

Illuminate Bible Series

Volume 1

God's Glory: The Reason for Everything

Student Guide | 7th - 12th



For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6



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CURRICULUM OVERVIEW



What Is the *Illuminate Bible Series*?

Do you want your students to gain a firm knowledge of Scripture? The Bible exposition veterans at Union Gospel Press want to help. *Illuminate Bible Series* has a unique approach that will enrich their studies with intelligent, reliable, and stimulating Bible knowledge. Your students will genuinely enjoy these engaging Bible lessons in their exploration of God's truth.

“They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily” (Acts 7:11)

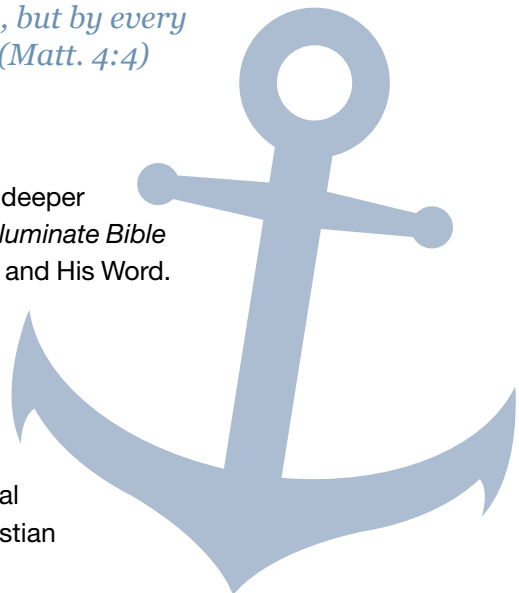
The Most Important Class of the Day!

Science and math and spelling are necessary and valuable topics of study, but nothing can surpass the value of consistent time devoted to learning God's Word. Numerous studies paint a painful picture of the state of biblical literacy and Christian conduct among “churched” teens and college students. “Good kids” who attend church regularly all their lives are reaching college with minimal knowledge of Bible basics, having no serious interest in Bible study or prayer, and lacking the spiritual discipline to live in accordance with biblical truth. If Scripture truly is the only source for authoritative truth, then our students need to study it and know it well. No other study or pursuit of knowledge can have the eternal impact that Bible study does. It should never be ignored or treated as a matter of secondary importance.

“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:4)

Going Deep

Some scriptural truths seem simple on the surface, yet the deeper you explore, the more spiritual riches are brought to light. *Illuminate Bible Series* is intended to help students think deeply about God and His Word. The number of Bible learning aids available for students today is enormous. Yet, on average, teens today know less about the Bible than teens a generation ago. The best way to combat this uncomfortable reality is to draw students into meaningful engagement with Scripture. Our robust Bible study materials help teens wrestle with vital Bible teachings and solid doctrine. We want to anchor Christian families in the bedrock truth of Scripture.



How Does the *Illuminate Bible Series* Work?

A Dependence on God’s Word

Our approach is simple. We want to cultivate a love for and dependence on God and His Word. The *Student Guide* is a Christ-focused, worldview-oriented, expository Bible curriculum that we pray will nurture in each student the desire to love the Lord with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27).

Each weekly lesson provides several articles. Students read a key passage of Scripture to begin each week followed by related passages to help them better grasp the concepts being taught. The lessons are designed to be read by the student, but the *Student Guide* can also be used by a teacher to instruct students in a classroom setting.

A Typical Week

Each day of study should include the following elements:

- **Bible**—Read the Scripture text for the day.
- **Daily Lesson**—Read an article from the *Student Guide*.
- **Student Workbook**—Answer the questions in the *Student Workbook* that correspond to the article you read in the *Student Guide*. The *Student Workbook* questions can also be answered at the end of the week if preferred.

There are multiple ways to read through each weekly study. Some may prefer to read several articles in one sitting, while others may seek to read one per day. Here is a sample of how a week can be structured:

Monday Read the **Introduction** and **Story Elements** article

Tuesday Read **The Bible & . . .** feature and the **Context** article

Wednesday Read the **Connections** article and the **Christ Focus** feature

Thursday Read the **Doctrine** article and the **Worldview** feature

Friday Read the **Application** article

How To Use The *Student Guide*

The *Student Guide* is the learning manual for older students, beginning with grade 7. It is a two semester study that includes 8 units spread over 32 weeks.

Each week of the *Student Guide* focuses on a prominent **Bible passage** to be read the first day. Four additional key articles provide **supplemental passages** and different perspectives that encourage a deeper understanding of the main Bible passage in light of other Scripture truths.

STORY ELEMENTS—A thought-provoking treatment of elements within *the featured Bible story*

CONTEXT—Noteworthy information about the featured story’s *context and background*

CONNECTIONS—Significant connections between the featured Bible story and other *related Scriptures and biblical concepts*

DOCTRINE—An engaging discussion of *doctrinal truth* related to the featured Bible story

APPLICATION—A *review* of the week’s lessons and meaningful ways to *put truth into practice*

Other features are included in each week to enrich students’ understanding of the unit’s concept and equip them to apply it to their lives.

