably John Hick in his work *Evil and the God of Love*. The soul-making theodicy suggests that a world without genuine moral choices would be incapable of producing mature, virtuous persons. We become who we are meant to be through choosing good in the face of temptation. Suffering serves a pedagogical purpose.<sup>26</sup>

This is a reasonable approach which seems to be true as far as it goes. It succeeds in finding meaning in suffering by suggesting that it contributes to our moral and spiritual development, which in some cases it certainly does. But notice again the basic posture. God uses evil to bring about good. He brings benefit out of suffering. He makes lemonade out of the lemons that free will has handed Him. The framework is fundamentally reactive.

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<sup>22</sup> Michael P. Foley. "Introduction." *On Order* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300238532.003.0001>. Brian Gronewoller. "Augustine's Use of Rhetorical Economy in His Theology of Creation." (2021): 63-97. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197566558.003.0004>. Fred Berthold. "Free Will and Theodicy in Augustine: An Exposition and Critique." *Religious Studies*, 17 (1981): 525 - 535. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034412500013287>.

<sup>23</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974). *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978)

<sup>24</sup> J. L. Mackie explicitly acknowledges the success of Alvin Plantinga's free will defense in his later work, after his original 1955 article on the logical problem of evil. Swinburne, Richard, J. L. Mackie, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, Anthony John Patrick Kenny and Terence M. Penelhum. "The Miracle of Theism." (1982).

<sup>25</sup> *Against Heresies* 4 (esp. 4.37–4.39) *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons: Against Heresies & Fragments*, Edited by Alexander Roberts, D.D & James Donaldson, L.L.D (Meadville: Newman Press, 1991)

<sup>26</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Princeton: Springer, 2010)

Along this line, more recent philosophical theodicies maintain this reactive stance. Marilyn McCord Adams, in her influential work *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*,<sup>27</sup> focuses on evils so terrible that they seem to ruin the lives of the people who experience them. She argues that God can and will defeat even these horrendous evils by incorporating them into a larger good, by giving them meaning in retrospect, by ensuring that the person's life as a whole is worth living. This is moving in the right direction, but the basic reactive structure remains; evil happens, and God works to bring good out of it.

Peter van Inwagen, in his book *The Problem of Evil*, acknowledges the reactive nature of theodicy and embraces it. He explicitly frames his project as explaining what God permits and why He might be justified in permitting it.<sup>28</sup> Van Inwagen develops what he calls a "defense" rather than a theodicy. He's not claiming to know God's actual reasons for permitting evil, only to show that there could be morally sufficient reasons for a perfectly good and all-powerful God to allow the evil we see in the world.

John Peckham's *Theodicy of Love* moves closer to the proposed 'demonstration framework' than traditional reactive theodicies but ultimately remains within the reactive paradigm.<sup>29</sup> Peckham argues that God's fundamental attribute is self-giving, other-centered love, and that He voluntarily limits His power to preserve a genuine relationship with free creatures. Importantly, Peckham incorporates a cosmic conflict motif in which God demonstrates His character not only to humanity but also to the entire universe, including angelic observers. This aligns with the celestial audience emphasis in the demonstration framework. However, Peckham still frames the demonstration primarily as God's response to accusations and rebellion rather than as the original purpose for creation. In his view, the cosmic conflict arises when creatures question God's character, and God then demonstrates His love through His response to evil and suffering.

The incarnation and cross reveal God's love most fully as vindication against charges rather than as the planned climax toward which creation always aimed. So while Peckham takes divine *passibility* seriously, he still sees redemptive history as fundamentally reactive, God responding to a crisis, rather than as the intended stage for comprehensive self-revelation from eternity past.<sup>30</sup>

Peckham proposes that God demonstrates love *in response to* cosmic conflict. In the demonstration framework, God creates the possibility of cosmic conflict in order to demonstrate the fullness of His character. He's still attempting to answer the question "Why does God permit evil?" Whereas I'm asking, "What did God intend to reveal?"

These are sophisticated, carefully argued positions developed by brilliant thinkers. I have learned much from all of them. All of these approaches to the problem of evil are trying to explain why God allows or permits it. They all position God as responding to a problem He didn't create or intend. They all make the Incarnation, and the Cross appear to be God's Plan B, His backup strategy when Plan A (a perfect Eden) was disrupted by human decisions.

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<sup>27</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999)

<sup>28</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

<sup>29</sup> John C. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2023)

<sup>30</sup> Peckham, 11

## The Theological Problem: What About Divine Foreknowledge?

The reactive framework creates a theological tension that becomes apparent when we consider God's foreknowledge.<sup>31</sup> If God knows all things from eternity, and Christian theology has consistently affirmed that He does, then the Fall was foreseen. God was not surprised when it took place. What is going on?

Traditional theology affirms that God is all-knowing (omniscient). He knows not only what has happened and what is happening, but what will happen. More than this, He knows what could happen, what would happen under different circumstances. His knowledge is not limited by time; He sees all of history from the vantage of eternity. As the Psalmist declares, "...before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely" (Psalm 139:4). Nothing takes God by surprise.

If this is true, then God knew, before He created Adam and Eve, that they would rebel. He knew they would eat from the forbidden tree. He knew sin would enter the world, and He knew death would become the lot of humanity. He knew all of this before He spoke the first words of creation: "Let there be light."

This creates something of a puzzle. If God knew the Fall would happen, why did He create this specific world, where the Fall was certain to occur? Why not create a different world? One where free creatures would freely choose not to rebel? Or where the consequences of the rebellion would be less catastrophic? Or where redemption would be accomplished through some means other than the torture and execution of God the Son? These are the kinds of questions that prompt people like J.L. Mackie to maintain that belief in the Christian God is not just unlikely but is actually incoherent.<sup>32</sup>

The free will defense provides a partial answer. God wanted creatures capable of genuine love, and such creatures must have freedom, and freedom entails the possibility of choosing evil. But this doesn't quite resolve the puzzle. The question is not whether God should have created free beings; the free will defense adequately answers it. The question is: why did God choose to create these specific free beings in this specific world, knowing what they would freely choose to do?

Molinist theology, drawing on the work of the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, offers a more sophisticated framework.<sup>33</sup> Building on Aquinas's distinction between God's natural and free knowledge, Molina added a third category: middle knowledge, God's knowledge of what free creatures would do in any circumstance, prior to His decision about which world to create.

To better understand his approach to the problem, Molina, following Aquinas, distinguished between three types of divine knowledge.<sup>34</sup> First, God has natural knowledge: knowledge of all necessary truths and all logical possibilities. Second, God has free knowledge: knowledge of what He has chosen to create and of what will actually happen in the world He actualizes. Third, and most

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<sup>31</sup> God's knowing the future is anchored in scripture in such passages as Isaiah 44:28 where Cyrus is known 150 years before he frees Isreal. In 1 Samual 23:10-13 where God reveals to David the intentions of the people of Keilah. In 1 Peter 1:20 where Jesus is 'chosen' before the foundation of the world. I will suggest that Luis de Molina's view provides the best explanation of how this works.

<sup>32</sup> Mackie, J. L. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955): 200–212.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2251467>.

<sup>33</sup> Kirk MacGregor, *Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018)

<sup>34</sup> Molina is expanding on Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* I, q.14 (on divine knowledge) in his *Concordia* (1588)

importantly for our purposes, God has middle knowledge, knowledge of what any free creature would freely choose in any possible circumstance.

Through middle knowledge, God knows not just what Adam and Eve will do in the specific circumstances of Eden, but what they would do in any possible set of circumstances. He knows what you would do if you had been born in first-century Palestine or medieval France. He knows what decisions you would make under every conceivable situation. And on the basis of this comprehensive knowledge, God chose to actualize this particular world out of all the infinite worlds He could have created.

Molinas's approach helps us understand how God can have exhaustive foreknowledge while creatures retain genuine freedom. God doesn't cause our free choices, but He knows what we would freely choose in any circumstance, and He created the circumstances knowing what we would do. But this insight only sharpens our question: Given that God had infinite possible worlds to choose from, worlds with different combinations of free creatures and different circumstances, why did He choose to create this world? A world where He knew sin would enter, and suffering would proliferate. A world in which the Cross would be the solution.

The various reactive frameworks struggle to answer this question in a way that seems satisfying. If God's primary goal was a world of fellowship with His creatures, and if the Fall was an unfortunate but necessary risk of creating free beings, then why didn't God choose a possible world where free creatures would freely choose not to rebel? Surely among all the infinite possible worlds, there would be one in which free creatures consistently choose good?<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps not. Perhaps, given the nature of creaturely freedom, every possible world that includes genuinely free beings also includes at least the possibility, and given enough time, the actuality of sin. This is the position some theologians have taken. But even if we grant this, the question remains: Why did God choose to create at all, knowing what would happen? Why not refrain from creating anything outside Himself? The Triune God, perfect in loving fellowship within Himself, needed nothing beyond Himself.<sup>36</sup> Why create if creation would inevitably result in such devastating suffering?

### **The Pastoral Problem: When the Framework Fails**

The theological tensions I've described are not merely academic puzzles. They have profound pastoral implications. When we tell people that God is simply making the best of a bad situation, that He's bringing good out of evil He didn't want, and that He's fixing a world that broke despite His best intentions, we may inadvertently communicate something about God's character that is less than reassuring.

I have known people in their suffering. I have listened to mothers who have lost children, to spouses whose marriages have ended, to individuals battling chronic illness or mental anguish. And I have heard them ask the questions that I find difficult to answer. When people ask, "Why is this happening?" "Where is God in this?" "If God is all-powerful and all-loving as you say, why doesn't He stop this?" I always feel inadequate to the task, and perhaps I should.

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<sup>35</sup> Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge Philosophy Classics) (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2016)

<sup>36</sup> God's not needing anything outside Himself is known theologically as *aseity*. For an outstanding exposition of this concept see William Lane Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

The reactive framework's standard answers, though true, can feel less than satisfying in these moments. "God is bringing good out of this." "Your suffering is helping you grow spiritually." "God didn't want this to happen, but He's using it for His purposes." These statements are all true in some sense, but they can also feel hollow, even cruel, when spoken to someone in the depths of pain. So I don't say them. I remember Romans 12:15 and "...weep with those who weep."

More troublingly, the reactive framework can make it seem as though God is perpetually disappointed. He wanted Eden, but He got the Fall. He's constantly having to adjust His plans, constantly working around the problems created by His creatures' bad choices. This picture of God, however unintentionally communicated, can undermine confidence in His competence and power.

The framework can also create quite unrealistic expectations. If the original plan was a perfect world without suffering, and if God is working to restore that perfection, then why are we still living in such a broken world? Why hasn't God fixed things yet? The reactive framework makes God's tolerance of ongoing suffering seem like either powerlessness or indifference, even though neither is acceptable.<sup>37</sup>

I am not suggesting that those who hold to the traditional framework intend these implications. I do suggest that the demonstration framework might be a way of understanding God's purposes that would avoid these pastoral pitfalls while remaining faithful to Scripture. It takes suffering seriously without making God seem either surprised by it or merely tolerant of it. It gives meaning to our pain without minimizing its reality or explaining it away.

### **The Biblical Problem: Tensions in the Text**

Perhaps the most significant challenge to the reactive framework comes from Scripture itself. While the Bible certainly supports the broad movements of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, it also contains numerous passages that sit uneasily with the idea that the Incarnation and the Cross were Plan B.

Consider Revelation 13:8, which speaks of Christ as "...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." This is remarkable language. If Christ was slain "from the foundation of the world," then His sacrificial death was not an afterthought or an emergency response. It was planned from eternity. It was, in some profound sense, part of the original design.

First Peter 1:18-20 makes a similar point: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake." Christ was chosen before creation. His role as the sacrificial Lamb was not a last-minute decision but an eternal purpose.

Ephesians 1:4-5 extends this theme to our own salvation: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." God chose us in Christ before

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<sup>37</sup> With good reason we often fall back on 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." The present situation is based on God's patience in wanting as many people as possible to change their minds concerning their rebellion and relationship with Himself. But this doesn't address the problem directly.

creation. Our redemption through Christ was not an adaptation to unexpected circumstances but part of the eternal plan.

Acts 2:23 describes the crucifixion in striking terms: "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." The Cross was not just foreknown but part of God's "deliberate plan." The Greek phrase here is "τῆ ὀρισμένη βουλῆ" (tē hōrismenē boulē), meaning "the determined purpose" or "the definite plan." This was not improvisation; this was intention.<sup>38</sup>

These passages strongly suggest that the Incarnation, the Cross, and our redemption through Christ were not emergency measures implemented after the Fall disrupted God's original plan. They were the plan from the beginning. Christ was always meant to be the Lamb. We were always meant to be redeemed through His blood. The Cross was not Plan B; it was Plan A.

This creates a tension within the reactive framework. If Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and if the Cross was God's deliberate plan from eternity, then what does this tell us about God's purposes in creating the world? It suggests that God created with full knowledge not only that the Fall would occur, but also that redemption through the death and resurrection of His Son, as well as the restoration of an Eden-like existence, was the intended climax of the story. The question becomes not "How is God responding to the disaster of sin?" but "Why did God plan from the beginning to reveal Himself through a drama that includes sin, suffering, death, and redemption?"

### **The Question That Challenges the Framework**

The theological, pastoral, and biblical tensions I have outlined all point toward a single, fundamental question that the reactive framework struggles to answer adequately: If God had perfect foreknowledge of everything that would happen, and if He had the power to create any possible world, why did He choose to create this world?

The reactive framework can explain why God might permit certain things, given that He wants to preserve human freedom. But it has a harder time explaining why God would choose to actualize this particular possible world, knowing exactly what would happen, when He had infinite other worlds to choose from. This is the question that led me to reconsider the question: why create this particular world?

What if God didn't create the world despite knowing it would include sin, suffering, and death? What if He created this world precisely because this kind of world, with all its moral complexity and dramatic tension, was necessary to accomplish what He intended from the beginning? What if the story is not about God responding to disaster but about God revealing Himself through a carefully designed demonstration?

This is not to suggest that God causes sin or delights in suffering. Human and angelic beings bear full moral responsibility for their choices. Evil remains what it is, worthy of divine judgment. But it is to suggest that God, in His foreknowledge, His desires and wisdom, chose to create a world where moral antitheses would exist, because only such a world could adequately reveal the fullness of His character.

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<sup>38</sup> Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "ὀρίζω, Ἀφορίζω, Ἀποδιορίζω, Προορίζω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 452.

The reactive framework asks: "Given that the world is broken, how is God fixing it?" The demonstration framework asks: "Given that God chose to create this specific world, what was He intending to reveal through it?" The following comparison maps the structural difference between these two postures across the same five elements of the biblical story.

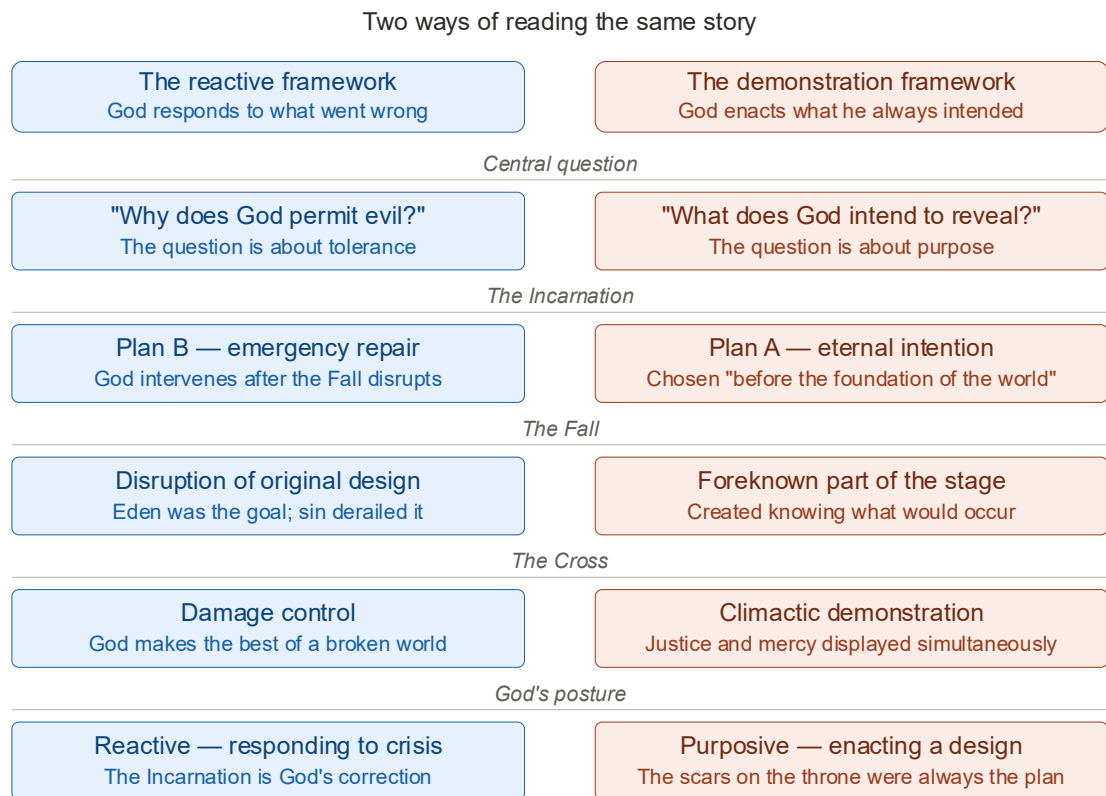


Figure 1.1. The structural difference between traditional theological approaches and the demonstration framework.

### Reading the Story Differently

I want to be clear about what I am not saying. I am not suggesting that the traditional frameworks are wrong. The biblical story does move from creation through the fall to redemption and restoration. God did create a good world. Humanity did rebel. God is redeeming what was broken. One day, He will restore all things.

Rather, what I am suggesting is that this framework may be incomplete. That there may be another layer to the story, a deeper purpose underlying the entire drama. That we might read Scripture not just as the account of how God is responding to a crisis, but as the revelation of how God is accomplishing what He intended from the beginning.

In the Introduction, I introduced the concept of reading the biblical story backward from Revelation rather than forward from Genesis. When we do this, we begin with the image of the slain Lamb on the throne bearing permanent scars. We see something that the reactive framework may tend to obscure. We see that the Incarnation is not a deviation from the plan but its fulfillment. The scars are not unfortunate reminders of a crisis that shouldn't have happened, but glorious marks of a demonstration that was always meant to occur.

This shifts our question. Instead of asking, "Why did God permit the Fall to happen?" we ask, "Why did God create a world where the Fall could happen, knowing it would?" Instead of asking,

"How is God bringing good out of evil?" we ask, "What is God demonstrating through a world that includes both good and evil?"

The difference is subtle but suggestive. The first set of questions assumes God is reacting to unintended problems. The second set assumes God is enacting an eternal purpose. The first makes the Incarnation Plan B. The second makes it Plan A.

In the chapters that follow, this alternative framework will be developed in some detail. We will explore what it means to understand the world as a theatre for divine self-revelation. We will examine why certain attributes of God can be demonstrated only in a world that includes suffering and evil. We will trace the six acts of divine demonstration through biblical history. And we will consider how this framework changes our understanding of prayer, suffering, mission, and hope.

But first, we need to understand more clearly what kind of world God would need to create if His purpose was comprehensive self-revelation. We need to examine the stage's parameters and the theatre's requirements. That is the goal of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2: Reading the Story Backward

*"The quality of your thoughts is determined by the quality of your reading."* — James Clear

Believing that God is engaged with human authors in His communication, we try to see the Bible as a connected whole. We begin with Genesis and work our way through the historical books, the wisdom literature, the prophets, the gospels, the epistles, and finally arrive at Revelation. This is how the canon is arranged, and it makes good sense when trying to understand the story's flow. It follows a roughly chronological order in moving from creation to consummation; from paradise lost to paradise regained, as it were.

This forward reading is natural and appropriate. The biblical story does unfold chronologically. God's revelation is understood to be progressive. The Old Testament is the basis for, and anticipates, what the New Testament fulfills. Reading forward helps us understand how the story develops. How God's purposes gradually become clearer through history.

But what if, having read the story forward many times, we tried reading it backward? What if we started not at the beginning but at the end? Not with Genesis 1:1 but with Revelation 21 and 22? Not with creation but with consummation?

This is not an arbitrary exercise. When we stand at the end of the biblical narrative and look back, we gain a perspective that forward reading alone doesn't provide. We gain perspective on where everything has been heading. This helps us understand the telos (τέλος), the goal or purpose, toward which all of history has been moving. And when we see the end clearly, it often changes how we understand the beginning.<sup>39</sup>

### **Standing at the End: The View from the Throne**

The book of Revelation gives us a vision of the final reality. Though in a decidedly abbreviated form, of how things will be. And what we see there is at odds with what experience tells us. We see a throne at the center of all things. We see God the Father seated on that throne. And we see the Lamb, Jesus Christ, sharing that throne (Revelation 22:1, 3). But this is no ordinary lamb. This is "...the Lamb who was slain" (Revelation 5:12). The wounds are still visible, and the marks of crucifixion remain.

This image makes us reflect on what may be intended. The climax of biblical revelation, the final picture of ultimate reality, features a slain Lamb on the throne of the universe. Not a pristine, unmarked Lamb. Not a Lamb whose wounds have been erased as though they never happened. But a Lamb who still bears the scars of execution, now glorified and exalted above all creation.

What might this tell us? At the very least, it tells us that the Incarnation is permanent. God the Son became human not temporarily but eternally. The hypostatic union, the joining of divine and human natures in one person, is not, and will not be reversed at the resurrection, ascension, or session. Jesus remains fully God and fully human forever. Humanity is now permanently united to deity in the person of Christ.

I would suggest there's something more here, something even more significant. The scars remain. They are not unfortunate reminders of a crisis that shouldn't have happened. They are not

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<sup>39</sup> Gerhard Delling, "τέλος, Τελέω, Ἐπιτελέω, Συντελέω, Συντέλεια, Παντελής, Τέλειος, Τελειότης, Τελειώω, Τελειώσις, Τελειωτής," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 49.

embarrassing marks of a Plan B that God had to implement when Plan A failed. They are permanent features of the divine throne room. They are, in some very meaningful sense, meant to be there.

If the scars are meant to be there, and if they are permanent rather than temporary, and if they are glorified rather than hidden, then what does this suggest about God's original purposes? I will contend that it suggests that the Cross was not an emergency response to an unintended crisis. It suggests that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were not adaptations to circumstances God didn't anticipate. It suggests, rather, that this was the plan all along.

### **The Session: Where Psalm 110 Meets Acts 2**

The doctrine of the session, the teaching that Christ is now seated at the right hand of God the Father, is grounded in one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament texts in the New Testament. Psalm 110:1 declares: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"<sup>40</sup>

This psalm is remarkable for several reasons. First, it's a royal psalm, written by David, in which David refers to someone he calls "my Lord." But David is the king. Who could be David's Lord? Only someone greater than David. Only someone who, though descended from David, transcends David. Christians have consistently understood this psalm as referring to the Messiah, to Jesus Christ.

Second, the psalm speaks of this figure being invited to sit at God's right hand. In the ancient Near Eastern context, sitting at the right hand of a king was the position of highest honor, of shared authority, of co-regency. When God invites someone to sit at His right hand, He is conferring upon that person divine authority and honor.<sup>41</sup>

Third, and most important for our purposes, this psalm is quoted or alluded to more than any other Old Testament text in the New Testament. It appears directly or indirectly in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter. The early church was absolutely convinced that this psalm described Jesus' current position.

Peter makes this explicit in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. After recounting the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter declares: "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" (Acts 2:33-35).

Notice what Peter is saying. Jesus is not merely going to be exalted sometime in the future. He is exalted now. He is seated now. The session is not a promise; it is a present reality. Right now, at this moment, a human being bearing the scars of crucifixion is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising divine authority over all creation.

When we stand at this point and take the reality of Christ's present session seriously, we're forced to ask: Was this what God intended all along? Was the goal always to unite humanity and deity

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<sup>40</sup> Mayboy Muchabwe. "The Theological Implications for the Phrase ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς μεγαλοσύνης in Hebrews 8:1-2 Regarding Christ's Mediatorial Work." *Pan-African Journal of Theology* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.56893/pajot2025v04i01.02>.

<sup>41</sup> V. d'Assonville. "'The perpetuity of Christ's reign ...' Calvin's interpretation of Psalm 110:1." *Koers - Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.19108/koers.87.1.2532>.

permanently in one person? Was the plan always to have a human being, bearing the marks of suffering and redemption, sharing the throne of heaven?

### **The Biblical Evidence for Plan A**

If the session represents the fulfillment of God's eternal purposes rather than an adaptation to unexpected circumstances, we should expect to find biblical evidence that the Incarnation and the Cross were planned from eternity. And indeed, that is precisely what we see.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned several key texts. Let me examine them more carefully here, because they provide the biblical foundation for understanding the Incarnation as Plan A rather than Plan B.

### **Revelation 13:8 and the Lamb Slain from the Foundation**

Revelation 13:8 contains one of the most theologically dense phrases in all of Scripture.<sup>42</sup> The verse describes those who worship the beast, noting that "...all inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast, all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world."

The phrase "...from the creation of the world" in Greek is "ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου" (apo katabolēs kosmou). The word katabolē literally means "foundation" or "laying down." It refers to the very beginning, to the establishment of the created order.<sup>43</sup> So the text is saying that Christ was slain "...from the foundation of the world."

What does it mean to say that Christ was slain from the foundation of the world? Clearly, the actual historical event of the crucifixion occurred at a specific time and place, during the reign of Tiberius Caesar, under the authority of Pontius Pilate, on a hill outside Jerusalem. The crucifixion was a dateable historical event.

But this text suggests that in some sense, in God's eternal purposes, Christ was already the slain Lamb before the world began. The Cross was not an afterthought in the divine mind. It was not a plan that God developed after the Fall occurred. It was part of the original design, woven into the very fabric of God's purposes from eternity.

This interpretation is strengthened by how the book of Revelation consistently presents Christ. Throughout Revelation, Jesus is identified as "the Lamb" more than twenty-five times. This is His primary designation. And the Lamb is always identified with His sacrificial death. He is the Lamb who was slain, the Lamb whose blood purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9).

If Christ's identity as the slain Lamb is so central to how He is revealed in the books' vision of ultimate reality, and if this identity extends back to "the foundation of the world," then we're dealing with something far deeper than an emergency intervention. We're seeing God's eternal purpose coming to fruition.

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<sup>42</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: New International Greek Testament Commentary* [NIGTC] (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998). Grant Osborne, *Revelation Verse by Verse* (Osborne New Testament Commentaries) (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Hauck, "Καταβολή" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 620.

## **First Peter 1:20 and the Chosen Christ**

Peter develops this same theme in his first epistle. Writing to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, he reminds them of the cost of their redemption: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Notice the temporal markers in this text. Christ was "...chosen before the creation of the world" but "...revealed in these last times." His role as the sacrificial Lamb, the one whose blood would redeem humanity, was determined before creation. It was not a response to the Fall. It was determined before the Fall ever occurred, indeed before the world in which the Fall would occur even existed.

The Greek word for "chosen" here is "προεγνωσμένου" (proegnōsmenou), which combines the prefix pro (before) with the verb ginōskō (to know). It means to foreknow, to choose in advance, to determine beforehand.<sup>44</sup> The perfect passive participle form indicates a completed action with ongoing results. Christ was chosen in the past with permanent effect.

But this raises a question. If Christ was chosen before creation to be the sacrificial Lamb, then God chose Him for this role, knowing that His sacrifice would take place. God knew, before creating the world, that the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the second person of the Trinity would take place. This means God created the world with full knowledge that redemption through Christ's blood would take place. The Cross was not Plan B. It was built into Plan A from the very beginning.

## **Ephesians 1:3-14 and the Eternal Purpose**

The eternal nature of God's purpose is briefly described in the opening of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In one long, theologically rich sentence (in Greek), Paul surveys the entire scope of God's saving work and repeatedly emphasizes its eternal nature.<sup>45</sup>

After the introduction to the letter, in verses 1-2, the encouragement begins: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:3-4).

Once again, we encounter the phrase "...before the creation of the world." God chose us in Christ before anything was created. Our salvation is not an adaptation to circumstances God didn't foresee. It was planned from eternity. We were chosen in Christ before the world began.

Notice also that we were chosen "in him," that is, in Christ. Our election is not independent of Christ; it is bound up with Him. We are chosen to be in union with Christ. This means that God's plan

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<sup>44</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Γινώσκω, Γινῶσις, Ἐπιγινώσκω, Ἐπίγνωσις, Καταγινώσκω, Ἀκατάγνωστος, Προγινώσκω, Πρόγνωσις, Συγγνώμη, Γνώμη, Γνωρίζω, Γνωστός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 715.

<sup>45</sup> For an insightful discussion see N. T. Wright, *The Vision of Ephesians: The Task of the Church and the Glory of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025)

of salvation through Christ, and His plan to have a redeemed people united to Christ, are one plan, not two. They were conceived together, before creation.

Paul continues, "In love he predestined (predetermined) us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:5). At this point, I will differ from the translation and suggest that there is no 'pre-destiny' here or anywhere else in the Bible. We do not have a destiny in the sense of the Greek fates, rather God determined what He intended to do before the creation event. He selected or 'chose' people to be 'in Christ.'<sup>46</sup> He pre-determined the Ephesians, and us, not just to salvation but to adoption, to becoming children of God, becoming part of the family of God. And this was done "in accordance with his pleasure and will," that is, it reflects what God had always purposed to do.

Later in the same passage, Paul writes: "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined (predetermined) according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). God works out everything, not just some things, according to the purpose of His will. Everything that happens is somehow related to God's eternal purposes and design.

If we have any understanding of these texts at all, I believe they strongly point to the conclusion that the Incarnation and the Cross were not contingency responses. They were instead central to God's eternal purposes. Christ came not because the original plan failed but because this was the plan all along.

### **Acts 2:23 and the Deliberate Plan**

We've already encountered Acts 2:23 in our discussion of Peter's Pentecost sermon. We want to return to it and examine how it addresses God's intentions regarding the Cross. Peter declares: "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23).

The phrase "deliberate plan" in Greek is "τῆ ὀρισμένη βουλῆ" (tē hōrismenē boulē). The word hōrismenē comes from horizō, which means to determine, to set boundaries, to decide definitively. It's where we get our English word "horizon," the boundary of what we can see. The word boulē means counsel, purpose, intention, will. Together, the phrase means something like "the determined purpose" or "the definite plan."<sup>47</sup>

Peter told the crowd that God not only foreknew the crucifixion and allowed it to happen, but that it was part of His plan all along. His intention was that the promised Messiah would be that 'suffering servant' of Isaiah 53. The crucifixion was part of God's determined purpose and plan. Though they bear the responsibility for their actions in rejecting Jesus, that rejection was part of the story being played out, and now they must make a choice.

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<sup>46</sup> I believe the translation of προορίζω by the English word 'predestine' is a theological misstep which is based in the belief that God determines everything that comes to pass. I would strongly suggest this creates more problems than it solves. I recommend Steve Lemke, *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique* (Brentwood: B&H Publishing Group, 2022). For προορίζω see William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 873.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "Ὀρίζω, Ἀφορίζω, Ἀποδιορίζω, Προορίζω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 452.

At this point, I want to be careful concerning what many feel is an interpretive tension in what Peter is saying. As I mentioned above, the same verse says that wicked men put Jesus to death. Human beings, exercising libertarian moral agency, chose to crucify Jesus. Peter grinds in their moral responsibility while at the same time emphasizing God's involvement. The crucifixion was both a great evil committed by wicked men and the fulfillment of God's deliberate plan. Both are true simultaneously. This is where Molina's middle knowledge, introduced in Chapter 1, comes into play.

Peter clearly identifies the crucifixion and resurrection as part of God's plan, not merely as something God permitted or tolerated, or as something God brought good out of after the fact. The Cross was planned by God from eternity.

### **Acts 4:27-28 and the Convergence**

Peter repeats this same theme again just two chapters later in Acts. After he and John are released from custody for preaching about Jesus, the church gathers to pray. Their prayer includes this interesting statement: "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen" (Acts 4:27-28).

Both God's will and human will are understood to be in play. Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel all conspired against Jesus. They were acting out of their own motivations, their own interests, and wickedness. Yet what they did was exactly what God's "power and will had planned beforehand should happen."

As in Ephesians, the phrase "decided beforehand" is a single Greek word, "προώρισεν" (proōrisen), from which we get our English word "predetermined." It means to determine in advance, to mark out the boundaries beforehand. Prior to Paul's epistles, the early church understood that what happened at the crucifixion was not a cosmic accident or an unfortunate disruption of God's plans. It was the fulfillment of what God had planned.

### **Romans 3:25-26 and the Demonstration Language**

I've already mentioned these verses in the Introduction and Chapter 1, but they're so central to the demonstration framework that I want to revisit them. Romans 3:25-26 is where I first encountered the concept that has shaped this entire study.

Paul writes, "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood, to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished, he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

The word translated "demonstrate" here is "ἐνδειξίς" (endeixis), has a wide semantic breadth. It can be translated as a showing forth, a proof, a demonstration, or an exhibition. It conveys the idea of a public display intended to make something clear, to reveal something that might otherwise be hidden or misunderstood.<sup>48</sup>

Paul uses this word twice in these verses. God presented Christ to demonstrate His righteousness, and He did this to demonstrate His righteousness at that time. The repetition is emphatic. The Cross is not merely accomplishing something (though it does accomplish propitiation

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<sup>48</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

and justification). The Cross reveals something about God's character that He wanted made visible, that required enactment rather than mere declaration, and that needed to happen when it did. The timing was just right.<sup>49</sup>

What is being demonstrated, and to whom? In the context of these verses, it means God's justice and His justifying grace are both being demonstrated together. The Cross demonstrates that God is perfectly just or righteous (He does not ignore sin or sweep it under the rug) and that He is the one who justifies (He makes sinners righteous, to be in right relationship with Himself, through faith in Christ). Both God's justice and His mercy are fully displayed at the Cross to both mankind and the angels.

This is demonstration language, not permission language. God is not reluctantly allowing something bad to happen and then making the best of it. He is purposefully enacting something that reveals His character in a way that could not be revealed otherwise. The Cross demonstrates God's righteousness by showing both His justice and His mercy operating simultaneously in the most extreme way conceivable.

### **What These Texts Tell Us**

When we gather these biblical texts together, a picture emerges that challenges the reactive frameworks we briefly examined in Chapter 1. These texts strongly suggest that since Christ was chosen before creation to be the sacrificial Lamb, His role as Redeemer was not an adaptation to unexpected circumstances but rather part of an eternal purpose. That Jesus was chosen and that we were chosen before creation. Our salvation through Christ is not Plan B but was woven into God's eternal purposes from the beginning.

The Cross was part of God's deliberate plan, His determined purpose. It was intended to demonstrate God's character in a way that made visible what could not be adequately communicated through mere declaration. This is due to the fact that of God's character or attributes require enactment to be fully revealed. Christ remains the slain Lamb on the throne eternally. The Incarnation and the marks of the Cross are permanent, not temporary and so are a continual reminder of what kind of God to which His family is related.

This biblical data fit uncomfortably within a framework that views the Incarnation and the Cross as emergency responses to an unexpected crisis. They sit much more naturally within a framework that understands the world as a stage for divine self-revelation. Where the Incarnation and the Cross represent the climax of a demonstration that God intended from eternity.

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<sup>49</sup> Douglas Moo: In his definitive commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT), Moo discusses the phrase "at the present time" (*en tō nyn kairō*) in verse 26. He notes that the cross is the "climax of history" where God's justice is finally vindicated after centuries of "passing over" sins. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 240. C.E.B. Cranfield: Often cited for the most thorough technical analysis of these verses, Cranfield emphasizes that "at the present time" stands in deliberate contrast to the "former sins" mentioned in verse 25, marking the unique era of the Gospel. C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 213. N.T. Wright: In his work *The Day the Revolution Began*, Wright discusses how Romans 3:21–26 defines the "present time" as the moment when the "new age" of God's covenant faithfulness was publicly displayed through the crucifixion. Citation: N.T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (HarperOne, 2016), 293

## **The Implications of Reading Backward**

When we read the biblical story backward from Christ's enthronement and let the end inform our understanding of the beginning, I would like to suggest that several implications emerge.

First, that God created the world knowing exactly what would happen and intending to reveal Himself more fully through the drama of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. The Fall was not unforeseen, and so the need for redemption was not unexpected. The Cross was not improvisation. Instead, it was part of the eternal plan.

Second, it repositions the Incarnation as central rather than peripheral to God's purposes. Christ is not merely the solution to a problem; He is the goal toward which creation was always heading. Humanity united to deity in the person of Christ is not damage control; it is the intended consummation.

Third, it suggests that the world we inhabit, with all its moral complexity, is not a broken version of what God wanted but is actually suited to accomplish what God intended. The possibility of moral evil, suffering, and death is not an unfortunate happenstance but is required for the demonstration God planned to enact.

Fourth, it changes how we understand suffering. Our pain is not meaningless or accidental. It is not the result of a plan gone wrong. It is part of our participation in God's purposes. This doesn't make suffering less painful or remove the need for lament. But it does suggest that our suffering is not absurd or pointless. It is not outside God's redemptive purposes.

I want to be careful here. I am not saying that God causes our suffering or that He delights in our pain. I am not saying that every specific instance of suffering serves an obvious purpose that we can identify. What I am suggesting is that God, knowing that this world would include genuine evil and real suffering, nevertheless chose to create it because only this kind of world could accomplish His demonstrative purposes. Only this kind of world could reveal the fullness of His character.

## **From Where We Stand**

We don't live at the end of the story. We live between the already and the not yet. From where we stand, we cannot see the end clearly. We see through a glass darkly. We know in part. Even so, Scripture gives us glimpses of the plot's direction and how the story ends. It pulls back the curtain momentarily to show us where all of this is heading. And when we catch sight of the saints and angels singing "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain," we're invited to reconsider how we understand the story we're living in.

