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Revelation chapter 14

6Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. **7**And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Revelation 14:6

ESV

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

What does Revelation 14:6 mean? This verse features another angel that flies above John and has a gospel message to proclaim to every person, nation, tribe, language and people. It seems God is granting the world a final opportunity to turn to Him. The gospel is good news. It stands forever, even in earth's darkest days, as good news about God's grace and forgiveness offered to sinners because Jesus died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3). However, there is no evidence that even one person believes the angel's message. The darkness of the beast's kingdom settles into the human heart.

Many interpreters see this as an example which demonstrates God's motivations behind the complex events of the end times. By offering repeated

opportunities for repentance, and extraordinary evidence of His truth, God is removing all excuses. These events, in part, help to prove that humanity does not ultimately reject God because they are misled, or uninformed. Mankind rejects God because they love their sin more than their Creator.

The gospel mentioned in Revelation 14:6 is called "eternal," suggesting it never changes. It is the same throughout all ages. Paul warned the Galatian church not to accept a false gospel. He wrote: "There are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:7–8).

Revelation 14:7

ESV

And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

What does Revelation 14:7 mean? The angel with the eternal gospel urged everyone to reverence God, ascribe glory to Him, and worship Him. The angel gives two reasons sinners should fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him. First, God's judgment is imminent. Soon He will bring an end to the beast and his empire (Revelation 17; 18). Also, He will consign the beast and the false prophet to eternal destruction in the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20). All the beast's followers, too, will experience similar judgment (Revelation 20:11–15).

In the church age—the modern, present era—God uses saved human beings to warn the lost to turn in faith to God. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:11: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." And in 2 Corinthians 5:20, he declared, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." In the tribulation, in addition to saved people, God apparently plans to use angels to warn sinners to turn to Him.

The angel with the eternal gospel also urges sinners to respect, glorify, and worship God because He created everything. Instead of worshiping an idol—the image of the beast—those who live in the tribulation should worship the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

Psalm chapter 46

English Standard Version

1To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamoth. A Song. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. **2**Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, **3**though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah **4**There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. **5**God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. **6**The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. **7**The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah **8**Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. **9**He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. **10**"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" **11**The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Context Summary

Psalm 46:1–7 introduces the theme of trust in God. He is Israel's protector, and He is present whenever the people of Israel need Him. The people may trust in Him regardless of what happens. Neither natural calamities nor the threat of nations can shake God's people, because they have an abundant supply of the presence of the Lord of hosts, the God of Jacob.

Psalm 46:1

ESV

To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamoth. A Song. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

What does Psalm 46:1 mean? This psalm reflects on God's miraculous deliverance of His people but does not specify an exact event. There are many possibilities, one of which is when the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem and advised King Hezekiah to surrender. Rather than surrender, Hezekiah prayed, and God answered (2 Kings 18–19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 36–37). Isaiah 37:36 declares: "And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when the people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies."

The word "refuge" comes from the Hebrew root term *machaceh*, meaning "shelter." In modern English, "shelter" is often applied to structures providing safety from things like rain, or natural disasters, or enemy attacks. As in the Assyrian invasion, God sheltered the people of Israel. He demonstrated that He was the source of their protection.

The phrase "a very present help in trouble" also benefits from deeper study. The concept of God being "very present" could also be phrased as "clearly proven" (Deuteronomy 4:7). Past experiences, including history, show that God is worthy of our trust (Hebrews 12:1). The word "trouble" comes from a Hebrew word literally meaning a confined space. Its use here closely resembles the English expression "in a tight spot." These are moments when one feels trapped or hopeless (Psalm 9:9). Christians today may feel trapped in tight situations. Like the people of Jerusalem besieged by the Assyrians, the best course of action is to trust in the Lord to handle the situation. He has done it before, and He can do it again.

Psalm 46:2

ESV

Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

What does Psalm 46:2 mean? Psalm 46 appears to have been written as a song for the entire congregation; it is a worship declaration from the nation of Israel. Based on prior experience with God's goodness (Psalm 46:1), the people resolve not to fear anything. God is their shelter, their power, and their well-proven advocate. Symbolically, the verse refers to some of the more common—and frightening—natural disasters. Both earthquakes and landslides involve the earth itself seeming to become unstable. Their results are catastrophic, and naturally cause fear. And yet, even in the face of those, God's people resolve to be faithful.

The language in this verse may symbolize the commotions and change that occur in nations. The nations rise and fall, but God remains the same. He declares in Malachi 3:6: "I the LORD do not change"; and Hebrews 13:8 describes Jesus Christ as "the same yesterday and today and forever." We all change as we grow older, and the political situation at home and abroad may change for the worse, but we do not need to fear. Our God never changes. We may not be able to count on good health or money in the bank or investments or friends, but we can always count on God.