THE BIBLE & . . .—A study of how great Bible truths impact the world in a variety of ways, including the arts, people, and culture

CHRIST FOCUS—A look at how the Scripture passage and lesson point to our loving Savior

WORLDVIEW—An examination of the arguments of worldviews contrary to Christianity and a discussion of the superiority of the Christian worldview

Student Guide Extras!

Each week is not only packed with Bible-rich lessons but also offers additional rewarding insights and helpful learning aids.

- A weekly **key concept** and **key verse** are provided to sum up the main thrust of the weekly lesson.
- **Callout boxes** offer unique and valuable ideas to consider that aid in understanding the lesson.
- Important **vocabulary words** are highlighted in green throughout these lessons; definitions are in the glossary at the back of this book.

Look at the **Lesson Chronology** on pages 365–366 to see how each lesson fits into the history of the events in the Bible.

Student Workbook

A separate *Student Workbook* makes it possible to measure students' learning progress. These resources were created to challenge students in their walks with Christ. The questions will help students review, meditate on, and apply the material studied within each week's lesson. It is our prayer that students will gain a firm understanding of Scripture and thus be equipped to explain and defend the truth about what they believe (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Pet. 3:15). **Weekly Review Questions** and **unit tests** are provided. The weekly review questions for each week are worth 30 points; the unit tests are worth 100 points. You will find the answers to the weekly review questions in the back of the *Student Guide*. The test answers are at the end of each unit.

UNIT 1

GOD'S GLORY IS DISPLAYED IN HEAVEN
WEEK 4

Story Elements | Rev. 4:1-11

1. Who wrote the book of Revelation? Where was he, and why was he there? **2 Points**

2. What objects does John use to describe God? **2 Points**

3. Which of the following were not in John's vision? **1 Point**

a. four creatures
b. John the Baptist
c. seven lamps
d. a glass sea

Context | Rom. 11:33-35

4. Why is it notable that Paul, one of the most insightful leaders in the early church, was still astounded at the depth of God's glory? **2 Points**

UNIT 1 - WEEK 4 15

UNIT 1 TEST

Match the words on the left with their correct definitions on the right. **2 points each**

1. ___ transfiguration	a. the transformation of our minds and hearts to become more like Jesus
2. ___ covenant	b. the moment in history when God the Son became man
3. ___ sanctification	c. the event in which Jesus transformed, revealing His divine glory to His disciples
4. ___ Ten Commandments	d. an agreement, similar to a contract, that establishes a relationship between two parties and spells out the terms for that relationship
5. ___ incarnation	e. the summary of God's law that lay at the heart of the covenant between God and Israel

Choose the best answer from the selection below. **2 points each**

6. What did the Lord give the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai?

a. safety from the Canaanites
b. the Ten Commandments
c. fields to graze their animals
d. a path around the river

7. What did Isaiah see in his vision?

a. the Lord on His throne
b. King Uzziah
c. seraphim
d. both a and c
e. all of the above

18 GOD'S GLORY

The Logic of the Scope & Sequence

There are a couple of common pitfalls regarding God’s Word that we wanted to avoid in creating our overall plan for *Illuminate Bible Series*:

Pitfall #1: seeing the Bible as merely a collection of heroic stories, miracles, and principles

Pitfall #2: treating the Bible primarily as a history book by using a strictly chronological approach

We believe the best way to study the Bible is through a careful presentation of its central message—the story of God’s grace and glory, which is ultimately expressed in Jesus Christ.

Realities to Remember

- God is at the center of the Bible. It was He who superintended and empowered the exciting lives of the characters in the Bible.
- Each book of the Bible is tied to the great central theme of God’s grace and glory, even though we seek to understand each book in its historical context.
- Seeing Jesus is essential. Instead of wading through nearly five years of chronological studies to finally get to Jesus, He is featured prominently in all six years of study.

What Is the Plan?

In the first three years, students will acquire the basics for understanding the message of the Bible. The final three years look at how God’s kingdom is at work.

1. **God’s Glory: The Reason for Everything**—an exploration of the greatness of God
2. **The Glory of Christ: The Center of History**—a concentrated focus on Christ
3. **Faith: The Response to God’s Glory**—a study of God’s relationship with His people
4. **God’s Glory as He Builds His Kingdom**—a discussion of how God’s kingdom grows
5. **Living for God’s Glory**—a survey of the ways in which we are to live for God’s glory
6. **The Triumph of God’s Glory**—a review of how God prevails for all eternity

But I Want a Chronological Study!