If the end is not a return to Eden but is rather something that transcends Eden. If it includes God bearing the permanent marks of suffering and redemption rather than erasing them. If the goal was always to unite humanity and deity in Christ and to display God's character through the drama of redemption. Then perhaps we need to expand our framework for understanding why God created the world He did.

This is what the demonstration framework attempts to do. It doesn't reject the traditional Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration framework but expands it by asking different questions. Not "How is God responding to disaster?" but "What is God revealing through this drama?" Not "Why does God permit evil?" but "What does God intend to demonstrate through a world that includes both good and evil?"

In the next chapter, we will continue the exploration of these ideas. We will ask what kind of world God would need to create if His purpose was comprehensive self-revelation. We will examine why certain attributes of God can only be demonstrated, not merely declared. We will consider what the theatre metaphor means and why it might be a helpful way to understand God's purposes in creation.

So, having started reading the story backward and seen where it all ends, we're now better positioned to understand why it began the way it did.

## CHAPTER 3: Why a Theatre?

*"I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."*

Oscar Wilde

The metaphor of the world as a theatre has a long and somewhat complicated history in Christian thought. Shakespeare famously wrote, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."<sup>50</sup> The image captures something true about human experience: we are actors in a drama we didn't write, playing roles we didn't choose.

The theatrical metaphor has sometimes been misused when it's employed to suggest that life is illusory. This is not at all what I intend to convey with the theatre metaphor. When I speak of the world as a theatre for divine self-revelation, I am not suggesting that human choices are unreal or that we lack genuine moral agency.

Instead, I am suggesting that God created the world in a way similar to a stage (θέατρον, theatron), where He could reveal His full character through enacted history. The word *theatron* literally means "a place for viewing," a space where something is meant to be seen and witnessed.<sup>51</sup> Just as a theatrical performance makes visible what would otherwise remain abstract or imaginary, so the created world makes visible what would otherwise remain incomprehensible about God's nature.

But why would God need such a theatre? Why couldn't He simply declare His character? Why go to the extraordinary lengths of creating a universe, allowing evil and suffering to occur, becoming incarnate, and dying on a cross, all to better reveal Himself? These are the questions we attempt to address in this chapter.

### The Necessity of Enactment

There is a fundamental difference between declaring something and demonstrating it. I can tell you that I love you, and I can even describe that love in eloquent terms. But as the saying goes, "Talk is cheap." Until love is enacted, declarations remain mere words. They may be true, but they carry none of the weight and credibility that only action can provide.

What is true in human relationships appears to be equally true in divine ones. God could have simply declared His character, and perhaps He did exactly that in the heavenly courts, announcing to the assembled angels, "I am merciful, just, loving, holy, patient, forgiving, powerful, wise, and faithful." Every word would have been true. But what could the angels conclude from such declarations? What could anyone conclude? Abstract self-description, however accurate, remains inherently unverified.

Demonstration changes everything. When God shows mercy, He shows it to actual sinners who have committed punishable offenses. When He executes justice, He judges real evil. When He loves, He loves specific persons who have done nothing to merit that love. When He exercises patience, He endures centuries of rebellion. When He forgives, He forgives people who have deeply betrayed Him. Each of these enacted moments transforms an abstract attribute into a witnessed reality. The truth migrates from proposition to event — from something stated to something seen. For finite

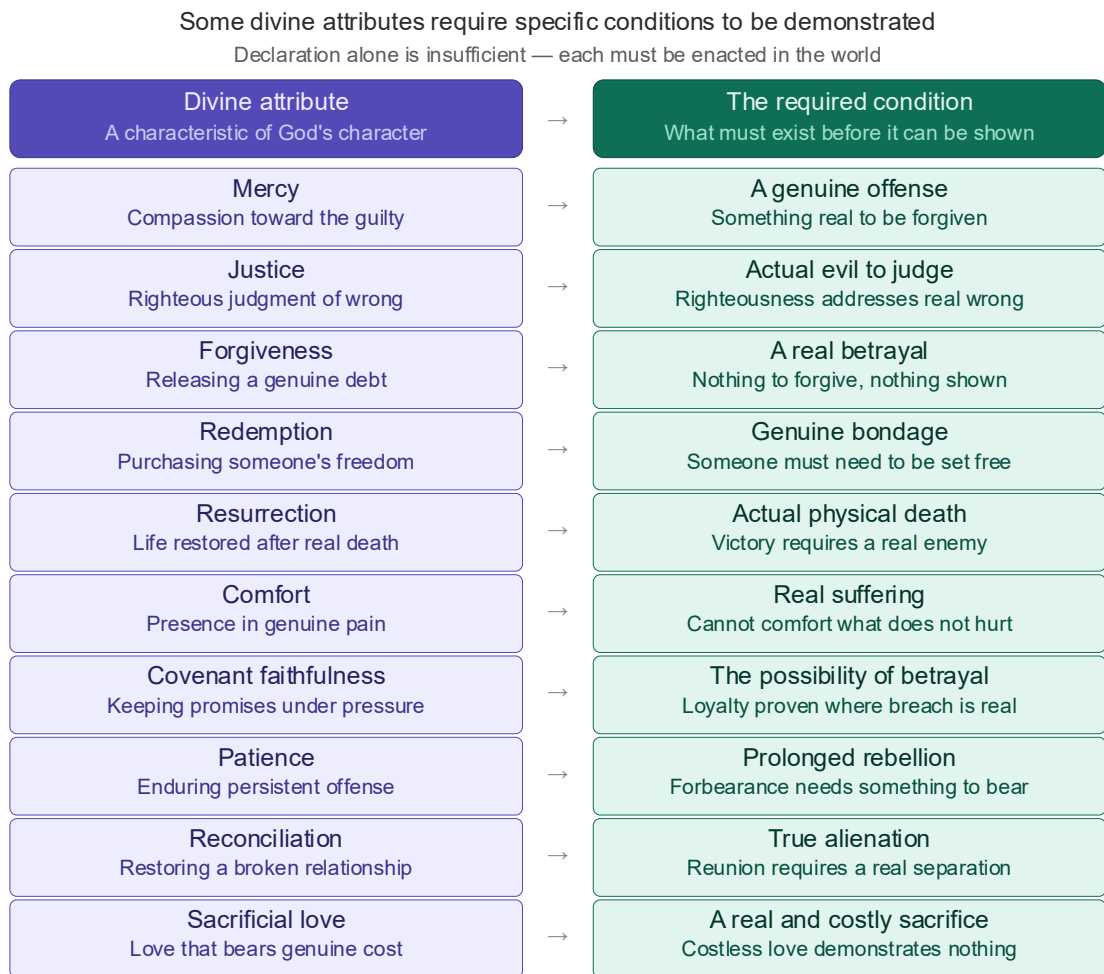
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<sup>50</sup> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 7, The Seven Ages of Man, Blog post <https://www.rsc.org.uk/as-you-like-it/about-the-play/famous-quotes>

<sup>51</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 136.

beings, whether angels or humans, who depend on concrete experience to grasp what is real, this is precisely what is needed to understand and worship God.

But there's something more here, something that goes beyond creaturely comprehension. Some attributes cannot be demonstrated without specific conditions. You cannot demonstrate mercy without offense. You cannot demonstrate forgiveness without betrayal. You cannot demonstrate redemption without something broken. You cannot demonstrate resurrection without death. You cannot demonstrate comfort without suffering. You cannot demonstrate reconciliation without alienation. If God wanted to reveal the fullness of His character, including these attributes that require specific conditions, He would need to create a world where those conditions exist.



*Without these conditions, God's full character could never be demonstrated.*

Figure 3.1. The conditions each divine attribute requires before it can be demonstrated rather than merely declared.

If God wanted to reveal the fullness of His character, including these attributes that require specific conditions, He would need to create a world where those conditions exist. The Heavenly realm wouldn't work. He would need a stage where moral evil occurs, where genuine suffering exists, and where death is a reality. Otherwise, certain aspects of His character would remain forever hidden, knowable only as abstract concepts but never witnessed, and so never really understood.

## The Good but Dangerous World

When God surveyed His completed creation in Genesis 1, He declared it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). This verdict is important for the proposed framework. God was not merely satisfied with what He had made. He pronounced it very good. Not perfect in the sense of being without the possibility of change or corruption. Not eternal in the sense of being immune to decay. But very good, suited to His purposes, designed according to His intentions, exactly what He meant to create.

What kind of world did God pronounce very good? A world that included the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with a command not to eat from it. A world that included the possibility of disobedience. A world where creatures could choose to rebel against their Creator. A world that was, by design, what we might call "good but dangerous."<sup>52</sup>

This phrase, "good but dangerous", captures something important about God's creative intent. The world was good. It functioned as God intended. It provided the stage for real relationships, choice, and moral drama. But it was also dangerous. Real stakes existed. Rebellion was possible, and if rebellion occurred, suffering would follow.

The danger was not a design defect; it was a feature. Without the possibility of rebellion with all the consequences that might ensue, there could be no risky obedience. The danger, the risk, the stakes, these were all necessary for the kind of demonstration God intended.

Why is this important? What would a world without danger look like? It would be a world where choices, though real and undetermined, just as in the heavenly realm, would not be what was needed to show the depth of God's character. Such a world might be comfortable, but it could not be the stage for the kind of moral drama required. There could not be a demonstration of mercy, as there would be no offense to forgive. As for justice, there would be no wickedness to judge. How could redemption be shown, and as for resurrection with its victory, how without sin and death? In short, it would be a world very much like the one we conceive of God's heavenly realm.

God pronounced this dangerous world "very good" because it was precisely the world required for His purposes. The danger was not an unfortunate result of bad choices that God reluctantly tolerated. It was an intentional feature of a world designed to reveal God's character comprehensively throughout a long and troubled history.

I would strongly suggest that this helps us understand why God placed two trees in the garden. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life made the choice clear. Choose relational trust, obedience, and life, or choose autonomy and death. It wasn't a trap. It wasn't God wondering how it would go. It was the necessary set of conditions for genuine moral agency. The possibility of making a wrong choice is the point.

This is what distinguishes the earthly material creation from the heavenly one. The celestial host has no such choice in their environment. There is no danger that we know of related to their choices. The world and the trees represented a new, observable reality that was both good and

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<sup>52</sup> For a lengthy exposition on what I think is an unusual way of looking at the creation story, and one that I am adopting for the demonstration framework I recommend Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014). Also for an understanding of the Celestial host see Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm (Expanded Edition): Discovering the Supernatural World of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2025)

dangerous. Unlike heaven, this was a place where creatures could flourish through obedience or suffer through rebellion.

### **The Complexity of Divine Character**

The God revealed in Scripture is not as simple as some would have Him. Rather, He reveals Himself as complex. He possesses attributes that, from our limited perspective, seem to exist in tension with one another. He is perfectly just and perfectly merciful. He is wrathful toward sin and compassionate toward sinners. He is transcendent beyond all creation and immanent within it. He is unchanging in His essential nature and responsive to human prayer. He is sovereign over all things and yet is affected by human choices.<sup>53</sup>

Classical theology has long wrestled with these tensions, sometimes by attempting to resolve them through careful distinctions, sometimes by emphasizing one set of attributes over others, and sometimes by punting to mystery that exceeds human comprehension.<sup>54</sup> But what if these apparent tensions are not problems to be solved but are aspects of God's character that He intends to reveal simultaneously?

How can God show Himself as both just and righteous and merciful? A world that only revealed God's justice would show Him punishing every sin immediately and completely. Such a world would demonstrate His holiness and His righteous judgment, but it would not reveal His mercy, His patience, His willingness to forgive, and His desire to redeem rather than to punish.<sup>55</sup>

Conversely, a world that only revealed God's mercy might show Him tolerating sin without consequence and forgiving without justice. Such a world might seem to display divine love, but it would certainly compromise His justice and holiness. It would suggest that sin doesn't really matter, and that God's moral character can be safely ignored.

The Cross reveals both simultaneously. At the Cross, God's justice is fully satisfied. Sin is punished completely. The penalty is paid in full. God does not compromise His holiness or treat sin lightly. At the same time, God's mercy is also fully displayed. Sinners are forgiven, and redemption is offered freely. Those who deserve wrath receive grace instead. Both justice and mercy are well displayed.<sup>56</sup>

I believe this is the point in Romans 3:25-26, which we briefly examined in the previous chapter. God presented Christ "...to demonstrate his righteousness...so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." God is both just (He judges sin) and the justifier (He saves sinners). Both are true. Both are demonstrated. Neither is compromised.

You can see that this type of character demonstration requires a specific kind of world. It requires a world in which sin occurs and deserves to be judged. It requires a world in which bad to heinous offenses are committed and require redress. A world where mercy has meaning because

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<sup>53</sup> What I have said is certainly controversial. For an excellent exposition on God's complexity, read John C. Peckham, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2021)

<sup>54</sup> *Divine Simplicity - Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2006. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity/>. *Divine Simplicity | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2023. <https://iep.utm.edu/divine-simplicity/>. *Anselm and the God of Classical Theism*. 2024. <https://cf.sbts.edu/equip/uploads/2024/05/SBJT-27.3-Anselm-and-the-God-of-Classical-Theism-Lewis.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Objantoro, Enggar, Emi SELI, and Matius Julianes. "The Concept of Divine Justice and Mercy in the Prophetic Literature of the Hebrew Bible." *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis* 8, no. 1 (2025): 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.3126/gnosi.v8i1.295> Accessed January 7, 2026

<sup>56</sup> Mark Ward et al., eds., *Lexham Survey of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

justice is real and sin is serious. Without these conditions, the demonstration does not occur. Without this good but dangerous world, God's full character would remain partially hidden.<sup>57</sup>

### **What Kind of World is Required?**

If we accept that God created the world as a type of theatre for divine self-revelation, we can ask what kind of world would be required for a thorough demonstration of God's character? What parameters must exist on this stage?

First, the world would contain creatures capable of making significant moral choices. They would be like the angels with the ability to choose. Without real libertarian freedom to choose between good and evil, there would be no genuine moral drama. If creatures are programmed to always choose good, then they are not really choosing at all. Their "obedience" would be mechanical rather than moral. Their relationship, love if you will, with God and each other would be automatic rather than authentic. For God to demonstrate His character through a relationship with creatures, those creatures must be capable of genuine choice, including the choice to rebel.

Second, these choices must have significant consequences. If evil choices produce no adverse results, then the moral stakes are not very high. The drama becomes theatrical in the worst sense, just a performance without substance. For God to demonstrate mercy, there must be offenders who could suffer the consequences from which they need to be mercifully delivered. For God to demonstrate redemption, someone must be in a state that requires purchase.<sup>58</sup>

Third, the world ought to include the possibility of both moral and natural evil. Moral evil (sin) arises from creaturely choices. Natural evil (suffering, disease, death) arises from living in a physical world governed by natural laws. Both are necessary for a comprehensive demonstration. Moral evil provides the context for demonstrating God's justice, mercy, forgiveness, and redemption. Natural evil provides the context for God's compassion, comfort, sustaining, and resurrection power.

Fourth, the world includes time and history. Some attributes of God can only be demonstrated over time. His faithfulness requires a history of covenantal, agreed-upon relationships to which He adheres. His patience requires enduring rebellion over centuries, and mankind, specifically the Jews, amply demonstrate that. His progressive revelation of Himself sequentially unfolds His purposes.

Fifth, such a world would include death, which is contrary to the heavenly experience of the angelic host. Without the consequence of death as the result of sin, the gravity of the offense of autonomy would not be appreciated. God's judgment and subsequent resurrection of Jesus is the most eloquent and powerful demonstration of God's nature in all of Scripture, but it requires actual death as its precondition.

Sixth, the world so created should allow for a legitimate, reciprocal relationship between God and His creatures. This means they must be capable of knowing, loving, and trusting God, and obeying Him, or choosing to do otherwise. In addition, they would be able to experience His presence

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<sup>57</sup> R. Hanks, "God's Justice and Man's Sin." Protestant Reformed Churches in America. <https://www.prc.org/resources/publications/articles/item/4479-god-s-justice-and-man-s-sin>. Accessed January 7, 2026

<sup>58</sup> "Irenaean Theodicy." *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice* 10 (2025): 7-21. <https://iirdjournals.org/get/IJRCP/VOL.%2010%20NO.%208%202025/Divine%20Responsibility%20and%20the%20Problem%207-21.pdf> Accessed January 7, 2026

or His absence. Without this relational capacity, there would be no audience for the demonstration. There would be no one to witness and understand what God is revealing.<sup>59</sup>

### The Role of Middle Knowledge

We touched briefly on Molinist middle knowledge in Chapter 1, but it deserves more careful attention here because it helps us understand how God could create a world with significant libertarian freedom while still accomplishing His demonstrative purposes.

Molinism, named after the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, proposes that God possesses three types of knowledge.<sup>60</sup> First, God has natural knowledge, that is, knowledge of all necessary truths, all logical possibilities, everything that could possibly happen. This knowledge is not contingent on God's will; it's simply knowledge of what is logically possible.

Second, God has free knowledge; knowledge of what He has chosen to create, what will really happen in the actual world. This knowledge is contingent on God's creative will. God knows what will happen because He knows what world He has chosen to actualize.

Between these two types of knowledge is a third type called *middle knowledge*. Middle knowledge is God's knowledge of what any sentient creature would freely choose in any possible circumstance. This knowledge is not contingent on God's creative will (it's not up to God what creatures would freely choose), but it's not necessary knowledge either (creatures could have chosen differently in different circumstances).<sup>61</sup> The following diagram maps the three types and their logical relationship, with God's creative decree marking the boundary between the pre-volitional and post-volitional moments.

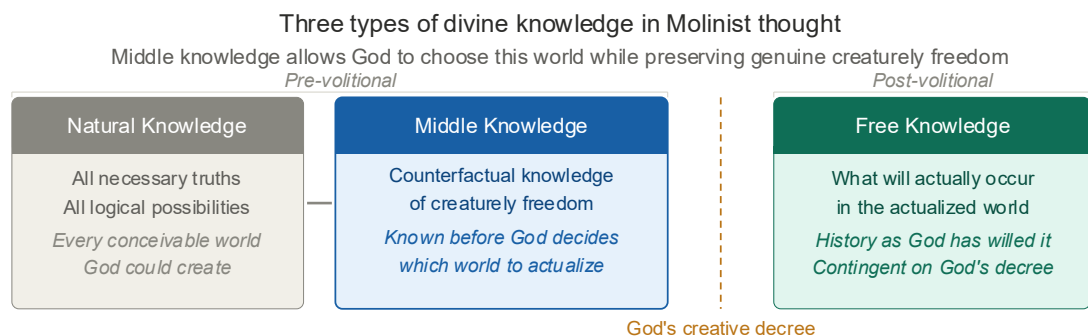


Figure 3.2. The three types of divine knowledge in Molinist thought. Middle knowledge is pre-volitional: known before God's creative decree and the actualization of a world.

Here's an example. God knows through middle knowledge what you would freely choose to do if you were offered a particular job in a particular city at a particular salary. He knows what you would choose if the offer were different, or if the city were different, or if your life circumstances were different. He knows all the possible variations of what you would freely choose in any possible scenario.

<sup>59</sup> Villegas, Diana L.. "Catherine of Siena on persons created in God's image: Basis for a spiritual path." *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9568> Accessed January 7, 2026

<sup>60</sup> Alfred J. Freddoso, "Molina, Luis de (1535–1600)." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 1998. <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/biographical/molina-luis-de-1535-1600/v-1> Accessed January 7, 2026

<sup>61</sup> Fischer, John M. "Foreknowledge and Free Will." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190227613.013.105> Accessed January 7, 2026

On the basis of this middle knowledge, God chose to create this particular world, actualizing certain circumstances and placing certain free creatures in those circumstances, knowing what they would freely choose. God didn't directly cause their choices, but He knew what they would choose, and He ordered the world accordingly.

How does this relate to the demonstration framework? Middle knowledge allows us to say that God created this specific world, knowing exactly what would happen, because this world best accomplishes His demonstrative purposes while preserving genuine creaturely freedom. Among all the infinite possible worlds God could have created, He chose to actualize this one because this world most fully reveals His character through enacted history.<sup>62</sup>

God knew that Adam and Eve would freely choose to eat from the forbidden tree. He knew that human sin would proliferate and spread through all their descendants. He knew that this would necessitate the Incarnation and the Cross. He knew all of this through His middle knowledge.<sup>63</sup> And He chose to create this world, not despite these facts but because this world best accomplishes what He intended from eternity: The comprehensive demonstration of His character to an audience that needs to see it.

This doesn't mean God caused Adam and Eve to sin. They freely chose to rebel. Their choice was real, not coerced or predetermined by God. Knowing what they would freely choose, He created the type of world and the circumstances that would produce the desired result. The Fall was not unforeseen or outside God's purposes. It was part of the drama God intended.

### **The Audience: To Whom Is the Demonstration Directed?**

If the world is a theatre for divine self-revelation, then who is the audience? Who is meant to witness this demonstration? Scripture identifies two distinct audiences: celestial beings (angels) and terrestrial beings (humans). Each audience has a somewhat different relationship to the drama, but both are integral to God's purposes. The following diagram maps that structure, showing the three categories of celestial observers on the left and the three roles humanity occupies on the right, with the world as the stage that connects them.

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<sup>62</sup> "Divine Providence." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 2024.  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2024/entries/providence-divine/> Accessed January 7, 2026

<sup>63</sup> Flint, Thomas P.. *Molinism*. Oxford Handbook of Topics in Philosophy.  
<https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/42642/chapter/358143853>

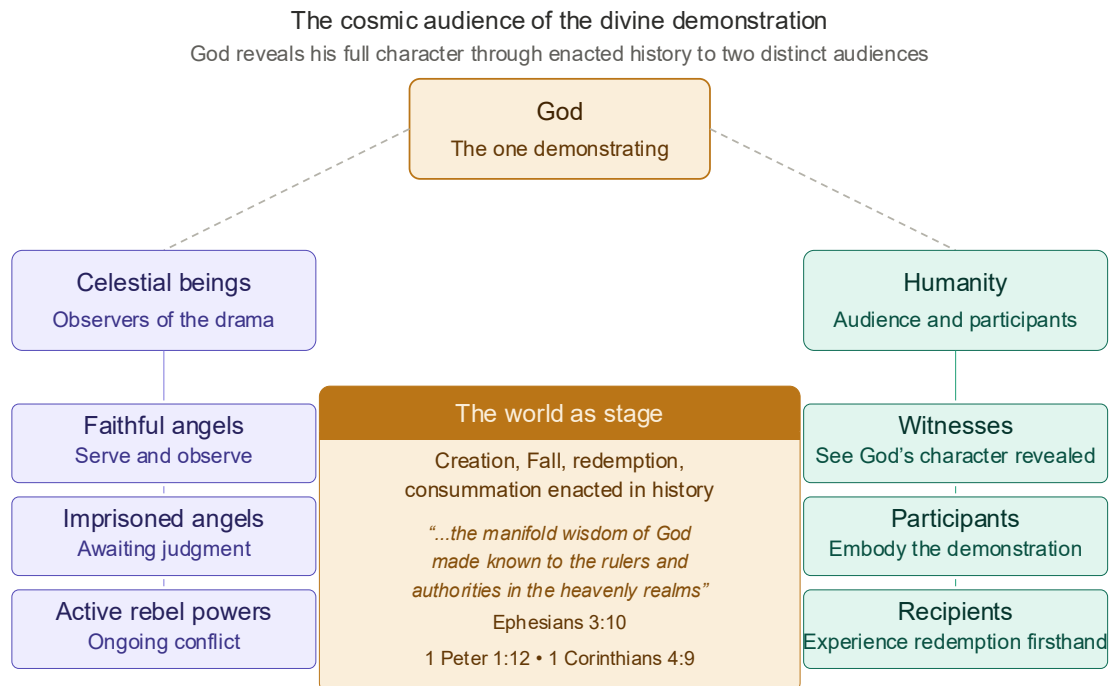


Figure 3.3. The structure of the cosmic audience for the divine demonstration.

## The Celestial Audience

The biblical testimony about angels is somewhat limited, but what we do know strongly suggests that they are deeply interested observers of God's work in human history.<sup>64</sup> They are not mere background characters but active participants as well as witnesses to the demonstration.

First Peter 1:12 is illuminating on this score. After describing the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow, Peter notes that the prophets who predicted these things "...were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."<sup>65</sup>

Angels long to look into these things. The Greek word translated "long to look into" is "παρακύψαι" (*parakupsai*), which means to stoop down to look closely at something, to examine carefully, to peer into.<sup>66</sup> It suggests intense curiosity and focused attention. The angels are not casual observers but eager students, seeking to understand the mysteries of redemption that are being worked out through Christ.

Ephesians 3:10 goes further, explicitly stating that human history serves as revelation to the angelic realm. Paul writes that God's purpose is "...that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom

<sup>64</sup> Michael Heiser, *Angels: What the Bible Really Says about God's Heavenly Host* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018)

<sup>65</sup> Jack Andrews, *Understanding 1 Peter*, The Jack Andrews Expository Studies (WORD search, 2017), 124–125.

<sup>66</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, "Παρακύπτω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 814.

of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." The church, composed of redeemed sinners united to Christ, makes God's wisdom known to angels.

The phrase "manifold wisdom" is "ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία" (hē polupoikilos sophia), meaning multi-faceted, many-sided, variegated wisdom.<sup>67</sup> Like a jewel with many facets, each reflecting light differently, God's wisdom has multiple dimensions that can only be seen when viewed from different angles. The church, in all its complexity and history, reveals aspects of God's wisdom that might not be visible otherwise, even to angels.

This passage is revealing. Angels, created in God's presence with direct access to Him, still desire to learn something about God, which they do by observing His work with humanity. They witness the demonstration of divine attributes that they could not fully comprehend without seeing them enacted in human history.

Why would this be necessary? Why wouldn't angels, created in heaven with full access to God's power and holiness, already understand His character completely? Perhaps because certain aspects of God's character can only be demonstrated through the drama of redemption. Angels know God's creative power; they watched Him create the universe. They know His holiness; they serve in His presence. But do they understand His redemptive love the way redeemed sinners do? The answer is a resounding NO!

This becomes even more significant when we remember that some angels seem to have rebelled. Satan, also known in the New Testament as the Devil, along with other Celestial and demonic powers described in Ephesians 6:10f, are in a sort of rebellion. Despite living in God's presence and knowing His capabilities, they nevertheless chose to go against His will.<sup>68</sup> If such beings with direct access to God could rebel, perhaps they needed a fuller revelation of His character. Maybe they needed to see not just His power and wisdom, but also His love, mercy, and redemption.

The book of Job illustrates this dramatically. The story opens with a scene in the heavenly council where "the Satan" (הַשָּׂטָן, ha-satan, "the adversary") questions God's character and Job's faithfulness.<sup>69</sup> The Satan suggests that Job only serves God because it benefits him. Remove the benefits, and Job will curse God to His face. What follows is a demonstration, a test that reveals both Job's character and God's. Is this part of some rebellion, or is this a role being played out?<sup>70</sup>

The angelic realm watches the drama unfold. They see Job remain faithful despite catastrophic loss. They see restoration come after testing. They witness dimensions of God's character that could only be revealed through this set of circumstances, as well as other examples of suffering and redemption. The Satan's challenge is answered not through declaration but through demonstration.

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<sup>67</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 90–91.

<sup>68</sup> David Seal, "Demon," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> It is important to understand that the definite article indicates that 'the Satan' is a title and not a proper name. This being has a role to play which is more fully developed in the New Testament. David Seal, "Satan," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>70</sup> Ryan E. Stokes, *The Satan: How God's Executioner Became the Enemy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

### **From Observation to Participation: The Relational Goal**

But why do angels need to observe this demonstration? Is all this really necessary? Why does God care about whether Celestial beings understand His character more fully? The answer takes us to the heart of God's purposes in creation. God is not just seeking to educate His creatures about His attributes. He is seeking to draw them into a closer relationship with Himself. The demonstration serves this goal.

The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, exists in perfect, eternal relationship characterized by *perichoresis* (περιχώρησις), the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons.<sup>71</sup> This is not simply coexistence but a profound relational unity. The three persons of the Trinity know each other completely, love each other perfectly, and share life fully. The Father delights in the Son. The Son glorifies the Father. The Spirit proceeds from both and unites them. This is the very essence of God, relational love at infinite depth.

When God created, He did so from the overflow of this love. His love is, by nature, *diffusivum sui* (self-diffusive, self-sharing).<sup>72</sup> He desired to expand the circle of love, creating a family, both celestial and terrestrial, who could participate in the Triune God's relational life. Not as equals, certainly, but as beloved children fully participating in family life.

But an authentic relationship requires sufficient and necessary knowledge held by each. You cannot deeply, relationally love someone you do not know. In the same way, you cannot participate in a relationship with someone whose nature remains hidden or misunderstood. If God wanted creatures who could relate to Him with some depth, not as servants at a distance, then those creatures needed to see as much of His full character as possible, given their inherent limitations.

Consider what aspects of God's character are critical for a deep relationship. Can I trust Him over time? What happens if I fail? Can He patiently endure my weaknesses? How can I know if He truly cares for me? Will He be present in my suffering? These are not abstract theological concepts. These are the very attributes that make an intimate relationship possible.

And these are precisely the attributes that can only be shown through the kind of world we inhabit. You can demonstrate faithfulness via a history of covenant-keeping. You can demonstrate mercy by granting it to those who need it and don't deserve it. Your patience is shown by being long-suffering regarding those who try it repeatedly. And love is understood when expressed to the unlovable.

The angelic beings observe this demonstration not to accumulate theological information but to come to know God in His fullness so they can relate to Him more deeply. They watch humanity's story unfold, with all its transience, brevity, choices, nobility, evil, and suffering. And through this observation, they learn about God's character, which gives them the opportunity to be transformed in their relationship with Him.

This is why the world needed to be "good but dangerous." A safe world, where nothing was at stake, where choices had no real consequences, and where suffering was impossible, would be

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<sup>71</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Adventure of Theological Ideas," *Religious Studies Review* 22, no. 2 (1996): 103. "Perichoresis 18.4 (2020)," n.d. doi:10.2478/PERC-2020-0019.

<sup>72</sup> Zacharia, P. (2024). "Parallels between Maximus the Confessor and Vladimir Soloviev" (1853-1900). *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 14, 105–146. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37772>

insufficient to demonstrate those relational attributes that require the kind of world we inhabit: the transient, fragile, dangerous one.

The end goal is not only that angels (and humans) would know facts about God. The goal is that we would all be drawn into participation in the life of the Triune God. That we would experience something analogous to *perichoresis*, not becoming divine, but being united in love with the Divine.<sup>73</sup> That we would form a family, both celestial and terrestrial, bound together by love for God and for one another, participating in the eternal life that flows from the Father through the Son by the Spirit.

This is the vision toward which all of Scripture moves. Not merely a return to Eden, but something far greater: a new heaven and new earth where God dwells with His people, where the Lamb is on the throne still bearing His scars, where the redeemed from every nation join with the celestial host in worship, and where the demonstration is complete and all creation participates in the glory, the character of God revealed.<sup>74</sup>

The observation of this world is not an end in itself. It is the means by which creatures come to know God truly, so they can love Him deeply, and so they can participate in the relational life for which they were created. The theatre serves the relationship. The demonstration serves the participation. And the "good but dangerous" world provides the stage where God's character is revealed in ways that make such a deep relationship possible.

### **The Human Audience**

Humanity is the other primary audience for God's self-revelation. And like the angels, we are also participants. We are both the audience watching the demonstration and the actors within it. This dual role is critical to understanding our place in God's purposes.

As audience members, we witness God's character revealed throughout history. We see His creative power in nature. We learn of His covenant faithfulness through Israel's history. We behold His love at the Cross. We experience His comfort in our suffering. We hope in His promises of resurrection and restoration. God reveals Himself to us through all these means.

We are also participants in the demonstration itself. Our lives, our choices, our responses to God become part of the drama. When we trust God in hardship, we demonstrate (to ourselves, to others, and to the angelic realm) that God is trustworthy. When we forgive those who wrong us, we demonstrate something about God's forgiveness. When we love our enemies, we demonstrate God's love. When we persevere through suffering, we demonstrate God's sustaining power.

Paul captures this dual role when he writes: "For it seems to me that God has put us, apostles, on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to people" (1 Corinthians 4:9). We are a "spectacle" (θέατρον, theatron—literally, "a theatre").<sup>75</sup> Our lives are part of the demonstration that both angels and people witness.

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<sup>73</sup> This may explain the rather enigmatic phrase found in John 17:21 when Jesus says "...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that you sent Me."

<sup>74</sup> "Revelation 21: A New Heaven and a New Earth." BibleHub. <https://biblehub.com/revelation/21.htm> Accessed January 7, 2026

<sup>75</sup> Gerhard Kittel, "Θέατρον, Θεατρίζομαι," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 42.

Through union with Christ, believers are incorporated into God's self-revelation. We become, in Paul's language, "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). We represent Him to the watching world. Our transformation demonstrates His power to make all things new. Our forgiveness demonstrates His mercy. Our love demonstrates His nature. Finally, our hope demonstrates His faithfulness to His promises.

This is not to say that we are perfect representations of God's character. We fail frequently. We misrepresent Him. We obscure rather than reveal His nature because of our sin and weakness. But even our failures serve to demonstrate the contrast between divine holiness and human sinfulness, making God's grace all the more glorious when He nevertheless chooses to work through such flawed vessels.

Like the angels, we are ultimately being prepared for participation in the life of the Triune God. But our journey is different. We are not observers of redemption from a distance; we are recipients of it. We experience God's mercy firsthand because we need it. We know His redemptive power personally because we are the ones being redeemed.

The demonstration serves to draw both celestial and terrestrial audiences into a deeper relationship with God and with each other. The family God is creating includes both angels and humans, both observers and participants, all united in worship of the Lamb who was slain, all experiencing the depth of relationship for which we were created.

### **The Lord's Prayer and the Demonstration Framework**

One of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture takes on new dimensions when read through the lens of the demonstration framework. The Lord's Prayer, recorded in Matthew 6:9-13, is typically understood as a model for how Christians should pray. And it is certainly that. But it may also contain clues about God's ultimate purposes in creation.

Jesus teaches us to pray "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."

Consider the phrase "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What is God's will? According to the demonstration framework, His will is to reveal His full character through enacted history. His will is to display His glory, to make His nature known, to be recognized and honored for who He truly is. His will is to create a family, celestial and terrestrial, who can participate in the relational life of the Trinity.

In heaven, God's will is done. His character is recognized. His glory is seen and celebrated. As we've seen, the Celestial host worship Him in a partial awareness of His nature. Heaven is the realm where God's self-revelation is unobstructed and yet incomplete. Where the relationship with Him is unhindered, but is also insufficient.

On earth, it is clear that God's will is not yet done fully. His character is not yet fully revealed. His glory is not yet recognized by all. Human rebellion obscures His nature. Sin distorts our understanding of Him. The demonstration is underway but not yet complete.

When we pray "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we are praying for the consummation of God's demonstrative purposes. We are asking that the earth become like heaven. We

are praying for the completion of the theatre, for the final act when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

The phrase "hallowed be your name" points in the same direction. To hallow God's name is to recognize it as holy, to honor it, to treat it with the reverence it deserves. God's name represents His character, His nature, His reputation.<sup>76</sup> When we pray that God's name would be hallowed, we are praying that His true character would be recognized and honored by all, both angels and humans.

This is precisely what the demonstration framework envisions. God created the world so that His name and His character would be treated as holy. So that His glory would fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). So that all creatures, celestial and terrestrial, would participate in a relationship with Him at the depth for which they were created.

### **Why Not a Different Theatre?**

Even if we grant that God chose to create a theatre to express His comprehensive self-revelation, and even if we accept that such a theatre must include moral agency with its attendant consequences, a pressing question remains: Why this theatre? Why this much suffering? Couldn't God have demonstrated His character with less pain, less evil, and less tragedy?

This is perhaps the most difficult objection for the demonstration framework, and I don't claim to have a fully satisfying answer. But several considerations may help us think about this question.

First, if God chose to reveal Himself through real relationships with genuinely free creatures, then the amount of evil in the world is at least partly a function of creaturely choices rather than divine design. God set the stage's parameters. He created a good but dangerous world where their choices had real consequences. But creatures improvise much of the script through their choices. Human history is as evil as it is largely because humans have freely chosen evil so consistently and so prolifically.

Second, there may be a kind of fitness or proportionality between the intensity of the demonstration and the depth of revelation that prepares creatures for the relationship. The Cross demonstrates God's love precisely because of the extreme cost. If Christ had endured only minor discomfort rather than torture and murderous execution, would the demonstration be as powerful? Would we understand the depth of God's love as clearly? Would it prepare us for the kind of intimate relationship God intends? Perhaps the intensity of the demonstration corresponds to what is being revealed and the depth of the relationship for which we are being prepared.

Third, we must acknowledge our limited perspective. We see only a small slice of history from our limited viewpoint. We cannot see the whole scope of God's purposes or how all the pieces fit together. What seems excessive to us may be necessary for purposes we cannot yet comprehend. Purposes related not just to knowledge but to the depth of relationship for which God is preparing us. This doesn't resolve the emotional weight of the objection, but it does counsel humility.

Fourth, the demonstration framework doesn't eliminate eschatological hope. The theatre is not the final state. The demonstration is meant to culminate in a consummation in which suffering ends, evil is vanquished, and God dwells with His people in perfect fellowship. The intensity of the

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<sup>76</sup> The English word 'hallowed' the Greek *hagios*. Otto Procksch and Karl Georg Kuhn, "ἅγιος—ἀγιάζω—ἁγιασμός Ἁγιότης—ἁγιωσύνη," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 111.

demonstration may be necessary to prepare us for the glory that will be revealed (Romans 8:18), and for the depth of participation in divine life that awaits.

### **The Theatre Established**

In this chapter, we have explored why God might need a theatre for divine self-revelation. We've seen that some attributes can only be demonstrated, not just declared. We've examined the concept of a "good but dangerous" world, a world that God pronounced very good precisely because it included the parameters necessary for the desired comprehensive demonstration.