Jesus taught His followers not to worry about material goods or food or drink but to put their confidence in God. He said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Psalm 46:3

ESV

though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.
Selah

What does Psalm 46:3 mean? Continuing a theme of assurance, this verse comes from the people of Israel who celebrate God as their shelter and support. The prior verse referred to two of nature's most surprising and damaging disasters: earthquakes and landslides. Even in the face of those, however, God's people can trust in His goodness (Psalm 46:1–2).

Here, the psalm evokes the chaotic nature of the sea. Not even the roaring, foaming, and swelling of the ocean can cause God's people to fear. The otherwise-immovable mountains may tremble when the sea erupts, but God's people need not shake in fear. In practice, of course, fear in the face of danger is a normal human reaction (Matthew 8:23–25). Reminders such as this are indications of how we can, or should, respond, not necessarily how we always *will* react.

This imagery of chaos may apply to international disturbances. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus predicted that in the end times "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:7). Although horrific international confrontation will take place in the tribulation period, believers today are bombarded with news about international strife, military threats from rogue nations, and the buildup of nuclear arms. Nevertheless, we need not tremble. Our God knows all about the nations' unrest and threats (Ecclesiastes 12:14). He offers peace of heart and mind to those who trust Him. Someday our heavenly Father will hold the rebellious nations in derision and will speak to them in His wrath (Psalm 2:4–5).

The term *se'lāh* is not fully understood, but it seems to be either a musical reference or something like the exclamation "amen!"

Psalm 46:4**ESV**

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

What does Psalm 46:4 mean? This verse mentions the presence of a stream that blesses Jerusalem, the city of God. Spiritually, Scripture often speaks of this as the dwelling place of the Most High God (Psalm 9:11; 132:13; Joel 3:17; Zechariah 8:3). Streams and rivers are common symbols of abundance: a source which perpetually flows. The imagery here resembles that of the river which Ezekiel 47 describes, gushing forth from the temple in the millennium when Christ rules the earth. Revelation 22:1–2 depicts a "river of the water of life" flowing in the New Jerusalem.

Some believe this psalm was composed to celebrate God's deliverance of Israel from the Assyrians in the days of king Hezekiah. If so, the reference to water might have a double meaning. Hezekiah had built an underground aqueduct that connected the Spring of Gihon in Kidron with the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). The sea might roar and foam, just as the Assyrians might rattle their swords and spears. Even so, the water supply in Jerusalem was calm and secure, just as God was reliably established in Jerusalem, His holy mountain.

Psalm 46:5**ESV**

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.

What does Psalm 46:6 mean? This psalm celebrates God's omnipotent ability to protect the city of Jerusalem and the people of the nation of Israel. Despite natural disaster or international war, the people of God can look on God's fulfilled promises as a source of trust in Him (Psalm 46:1–3). Some see parallels between this psalm and the miraculous rescue of Jerusalem from an Assyrian siege (2 Kings 18:28–35; 19:35). This verse certainly emphasizes God's power. He simply issued a command, and the Assyrian army was defeated.

The images here contrast the supposed strength of ungodly nations with the power of God. By comparison, He merely speaks, and they lose their balance. They stumble like a little child whose steps falter. The earth "melts" at the sound

of God's voice, symbolizing God's power to destroy even what seems to be indestructible (Amos 9:5).

Someday, as Psalm 2:4–5 predicts, the Lord will strike all the nations that oppose Him. That event awaits the close of the tribulation period when Jesus returns to earth. Revelation 19:15 reports that at Jesus' coming a sharp sword will proceed from His mouth, with which He will "strike down the nations." Furthermore, the whole earth will undergo a dramatic renovation at the end of time. The apostle Peter writes, "But 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).

Psalm 46:7

ESV

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

What does Psalm 46:7 mean? Against the backdrop of ungodly nations' instability, this psalm celebrates the stability of the Lord's people. This is part of the psalm's celebration of God's protection of the city of Jerusalem (Psalm 46:1–6).

Two titles identify God here. He is "the Lord of hosts" and "the God of Jacob." As the Lord of Hosts, God commands the armies of heaven and the entire universe. The title appears first in 1 Samuel 1:11, when Hannah prayed and requested a son. She acknowledged by this title that nothing was too hard for God.

The title "God of Jacob" identifies God as Israel's God (Genesis 32:28) who keeps the promises He made to Jacob and his descendants (Genesis 35:10–12). The people of Jerusalem believed no power on earth could destroy them because the Lord of Hosts, the God of Jacob, was with them and was their refuge. This was true, of course—but it did not mean God could not allow the people of Jerusalem to suffer judgment for their sinful rejection of God (Isaiah 1:2–3; Deuteronomy 30:15–19).