Each week is designed to thoroughly explore Bible passages that highlight the unfolding of God’s glory. The first year of study, **God’s Glory: The Reason for Everything**, calls attention to the central character of the Bible, God Himself. The first semester looks at all His glorious perfections, and the second takes a grand survey of Scripture to see the great acts of God. Notice that this is a *historical* survey, covering the four great periods of biblical history:

1. THE EARLY YEARS (which includes Creation)
2. THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL
3. THE LIFE OF CHRIST
4. THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

This pattern of historical progression can be seen repeatedly throughout the six-year scope and sequence as key themes are pursued. So, far from ignoring the chronology of Scripture, we believe the regular repetition of these main eras of Bible history is actually a better way of mastering chronology!

A Great Reward!

This approach will so equip students that at the end of these studies, they will possess invaluable skills to continue their lifelong study of the Bible and its great truths. But besides mastering academic content and historical facts, hopefully your child will also have a close relationship with our glorious God!

PLAN FOR THE YEAR

God's Glory: The Reason For Everything

Is the Bible a book that surprises you anymore? Does the idea of a school course about the Bible make you excited, or does it make you groan? It is perfectly understandable if you are tempted to adopt a “been there, done that” attitude to the Bible. On the other hand, if you have not had much exposure to the Bible before, you may wonder what possible relevance a book thousands of years old, containing a bunch of religious stories and rules, could have for you.

One of the big reasons why the Bible does not affect us as it should--since it is, after all, the very Word of God--is that we get our focus wrong. We turn it into primarily the story of man, with all his struggles and exploits. God made man and woman, of course, so we are important. But what we are going to concentrate on in our explorations is the fact that the Bible is primarily the story of God, and in particular the story of His astounding glory and His amazing grace. The greatest and most exciting thing in the world is to get to know Him.

Why do we not realize this as often as we should? Perhaps it is because we cannot see God. But we should give thanks that God has made Himself known to us, and preeminently through the birth, work, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Through Him we have not only the most perfect revelation of who God is, but we are also provided the way into having a personal relationship with God. Perhaps you have heard this many times before, but think about it—you can have a personal relationship with the great Creator God! Nothing is more amazing than that.

So how do we begin to understand the Bible in a God-centered way? We begin by understanding, as our first year's title declares, that God's glory is the reason for everything. In light of that fact, we will see how the Scripture reveals God's glory by its display of who He is—His character in all of its perfection (“Who God Is”—semester 1)—and then as it is evident by the great central acts He has performed (“What God Has Done”—semester 2).

We must avoid the trap of viewing the first semester studies as just boring introductory stuff. If we really mean it that we want to know God, how better than by seeing what kind of person He is, what He is like. He is glorious and good, righteous and loving. We long to experience such a perfect Being, and God is the only one who is eternally and infinitely perfect.

Semester 2 highlights the four central historic acts of God revealed in Scripture and to which we will often return in the years ahead—His creation of the world, His choosing of Israel, His sending His Son, and His building of His church. God's glory is magnificently displayed in the unfolding of His master plan for His creation.



Semester 1: *Who God Is*

UNIT 1

GOD'S GLORY

Doctrines

- God's Omnipotence
- Christ's Glory as the Son of God
- Christ Is the Word of God
- God's Glory Is Infinite and Eternal

Everything exists for God's glory. We see God's glory first of all in who He is. This first unit helps explain what His glory is and looks like. He revealed His glory to Israel at Sinai and to Isaiah. In the New Testament, Christ revealed God's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. And in heaven the chief joy is exalting in God's glory.