We've explored what kind of world such a demonstration requires: genuine moral agency, real consequences, the possibility of both moral and natural evil, time and history, death, and an authentic relationship between God and creatures. We've considered how Molinist middle knowledge helps us understand how God could create such a world while preserving creaturely freedom and accomplishing His purposes.

The audience for this demonstration, both angels and humans, has been recognized. The angels observe this transient, dangerous, morally complex world and learn about God's character in ways that prepare them for a deeper relationship with Him. Humans both observe and participate, experiencing God's redemptive work firsthand in ways that uniquely prepare us for intimate fellowship with Him.

That the goal of this demonstration is not merely cognitive has been made clear. It's not just about knowing facts about God. The goal is relational. God is preparing a family, celestial and terrestrial, to participate in His life, the life of the Triune God. The demonstration reveals the relational attributes of God that enable deep fellowship. The theatre serves the relationship.

We've reflected on how the Lord's Prayer points toward the consummation of God's demonstrative purposes. These include the earth becoming like heaven, God's will being done, His character being fully recognized by all, and the relationship with Him being perfected.

And we've wrestled, if only briefly, with the hardest question: Why this much suffering? Why this intensity of evil? We've offered some considerations but haven't claimed to fully resolve the question. Questions remain. But the demonstration framework at least provides a way of understanding why God might create a world that includes significant evil and suffering. It is because only such a world could accomplish His purpose of comprehensive self-revelation, preparing creatures for the depth of relationship He intends.

Having established why God used a theatre and what kind of theatre is required, we're now ready to examine the drama that unfolds on this stage. In the next chapter, we will confront what many consider the most problematic aspect of the demonstration framework: the intensity and scope of suffering it seems to require. We will ask whether the demonstration is worth such a cost and what it means for our own experience of pain and hope.

## CHAPTER 4: Some Significant Difficulties

*"The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."* – William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2

Having read the preceding chapters, you may, at this point, have some difficulties. For instance, if God had presented you or me with what I have suggested is the 'script' for this world before creation and asked for my input, I would have rejected it. There just seems to be too much evil and pain spread across too many lives for too long. I would have argued for revisions. Couldn't we accomplish Your purposes with a good deal less tragedy? Couldn't the demonstration be just as effective without quite so much horror?

I suspect this would be the universal reaction to the play. The demonstration framework, for all its biblical grounding and theological coherence, faces this rather serious objection. Even if we grant that God desired to create a theatre to reveal His character, even if we accept that such revelation serves relational purposes, the question remains, why THIS much?

This chapter confronts that objection directly. I will not pretend to resolve all the difficulties or to eliminate the weight of the question. A certain degree of unresolved tension remains. But I want to explore several considerations that may help us understand why the demonstration required the scope and intensity of suffering we observe, and why, most importantly, God Himself bears the cost of the script.

### **The Objection Stated Clearly**

Before attempting to address the difficulties, I should state them as clearly as possible. Granting the premise that God wanted to demonstrate His character more completely to the angels and humans, and accepting that such a demonstration requires a world where dangerous conditions, evil, and suffering are possible, surely God could have accomplished His purpose with less.

The history of human suffering is tragic in its scope. Wars, genocides, plagues, famines, natural disasters, and suffering multiplied across countless lives over thousands of years. Children dying of cancer. Mothers burying their babies. Whole populations enslaved, tortured, even exterminated. The sheer weight of suffering in human history staggers the imagination.

If God wanted to demonstrate His mercy, couldn't He have done so with fewer offenses to forgive? If He wanted to demonstrate His power over death, couldn't He have accomplished the goal with fewer people dying? Why not create a world where evil exists but is less prevalent, and where the demonstration happens but at a lower cost?

The objection becomes even more pointed when we consider specific cases. The child dying slowly of a degenerative disease. The Holocaust. The millions who died in the Black Death. The mother watching her children starve. What demonstrative purpose could possibly justify these specific instances of horror? And making this more personal, how does my particular suffering, and that of my family, serve God's revelation of Himself to His creation? This seems a strange way to engender a loving relationship.

This is not an abstract theological puzzle. This is the cry of human beings who have endured and are asking whether their pain means anything. Whether God is good. Whether the demonstration, if that's what this is, could possibly be worth such a cost.

No explanation, however scriptural or reasonable, will satisfy everyone in their situation. Each of us has faced, or will face, a trial that seems overwhelming. Given the life we experience, I want to consider how the demonstration framework may help us think about these questions, even if it doesn't resolve all our difficulties.<sup>77</sup>

### **The Scope Required**

One way is that a comprehensive demonstration may require this kind of scope. If God's purpose is to reveal the entire range of His nature in all its complexity, then the demonstration may need to be correspondingly wide-ranging.

Because the world and people are the way they are, examples include God's mercy, which is demonstrated toward individual sinners as well as entire rebellious nations. His patience is shown through the centuries-long patterns of strife. His comfort for small disappointments as well as catastrophic loss, and His redemptive power in restoring broken individuals and broken civilizations. Lastly, His justice is most clearly seen at the Cross.

Each attribute is demonstrated not just once but repeatedly, in various circumstances, at different scales, across different cultures and time periods. The angels are watching a drama that spans all of human history. They see God's character revealed through Abraham's family and through the Exodus from Egypt. Then again, through the destruction of the first Temple, the Babylonian exile, and the return of many of the Jews to their homes. Through the fall of Rome and through the Reformation. Through countless individual lives across thousands of years.

I would contend that the scope is not arbitrary excess; it is needed as it is. It serves to demonstrate the fullness of God's character. God's patience, demonstrated over the centuries, reveals the full depth of divine forbearance in a way that a shorter demonstration could not. Similarly, though God's mercy demonstrated toward one repentant sinner would certainly reveal what He is like, demonstrated toward millions of repentant sinners from every nation, tribe, and tongue reveals the scope and universality of divine mercy in a way that a smaller demonstration would not. I am strongly suggesting that the nature of God's character requires this kind of extensive demonstration.

This doesn't mean that every specific instance of suffering is directly necessary for the demonstration. It means that the general scope and scale of the drama serves the goal of revelation. A world with less history, fewer people, and narrower circumstances would reveal less about God's character.

### **The Freedom of Creatures and the Multiplication of Evil**

Moral evil is due to creaturely choices. God created the stage as a good but dangerous world where choices have consequences. This was so that creatures, both angelic and human, would have

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<sup>77</sup> This objection is known as the 'evidential problem of evil' and is most famously expounded by William Rowe. William L. Rowe 2001a. "Grounds for Belief Aside, Does Evil Make Atheism More Reasonable than Theism" in William Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp.124-37. For an excellent explanation see Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2025/entries/evil/>.

the opportunity to be involved in ad-libbing a good deal of the script through their free, undetermined choices.

The following short list of examples brings the point home. When the angelic rebellion took place, whenever and for what reasons it did, that was a free choice on their part. When Adam and Eve made their run at autonomy and ate from the forbidden tree, that was also a free choice. When Cain, though warned by God Himself, murdered Abel, that was his choice. As Pharaoh hardened his heart against God, the consequences were his. When the Jewish leaders conspired to crucify Jesus, and when Hitler and Stalin orchestrated such massive unhappiness, they were responsible.

Human and angelic autonomy, with its resulting sin and evil, are certainly the cause. One person's choice to rebel often influences others. Patterns of sin can become embedded in institutions and in cultural systems. The suffering caused by human evil is not something God directly determines. Rather, it is something humans inflict on each other through the cumulative effect of countless choices.<sup>78</sup>

This doesn't fully resolve the objection, of course. God knew through His middle knowledge what choices creatures would make. He knew how sin would multiply, and He knew the scope of suffering that would result. Yet He chose to create this world anyway. So the question remains: why THIS world, knowing what would happen?

Taking this position on divine foreknowledge does shift the question somewhat. It reminds us that God is not the author of sin. Human and angelic beings are morally responsible for their choices, and for the suffering those choices cause. The scope of evil in the world is partly explained by the scope of creaturely rebellion. God permitted this not because He delights in suffering, but because the relationship He is seeking requires this kind of freedom, which includes the possibility of choosing evil on a massive scale.

### **The Divine Cost**

Turning to the most important consideration in thinking about the scope of suffering is that God Himself bears the cost of the demonstration. He does not observe suffering from a distance. He does not send others to endure pain while remaining aloof. He enters into the suffering Himself. The demonstration is costly for God.

This is the scandal of the Incarnation, when God the Son becomes human, taking on flesh, with all its vulnerability to pain, exhaustion, hunger, thirst, suffering, and death.<sup>79</sup> He was born in poverty, lived in obscurity for thirty years, experienced rejection, knew betrayal by close friends,

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<sup>78</sup> I've perhaps overused the phrase 'free choice' throughout this section, meaning a choice which is undetermined by an outside agency. I acknowledge the role of both influence and coercion as motivations for choices but maintain that people still bear responsibility.

<sup>79</sup> This was considered a problem to be discussed early on. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990). Gerald O'Collins, "The Incarnation: The Critical Issues", in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O'Collins SJ (eds), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford, 2002; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Nov. 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199248451.003.0001>, accessed 20 Feb. 2026. Bauckham, Richard, Gerald O'Collins, John Behr, Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, Jürgen Moltmann, Elizabeth A Johnson, Denis Edwards, et al. *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology*. Edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen. Augsburg Fortress, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt13wwwk5>.

endured torture, and finally died an agonizing death by crucifixion. The eternal Word who spoke galaxies into existence died gasping for breath on a Roman cross.<sup>80</sup>

The cost to God extends beyond the physical suffering of Jesus. Classical Christian theology has taught that God is unaffected in His essential nature by circumstances. That He cannot be acted upon in any way, and that He does not change in His essential being. He is not, and cannot be, overwhelmed by anything external. There is an ongoing controversy over whether God is emotionally detached and unaffected by what happens in creation; that He is, in a word, *impassible*.<sup>81</sup>

Contrarily, my position is that the God revealed in Scripture is most certainly affected by the world and the people He created. He grieves (נָחַם (*nā·ḥām*) over human sin.<sup>82</sup> He feels betrayed by Israel's unfaithfulness. He weeps over Jerusalem. He is described as a father who aches for His wayward children, and as a husband wounded by His bride's adultery. Finally, as a king whose heart breaks over His rebellious subjects. I would maintain that these are not just anthropomorphic metaphors of accommodation.<sup>83</sup> Rather, they reveal something true and understandable about God's nature. That He sincerely suffers when His creatures rebel.

This has been discussed as divine *passibility*. Not the inability to avoid being acted upon, but the choice to make Himself vulnerable in His relationships. God doesn't have to care about our choices. He doesn't have to be affected by our sin. There is nothing forcing Him to grieve over our suffering. But He does. Why? Because He genuinely loves His creatures, and love makes a person vulnerable to the beloved's pain.

When we ask why God would create a world with so much suffering, for Himself and for His creation, the answer is elevated when understood to be not unforeseen. Every human death is a death that grieves the God who made that person. Every betrayal wounds the God who loves faithfully. Each injustice offends the God who is perfectly just. The tear shed by a suffering child is seen by the God who cares for that child more than any human parent could.

The demonstration of His character costs God. It costs Him the grief of watching His creatures rebel for millennia, the ongoing sorrow of seeing His children continue to wound each other

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<sup>80</sup> For a few of the modern treatments of this viewpoint see Kenneth R. Overberg SJ, *The Mystery of God and Suffering: Lament, Trust, and Awe* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020). John Clark, *The Incarnation of God: The Mystery of the Gospel as the Foundation of Evangelical Theology* (Toronto: Crossway, 2015). Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). Graham A. Cole, *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation, Vol. 30* (New Studies in Biblical Theology) (Westmont: Intervarsity Press, 2013)

<sup>81</sup> Whether or not God is able to change, or feel emotion, or respond in any way to events outside Himself is controversial. I think scripture indicates that He is responsive. Thomas Jay Oord, Robert J. Matz (Editor), A. Chadwick Thornhill (Editor), *Divine Impassibility: Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering* (Spectrum Multiview Book Series) (Westmont: IVP Academic, 2019). Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God* (Paternoster Theological Monographs) (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009)

<sup>82</sup> In Genesis 6:6 God grieves, or regrets having created mankind due to its inclination toward evil. Regret נָחַם (*nā·ḥām*) James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>83</sup> The concept of accommodation is that God's character and actions are not described in the Bible as they are but are put in more understandable terms accommodated to limited scope of human understanding. This makes a good deal of our understanding of God false, and we are left to guess what He may actually be like. Neil D. Graves. "Milton and the Theory of Accommodation." *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 2 (2001): 251–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174699>.

and themselves through sin. It culminates in the pain He Himself endures in entering human suffering in the Incarnation and on the cross. God is not an unfeeling deity who demands suffering from others while remaining untouched. He is the God who suffers alongside and on behalf of His creatures.

*This doesn't make suffering good, nor does it eliminate the problem of evil. But it does change the character of the question. We're not asking why a detached deity permits suffering. We're asking why a loving God who Himself suffers chose to create a world where such suffering occurs. And the answer the demonstration framework proposes is that this suffering serves a worthwhile purpose: the comprehensive revelation of God's character, preparing creatures for a depth of relationship with Him that could not be achieved in any other way.*

### **The Particularity Problem**

But even if we accept that the demonstration requires this kind and extent of potential suffering, and that God Himself bears much of the cost, another difficulty remains. We might call it the *problem of particularity*. Why, and how, does my particular suffering serve God's purposes? How does this child's cancer, this family's tragedy, and this person's loss contribute to the demonstration?

The demonstration framework, as I've presented it, explains the issue at the macro level: why God created this kind of world rather than another. It explains why there needs to be a theatre with certain parameters. It explains why such a comprehensive demonstration requires this extensive scope. But it doesn't explain the micro level. Why does any specific instance of suffering at any specific time happen to this person?

And I don't think we should expect it to. The framework is not meant to provide an explanation for every individual instance of suffering. It's meant to provide a way of understanding God's purposes at the general level. It attempts to give meaning to suffering without requiring us to identify the specific purpose of each tragedy.

This is important because attempts to identify specific purposes for someone's suffering can go badly wrong. A well-meaning person may tell someone, "God gave you this disease to teach you patience." "God took your child to accomplish His purposes." "Your suffering is punishment for sin." These statements, even when intended to provide comfort, often cause additional harm by suggesting that we can identify God's specific reasons for particular tragedies.<sup>84</sup>

The demonstration framework says something different. It says that God created a world where suffering is possible because only such a world can accomplish His demonstrative purposes. It says that any particular instance of suffering occurring within that world is subject to the complex interplay of natural laws, creaturely choices, and divine providence. It continues to explain that God is working to bring good out of every instance of suffering, and to incorporate even our worst moments into His larger purposes. It ensures that nothing is ultimately wasted or meaningless.

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<sup>84</sup> I would suggest that this well-meaning type of counsel often does more harm than good. For an exposition on this topic and ways to counsel with compassion and restraint see Mark A. Jumper, Steven E. Keith and Michael W. Langston, *Chaplaincy: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024). Daniel Williams, *The Apologetic Chaplain* (Blain: GraceCore Academy, 2026). Agnes Mariana Mayangsari, Muslikah Muslikah & Anwar Sutoyo. (2025) "The Competence of Counselor in Conducting Spiritual Counseling: A systematic Literature Review". *Counsnesia Indonesian Journal Of Guidance and Counseling* 6:1, pages 19-27.

However, it doesn't claim to identify the specific reason why you got cancer rather than your neighbor, or why your child died rather than another child. Those questions remain largely mysterious. And perhaps that's appropriate. It seems that we're not meant to know the specific purposes behind every particular case of suffering.

What we can know is that our suffering participates in something larger than ourselves. That it occurs within a world where God is revealing His full character. That even our pain contributes, in ways we may not understand, to the comprehensive demonstration that prepares creatures for a relationship with God. That nothing we endure is outside God's awareness or beyond His redemptive reach. And finally, that He suffers alongside us and, we hope, will one day He will wipe away every tear.

### **Natural Evil and the Fabric of Creation**

One aspect of the scope problem deserves special attention: natural evil. Moral evil can be attributed to creaturely choice. But what about earthquakes, tsunamis, diseases, droughts, and famines? These cause immense suffering but are not the direct result of anyone's moral choice. They arise from the natural operations of the physical world. Why would God create a world where natural processes can cause such harm?

The traditional answer is that natural evil results from the Fall. When sin entered the world, creation itself was cursed. Romans 8 speaks of creation being "subjected to frustration" and groaning as in the pains of childbirth. According to this view, the physical world became corrupted and subject to disaster because of human sin.<sup>85</sup>

But this raises questions. Did earthquakes not exist before the Fall? Did tectonic plates suddenly start shifting only after Adam sinned? Did lions become carnivorous only after human rebellion? The geological and biological evidence suggests that these features of the natural world existed long before humans appeared on the scene.

The demonstration framework suggests a different way of thinking about natural evil. Perhaps the world was always meant to include natural processes that could cause suffering. That plate tectonics, which generate earthquakes and tsunamis, were part of the original design because they're necessary for a dynamic, life-sustaining planet. That disease and death were always necessary features of biological life. Perhaps predation was always part of the ecosystem. This follows Iain Provan's suggestion in chapter 5 of his book, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*.<sup>86</sup>

This doesn't mean God delights in suffering or that He's indifferent to natural disasters. It means that the kind of world required for God's demonstrative purposes is a physical world governed by natural laws, and that such a world inevitably includes processes that can cause harm. Gravity, which allows us to walk on Earth, also means we can fall and be injured. Fire, which provides warmth and enables cooking, can also burn. Water, essential to life, can cause drowning. The same natural laws that make life possible also make suffering possible.

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<sup>85</sup> For the most accessible treatment of this issue I recommend C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperOne Publishing, 2001). Another approach is taken by Sharon Dirckx, *Broken Planet: If There is a God, Then Why Are There Natural Disasters and Diseases?* (Lisle: IVP, 2023). John Adair, *The Origins of Natural Evil: Christian Perspectives Through History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024)

<sup>86</sup> Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014)

Why didn't God create a world with different natural laws? Perhaps He did so because the laws of this world are particularly well-suited to supporting complex life and providing the stable, predictable environment necessary for genuine moral agency. Further, a world in which natural laws were constantly suspended to prevent suffering would not be one in which creatures could exercise genuine freedom or in which God's character could be fully demonstrated.

Natural evil, like moral evil, provides the context for demonstrating His divine attributes. God's compassion is shown in His response to suffering, while His sustaining power is shown as He upholds creatures through various trials. His comfort is demonstrated as He ministers to those in pain. His power is demonstrated through the resurrection of Jesus as He brings life out of death. Without natural evil, these attributes would remain less fully revealed.

This is a difficult teaching. It suggests that God intentionally created a world where natural disasters would occur, where diseases would afflict, and where biological death would be a reality. If the demonstration framework is correct, such a world was necessary for God's purposes. The question becomes whether the end, comprehensive self-revelation leading to a greater depth of relationship, justifies the means.<sup>87</sup>

### **The Proportionality Question**

Even granting everything said so far, the question of proportionality remains. Is the demonstration worth this cost? Could any purpose, however profound, justify the scope of suffering we observe in history?

This is ultimately a question about values. What is most important? What is worth pursuing even at great cost? The demonstration framework says that God's highest purpose is not the comfort of His creatures but their transformation into beings capable of a deep relationship with Himself and with each other. It says that this relationship requires a fuller knowledge of His character than previously available. And it says that such knowledge requires this kind of demonstration.<sup>88</sup>

From our perspective, standing in the middle of history and experiencing suffering firsthand, this can seem like a terrible tradeoff. We might prefer comfort to transformation, safety to relationship, and a bit more ease rather than an improvement in our knowledge of God. And God doesn't condemn us for feeling this way. He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.<sup>89</sup> He weeps with those who weep.<sup>90</sup>

The biblical testimony suggests that from God's certainly more informed perspective, the absence of suffering would not bring about the blessings we think it would. Instead, it is the improved, deep relationship with Himself that brings about the joy we seek. The end of human life is not to avoid pain, but to know God fully and be known by Him. The destination the human race is

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<sup>87</sup> Of course, what else but the goal, any goal, could justify the means taken for any action. We should first contemplate and critique the goal, and then the means, I think.

<sup>88</sup> I don't think my approach falls into the 'greater good' type of theodicy. For some background on this type of theodicy, see Anthony MacPherson, *The Redeemed Good Defense: The Great Controversy as a Theodicy Response to the Evidential Problem of Evil* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021)

<sup>89</sup> An allusion to Psalm 103:14-16

<sup>90</sup> An allusion to John 11:35

striding toward is not some utopian world without challenges, but a family united in love with the Triune God and with each other.

Paul captures something of this in Romans 8:18: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Notice what he's comparing. Not present suffering versus future comfort. But present suffering versus future glory. The glory of being fully transformed, fully known, and fully united with God. This is certainly a different perspective from the prosperity gospel of divinely provided goodies in this world now.

The demonstration, with all its costs, serves this end. This expanded understanding and engagement with God's character prepare the angels and us for participation in divine life at a depth that would not be possible without this kind of revelation. The theatre, with all its tragedy, leads to a consummation where we will know God as He knows us, love Him as He loves us, and participate in the Trinitarian life for which we were created.

Is this worth it? From where we stand now, the question may be impossible to answer. We see through a glass darkly, and we know in part.<sup>91</sup> We experience the weight of suffering without yet experiencing the weight of glory. But Scripture consistently testifies that when we finally see God face to face, when the demonstration is complete, and we participate fully in the life for which we were made, we will understand and be glad. Not that the suffering was good in itself, but that it served a purpose that justifies its inclusion in God's plan.

### **Living with Mystery**

I have not resolved the problem of evil. The demonstration framework provides a way of understanding God's purposes at the macro level, but it leaves many questions unanswered at the micro level. Mystery remains. And perhaps it always will, this side of the consummation of history.

When someone is sitting in a hospital room watching a loved one die, theological frameworks, even good ones, often feel inadequate. When a parent is burying a child, explanations about divine purposes can ring hollow. And when someone is enduring prolonged suffering with no relief in sight, talking about comprehensive demonstrations of God's character for some future paradise may seem cold and distant.

The demonstration framework is not meant to eliminate lament. It's not meant to make suffering easy or to provide simple answers to complex questions. It's meant to give us a way of thinking about God's purposes that honors both His goodness and acknowledges the reality of suffering while affirming that it serves a larger, worthwhile goal.

Scripture makes room for lament.<sup>92</sup> The Psalms are filled with it. Job demands answers from God. Jeremiah weeps. Jesus Himself cries out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The Bible gives us permission to be honest about our pain, to question, to protest, and to grieve. The demonstration framework doesn't eliminate the need for lament. If anything, it affirms it by taking suffering seriously as part of the drama God intended.

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<sup>91</sup> An allusion to 1 Corinthians 13:12

<sup>92</sup> I recommend, Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019). This book seeks to address pain and lament in order to help readers discover the power of honest wrestling with the questions that come with grief and suffering.

What the framework does provide is hope. It tells us that our suffering is not meaningless. It participates in God's purposes even when we can't see how. That God suffers alongside us, and that He will bring good out of even our worst moments. The demonstration is underway but not complete. We experience the cost without yet experiencing the full glory. We live in that place of tension where we need both theological frameworks to think about God's purposes and spiritual practices, and encouragement to endure.

The demonstration framework provides the former. It gives us a way of understanding why God created the world He did. But it doesn't replace prayer, worship, community, lament, hope, or the many other ways we maintain relationship with God through our suffering. It complements these practices by providing intellectual and theological grounding for what we already know in our hearts. That God is good, that our suffering matters to Him, that He has not abandoned us, and that He is working all things together for good (Romans 8:28).

### **The Script We're In**

So we return to where we began. This is the script nobody wanted to read. It includes too much suffering, too much evil, too much pain. If we had been consulted, we would have argued for revisions. And our objections would have been understandable, even valid, from our limited perspective.

But we weren't consulted. God wrote the script. He set the stage's parameters. He created a good but dangerous world where genuine choices have real consequences, where natural laws operate with sometimes tragic results, where evil multiplies through creaturely rebellion. He did this knowing the cost, bearing much of that cost Himself, in order to accomplish the demonstration of His character that prepares creatures for the depth of relationship with Him which He desired.

This is the world we inhabit. This is the drama of which we're part. The question is not whether we would have chosen to walk into this theatre. The question is whether we can trust the play's Author. Whether we believe He is good despite the suffering we observe. Whether we accept that His purposes, though mysterious, are ultimately right and wise. And finally, whether we hope that the glory to be revealed will indeed surpass the sufferings of the present age. It's a choice we all have to make.

The demonstration framework doesn't eliminate these questions, but it does provide a context for asking them. It reminds us that this theatre has a purpose, and that the script serves a purpose. That the demonstration is going somewhere. That the Author is not distant or indifferent but intimately involved in the drama, suffering alongside His creatures, working to bring good out of evil, and promising that one day the performance will end in a standing ovation that makes all the pain seem worthwhile.

In the next chapter, we will step back from these difficult questions and examine how the demonstration actually unfolds. We will look at Act One, the setting of the stage, and explore what God was establishing in creation that would make the subsequent drama possible.

## CHAPTER 5: Act One—Setting the Stage

"...my father's legacy is about setting the stage." — Martin Luther King Jr.

If the world is a theatre intended for divine self-revelation, then creation is Act One of the Play. This is where the stage is set, the parameters are established, the audience is assembled, and the conditions for the drama are put in place. Everything that follows depends on what happens here. The theatre must be designed correctly for the demonstration to unfold as God intends.

Genesis 1 and 2 are typically read as accounts of origins. We are informed about how the universe came into being, how life developed, and how humanity came into being. And they are certainly that. But when read through the lens of the demonstration framework, they also reveal something about purpose. They show us God establishing the conditions necessary for the drama He intends to enact.

This chapter examines Act One of the divine demonstration. We will explore what God creates and why. How the stage is prepared for what will follow, and what role the angelic realm plays in observing this initial act. We will see that creation is purposefully designed as preparation for God's more complete self-revelation.

### **Before the Beginning: The Angelic Prologue**

Scripture tells us relatively little about the creation of angels, but what we do know is significant. Angels existed before the creation of the physical universe. Job 38:4-7 pictures God laying the foundation of the earth while "...the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" The angels were present, watching, and celebrating as God brought the material world into being.<sup>93</sup>

This means the celestial audience was in place before the earthly drama began. The angels were created first, existing in His presence, with immediate access to Him. They knew His power as they watched Him create galaxies with a word. They knew His wisdom, observing the intricate ordering of the cosmos. They served in His heavenly throne room.<sup>94</sup>

But as was discussed in Chapter 3, even angels with such direct access to God required something more. They needed to see dimensions of God's character that can only be revealed through the drama of redemption. To witness His mercy, His patience, His and His redemptive love. His willingness to suffer for and with His creatures. This type of love requires a different kind of stage than the heavenly throne room.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 341. Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2026), 38,39.

<sup>94</sup> "Angelology: The Doctrine of Angels." Bible.org. <https://new.bible.org/article/angelology-doctrine-angels> Accessed January 9, 2026

<sup>95</sup> For an interesting excursion into the topic of celestial beings and the literature developed in early Christian thinking, see Annette Henrietta Margaretha Evans, "The Development of Jewish Ideas of Angels: Egyptian and Hellenistic Connections ca. 600 BCE to ca. 200 CE". Unpublished Dissertation Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch, 2007. <https://files01.core.ac.uk/download/pdf/37319575.pdf>

So I'm suggesting that God announced His intention to the celestial host, to create a material world, to populate it with free creatures, and to establish conditions where the moral drama could unfold. And the angels watched with anticipation. They didn't yet know the full scope of what they would witness. They didn't yet understand how deeply God would involve Himself in this drama. But they did understand that something important was about to begin.

### **The Question of Angelic Rebellion**

Before we proceed, I need to address a question that has significant implications for the demonstration framework. Scripture indicates some sort of celestial rebellion. When did the angelic rebellion occur? Did *the Satan or the devil* fall from grace before the creation of the material world? Before the creation of humanity?<sup>96</sup> Or was it at some point during human history? Scripture is less clear on this than we might wish.

What we know with certainty is limited. As we've seen, angels were present and celebrating when God laid the foundations of the earth (Job 38:7). By the time we encounter the serpent in Genesis 3, some form of spiritual rebellion has already occurred, and the tempter is already opposed to God's purposes. Second Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 mention angels who sinned and are kept in chains, but neither passage specifies when this occurred. Revelation 12:4 speaks of a dragon's tail sweeping a third of the stars from heaven, but this is apocalyptic imagery whose precise historical referent is debated.<sup>97</sup>

Traditional interpretations have often assumed that Ezekiel 28 (the lament over the king of Tyre) and Isaiah 14 (the taunt against the king of Babylon) describe Satan's original fall from heaven. But contemporary scholarship has questioned whether these texts are actually about an angelic rebellion at all, or whether they are poetic language about human kings whose pride led to their downfall. The question is more complex than earlier interpreters recognized.

Contemporary biblical scholarship suggests that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 were originally written as polemics against human kings, specifically the King of Babylon and the King of Tyre. They use the language of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) mythology to mock their hubris. The interpretation of these texts as descriptions of Satan's primeval fall is a later theological development that occurred in late antiquity.<sup>98</sup>

In their original 6th–8th century BCE contexts, these passages are categorized as "taunt songs" (*mashal*) or "laments" (*qinah*) directed at specific political enemies of Israel. In Isaiah 14:12–15 (the King of Babylon), scholars such as Mark S. Smith and Brevard Childs identify it as a taunt against a Babylonian or Assyrian monarch (candidates include Sargon II or Nebuchadnezzar II).<sup>99</sup> The "Day Star, son of Dawn" (*Helel ben Shahar*) refers to a Canaanite myth of a minor deity (likely

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<sup>96</sup> It is important to understand that very often the definite article is used with the term Satan which designates it as a title or role rather than a proper name. It is used of people, the Angel of the Lord, and other beings. See 1 Samuel 29:4-5; Numbers 22:21-22; Psalm 38:19-22; Zechariah 3:1-2. Sarah E. Fisher, "Satan: Adversary is Not a Name," Hebrew Word Lessons, accessed 1/9/2026 [www.hebrewwordlessons.com](http://www.hebrewwordlessons.com)

<sup>97</sup> Michael Heiser, "Are Demons Fallen Angels and 2 Other Common Misconceptions," Word by Word: Bible Study Magazine Blog, 2020. <https://www.logos.com/grow/bsm-are-demons-fallen-angels-and-2-other-misconceptions/> Accessed 2/21/2026

<sup>98</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 83-86

<sup>99</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

derived from the planet Venus) who attempted to storm the mountain of the gods but was cast down at sunrise. Isaiah uses this myth to mock the king's failed "ascension" to world dominance.

In Ezekiel 28:11–19 (King of Tyre) this lament mocks the ruler of Tyre (likely Ittobaal III). Daniel Block and Dexter Callender argue that the text compares the king to a "Primal Human" or "Adam" figure who dwelt in a divine garden/mountain before being cast out for pride and "unrighteous trade." While the imagery is supernatural (cherubim, Eden), it functions as a metaphor for the king's commercial success and eventual ruin.<sup>100</sup>

The transition from reading these as political satires to cosmic history happened during the Second Temple period and was taken up by the early Church. During the Intertestamental Period, works like *1 Enoch* began developing a demonology of fallen angels, though they did not initially rely on these specific verses.

Among the Church fathers, Origen (3rd century CE) was one of the first to explicitly link Isaiah 14 to the fall of Satan, arguing that the language was too grand for a human king.<sup>101</sup> This was solidified by Jerome's Latin Vulgate, which translated *Helel* as "Lucifer" (light-bringer), turning a descriptive title into a proper name for the devil.

Gregory the Great and later poets like Dante and Milton (*Paradise Lost*) cemented the "Lucifer" narrative in Western consciousness, making it the dominant reading until the rise of modern historical-critical scholarship.<sup>102</sup>

### Contemporary Scholarly Perspectives

Modern scholarship emphasizes that the authors used "broken myths"—pagan stories used as rhetorical tools—to heighten the irony of a mortal king's death.

Interpretation	Subject	Major Proponents / Sources
<b>Historical/Mythological</b>	Human Kings (Babylon/Tyre)	Paul Joyce, Daniel Block, Mark S. Smith, Brevard Childs
<b>Primal Human / Adam</b>	Idealized "First Man"	Dexter Callender, Norman Habel
<b>Divine Rebel</b>	Member of the Divine Council	Michael Heiser (minority view, links to Satan)
<b>Traditional/Satanic</b>	Satan / Fall of Lucifer	Traditional Church Theology, Origen, Latin Vulgate

<sup>100</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Dexter E. Callender, *Adam in Myth and History: Ancient Israelite Perspectives on the Primal Human* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

<sup>101</sup> Origen, *De Principiis*, 3rd century CE.

<sup>102</sup> Hector M. Patmore, *Adam, Satan, and the King of Tyre: The Interpretation of Ezekiel 28:11-19 in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Similarly, the idea that "one-third of the angels" fell with Satan comes from Revelation 12:4's symbolic imagery of a dragon's tail sweeping down a third of the stars. But Revelation is apocalyptic literature rich in symbolism, and we should be cautious about extracting precise numerical data from such imagery. The text may convey the scope and significance of spiritual rebellion without providing exact statistics.

Revelation 12:4 is one of the most visually arresting passages in the New Testament: "*His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.*" While popular tradition frequently uses this verse to explain the origin of demons, modern biblical scholarship, most notably the work of Michael Heiser, suggests that this interpretation may miss the specific astronomical and polemical context of the first century.<sup>103</sup>

The traditional reading of Revelation 12:4 suggests that the passage describes a primordial rebellion in heaven. Under this view, the "stars" are a metaphor for angels, a figure of speech found elsewhere in scripture (Job 38:7; Rev. 1:20). The "third of the stars" is interpreted as a literal census of the angelic host that followed Satan in his revolt against God. This event is historically placed prior to the fall of man in Genesis 3. As noted by G.K. Beale, this traditional view sees the casting down of the stars as the "origin story" of the demonic realm, providing a numerical scope to the spiritual forces of darkness.<sup>104</sup>

#### **Michael Heiser's Critique: Timing and Context**

Heiser in *The Unseen Realm* challenged this traditional chronology. Heiser's critique rests on three pillars. Heiser points out that Revelation 12:1–5 describes the "woman clothed with the sun" giving birth to a child who will rule the nations; a clear reference to the birth of Jesus. Therefore, the "sweeping of the stars" is not a prehistoric event but one that occurs in conjunction with the First Advent.<sup>105</sup>

Heiser goes on to argue that John is intentionally echoing Daniel 8:10, where a "little horn" grows until it reaches the host of the heavens and throws "some of the starry host" to the earth. In Daniel, this represents the persecution of God's people and the temporary triumph of evil, not a voluntary following of a rebel leader.

He then suggests that the "one third" may not represent followers of the Dragon, but rather the Dragon's victims. In this reading, the Dragon is asserting cosmic authority by "sweeping away" a portion of the heavenly host as he prepares to devour the Messianic child.

Ernest L. Martin suggests what he calls the "Astral Prophecy" view. This theory proposes that Revelation 12 is a literal description of the night sky on September 11, 3 B.C., the date many scholars propose for the birth of Jesus.<sup>106</sup> Under this interpretation:

1. The Dragon: The constellation *Hydra* (the multi-headed serpent) spans across one-third of the ecliptic (the path the sun follows).

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<sup>103</sup> Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, Chapter 11

<sup>104</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

<sup>105</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *Angels: What the Bible Really Says About God's Heavenly Host* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018). 112

<sup>106</sup> Ernest L. Martin, *The Star that Astonished the World*. Portland, OR: ASK Publications, 1991.

2. The Tail: As the sky rotates, the "tail" of Hydra appears to sweep across the horizon, "dragging" the stars down as they set.

This view transforms the "one third" from a literal count of fallen angels into a specific celestial signifier that pointed toward the arrival of the King of Kings to a first-century audience familiar with "reading the heavens."

How should we interpret Revelation 12:4? Grant Osborne and Richard Bauckham emphasize several key principles that they believe should govern how we read Apocalyptic Genre.<sup>107</sup>

1. Primarily Symbolic: Apocalyptic literature uses "picture language." One should not look for a literal dragon with a physical tail, but for the spiritual or political reality the symbol points toward.
2. Intertextuality: The Old Testament is the "codebook" for Revelation. An interpreter must ask where "stars" and "dragons" appear in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, Daniel 8) to understand John's intent.
3. Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Polemic: The author is often "de-mythologizing" pagan myths. Revelation 12 mimics the "Combat Myth" (common in Egyptian and Babylonian culture) where a chaos monster threatens a divine child, only for the child to triumph. John uses this familiar imagery to declare that Jesus, not Caesar or a pagan deity, is the true ruler of the cosmos.

While the traditional view of a prehistoric angelic rebellion remains a staple of Christian art and literature, modern scholarship highlights the importance of placing the text within its first century context. Whether the "one third of the stars" refers to a celestial alignment of the constellation Hydra or a symbolic attack on the heavenly host, the theological point remains: *the Dragon's attempt to subvert the Messianic birth was a cosmic failure.*

Given all of the above, what matters for the demonstration framework is not the precise timing of angelic rebellion but the reality that by the time humanity faces temptation in Genesis 3, the spiritual realm already includes forces actively opposed to God's purposes. And what Scripture reveals about those forces is more complex and more significant for the demonstration than a simple division between faithful and fallen.

Three distinct groups comprise the cosmic audience. First, the faithful angels, who serve God in His heavenly court, minister to His people (Hebrews 1:14), and observe the human drama with eager attention (1 Peter 1:12). Second, a subset of fallen angels who are already under custodial judgment, the angels of Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4, kept in chains in Tartarus, awaiting final sentencing. Their rebellion has resulted in a kind of provisional imprisonment, though not yet final condemnation. Third, a company of active rebellious spiritual beings who are active in the present order.