Believers today know and serve this same God: the Lord of Hosts, the God of Jacob, and He is with us at all times. He is Immanuel, meaning *God with us* (Matthew 1:23). Hebrews 13:5 assures us He will never leave us. Also, He is our refuge. The apostle John assured his readers that they were overcomers, because "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

A *fortress* is a secure place, deliberately reinforced and strengthened against attack. In the original Hebrew, it implies somewhere inaccessible or elevated. Faith in God means placing one's trust beyond the reach of any earthly enemy.

Se'lāh is a Hebrew word without a clear definition. It appears to imply pause, or reflection, but might also be a musical reference.

Psalm 46:8

ESV

Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth.

What does Psalm 46:8 mean? Scripture is not clear if some unique event inspired this song of praise. Similarities between phrases in this psalm and the writings of Isaiah suggest it might have been written, or at least commissioned, by king Hezekiah. During his reign, the kingdom of Assyria attempted to conquer Jerusalem, only to be supernaturally annihilated by God (2 Kings 19:35). After 185,000 troops were destroyed, the invaders fled without harming the city (2 Kings 19:36). Thanks to God's unending supply of protection, the city was saved from certain doom (Psalm 46:1–7).

In that instance, at least, the people of Israel did not have to fight for themselves. The Lord came to their defense. This situation previewed what will happen at the end of the millennium: the thousand-year reign of Christ. The Devil will be released from the bottomless pit and will deceive the nations from around the world. Those militant anti-Christ nations will surround Jerusalem, called "the camp of the saints" and "the beloved city" (Revelation 20:7–9). However, God will come to Jerusalem's defense. He will rain fire from heaven upon the marching armies and consume them. The judgment ends the Devil's wicked activity on earth. He is thrown into the lake of fire to be tormented forever and ever (Revelation 20:10).

Context Summary

Psalm 46:8–11 invites worshipers to consider the peace God gives those who trust in Him. He triumphs over those who wage war, and He will be given His proper respect among the peoples of earth. He is with His chosen nation, Israel, as their protector and guardian. This might have been composed in response to

one of God's miraculous rescues of Israel, such as when Assyria besieged the city (2 Kings 19:35).

Psalm 46:9

ESV

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.

What does Psalm 46:10 mean? This often-quoted verse comes in a specific context: God's omnipotent power to protect the nation of Israel from the hostile forces which attack her (Psalm 46:1–7). The phrase "be still" uses a Hebrew term which can be rendered as "relax," "let go," or "stop." It implies an act of surrender—a release of striving and hostility. Prior verses pointed out that attempting to fight against God is a losing proposition (Psalm 46:8–9). Those who rage against God (Psalm 2:1) would be better off letting go of frantic anger and accepting His truth instead.

In literal terms, this verse does not mean to "sit quietly and listen for God." That interpretation is not entirely flawed, of course. Where God's enemies need to "be still" by ending their tantrums against Him, God's people can "be still" by faithfully trusting God to be their source of strength (Exodus 14:13).

That trust and submission is key to what it means to "know that I am God." One might imagine a strong, protective parent telling a child, "don't be afraid, keep in mind how I've kept you safe in the past."

Scriptural references to "the nations" often mean the Gentile world: nations other than Israel. That same context also implies a message meant to be heard and understood by the entire world. This psalm calls upon all people to stop squabbling and know that the Lord is God. Psalm 2:10–12 issues similar counsel. The Lord advises the nations to be wise, to be warned, to serve the Lord with fear, to rejoice with trembling, and to kiss the Son. In other words, the Lord summons the nations to repent, throw down their weapons of warfare, and come to friendly terms with Him.

One way or another, God will be properly honored by all people and in all places on earth (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11). Someday, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess Christ as Lord, giving glory to God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11).

Psalm 46:10**ESV**

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

What does Psalm 46:10 mean? This often-quoted verse comes in a specific context: God's omnipotent power to protect the nation of Israel from the hostile forces which attack her (Psalm 46:1–7). The phrase "be still" uses a Hebrew term which can be rendered as "relax," "let go," or "stop." It implies an act of surrender—a release of striving and hostility. Prior verses pointed out that attempting to fight against God is a losing proposition (Psalm 46:8–9). Those who rage against God (Psalm 2:1) would be better off letting go of frantic anger and accepting His truth instead.

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One way or another, God will be properly honored by all people and in all places on earth (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11). Someday, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess Christ as Lord, giving glory to God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11).