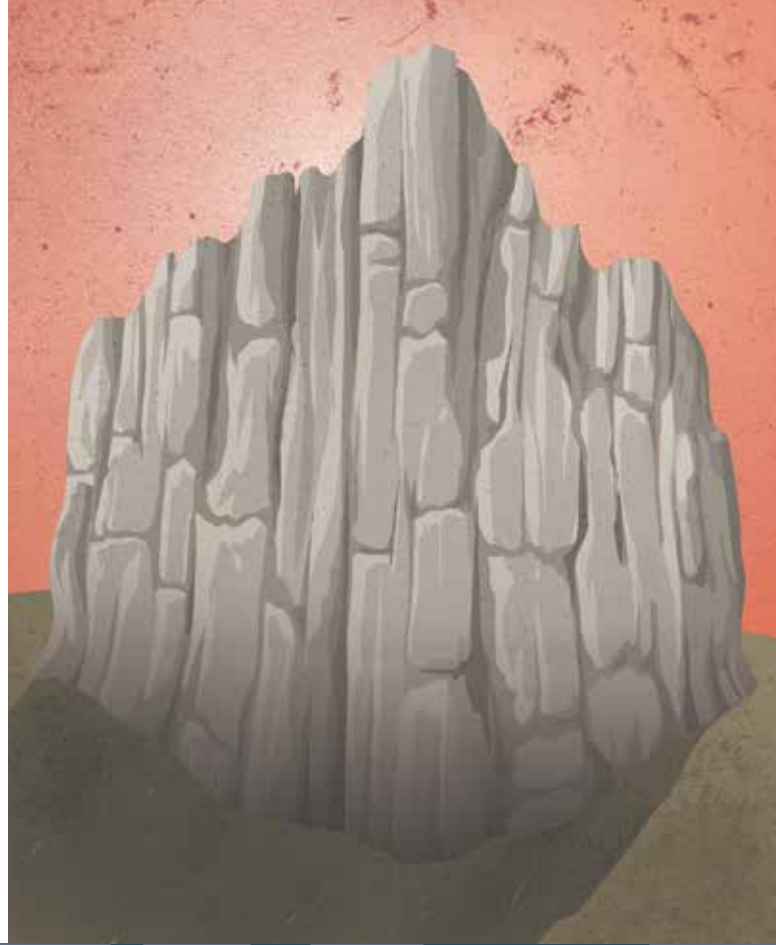
GOD SHOWS HIS GLORY TO ISRAEL

EXODUS 19:10-25

KEY CONCEPT

Everything exists to bring glory to God.

Key Verse: Psalm 115:1



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. Story Elements

Exodus 19:10-25

2. Context

Exodus 34:27-35

3. Connections

1 Timothy 6:12-16

4. Doctrine

Psalm 115:1-3

5. Application

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Here is the most important thing to know in all the world: Everything exists to bring glory to God. You exist to bring glory to God, to know Him and worship Him. As you do that, you will find the only source of lasting joy and sense of worth.

Many years ago, God chose to make Himself known through the nation of Israel. This nation was to glorify and spread the word about Him. When God entered into a special covenant, or agreement, with Israel, the first thing He revealed about Himself was that He is awesomely great and holy. A healthy reverence for who God is forms the foundation of any relationship with Him.

As you read and think about the way God revealed Himself to Israel, consider how it compares with how the world today thinks about God. The world tries to make man seem big and God seem small. If we fall for this perspective, we will not have a good grasp of reality. God grabbed Israel's attention, and He is calling for ours.

STORY ELEMENTS

Exodus 19:10-25

What happened, and why is it important?

As we read Exodus 19, God is about to reveal Himself to Israel in a powerful way. We must remember, however, that this was not the first time that God had shown His greatness and majesty to Israel. He had just delivered the nation from bondage in Egypt. He had sent plagues upon proud Pharaoh's people and then parted the Red Sea so that Israel could escape. So the only reason the people of Israel would now see God's glory at all was because of His prior grace and kindness to them. This needs to be clear from the start because when God came to meet with Israel at Sinai, it would be in such an awe-inspiring way that they might have cause to wonder what they were getting into!

The nation of Israel had been led to Mount Sinai. God had summoned Moses, their leader, to the top of the mountain to give him instructions about what was about to happen. The Lord was going to come and meet with the people. He was going to give them the **Ten Commandments**, the summary of God's law at the heart of the covenant that was to exist between Himself and Israel.

Relationships do not blossom overnight. It takes time and effort to come to a true understanding of another person. If this is true of relationships among people, it is even more the case when it comes to fellowship between man and God. What we see in Exodus is God's training and preparation of a people He loves so that they can enjoy communion with Him.

Many teachers relate how the necessary starting point for a fruitful, teacher-student relationship is establishing one's authority and commanding respect. After this foundation is laid, then the teacher can open up and begin to offer a greater amount of freedom to the students, who have come to understand the authority of the teacher. Of course, even the best teachers have faults, but God is absolutely perfect, and so He is deserving of complete respect. He gave Moses a set of instructions and rules the people were to follow before they would meet with Him. All these rules were designed to impress upon the people that God was very great and holy and not to be trifled with.

God's instructions were not arbitrary. The people would meet with God on the third day. This established that it was God who determined the time and place of meeting and that His greatness was such that a person was not to rush into His presence. The people were to wash their clothes. This was the first of many ways in which God would illustrate the importance of moral cleanness and holiness when they stood before Him. Boundaries were to be set up around the mountain so that the people would



Mount Sinai—Many important events in the Bible happen on mountains. Mountains make a fitting, natural setting for the proclamation of a message. The mountain itself can then become a reminder of the events and truths proclaimed there. Because it was the place where God gave Israel the Ten Commandments and established His covenant with Israel after the Exodus, Mount Sinai is one of the most famous mountains of the Bible. It is referred to as the “mountain of God” (Ex. 3:1), a distinction it shares with Mount Zion in Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 2:1-3), the mountain associated with the kingdom of Christ. The history of salvation recorded in Scripture is in one sense the story of the progression from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion (cf. Heb. 12:18-24).

not set foot on it while God was there. And if anyone violated this boundary, he was to be put to death by arrows or stoning so that no one made themselves unclean by even touching the disobedient person. Finally, the people were to wait until they heard the sound of a ram's horn before they even came up to the boundaries around the mountain.

Do you think the penalty for touching the mountain was harsh?