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<sup>107</sup> Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

This third group comprises the rulers, authorities, and powers that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:12.<sup>108</sup> It likely describes the Prince of Persia who opposes God's messenger in Daniel 10.<sup>109</sup> The Satan himself who prowls the earth like a roaring lion in 1 Peter 5:8.<sup>110</sup>

This third group means that the angelic rebellion is not a prior, closed event being observed from a settled vantage point. It is a concurrent, ongoing conflict that runs parallel to human history. When the serpent appears in Genesis 3, he is not a historical casualty of a finished war; he is an active combatant prosecuting an ongoing one. Cosmic conflict is not the backdrop to the human drama; the two are simultaneous and intertwined, both heading toward resolution.

This parallelism is essential for the demonstration framework. God is not staging the human drama for a neutral audience, with the fallen angels watching from the gallery of the condemned. He is enacting it in the middle of an active war, in full view of adversaries who have chosen the same path as the serpent and who are watching what God does with creatures who followed that path in the terrestrial realm. The demonstration speaks to their present situation as directly as it speaks to ours.

### Creation in Six Days

Genesis 1 describes creation unfolding over six days, culminating in God's rest on the seventh. The question of how to interpret these "days" has generated considerable debate. Are they literal twenty-four-hour periods? Are they vast ages? Are they some sort of literary framework for theological teaching? I don't intend to attempt to resolve the debate here. What matters for the demonstration framework is not the duration but the purpose of what God creates.

That said, a brief survey helps us understand what's at stake. Four major positions have emerged within evangelical scholarship, each addressing how we relate Scripture to scientific observation. Understanding these approaches clarifies why the demonstration framework can disregard the issue of multiple views on *how long* while focusing on *what for*.

Young Earth creationism holds that the Genesis days were six consecutive twenty-four-hour periods that occurred roughly 6,000 to 10,000 years ago.<sup>111</sup> Advocates argue that the Hebrew *yôm* with numerical modifiers consistently means twenty-four-hour days, and they appeal to Exodus 20:11's grounding of the Sabbath in God's six-day creation week.<sup>112</sup> Henry Morris and John Whitcomb's influential book, *The Genesis Flood*, launched modern creation science, with contemporary voices including Ken Ham, Andrew Snelling, and Terry Mortenson.<sup>113</sup> These scholars propose alternative scientific models, such as catastrophic plate tectonics, accelerated decay, and global flood geology, to account for evidence that mainstream science interprets as indicating an ancient Earth.

Old Earth creationism accepts an earth approximately 4.5 billion years old while maintaining God's direct creative activity. The "day-age" theory interprets each Genesis Day as representing a long

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<sup>108</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Vision of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2025), 126-140

<sup>109</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 119, 120

<sup>110</sup> Ed Murphy, *The Handbook of Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 517

<sup>111</sup> Terry Mortenson, *The Great Turning Point: The Church's Catastrophic Mistake on Geology—Before Darwin* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004), 15-42.

<sup>112</sup> Ken Ham, *The Lie: Evolution/Millions of Years* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012), 87-93.

<sup>113</sup> Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1961); Andrew A. Snelling, *Earth's Catastrophic Past: Geology, Creation and the Flood*, 2 vols. (Dallas: Institute for Creation Research, 2009).

geological epoch.<sup>114</sup> This view notes that *yôm* can refer to extended periods (Genesis 2:4; Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8), suggesting divine temporality differs from human experience. Hugh Ross has developed what he terms a *concordist* model aligning Genesis with current cosmology, while other advocates include Gleason Archer and William Lane Craig.<sup>115</sup>

The framework hypothesis proposes that Genesis 1 presents a literary-theological structure rather than a chronological sequence. Days one through three establish domains (light/darkness, waters, land), while days four through six populate those domains (luminaries, sea creatures/birds, land animals/humanity).<sup>116</sup> Meredith Kline's influential work, along with Henri Blocher's *In the Beginning*, argues that recognizing Genesis 1's literary artistry honors Scripture's authority, the emphasis falls not on *when* or *how long* but on *who* and *why*.<sup>117</sup>

C. John Collins's analogical days view proposes that Genesis days represent God's workdays, "the workweek of God," analogous to but not identical with human twenty-four-hour days.<sup>118</sup> The days are "ordinary" from God's perspective, but don't necessarily map onto human temporal experience. This approach affirms genuine chronological progression while refusing to correlate days precisely with geological epochs, acknowledging that Genesis uses phenomenological description without requiring it to answer modern questions about a specific chronology.

Each view has thoughtful defenders and legitimate criticisms. Young Earth creationists face multiple independent lines of evidence for an ancient Earth. Old Earth creationists must address death before the Fall and millions of years of animal suffering. Framework advocates must explain concrete temporal markers if sequence isn't intended. Analogical interpreters must clarify what "analogous to but not identical with" means in practice.

I think what all four positions affirm is what matters most. God created deliberately, purposefully, and powerfully. Whatever the mechanism and duration, this world is what God chose to make, and that choice is part of a plan. The demonstration framework transcends the day-length debate by focusing on divine intention.

The question remains: Why did God create *this* kind of world? Genesis 1 reveals the structure and beauty of the image-bearers reflecting their Creator. But Genesis 2-3 quickly reveals this world also includes moral choice, temptation, rebellion, and death. What if these are essential elements of the stage God designed for comprehensive self-revelation? What if the world's structure creates conditions necessary for God to demonstrate the fullness of His character in ways not available in any other world?

This question doesn't require resolving the length of creation days. Whether the world unfolded over six literal days, geological epochs, or through a literary framework expressing

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<sup>114</sup> Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy*, 2nd ed. (Covina, CA: RTB Press, 2015), 45–78.

<sup>115</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 187–91; William Lane Craig, "Doctrine of Creation (Part 2)," *Reasonable Faith*, podcast series, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-2/s2-doctrine-of-creation/>.

<sup>116</sup> Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 50–59.

<sup>117</sup> Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal* 20, no. 2 (1958): 146–57.

<sup>118</sup> C. John Collins, *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 80–88.

theological truth, the result remains, a world suited to divine demonstration. A world where choices have consequences and where mercy and justice, grace and judgment, redemption and transformation are not only declared but performed.

Each day of creation establishes parameters necessary for the demonstration. Light and darkness (Day 1), establishing the antitheses that will characterize the drama. Sky and waters (Day 2), creating a habitable environment. Land and vegetation (Day 3), providing the resources for life. Sun, moon, and stars (Day 4), establishing time, seasons, the rhythm of days and years necessary for historical narrative. Fish and birds (Day 5), filling the world with life. Land animals and humanity (Day 6), creating the terrestrial audience and participants.

Each element serves the larger purpose. God is not merely creating for creation's sake. He is establishing the theatre where His character will be revealed. He is preparing a stage suitable for the drama He intends to enact.

Notice also what happens on Day 6. God creates land animals according to their kinds, resulting in a diverse ecosystem, a complex web of life with predator and prey. Birth and death are already present in the animal kingdom. Then He creates humanity, distinct from the animals, made in His image and likeness.

### **The Image of God**

Genesis 1:26-27 records God's intention and activity: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

What does it mean to be made in the image of God (תְּצַלְמֵנוּ אֱלֹהִים, *tselem elohim*)? In his article on the Image of God, Heiser writes that the phrase is found several times in the book of Genesis (Gen 1:7–27; 5:1–3; 9:6) and that it distinguishes humankind from the animal and plant kingdoms. It elevates people above all terrestrial created things so as to exercise benevolent and ethical stewardship over creation. He goes on to say that, "...*Image of God* language is found in the New Testament as part of the Christian's responsibility to imitate Christ, who is the image(r) of God par excellence."<sup>119</sup>

When Genesis 1:26-27 declares that God created mankind "in our image, according to our likeness," it shapes our understanding of humanity's nature and purpose. The question concerning the nature of the 'image' matters for the demonstration framework because if humans are 'imagers' of God, then what we are and do participates in revealing who He is.

*Tselem* denotes physical likeness or representation, something that images or corresponds to something else.<sup>120</sup> In other biblical contexts, it refers to carved idols (Numbers 33:52) or painted figures (Ezekiel 23:14), emphasizing the concrete, representative nature of the term.<sup>121</sup> Paired with

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<sup>119</sup> Michael S. Heiser, "Image of God," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>120</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 853.

<sup>121</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 1:1028–29.

*demût* (דמיון, "likeness") in Genesis 1:26, these terms indicate that humanity functions as God's representative, bearing a correspondence to divine nature while remaining ontologically distinct.

The question then is, in what sense do human beings correspond to God? At least three major interpretive approaches have emerged. These aren't mutually exclusive; scholars recognize that image encompasses multiple dimensions, but different emphases shape how we understand humanity's created purpose.

The *structural* view understands the image as residing in specific capacities such as rationality, moral consciousness, self-awareness, creativity, and spiritual capacity.<sup>122</sup> This approach has deep roots in Augustine's emphasis on reason and Aquinas's focus on intellect and will. Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema articulates a modern version, arguing the image involves both structural elements (rational, moral, spiritual capacities) and functional elements (exercising dominion), though he prioritizes structural components.<sup>123</sup> The structural view recognizes genuine qualitative differences between humans and other creatures, though critics note it can lead to speculative discussions about which capacities constitute the image.

The *functional* view shifts emphasis from what humans *are* to what humans *do*. Old Testament scholars Gerhard von Rad and Claus Westermann argue the image consists primarily in humanity's role as God's representative exercising dominion.<sup>124</sup> Ancient Near Eastern parallels illuminate this reading significantly. In Mesopotamian and Egyptian contexts, gods were represented by physical statues and reliefs that served as their earthly presence, receiving worship and offerings. Kings were also described as divine images, functioning as representatives who exercised delegated authority on earth.<sup>125</sup>

Genesis transforms this concept in a profound way. As Michael Heiser argues, the true God is not represented by lifeless stone or wooden idols but by living, breathing humans who can actively represent divine character and purposes.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, this privilege is democratized. All humans, not just kings, bear God's image and exercise His delegated authority. John Walton develops this extensively, arguing that image-bearing means humans are "installed" as God's representatives to govern creation on His behalf.<sup>127</sup>

The *relational* view understands the image primarily as humanity's capacity for relationship with God and others. Karl Barth argued that the image consists in the male-female relationship itself, seeing Genesis 1:27's "male and female" as definitional.<sup>128</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer similarly emphasized

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<sup>122</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 67–73.

<sup>123</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 11–65.

<sup>124</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 58–60; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 147–61.

<sup>125</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 93–125.

<sup>126</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 38–41.

<sup>127</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 68–70, 122–35.

<sup>128</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/1, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 182–206.

humans as beings-in-relationship, imaging the triune God whose nature is relational.<sup>129</sup> This view highlights that humans alone among earthly creatures can enter a covenant relationship with God, responding to divine communication with understanding and love.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly integrates these views. Marc Cortez proposes a "pluriform" understanding embracing structural, functional, and relational dimensions,<sup>130</sup> while J. Richard Middleton develops a "social-functional" interpretation combining royal representation with human community.<sup>131</sup> These approaches acknowledge that the image involves what we are (possessing capacities for rationality and transcendence), what we do (exercising dominion), and who we are in relationship to (God and fellow image-bearers).

For the demonstration framework, this variegated understanding proves to be important. If humans image God structurally, our consciousness and moral awareness reveal divine attributes. If functionally, our exercise of delegated authority demonstrates God's sovereignty, and unlike the lifeless idols of the ancient world, we are living representatives capable of displaying divine character through our actions. If relationally, our covenant capacity and communal existence point to Trinitarian relationality. *Human existence itself functions as a living demonstration of divine character.*

The Fall doesn't destroy the image. Genesis 9:6 grounds the prohibition of murder in the image-bearing even after the Fall. James 3:9 acknowledges humans remain made "in God's likeness" despite their cursing. The image is marred, distorted, corrupted, but not obliterated. Our capacities remain, though corrupted, our functional calling continues, though often perverted, and our relational nature persists, though fractured.

The New Testament answers the dilemma. Christ is the true image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15), the perfect representation of divine nature in human form. Redemption involves conformity to Christ's image (Romans 8:29), renewal in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness after the Creator's image (Colossians 3:10). The demonstration framework sees this as purposeful from eternity past. God always intended to reveal Himself most fully in the incarnate Son, the perfect image. Human image-bearing was always meant to find its *telos* in Christ.<sup>132</sup>

We were created to be conformed to the image of the One who would become Incarnate. Our redemption consists in restoration to authentic image-bearing through union with the true Image, becoming living demonstrations of divine grace, power, and transforming love.

For the demonstration framework, what matters most is that being made in God's image means humans are capable of relationship with God. We can know Him, love Him, obey Him, and worship Him as He intends. We can understand His revelation. We can respond to His character. We are suited to be both audience and participants in the demonstration.

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<sup>129</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 64–76.

<sup>130</sup> Marc Cortez, *Resourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 186–214.

<sup>131</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 24–50.

<sup>132</sup> *Telos* is the end, the goal, the achievement of someone or something. Gerhard Delling, "τέλος, Τελέω, Ἐπιτελέω, Συντελέω, Συντέλεια, Παντελής, Τέλειος, Τελειότης, Τελειώω, Τελειώσις, Τελειωτής," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–), 49.

The image also includes genuine libertarian freedom.<sup>133</sup> Humans are not pre-programmed automatons but moral agents capable of choice. Just as the angels, we can choose obedience or rebellion, faithfulness or betrayal, love or indifference. This freedom is essential for a genuine relationship and for the moral drama that will unfold.

### **The Garden: A Good but Dangerous World**

Genesis 2 focuses on the creation of humanity and describes the environment God prepared for them: the Garden of Eden. This is the stage where the human drama will begin. And it is, as we noted in Chapter 3, a good but dangerous world, outside.

God plants a garden in the east and places the man there. The garden is filled with trees that are "...pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Genesis 2:9). It's a place of abundance, beauty, and provision. Rivers flow through it, watering the land. Gold and precious stones are mentioned, suggesting wealth and splendor. This is not a harsh environment but a generous one.

God gives the man work to do: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). Even in paradise, before the Fall, work exists. Humanity has purpose, responsibility, and is in a creative partnership with God in caring for creation. This is not a static existence but a dynamic one.

Then comes the explicit volitional test: "And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die'" (Genesis 2:16-17).

This is where the garden itself becomes dangerous. Not inherently evil, God has created everything and called it good. But dangerous because the stakes are high. The command crystallizes the issue of obedience or disobedience. The warning makes clear that choices have consequences. The tree itself represents the parameters of the good but dangerous world.

It would be pure speculation at this point to wonder at the volitional conditions in the heavenly realm, but the idea that there were any explicit tests of loyalty seems to me to be unlikely. For the watching Principalities and Powers.<sup>134</sup> This test would have brought the issue into sharp relief, making the initial set of conditions clear: loyalty or autonomy.

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<sup>133</sup> I have used the defining term 'libertarian' for freedom several times. It means freedom of choice, which is uncoerced, undetermined by an outside agency. For an interesting article see Tim Stratton, Defining Libertarian Freedom, Free Thinking Ministry Blog, <https://www.freethinkingministries.com/post/defining-libertarian-freedom>. Accessed 2/21/2026. Also see by John Martin Fischer, Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, and Manuel Vargas, *Four Views on Free Will* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2007). William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge & Human Freedom* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000)

<sup>134</sup> The Angelic or Celestial host terminology which I've used interchangeably can be further augmented by reference to 'Principalities and Powers' identifiers. The Book of Ephesians is the primary source for this terminology. It describes these entities as both part of the created order and, in some contexts, as rebellious forces. Ephesians 1:21: Paul describes Christ's exaltation, placing Him "...far above all principality and power and might and dominion." Ephesians 3:10: Mentions that the wisdom of God is being made known "...to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." Ephesians 6:12: This is the most famous "warfare" verse: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age..." Colossians clarifies that these beings were created by God but are ultimately subject to Christ. Colossians 1:16: "For by Him all things were created... whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers." Colossians 2:15: Describes a spiritual victory: "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." Romans, discusses the limits of their

### **The Tree of Knowledge: Why Include It?**

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil has puzzled readers for millennia. Why would God place such a tree in the garden? If He didn't want humans to eat from it, why not simply omit it? If He knew through middle knowledge that they would eat from it, why create these specific circumstances?

The demonstration framework suggests an answer. The tree is necessary because it exemplifies and crystallizes the issue and its consequences. It makes everything explicit. The tree represents the reality that this is a world where choices matter, where consequences are real, and where moral drama can unfold quickly. The angels are watching.

The tree represents the necessary condition for the relationship God desires. Faithfulness, loyalty, and love are choices. *The tree represents this kind of relationship by making choice glaringly consequential.* The tree poses a question that needs an answer. Which way will you go? Autonomy or trusting loyalty? The angels are watching.

The serpent creature proposes THE alternative answer to obedient trust. God is holding back something beneficial. You can't trust Him. You need to choose the life of a god (*elohim*) through knowledge and become even more like Him than being 'imagers' allows.

### **The Creation of Woman**

Before the appearance of the serpent and before the test of the tree, God created the woman. Genesis 2:18 records God's assessment: "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"

This is the first time something is declared "not good" in the creation account. Everything else, light, sky, land, vegetation, celestial bodies, and animals, are identified as good or very good. But the man's aloneness is not good. Relationships of a certain kind are necessary. Humanity is meant to exist in its own, distinct community, just as the angels do.

God creates woman from the man's side, establishing both unity (she is bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh) and distinction (male and female, complementary yet different). The man recognizes her immediately as his counterpart, his equal, his suitable companion/helper. This is the first human relationship, the foundation of family, the beginning of community.

For the demonstration framework, the creation of both man and woman is significant because it establishes that humans are inherently relational, as God is. We are not solitary beings but communal ones. We are made for relationship with God and with each other. The drama that will unfold is not just about individuals but about community, covenant, family, and the people of God. It implies the Trinity as the relational basis of reality.<sup>135</sup>

The chapter ends with a picture of innocence and intimacy: "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25). This is humanity before the Fall, in right relationship with God, with each other, with creation. Vulnerable yet unashamed. Innocent of any wrongdoing. This is the baseline against which everything that follows will be measured.

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power Romans 8:38: Paul reassures believers that neither "...angels nor principalities nor powers... shall be able to separate us from the love of God."

<sup>135</sup> Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006)

## Very Good: God's Verdict on Creation

After creating humanity, male and female, God surveys all He has made. Genesis 1:31 records His verdict: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Not merely good, as on previous days, but very good. The Hebrew is emphatic: טוֹב מְאֹד (tov me'od), good exceedingly, surpassingly good.<sup>136</sup>

What exactly is God pronouncing very good? Everything He has made. The entire created order, the heavens and the earth. All of the living beings, including mankind. All of it together, the complete system is very good.<sup>137</sup>

This would include the two trees. That of life and the one of knowledge. It includes the question of obedience or of disobedience. It includes the parameters that make this a good but dangerous world. God is not pronouncing any of these things evil or regrettable. He is declaring them very good, suited to His purposes, exactly what He meant to create.

I'm not saying God reluctantly permitted a world with danger and risk. I'm saying He intentionally created such a world and pronounced it very good. The danger is not a defect to be apologized for, but a feature designed for His purpose.

The very good verdict applies to the world as God created it, before the Fall. This means that even before human sin enters the picture, this is a world where death exists (at least among animals), where natural processes operate according to laws that can sometimes cause harm, where creatures must eat to survive, and where competition and predation are part of the ecosystem. This is important to keep in mind as God calls all of this very good.<sup>138</sup>

Some will object that this contradicts the idea of a perfect paradise. But I contend that perfection in this context doesn't mean the absence of all danger or the impossibility of change. It means fitness for purpose. A knife is "perfect" not when it cannot cut (that would make it useless) but when it cuts well. The world is "very good," not because it cannot include danger, but because it is perfectly suited to accomplish what God intends as the demonstration of His character.

## The Sabbath Rest

Genesis 2:1-3 describes God's rest on the seventh day: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

God's rest does not mean He is tired or needs to recuperate. It means the work of creating is complete. The stage is set. The parameters are established. The audience is assembled. Everything is ready for the drama to begin. God's rest marks the transition from creation to history, from establishing the theatre to enacting the drama.

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<sup>136</sup> טוֹב tov - Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 373.

<sup>137</sup> B. Kedar-Kopfstein, "מְאֹד," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 39.

<sup>138</sup> I appreciate that this is an alternative reading from what is normally taught. But I do think it is warranted. For an exposition on this viewpoint see, Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014). Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

The blessing and sanctification of the seventh day establishes rhythm and pattern. Six days of work, one day of rest. Activity and reflection. Labor and worship. This pattern will become central to Israel's life and will point forward to ultimate rest in God. For now, it marks the completion of Act One.

The Hebrew verb for rest is *shabat* (שָׁבַת), which means to cease or desist from activity.<sup>139</sup> Of course, divine rest doesn't signify exhaustion; God doesn't grow weary (Isaiah 40:28). Rather, as John Walton's work on Ancient Near Eastern parallels demonstrates, divine rest represents the cessation of ordering activity once chaos has been transformed into ordered cosmos.

In Mesopotamian creation accounts, divine rest occurs when a god takes up residence in a temple after its construction is complete. Rest means enthronement, the deity settling into sovereignty over the ordered realm.<sup>140</sup> Genesis adapts this concept. God rests not in a physical temple but in the cosmos itself, taking up residence as sovereign King over creation now ordered and pronounced "very good." The seventh day represents completion, satisfaction, and divine enthronement.

This divine pattern becomes the foundation for human sabbath observance. Exodus 20:11 explicitly grounds the weekly sabbath in God's creation rest, while Deuteronomy 5:15 adds a redemptive dimension, connecting sabbath to Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The sabbath thus commemorates both creation and redemption, reminding Israel that God brings order from chaos and freedom from bondage. By ceasing work one day in seven, Israel demonstrated trust in God's provision and acknowledged their creatureliness. They were not defined by ceaseless productivity but by their relationship with their Creator.

The New Testament reveals that sabbath observance always pointed beyond itself to eschatological fulfillment. Hebrews 3-4 develops an extended argument that "...there remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (4:9).<sup>141</sup> This rest is both *already* and *not yet*, entered through faith in Christ's finished work ("we who have believed enter that rest," 4:3), yet awaiting full consummation when God's redemptive purposes reach completion. The seventh day of Genesis remains without the "evening and morning" formula that closed the previous six days, suggesting it remains perpetually open, pointing toward the ultimate rest when God's new creation is finished, and we rest eternally in His presence.<sup>142</sup>

For the demonstration framework, divine rest carries important implications. God's rest demonstrates His sovereignty over the ordered cosmos and His satisfaction with creation's goodness. Human sabbath participation demonstrates trust, acknowledges creatureliness, and looks forward with eschatological hope. The pattern from Genesis to Revelation reveals coherent progression: creation establishes rest, the sabbath command institutionalizes it, Christ's finished work makes eschatological rest possible, and the new creation will bring rest to ultimate fulfillment. Throughout, rest functions as both gift and goal. God's gift of Himself to His people, and the consummation toward which His redemptive purposes drive.

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<sup>139</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 991-92.

<sup>140</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 179-87.

<sup>141</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 47A (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 97-103.

<sup>142</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 22-23, 54-60.

The angels have watched this entire process. They've seen God speak worlds into being. They've observed the ordering of creation, the establishment of natural laws, the creation of life. They've witnessed the special attention given to humanity, creatures made in God's image, capable of relationship with Him, given dominion over creation, placed in a garden with abundance and purpose and one explicit prohibition.

They suspect that something important is about to happen. The stage is set. The conditions are right. The test is in place. Will these creatures, given freedom and commanded not to eat from one tree, obey or rebel? Will they trust God's goodness and wisdom, or will they grasp for knowledge they're not meant to have?

The angels don't have to wait long for their answer.

### **What Act One Establishes**

Before we move to Act Two and the crisis, let's summarize what God has established in Act One: Setting the Stage:

First, He has created a cosmic audience, but not a passive or uniform one. The faithful angels serve and observe, learning about dimensions of God's character that their own experience of His presence could not disclose. A subset of fallen angels are already under custodial judgment, awaiting their final sentence. And a company of active rebel powers remain operative in the present order, running their own ongoing opposition to God's purposes in parallel with the human drama that is now about to begin. The demonstration is not staged for settled spectators. It unfolds in the middle of an active conflict, and every group in that audience has a stake in what happens next.

Second, He has created a material world governed by natural laws. A stable, predictable environment where the story can unfold, where actions have consequences, and where creatures can exercise their freedom of expression.

Third, He has created humanity in His image. Beings capable of relationship with Him and each other. They are capable of moral choice and of understanding His revealed will. These are suited to be both the audience and participants in the demonstration.

Fourth, He has established the parameters of genuine, libertarian freedom. The tree represents choice and the consequences. Obedience and disobedience are both possible. The choices matter.

Fifth, He has created a good but dangerous world. A world He pronounces very good despite (or because of) its inclusion of risk, and the possibility of both flourishing and suffering depending on the choices made.

Sixth, He has established relationship as central. Humanity is created for fellowship with God and with each other. The drama will be fundamentally relational, not individual.

All of this prepares the way for what follows. In any play, Act One is never the whole story, just the necessary beginning. The stage is set, props are in place, and initial positions are marked. The conditions are established. The demonstration is ready to unfold. And what happens next will reveal dimensions of God's character that would not and could not be revealed in the Heavenly environment.

## **The Importance of Getting Act One Right**

Understanding Act One correctly is critical for understanding everything that follows. If we see creation as God's ideal that got disrupted, we could interpret the rest of Scripture as damage control. But if we see creation as the intentional setup for the intended comprehensive demonstration, we'll interpret the rest of Scripture as the unfolding of God's original purpose.

This doesn't mean the Fall was good or determined in some fatalistic way. It doesn't mean God wanted human rebellion. It means God created conditions where rebellion was possible, knowing it would occur. Only a world that includes genuine moral choice and real consequences could accomplish His demonstrative purposes.

The cosmic audience watching understands this at some level, though their responses differ sharply. The faithful angels see God creating intentionally, purposefully, and with clear design. They see the two trees placed in the garden not as an afterthought but as an integral element. They understand that what happens next will be significant, and they watch with anticipation.

The active rebel powers understand it too, and they are not passive. The serpent creature does not stumble into the garden accidentally. He arrives with a strategy, targeting God's word and God's character with calculated precision. He is not an observer of the drama; he is an active agent within it, prosecuting in the terrestrial realm the same opposition he has chosen in the heavenly one. The adversarial forces arrayed against God's purposes are not watching from outside the story. They are participants in it.

And the bound angels, those already in custodial judgment, experience the drama differently still. They have already received a partial verdict. What they witness unfolding in the human realm is a story whose outcome they could not have predicted: that rebellion might be met not only with judgment but with redemption.

Act Two is about to begin. The stage is set, the conflict is already underway in the heavenly realm, and it is about to erupt into the terrestrial one. Through that collision, dimensions of God's character that remained hidden in Act One will begin to be revealed to every order of being watching, and to us.

## CHAPTER 6: Act Two—The Conflict Begins

*“Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.”—Augustine of Hippo, Confessions, I.1*

The stage has been set. Now the action begins. Eden was ‘sacred space,’ a terrestrial throne room mirroring the heavenly one, populated by priestly image-bearers rather than celestial servants. The parameters established in Act One are now in play: genuine freedom, real consequences, a command that crystallizes the moral choice at stake. The celestial audience is in position. What Act One declared structurally, Act Two will test dramatically. And the drama opens not with triumph but with catastrophe.

This chapter examines how Genesis 3 functions within the demonstration framework, not merely as the record of a tragic choice but as the event that makes the fullness of God’s self-revelation possible. We will see how the temptation was staged, what the Fall accomplished within God’s demonstrative purposes, and why the human drama educates the angelic audience in dimensions of divine character that declaration alone could never reveal.

### Eden as Sacred Space

Genesis 2 describes Eden with the vocabulary later reserved for Israel’s tabernacle and temple, places where God’s presence was manifested in concentrated form.<sup>143</sup> The man is placed in the garden “to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew verbs here, *‘abad* (עָבַד, to work or serve) and *shāmar* (שָׁמַר, to keep or guard), are the identical terms used for priestly service before the tabernacle (Numbers 3:7–8; 8:25–26). Adam’s calling in Eden was therefore fundamentally priestly: to serve in God’s presence and guard the sacred space entrusted to him.<sup>144</sup>

These details establish Eden’s function within the demonstration. Angels serve in God’s heavenly throne room (Psalm 103:20–21; Hebrews 1:14), while humans serve in God’s earthly sacred space. God has constructed parallel arrangements, celestial and terrestrial, each populated by moral agents bearing responsibilities of service and guardianship. The parallels are intentional, and they set up the question the cosmic audience is now positioned to observe: Will the terrestrial image-bearers remain faithful?

The asymmetry between the angelic and human situations matters enormously here, but it is more layered than a simple contrast between judgment and no judgment. Some fallen angels are already under custodial sentence, kept in chains awaiting final judgment (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4). They have experienced the consequences of rebellion but have never witnessed the possibility of restoration. Others remain active: the rulers and authorities of Ephesians 6:12, Satan retaining access to God’s court in Job 1–2, the prince of Persia opposing God’s messenger in Daniel 10. These powers are not historical casualties watching from a distance. They are active participants in an ongoing conflict that is now

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<sup>143</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986): 19–25. Wenham argues that the garden is “not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him,” and identifies the parallels between the garden’s features and the later tabernacle and Jerusalem temple. Beale develops the argument at length in *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 66–80, tracing the sanctuary parallels through the subsequent biblical canon.

about to intersect with the human realm. What none of them has ever seen, whether bound or active, condemned or still prosecuting their rebellion, is whether God might respond to the defection of His creatures with something other than judgment. That is precisely what the human drama is designed to show.

### **The Temptation and the Test**

Genesis 3 opens with the serpent, described as “more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made” (3:1). The text does not explicitly identify the serpent as Satan or a fallen angel, though later Scripture makes the connection (John 8:44; Revelation 12:9; 20:2). What matters for the demonstration framework is that spiritual rebellion has already occurred before this scene. The tempter is present, opposed to God’s purposes, and pursuing the corruption of God’s good creation.

The serpent’s opening move is distortion: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (3:1). God had granted permission to eat from every tree but one (2:16–17). The question reframes His generosity as restriction. Next comes direct contradiction: “You will not surely die” (3:4). God’s warning is flatly denied. The third move is the attack on motive: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). The implication is that God withholds something good, that His command is driven by jealousy rather than love. This is the heart of the temptation: not merely an invitation to disobey but a systematic assault on whether God can be trusted at all.<sup>145</sup>

Eve considers the fruit. It is “good for food... a delight to the eyes... desired to make one wise” (3:6). Nothing appears harmful on the surface. The prohibition seems arbitrary. And if they might indeed become like God (even though she is already “like God” as His imager), would that not be worth the risk? She takes and eats. Adam, who is with her, also eats. In that moment, everything changes.

What precisely happened? I would suggest that, at the most fundamental level, humanity chose autonomous self-determination over trusting obedience to God. The knowledge of good and evil they grasped was not merely intellectual. It was the experiential knowledge that comes from deciding for oneself what is right and wrong, independent of God’s revelation. They asserted the right to be their own ultimate authority. This, I believe, is the essence of sin: not simply the breaking of a rule, but the rejection of God’s rightful claim to define truth, morality, and purpose.<sup>146</sup>

### **The Dual Demonstration for Angels**

Here is what I believe is the critical insight into what God is displaying through the human drama. The cosmic audience observing the Fall is not a settled gallery of spectators who have already received their verdicts. It is a fractured, internally conflicted assembly. There are the faithful angels

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<sup>145</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 66–80. Beale identifies ‘*abad* and *shāmar*’ as the technical vocabulary for Levitical service (Numbers 3:7–8; 8:25–26), establishing the priestly character of Adam’s vocation in the garden. See also John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 119–35, on Eden as functional sacred space rather than merely horticultural setting.

<sup>146</sup>Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 13–14. Plantinga’s characterization of sin as the corruption of shalom—and specifically as self-will displacing divine order—provides a theologically precise framework for the Genesis 3 dynamic. The knowledge grasped by Adam and Eve was not information previously withheld but the experiential authority to define good and evil for themselves.

who chose obedience and now watch with anticipation. There are those bound angels who have already tasted judgment and await its completion. Additionally, there are active rebel powers who have chosen the same path as the serpent and are now observing, with very different interests, what God does with creatures that followed that path in the terrestrial realm. The human drama speaks to all three groups simultaneously, but what it has to say to each of them is different, and in some cases deeply unwelcome.

The faithful angels had witnessed rebellion among their own ranks, resulting in judgment. That meant they had seen only one side of the story. They knew what autonomy from God deserves. They had not yet seen what God might do for creatures who receive their just deserts, whether anything other than condemnation was even possible. The bound angels had experienced judgment personally but had never witnessed the possibility of reversal. And the active rebel powers, still prosecuting their opposition to God's purposes, were now watching whether the infection of their rebellion, having spread to the terrestrial realm, would be met with the same immediate condemnation they had chosen to risk, or with something altogether different. Through humanity's fall and subsequent redemption, all three groups would witness a demonstration that none of them could have predicted.

The human drama provides the missing piece. Through humanity's fall and subsequent redemption, angels witness a demonstration of God's character that goes far beyond anything their own experience had revealed. It proceeds in two movements.

The first is the full cascade of consequences that autonomous rebellion produces. The angelic rebellion resulted in judgment, but the human rebellion unfolds over an extended period, allowing the full deterioration to be displayed before the cosmic audience. Genesis 3–11 narrates the progression in detail: shame and fear enter human experience (3:7–10), relationships fracture between man and woman (3:16), between humans and creation (3:17–19), and between humans and God (3:23–24). Violence erupts in the very next generation as Cain murders Abel (4:8). Wickedness spreads until “every intention of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually” (6:5). The trajectory of rebellion is comprehensive degradation.

The angels watching this unfold are seeing, in expanded form, what they experienced briefly in their own rebellion: sin does not remain isolated but spreads like a contagion. Autonomy from God does not produce freedom but bondage. This is a demonstration, not a declaration. God is not telling the angelic host that rebellion is destructive. He is showing them, at length, across generations, in excruciating detail, the consequences of bad choices and His response to them.

The second movement, and the decisive one, concerns what restoration of rebels requires from God Himself. This is the dimension the fallen angels never experienced and which the faithful angels could not comprehend without the human drama. Hebrews 2:16 makes explicit that God's redemptive help is directed toward “Abraham's descendants,” not angels, not because angels are unworthy of redemption or beyond God's power to restore, but because the human story serves a demonstrative purpose that requires showing what rebellion deserves (judgment) alongside what God provides despite what it deserves (redemption).

Through humanity's redemption, angels witness divine attributes that can be revealed only through the costly process of restoration. They see mercy that forgives genuine guilt and grace that justifies the ungodly. They see patience that endures persistent rebellion over generations. And most staggeringly, they witness the Incarnation itself, God taking on human nature and experiencing temptation, suffering, and death from within. “These things angels long to look into,” Peter writes (1 Peter 1:12), because they are encountering dimensions of God's character that no prior revelation had disclosed.

Paul states the cosmic audience's role explicitly in his letter to the Ephesians: "...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:10). The phrase "manifold wisdom," translating the Greek *polypoikilos sophia* (πολυποίκιλος σοφία), conveys wisdom in its multi-faceted, richly variegated fullness: the kind of wisdom that encompasses justice and mercy simultaneously, judgment and restoration held together.<sup>147</sup> The angelic host learns this wisdom not through heavenly instruction but by observing what God does with and for rebellious humanity across history.

**The Protoevangelium: First Promise of Redemption** Immediately after the Fall, and before pronouncing its consequences, God addresses the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). This verse, the protoevangelium or first gospel, introduces the promise of redemption at the precise moment sin enters the world.

The promise is both cryptic and prophetic. The offspring (*zera'*, זרע) of the woman will engage in sustained conflict with the serpent's offspring. The serpent will wound the heel of the offspring, painful but not fatal. But the offspring will crush the serpent's head, a mortal blow. Later Scripture identifies this promised offspring as Christ (Galatians 3:16), and the crushing of the serpent's head as His victory accomplished through the Cross and resurrection.<sup>148</sup>

What matters for the demonstration framework is that redemption was announced immediately and publicly. The cosmic audience hears God declare, in the very moment of judgment, that rebellion will not have the final word. Victory is coming, though it will cost the offspring dearly. The drama of redemption is introduced at the opening of Act Two, signaling to every witness that this story will encompass not only the consequences of autonomy but the possibility of restoration.

This is the crucial asymmetry between the angelic situation and the human one, though it must be stated precisely. For the angels now in custodial imprisonment, the trajectory from rebellion to judgment was swift and apparently final; no promise of restoration accompanied their sentence. But for the active rebel powers still prosecuting their opposition to God's purposes, the protoevangelium carries a different kind of weight. They are not watching a story about creatures whose fate echoes their own experience. They are watching God announce, in real time, that He intends to redeem the very ones they have just corrupted. The serpent hears his own doom pronounced in the same breath: the offspring of the woman will crush his head. What the angelic rebels chose, autonomy, opposition, the attempt to draw humanity into their rebellion, will not produce the outcome they intended. God's response to the human rebellion is not simply to execute the judgment they had reason to expect. It is to promise a costly redemption that neither the bound angels, the active rebels, nor the faithful ones had ever witnessed before. Colossians 1:20 may hint at a broader reconciliation of all things, but Hebrews 2:16

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<sup>147</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 185–87. The term *πολυποίκιλος* appears nowhere else in the New Testament and is rare in classical Greek, suggesting a deliberate reach for vocabulary adequate to wisdom whose complexity exceeds any single attribute. See also Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 452–56, who notes the compound prefix *poly-* as intensifying the already rich term *poikilos*, meaning variegated or many-colored.

<sup>148</sup>C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (1997): 139–48. Collins argues that the Hebrew *zera'* carries a collective sense referring to a line of descendants while also permitting the singular reading Paul exploits in Galatians 3:16. See also T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 98–102, on the seed theme as the central narrative thread of the Pentateuch.

pointedly declares that God’s redemptive work is aimed at Abraham’s descendants. It is through the human story that the full character of God, just and justifying, wrathful and merciful, is placed on display before the entire cosmic assembly.