Psalm 46:11**ESV**

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

What does Psalm 46:11 mean? This closing verse of Psalm 46 repeats verse 7, probably in keeping with the psalm's musical nature. The term *se'lāh*, used at the very conclusion, is only vaguely interpreted. The use implies a pause, so it may be like the exclamation "amen!" or be used as part of musical notation.

The emphasis on God's role as commander of the armies of heaven, His covenant relationship with the people of Israel, and His omnipotent power to preserve His people are all fitting conclusions.

As the Lord of Hosts, God commands all the armies of heaven. He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We face no problem that He cannot solve, no temptation that He cannot defeat, and no trial that He cannot overcome. Best of all, He is "with us." When Jesus commissioned His disciples, He promised to be with them always (Matthew 28:20), and Hebrews 13:5 assures us that He will never leave us or abandon us.

Further, our Lord is the God of Jacob. When Jacob was on his journey from Beersheba to Paddan-aram, he had a dream in which he saw the Lord above a ladder that stretched to heaven (Genesis 28:10–16). The Lord spoke to him and promised to give him and his descendants the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. He also promised to bless all the families of the earth in Jacob and his descendants. Finally, He promised to be with Jacob and to keep him and return him home. Despite the animosity of Esau and, later, the abuse of Laban, the Lord kept Jacob safe. He prospered Jacob and eventually returned him home. Jacob could not take credit for any of his good fortune (Genesis 32:22–28).

Similarly, the Lord is depicted as a reinforced, secure, high place beyond the reach of enemies: a "fortress." Nothing can destroy our safety in Him.

Romans chapter 3

19Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20**For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

21But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22**the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24**and are justified by his

grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25**whom God put forward 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. **26**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.

27Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. **28**For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Romans 3:19

ESV

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

What does Romans 3:19 mean? Paul sums up his case that the law cannot protect anyone from God's judgment of their own, personal sinfulness. Anyone who believes that is deceiving themselves. Paul writes that the law speaks to those under the law. And what does it say? It says, "You can't keep the law." This was the conclusion supported by Paul's prior references to the Old Testament: that nobody lives a life of "righteousness" in comparison to the standards of God.

In other words, Moses' law, God's gift to Israel, does not provide any protection from God's eternal judgment for human sin. Not for Jews, nor for Gentiles. Instead, the law reveals just how much we humans sin. It forces us to agree with God that we deserve His anger because we now understand all of the ways in which we have sinned against Him.

In this way, Paul writes, it shuts every mouth. Put another way, the law takes away all of our arguments and excuses that we are worthy of God's approval on our own merits. Clearly, the law shows us, we are not.

This is true for every individual in the "whole world," Paul declares. Both Jews and Gentiles will be held accountable to God. On our own, all of us would be found to be guilty, to be "under sin." Soon, though, Paul will show us the opportunity to be declared righteous before God through faith in Christ. He's not quite there yet, however.

Romans 3:20**ESV**

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

What does Romans 3:20 mean? In the next verse, Paul will turn to God's plan to offer righteousness to sinful humans through faith in Christ. He's not there yet, however. With this verse, he concludes his argument that every single person deserves God's angry judgment against our sinfulness, even those who live under the law of Moses (Romans 3:10).

The law was indeed God's gift to Israel, but it was not the path to being righteous in God's sight. Paul puts it bluntly: No human being will be justified in God's sight by works of the law. Why is this? Because no human being is able to keep the works of the law perfectly. We are sinners by nature. Every single person, without exception, chooses to do what they know is wrong, at least sometimes.

The law is a gift because it proves to us, to Jews and Gentiles, just how sinful we are. Without God's written description of human righteousness in the law, we might be tempted to argue that we are pretty good people. When we compare our lives with the rules of the law, however, we must finally admit that we are desperate sinners. We violate God's law in more ways than we can count.

The law brings knowledge of sin and the ultimate conclusion that we deserve God's judgment. That's not the end of the story, though. In the very next verse, Paul begins to describe a path to righteousness for us that is available "apart from the law."

Romans 3:21**ESV**

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

What does Romans 3:21 mean? The words "but now" that begin this verse may be two of the most important words in all of the Bible. Paul has just said in the previous verse that "by works of the law no human being will be justified" in God's sight. Nobody can keep the law perfectly, and no person lives a life worthy of God's righteousness (Romans 3:10). Things sounds bleak for us. If

even law-followers cannot escape God's angry judgment, what hope do any of us have?

Finally, Paul turns the corner to the main point of Romans: "But now." Something crucial has changed in human history. The thing none of us could live up to—God's righteousness—has now been manifested, or "made known," apart from the law. In other words, Paul will go on to say, there is hope. There is a path to the righteousness of God which does not require us to keep God's law.