When Moses came down from meeting with the Lord, he carefully relayed the instructions that he had been given and made sure that they were carried out. The people were to be careful to devote all their attention to the impending encounter with God.

When the third day came, God made His presence known in an awe-inspiring display. There were thunder and lightning, smoke and fire, and an ever-louder blast of a trumpet. The ground shook. We can only imagine what it must have been like to experience all this. It is certainly not surprising that the people were shaking as they came near the mountain. God was showing His glory and power. This was the first thing the nation of Israel needed to know about the God that they were to follow—a healthy and reverent respect for the Lord.



“Trumpet” (Ex. 19:10)—Ancient Israel did not have the sophisticated musical instruments that we have today. They made use of what they had ready access to. A ram’s horn could be adapted into a kind of trumpet, called a shofar, which would be used to signal an important message to the nation of Israel and to lend weight to religious occasions. A ram’s horn was used to signal to Israel that it was time to meet with God.

Should we be afraid of God?

Now God called Moses to come up to meet with Him again. He was making sure the people would respect Moses as the intermediary between God and them, but we can imagine the faith and courage it required for Moses to climb up the mountain amid all the amazing sights and sounds of that day! God knows what people are like and how important truths need to be repeated and reinforced, so the first thing He told Moses was that He needed to go back down and warn the people again not to come up the mountain. If they disobeyed, the Lord would pour out judgment against them. God was preparing even the future priests of Israel to be mindful that special care had to be taken before even thinking about approaching God.

Moses still had a lot to learn about leadership of a sinful group of people. He seemed to assume that because he had already told the people what God had said, there was no need for further warning. But God wanted to reinforce the reality of His glory, and He knew how presumptuous and prone to sin the Israelites were. Even today, it is often a good thing to be reminded about the importance of obedience to God's revealed will. Repetition aids learning.

God told Moses that he should bring his brother Aaron, who was to be the leader of the priests of Israel, up the mountain with him. This would be valuable training for him. In all the things God said, Moses was obedient. He questioned God when he did not understand something, but then he freely submitted to God's will. He is a good example for us in this.



Moses—As we study the Bible together, we will meet up with Moses quite a bit. We will learn more about his life and mission. Along with Abraham before him and David, who comes after him, Moses is one of the three most important figures of the Old Testament.

THE BIBLE & HISTORY



*“What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”
—Westminster Shorter Catechism*



The scholars who hammered out the Westminster Catechism, one of the most famous documents in Christian history, certainly got this one right. The first in a series of 107 question-and-answer teaching points precisely nails our purpose in life: We were created to live for God’s glory and enjoy Him for all eternity. That truth establishes an irrevocable, fundamental reality: It’s not about us; it’s about God. He is the Supreme Being and Creator of all, the One everything depends on for existence.

But what does it mean to glorify God? Many people immediately think of singing choruses of praise, either in a worship service or by oneself. And that is part of it, but it is not the whole story or even the main idea.

When we praise God, we are not telling Him nice things to build up His ego or His confidence. When we “give God glory,” we are not really *giving* Him anything, as if He had need of it or found Himself in short supply without our contribution. To glorify God is essentially to become aware of His glory—an awareness that should deepen over time—and to live our lives in line with that reality. We cannot *give* God glory until we see His glory, even if only in tantalizing glimpses, and strive to have our words and actions reflect a little bit of that glory to others as well as back to Him.

In a world that conceives of life’s purpose in terms of career success, material affluence, or family ties, the aim of seeing and reflecting God’s glory may seem impractical and unappealing. This should not be surprising. Most people are so far from any awareness of God’s glory that they are unable to imagine its pursuit being at all worthwhile. Indeed, the glory of God is real only to those who have had a taste of it, however small. But those who have been given a taste desire more, and the more they receive, the more ardently they seek it.

This is made clear in the second half of the Westminster statement. The glory of God is not some abstract reality removed from life’s joys or deepest longings. It is the fulfillment of those longings. Our created purpose, our chief end, is to enjoy God forever. And in using the word “enjoy,” the Westminster writers were not thinking of some mild amusement or diversion. They were talking about experiencing joy in its fullest possible sense—a joy so full and deep that no one has in fact fathomed the depths of or fully imagined.

The greatest joy that can ever be known, the joy that every human heart unknowingly longs for, comes when we begin to see and revel in God’s glory. That joy grows as we become enthralled by that glory in ever-increasing degrees, as we increasingly glorify Him. God’s call for us to seek His glory is the best thing He could have ever given us. Let us not neglect that gift!

CONTEXT

Exodus 34:27-35

Who, what, where, when?

We turn now to Exodus 34 for some further insights into the character of God, particularly His grace and glory. A lot happened between Exodus 19 and 34. Moses received the Ten Commandments from God, recorded on two tablets of stone. While he was up in the mountain for a long time, the people of Israel got restless and, enabled by Aaron in his weakness, they made a golden calf idol to worship and indulged in much sin. When Moses saw what had happened, he was very angry and broke the tablets of the law. He punished the evildoers who were behind Israel's sin and then went back to meet with God to intercede for the people and receive a new copy of God's commandments.