### **Cascading Consequences**

The immediate aftermath of the Fall reveals the comprehensive reach of that choice. Adam and Eve’s eyes are opened, but what they see is their own nakedness and vulnerability (3:7). Shame enters human experience for the first time. They hide from God’s presence, which they had once freely enjoyed (3:8). When confronted, they deflect responsibility: Adam blames Eve and implicitly blames God (“the woman you gave me”), while Eve blames the serpent (3:12–13). Alienation fractures every relationship simultaneously.

God’s pronouncements of consequence touch every dimension of existence. The serpent is cursed (3:14–15). The woman will experience increased pain in childbirth and conflict in her marriage (3:16). The man will face frustration and futility in his work, as the ground itself is cursed (3:17–19). And both will face physical death, returning to the dust from which they were formed (3:19). These are not arbitrary punishments but the natural outworking of what rebellion against the source of life produces.

Thorns and thistles, toil, pain, death, and decay become the fabric of human existence after the Fall. The created order itself is subjected to futility (Romans 8:20–21), waiting for redemption. What God pronounced “very good” in Genesis 1:31 has been corrupted, though not destroyed. The world retains the marks of its Creator’s design, but it also bears the wounds of humanity’s rebellion.

For the angelic audience, this extended display of consequences over time serves an irreplaceable educational purpose. They see that sin is not a minor infraction capable of easy correction. They see the justice of God’s judgment even as they await the unfolding of His promised mercy. They see confirmed what they had suspected from their own experience of celestial rebellion, now rendered visible in slow motion across generations in the material world.

### **Why Not Redeem the Angels?**

A question inevitably arises at this point. If God’s purpose is to demonstrate mercy and redemption, why not extend that offer to the fallen angels? Scripture does not provide an explicit answer, but several considerations emerge from the biblical narrative.

First, angels and humans differ in nature and circumstance in morally significant ways. Angels exist as individual spirits with immediate access to God’s presence and direct, though not exhaustive, knowledge of His character and actions. Their rebellion occurred with this understanding, and without the kind of external temptation humanity faced. Satan was not himself deceived by a superior being. Human beings, by contrast, are embodied creatures living in communities, subject to external temptation, and possessing limited and mediated knowledge of God. The moral calculus may well differ between these two orders of being, though both are genuinely culpable for their choices.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 397–410. The moral distinction between angelic and human circumstances has been noted by theologians across the tradition; Grudem’s synthesis is particularly accessible as a point of entry. The key asymmetry is that the angelic rebellion occurred in the direct presence of God and without external instigation, while the human fall involved both limited knowledge and active deception by a superior spiritual being.

Second, the demonstration framework itself suggests that God created two classes of moral beings whose different destinies serve complementary demonstrative purposes. Paul addresses this directly in discussing God’s sovereign purposes: “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy?” (Romans 9:22–23). The fallen angels receive what their rebellion deserves: judgment and separation from God. There is no injustice in this. What humans receive through Christ is both justice and mercy simultaneously, deserved punishment redirected to the innocent and undeserved blessing extended to the guilty. The angels witnessing this learn that God is both perfectly just and extraordinarily merciful, displaying the full range of His character in a way that neither judgment alone nor mercy alone could accomplish.<sup>150</sup>

Third, the Incarnation provides redemption specifically through the taking on of human nature. “For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect” (Hebrews 2:16–17). Christ became human to redeem humans. The specificity of the Incarnation is not incidental; it is integral to the demonstration.<sup>151</sup> Through one human life, the Last Adam, God displays His character most fully and provides redemption for fallen humanity. This point warrants further development in subsequent chapters, but for now it is sufficient to note that the Incarnation’s particularity is itself part of what the cosmic audience is meant to observe.

## Act Two and the Shape of the Drama

Act Two of the divine demonstration introduces the conflict that drives everything that follows. Humanity rebels and experiences the consequences of autonomy from God. But even in judgment, mercy is announced. The serpent will be crushed. Redemption will come, though at great cost.

For the angelic audience, Act Two provides essential and previously inaccessible instruction. The fallen angels, experiencing judgment themselves, see confirmed what they already suspected: rebellion against God leads to dire consequences. But they also begin to witness something they could not have anticipated, the possibility that God might redeem rather than simply condemn. The faithful angels, who chose obedience, now see that God’s response to rebellion in the terrestrial realm extends beyond justice to encompass mercy. Both groups are learning dimensions of God’s character that angelic experience alone could never have disclosed.

This reframes the Fall within the demonstration framework. The Fall was not God’s original desire. He created humanity in innocence and pronounced creation “very good.” Nor was it a surprise. He foreknew it from eternity, and redemption was purposed before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8; 1 Peter 1:20).<sup>152</sup> The Fall was not necessary in the sense that God

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<sup>150</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 521–26. Schreiner’s exegesis of Romans 9:22–23 resists both a hard determinism that eliminates genuine culpability and a reading that reduces Paul’s argument to a mere hypothetical. The vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy serve a unified demonstrative purpose within the economy of divine revelation.

<sup>151</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary 47A (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 59–64. Lane’s exegesis of Hebrews 2:14–17 establishes the deliberate particularity of the Incarnation: the author uses *epēlanthen* (ἐπιλαμβάνεται), a verb denoting purposeful assistance extended to a specific party, to underscore that redemptive help is offered to Abraham’s seed and not to the angelic order.

<sup>152</sup>The convergence of Ephesians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:20, and Revelation 13:8 around the language of divine purpose “before the foundation of the world” reflects a consistent apostolic theology of pretemporal election in redemptive history. For an evangelical treatment, see Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). The present framework operates from a Molinist perspective, which affirms comprehensive divine

lacked the power to prevent it. But this world, one with genuine moral weight, real rebellion, and actual cost, would provide for the comprehensive demonstration of His character that He intended from eternity past. A world without risk, without rebellion, without cost, could not have shown what this one will.

### **First Responses: Garments and Grace**

God's immediate response to the Fall establishes the pattern that will characterize the entire subsequent biblical narrative: judgment accompanied by mercy, consequences paired with provision. Before the chapter of Eden closes, something unexpected occurs. "And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).

Adam and Eve had already tried to cover their shame with fig leaves (3:7), but their own efforts proved inadequate. God gives them something better, garments made from animal skins. An animal had to die to accomplish this. This is the first death recorded in Scripture, and it occurs as a direct response to sin. Many theologians have recognized in this act a prefiguring of substitutionary atonement: an innocent creature dies so that guilty image-bearers can be covered. John Walton observes that the provision of animal-skin garments involves the death of animals not as an incidental detail but as part of the narrative's theological logic; the act is simultaneously an acknowledgment of the gravity of disobedience and a demonstration of divine compassion, God addressing the shame that the guilty parties cannot resolve for themselves.<sup>153</sup>

For the watching cosmic audience, the lesson is immediate. God is just: He does not ignore sin or treat its consequences as trivial. God is also merciful: He provides a covering for those who cannot righteously cover themselves. Redemption will be costly, for covering sin requires death, and God will supply what fallen creatures cannot manufacture for themselves. This first act of provision after the Fall encapsulates the logic of everything that follows in redemptive history.

God then sends humanity out of Eden, placing cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life (3:22–24). This might read as additional punishment, but the text's own reasoning reveals mercy: to eat from the tree of life in a fallen state, separated from God and living under the curse, would be to make that condition permanent. Exclusion from Eden preserves the possibility of a redemption that has already been promised. The tree of life will reappear in Revelation 22, accessible to all God's redeemed people in the New Jerusalem.<sup>154</sup> The exclusion is real, but it is temporary.

Act Two closes here: with the protoevangelium spoken, the first death enacted as a covering for shame, and humanity ushered out of the sacred garden into a world now marked by thorns, toil, and mortality, but not without hope. The promise stands. The offspring of the woman will crush the serpent's

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foreknowledge and intentional design without entailing meticulous determinism. See Kirk R. MacGregor, *Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 145–67.

<sup>153</sup>John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 234–35. Walton notes that the provision of animal-skin garments involves the death of animals not as an accidental detail but as part of the narrative's theological logic: something must die to cover what sin has exposed. The act is simultaneously an acknowledgment of the gravity of disobedience and a demonstration of divine compassion.

<sup>154</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 311–332. Beale traces the tree of life from Genesis 2–3 through the temple imagery of Ezekiel 47 and into the eschatological garden of Revelation 21–22, arguing that the trajectory is unified in the biblical theology of sacred space and divine presence. The tree's reappearance in the New Jerusalem signals that what was lost in Eden is not merely restored but surpassed.

head. And the garments of skin have already shown the cosmic audience the shape of the victory that will require.

Act Three is next. Over the long centuries from Eden to Bethlehem, God will continue to reveal His character through the sustained drama of Israel's story, a drama the entire cosmic audience will watch unfold across generations of faithful and faithless alike.

## CHAPTER 7: Act Three—The Drama Unfolds

*"Conflict is the essence of drama"- Elizabeth Bear.*

The promise has been spoken, the first death has been enacted, and humanity has been sent east of Eden into a dangerous world. All is not lost. God is still available and interacts with Adam's family as they begin to find their way. Previously, He announced in the garden that an offspring of the woman would one day crush the serpent's head. Act Three is the long drama of how that promise works itself out through a difficult history. And how it reveals dimensions of God's character that could, and possibly were, declared from the throne, but were now to be demonstrated through the unfolding of events.

Act Three covers thousands of years of human history, recorded in the Old and New Testaments. It encompasses the stories of patriarchs, covenants, exodus, conquest, monarchy, exile, and prophetic promise. Throughout this sustained narrative, God reveals qualities that can only be seen through patient involvement with creatures who are both faithful and rebellious. The celestial host watch as justice, mercy, holiness, grace, wrath, and patience are God's response in a wide variety of situations. For instance, in the call of Abraham, the plagues of Egypt, the giving of the Law, the fall of Jerusalem, and the visions of the prophets. The Old Testament is not a prologue to the New Testament. It is an indispensable demonstration that shows sides of God's character that make the Incarnation intelligible.

This chapter traces how God reveals Himself through the key movements of Israel's story and examines how each contributes to the progressive self-disclosure that the cosmic audience is being educated to receive.

### **The Patriarchs: Promise and Faith**

The narrative accelerates through the generations from Adam to Noah, chronicling humanity's increasing wickedness until we find that "...every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). God's response of the Flood demonstrates divine judgment on mankind's rebellion while preserving a remnant through Noah.<sup>155</sup> This pattern of warning, judgment, and then mercy and restoration continues throughout the Old Testament.

Act Three's pivotal scene occurs with Abraham. God calls Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans with a promise that will shape the rest of biblical history: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3). Everything from here forward unfolds under the canopy of this covenant.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> For a variety of opinions on the Flood narrative, none of which impact the demonstration framework thesis, see M. E. L. Mallowan, "Noah's Flood Reconsidered." *Iraq* 26, no. 2 (1964): 62–82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4199766>.

<sup>156</sup> J. Hays, "An exegetical and theological study of the Abrahamic covenant in a canonical context", [Online]. Available: <https://search.proquest.com/openview/adac9d0d373264d584623094dcd01c43/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y> Accessed 2/23/2026

This promise to Abraham introduces the covenant as the way God relates to His people.<sup>157</sup> Unlike the covenant with Noah, which was for all creation, the Abrahamic covenant focuses on one man and his descendants, who will become the channel of blessing for all nations. The promise includes the land, his descendants, and God's continued favor to his family. Most importantly, it says that through Abraham's offspring, all families on earth will be blessed.<sup>158</sup>

Paul later says this promise is the gospel announced in advance (Galatians 3:8), with Christ as the true "seed" who brings blessing to all nations (Galatians 3:16). Before Christ comes, the promise itself reveals God's intentions. All creation sees God committed to a long-term plan, by His maintaining this, as well as the Mosaic covenant, with people who are consistently faithless. God's faithfulness is manifest as He keeps His promise to Abraham's descendants, even though they are unfaithful throughout their history.

Abraham's response to God's promise shows something important: that faith is the right way for people to respond to God's word. "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Abraham's faith was not perfect or steady; the Bible tells us about his failures as well as his trust. But the main idea is clear: God counts people as in right relationship with Himself when they trust Him, not when they achieve perfect obedience. This idea runs through the whole Bible and is fully explained in the New Testament's teaching on justification by faith.<sup>159</sup>

By common consent, the most dramatic demonstration in Abraham's story occurs on Mount Moriah. God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, the son of promise through whom God's covenant blessings were to flow (Genesis 22:2). Abraham obeys, taking Isaac to the mountain, binding him, then raising the knife. At the last moment, God intervenes: "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (22:12).

God provides a ram caught in a bush to take Isaac's place. Abraham names the place "The LORD will provide" (*Yahweh Yireh*, יהוה יִרְאֶה), and the story adds, "As it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided'" (22:14). This event points ahead to substitutionary atonement: an innocent substitute dies instead of the one who deserves death. It shows Abraham's faith and hints at God's future gift of His own Son. Paul makes this connection clear: God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32), doing what He stopped Abraham from doing, by offering His "only Son" as the sacrifice for redemption.

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<sup>157</sup> For an excellent short description of 'covenant' see, Rene Lopez, "Israelite Covenants in light of ANE Covenants (pt 1 of 2)," Chafer Theological Journal blog, [https://www.chafer.edu/CTS-Journal-Israelite-Covenants-in-the-Light-of-Ancient-Near-Eastern-Covenants-Pt-1-by-Rene-Lopez#:~:text=There%20are%20two%20types%20of%20ancient%20Near,of%20the%20agreement%20\\*%20The%20concluding%20ceremony](https://www.chafer.edu/CTS-Journal-Israelite-Covenants-in-the-Light-of-Ancient-Near-Eastern-Covenants-Pt-1-by-Rene-Lopez#:~:text=There%20are%20two%20types%20of%20ancient%20Near,of%20the%20agreement%20*%20The%20concluding%20ceremony). Accessed 1/15/2026

<sup>158</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 122–39.

<sup>159</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 744–70.

## **The Exodus: Power and Deliverance**

Centuries go by. Tradition tells us that Abraham's descendants would grow in number in Egypt and eventually become slaves under Pharaoh. When they cry out for help, God hears them and calls Moses to lead them out of bondage. The Exodus serves as the primary example of God's power, justice, and faithfulness in the Old Testament, and it is often mentioned in Scripture as the key moment of God's deliverance.

The conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh shows many sides of God's character. Through the ten plagues, God proves He is greater than Egypt's gods, each plague challenging an aspect of Egyptian religion. Clearly, their gods are powerless before Israel's God.<sup>160</sup> All creation sees that the God of Israel rules over creation and is determined to save His people even when the odds are against Him.

The final plague, the death of the firstborn, introduces the Passover as the central act of redemption in Israel's story. God instructs each household to sacrifice a lamb and apply its blood to the doorposts. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you" (Exodus 12:13). The demonstration is clear: death is deserved (even Israel's firstborn need this absolution). Substitutionary sacrifice somehow provides deliverance. The innocent lamb dies so the guilty household lives.

This pattern continues throughout Israel's sacrificial system and is finally fulfilled in Christ, whom John calls "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Paul also says, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Passover shows all creation that the consequence of rebellion is death. That redemption cannot be accomplished by the one who needs it. Some sort of substitution or proxy arrangement is continuously demonstrated as required through an elaborate, shadowy sacrificial system which eventuates in the Cross.<sup>161</sup>

The crossing of the Red Sea with the destruction of Pharaoh's army shows God's power to save. When Israel is trapped between Pharaoh's army and the sea, God parts the waters so they can cross on dry ground, then closes the sea over the Egyptians (Exodus 14). Moses' victory song says, "The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name" (15:3). God fights for His people, showing that redemption comes from His power, not from human effort.

## **Sinai: Holiness and Law**

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel came to Mount Sinai, where God expanded on the covenant He'd made with Abraham. The events at Sinai reveal God's character in a powerful way: thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, trumpet blasts, fire, smoke, and an earthquake (Exodus 19:16-19). The mountain is so holy, so completely removed from sin, that people cannot go near it. They can't even touch the base as it would mean certain death (19:12-13). Only Moses is invited to go up to meet God, while the people stay at the bottom, increasing fearing God's presence.

God gives the Law (Torah – instruction), which includes moral, civil, and ceremonial rules for the new nation of Israel. The Ten Commandments are the foundation (Exodus 20), but the Law

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<sup>160</sup> John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 99–117. Currid demonstrates how each plague targeted specific Egyptian deities.

<sup>161</sup> For a comprehensive understanding of sacrifice and substitution, see Ann W. Astell (Editor), Sandor Goodhart, *Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity)* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022)

covers every part of life. This shows that holiness affects everything: worship, justice, sexuality, money, food, cleanliness, war, and even farming. No part of life is outside their relationship with God.

But the Law is more than just a set of rules. Paul says the Law was "added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19) and acted as a "guardian" until Christ came (Galatians 3:24). The Law shows God's holiness, reveals human sin, and helps people understand His grace. When Israel cannot keep the Law, when sacrifices are needed again and again, and even the best leaders fail, all creation sees that the Law cannot and was not meant to save. It only shows what God's character demands and how far people fall short.

The sacrificial system set up at Sinai shows this truth again and again. Daily sacrifices, festival sacrifices, sin offerings, guilt offerings, and burnt offerings, all the blood shed shows that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). But these sacrifices cannot really remove sin. Hebrews says, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). The sacrifices were temporary and pointed forward to the one true sacrifice that will bring real atonement.<sup>162</sup>

The tabernacle is a visual lesson about access to God's presence. Its layout moves from the outer court to the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place, with stricter limits on who can enter each area. Only the high priest can go into the Most Holy Place, and only once a year, and only with blood (Hebrews 9:7). All creation sees that sin puts up barriers between people and God, but blood sacrifice gives only temporary, limited access. The question remains: Will these barriers ever be removed for good?

### **The Wilderness: Testing and Provision**

Israel's forty years in the wilderness provides another example of God's demonstration. The people who saw the Exodus did not trust God when the spies reported on the Promised Land (Numbers 13-14). Even though they saw God's power in Egypt and at the Red Sea, and received manna and water from the rock, they did not believe God could help them defeat the Canaanites. Because of their lack of faith, that whole generation dies in the wilderness and does not enter the land God promised.

The time in the wilderness shows many of God's qualities at once. God's justice is evident when He judges the rebellious generation for their unbelief. His patience is evident as He cares for them for forty years, even though they complain and rebel. His faithfulness is shown by giving them manna every morning, water from rocks, and clothes and sandals that do not wear out (Deuteronomy 29:5). God's discipline is meant to teach the next generation to trust Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-5).

The story of the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:4-9) is another example. When God sends poisonous snakes because of the people's rebellion, He also gives them a way to be healed: a bronze serpent on a pole, and anyone who looks at it will live. Jesus later says this points to His own crucifixion: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The pattern continues: judgment comes with provision, death is required, but a substitute is given, and faith is the means of receiving salvation.

### **Conquest and Kingdom: Justice and Mercy in Tension**

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<sup>162</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 37 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 51–88.

Joshua leads the new generation into the Promised Land, and the conquest narratives raise difficult questions about God's justice and mercy. God commands Israel to devote certain Canaanite cities to destruction (*herem*, הָרָם), including men, women, and children (Joshua 6:17-21). These texts disturb modern readers and require careful theological reflection.<sup>163</sup>

How should we understand these stories? God told Abraham that his descendants would not get the land right away because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). God gave the Canaanite nations four hundred years to change their minds before bringing judgment through Israel. When judgment came, it was not random but the result of long patience. The conquest shows God's holiness and His justice. Though forbearing, He eventually brings judgment on deep wrongdoing.

Yet even in conquest, mercy appears. Rahab the prostitute, who hid the Israelite spies and confessed faith in their God, is spared along with her household (Joshua 6:22-25). She becomes part of the messianic line, appearing in Jesus' genealogy (Matthew 1:5). The Gibeonites, through deception, secure a covenant with Israel and are preserved (Joshua 9). God's judgment is not indiscriminate; those who turn to Him in faith find mercy even among the condemned nations.

The time of the Judges shows what happens when Israel keeps rebelling. The pattern repeats: Israel turns away from God, God lets them be oppressed, they cry out for help, God sends a judge to save them, they have peace until the judge dies, and then the cycle starts again (Judges 2:11-19). All creation sees God's patience as He endures these cycles, showing that He stays faithful even when His people do not.

When Israel becomes a kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, new lessons are shown. David's reign especially reveals many sides of God's character. God chooses David as "a man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), but David commits adultery with Bathsheba and has her husband Uriah killed. When the prophet Nathan confronts him, David repents, and God forgives him, but there are still consequences. David's son from Bathsheba dies, and violence troubles David's family (2 Samuel 12:1-23).

This story shows that sin has real consequences even when God forgives. In addition, God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6), and true repentance leads to mercy. David's confessional psalms, especially Psalm 51, serve as examples of how people should come to a holy God. They must admit their guilt, confess their sins, ask for mercy, and trust in God's kindness rather than their own goodness.

The covenant with David expands on the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. God promises to make David's throne last forever: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). This promise is finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ, called the "Son of David," who will reign forever (Luke 1:32-33). All creation starts to see that the coming Redeemer will be both a king, a priest, and a sacrifice, and that He will set up an eternal kingdom where God's rule is for everyone.

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<sup>163</sup> For helpful theological reflection on the conquest narratives, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 73–108; Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014).

## **Exile and Restoration: Faithfulness Through Judgment**

Solomon's reign brings Israel to its zenith of power and prosperity, but in his later years, he introduces idolatry that will break the kingdom apart. After Solomon dies, the nation splits into the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). Both kingdoms become increasingly rebellious, even though prophets repeatedly warn them. The northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BC. The southern kingdom falls to Babylon in 586 BC, the temple is destroyed, and the people are taken into exile. They appear to be abandoned by God. Yet even here, the demonstration continues. Through the prophets, God explains that the exile is a deserved judgment for persistent covenant-breaking (Jeremiah 25:8-11; Ezekiel 5:5-12). But He also promises restoration. The exile will not be permanent. A remnant will return. The covenant will be renewed. It is promises such as these that sustain the faithful through decades of captivity.

Jeremiah speaks of a coming "new covenant" that will be very different from the Mosaic covenant: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people... For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:33-34). This promise looks past temporary restoration to final redemption. The new covenant will do what the old one could not: bring real change inside people and complete forgiveness.

Ezekiel sees visions of God's glory leaving the temple before it is destroyed (Ezekiel 10-11), and also visions of a future when God's glory will return to a new temple (Ezekiel 43:1-5). He says God will give His people a new heart and a new spirit: "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). All creation learns that true restoration needs God to change people at their core, something only He can do.

Isaiah's prophecies talk about the Suffering Servant, whose mission is unexpected. This Servant will be "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He will be "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" (53:5). The text shows that the Servant suffers not for His own sins, but as a substitute: "The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6). The story becomes more intense: the coming Redeemer will not just announce forgiveness, but will take on the punishment for sin Himself.<sup>164</sup>

## **Between the Testaments: The Stage Set for Climax**

After 70 years, a small group returns from Babylon with the Persians' permission. They rebuild the temple, but it lacks the glory of Solomon's temple (Ezra 3:12-13). They also rebuilt Jerusalem's walls under Nehemiah. But the restoration is not complete. Foreign powers still rule, first the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans. The promises of a worldwide Davidic kingdom are still unfulfilled. The new covenant and changed hearts are still a hope for a future day.

After Malachi, there are no more prophetic voices. Four hundred years go by without new revelation, a time Jewish tradition calls the "years of silence." But this silence does not mean God is absent. God is preparing for the most important part of the demonstration. Political changes make it easier for the gospel to spread. Roman roads and the Greek language help people communicate across the empire. Religious changes also build expectations. Messianic hope grows stronger among Jews everywhere.

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<sup>164</sup> Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 424–45. Motyer provides a detailed analysis of the Suffering Servant passages.

All creation has watched Act Three happen over thousands of years. They have seen God keep His promises even when people were unfaithful. They have seen God's patience through repeated rebellion. They have repeatedly seen His justice and mercy. They have heard the prophets promise a coming Redeemer who will be both King and Servant, and who will set up an eternal kingdom and bring final redemption.

But there are still many questions. How can God be both just and merciful? How can He punish sin and still forgive sinners? How will the promised offspring crush the serpent's head and yet be wounded? How will the Davidic king set up an eternal throne? How will the Suffering Servant's death bring salvation? How will the new covenant change human hearts?

Act Three has been building toward a resolution. Promises have been made, and expectations are high. Everything is ready for Act Four, where the demonstration will reach its peak in the Incarnation of the Son of God. As Paul says, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4). The waiting is finished. The main event of God's plan is about to start.

## CHAPTER 8: Act Four—The Climax

*"We want a story that starts out with an earthquake and works its way up to a climax."- Samuel Goldwyn*

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). With these words, the apostle John announces the central event of human history: the Incarnation of the Son of God. Act Four has begun. The demonstration for which all previous acts prepared now unfolds with unprecedented clarity and at devastating cost.

Every element of the divine drama has led to this pivotal moment. Ancient promises spanning millennia, the child destined to crush the serpent, Abraham's seed bringing blessing to all nations, David's heir whose throne endures forever, the Suffering Servant bearing the people's iniquities, all find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Now, what the cosmic audience has long anticipated steps onto the stage personally.

This chapter explores Act Four, the high point of God's demonstration. We'll look at how the Incarnation reveals who God is, how Jesus' life and ministry make God's character visible in human form, why the Cross is the clearest display of God's love and justice, and how the Resurrection validates everything. In Christ's death and resurrection, both angels and people see the full revelation of God's character and the deepest reason for creation itself.

### **The Crucifixion: Love's Ultimate Demonstration**

The Roman soldiers led Jesus to Golgotha, "the place of a skull" (*kranion topos*, κρανίων τόπος). The location's name may derive from its skull-like appearance or from its use as an execution site.<sup>165</sup> There they crucify Him at the third hour, 9:00 AM by Roman reckoning (Mark 15:25). Two criminals are crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left (Mark 15:27), fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that He would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

Crucifixion was Rome's method for executing slaves, rebels, and the lowest criminals, a death designed for maximum pain, humiliation, and public deterrence. The process involved nailing or binding the victim's hands to a horizontal crossbeam (*patibulum*), which was then raised and attached to a vertical post. The victim's feet were nailed or bound to the vertical post. Death came slowly, primarily through asphyxiation as the body's weight made breathing increasingly difficult. To breathe, the victim had to push up on the feet and pull with the arms, causing excruciating pain from the nails and the scourged back scraping against rough wood. Exhaustion eventually made breathing impossible. Victims sometimes survived for days.<sup>166</sup>

Medical analysis reveals the physical trauma involved. The scourging before crucifixion caused significant blood loss and shock. The crown of thorns caused bleeding from the scalp's highly vascularized tissue. The nails through the hands (likely through the wrists at the carpal bones) would have damaged the median nerve, causing intense pain radiating up the arms. The nail through the feet

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<sup>165</sup> Robert Harry Smith, "Golgotha," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 519.

<sup>166</sup> Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

damaged nerves and bones. Hypovolemic shock from blood loss would have increased heart rate and decreased blood pressure. Respiratory acidosis from reduced breathing capacity would have further weakened the body. Eventually, cardiac and respiratory failure brought death.<sup>167</sup>

But the physical suffering, horrific as it was, represents only the surface of what Jesus endures. The deeper agony is spiritual. Paul writes that God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ did not become a sinner. He remained sinless throughout. Rather, God treated Him as if He were the sinner, imputing humanity's sin to Him. The one who "knew no sin" (*ton mē gnonta hamartian*, τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν) was made to be sin (*hamartian epoiēsen*, ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν) for our sake.<sup>168</sup>

Isaiah prophesied that the Suffering Servant would be "stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4), that "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6), that "he bore the sin of many" (53:12). Peter explains that Christ "bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). Hebrews declares that Christ "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:12). The consistent biblical testimony is that Christ's death involved bearing the punishment that human sin deserves, serving as substitute for guilty humanity.

How this substitution works mechanically remains mysterious, but the theological reality seems clear: the holy God who cannot look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13) pours out His wrath against sin upon His own Son. Jesus experiences the separation from the Father that sin causes. The Trinity's eternal fellowship is ruptured as the Son bears the weight of sin. This is the cup Jesus prayed might pass from Him in Gethsemane, not merely physical death but spiritual death, bearing divine wrath, experiencing God-forsakenness.<sup>169</sup>

### **The Seven Last Words**

During the six hours Jesus hangs on the cross, He speaks seven times. Each statement reveals dimensions of His character and mission. These "seven last words" have been meditated upon by Christians throughout church history as windows into Christ's heart during His supreme suffering.

*First Word: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).* Jesus' first words from the cross are intercession for His executioners. The present imperative *aphes autois* (ἄφεσις αὐτοῖς, forgive them) could be translated "keep on forgiving them," a continuous act of forgiveness for ongoing sin. The scope of "them" includes the soldiers driving the nails, the religious leaders demanding His death, the crowd shouting for crucifixion, and Pilate authorizing execution, all

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<sup>167</sup> William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *JAMA* 255, no. 11 (1986): 1455–63.

<sup>168</sup> Jeffrey E. Miller, "Imputation," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>169</sup> J.V. Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputation* (Nairobi: Mentor Publishing, 2016). David M. Moffitt, *Rethinking the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022). William Lane Craig, *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020)

participants in this injustice. Yet Jesus asks the Father to forgive because "they know not what they do."<sup>170</sup>

This demonstrates divine mercy at its most costly. While experiencing torture, Jesus prays for those torturing Him. While being murdered, He intercedes for the murderers. The cosmic audience witnesses that God's love extends even to His enemies, that His mercy is offered even to those actively rejecting Him. This fulfills Jesus' own teaching: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). He practices what He preached, demonstrating that such love is possible even in the most extreme circumstances.

*Second Word: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).* One of the criminals crucified beside Jesus mocks Him: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (23:39). But the other criminal rebukes his companion: "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (23:40-41). Then he turns to Jesus: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (23:42).

Jesus responds with amazing grace: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43). The word "today" (*sēmeron*, σήμερον) emphasizes immediacy, not someday in the distant future but this very day.<sup>171</sup> "Paradise" (*paradeiso*, παραδείσῳ) derives from a Persian word meaning "garden" or "park," used in the Septuagint for the Garden of Eden.<sup>172</sup> Jesus promises that the repentant thief will be with Him in God's presence immediately upon death.

This demonstrates salvation by grace through faith alone. The thief has no opportunity for good works, no time to prove that his repentance is genuine, and no chance to be baptized or take communion or join a church. He simply acknowledges Jesus' kingship and asks to be remembered. Jesus grants him paradise. The cosmic audience learns that salvation is not earned by works but received by faith, that it's never too late to turn to Christ, and that one moment of faith saves eternally.

*Third Word: "Woman, behold, your son... Behold, your mother" (John 19:26-27).* Standing near the cross are Jesus' mother, Mary; her sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene (John 19:25). The beloved disciple, possibly John himself, also stands there. Jesus sees His mother and the disciple and speaks to them. To Mary: "Woman, behold, your son" (*gynai, ide ho hyios sou*, γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου). To the disciple: "Behold, your mother" (*ide hē mētēr sou*, ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου). John records that "...from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (19:27).

Even in His agony, Jesus cares for His mother's future well-being. As the eldest son, He had responsibility for her care. His brothers apparently don't yet believe in Him (John 7:5), so He entrusts Mary to His beloved disciple's care. This demonstrates Jesus' genuine humanity; He experiences the

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<sup>170</sup> Some early manuscripts do not include Luke 23:34a. However, the saying fits Jesus' character and teaching perfectly and has strong early attestation. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 154.

<sup>171</sup> σήμερον *sēmeron* today: Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 241.

<sup>172</sup> Παράδεισος is a loanword from old Iranian and generally designates a "garden" or "park." Accordingly, in the LXX it refers esp. to the "garden of God" (Gen 2:8ff.; 13:10; Ezek 31:8). Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 17.

human bonds of family and ensures His mother won't be abandoned. It also demonstrates the creation of new family bonds in the community of faith. The disciple becomes Mary's son, and Mary becomes the disciple's mother.

*Fourth Word: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).* At the sixth hour (noon), darkness falls over the whole land until the ninth hour (3:00 PM). At the end of this three-hour darkness, Jesus cries out with a loud voice in Aramaic: "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" ( ἐλωϊ ἐλωϊ λεμὰ σαβαχθανί), which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These are the opening words of Psalm 22, a psalm that begins with anguish but ends with confidence in God's deliverance.

This cry reveals the spiritual agony Jesus endures. The Father has not literally abandoned the Son; the Trinity remains united in essence. Yet in His humanity, Jesus experiences the separation from the Father that sin causes. He who knew no sin becomes sin for us, bearing the punishment we deserve, experiencing the God-forsakenness that results from bearing the world's guilt. The Son who existed in eternal fellowship with the Father now experiences the horror of separation.

The cosmic audience witnesses the cost of redemption at its highest point. This is what the cup contained, not merely physical death but spiritual separation, bearing divine wrath, experiencing the judgement that sin deserves. The fallen angels see what mercy costs. The faithful angels who never rebelled see depths of divine love they couldn't have imagined. Humans learn that their sin is more serious than they grasped, and that God's love is deeper than they dared hope. He endured this for us.

*Fifth Word: "I thirst" (John 19:28).* After this, Jesus knows that all is now finished. To fulfill Scripture, He says, "I thirst" (*dipsō*, διψῶ). A jar full of sour wine stands there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and hold it to His mouth (19:28-29). The statement fulfills Psalm 69:21: "for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."

This brief statement emphasizes Jesus' humanity. He experiences genuine physical thirst after hours of exposure, blood loss, and the exertion required to breathe while crucified. The one who declared "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37) now thirsts Himself. The one who offered the Samaritan woman living water so she would never thirst again (John 4:13-14) now experiences thirst in its most acute form. He who created water itself now craves a drink.

*Sixth Word: "It is finished" (John 19:30).* After receiving the sour wine, Jesus says, "It is finished" (*tetelestai*, τετέλεσται). The word is the perfect passive indicative of *teleō* (τελέω), meaning to complete, accomplish, or fulfill. The perfect tense indicates completed action with ongoing results; it has been finished and remains finished.<sup>173</sup>

What is finished? The work of redemption. The demonstration of God's character. The fulfillment of Scripture. The payment for sin. The defeat of Satan. Everything required for salvation has been accomplished. Nothing needs to be added. The debt has been paid in full; *tetelestai* was written on receipts in the ancient world to indicate "paid in full." Christ has paid the debt humanity could never pay.

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<sup>173</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 722–23.

This is the climax of the demonstration. The cosmic audience witnesses that salvation is entirely God's work from beginning to end. The Father planned redemption before the foundation of the world. The Son accomplished redemption through His life, death, and resurrection. The Spirit applies redemption to believers. Humans contribute nothing except the sin that made redemption necessary.

*Seventh Word: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).* Jesus' final words are addressed to the Father: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (*pater, eis cheiras sou paratithemai to pneuma mou, πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου*). This quotes Psalm 31:5, a prayer of trust in God's deliverance. After saying this, "he breathed his last" (23:46).

Jesus dies voluntarily, committing His spirit to the Father. He earlier declared, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:17-18). His death is not a defeat but a willing sacrifice. He remains in control even in dying, demonstrating that He gives His life rather than having it taken from Him.

The address "Father" is significant. After the cry of dereliction ("My God, my God"), Jesus returns to intimate address ("Father"). The separation caused by bearing sin has ended. The work is finished. The fellowship is restored. He dies in confidence, trusting the Father to fulfill His promise of resurrection. The cosmic audience sees that even death cannot ultimately separate the Son from the Father.

### **Propitiation and Demonstration**

The theological meaning of Christ's death requires careful consideration. Romans 3:25-26 provides Paul's densest statement of atonement theology: "God put forward [Christ] as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."<sup>174</sup>

The word translated "propitiation" is *hilastērion* (ἱλαστήριον). In the Septuagint, *hilastērion*, translates the Hebrew *kapporet* (כַּפֶּרֶת), which is translated by a wide variety of words in English. The primary meaning seems to be to "atone, cover, pardon, appease." This word described the golden lid on the ark of the covenant where the high priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:14-15). The so-called 'mercy seat'<sup>175</sup> was the place where God's justice and mercy met, where atonement was accomplished.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 199–218. Cranfield calls this passage "the center and heart of the main theological section of Romans."

<sup>175</sup> Why "Mercy Seat"? The translation was a deliberate theological choice rather than a literal one. Here is how the transition happened: Hebrew (Kapporet): Derived from the root kaphar, meaning "to cover" or "to atone." It physically referred to the gold lid of the Ark. Luther's German (Gnadenstuhl): Luther translated this as Gnadenstuhl (literally "Grace-Seat" or "Mercy-Seat"). He wanted to emphasize that this was the location where God's grace was seated and dispensed. Tyndale's English (Mercy Seat): Tyndale, who used Luther's work as a guide for his English translation, brought the concept over directly. Oxford English Dictionary, "Mercy seat (n.)," June 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1035414400>.

<sup>176</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 232–38.

Propitiation means the turning away of wrath through the offering of a sacrifice. Some modern translations use "expiation" (removing sin) or "sacrifice of atonement." Christ's death expiates sin and propitiates God. God's just wrath against sin is real and will be satisfied. Christ's sacrifice satisfies divine justice, demonstrating how God can forgive without compromising His righteousness.

Paul emphasizes that this was "to show God's righteousness" (εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ, *eis endeixin tēs dikaiosynēs autou*). The word *endeixin* (ἔνδειξις) is in the accusative singular of *endeixis* (ἔνδειξις), meaning demonstration, proof, or public showing forth. BDAG defines it as "the act of pointing out or proving, demonstration, proof," with particular emphasis on making something evident or manifest to observers.<sup>177</sup> The term appears in contexts where something needs to be publicly demonstrated or proven convincingly (Romans 3:25, 26; 2 Corinthians 8:24; Philippians 1:28). In classical Greek, *endeixis* was used for legal demonstration or the public display of evidence.<sup>178</sup> Paul's use emphasizes the Cross as a visible, public demonstration rather than a private transaction.