Paul adds that this new thing has not been unexpected. The Law and the Prophets have been pointing to God's righteousness all along. In fact, it was always God's plan to arrive at this "but now" as a way for humans to be saved. Paul describes how to come into this righteousness in the following verse.

Context Summary

Romans 3:21–31 finally introduces the "good news" part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Up to this point, Paul has shown that even following the law cannot spare us from being judged by God for our sin. Now Paul announces that, through faith in Christ, we can be made righteous in God's sight. Entirely apart from the law, we can be redeemed by the atoning sacrifice of Christ's blood, willingly shed for our sin. This gift of God's grace instead of wrath is available to everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. This is truly good news!

Romans 3:22

ESV

the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

What does Romans 3:22 mean? Paul has thoroughly and completely eliminated the possibility that anyone can be made right with God by following the law. Simply put, absolutely nobody seeks God sufficiently to earn the label "righteous" (Romans 3:10). That means all people, Jew and Gentile, deserve the wrath of God for sin. Having said that, and making it clear that no person has any hope of heaven by their own efforts, Paul has suddenly thrown open the door to another way to be made righteous. To be made righteous before God is the only way to be saved from God's wrath.

Paul sums up very clearly that the righteousness of God is available to humans through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. How is this possible? Paul will

go on to show that only Jesus ever kept the law perfectly. He then died for the sins of all of us lawbreakers. When we place our faith in Jesus, God gives us credit for His righteousness and receives Jesus' payment of His own death for our sin.

The verse ends with the beginning of a new thought: "There is no distinction." Paul means that there is no difference between any groups of human beings. He will say in the next verse that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. This includes every kind of people group: Jews, Gentiles, men, women, the oppressed, the oppressors, those who do good works and those who do not. Everyone sins, and none of us earn God's glory.

Romans 3:23

ESV

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

What does Romans 3:23 mean? Romans 3:23 is another of the best-known and most often-quoted verses in all of the Bible. This expresses an idea which is key to understanding how to be saved from God's wrath and included in His family. A key point to understanding this verse is its context. Verses 21, 22, and 23 combine to point out that all people, without distinction, are equally deserving of wrath for our sin, and all people who are justified, without distinction, are justified through Jesus Christ.

The statement here is short and to the point: Everyone sins. Everyone has sinned. There is no one who does not sin (Romans 3:10). This further emphasizes the point Paul drew from Old Testament Scriptures earlier in this chapter. There is no escape from this label. Paul does not offer any category besides "sinner," and everyone falls into it. The previous verse emphasized that there is "no distinction." The most moral of humans—relatively speaking—and the most perverse of humans are all in the same container: "sinner."

Worse, knowing the difference between right and wrong, even the law given by God, doesn't make us moral. The Greek word translated as "fall short" here is in the present tense. In reality, we *keep on* falling short. In other words, even knowing the consequences of our sinfulness is not enough to keep us from sinning (Romans 1:18–20).

Because none of us are sinless, all of us fall short of God's glory. That matters, because we cannot be saved from God's angry judgment against our sin except by being sinless. That is God's standard, and we all fall short of His "glory"

because of our sin. God's glory, or the glory of Himself and His kingdom, is what He shares with those who are in His family, His children. Our sin, though, keeps us from sharing in His glory.

Fortunately, Paul follows this famous verse with the next one. It describes how we may reach God's glory, after all.

Romans 3:24

ESV

and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

What does Romans 3:24 mean? The previous verse described the universal human tragedy: Every one of us has sinned. Because of that sin, we have all fallen short of being able to participate in the glories of God and His family. In direct terms, this means nobody deserves heaven; we all have earned separation from God as a result of our own actions.

This verse describes the universal opportunity for every person. In spite of our sin, God has made it possible for us to be justified—declared righteous and sinless—by His grace. It is essential to understand what the Bible means by the word "grace." Grace is receiving a good thing when we deserve a bad thing. Paul describes it that way here. God gives to us the opportunity to be justified in His eyes "as a gift."

As Paul has already made clear: We cannot be justified by following the works of the law. Why? Because none of us can do so without breaking the law. Everyone sins in that way. That's why God must justify us by His grace, as a gift we could never earn. This gift is given through faith in Christ to "all who believe" (Romans 3:22).

Paul adds another important word to this verse: redemption. God gives to us this gift of grace, this opportunity to be included in His family and to participate in His glory, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. *Redemption* comes from a very specific word in the Greek. *Apolytrōseōs* literally means "a ransom payment." Our sin held us captive, unable to be included in God's family. The price of our sin was death. Jesus paid that price when He died for our sin on the cross. He paid the ransom for us. He redeemed us. He received the anger of God's judgment on our sin in His own body.

Romans 3:25

ESV

whom God put forward 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.