There are three important points to notice in Exodus 34:

1. God told Moses that He was making a **covenant** with Israel. Covenants play an important role throughout Scripture. Covenants are agreements, kind of like contracts that establish a relationship between two parties and lay out the terms for how that relationship is supposed to work. We should not, however, think of God's covenants with His people in Scripture as cold legal documents. They actually show God's commitment to His people and His love for them. The Mosaic covenant set out a series of laws, summarized in the Ten Commandments, that Israel was to live by. If the nation were obedient to these laws, it would experience blessing. If they disobeyed, they would suffer severe chastisement.

Why do we need to follow the rules laid out in the Bible?

2. While Moses was on the mountaintop meeting with God, he fasted; that is, he went without food or water for forty days. God sustained him physically during this time. This period of fasting highlights the fact that there is nothing more important than God and our relationship with Him. God used this time to prepare Moses for the special ministry of leading the people of Israel. It is noteworthy that before Jesus entered into His public ministry, God the Father led Him into the wilderness to undergo a period of fasting for forty days. Moses was an important **mediator** and leader, a forerunner of the greatest Mediator and Leader of all, the Lord Jesus Christ. As John 1:17 says, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ." Moses was an important leader in the long period of preparation that would climax in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ.
3. When Moses came down from meeting with God for this extended time, his face was radiant. He was reflecting to a degree the glory of God, and this scared Aaron and the rest of the people of Israel. They did not want to come near him at first. The solution to this situation was that when Moses was done relating God's messages to the people He would wear a veil over His face. He would remove the veil whenever he spoke with God, and then the people would see the radiance again when he was done. This was another way in which God reinforced Moses' authority and also showcased His own glory. The people were receiving regular lessons about God's greatness.

Why was only Moses allowed to talk to God for the people?

CONNECTIONS

1 Timothy 6:12-16

Let's take a look at some other passages and themes in Scripture.



Overheard in a pew at the back of the church:

“OK, I get it. The Bible was written for people in a different time and place, so we shouldn't expect to find them dealing with things like social media bullying or hot trends on Instagram. But still—this passage is about a bunch of people wandering around the desert with their herds of sheep and getting spooked by pyrotechnics on a mountaintop! I mean, c'mon! It doesn't even seem to have much of anything to do with other parts of the Bible, much less my life today. What does it have to do with knowing Jesus?”



The friend being asked this had no answer, but if you were put on the spot in this way, you might offer something along these lines:

It has everything to do with knowing Jesus. Don't get all hung up on peripherals like sheep and sandals. What's the most important thing in this passage? Clearly, it's God and His glory. And especially what it means to be confronted with His glory. For the Israelites, that was a fearful thing. What did it mean for other people in the Bible?

Just a few chapters later, in Exodus 34:18, Moses point-blank asks to see God's glory. He must have discerned that there was more to it than smoke and fire; in fact, it becomes clear that the smoke and fire were there to *conceal* God's glory. How do we know that? Because God agrees to his request but tells him he'll only be allowed to see His backside as He passes by, because no one can see His face and live (vs. 20). So Moses gets a tiny glimpse of God's glory, but only a glimpse. It's just not safe to see that glory full-on. An unfiltered view of God's searing holiness would be devastating to a sinful human being. It would be like staring intently into the sun, except the sun is mild in comparison.

This was confirmed many years later by Isaiah. As described in Isaiah 6, this great prophet of God had a vision of the Lord seated on a throne in the temple. Here too there were pyrotechnics, or at least thick smoke. The whole temple shook—and so did Isaiah. He does not say he saw the Lord's face, but what he did see made him fear for his life. He became instantly aware of how sinful he was in such a holy presence (vs. 5). Only the supernatural cleansing of his sin by an angel carrying a hot coal allowed him to continue the encounter.

Some people might think God was just putting on an elaborate sound-and-light show in these instances in order to impress His audience (Isaiah, the Israelites). But the Apostle Paul assures us that this awesome glory is intrinsic to who He is. He dwells “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). He is “the King of kings and Lord of lords,” immeasurably and unimaginably exalted (vs. 15). So are we left with no hope of ever seeing the glory of God without coming away damaged? Not if we know Jesus.

God sent Jesus, not just to rescue us from eternal punishment (as important as that is!), but especially to make it possible for us to see and enjoy the glory of God. This is what we were originally

created for. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). None of us are pure in heart on our own, but Jesus wraps us in His purity and changes us from the inside out. “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18).

This is God’s promise to His children. Yes, the powerful revelations of God’s glory seen in the Old Testament should strike awe in those who call Him Lord. God’s tremendous glory shows us that He and He alone is worthy of “honor and everlasting power” (1 Tim. 6:16). But God’s glory is not simply a tool He uses to strike fear in us; it is in seeing it that we are led to faithful obedience. Those who get a glimpse of God’s glory should be left undone as they are humbled but should remember the God who is behind the brilliant light—the God of perfect holiness *and* immense mercy.