The phrase "to show God's righteousness" raises an important question: what does "God's righteousness" (*dikaiosynē theou*, δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) mean here? Scholars debate whether it refers primarily to God's own righteous character (His justice and integrity) or to His saving righteousness (His covenant faithfulness that brings salvation).<sup>179</sup> The context suggests both aspects are in view. God demonstrates that He is Himself righteous (just, holy, maintaining moral order) while simultaneously demonstrating His righteousness that saves (His faithfulness to covenant promises, His provision of justification, His love for His creation).<sup>180</sup> The Cross displays both God's unwillingness to overlook sin (justice) and God's provision to deal with sin (mercy). The following diagram makes that convergence visible: justice and mercy arrive at the Cross from opposite directions and are satisfied simultaneously in a single act.

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<sup>177</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 332.

<sup>178</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 556.

<sup>179</sup> For the debate, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 196–98; N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 470–72.

<sup>180</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 235–37. Moo argues that both dimensions of God's righteousness are present: "God's righteousness is both the standard he upholds and the power by which he saves."

The Cross: where justice and mercy meet simultaneously

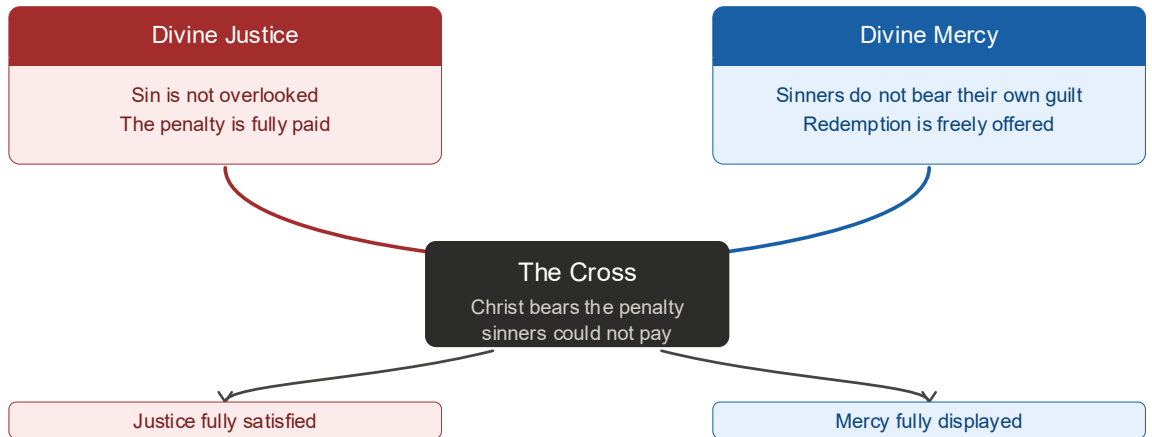


Figure 8.1. The Cross as the climactic demonstration of divine justice and mercy simultaneously — Act Four of the six-act demonstration (Romans 3:25–26).

Paul doesn't state the purpose just once but repeats it for emphasis: "It was to show his righteousness at the present time" (πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, *pros tēn endeixin tēs dikaiosynēs autou en tō nyn kairō*). The repetition in verses 25 and 26 stresses that demonstration is the purpose, not merely a side effect, of Christ's propitiatory death.<sup>181</sup> The phrase "at the present time" (*en tō nyn kairō, ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ*) indicates that what was partially obscured in the Old Testament era has now been fully manifested. God's righteousness has been demonstrated definitively in Christ's death.<sup>182</sup>

The Cross is thus explicitly described as a *demonstration*. A visible, historical, public display of God's character in its fullness. This is not abstract theological theory but is rather a concrete historical event witnessed by specific people at a specific time and place. The cosmic audience, angels and humans, observe God's character revealed through Christ's blood publicly shed on Golgotha. As Simon Gathercole notes, the *endeixis* language emphasizes "the revelatory and demonstrative character of the cross," making visible what might otherwise remain hidden about how God maintains justice while extending mercy.<sup>183</sup>

Why did God's righteousness need demonstrating? Because "in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins." Throughout Old Testament history, God forgave sins based on animal sacrifices that couldn't truly remove sin. How could a holy God forgive guilty sinners without compromising His justice? What are angels and people to think?

The Cross answers that question. God wasn't being lenient as He repeatedly overlooked sin. He was allowing the guilt to accumulate, to be dealt with comprehensively at Calvary. Christ's death demonstrates that God can forgive because sin has been punished, not overlooked, but punished in the substitute rather than in the offender.

<sup>181</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 208–9.

<sup>182</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 621.

<sup>183</sup> Simon J. Gathercole, *Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 75–76.

The purpose is specified: "so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (3:26). This is the theological point. God maintains His justice (He punishes sin) while extending justification (He declares sinners righteous). The Cross demonstrates that these are not contradictory but complementary. Justice is satisfied through Christ bearing our punishment. Mercy is extended through Christ's righteousness being imputed to believers through faith. God remains just while justifying the ungodly.

For the cosmic audience, this demonstration answers the fundamental question: How can God be both holy and merciful? How can He maintain justice while extending grace? The answer is the Cross, where justice and mercy meet, and where wrath and compassion are simultaneously satisfied. The angels watching learn that God's character is not contradictory but coherent, and that His attributes work in harmony rather than tension. It is through the Cross that the wisdom of God's plan conceived before creation is fully revealed.

### **The Cosmic Signs**

The crucifixion is accompanied by cosmic phenomena that signal its significance. At noon, darkness falls over the whole land until 3:00 PM (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). This was not a solar eclipse, which is impossible during Passover, which occurs at a full moon when the moon is opposite the sun. The darkness was supernatural, a sign of divine judgment. Amos prophesied, "And on that day, declares the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight" (Amos 8:9). The darkness demonstrates that the Light of the World is being extinguished, that judgment is falling, that cosmic forces recognize what is occurring.<sup>184</sup>

When Jesus dies, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). The curtain (*katapetasma*, καταπέτασμα) separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place where God's presence was met. Only the high priest could pass through this curtain, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement, and only with blood (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:7). The curtain was approximately sixty feet high and four inches thick, made of heavy woven material.<sup>185</sup> Its tearing "from top to bottom" indicates divine action. God Himself tears apart the barrier between Himself and sinful man from heaven downward.

The barrier between God and humanity has been removed. Access to God's presence is now open to all who come through Christ. The author of Hebrews explains: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh... let us draw near" (Hebrews 10:19-22). Christ's torn flesh corresponds to the torn curtain. His death opens the way into God's presence.

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<sup>184</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1:305–34; 2:525–30. Keener provides extensive documentation of cosmic signs in ancient literature and specifically addresses the darkness at the crucifixion, noting parallels in Jewish apocalyptic literature where darkness signals divine judgment and cosmic upheaval. He demonstrates that such portents were understood in the ancient world as indicators of momentous divine action. Also see Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1056–60.

Marcus discusses the darkness and other cosmic signs extensively, connecting them to Old Testament prophetic imagery (particularly Amos 8:9) and Jewish apocalyptic literature. He argues that the darkness functions as "cosmic mourning" and demonstrates that creation itself recognizes the significance of Jesus' death.

<sup>185</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1874; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 87–91.

The temple system is declared obsolete. The sacrifices that pointed forward to Christ are no longer needed. The priesthood that offered those sacrifices is superseded by Christ's eternal priesthood. The Most Holy Place, which was inaccessible, is now open through Christ. The cosmic audience witnesses that the old covenant has fulfilled its purpose and given way to the new covenant promised through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and established through Christ's blood (Luke 22:20).

The earth itself responds: "The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs were also opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:51-53). The earthquake demonstrates creation's convulsion at the Creator's death. The splitting of rocks shows that even inanimate creation recognizes what has occurred. The opening of tombs anticipates the resurrection power that Christ's death has secured; death's grip is broken, the graves will eventually give up their dead, and resurrection is guaranteed.

The raised saints appear in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection, demonstrating that His resurrection is the first fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) that guarantees the harvest to follow. Their resurrections are not permanent, but they serve as signs that death has been defeated, that resurrection power is real, that Jesus' victory over death extends to all who belong to Him.<sup>186</sup>

Even the Roman centurion overseeing the execution recognizes something extraordinary. When he sees the darkness, hears Jesus' final cry, witnesses the earthquake, he declares, "Truly this was a son of god!" (Matthew 27:54). This Gentile soldier, likely a pagan, confesses what many Jewish leaders refused to acknowledge. His confession demonstrates that the evidence is overwhelming, that Christ's identity has been vindicated even in death, and that the demonstration has reached even those who began as hostile witnesses.

### **The Resurrection: Vindication and Victory**

Jesus dies. Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Sanhedrin who had not consented to Jesus' condemnation, asks Pilate for the body (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51). Pilate confirms His death with the centurion before releasing the body (Mark 15:44-45). Joseph takes the body, wraps it in linen cloth, and lays it in his own new tomb cut from rock (Matthew 27:59-60). A large stone is rolled across the entrance. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus see where Jesus is laid (Mark 15:47). Note how public a place this is.

The next day, the chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore, order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead'" (Matthew 27:63-64). Pilate tells them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can" (27:65). They secure the tomb by sealing the stone and posting guards (27:66). These precautions will serve as evidence that no one could have stolen the body.

Early on the first day of the week, at dawn, the women came to the tomb bringing spices to anoint Jesus' body (Luke 24:1). They found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty (24:2-3). Two

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<sup>186</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1078-82. France discusses the interpretive difficulties and argues the passage functions theologically to show that Jesus' death/resurrection inaugurates the eschatological age when the dead will rise.

men in dazzling apparel appear and say, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise" (24:5-7). The women remember His words and go to tell the eleven disciples (24:8-9).

Peter and John run to the tomb. John arrives first, looks in, and sees the linen clothes lying there but doesn't enter. Peter arrives and goes into the tomb. He sees the linen cloths and the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head, "not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself" (John 20:6-7). The arrangement of the grave clothes is significant. They're not disheveled as if someone hastily unwrapped a body, but lying as if Jesus' body passed through them, leaving them undisturbed. John enters, sees, and believes (20:8).

Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (John 20:11-18), to the other women as they return from the tomb (Matthew 28:9-10), and to Peter sometime that day (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5). Eventually, He appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). That evening He appears to the gathered disciples, showing them His hands and side, breathing on them and giving them the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23). Thomas is absent and later refuses to believe unless he sees and touches Jesus' wounds (20:24-25).

A week later, Jesus appears again when Thomas is present. With no hint of reproval He invites Thomas to "Put your finger here and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (20:27). Thomas responds with the clearest confession of Christ's deity in the Gospels: "My Lord and my God!" (*ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou*, ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, 20:28). Jesus accepts this worship and pronounces blessing on those who believe without seeing: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20:29).

Paul provides an extensive list of resurrection appearances: Christ appeared to Peter, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred brothers at once (most of whom are still alive when Paul writes), then to James, then to all the apostles, and finally to Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). These appearances span forty days (Acts 1:3) and involve different individuals and groups in various locations, providing multiple independent eyewitness accounts of the resurrection.

Jesus' resurrection body displays both continuity and transformation. Jesus bears the wounds from His crucifixion: the nail prints in His hands and feet, the spear wound in His side. He can be touched and handled (Luke 24:39). He eats fish to demonstrate His physical reality (24:42-43). Yet He can appear in locked rooms (John 20:19), vanish from sight (Luke 24:31), and ascend into heaven (Acts 1:9). His resurrection body is physical but somehow glorified, recognizable yet transformed. Paul explains that in the resurrection, our bodies will be "raised imperishable... raised in glory... raised in power... a spiritual body" not non-physical but perfectly adapted to eternal existence (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

The Resurrection vindicates everything Jesus claimed. His declarations of divinity, which the religious leaders condemned as blasphemy, are proven true. His promise to rise on the third day is fulfilled. His victory over sin and death is demonstrated. Paul declares that Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead"

(Romans 1:4). God's raising Jesus from the dead is divine approval of Jesus' person and work, confirmation that His sacrifice was accepted, proof that His claims were legitimate.<sup>187</sup>

For the demonstration framework, the Resurrection reveals multiple divine attributes. God's power is displayed in raising the dead, the ultimate demonstration of sovereignty over creation. God's faithfulness is shown in the fulfillment of His promises. Jesus predicted His resurrection, and it occurred exactly as promised. God's victory over evil is proven. Death, the last enemy, has been defeated. God's wisdom is revealed. The Cross that appeared to be a defeat was actually a victory, the death that seemed to end everything was actually the means to new life.

Paul connects Christ's resurrection to believers' future resurrection: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). Christ's resurrection is the first fruits, the initial harvest that guarantees the full harvest to come. Because He lives, we shall live (John 14:19). His resurrection secures ours. The demonstration will continue until the end when all believers are raised imperishable, clothed with immortality, and death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

### **What the Angels Witnessed**

What did the cosmic audience learn through Act Four? The fallen angels, experiencing judgment without any apparent redemption, witnessed what mercy looks like in its costliest form. They saw that God's love extends even to His enemies, that His patience endures long-suffering, and that His grace is offered freely to the undeserving. They observed that redemption requires sacrifice at the highest level. God Himself bearing the punishment sin deserves.

The faithful angels, who chose obedience over rebellion, witnessed dimensions of God's character they would not have known otherwise. They saw that God is willing to suffer for His creatures, that divine love goes to lengths they had never imagined, that redemption is costly even for the omnipotent Creator. They observed justice and mercy perfectly balanced at the Cross,

Peter writes that even "angels long to look into" the things concerning salvation (1 Peter 1:12). The Greek verb *paraklyptō* (παρακλύπτω) means to stoop down to look closely, to peer intently into something.<sup>188</sup> The image is of someone bending over to examine something carefully, drawn by fascination and wonder. The angels desire to understand more fully what they're witnessing. How God can be both just and merciful, how the Incarnation displays divine humility, how the Cross demonstrates love and justice simultaneously, and how the Resurrection proves victory over death.

Paul states explicitly that the church's existence serves to display God's wisdom to the angelic realm: "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:10). The "manifold wisdom" (*polypoikilos sophia*, πολυποίκιλος σοφία) is God's wisdom in its many-colored, multifaceted richness.<sup>189</sup> The kind

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<sup>187</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 553–84, 607–738.

<sup>188</sup> Wilhelm Michaelis, "Παρακλύπτω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 814.

<sup>189</sup> Peter J. Forshaw, *The Mage's Images: Heinrich Khunrath in His Oratory and Laboratory, Volume 2*, (Leiden: Brill, 2025).

of wisdom that encompasses both justice and mercy, both holiness and grace, both judgment and restoration. Angels learn this wisdom by observing what God does with and for rebellious humanity.

Human beings, the redeemed rebels, learned truths about God's character and their own condition through Act Four. They discovered that they are loved beyond comprehension. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The word "shows" (*synistēsin*, συνίστησιν) means to demonstrate, prove, or commend—the same demonstration language that permeates the framework.<sup>190</sup> God's love is not merely declared but demonstrated through historical action at tremendous cost.

We learn that our sin is more serious than we could have imagined. It required the death of God. And that God's grace is more abundant than we could have hoped. It is freely offered to all who trust in Christ. We contribute nothing to salvation except the sin that made it necessary and the faith that receives it as a gift.

The demonstration also reveals the character of true love. Jesus defined it: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But Christ's love exceeded even this. He laid down His life not for friends but for enemies (Romans 5:10). John explains, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). The Cross becomes the defining standard for understanding love, not sentiment or feeling, but costly self-sacrifice for the benefit of another.

Act Four demonstrates what Act Three promised and what Act Two made necessary. The Incarnation reveals God in human form. God's divine attributes are displayed through human behavior. A righteousness lived in complete obedience to the Father. The Cross displays divine love at its costliest; bearing sin, absorbing wrath, experiencing separation, dying in agony to redeem His enemies. The Resurrection proves divine power over death. It validated Christ's claims and secured the believers' future resurrection.

Together, the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection constitute the climax of the divine drama, the centerpiece of the demonstration for which all creation serves as theatre. The cosmic audience, angels and humans, visible and invisible powers, witnesses the comprehensive revelation of God's character. The demonstration that began in creation reaches its apex in crucifixion and resurrection.

But the demonstration is not yet complete. Act Four accomplished redemption, but the redeemed still live in fallen bodies in a fallen world, awaiting final transformation. The demonstration continues through the church as believers participate in displaying God's character to the watching cosmos. And it moves toward consummation, the final act when God's purposes reach their ultimate fulfillment, when all things are made new, when the theatre of glory displays in perfected form what has been progressively revealed throughout history.

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<sup>190</sup> Wilhelm Kasch, "Συνίστημι, Συνιστάνω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 896.

## CHAPTER 9: Act Five—The Demonstration Continues

*“What sort of demonstration?’ ‘Hmm... A new kind. It looked poetical at first, but then became rather political.” — Jean-Christophe Valtat*

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus gathered His disciples on the Mount of Olives. They asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The question is entirely understandable, and perhaps a little poignant. These men had watched their teacher die and rise again. They had seen enough. Surely now was the moment for the long-promised restoration of Israel’s kingdom. Jesus redirects their focus with characteristic patience: “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8). Then, while they watched, He ascended into heaven, and a cloud took Him from their sight (1:9).

They returned to Jerusalem and waited. They did not yet fully understand what they had been a part of, or what they were being commissioned to continue. Act Four had accomplished redemption; Act Five, the Church or Kingdom age, would now carry the demonstration forward. What Jesus began in His incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection would continue through His body, the Church, empowered by His Spirit. The demonstration that climaxed at Calvary and the empty tomb was not finished. It had entered a new phase, one in which redeemed humanity would participate in displaying the divine character to the watching cosmos.

What does that participation look like? That is the question this chapter takes up. We will see how the Spirit’s arrival at Pentecost inaugurates and empowers the Church’s demonstrative role, how the Church’s very existence addresses the celestial audience, and how suffering, unity, love, and even failure all contribute to the ongoing revelation of God’s character. Act Five is not an epilogue to the drama. It is one of its most revealing acts.

### **Pentecost: The Spirit Arrives**

Ten days after the ascension, on the Jewish feast of Pentecost (*pentēkostē*, πεντηκοστή, fiftieth, fifty days after Passover), the promised Holy Spirit arrives.<sup>191</sup> Luke describes the event: “Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:2-4).

The imagery is rich with Old Testament connections, and deliberately so. The *ruach* (רוּחַ, wind/breath/spirit) that hovered over the waters of creation now fills God’s people (Genesis 1:2).<sup>192</sup> The fire that signified God’s presence at Sinai now rests not on a mountain but on individual believers (Exodus 19:18). What seemed to be occasional in the Old Testament, the Spirit coming upon

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<sup>191</sup> In the literature of Hellenistic Judaism πεντηκοστή (sc. ἡμέρα) is very commonly used for the Feast of Pentecost. The Old Testament does not use the term but speaks of the תּוֹשַׁבְּעוֹת לַחֵטְא, *Hāg haššāvu’ot*, the Feast of Weeks or Reaping; Ex. 34:22; Dt. 16:10, 16; 2 Ch. 8:13; the Feast of Weeks. Eduard Lohse, “Πεντηκοστή,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 45.

<sup>192</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

prophets, judges, and kings for specific tasks, becomes permanent in the New Testament. Joel's prophecy is fulfilled: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28, quoted in Acts 2:17).<sup>193</sup>

Peter's sermon on Pentecost explains what is occurring. The crucified Jesus has been raised and exalted to God's right hand, where He has "received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit" and "poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2:33). The Spirit's arrival proves that Jesus is "both Lord and Christ" (2:36), vindicated by God and reigning from heaven. When the crowd asks, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter responds, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). Three thousand responded and were baptized that day (2:41).

Pentecost marks the birth of the Church as the Spirit-filled community of believers, and it marks something else as well. It is the moment when the long-promised transformation from external law to internal renewal begins its realization. Ezekiel had prophesied, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you... And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Jeremiah had promised a new covenant in which God would "put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33). At Pentecost, these promises do not merely begin to be fulfilled. They announce to the watching cosmos that God keeps His word—that what He intends, He accomplishes, and that the power He brings to bear is not human effort augmented by divine encouragement but something altogether different. The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead now dwells in believers (Romans 8:11). The Church is not a human organization. It is a Spirit-empowered organism, Christ's body animated by His Spirit, and the celestial audience that has watched every act of the drama knows it.

### **The Church as Living Demonstration**

Paul makes explicit what Pentecost implies. The Church's very existence serves a demonstrative purpose for the cosmic audience. Writing to the Ephesians about the mystery now revealed, he states that his commission is "to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God... so that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:9-10).

The phrase "manifold wisdom" translates *polypoikilos sophia* (πολυποίκιλος σοφία), literally "many-colored" or "multi-faceted" wisdom. The word *polypoikilos* combines *poly* (many) and *poikilos* (variegated, diverse, complex), suggesting wisdom with multiple aspects—like light refracted through a prism displaying many colors simultaneously. God's wisdom is not simple or one-dimensional. It is displayed in countless ways through varied circumstances, and this multi-faceted quality is precisely what the angels are meant to see.<sup>194</sup>

This wisdom is "made known" (*gnōrīsthē*, γνωρισθῆ) "to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (*tais archais kai tais exousiais en tois epouraniois*, ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις). Paul uses this phrase "heavenly places" throughout Ephesians to refer to the spiritual realm where both faithful and fallen angelic powers operate (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). The Church's existence, then, teaches the celestial audience something about God that even the Incarnation alone could not exhaust.

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<sup>193</sup> For a better understanding of how Joel's prophecy might fit the context of Acts 2 see, Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 93–112.

<sup>194</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 464–71.

What do they learn? They witness God’s redemptive power transforming sinners into saints. They see former enemies reconciled—Jews and Gentiles united in one body (Ephesians 2:14-16). They observe divine patience with human failure, and divine faithfulness to covenant promises. They watch as God takes “the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the strong and wise” (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). The very existence of a redeemed community demonstrates that God’s plan for creation, apparently disrupted by the Fall, is being fulfilled through Christ.

Peter confirms that this celestial attention is real and intense. He writes that the prophets who foretold redemption “were serving not themselves but you,” and that into these things “angels long to look” (1 Peter 1:12). The phrase “long to look” translates *parakupsai* (παρακύψαι), meaning to stoop down and peer intently—the posture of someone leaning in to see something they cannot quite believe. Angels are students of redemption, learning from God’s actions in history what they could not have known any other way.<sup>195</sup>

### **Unity in Diversity: Breaking Down Dividing Walls**

The “dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14) operates on two inseparable dimensions. While the immediate context emphasizes the horizontal barrier between Jew and Gentile—abolished through Christ’s nullification of “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (2:15)—the passage simultaneously addresses the vertical barrier between humanity and God. As Harold Hoehner observes, “The enmity has a dual dimension: the hostility between Jews and Gentiles and the hostility between sinful humanity and God.” Paul explicitly states that Christ’s purpose was “to reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (2:16).<sup>196</sup>

The cross accomplishes both reconciliations simultaneously, and this is not incidental. Frank Thielman notes that “the ‘dividing wall’ may refer both to the barrier that the Mosaic law erected between Jews and Gentiles and to the more fundamental barrier that sin erected between God and humanity.”<sup>197</sup> Vertical reconciliation makes possible and is demonstrated through horizontal reconciliation. Enemies are made one people. The cosmic audience witnesses God’s comprehensive redemptive wisdom in a single, enacted reality.

Christ’s death demolished this wall. “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross” (Ephesians 2:14-16). Jews and Gentiles become “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6).

This unity extends beyond ethnicity. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Social status does not determine standing in the Church. Gender does not create a hierarchy of value. Economic class does not establish spiritual rank. All are equally image-bearers, equally redeemed,

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<sup>195</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 59–61.

<sup>196</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 380.

<sup>197</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 167.

equally members of Christ's body. The tragedy, of course, is how seldom the Church has actually looked like this point we will return to when we consider the Church's failures.

Paul develops the theme of unity in diversity through his body metaphor. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). Each member has different functions—the eye, ear, hand, foot, yet all belong to one body, and all are necessary. Diversity of gifts, roles, and backgrounds does not threaten unity but enriches it.<sup>198</sup>

For the celestial audience, this unity carries a particular message: God's ultimate purpose is not tribal or nationalistic but universal. The promise to Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3) finds its fulfillment as the Church gathers people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The demonstration reveals that God's love is not limited by human categories and that His redemptive plan encompasses all humanity.

### **Love as Demonstration of Divine Character**

Jesus established love as the identifying mark of His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Love becomes the Church's primary testimony—the evidence that the watching world cannot easily dismiss.

This love is not sentimental. Jesus told His disciples plainly that if they love Him, they will keep His commandments.<sup>199</sup> The early Church in Acts demonstrates what this looks like when it is taken seriously. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:42, 44-45). And again: "The full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32, 34). The world around them had no framework for this. Neither did the angelic realm, if we take Ephesians 3:10 seriously.

Paul's great love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 defines what this love entails—patient, kind, without envy or boasting, without arrogance or rudeness. Love does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). This is not a counsel for the temperamentally gentle. It is a description of what the Spirit produces in creatures who were once self-absorbed rebels.<sup>200</sup>

And that is precisely the point for the watching cosmos. What the angels observe in a genuinely loving Church is that God's character can be reproduced in His creatures. Humans created in God's image, redeemed by Christ, empowered by the Spirit, can actually love as God loves—

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<sup>198</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 983–1001.

<sup>199</sup> John 14:15, 21, and 23

<sup>200</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 627–82.

sacrificially, persistently, across every human barrier. When believers love their enemies, serve their neighbors, forgive offenders, and bear one another's burdens, they display the divine character. The angels see that redemption is not merely a legal transaction but a genuine transformation—that salvation produces not just justified sinners but loving saints.

### **Suffering and Persecution: Faithfulness Under Fire**

The demonstration continues through suffering. Acts records a pattern that repeats itself throughout the Church age: the Church proclaims Christ, persecution follows, believers respond with faithfulness, and the gospel spreads further. Stephen becomes the first martyr, dying while praying for his executioners (Acts 7:59-60). James is killed by Herod's sword (Acts 12:2). Paul endures beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, and hardships he can only catalog but not fully convey (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Yet persecution does not silence the Church; it strengthens and spreads it.

Paul teaches believers to view suffering through a lens of demonstration. "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5). Suffering is not meaningless. It develops endurance, proves character, and strengthens hope—and it does so visibly, before an audience.<sup>201</sup>

In 2 Corinthians, Paul develops this further: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:7-10). The image is striking: weak vessels containing divine treasure, demonstrating by their very weakness that the sustaining power comes from God and not from human reserves.

The celestial audience watching this cannot miss what it means. They observe believers endure persecution without abandoning faith, face death without recanting truth, and suffer loss without losing hope. They witness divine power made manifest in human weakness—supernatural joy amid natural sorrow, eternal perspective maintained through temporal pain. The demonstration shows that God does not merely rescue His people from suffering but sustains them through it; that His grace is, precisely as He promised, sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).

### **Spiritual Gifts: The Spirit's Empowerment for Service**

The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to believers for building up the Church. Paul lists various gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, showing mercy (Romans 12:6-8); utterances of wisdom and knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation (1 Corinthians 12:8-10); apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers (Ephesians 4:11). The diversity is itself revelatory suggesting a God whose creativity and whose comprehensive purposes for the Church cannot be served by a single gift or a single kind of person.

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<sup>201</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 306–12.

These gifts serve a unified purpose: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). Gifts are not for personal glory or individual consumption but for corporate edification.<sup>202</sup> Paul makes this emphatic: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). The Church functions effectively when each member exercises their gifts for the benefit of others.<sup>203</sup>

Paul prioritizes gifts by their edifying value. Love must govern all gifts (1 Corinthians 13). Prophecy surpasses tongues because it builds up the Church rather than only the individual speaker (1 Corinthians 14:1-5). Whatever promotes understanding and strengthens the community ranks higher than spectacular displays that impress but don’t edify. The principle is consistent: gifts are for the body, not the individual.

What does the celestial audience make of this? They see the Spirit’s active presence in ordinary people. They watch someone who never had a gift for words suddenly speak with divinely inspired clarity. They observe healings, discernment, and supernatural strength for service. The gifts announce that Pentecost was not a one-time event but the inauguration of a new era in which the Spirit continuously equips and indwells His people. God has not abandoned His Church to its own resources; He actively works within it.

### **The Already-But-Not-Yet: Living Between Two Ages**

The Church exists in eschatological tension. The kingdom has been inaugurated but not yet consummated. Jesus proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15), yet He also taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). The kingdom is both present reality and future hope—already begun, not yet complete.

George Eldon Ladd gives us the classic articulation: “The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history, and consummation at the end of history.” Believers thus live “between the times,” experiencing the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5) while still residing in the present evil age (Galatians 1:4).<sup>204</sup>

This creates the tension Paul describes. “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). Christians possess the Spirit as a down payment (*arrabon*, 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14), guaranteeing future inheritance while the full inheritance still awaits. The kingdom is both present reality and future hope, already inaugurated but not yet consummated. Paul captures the fullness of this tension in Romans 8:19-23: all creation waits with eager longing, groaning together in the pains of childbirth, and believers themselves groan with it, awaiting adoption and the redemption of their bodies.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> For an outstanding exposition on edification in the first century Church see Tomas R. Wadsworth, *A Worship service or an Assembly: An Investigation of the Terminology Used to Describe Church Meetings in the New Testament*. An unpublished dissertation for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/66343e9028842f2f20144bb8/t/6788748b7439fe79050da243/173699598177/Worship+Service+or+Assembly+-+Tom+Wadsworth+dissertation+2022.pdf>. Accessed 1/19/2026

<sup>203</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 278–90.

<sup>204</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 89–90.

<sup>205</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 422–45.

What are we to do with this tension? Not resolve it prematurely by collapsing into either a triumphalism that pretends the battle is already won in every visible sense, or a despair that forgets the victory secured at Calvary. We hold both ends of the revelation at once. We live as citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) while residing on earth, possessing spiritual blessings “in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3) while in conflict with spiritual forces “in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). We are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) who still struggle with sin. We possess eternal life (John 5:24) and still face physical death. The honest acknowledgment of this tension—rather than its suppression—is itself part of the demonstration.

The cosmic audience watches creation in transition. The old age is passing, and the new age is dawning. The overlap period stretching across centuries seems painfully slow from any vantage point. But what the angels observe is a Church living as the advance manifestation of the age to come while still embedded in the present evil age—demonstrating that final restoration is certain though not yet complete, that victory is secured though battles continue, that God’s promises are reliable even when their fulfillment is delayed.

### **The Church’s Failures: Demonstrating Grace**

Here we must be honest. The Church’s history includes not only triumph but failure—and conspicuous failure at that. The Corinthian Church battled divisions, sexual immorality, pride, and disorder (1 Corinthians). The Galatian churches abandoned gospel freedom for legalistic bondage (Galatians 1:6). Laodicea became lukewarm, thinking itself rich while spiritually poor (Revelation 3:14-17). Individual believers like Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11), while Demas deserted Paul, having fallen “in love with this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10).

The biblical record does not soften any of this. Paul confronts Peter’s hypocrisy in Galatia with a directness that must have been uncomfortable for everyone present (Galatians 2:11-14). He rebukes the Corinthians sharply for tolerating sexual sin worse than what even pagans accept (1 Corinthians 5:1). James warns believers about worldliness, partiality, and uncontrolled language across three chapters (James 1-3). The failures are documented with the same fidelity as the triumphs.

And yet these failures themselves contribute to the demonstration. They show that transformation is a process, not an instant perfection. They reveal God’s patience with struggling saints, His discipline of wayward children, and His restoration of repentant sinners. When Peter denies Christ three times yet is restored to apostleship, the angels witness divine grace that is more than a theological concept; it is enacted, observable, and real. When the Corinthians repent after Paul’s severe letter, the watching cosmos sees redemptive discipline actually working. When believers confess sins and receive forgiveness, they demonstrate covenant faithfulness on God’s part despite human failure on ours.

The demonstration, rightly understood, includes both triumph and struggle, both victory and failure, both progress and setbacks. This honest portrayal prevents romanticized fantasies about the Church while maintaining hope in God’s sanctifying work. As John writes, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive

us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).<sup>206</sup> That promise itself is part of what the watching cosmos observes.

### **Looking Forward: The Demonstration’s Completion**

Act Five continues until Christ returns. The Church’s mission to witness to all nations (Matthew 24:14) remains unfinished. The demonstration of divine wisdom to the angelic powers awaits final vindication. Creation’s groaning for redemption persists until liberation comes. The Church lives in this extended interim, faithfully serving while eagerly awaiting.

Jesus promised, “I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Michael Heiser illuminates the weight of this declaration by attending to where Jesus said it. Caesarea Philippi was a site notorious for pagan worship, where a deep cave was believed to be an entrance to the underworld, which was called the “gates of Hades.” Jesus speaks these words at the very threshold of the enemy’s claimed territory, and His meaning is more offensive than defensive. As Heiser puts it, “Jesus isn’t promising that the Church will survive attacks from hell. He’s telling His followers that they are part of an unstoppable offensive strike force. The Church will storm the gates of hell, and those gates—the powers of the underworld and death itself—will not prevail against it.” The binding and loosing authority Jesus grants (Matthew 16:19) is authority over spiritual powers, authority to reclaim enemy-held territory in the cosmic conflict between God’s kingdom and the rebellious *elohim* who have held the nations in darkness since Babel (Deuteronomy 32:8-9).<sup>207</sup>

The Church’s ultimate success is guaranteed by Christ’s power, not human effort. The Spirit who began the work at Pentecost will complete it at the Parousia.<sup>208</sup> The bride of Christ will be presented to Him “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27).

Until that day, the Church continues its demonstrative role. Every act of love, every display of unity, every faithful endurance of suffering, every exercise of spiritual gifts, every repentance from sin—all contribute to the ongoing revelation of God’s character to the cosmic audience. Angels watch. The world observes. And God works through His Spirit-empowered people to demonstrate His manifold wisdom to anyone who has eyes to see it.

Act Five is not the final act. The demonstration continues but awaits completion. The Church lives between Pentecost and Parousia, between first coming and second coming, between inauguration and consummation. We proclaim a crucified and risen Savior while awaiting His glorious return. We demonstrate God’s character imperfectly yet genuinely, partially yet truly, until the day when we see Him face to face and the demonstration reaches its ultimate fulfillment.

Then every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Then creation itself will be liberated from bondage (Romans 8:21). Then God will dwell

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<sup>206</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 62–72.

<sup>207</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 297–99.

<sup>208</sup> The Greek word *parousia* (παρουσία, *parousia*) means “presence” or “arrival.” It is used as a technical term to refer to the return of Christ in glory at the end of this world. T.M. Derico, “Parousia,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

with His people, and death will be no more (Revelation 21:3-4). Act Six awaits—the consummation of all things, when the demonstration reaches its climax, and God is revealed as all in all.

## CHAPTER 10: Act Six—The Demonstration Complete

*“All's well that ends well.” — William Shakespeare*

The demonstration that began in creation, intensified through redemptive history, and reached its peak at Calvary now approaches its final act. All of history has been moving toward this moment: the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the establishment of a new creation. What God began in Genesis 1 reaches completion in Revelation 21–22. The theatre of glory, which has displayed God’s character to the cosmic audience across millennia, arrives at its culmination.

It is worth pausing at the threshold of this final act to ask what the cosmic audience has been waiting for. They have watched creation ordered from chaos. They have seen humanity given the image of God and then squander it in rebellion. They have observed the long, patient drama of redemptive history—covenants made and broken, prophets sent and rejected, the law given and grievously ignored. They witnessed the Incarnation itself, God taking on human flesh, and then the Cross, where divine justice and mercy met in a single act. They watched the empty tomb, the Ascension, and Pentecost. Now, in Act Six, the drama reaches the verdict that the entire performance has been building toward. The consummation is not an ending. It is a fulfillment—the realization of everything God intended from the beginning.

Paradise lost becomes paradise regained. The image-bearers marred by sin are fully restored. The creation groans under the curse, but experiences liberation. The kingdom inaugurated by Christ’s first coming is fully realized at His second. And the watching angels witness the final vindication of God’s purposes—seeing that the long, patient demonstration was worth every moment.

### **The Parousia: Christ’s Glorious Return**

The New Testament is unanimous on this point: Christ will return. The Greek term employed throughout is *parousia* (παρουσία), meaning “presence” or “arrival.” What began with humiliation at the first coming culminates in exaltation at the second. Jesus, who came as the suffering servant, returns as the conquering king. The one who rode a donkey into Jerusalem returns on the clouds of heaven. The crucified Christ returns in glory.<sup>209</sup>

Jesus Himself promised it: “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). This deliberately echoes Daniel’s vision: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away” (Daniel 7:13–14). Jesus is not speaking in vague generalities. He is claiming to be the very figure Daniel saw.

The testimony is consistent across the New Testament. At the Ascension, angels assured the disciples: “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Paul writes that “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1

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<sup>209</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, Anchor Bible 28A (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1520–25.

Thessalonians 4:16). John sees Him in Revelation: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” (Revelation 1:7).

The Parousia is sudden and unmistakable. Jesus compares it to lightning flashing across the sky (Matthew 24:27) and a thief coming unexpectedly (Matthew 24:43). Peter warns that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Peter 3:10). No one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36), which is precisely why constant readiness is required rather than merely occasional attention.<sup>210</sup>

For the cosmic audience, Christ’s return vindicates everything proclaimed during His absence. The world that rejected Him will see Him exalted. Those who mocked His claims will witness His sovereignty. The powers that crucified the Lord of glory will bow before Him. Every knee will bend and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11). What was declared at Calvary—that this was the Son of God, that the redemption was accomplished, that death was defeated—is now publicly, cosmically confirmed. The crucified one returns as cosmic judge and king.

### **Resurrection and Transformation: Bodies Redeemed**

At Christ’s return, the dead in Christ are raised. Paul’s language is worth attending to carefully: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). What Paul describes is not resuscitation of corpses but transformation into glorified bodies—a distinction that matters enormously for how we understand what God is doing in the consummation.

Paul develops this at length in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter. Christ’s resurrection guarantees believers’ resurrection: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:22–23). Christ’s resurrection was the *firstfruits*—the first installment guaranteeing the full harvest. Our resurrection completes what He began.<sup>211</sup>

The resurrection body is different from the mortal body, yet continuous with it. “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). The term “spiritual body” requires careful handling. It does not mean immaterial. Christ’s resurrection body provides the model—physical enough to eat fish and bear the wounds of crucifixion, yet capable of appearing and disappearing, passing through walls, ascending to heaven.

