



Chapter Summaries

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The God Who is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story

By D.A. Carson

Driving home from work on the 405 freeway can be a vexing experience especially if you despise traffic like I do. A remedy I find is listening to classic rock stations that play my favorites and when I'm done with that I'll "station surf". This brought me to an interview where apologist and public speaker Frank Turek was answering questions about his new book, "Stealing From God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case", by the host Michael Sontag.

Sontag asked Turek to speak to the Christian that fears not having answers to questions nonbelievers may ask them—(this is not verbatim but the gist as I recall is...)—"Believers need to study and learn apologetics...life's hard, marriage is hard, work is hard, raising children is hard, so why would learning about the apologetic issues be any different? While we can simplify the concepts and core issues, one must do the hard work of studying". I *almost* fully agree.

That is, Christians do need to give priority to the life of the mind as part of loving God and neighbor. But (and I don't think Turek would disagree from what I did hear, he just did not mention it when I was listening to the show), knowing the issues, the philosophical arguments and having strategies to counter false arguments is limited in scope and power. Let me explain.

When I was working on my master's degree in apologetics at Biola University, I noticed many students (from all walks and ages) were biblically illiterate. They knew how to give arguments for God's existence but not for Christ's atonement.

My response to Sontag's question would be, "If believers want to obey God's command in (1 Pet.3:15; Jude 3; Mt.28:18-20) then they must understand the Big ideas of the little Book—Bible, and the Big ideas of the Big Book—Creation. That is, Christians need to understand the big ideas of *creation, fall, redemption and consummation* and be able to understand the *philosophical thought which has shaped our civilization*. Both are important, but if the former is not in place, I don't see how we can faithfully be salt and light as Christ's ambassadors. So while I'm all for thinking well and knowing the issues, we fail the Master as ambassadors for Christ when we are weak in our Biblical knowledge.

This leads me to explain why I chose Carson's book, "*The God Who is There*". Of the many stalwarts in thinking Biblically and critically I have had, D.A.

Carson is at the top of the list. His biblical, theological, philosophical and practical acumen is rife in anything he writes. This book in particular is an amazing example of writing a “salvation history” tome in terms a high school student can grasp without forfeiting theological rigor. This book is the fourth I want to commend for Christians who are serious about the life of the mind and the heart.

OS Guinness’s *Fools Talk* helps the reader understand from a biblical venue how to engage in speech those who are indifferent or hostile to the faith. Allister McGrath’s *Mere Apologetics* gives the reader insight into the big apologetic issues and challenges believers to make the responses their own, not someone else’s. Lastly, James Sire’s *The Universe Next Door* helps the reader understand how to think in worldviews as a means to engage the culture. Now, D.A. Carson is about to take us through the big ideas of the Bible. May you truly be strengthened in the faith, or may you become clearer as a searcher of what true life really is.

CHAPTER ONE: THE GOD WHO MADE EVERYTHING (Pages 11-26)

Carson begins this chapter by pointing out that ***the Bible is the foundation documents of Christianity***, made up of 66 books, written over a span of 1500 years. These books vary in length, are mostly written in Hebrew, some Aramaic, and in Greek. These documents have very different genres. Some are written in letters, others poetry, laments, genealogies, oracles from God, and some are apocalyptic in nature. This diverse nature makes the Bible more accessible in certain places to 21st century people than in others because of its’ context, language and customs.

As the foundation documents of Christendom, believers insist that here is where God has disclosed Himself. Thus, Carson’s goal for the reader is to allow the Bible to sketch out what Christianity says, what it means, and what it looks like. Lamentably, writes Carson, too often Christians have abandoned these foundation documents and have betrayed their heritage. He points out that this Bible actually discloses the “*God Who is There*” and argues that it’s broken down into chapters and verses.

Genesis: the first Book. Carson considers how the book of Genesis should be approached. He says that in light of 20th century thought it’s assumed that Science and the opening chapters of Genesis are *incompatible*. Nevertheless, the following obtains.

First, there's more ambiguity in the interpretation of these opening chapters than some Christians recognize.

Some are convinced that when read responsibly, these chapters reveal that the world is no more than four thousand years old (*Young Earth Advocates*) and that the days are literally twenty four hours in Genesis not symbolic. Others hold that these chapters reveal and support that the world is vastly old (*Old Earth Advocates*) and that each day represents an age, rather than a literal twenty four hour day. Still others insert a big *gap* between verse one and verse two.

Again, some see this as a *literary device* where the creation week is symbol laden, while others devote their energies to viewing it as *one of many creation accounts* in the world (e.g., *Enuma Elish*).

Carson rightly points out that *Genesis is a mixed genre of history and symbolism*. There's some historical details offered which take place in space and time, even though they were written after the actual events. Then there's the *symbolism* which is often difficult to distinguish between the symbolic and the actual.

Second, there's more ambiguity in the claims of science than some Scientists recognize. Carson unfolds how the *New Atheisms'* resources are based on philosophical materialism which holds that whatever exists is confined only to *matter, space and time*. This means that anything outside that box is immediately disregarded, ridiculed, and seen as superstitious which moderns can't tolerate!