This is a powerful motivator for us to be obedient to the God of all glory. As Paul charged Timothy, we are to remain pure and keep God’s commandments. This was possible for him and us through the Spirit’s work and is jump-started by beholding the glory of Christ and holding fast to God’s promises. God has graciously revealed Himself to man, pouring out His mercy and love. He always fulfills His promises, and Christ will soon return as He promised. This is a God worthy of our utmost obedience.

CHRIST FOCUS



In the New Testament, we read of another extraordinary scene on another mountaintop, this one not named (we will review this in more detail in a couple of chapters). It was here that Jesus was radically changed in appearance from what His followers knew day by day. Moses appeared on this mountain too, along with Elijah, but the focus is on Jesus. Matthew 17:2 describes it this way: “He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” At one point a cloud enveloped everything, obscuring the sight, and the voice of God silenced everything else.

Peter, James, and John were on this mountain with Jesus, and what they saw was the glory of God revealed in Christ. As Peter put it years later, they were “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). What they saw and heard made them fall down in fear too (and caused Peter to babble a bit of nonsense), but they were never in any danger. Unlike the Israelites in Exodus 19, who were strictly barred from even touching the mountain, the three disciples were invited by Jesus to join Him on top of this mountain.

There are similarities between both mountaintop appearances of God’s glory, but there is one all-important difference. Jesus’ whole mission was to reveal the glory of God to mankind (Isa. 40:5; John 1:14; Heb. 1:2-3). He could do that without risk of bringing harm to us because He also came to save us. He took our sin on Himself and gave us His perfect righteousness (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21), which we receive by faith in Him. We are truly being transformed.

Knowing this truth is not just an academic issue. When we grasp it and put our full hope in it, it is life changing. “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). That is surely something to be excited about and to praise God for!

As we've seen in our opening story this week, one of the most important things the Lord wants us to understand and treasure is His glory. The glory of God is awesome beyond our imagining. But does His glory have any bearing on our day-to-day living, or is it reserved for mountaintop experiences? We certainly look forward to seeing God's glory in heaven. But what does it mean for us now?

One of life's paradoxes is that the more focused we are on God and His glory, the less worried we become about our own glory; we're less anxious about our place in the world or what people think of us. Psalm 115 opens with a remarkable prayer request: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory." The people who first sang the words of this worship hymn were not concerned about their own honor and reputation but about God's. They wanted to be sure that all the glory went to God, not to them. Why? "Because of Your mercy, because of Your truth."

The psalm then launches into a fascinating contrast between the Lord God and the gods that the surrounding pagan nations worshipped. It was all about where the true glory was. In brief terms, the contrast is between a God who holds absolute power and sovereignty (vs. 3) and idols that were lifeless and helpless (vss. 4-7). Pagan idols may have been handsomely crafted, but they couldn't speak, couldn't see, couldn't hear, couldn't act, and couldn't move. They could do nothing for the people who made them and prayed to them. They were totally useless!

But the worst part about idols was that their worshippers became just like them: lifeless and useless (vs. 8). Why would that be so? Because we start to take on the characteristics of whatever we focus on, whatever we give our hearts and lives to. So we need to be careful what—or who—we are allowing to capture our attention, loyalty, and worship.

This is where Psalm 115 dramatically draws attention back to the Lord God. Three times it proclaims, "He is their help and their shield" (vss. 9, 10, 11). **In complete contrast to the lifeless pagan idols, the Lord is supremely alive and active. He is in charge.** We can trust Him with our lives, even up to and beyond the grave (vs. 17). In short, He is the God of glory, who holds our lives in His hands. Giving Him the glory—acknowledging His glory and reveling in it—will change our lives the way we need them to be changed—the way we, deep down, want them to be changed.

One of the most difficult things for sinful, self-centered human beings to learn is also the most vitally crucial thing we need to get a grasp of: It is not about us. It is not about you. It is all about Him. He is the God of all glory, the One around whom everything revolves. Everything—everyone—owes existence to Him and was created to serve His purposes. To miss His purpose for us, or to balk at it, is to miss out on all the glory He has planned. It is to be left out in the cold, out there with the lifeless, useless idols. Today that would include the empty, fleeting attractions offered by the world. They may hold an appeal for the present, but soon their glory will turn to ashes.

The complete opposite is in store for those who, by His grace, give their hearts and their lives to pursuing God and His glory. Paul says that as we behold His glory—even in tiny glimpses—we are transformed by it (2 Cor. 3:18). We start to reflect His glory in ways we might not even be aware of. We become aligned with a glorious purpose that will shine for all eternity. There is no greater purpose in all the universe. Let's give exuberant thanks and praise for the privilege of being invited to share in the proclamation and reflection of God's glory!