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<sup>210</sup> Richard Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 316–21.

<sup>211</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1187–1234.

Gordon Fee clarifies what Paul means by “spiritual body” (*sōma pneumatikon*, σῶμα πνευματικόν): not a body made of spirit but a body animated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the present “natural body” (*sōma psychikon*, σῶμα ψυχικόν) animated by natural life. As Fee writes, “The contrast is between a body whose life is the ‘soul’ and one whose life is the ‘Spirit.’” Christ’s resurrection body demonstrates this reality—physical enough to be touched and to eat fish, yet transformed and empowered by the Spirit to transcend physical limitations.<sup>212</sup>

N.T. Wright presses the same point from his own direction. When Paul calls the resurrection body “spiritual,” he does not mean immaterial or non-physical. He means “a body which, though still robustly physical, is animated by God’s Spirit rather than by normal human vitality.”<sup>213</sup> The convergence of Fee and Wright on this is worth noting: two scholars arriving at the same conclusion by different exegetical routes. The resurrection body is not the escape from physicality but its redemption.

Living believers undergo instant transformation rather than death and resurrection. “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51–53). Mortality is transformed into immortality; corruptibility into incorruptibility. The very speed of it—the twinkling of an eye—speaks to the power of the one doing it.

What does the celestial audience witness in the resurrection? They see what sin corrupted, restored. What death destroyed, rebuilt. The bodies that bore God’s image yet suffered decay are renewed to bear that image perfectly. Wright captures the theological weight of this: “The resurrection of Jesus, and subsequently of all God’s people, is the reaffirmation of the goodness of creation, and hence of the created, bodily, human being.”<sup>214</sup> God’s purposes for embodied humanity are not abandoned. They are fulfilled. The material creation was never the problem; it was always the stage, and in the resurrection, it becomes the permanent dwelling.

### **Final Judgment: Justice Vindicated**

Christ returns not only as savior but as judge—and the two roles cannot be separated. Paul declares that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Jesus Himself taught, “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). The one who died for sinners returns to judge sin. The one who offered grace to all now holds all accountable. There is no tension here; both are expressions of the same holy character.

Revelation depicts this judgment with the full weight of its imagery: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence, earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done” (Revelation 20:11–12). Every person

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<sup>212</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 796–800.

<sup>213</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 348–49, 477.

<sup>214</sup> N.T. Wright, 732

faces judgment based on their deeds, with eternal destiny determined by whether their names appear in the book of life.<sup>215</sup>

Paul adds a dimension often overlooked: believers also face judgment, though not for salvation. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10). The *bēma* (βῆμα)—the judgment seat—evaluates believers’ works. Paul employs the metaphor of building materials tested by fire: “If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:14–15). Believers are saved by grace; they are rewarded according to faithfulness.<sup>216</sup>

Final judgment vindicates God’s justice completely. Every wrong is addressed. Every secret revealed. Every claim examined. No injustice escapes notice. No evil goes unpunished. No righteousness goes unrewarded. The patience that allowed evil to persist for millennia ends in thorough accounting. This is the moment that has seemed so long in coming—when those who accused God of indifference see comprehensive justice, and those who questioned whether God cared about suffering witness Him setting all things right.

For the cosmic audience, judgment answers a question that has hung over the entire demonstration: why did God permit evil to flourish for so long? The answer is now clear. His patience was not weakness. His mercy was not indifference. His delay was not indecision. The long demonstration during which evil flourished alongside good, during which the wicked prospered while the righteous suffered, during which injustice seemed to triumph—all of this culminates in perfect justice. Angels who watched the entire drama see that God’s character includes both mercy and judgment, both patience and accountability, both grace for the repentant and justice for the impenitent. Neither attribute was ever absent. Both were always in play.

### **New Creation: Paradise Regained**

Judgment is not the final word. After the old pass away, God creates new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah had prophesied it: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (Isaiah 65:17). Peter connects this promise to the reality of final judgment: “We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). John sees the vision fulfilled in Revelation 21:1. The story that began in a garden ends in a city—but a city suffused with the garden’s life.

This new creation is not an immaterial heaven but a renewed physical cosmos—a point worth insisting on. The word “new” (*kainos*, καίνος) means “new in quality” rather than “new in origin,” suggesting transformation and renewal rather than wholesale replacement and abandonment. Richard Bauckham explains: “The New Jerusalem does not replace the earth; it comes down from heaven to

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<sup>215</sup> There are several viewpoints on ‘the book of life.’ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 645. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 372.

<sup>216</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 408–23.

earth, so that God's presence transforms the earth into the new creation."<sup>217</sup> Continuity exists between present creation and new creation, just as resurrection bodies maintain continuity with mortal bodies while being transformed. God does not scrap His creation and start over. He redeems it.

The curse is finally and fully removed. "No longer will there be anything accursed" (Revelation 22:3). The ground no longer produces thorns. Childbirth no longer brings pain. Work no longer results in futility. Death no longer reigns. "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" (Revelation 21:4). Everything that entered through the Fall exits through the consummation. The symmetry is deliberate and complete.

God dwells with His people directly—not symbolically, not through a tabernacle or temple, but immediately. "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" (Revelation 21:3). What was lost in Eden—immediate, unmediated access to God's presence—is restored. Indeed, the tabernacle and temple become unnecessary precisely because God Himself is the temple (Revelation 21:22). The glory that once filled a room in the wilderness sanctuary now fills all creation.

And the tree of life reappears. In Eden, humanity was barred from it after sinning (Genesis 3:22–24). In new creation, access is restored: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates" (Revelation 22:14). The tree "yields its fruit each month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2). What was forbidden after the Fall becomes freely available at redemption's completion. The drama has a magnificent sense of resolution.

### **Eternal Worship and Service: Humanity's Purpose Fulfilled**

New creation is not eternal leisure but purposeful existence. "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:3–5). Believers are simultaneously worshipers and rulers, serving God and reigning with Him. The precise nature of that reign we do not yet know. But the direction is clear, and the promise is certain.

The vision of worship in Revelation 4–5 gives us a preview of what this looks like. Heavenly beings continually cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8). The twenty-four elders fall before the throne, casting their crowns and declaring, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Revelation 4:11). Worship flows from recognition—of who God is and what He has done. And in eternity, that recognition will be complete and unimpeded.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 49.

<sup>218</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 220–39.

Believers also reign. Paul promised: “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12). Revelation confirms: “They will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5). This fulfills humanity’s original mandate. In Eden, humans were commissioned to exercise dominion over creation (Genesis 1:26–28). Sin corrupted that dominion into tyranny and exploitation. In the new creation, redeemed humanity exercises righteous rule as God always intended—not dominating creation selfishly but stewarding it lovingly under God’s authority.

The specific nature of this reign remains partially mysterious. Scripture does not detail the activities or responsibilities, and it is perhaps wise not to press too far beyond what is given. But the pattern is clear enough: humans created in God’s image, redeemed through Christ’s sacrifice, transformed by the Spirit, fulfill their purpose as God’s vice-regents in the renewed cosmos. Work continues—not toil under curse but joyful, fruitful labor. Creativity flourishes. Relationships deepen. Knowledge expands. All without sin’s corruption, death’s threat, or Satan’s opposition. It is everything the garden was meant to become.

### **The Demonstration Complete: God All in All**

The cosmic demonstration that began in creation reaches completion in consummation. Every act has progressively displayed God’s character: creation revealed His power and wisdom; the Fall demonstrated His patience and the seriousness of sin; redemptive history showed His covenant faithfulness; the Incarnation and Cross displayed His love and justice simultaneously; the Church Age revealed His transforming power. The Consummation vindicates His purposes and completes His plan. Nothing is left unfinished. Nothing is left unaddressed.

What has the cosmic audience learned through the full length of this demonstration? They have witnessed that God is omnipotent—able to create from nothing, sustain all things, overcome all opposition, and defeat death itself. They have seen that He is omniscient, knowing the end from the beginning, orchestrating history toward purposes determined before time began. They have observed that He is holy—absolutely separate from evil, requiring righteousness, judging sin completely. They have watched Him exercise justice while extending patience, giving sinners opportunity for repentance, yet ultimately holding all accountable. I would suggest that none of these attributes could have been fully seen any other way. They required the theatre of this specific drama.

They have also witnessed God’s love in its fullest expression—not love that overlooks sin or compromises justice, but love that satisfies both through self-sacrifice. Love that pursues rebels. Love that pays the penalty for enemies. Love that transforms sinners into saints. Love that restores rather than destroys. Love that endures rejection and remains faithful. Love that completes what it begins. The Cross is the center of the demonstration precisely because it is the point where attributes that might seem contradictory—perfect justice and perfect mercy—meet in a single act and prove to be not contradictory at all, but complementary expressions of a single, coherent character.

Paul summarizes the ultimate purpose with characteristic precision: “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:24–28). The phrase “all in all” (*panta en pasin*, πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν) expresses total supremacy—God’s glory

filling all reality, His presence permeating all existence, His purposes accomplished completely. This is not an afterthought. It is what the entire demonstration has been building toward.<sup>219</sup>

Michael Heiser connects this to the cosmic conflict that has threaded through the entire drama: “The final rebellion will be crushed and the disloyal gods destroyed. God’s original Eden vision for global divine-human harmony will be realized. The nations will stream to the new Jerusalem to worship the living God... and his glory will fill the new earth. The entire cosmos will be his holy place. The long story of estrangement and spiritual warfare will finally reach its divinely ordained conclusion.”<sup>220</sup> The demonstration vindicates God’s original purposes. Despite rebellion and corruption, despite every effort of fallen powers to disrupt and derail it, the plan succeeds completely. This, too, is something the watching angels could not have known in advance. They had to see it enacted.

### **Living in Light of Consummation**

There is a pastoral dimension to all of this that should not be passed over too quickly. Understanding the consummation ought to transform how we live now. If this is where history is heading—Christ’s return, resurrection, judgment, and new creation—then current priorities cannot remain what they were. What matters eternally is not identical with what seems urgent in the here and now. Paul reasons it out plainly: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1–2).

Peter draws practical implications from eschatology with the directness he always brings to such things: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God... Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Peter 3:11–14). Knowing where the story ends motivates how we live in its penultimate chapters. This is not escapism; it is realism of the highest order.

Paul similarly argues that resurrection hope energizes current labor: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Work done for Christ is never wasted because resurrection guarantees that what is built on Him endures. The consummation does not render present action meaningless; it establishes its eternal significance. Our choices here have weight that extends beyond this age.

And the demonstration framework adds yet another dimension: believers participate even now in displaying God’s character to the cosmic audience. How we live in light of the promised consummation itself demonstrates the truth about God. When we endure suffering with hope, we show the watching cosmos that God’s promises sustain His people. When we pursue holiness despite temptation, we demonstrate that His power enables us to obey. When we love enemies, we display His character. When we persevere in faith despite delayed fulfillment, we prove His worthiness to be

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<sup>219</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 870–88.

<sup>220</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 380.

trusted. We are not mere spectators of the demonstration. We are, in Act Five and even into Act Six as it begins, participants in it.

### **Conclusion: From Glory to Glory**

The Matter of God's Character began with God's creative word bringing cosmos from chaos. It continued through the long drama of redemptive history—promises made, covenants established, law given, prophets sent, exile endured. It reached its climax at Calvary, where divine justice and mercy met in the perfect sacrifice of God's own Son. It extended through the Church age as redeemed humanity displayed God's character to an audience that did not always recognize it for what it was. And it finds its completion in Christ's return, resurrection, judgment, and new creation.

From beginning to end, the demonstration reveals God's character comprehensively. What appears contradictory to our limited perspective, His sovereignty and human responsibility, justice and mercy, transcendence and immanence, wrath and love, proves harmonious when the full story unfolds. The cosmic audience, having watched every act, finally sees no contradiction in God's character but perfect consistency. The attributes that seemed in tension turn out to be complementary. The actions that seemed incompatible prove coordinated toward one supreme purpose: displaying who God is in fullest expression.

We who live in Act Five see the demonstration incompletely. We know in part and prophesy in part (1 Corinthians 13:9). We walk by faith, not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). We await what we do not yet see (Romans 8:25). But the promise is certain: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). The partial revelation we currently possess will give way to complete understanding. What we now observe imperfectly will be fully revealed. And what will be revealed will not surprise us, because God's character is already disclosed in Scripture—we will simply see what we now believe.

Until that day, we live as witnesses and participants. We proclaim the gospel that demonstrates God's wisdom. We love one another in ways that display His character. We endure suffering that proves His sustaining grace. We await Christ's return with the confidence of those whose hope is not misplaced. And we know that when the curtain finally falls on human history, when the last act concludes and eternity begins, the cosmic audience will have one unanimous verdict: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power."<sup>221</sup>

The demonstration will be complete. God will be all in all.

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<sup>221</sup> Revelation 4:8, 11

## Annotated Bibliography

### *The Matter of God's Character: Creation, the Cross, and Why This Particular World*

Adams, Marilyn McCord. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Adams develops a theodicy centered on the category of "horrendous evils"—atrocities so severe that they threaten to render a person's life not worth living. She argues that a good God must defeat such evils by integrating them into a beatific relationship with the divine. Williams engages Adams as part of the major contemporary theodicy conversation that his demonstration framework both acknowledges and seeks to supplement.

Adair, John. *The Origins of Natural Evil: Christian Perspectives Through History*. London: Bloomsbury, 2024.

Adair surveys how Christian thinkers throughout history have attempted to account for natural evil — earthquakes, disease, and ecological suffering — within a theistic framework. Williams cites the work alongside Lewis and Dirckx as a resource for readers wanting additional perspectives on this dimension of the problem of evil.

Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

Alexander traces the theological structure of the Pentateuch, giving sustained attention to the covenantal and typological patterns that run from creation through the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. Williams cites this work to support the canonical reading of covenant history that underlies his argument that God's purposes unfold on a redemptive-historical stage.

Andrews, Jack. *Understanding 1 Peter*. The Jack Andrews Expository Studies. WORD search, 2017.

Andrews provides verse-by-verse exegetical commentary on the First Epistle of Peter. Williams draws on this work in his treatment of the angelic audience motif in 1 Peter 1, where Peter describes the things into which angels long to look — a text central to the book's argument that redemptive history is performed before a celestial audience.

Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. 3rd ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

Archer's standard introduction to Old Testament scholarship addresses questions of authorship, date, genre, and canonical formation for every section of the Hebrew Bible. Williams references Archer alongside William Lane Craig's podcast series to situate his treatment of the creation narratives within mainline evangelical scholarship on the interpretation of Genesis.

Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Known as BDAG, this is the standard scholarly Greek lexicon for New Testament studies. Williams uses it to examine the semantic range of several key terms, including the Greek verb *proorizō* (typically translated "predestine") and the noun *paradeisos* (paradise), in support of his exegetical arguments throughout the book.

Astell, Ann W., and Sandor Goodhart. *Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022.

This interdisciplinary collection examines the theology of sacrifice and substitution across Jewish and early Christian texts, tracing how the concept of vicarious suffering is embedded in the canonical literature. Williams recommends it to readers wanting a comprehensive understanding of sacrifice and substitution as background for his treatment of the cross as the dramatic climax of redemptive history.

Balz, Horst Robert, and Gerhard Schneider. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

This three-volume reference work provides detailed lexical and exegetical analysis of every significant term in the Greek New Testament, with attention to Septuagint usage and intertestamental background. Williams cites it repeatedly throughout *Theatre of Glory* for precise word studies, including analyses of *epideigma* (demonstration), *sarx* (flesh), *sēmeron* (today), *paradeisos* (paradise), and *theatron* (theater).

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. III/1, *The Doctrine of Creation*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Translated by J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958.

In this foundational section of his *Dogmatics*, Barth argues that creation must be understood in light of the covenant — creation is the outer basis of the covenant, and the covenant is the inner basis of creation. Williams engages Barth's christocentric anthropology as background to his own treatment of the *imago Dei* and the purpose of human existence within the theatrical demonstration framework.

Bauckham, Richard. *2 Peter, Jude*. *Word Biblical Commentary* 50. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983.

Bauckham's technical commentary provides a thorough exegesis of Second Peter and Jude, with careful attention to the eschatological material in 2 Peter 3 and the judgment passages in Jude. Williams draws on this commentary in his treatment of the consummation of the demonstration, where the cosmic stage of history reaches its final act.

Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. *New Testament Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Bauckham offers a sustained theological reading of Revelation, arguing that the book presents an alternative vision of reality that subverts imperial ideology through its portrayal of the enthroned Lamb. Williams cites this work alongside Osborne's commentary in his discussion of how the Apocalypse frames the end of history as the definitive revelation of God's character before all witnesses.

Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation: New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Beale's massive commentary on Revelation is widely regarded as the most comprehensive evangelical treatment of the book. Williams draws on Beale's exegesis of passages dealing with the cosmic throne room, the Lamb's enthronement, and the eschatological consummation, all of which bear on his argument that Revelation presents the final act of God's theatrical self-demonstration.

Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Beale traces the theological unity of the New Testament through the lens of inaugurated eschatology and temple theology, arguing that the New Testament writers understood themselves to be living in the fulfillment of the Old Testament storyline. Williams recommends this work as an outstanding exposition of the "traditional framework approach" to scripture that underpins his own canonical reading.

Berthold, Fred. "Free Will and Theodicy in Augustine: An Exposition and Critique." *Religious Studies* 17 (1981): 525–535.

Berthold examines Augustine's theodicy, evaluating both its strengths and its internal tensions, particularly around the relationship between divine foreknowledge, free will, and the origin of evil. Williams cites this essay as part of a cluster of works on Augustine's theodicy that form the early tradition his own demonstration framework engages.

Blankenhorn, Bernhard-Thomas. "The Good as Self-Diffusive in Thomas Aquinas." *Angelicum* 79, no. 4 (2002): 803–837.

Blankenhorn analyzes Aquinas's teaching that the Good, by its nature, diffuses itself outward — a Neoplatonic concept that Aquinas Christianizes in his account of creation and divine benevolence. Williams engages this idea as part of his interrogation of the diffusion/overflow metaphor in classical theology, which he contrasts with his own relational and volitional account of why God creates.

Block, Daniel I. *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Block's commentary offers rigorous historical-grammatical exegesis of Ezekiel's second half, including the oracles against Tyre and the vision of the valley of dry bones. Williams draws on Block in his treatment of Ezekiel 28, where the "guardian cherub" passage has traditionally been interpreted as a description of the fall of Satan — a passage central to his argument about the angelic rebellion and the origin of the cosmic conflict.

Blocher, Henri. *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*. Translated by David G. Preston. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

Blocher offers a literary and theological reading of Genesis 1–3, arguing for a "framework interpretation" of the creation days that takes the text's literary artistry seriously without committing to either strict literalism or purely allegorical readings. Williams cites Blocher in situating his own exegetical approach to the creation narrative within the evangelical interpretive landscape.

Blomberg, Craig. *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016.

Blomberg's comprehensive study defends the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament documents against a wide range of critical challenges, covering questions of authorship, textual transmission, eyewitness testimony, and archaeological corroboration. Williams recommends this work in his opening apologetic note, as part of the foundational case for the credibility of the Christian story his theodicy presupposes.

Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Bock's exegetical commentary on Acts is one of the most thorough evangelical treatments available. Williams references it for understanding how Joel's prophecy (Joel 2) fits the context of Pentecost in Acts 2, a passage relevant to his discussion of the Spirit's role in the continuing demonstration of God's character through the church.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*. Translated by Douglas Stephen Bax. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

Originally delivered as lectures at Berlin in 1932–33, this work offers Bonhoeffer's christological reading of the creation and fall narratives, emphasizing the irreversibility of the fall and the radical newness of redemption. Williams engages Bonhoeffer's anthropological reflections as background to his treatment of humanity's original vocation as image-bearers within the demonstration framework.

Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Known as BDB, this remains the standard reference lexicon for classical Hebrew scholarship. Williams uses it throughout *Theatre of Glory* for precise word studies in the Old Testament, including analyses of *kavod* (glory/weight), *tov* (good/beautiful), and the Hebrew terminology for humanity's relationship to the divine in Genesis.

Bultmann, Rudolf. "Ginōskō, Gnōsis, Epiginōskō, Epignōsis, Kataginōskō, Akatagnōstos, Proginōskō, Prognōsis, Sungnōmē, Gnōmē, Gnōrizō, Gnōstos." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Bultmann's TDNT article on the Greek word group for "knowing" provides exhaustive coverage of the semantic range of *proginōskō* (foreknow) and *prognōsis* (foreknowledge) in biblical and Hellenistic usage. Williams uses this study in his examination of divine foreknowledge and its relationship to the demonstration of God's justice, particularly in Romans 3:21–26.

Callender, Dexter E. *Adam in Myth and History: Ancient Israelite Perspectives on the Primal Human*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000.

Callender examines the figure of Adam in ancient Israelite literature, including the "Adam" traditions embedded in Ezekiel 28, tracing how ancient Near Eastern mythological patterns shaped the Hebrew writers' presentation of primordial humanity and its fall. Williams draws on this work in his discussion of the Ezekiel 28 passage and its relevance to the rebellion of the angelic guardian.

Castelo, Daniel. *The Apathetic God*. Paternoster Theological Monographs. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009.

Castelo examines the classical doctrine of divine apathy (impassibility) — the view that God cannot suffer or be emotionally affected by creaturely events — and assesses its biblical and philosophical merits. Williams cites this work alongside Thomas Jay Oord's volume as part of the debate over divine passibility, a question integral to his theodicy's claim that God genuinely cares about and is responsive to creaturely suffering.

Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

Childs's landmark study established the program of "canonical criticism," arguing that the Old Testament's final canonical shape is an intentional theological product rather than a random historical accumulation. Williams references Childs in establishing the literary and theological intentionality of the biblical narrative, which his demonstration framework depends upon.

Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Childs provides a canonical and theological commentary on the whole book of Isaiah, with particular attention to its unity and its messianic trajectory. Williams cites this work in the context of his discussion of divine monotheism and the polemic against rival gods embedded in the Isaianic literature.

Clark, John. *The Incarnation of God: The Mystery of the Gospel as the Foundation of Evangelical Theology*. Toronto: Crossway, 2015.

Clark argues that the Incarnation — not the Fall — is the foundation for understanding God's saving purposes, and that Evangelical theology must be restructured accordingly. Williams cites this work as one of a cluster of treatments supporting the view that the Incarnation was Plan A rather than a divine emergency response, a claim central to Theatre of Glory's theodical argument.

Cole, Graham A. *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*. Vol. 30, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*. Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Cole traces the biblical-theological development of the Incarnation from its anticipations in the Old Testament through its fulfillment and cosmic implications in the New Testament. Williams references Cole in support of his argument that the Incarnation was the predetermined climax of a carefully ordered divine demonstration rather than a contingent response to the problem of sin.

Collins, C. John. *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2003.

Collins examines the relationship between scientific inquiry and Christian faith, arguing for a model of integration that takes both Scripture and the natural order seriously. Williams cites Collins in his survey of interpretive approaches to Genesis 1–2, positioning his own reading within the range of evangelical options.

Copan, Paul, and Matthew Flannagan. *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014.

Copan and Flannagan mount a sustained philosophical and exegetical defense of the divine command to destroy the Canaanites, responding to critics who see the conquest narratives as morally incompatible with a good God. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the Old Testament conquest as part of the larger demonstration of divine justice and holiness that Theatre of Glory traces.

Cortez, Marc. *Resourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.

Cortez offers a constructive theological anthropology centered on Christ as the definitive image of God, drawing on a wide range of historical and contemporary voices to develop a robustly christological account of what it means to be human. Williams engages Cortez as part of the broader discussion of the *imago Dei* that grounds his account of humanity's role within the divine demonstration.

Coyne, Jerry. *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible*. London: Penguin Books, 2016.

Coyne, an evolutionary biologist, argues that science and religion are fundamentally incompatible ways of knowing and that religious belief cannot be rationally sustained in the light of scientific discovery. Williams references this work as a representative voice of the secular challenge to theism that his apologetic theodicy is designed, in part, to address.

Craig, William Lane. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020.

Craig brings philosophical precision to the doctrine of atonement, surveying the major atonement theories and constructing a defense of penal substitution that is both exegetically grounded and philosophically coherent. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the cross as the central act in God's theatrical demonstration of justice and love.

Craig, William Lane. *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Craig examines the doctrine of divine aseity — God's absolute self-sufficiency and independence from all created things — and defends it against the challenge posed by Platonistic realism about abstract objects. Williams uses this work to illuminate the concept of aseity in his discussion of why God, who needs nothing, creates at all.

Craig, William Lane. *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2000.

Craig argues that divine omniscience and genuine human freedom are not logically incompatible, offering a defense of the Molinist framework of middle knowledge as the best account of how God can foreknow all free choices without determining them. This work is foundational to Williams's theodicy, which depends on the compatibility of divine sovereignty and genuine creaturely freedom.

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.

Craig's comprehensive apologetics text surveys the major arguments for Christian theism, including cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for God's existence, as well as the historical case for the resurrection. Williams cites this work in his opening note as a foundational resource for the broader apologetic framework within which Theatre of Glory operates.

Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 1. *International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975.

Cranfield's two-volume ICC commentary on Romans is among the most technically rigorous available. Williams draws on it repeatedly in his chapter on Romans 3:21–26, which he treats

as the most compressed and theologically dense statement of God's demonstration of justice through the death of Christ — the heart of the book's argument.

Currid, John D. *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997.

Currid demonstrates the historical and religious connections between the Exodus plagues and the specific deities of the Egyptian pantheon, arguing that each plague was a targeted divine polemic against a god worshiped by Egypt. Williams draws on this work to show that the Exodus functions as a dramatic divine demonstration of God's superiority over all rival powers — a key instance of the demonstration motif.

d'Assonville, V. "The perpetuity of Christ's reign... Calvin's interpretation of Psalm 110:1." *Koers — Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 87, no. 1 (2022).

This article examines Calvin's reading of Psalm 110:1 and the implications of Christ's ongoing enthronement for Reformed theology's understanding of divine sovereignty. Williams references this in his treatment of the session of Christ — his ongoing rule at the Father's right hand — as a sustained demonstration of divine sovereignty before the angelic host.

Dauids, Peter H. *The First Epistle of Peter*. *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Dauids's NICNT commentary offers thorough exegesis of 1 Peter with careful attention to its Old Testament background and its setting among dispersed Jewish-Christian communities. Williams consults Dauids in his treatment of the celestial audience motif, particularly the passage in 1 Peter 1 where angels are described as intensely curious observers of redemption.

Delling, Gerhard. "Telos, Teleō, Epiteleō, Sunteleō, Sunteleia, Pantelēs, Teleios, Teleiotēs, Teleioō, Teleiōsis, Teleiōtēs." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Delling's comprehensive TDNT article on the Greek telos word group examines the concept of end, goal, and completion in Greek philosophical and New Testament usage. Williams draws on this article to establish the teleological framework of his theodicy — the conviction that God is working toward a definite telos, a completed demonstration of his character.

Derico, T. M. "Parousia." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Edited by John D. Barry et al. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016.

This reference entry explains the technical meaning and New Testament usage of parousia (presence/arrival) as a term for the return of Christ. Williams cites it in his eschatological chapters, where the parousia is treated as the final curtain call of the cosmic drama — the moment when the full demonstration of God's character will be publicly complete.

Dirckx, Sharon. *Broken Planet: If There Is a God, Then Why Are There Natural Disasters and Diseases?* Lisle: IVP, 2023.

Dirckx addresses the evidential problem of natural evil for Christian theism from an accessible, apologetically oriented perspective, bringing both scientific and theological resources to bear on the question. Williams recommends this work alongside Lewis and Adair for readers pursuing additional engagement with the problem of natural suffering.

Edersheim, Alfred. *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*. London: Religious Tract Society, 1874. Repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994.

Edersheim's classic study of the Jerusalem Temple's liturgical arrangements, priesthood, and sacrificial system draws on rabbinic sources to reconstruct the daily life of the Temple. Williams uses this work in his treatment of the veil's tearing at the crucifixion, as part of his argument that the events of the cross constituted a dramatic divine demonstration performed before both human and angelic witnesses.

Edwards, William D., Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer. "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ." *JAMA* 255, no. 11 (1986): 1455–1463.

This landmark medical study examines the physiological causes of death by crucifixion, providing clinical analysis of the cardiac and respiratory failure that would have accompanied the process. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the historical and physical reality of Christ's death, establishing the factual foundation that his theological interpretation of the cross presupposes.

Evans, Annette Henrietta Margaretha. "The Development of Jewish Ideas of Angels: Egyptian and Hellenistic Connections ca. 600 BCE to ca. 200 CE." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stellenbosch University, 2007.

Evans traces the development of Jewish angelology from its ancient Near Eastern antecedents through its Second Temple elaborations, showing how Egyptian and Hellenistic influences shaped the emerging Jewish literature on heavenly beings. Williams recommends this dissertation for readers interested in the fuller theological context of the celestial audience motif that Theatre of Glory develops.

Feeney, Thomas. "Leibniz on the Problem of Evil." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2026 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman.

This encyclopedia entry traces Leibniz's invention of the term theodicy and his attempted resolution of the problem of evil through his doctrine of the best possible world. Williams cites this reference to establish the intellectual genealogy of the theodicy project that Theatre of Glory enters, noting that the formal discipline of theodicy began with Leibniz in 1710.

Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Rev. ed. *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

Fee's NICNT commentary on 1 Corinthians is widely regarded as one of the finest evangelical commentaries available on any New Testament book. Williams draws on it in his treatment of 1 Corinthians 13, chapter 15 (the resurrection chapter), and the church's role as a theater of demonstration before the angelic powers — themes from Ephesians that are illuminated by Paul's Corinthian correspondence.

Fesko, J. V. *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputation*. Nairobi: Mentor Publishing, 2016.

Fesko provides a comprehensive historical, exegetical, and systematic defense of the doctrine of imputation — both the imputation of Adam's sin to humanity and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the cross and atonement as the judicial demonstration that grounds the believer's right standing before God.

Fischer, John M. "Foreknowledge and Free Will." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015).

Fischer's encyclopedia article surveys the major philosophical positions on the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human free will, including compatibilism, libertarianism, and Molinist approaches. Williams cites this entry as part of his engagement with the philosophical dimensions of his theodicy, which depends on the genuine freedom of both angelic and human agents.

Fischer, John Martin, Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, and Manuel Vargas. *Four Views on Free Will*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

This volume presents four major philosophical positions on free will — compatibilism, libertarianism, hard determinism, and illusionism — with essays and responses from leading philosophers. Williams recommends it as a resource for readers wanting to understand the philosophical landscape of the free will debate that is foundational to his theodical argument.

Fisher, Sarah E. "Satan: Adversary Is Not a Name." *Hebrew Word Lessons*. [hebrewwordlessons.com](http://hebrewwordlessons.com). Accessed January 9, 2026.

Fisher examines the Hebrew usage of the term *satan* (adversary) in the Old Testament, demonstrating that it functions as a title or role descriptor rather than a proper personal name in many of its Old Testament occurrences. Williams draws on this to establish that the character of the adversary is introduced in the Old Testament primarily as a functionary whose full identity as a rebel is more fully developed in the New Testament.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV*. Anchor Bible 28A. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Fitzmyer's Anchor Bible commentary is among the most exhaustive critical commentaries on the Gospel of Luke. Williams draws on it in his treatment of Luke's passion narrative, particularly Jesus's words from the cross — including the promise to the thief and the commitment of his spirit to the Father — as dramatic moments in the unfolding demonstration of God's character.

Flint, Thomas P. *Molinism*. *Oxford Handbook of Topics in Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flint, one of the foremost contemporary defenders of Molinism, provides a precise philosophical exposition of Luis de Molina's doctrine of middle knowledge, explaining how God's knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom allows him to providentially govern history without coercing creaturely choices. Williams relies on Molinism as the philosophical framework for reconciling divine providence with genuine creaturely freedom throughout his theodicy.

Foley, Michael P. "Introduction." In *On Order* by Augustine. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

Foley's introduction to Augustine's *De Ordine* situates the work within Augustine's early philosophical development and explains his argument that evil and disorder, rightly understood, are not outside divine order but are ordered to God's providential ends. Williams cites this alongside other Augustinian studies in tracing the tradition of theodicy that Theatre of Glory enters and seeks to move beyond.

Forshaw, Peter J. *The Mage's Images: Heinrich Khunrath in His Oratory and Laboratory*. Vol. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2025.

This specialist study examines the Renaissance alchemist and theologian Heinrich Khunrath, whose work combined Christian mysticism with natural philosophy and imagery of divine light. Williams makes a passing allusion to this work in a footnote touching on the history of ideas about divine demonstration and the theater of nature — a motif with deep roots in early modern thought.

France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

France's NICNT commentary is one of the most thorough evangelical treatments of the Gospel of Matthew. Williams draws on it in his treatment of the cosmic signs at the crucifixion — including the darkness, the earthquake, and the rising of the saints — which France discusses as events that function theologically to signal the inauguration of the eschatological age.

Freddoso, Alfred J. "Molina, Luis de (1535–1600)." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998).

Freddoso, a leading Molina scholar, provides a concise account of Molina's life, intellectual context, and theological contribution, particularly his development of the doctrine of middle knowledge in the Concordia. Williams cites this article as background for his use of the Molinist framework to explain how God's providential government of history is compatible with genuine creaturely freedom.

Gale, Richard M. *On the Nature and Existence of God*. *Cambridge Philosophy Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Gale's philosophical study examines the coherence of classical theism, including divine omniscience, omnipotence, and necessary existence, and assesses the major arguments for and against God's existence. Williams cites this work in his engagement with the philosophical dimensions of the theodicy debate, particularly the relationship between God's nature and the problem of evil.

Gathercole, Simon J. *Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

Gathercole offers a focused exegetical defense of penal substitution as a genuinely Pauline category, responding to critics who argue that substitution is either absent from or peripheral to Paul's soteriology. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the cross as the moment when God's justice is demonstrated publicly through the substitutionary death of Christ.

Graves, Neil D. "Milton and the Theory of Accommodation." *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 2 (2001): 251–272.

Graves examines John Milton's use of the theological principle of divine accommodation — the idea that God reveals himself in human terms suited to limited creaturely understanding — and its implications for reading biblical descriptions of God. Williams cites this work in his critique of the accommodation doctrine as applied to theodicy, arguing that accommodation taken too far renders our knowledge of God effectively empty.

Gronewoller, Brian. "Augustine's Use of Rhetorical Economy in His Theology of Creation." In *Rhetorical Economy*, 2021.

Gronewoller examines how Augustine's rhetorical and theological economy shapes his treatment of creation, showing the interconnections between Augustine's Platonic inheritance and his distinctively Christian account of creation *ex nihilo*. Williams cites this essay alongside Foley and Berthold in his survey of the Augustinian tradition of theodicy.

Ham, Ken. *The Lie: Evolution/Millions of Years*. Green Forest: Master Books, 2012.

Ham argues that evolutionary theory and an old-earth chronology are incompatible with the plain reading of Scripture and that accepting them has had devastating consequences for Christian faith and ethics. Williams cites this work as a representative of Young Earth Creationism, one of the interpretive options he surveys in his treatment of the creation narratives.

Hanko, R. "God's Justice and Man's Sin." *Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. [prca.org](http://prca.org). Accessed January 7, 2026.

Hanko's essay presents the Reformed confessional tradition's understanding of God's justice as perfectly compatible with his sovereignty over human sin. Williams cites this as background for his own treatment of divine justice, which he develops not through the lens of Reformed high Calvinism but through the demonstration framework and the Molinist account of divine governance.

Harris, Murray J. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. *New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Harris's NIGTC commentary offers meticulous exegesis of 2 Corinthians, with particular care for Paul's autobiographical and eschatological passages. Williams draws on Harris in his treatment of 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul's imagery of standing before the judgment seat of Christ bears on the demonstration framework's account of eschatological accountability.

Hauck, Friedrich. "Katabolē." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Hauck's TDNT article examines the Greek term *katabolē* (foundation/casting down) and its use in the phrase "before the foundation of the world" (*pro katabolēs kosmou*). Williams uses this study to support his argument that God's electing and demonstrative purposes were established before creation itself — an important plank of the book's theological architecture.

Hays, J. "An Exegetical and Theological Study of the Abrahamic Covenant in a Canonical Context." Doctoral dissertation, available through ProQuest.

This dissertation provides a thorough examination of the Abrahamic covenant across both testaments, attending to its canonical development and theological significance for understanding God's redemptive purposes. Williams cites this study in his treatment of the Abrahamic election as a pivotal moment in the theatrical demonstration of God's character through a chosen people.

Heiser, Michael S. *Angels: What the Bible Really Says about God's Heavenly Host*. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018.

Heiser surveys the biblical data on angels and the divine council, arguing that the Old Testament presents a complex picture of a supernatural household that includes both loyal and rebellious members. Williams draws on this work extensively in his treatment of the angelic audience for human history and in his account of the cosmic conflict between loyal and rebel angels that forms the backdrop of Theatre of Glory.

Heiser, Michael S. "Are Demons Fallen Angels and 2 Other Common Misconceptions." Word by Word: Bible Study Magazine Blog. Logos.com. Accessed February 21, 2026.

Heiser challenges the popular identification of demons with fallen angels, arguing from the Second Temple Jewish literature that the biblical writers drew a conceptual distinction between the two categories. Williams engages this argument in his treatment of the supernatural antagonists in the cosmic drama, noting that precision about the identity and origin of hostile spiritual beings matters for the book's theodical argument.

Heiser, Michael S. "Image of God." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Edited by John D. Barry et al. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016.

Heiser's reference article on the *imago Dei* surveys the major interpretive traditions and argues for a functional-representative understanding of the image: humanity is created to serve as God's representative rulers in the created order. Williams draws on Heiser's treatment in his account of humanity's vocation within the theatrical demonstration.

Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. 2nd ed. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2025.