What does Romans 3:25 mean? The previous verse concluded with the statement about God's gift of grace. God's justifying of us—His making us righteous—came through the redemption that is in Jesus.

Now Paul writes that God put Christ, His Son, forward as a "propitiation." This is yet another weighty and meaningful theological word. *Propitiation* comes from the Greek term, *hilastērion*, which means "sacrifice of atonement." God literally gave Jesus over as the blood sacrifice to pay the debt of (or to atone for) our personal sins. It's also important to note that this same term, *hilastērion*, is used in Hebrews 9:5 to describe the "mercy seat:" the place on the ark of the covenant where blood was placed for atonement (Exodus 25:17).

In other words, God expressed all of his righteous anger against our sin on Christ on the cross to the point of death, paying what we owed in full. This gift of the sacrifice of God's own Son to atone for our own sin must be received, Paul writes. We must receive this gift by faith. In fact, Paul will make clear through the rest of this letter that faith in this gift, this act by Christ on our behalf, is the *only* way for anyone to be made righteous before God and to be included in His family.

This brings us to a great question: Why did God do this for us? Why would He do this? The answer Paul gives is that it is because of God's righteousness or justice. God did not say, "Your sins don't matter; I'll just ignore them." He fully poured out His justice against sin when sinless Jesus was sacrificed for sin on the cross.

Paul shows that this includes the sins of the past, before Christ died on the cross. He writes that God "passed over" those previous sins in an act of divine patience and perfect timing. Again, it's not that God failed to punish those old sins. It's that He stored up His punishment and poured it out on Jesus to fully satisfy the payment for those "former sins."

Romans 3:26

ESV

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.

What does Romans 3:26 mean? Paul repeats and expands on what he has just written in the previous verse. Why did God hand Jesus over as a sacrifice to atone for our sin with His blood? Why did He make it possible for us to be redeemed from our sin and the death we had earned with it?

Paul now answers that God did it to show His own righteousness when the right time had come. God showed He was just. His sacrifice of His Son for our sin made it possible for Him to offer to us eternal life without leaving human sinfulness unpunished. In addition to His love, God demonstrated His justice, His righteousness. More than that, God also wanted to be the "justifier" of those who have faith in Jesus. Only the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross accomplished *both* of these goals: to uphold the justness of God, and the merciful love of God.

When we trust in Christ for our salvation, for our place in God's family, our sin is forgiven. God is no longer the executioner-in-waiting. He becomes the "justifier." He changes His verdict from "guilty" to "redeemed." And He can do this with perfect holiness and perfect righteousness, because those sins have, in fact, been punished.

Romans 3:27

ESV

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

What does Romans 3:27 mean? Paul has shown that there is a way to be made righteous before God. However, this does not include perfectly keeping the works of the law—since nobody can, or does (Romans 3:10, 23). Instead, God handed over His own sinless Son to be the sacrifice to fully and completely pay the price for our sin. This upholds God's just-ness and righteousness, but punishing sin, as well as upholding His loving mercy. As a result, those who place their faith in Christ can now be redeemed and justified by God. We are welcomed into His family forever.

Now Paul turns back to our response. What can we possibly say? He asks, "What becomes of our boasting?" Paul is referring to the inevitable pride that comes with religious rule-following, as men and women compete to be morally superior to each other in order to be more acceptable to God. Paul says that game has become pointless. God has done all the work and offers His full acceptance to all by faith in Christ alone.

Paul anticipates an objection. Where is this written, that we can't boast in our own salvation? What kind of rule is this? Shouldn't we have this in black and white? Paul says no. That's the point. He calls it the "law of faith." Being made right before God in this way is all about faith in what God has done for us in and through Jesus. It's not about any law we can try to follow in our own strength and therefore be judged by.

Romans 3:28

ESV

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

What does Romans 3:28 mean? This verse is a summary of what Paul has written in Romans 3:21–27. It also serves as a useful, concise proof that our salvation is not, in any sense, dependent on good deeds, rituals, sacraments, or other behaviors. Prior verses made it clear: we cannot and will not be seen as righteous before God on the basis of our own efforts (Romans 3:10). However, unless God declares a person to be "justified"—righteous, having no sin in need of punishment—that person cannot be with God. The unjustified person has earned God's angry judgment.

Paul has shown that nobody is able to reach this level of being justified by following the works of the law. Human beings can't do it. We sin. It's in our nature. Once we have sinned, the price of our sin is to be excluded from God's glory (Romans 3:23).

Thankfully, God provides a way—but only one way—for humans to be declared "justified." This comes through faith and not through works of the law. Later, Paul will expand on this to further prove that this salvation is entirely on the basis of faith, with no contribution or requirement of works, whatsoever (Romans 4:3; 11:6).