WORLDVIEW



LIE: You can't really know what is right and wrong. It's all relative.

People want to define what is good based on their own experiences. You'll even hear some say that morality is "culturally relative" and that there is no such thing as **sin**. However, God made a point of showing us that there is sin by giving us rules to live righteously. **Sin is falling short of conformity to God's moral law. It is anything that separates us from the goodness of God.** By trying to follow the principles from God's Word, you are accepting that He, as your Creator, knows what is best for you. If people thought the Bible laid out the best plan for their lives, they all would try to follow it! But they don't.

It is important to realize that a person's perspective on something does not change reality. This means that an individual's opinion about morality doesn't change the reality of sin. But why the difference of opinion? How do we explain that different cultures and individuals view different things as morally wrong? The Bible tells us that sin goes much deeper than just doing the wrong things. Because of the Fall, we have a sin nature, which means that we are bent on rebellion.

Even our minds and hearts have been corrupted by sin. Jeremiah exclaims, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (17:9; cf. Gen. 8:21). Because of this sin nature, even our feelings about morality do not make sense and are often wrong.

Though people have enough knowledge to be accountable to God (cf. Rom. 2:12-16), they cannot fully know what He requires without the Bible. **If we take our above definition of sin, we will realize that anything we do that is not mindful of God's glory cannot be good.**

Some things seem good, but they are not actually good because they do not aim to glorify God (8:8). Confused? Imagine if you were playing a round of archery. The point of the game is to hit the bull's-eye. So what if you decided to aim for a tree in the opposite direction? Since you hit what you were aiming for, would you win the game? Of course not. You didn't follow the rules. And this is what most people don't realize: In His holiness and goodness, God made the rules, but we missed the mark. And ever since then, we have been aiming in the wrong direction.



God's rules have never changed. He requires total perfection and holiness (cf. Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16). Like Adam and Eve in the garden, man wants to be like God, with the power to decide good from evil. We are constantly trying to cheat God of His glory. Because of this, many people are trying to play by their own rules, but until they put their trust in the gospel message—that God has provided a way for them to be holy through Jesus Christ—they will never be able to live by God's real and true rules.

We have sinned against a holy, eternal God and deserve eternal punishment. But Jesus paid for our sins—past, present, and future—and took our punishment so that we could be reconciled with God. When we trust in Christ, it is then that we receive the Holy Spirit to help guide us in truth and produce good works (John 16:13; Gal. 5:22). As believers, we have the privilege to use these works to worship God and display His goodness to all the earth.

TRUTH: Anchor your understanding of righteousness in God's Word. It never changes.

APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

What is the Lord calling us to do?

I'm sure you've heard or read the verse that says, "Do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31), but what does this even mean? What does it mean to show God's "glory"? When we say something is glorious, we usually just mean that it is a very good thing. And, in a sense, this is also what we mean when we say it of God. God is very good—the ultimate good—but that goodness encapsulates so many more characteristics. He is good because He is faithful, just, merciful, loving, gracious, patient, mighty, holy, and kind. God is our very definition of good. So glorifying God is really showing His character and revealing His glorious attributes.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, we see that beholding the glory of the Lord should change us. As Moses communed with the Lord, he physically changed to reflect God's glory. Though there would be cause for concern if our faces started physically glowing, there will be physical effects to us communing with God. Paul calls these changes the "ministry of the Spirit." He uses this term and the "ministry of righteousness" interchangeably, revealing that the Spirit's presence in us should lead us to practice righteousness.

Paul touches on righteous attributes when He reveals the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). As we get to know God better through reading His Word, praying, and fellowshiping with other believers, we will inevitably start to change. The Spirit will first change us inwardly, but then we will change outwardly. We will become more loving, more joyful, and more peaceful. We will "glow" (in a sense) as a light in the darkness, showing God's glorious goodness against the contrasting backdrop of a fallen, sin-filled world.

TAKEAWAYS

Revere God's commands. If you have a relationship with the Lord, there are times when you are tempted to forget that He is holy and all-powerful.

Worship God because He is worthy. How often do we only worship God for the blessings He gives us or the kindness He has shown us?

Tell others about God's love and His holiness. Knowing that there is a God who is all-powerful can be scary for the people who haven't accepted Jesus' sacrifice, but He is also the same God who lovingly gave us Christ.



Thinking

Are you seeking to find out more about who God really is? What faulty perceptions do you think you might have about God?



Feeling

In what areas of your life are you not reverent of God? Do your feelings ever get in the way of worshipping Him? How can your feelings help you worship instead of hinder you (cf. Ps. 119)?



Doing

Do you have an unbelieving friend who has only a partial understanding of who God really is? Try to talk to him this week about how God has revealed Himself in His Word.

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7th to 12th grade at the same time.

"For it is the God who commanded **light** to shine out of darkness, who has **shone** in our hearts to **give the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"
(2 Cor. 4:6).

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