Heiser's major work recovers the divine council theology embedded in the Old Testament, demonstrating that the biblical writers understood God to govern creation through a hierarchy of spiritual beings, some of whom rebelled. This book is one of the most important conversation partners for Theatre of Glory, providing the exegetical and biblical-theological foundation for Williams's treatment of the angelic audience, the cosmic conflict, and the supernatural dimensions of redemptive history.

Hengel, Martin. *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.

Hengel's study documents the widespread use of crucifixion in the ancient Mediterranean world and shows why it was regarded as the most shameful and degrading form of execution — reserved for slaves, criminals, and enemies of the state. Williams draws on this to establish the cultural context of the cross, which makes God's willingness to demonstrate his love through this specific act all the more dramatic.

Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love*. Princeton: Springer, 2010.

Hick's classic theodicy develops the "Irenaean" tradition, arguing that evil serves the purpose of soul-making — the formation of mature, morally developed persons through struggle and suffering. Williams engages Hick as a major alternative theodical framework, acknowledging its strengths while distinguishing his demonstration model from soul-making theodicy.

Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Hoehner's massive commentary is widely regarded as the most comprehensive evangelical treatment of Ephesians available. Williams draws on it repeatedly, particularly in his

treatment of the principalities and powers passages in chapters 3 and 6, which he reads as evidence that the church's existence functions as a cosmic demonstration of divine wisdom before the angelic realm.

Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

Hoekema's systematic treatment of the *imago Dei* surveys the biblical material and the theological tradition, arguing for a structural-functional view of the image that encompasses both what humanity is and what humanity is called to do. Williams engages Hoekema in his development of humanity's vocation as image-bearers called to reflect and demonstrate God's character within the theatrical framework.

"Irenaean Theodicy." *International Journal of Religious and Cultural Practice* 10 (2025): 7–21.

This article examines the Irenaean tradition of theodicy, associated with the second-century bishop Irenaeus and revived in modern form by John Hick, which treats suffering as necessary for spiritual and moral development. Williams cites this essay in his engagement with the major theodical traditions, distinguishing his demonstration model from the soul-making approach.

Irenaeus of Lyons. *Against Heresies*. In *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons: Against Heresies and Fragments*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Meadville: Newman Press, 1991.

Irenaeus's second-century refutation of Gnosticism includes his famous "recapitulation" theodicy (especially in books 4–5), arguing that God permitted the fall and works through history toward the maturation of humanity in the image of Christ. Williams engages Irenaeus as the foundational figure in the theodical tradition that understands human development and freedom as part of God's purposes in creation.

Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. 2 vols. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

The JFB Commentary is a classic nineteenth-century evangelical reference work providing concise exegetical notes on every biblical book. Williams draws on it in his treatment of the "morning stars" in Job 38 (where the angelic host is present at creation), and for the Galatians 4:4 passage on the fullness of time — both of which bear on his argument about the intended cosmic audience for the drama of redemption.

Jobes, Karen H. 1, 2, and 3 John. *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Jobes provides exegetically rigorous commentary on the Johannine epistles, with careful attention to John's distinctive theological vocabulary and the ethical imperatives grounded in his theology of love. Williams draws on Jobes in his treatment of the Johannine material on love, which he connects to the Trinitarian relational ethic that the demonstration framework is designed to establish.

Jumper, Mark A., Steven E. Keith, and Michael W. Langston. *Chaplaincy: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024.

This comprehensive academic introduction to chaplaincy covers the theology, practice, and institutional contexts of chaplaincy ministry across military, healthcare, correctional, and corporate settings. Williams cites this work in his treatment of pastoral care and suffering,

noting that chaplains must be equipped to minister within theodical questions rather than simply offering superficial comfort.

Kasch, Wilhelm. "Sunistēmi, Sunistanō." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Kasch's TDNT article examines the Greek verb *sunistēmi* and its cognates, which carry the meaning of commending, establishing, or demonstrating. Williams uses this study in his treatment of Romans 5:8 — "God demonstrates [*sunistēsīn*] his love for us" — as a key proof text for the demonstration framework that gives Theatre of Glory its organizing thesis.

Kedar-Kopfstein, B. "Me'od." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

This TDOT article examines the Hebrew adverb *me'od* ("very") and its semantic range, including its emphatic use in the creation narrative when God surveys the completed creation and declares it "very good" (*tov me'od*). Williams uses this lexical study in his argument that the creation was completed in a state of genuine excellence and ordered beauty, the disruption of which by sin forms the dramatic conflict of the cosmic story.

Keener, Craig S. *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Keener's landmark study marshals extraordinary historical and anthropological evidence for miracle reports across cultures and periods, arguing that the New Testament miracle accounts deserve historical credibility. Williams cites Keener specifically in his treatment of the darkness at the crucifixion, where Keener documents ancient literary parallels and shows that cosmic signs were understood as indicators of divine action.

Kittel, Gerhard. "Theatron, Theatrizomai." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

This TDNT article examines the Greek terms *theatron* (theater/spectacle) and *theatrizomai* (to be made a spectacle), including their occurrences in the New Testament. Williams draws on this study in developing the theatrical metaphor that gives his book its title and central organizing image, establishing that the New Testament writers themselves used theatrical language to describe the public character of God's saving acts.

Kitchen, K. A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Kitchen, a distinguished Egyptologist and biblical scholar, marshals extensive archaeological and ancient Near Eastern evidence in support of the historical reliability of the Old Testament. Williams recommends this work as part of the foundational historical case for the Christian story within which his theodicy operates.

Kline, Meredith G. "Because It Had Not Rained." *Westminster Theological Journal* 20, no. 2 (1958): 146–157.

Kline argues in this influential article that the creation narrative of Genesis 2 cannot be read as temporally prior to Genesis 1, and that the "framework hypothesis" for interpreting the

creation days is exegetically defensible. Williams cites this article in his survey of interpretive options for the creation narrative.

Kline, Meredith G. *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*. Overland Park: Two Age Press, 2000.

Kline develops a covenantal reading of Genesis 1–11, arguing that the creation narrative establishes the foundational structures — including the Sabbath, the image of God, and the kingly commission — that govern the entire biblical covenantal structure. Williams engages Kline's work in establishing the cosmic and covenantal backdrop of his demonstration framework.

Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 5 vols. Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.

Known as HALOT, this is the premier scholarly lexicon of classical Hebrew and Aramaic. Williams uses it in his Old Testament exegetical work throughout *Theatre of Glory*, particularly in his treatment of key creation and anthropological vocabulary.

Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Rev. ed. Edited by Donald A. Hagner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Ladd's biblical theology of the New Testament is a standard evangelical reference, organized around his theme of inaugurated eschatology — the kingdom of God has come in Christ but awaits its final consummation. Williams draws on Ladd in his treatment of the New Testament's eschatological framework and the church's role in the in-between time of the demonstration.

Lane, William L. *Hebrews 1–8*. Word Biblical Commentary 47A. Dallas: Word Books, 1991.

Lane's WBC commentary provides thorough exegesis of the first half of Hebrews, with careful attention to the book's high-priestly Christology and its use of the Old Testament. Williams draws on Lane in his treatment of the cosmic dimensions of Christ's priestly work — specifically the session at the right hand of the Father as an ongoing demonstration of divine victory before the heavenly host.

Lemke, Steve. *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique*. Brentwood: B&H Publishing, 2022.

Lemke offers a sustained evangelical critique of the five-point Calvinist system, arguing that TULIP creates more biblical and theological problems than it solves and that an Arminian or Molinist alternative does greater justice to the full range of scriptural data. Williams recommends this work in his note arguing that the translation of *proorizō* as "predestine" is a theological misstep.

Levenson, Jon D. *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Levenson argues from the Hebrew Bible that creation is not presented as a completed and settled order but as an ongoing divine struggle against chaos — and that God's sovereignty is exercised through continual engagement with resistant forces rather than simple omnipotent decree. Williams cites this work in his account of the creation narrative as an ordered but contested stage for the divine demonstration.

Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001.

Lewis's accessible theodicy argues that pain and suffering serve the purpose of stripping away self-sufficiency and driving both humans and God into a relationship of genuine encounter. Williams recommends this as the most accessible treatment of the problem of pain and as a complementary perspective to his own demonstration approach.

Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Revised by Henry Stuart Jones. 9th ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.

Known as LSJ, this is the standard reference lexicon for classical Greek. Williams uses it in his treatment of the term *hilastērion* in Romans 3:25, where the debate between "propitiation" and "expiation" turns in part on the lexical evidence from classical Greek usage.

Lloyd-Jones, David Martyn. *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972.

Lloyd-Jones's expository treatment of Ephesians 3 offers a characteristically rich engagement with Paul's argument about the church as the vehicle through which God makes known his manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Williams draws on this commentary directly in his treatment of the church's cosmic demonstrative function, which is central to Theatre of Glory's thesis.

Lohse, Eduard. "Pentēkostē." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Lohse's TDNT article traces the history and theological significance of Pentecost in both its Jewish (Feast of Weeks) and early Christian (Acts 2) forms. Williams draws on this in his treatment of Pentecost as a dramatic divine demonstration — the outpouring of the Spirit constituting a visible, public announcement of the new phase of God's redemptive activity.

Lopez, Rene. "Israelite Covenants in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Covenants (pt. 1 of 2)." *Chafer Theological Journal* blog.

Lopez surveys the major types of covenants in the ancient Near East — suzerain-vassal treaties and royal grant covenants — and shows how they illuminate the structure and theology of the biblical covenants. Williams cites this article in his treatment of the covenant framework through which God's theatrical demonstration unfolds in redemptive history.

MacGregor, Kirk. *Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018.

MacGregor provides both a scholarly biography of the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina and a systematic exposition of his doctrine of middle knowledge — God's knowledge of counterfactuals of free creaturely choice. Williams relies on this work as the primary historical and theological source for the Molinist framework that his theodicy employs.

Mackie, J. L. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955): 200–212.

This landmark article formulates the "logical problem of evil" in its classic analytic form, arguing that the existence of a perfectly good and omnipotent God is logically incompatible with the existence of any evil. Williams engages this argument as the strongest philosophical challenge to theism that his demonstration theodicy must address, and notes that Mackie

himself later acknowledged Plantinga's free will defense as a successful refutation of the logical problem.

MacPherson, Anthony. *The Redeemed Good Defense: The Great Controversy as a Theodicy Response to the Evidential Problem of Evil*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021.

MacPherson develops a theodicy based on the Adventist "Great Controversy" narrative, arguing that the cosmic conflict between God and Satan provides an answer to the evidential problem of evil. Williams cites this as background on the "greater good" type of theodicy, from which he distances his own demonstration approach.

Mallowan, M. E. L. "Noah's Flood Reconsidered." *Iraq* 26, no. 2 (1964): 62–82.

Mallowan examines the archaeological and geological evidence bearing on the historicity of a major flood event in the ancient Near East, evaluating the various competing theories for its scope and extent. Williams cites this study in a note on the Flood narrative, clarifying that debates about its scope do not affect his demonstration framework thesis.

Marcus, Joel. *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible 27A. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Marcus's Anchor Yale Bible commentary on the second half of Mark is widely regarded as the most comprehensive critical commentary available on this portion of Mark's Gospel. Williams draws on Marcus in his treatment of the cosmic signs at the crucifixion, where Marcus connects the darkness and other portents to Old Testament prophetic imagery, arguing that they function as cosmic mourning for the death of Jesus.

Martin, Ernest L. *The Star That Astonished the World*. Portland: ASK Publications, 1991.

Martin presents an astronomical argument for identifying the star of Bethlehem with a specific celestial conjunction in 3–2 BC, arguing for a precise dating of the birth of Jesus. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the Incarnation as a cosmically significant event that was, in a real sense, announced to the universe.

Mayangsari, Agnes Mariana, Muslikah Muslikah, and Anwar Sutoyo. "The Competence of Counselor in Conducting Spiritual Counseling: A Systematic Literature Review." *Counsnesia Indonesian Journal of Guidance and Counseling* 6, no. 1 (2025): 19–27.

This systematic review examines the competencies required for effective spiritual counseling, surveying the literature on the intersection of psychological and spiritual care. Williams references this article in his treatment of pastoral care for those suffering, noting that chaplains must bring genuine theological depth — not merely therapeutic technique — to the ministry of presence in the context of suffering.

Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994.

Metzger's commentary documents the decisions of the United Bible Societies committee on textual variants throughout the Greek New Testament, providing the reasoning behind each editorial decision. Williams cites this work in his treatment of Luke 23:34a ("Father, forgive them"), noting the textual uncertainty while defending the passage's inclusion based on its consistency with Jesus's character and teaching.

Michaelis, Wilhelm. "Parakuptō." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Michaelis's TDNT article examines the Greek verb *parakuptō* (to stoop and look intently), used in 1 Peter 1:12 to describe the angels' eager observation of salvation. Williams draws on this study to establish the intensity and intentionality of the angelic gaze at the events of redemptive history — a key text for the theatrical audience motif of Theatre of Glory.

Middleton, J. Richard. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005.

Middleton argues that the image of God in Genesis 1 is best understood against the background of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology, where the image of a king was erected throughout his domain as a sign of his rule. Humanity, as divine image-bearers, is thus commissioned as God's royal representatives and rulers of creation. Williams engages this influential reading in his treatment of humanity's vocation within the theatrical demonstration.

Miller, Jeffrey E. "Imputation." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Edited by John D. Barry et al. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016.

This reference article explains the theological concept of imputation — the crediting of righteousness or guilt to another's account — as it appears in the doctrines of original sin and justification. Williams cites this entry in his treatment of the atonement as the judicial mechanism through which the demonstration of God's justice in the cross is applied to individual believers.

Moffitt, David M. *Rethinking the Atonement*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022.

Moffitt challenges dominant Western models of atonement that focus exclusively on Christ's death, arguing that the New Testament (especially Hebrews) presents the resurrection and heavenly presentation of Christ's life as equally essential to the atoning work. Williams cites this alongside Craig and Fesko in his nuanced treatment of the atonement.

Moltmann, Jürgen. "The Adventure of Theological Ideas." *Religious Studies Review* 22, no. 2 (1996).

In this autobiographical essay, Moltmann reflects on the theological ideas that have driven his career, including his theology of the cross, the Trinity, and the suffering God. Williams cites this essay in connection with perichoresis and the Trinitarian dimensions of his argument about the inner life of God as the ultimate backdrop of the cosmic demonstration.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Moltmann's landmark work argues that the cross must be understood as an event within the inner life of the Trinity — a Trinitarian solidarity with human suffering that is constitutive of Christian theology. Williams engages this work as a major voice in the tradition of "cruciform theology" that informs his account of the cross as the definitive demonstration of divine love within the theatrical framework.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Moo's NICNT commentary on Romans is widely considered the definitive evangelical commentary on that epistle. Williams draws on it throughout his treatment of Romans,

particularly in his extended discussion of Romans 3:21–26, which he treats as the theological center of the demonstration framework — the passage where God publicly demonstrates his justice through the cross.

Morales, L. Michael. *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 37. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015.

Morales develops a biblical theology of Leviticus centered on the tabernacle and its sacrificial system as God's provision for restoring access to his holy presence. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the Old Testament sacrificial system as a divinely ordained theatrical preparation for the climactic sacrifice of Christ.

Morris, Henry M., and John C. Whitcomb. *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1961.

This foundational text of the modern Young Earth Creationist movement argues that the Genesis Flood was a global catastrophe that accounts for the major features of the geological record. Williams cites Morris and Whitcomb as representatives of the Young Earth position in his survey of interpretive options for the early chapters of Genesis.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. Rev. ed. *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Morris's NICNT commentary on John is a standard evangelical reference, offering thorough theological and exegetical engagement with the Fourth Gospel's distinctive Christology. Williams draws on Morris in his treatment of the Johannine passion narrative, particularly the "It is finished" declaration, which he reads as the climactic announcement that the demonstrative work of the cross is complete.

Mortenson, Terry. *The Great Turning Point: The Church's Catastrophic Mistake on Geology — Before Darwin*. Green Forest: Master Books, 2004.

Mortenson argues that the acceptance of uniformitarian geology by Christian intellectuals in the early nineteenth century represented a catastrophic departure from biblical authority that prepared the ground for Darwinism. Williams cites this work as a representative of Young Earth Creationism in his survey of interpretive approaches to Genesis.

Motyer, Alec. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993.

Motyer's commentary treats Isaiah as a unified prophetic work and provides careful exegesis of the Servant Songs, the trial speeches against the nations, and the eschatological vision of chapters 40–66. Williams draws on Motyer in his treatment of the Suffering Servant passages as a divinely intended literary preview of the cross — a script written in advance for the climactic act of the cosmic drama.

Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Rev. ed. *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Mounce's NICNT commentary on Revelation provides accessible evangelical exegesis of the Apocalypse, with careful attention to its Old Testament background and eschatological framework. Williams cites Mounce alongside Schreiner in his treatment of the Book of Life, a motif that bears on his eschatological account of the final demonstration of divine justice.

Muchabwe, Mayboy. "The Theological Implications for the Phrase *en dexia tou thronou tēs megalōsunēs* in Hebrews 8:1–2 Regarding Christ's Mediatorial Work." *Pan-African Journal of Theology* (2025).

Muchabwe examines the Hebrews 8 description of Christ seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, exploring the implications of this imagery for understanding Christ's ongoing high-priestly mediation. Williams draws on this article in his treatment of the session of Christ as a sustained performance of divine victory before the celestial audience.

Murphy, Ed. *The Handbook of Spiritual Warfare*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Murphy's comprehensive treatment of spiritual warfare covers the biblical theology of angelic and demonic activity, practical strategies for discernment, and the church's role in the ongoing cosmic conflict. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the principalities and powers, noting it as a resource for readers wanting a more practically oriented engagement with the warfare dimensions of Theatre of Glory's argument.

O'Collins, Gerald. "The Incarnation: The Critical Issues." In *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*. Edited by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O'Collins SJ. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

O'Collins surveys the central philosophical and theological questions raised by the doctrine of the Incarnation, including questions of divine immutability, the mechanics of the hypostatic union, and the relationship between the Incarnation and redemption. Williams engages this essay in his treatment of the Incarnation as Plan A — the predetermined climax of the divine demonstration — rather than a divine emergency measure.

Objantoro, Enggar, Emi Seli, and Matius Julianes. "The Concept of Divine Justice and Mercy in the Prophetic Literature of the Hebrew Bible." *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis* 8, no. 1 (2025): 45–58.

This article examines how the Hebrew prophets hold together divine justice and mercy, arguing that the prophetic literature presents these not as competing attributes but as complementary expressions of a unified divine character. Williams cites this study in his theological account of how God's justice and love are simultaneously demonstrated in the cross.

Oord, Thomas Jay, Robert J. Matz, and A. Chadwick Thornhill, eds. *Divine Impassibility: Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering*. Spectrum Multiview Book Series. Westmont: IVP Academic, 2019.

This multiview volume presents four distinct theological positions on divine impassibility — the question of whether and how God can suffer or be emotionally affected by creaturely events — with essays and responses. Williams cites this work in his discussion of divine responsiveness to suffering, which bears on his argument that God's demonstration of love in the cross involves genuine divine engagement with human pain.

Origen. *De Principiis*. 3rd century CE.

Origen's foundational theological treatise is one of the first systematic presentations of Christian doctrine and includes a speculative account of the preexistence of souls, the fall of spiritual beings, and the progressive education of creation toward God. Williams cites Origen

in connection with early patristic attempts to explain the origin of evil through the freedom of spiritual beings — an attempt with which his demonstration framework has partial affinity.

Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Osborne's BECNT commentary on Revelation offers thorough exegetical engagement with the Apocalypse's imagery, structure, and theology. Williams draws on Osborne's treatment of the heavenly throne room scenes and the eschatological consummation in his argument that Revelation presents the final act of the theatrical demonstration of God's character.

Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation Verse by Verse*. Osborne New Testament Commentaries. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016.

This more accessible commentary by Osborne on Revelation covers the same ground as his BECNT volume in a format suited to general readers. Williams cites both of Osborne's Revelation commentaries in his treatment of the eschatological consummation scenes.

Ouellet, Marc Cardinal. *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Ouellet develops a Trinitarian anthropology in which the human family — built on the spousal covenant of man and woman — is understood as an image of the Trinitarian communion of persons. Williams cites this work in connection with his treatment of the *imago Dei* and the relational character of human existence as a reflection of the divine life.

Overberg, Kenneth R. *The Mystery of God and Suffering: Lament, Trust, and Awe*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020.

Overberg approaches the problem of suffering from a contemplative Catholic perspective, arguing that God's solidarity with human suffering — revealed above all in the cross — is the Christian response to theodicy. Williams cites this as one of a cluster of modern works treating the Incarnation and cross as God's answer to the problem of evil.

Patmore, Hector M. *Adam, Satan, and the King of Tyre: The Interpretation of Ezekiel 28:11–19 in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Patmore surveys how Jewish and Christian interpreters in late antiquity read Ezekiel 28's oracle against the King of Tyre, tracing the development of the tradition that identifies the "guardian cherub" with the figure known as Satan. Williams draws on this work in establishing the exegetical background for his treatment of the angelic rebellion as the origin of the cosmic conflict.

Peckham, John C. *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture*. Ada: Baker Academic, 2021.

Peckham examines the major divine attributes — omniscience, omnipotence, love, justice, and simplicity — through a biblically grounded, covenantal lens, defending a "canonical theistic" position that takes the full range of biblical data seriously without capitulating to either classical theism's impassibility or open theism's revisionism. Williams recommends this work for an exposition of God's complexity that complements his own theodical argument.

Peckham, John C. *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil*. Ada: Baker Academic, 2023.

Peckham develops a theodicy grounded in the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, arguing that the love relationship between God and creatures requires genuine freedom and thus vulnerability to rebellion. Williams engages this work as a major conversation partner whose "cosmic conflict" framework overlaps significantly with — while differing in important ways from — his own theatrical demonstration model.

Plantinga, Alvin. *God, Freedom and Evil*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.

Plantinga's celebrated free will defense argues that it is logically possible that God could not create a world with free beings who always do right — and therefore the existence of moral evil is compatible with both God's omnipotence and perfect goodness. J. L. Mackie subsequently acknowledged this as a successful refutation of the logical problem of evil. Williams treats this as a decisive contribution that cleared the ground for his own more constructive theodical project.

Plantinga, Alvin. *The Nature of Necessity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Plantinga's major work in modal metaphysics provides the philosophical underpinning for his modal ontological argument for God's existence and his free will defense. Williams cites this alongside *God, Freedom and Evil* as part of the foundational philosophical work that informs his theodicy's engagement with necessity, possibility, and divine action.

Procksch, Otto, and Karl Georg Kuhn. "Hagios — Hagiazō — Hagiasmos — Hagiotēs — Hagiōsunē." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

This foundational TDNT article traces the semantic development of the Greek *hagios* (holy) word group from its LXX roots through its New Testament usage. Williams draws on this study in his treatment of the divine holiness that is being demonstrated in the cosmic drama — the holiness that requires the cross as its public vindication.

Provan, Iain. *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014.

Provan offers a wide-ranging defense of the Old Testament's worldview as a coherent and humane vision of reality, contrasting it favorably with both ancient Near Eastern alternatives and modern secular ideologies. Williams relies on this work repeatedly in *Theatre of Glory*, citing Provan's creation theology, his reading of the cosmic narrative, and his account of the Celestial host as important pillars of the demonstration framework.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Translated by John H. Marks. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972.

Von Rad's classic commentary on Genesis combines form-critical analysis with theological sensitivity, treating Genesis as the foundational narrative of Israel's faith and the source of its characteristic understanding of history, humanity, and God. Williams cites von Rad alongside Westermann in his treatment of the *imago Dei* and the creation narrative's theological significance.

Rasmussen, Joshua. *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith*. Lisle: IVP Academic, 2019.

Rasmussen constructs a philosophical pathway from observations about the natural world to robust theistic belief, avoiding assumptions about special revelation and working instead from publicly accessible reasoning. Williams cites this work in his apologetic introduction, recommending Rasmussen alongside Craig, Kitchen, and Blomberg as resources for readers wanting the foundational philosophical and historical case for Christian theism.

Ross, Hugh. *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy*. 2nd ed. Covina: RTB Press, 2015.

Ross defends the Day-Age interpretation of Genesis 1, arguing that the Hebrew *yom* and its contextual signals allow for — and indeed require — understanding the creation days as long epochs rather than twenty-four-hour periods. Williams cites this as a representative of the Old Earth Creationist position in his survey of the interpretive landscape.

Rowe, William L. "Grounds for Belief Aside, Does Evil Make Atheism More Reasonable Than Theism?" In *God and the Problem of Evil*. Edited by William Rowe. Malden: Blackwell, 2001.

Rowe presents his "evidential problem of evil" — the argument that the sheer quantity and apparent gratuitousness of suffering in the world, while not logically disproving God's existence, gives us strong probabilistic reason to doubt it. Williams engages Rowe's formulation as the most powerful version of the problem of evil that his demonstration theodicy must address.

Sahinidou, Ioanna. "Christological Perichoresis." *Open Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 4 (November 2014).

Sahinidou examines the concept of perichoresis — the mutual indwelling of the Trinitarian persons — and explores its christological implications. Williams engages this article in his treatment of the Trinitarian relational life that forms the ultimate backdrop of the cosmic demonstration, arguing that the perichoretic relations within God provide the original archetype for the relational love that the theatrical history displays.

Sailhamer, John H. *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

Sailhamer argues, through rigorous linguistic and structural analysis, that the Pentateuch is a carefully composed theological narrative with a specific eschatological agenda rather than a haphazard collection of sources. Williams cites this as evidence of the intentional compositional unity of the biblical narrative that his theatrical demonstration framework presupposes.

Schmidt, Karl Ludwig. "Horizō, Aphorizō, Apodiorizō, Proorizo." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Schmidt's TDNT article examines the Greek *horizō* word group, including the compound *proorizo* (typically translated "predestine"). Williams draws on this study in his argument that *proorizo* is better translated as "determine beforehand" or "mark out in advance" than as "predestine," which he sees as importing a narrowly Calvinist theological framework into the text.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Schreiner's comprehensive New Testament theology is organized around the theme of God's glory and sovereignty, tracing the major theological motifs of the New Testament with careful attention to their narrative development. Williams cites this work in his treatment of eschatological judgment and the Book of Life, themes relevant to Theatre of Glory's account of the final demonstration.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. 2nd ed. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.

Schreiner's BECNT commentary on Romans is one of the most careful evangelical treatments of this epistle, with thorough engagement with both exegetical details and systematic implications. Williams draws on Schreiner's treatment of hilastērion in Romans 3:25 (the mercy seat / propitiation debate) and on his analysis of Romans 8 in his treatment of the cosmic dimensions of redemption.

Scrutton, Anastasia. "Divine Passibility: God and Emotion." *Philosophy Compass* (2013).

Scrutton surveys the contemporary philosophical theology debate over whether God can have genuine emotional responses to creaturely events, charting the major positions and their implications for theodicy and pastoral theology. Williams cites this alongside Simoni's article in his treatment of divine passibility, which bears on his claim that God genuinely cares about the suffering that the demonstration of his character requires.

Seal, David. "Demon." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Edited by John D. Barry et al. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016.

Seal's reference article surveys the biblical terminology and theology of demonic beings, tracing the development from the Old Testament to the New Testament and the Second Temple literature. Williams draws on this article in his treatment of the cosmic antagonists in Theatre of Glory's drama.

Seal, David. "Satan." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Edited by John D. Barry et al. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016.

Seal examines the figure of Satan in canonical context, noting the progressive revelation from the Old Testament's functionary figure to the New Testament's picture of a fully developed cosmic adversary. Williams uses this entry to establish the gradual unveiling of the adversary's identity within the dramatic arc of Theatre of Glory.

Seifrid, Mark A. "Romans." In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Seifrid's contribution to the Beale-Carson commentary traces Paul's use of Old Testament texts in Romans, including the complex quotations and allusions in the critical third chapter. Williams draws on Seifrid's analysis in his treatment of Romans 3:21–26, where Paul cites the Day of Atonement imagery to describe the cross as God's definitive demonstration of covenant faithfulness and justice.

Simoni, Henry. "Divine Passibility and the Problem of Radical Particularity: Does God Feel Your Pain?" *Religious Studies* 33, no. 3 (1997): 327–347.

Simoni examines the question of divine passibility — whether God can be genuinely affected by particular creaturely suffering — and explores its theodical implications. Williams cites

this article in his treatment of divine responsiveness to suffering as part of his argument that God's theatrical demonstration is not a coldly judicial performance but an expression of genuine divine love and sorrow.

Smith, Mark S. *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Smith examines the development of Israelite monotheism from its polytheistic roots, drawing on the Ugaritic texts and other ancient Near Eastern sources to show how Israel's conception of God emerged in dialogue with the divine council traditions of the ancient world. Williams engages this scholarship as background for Heiser's divine council theology, which plays an important role in *Theatre of Glory*.

Smith, Robert Harry. "Golgotha." In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

This reference article examines the historical and geographical evidence for the site of the crucifixion, "the Place of the Skull," including its location, its significance in first-century topography, and its symbolic resonances. Williams uses this entry in establishing the historical concreteness of the crucifixion event — the specific public setting that makes it a genuine demonstration before human witnesses.

Snelling, Andrew A. *Earth's Catastrophic Past: Geology, Creation and the Flood*. 2 vols. Dallas: Institute for Creation Research, 2009.

Snelling provides an extensive Young Earth Creationist engagement with the geological evidence, arguing that the features of the geological record are better explained by catastrophic Flood geology than by uniformitarian processes over millions of years. Williams cites this as a representative source for the Young Earth geological interpretation in his survey of options.

Stokes, Ryan E. *The Satan: How God's Executioner Became the Enemy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019.

Stokes traces the development of the Satan figure from his role as a divine functionary in the Old Testament — God's prosecuting attorney or executioner — to his emergence as a cosmic adversary in the Second Temple literature and New Testament. Williams draws on this study in his treatment of the adversary's identity and the origin of the cosmic conflict that *Theatre of Glory* traces.

Stratton, Tim. "Defining Libertarian Freedom." *Free Thinking Ministry Blog*. [freethinkingministries.com](http://freethinkingministries.com). Accessed February 21, 2026.

Stratton provides a careful philosophical definition of libertarian free will — the view that genuine freedom requires the ability to choose otherwise than one does, unconstrained by prior causes — and defends it against both hard determinism and soft compatibilism. Williams cites this as a resource for readers wanting precision on the concept of freedom that his theodicy presupposes.

Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

Swanson's lexical resource organizes New Testament Greek vocabulary by semantic domain, providing semantic range analyses for key terms. Williams uses this work in his examination of the Greek terminology for divine demonstration, including *endeixis* (demonstration/proof), a term central to the book's thesis.

Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

Swanson's Old Testament counterpart to his Greek lexicon provides semantic domain analysis for classical Hebrew vocabulary. Williams uses it for word studies involving the Hebrew terms for regret (*nacham*) and Spirit (*ruach*), among others, in his treatment of divine emotional responsiveness and the work of the Spirit in the redemptive drama.

Swinburne, Richard, J. L. Mackie, Alvin Plantinga, et al. "The Miracle of Theism." 1982.

This entry refers to the exchange around Mackie's *The Miracle of Theism* (1982), in which Mackie acknowledged the success of Plantinga's free will defense in defeating the logical problem of evil while maintaining that the evidential problem of evil still gives rational grounds for atheism. Williams cites this to establish the terrain that the post-Plantinga theodicy discussion occupies.

Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Thielman's BECNT commentary on Ephesians is a thorough evangelical treatment of this epistle's theology, with careful attention to its Trinitarian structure, ecclesiology, and cosmic dimensions. Williams draws on Thielman repeatedly — particularly on Ephesians 3:10 (God's wisdom made known to principalities and powers through the church) — in developing the argument that the church itself functions as a cosmic theater of demonstration.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Thiselton's NIGTC commentary on 1 Corinthians is widely considered the definitive critical commentary on this letter. Williams cites it in his treatment of Paul's argument about love and knowledge in 1 Corinthians 13 and the resurrection discussion in 1 Corinthians 15, both of which bear on the eschatological dimensions of Theatre of Glory's argument.

Tooley, Michael. "The Problem of Evil." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2025 Edition). Edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman.

Tooley's encyclopedia article provides a comprehensive survey of the logical and evidential problems of evil, including the major theistic responses. Williams recommends it alongside Rowe's article as the best explanatory treatment of the evidential problem of evil that his demonstration theodicy is designed to address.

van Inwagen, Peter. *The Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Van Inwagen's careful philosophical treatment of the problem of evil argues that the atheistic argument from evil, properly formulated, is much weaker than it typically appears, and that Christian belief is not rendered irrational by the facts of suffering and evil. Williams engages this work as part of the philosophical conversation his demonstration theodicy enters.

Villegas, Diana L. "Catherine of Siena on Persons Created in God's Image: Basis for a Spiritual Path." *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024).

Villegas examines the medieval Dominican mystic Catherine of Siena's understanding of the *imago Dei* and its implications for the spiritual life, tracing how Catherine's theology of the image grounds her account of the soul's journey toward union with God. Williams cites this article in his treatment of the image of God and human personhood within the demonstration framework.

von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990.

Von Balthasar presents Irenaeus's anti-Gnostic argument in accessible form, with a theological introduction situating Irenaeus's account of the Incarnation within the broader history of Christian thought. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the patristic background to his claim that the Incarnation was God's original plan rather than a divine response to the fall.

Vroegop, Mark. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019.

Vroegop makes a pastoral and biblical case for the practice of lament as an expression of faith rather than a failure of it, arguing that the biblical lament psalms and the book of Lamentations provide a legitimate vocabulary for honest wrestling with grief, suffering, and unanswered prayer. Williams recommends this as a pastoral companion to Theatre of Glory's theodical argument.

Wadsworth, Tomas R. *A Worship Service or an Assembly: An Investigation of the Terminology Used to Describe Church Meetings in the New Testament*. Unpublished dissertation, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Wadsworth's dissertation examines the Greek terminology for early Christian gatherings, arguing that the New Testament's language for assembly (*ekklēsia*) and its associated practices differs meaningfully from later institutional models. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the church's gathered life as a public demonstration of the new community that God's redemptive work produces.

Walton, John H. *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Walton argues that Genesis 1 is best read as a cosmic temple inauguration text — concerned with assigning functions to creation rather than describing material origins — set within its ancient Near Eastern cosmological context. Williams engages this interpretation as one of the options in his survey of creation hermeneutics.

Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

Walton's accessible presentation of his "functional origins" interpretation of Genesis 1 argues that the text addresses how God ordered the cosmos for human habitation rather than describing physical creation from nothing over six days. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the creation narrative and its relationship to the demonstration framework.

Ward, Mark, et al., eds. *Lexham Survey of Theology*. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018.

This comprehensive one-volume theological survey provides accessible articles on the major loci of systematic theology from an evangelical perspective. Williams cites this reference work in his treatment of the divine attributes, particularly the justice of God, in connection with his argument that the theatrical demonstration is designed to vindicate the justice of a God who has apparently overlooked sin throughout human history.

Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Westermann's detailed commentary on Genesis 1–11 represents the mature fruit of German form-critical scholarship on the primeval history, with careful attention to genre, tradition history, and theological intention. Williams cites Westermann alongside von Rad in his engagement with the scholarly discussion of the *imago Dei* that underpins his account of humanity's vocation within the demonstration.

Williams, Daniel. *The Apologetic Chaplain*. Blaine: GraceCore Academy, 2026.

Williams's own companion volume integrates apologetics with chaplaincy practice, arguing that chaplains in military, healthcare, correctional, and corporate settings need more than therapeutic skill — they need an intellectually rigorous, compassionate defense of the faith that can engage genuine suffering with honest answers. *The Apologetic Chaplain* is the practical ministry companion to the theoretical framework of *Theatre of Glory*.

Wilson, Gerald H. *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 76. Chico: Scholars Press, 1985.

Wilson's groundbreaking study demonstrates that the Book of Psalms is not a random hymnbook but a carefully edited five-book collection with a coherent editorial framework centered on the Davidic covenant and its apparent failure and renewal. Williams cites this in support of the compositional intentionality of the biblical canon, which his theatrical reading of redemptive history presupposes.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

Wright addresses several of the most challenging questions raised against Christian faith — including the conquest narratives, the problem of evil, and the exclusivity of Christ — with pastoral warmth and theological depth. Williams recommends this work alongside Copan and Flannagan for readers wrestling with the moral questions raised by the Old Testament conquest narratives.

Wright, N. T. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*. New York: HarperOne, 2016.

Wright argues that the cross must be understood within the narrative of Israel's covenant history rather than through the abstract juridical categories of later Western theology. Williams draws on Wright's reading of Romans 3:21–26 in his argument that the cross constitutes God's public demonstration of covenant faithfulness at the climax of the long history of Israel.

Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. *Christian Origins and the Question of God* 4. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

Wright's massive treatment of Pauline theology argues that Paul's thought is best understood within its Jewish apocalyptic framework, centered on the conviction that Israel's God has been faithful to the covenant through the death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah. Williams draws on Wright's treatment of covenant faithfulness in his exegetical engagement with Romans and Ephesians.

Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God 3*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Wright's monumental historical study argues that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation of the available first-century evidence, examining the Jewish background of resurrection belief and the early Christian testimony in exhaustive detail. Williams cites this work in his treatment of the resurrection as the definitive divine demonstration of victory over death — the climactic act of the cosmic drama.

Wright, N. T. *The Vision of Ephesians: The Task of the Church and the Glory of God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025.

Wright's study of Ephesians argues that Paul's vision for the church is inseparable from his understanding of the cosmic scope of God's redemptive purposes, with the church as the community through which God's manifold wisdom is being made known to the powers that govern the present age. Williams draws on this work extensively in his treatment of the church's demonstrative function within the theatrical framework of Theatre of Glory.

Zacharia, P. "Parallels Between Maximus the Confessor and Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900)." *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 14 (2024): 105–146.

Zacharia traces parallels between the seventh-century Byzantine theologian Maximus the Confessor and the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, particularly in their accounts of divine-human union and the cosmic significance of the Incarnation. Williams cites this article in his treatment of perichoresis and the Trinitarian relational life that the theatrical demonstration of God's character is designed to display