John chapter 8

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” **33** They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” **34** Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. **35** The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. **36** So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. **37** I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. **38** I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

Context Summary

John 8:31–59 is a passage which dovetails with John 2:13–22, where Jesus drives corrupt businessmen from the temple. These Scriptures disprove any myths that Jesus was weak, timid, passive, or soft. In this exchange with the Pharisees, Jesus pulls no punches. Jerusalem's religious leaders, and their followers, continue to resist Jesus' preaching. They rely on arrogance and insults, to which Jesus responds with blunt, unfiltered condemnation. This culminates in Jesus making an overt statement of His own divinity, punctuating the debate by declaring "before Abraham was, I am!"

John 8:31

ESV

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,

What does John 8:31 mean? As with verse 30, it is tempting to think that those who "believed" in Jesus were expressing saving faith. However, the Bible distinguishes between those who believe in a shallow, superficial sense from those who express legitimate *faith* in Christ. This verse explains one of the ways to know the difference: those who truly submit to Christ "abide in [His] word" (John 8:12; John 5:38; 1 John 2:14). Some of Jesus' earlier teachings caused some who claimed to believe in Him to walk away (John 6:65–66). Many of the crowd who find Jesus' words compelling at this moment, will reject Him later.

The terminology used here needs to be understood. "The Jews," as used in the gospel of John, typically refers to the religious leaders of Jerusalem and their followers. This would include the temple Scribes, the Pharisees, and the local residents who agreed with their approach. The conversation Jesus is having now, is still mostly aimed at the Pharisees, but it actually includes all of the hostile crowd which has now gathered.

John 8:32

ESV

and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

What does John 8:32 mean? The most enticing aspect of sin is the promise of freedom. Even from the first temptation, in the garden of Eden, man has assumed that defying God is a way to control his own destiny. In fact, the opposite is true. Nothing enslaves like sin—it corrupts our thinking, controls our actions, and destroys our peace. Worst of all, it separates us from God (Ephesians 2:12) and condemns us to an eternity of loneliness and shame (Matthew 8:12). Jesus, on the other hand, represents the truth—that is, Himself. This is theme Christ will return to often in His teaching (John 14:6; John 8:12). No other claims are true, and nothing but truth can really free us.

Comforting lies are never as beneficial as loving truth. Even when the truth is not what we want to hear, we can't expect to make good decisions or correct choices when we're operating under the control of a lie. As Christ stated earlier in this dialogue, He—alone—is the "light of the world," the one and only means to apprehend truth. True freedom is found in forgiveness of sin and service to God, and this is only found when we accept Jesus.

John 8:33

ESV

They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

What does John 8:33 mean? The "they" referred to here is a collection of Jewish religious leaders and their followers. Jesus is debating them in Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths (John 7:1–2). Prior to this moment, Jesus has claimed to be "the light of the world" (John 8:12) and therefore the only source of spiritual truth. In the prior verses, Jesus reemphasized this point by claiming

that those who "abide in [His] word" are those who know the truth, and are set free by that truth. Later, He will clarify that those who have not accepted this truth are still slaves to sin (John 8:34). The response from the hostile crowd is not merely bizarre, it demonstrates a lack of insight.

The "freedom" Jesus has spoken of is spiritual: those who reject Christ are still enslaved to sin. This results in both eternal damnation and earthly consequences (Romans 1:26–27). The people who remark back about their freedom seem to think that if they are not actual *slaves*, in a social sense, they have no need to be freed. In this way, their reaction proves that they do not understand the point Jesus is making.

The absurd side to this argument is that it ignores both Israel's history and her current situation! In the past, Israel was often subjugated to other nations—the entire book of Judges describes the nation's cycles of sin, oppression, and rescue. At one point, the vast majority of the Jewish people were carried off into captivity (Daniel 1:1; Esther 2:5–6). And, most obviously, the nation of Israel had been enslaved by the nation of Egypt prior to the events of the book of Exodus. At the very moment these words were spoken, Israel was under the absolute control of the Roman Empire. It's mind-boggling that they could claim to have "never been enslaved to anyone." Then again, so is their inability to recognize their enslavement to sin.

John 8:34

ESV

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

What does John 8:34 mean? Here Jesus uses the phrase translated as "truly, truly," or "very truly." This is from a doubled use of the Aramaic word *amēn*. Used at the end of a statement, as many cultures do in prayer even today, it suggests a hope that the words will be fulfilled, or that they are true. Used at the beginning of a statement, it is a claim to absolute, original, first-hand knowledge.

It's important to realize what Christ is saying here, and what He is not saying. Earlier, Jesus claimed to be the one and only source of spiritual truth, and that those who accepted Him would be set free from the enslavement of sin (John 7:37–38; John 8:12). Without question, Jesus is pointing out that sin is a mark of following darkness, instead of His light (1 John 1:5–10). Sin, by definition, means choosing earthly, worldly things over heavenly things.

What Jesus is not saying is that *all* sin, at *all times*, should be interpreted to mean that the sinner has no relationship to Christ. The Greek of this phrase makes this nuance much easier to understand than any English translation. The exact phrasing used is *pas ho poiōn ho hamartia doulos ho hamartia*. Literally, this means "everyone who keeps practicing sin is a slave of sin." In other words, Jesus is now speaking of a habitual, persistent sin. Those who are free in Christ may stumble into darkness, but they do not perpetually "walk" in it (John 8:12).

John 8:35

ESV

The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.

What does John 8:36 mean? John 8:36 is one of the most inspirational phrases in all of Scripture. While sin enslaves us (John 8:31–32), true freedom is found only in Christ (John 8:31–32). Sin deceives by promising freedom, when all it does is control and corrupt us. Those who don't have faith in Christ are bound by sin (Romans 6:18), and subject not only to slavery, but to spiritual death (John 3:36). Those who find Christ, the one and only source of spiritual truth (John 8:12), will be "truly" free.

The context of this comment is a discussion about Abraham and the concept of a spiritual "father." The religious leaders of Jerusalem, and their followers, are referred to as "the Jews" in this part of the gospel of John. When Jesus claimed to be doing the will of His "father," these critics responded by laying claim to their ancestry through Abraham. Christ's reply is that biological fatherhood is not as important as spiritual fatherhood. Jesus has just used the example of a household servant, who is not a permanent part of a family, in contrast to a son, who is always guaranteed access to his father (John 4:15–16). This was an analogy to the difference between those who merely know "about" God—including the spiritually obstinate Pharisees—in contrast to those who truly know God because they know Christ (John 8:31–35).

Christ is the real, promised "son" of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). So, the "real" children of Abraham are those who obey God, by accepting Christ (Galatians 3:26). This is the subtext behind the rest of Jesus' dialogue with the crowd.

John 8:37**ESV**

I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.

What does John 8:37 mean? In response to Jesus' claims of spiritual truth, His critics have professed to be children of Abraham. At this point, they still misunderstand the way in which Jesus refers to God as His "father." Their confusion lies in assuming that, as descendants of Abraham, they are part of the "house" of God. Jesus' comments over the last few verses dispute that assumption. His analogy highlights the difference between a household servant and the master's son. One is not a permanent part of the family, while the other is guaranteed a place with the master. The "true" sons of Abraham, then, are those who are spiritually the sons of God—a status only available to those who trust in Christ (Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 3:29).

Jesus is aware that the religious leaders of Jerusalem, and their followers—called "the Jews" here in the gospel of John—are the descendants of Abraham. However, they are not really part of God's family, since they don't accept the message of God. That message includes Christ (John 6:29). Since they reject Jesus, they also reject God, and cannot claim to have His truth, or His light, inside them. Jesus' challenge to their spiritual arrogance has led them, not only to reject Him, but to attempt to kill Him (John 5:18).

This leads Jesus to continue the analogy of "fatherhood," by making a brutally condemning remark. In the next verses, Jesus will suggest that the people opposing Him are following the example of their spiritual father...who is neither God nor Abraham. Rather, according to Christ, their father is the Devil (John 8:44)!

John 8:38**ESV**

I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

What does John 8:38 mean? A major point of pride in the nation of Israel, was their descent from Abraham. As the man given a promise by God, Abraham represents an anchor point for the Jewish understanding that they are God's chosen people. In trying to dispute Jesus' claims to spiritual truth, the religious

leaders of Jerusalem have misinterpreted His references to His "father." Their claim, in response, was to profess their descent from Abraham. As Jesus has pointed out, however, being a part of God's family is driven by faith and spirit, not by genealogy. The "true" children of Abraham are those who obey God, which includes following His son, Jesus Christ (John 6:29). As Abraham followed God, so too will his spiritual children.

After claiming that the people opposing Him are not really sons of Abraham, Jesus now begins to refer "your father," meaning the spiritual father of these obstinate critics. While Jesus comes by the will of God, and does what His Father wants Him to do, the people who seek to kill Him (John 5:18) are acting in the example of *their* father. Jesus will subtly make this point several times before outright naming the true spiritual father of His enemies: the Devil (John 8:44)!

Unsurprisingly, this escalation leads Jesus' critics to resort to insults (John 8:41), accusations of insanity (John 8:48), and another attempt on His life (John 8:59).