Yet, there are many top notch scientists, mathematicians and philosophers who reject the foundation of naturalism. Many of these scholars are Christians (certainly not all) which tend to be Math and Science teachers, rather than Psychology or English teachers. The point being, these instructors use logic and reason to practice their disciplines, hence they're not superstitiously bent.

Recent books written by scientists such as; *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, *Uncommon Descent*, *Darwin's Black Box*, etc., point out core problems the Darwinian evolutionary model of reality faces in light of the latest science and philosophy and can't just be brushed off as "superstition". Then there's *Big Bang cosmology* that fits better in a theistic view of origins than a naturalistic paradigm. Carson rightly notes that to say matter, "came out of nothing" (as naturalist's hold) is an absurdity because we know that "some-thing" can't come from "no-thing".

Then there's the noteworthy *Intelligent Design Hypothesis* which offers an alternative scientific theory to naturalism, and discusses an organism's *irreducible complexity* which statistically makes chance mutation virtually an impossible hypothesis for a Darwinian naturalistic approach to intellectually hold sway.

Third, Carson notes ***the contribution Francis Schaeffer offers for understanding the opening chapters of Genesis***. Schaeffer argued that to make sense out of the Bible, the Genesis account must minimally be saying certain things.

First, the Genesis account *assumes God's existence rather than arguing for it*. This entails that He's the measure of all things because of His self-existent. But if humans are the measure of all things, then we determine what *is* and what *is not*. And as we relate to God, we are then positioned to become His judges. Yet, Genesis reveals that God is not an object that we evaluate, but the Creator who we are to worship.

Second, *the Genesis account reveals to us that God is a talking/communicating being*. This means that any idea we have of God, can only result from His self-disclosure. What we know about Him must therefore come from God. This means that He's not an abstract unmoved mover, or a mystical experience, but the Creator who chose to disclose Himself in language that human beings can understand. And the foundational message the Bible reveals to us is that *God is good*, despite all the evil the world contains.

Third, *the Genesis account reveals there's a Creator and creature distinction*. This means that God is *independent of everything and everything else* is dependent on God for its existence because unlike the Creator, everything else has had a beginning.

Fourth, *the Genesis account reveals that human beings—and they alone are made in the image of God*. This does not mean that we don't share some characteristics with other creatures (we do and know this from genetics). For example, a percentage of our genes we also share with the chimp/piglet, because we both die and return to the dust. But, unlike animals, only humans reflect God in speech, knowledge, creativity, capacity to work (e.g., we tend gardens, buffalo do not), and to rule as faithful vice regents who are to properly steward God's resources.

Fifth, *the Genesis account reveals that human beings image God as male and female*. Here differences and sameness are emphasized. Through sexual union families procreate, two individuals become one (we're not just animals just

doing it), thus woman are not chattel to be owned, but are equal image bearers to be cherished.

Sixth, *the Genesis account reveals that human innocence was lost*. That is, our first parents nakedness points to the shame rebellion wrought when God's holy command was not trusted. This is seen in chapter three, where *The Fall* of man is recorded. It's this backdrop that explains the New Testament meaning of a *New Creation*. While Adam is the progenitor of the human race, Jesus is called the "Second Adam" of a new human race revealed in the Gospel.

Seventh, *the Genesis account reveals the difference between monotheism and polytheism*. Monotheism is the belief that there is only one God, whereas polytheism is the belief in many gods. The god's of the Nations' only have authority over certain domains—the highest pleasure here is Hedonism. But the God of the Bible is ruler over everything—where the highest pleasure is God Himself.

Eighth, *the Genesis account reveals that human beings alone are morally responsible and accountable*. The reason God should be obeyed is because He made us, designed us, owns us and thus is owed everything. When we image bearers direct our lives contrary to God's design, we don't optimally exist. Our contrariness reveals a false belief that God is a bully rather than our maker to whom we owe everything.

CHAPTER TWO: **THE GOD WHO DOES NOT WIPE OUT REBELS** (Pages 27-42)

In this chapter Carson continues in the book of Genesis. He explains how *The Fall* took place, how it tarnished human relationships, and what God promised to do about it. **First, Carson tackles the issue of God's ontological status compared to Satan's.** Too often people mistakenly equate God and Satan as mirror images of each other (one good, the other bad), thus making him equivalent to God. But Genesis reveals that Satan is a rebellious, contingent, dependent, "smart-mouth" creature, not on par with God at all.

According to Carson, Satan's craftiness started out in prudence but ended in craftiness. That is, he was crowned with more prudence than any of the other creatures but in his rebellion it turned into craftiness. This virtue became a vice, the blessing became a curse (Prov. 12:23; 14:18):

²³ *A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly.*

¹⁸ *The naive inherit foolishness, But the sensible are crowned with knowledge.*

This craftiness is revealed in the question the serpent asks Eve where the pinnacle of evil is seen by assaulting God's goodness. Implied is that God's out to keep you from having any fun. The creature is telling the Creator (implicitly) "I know better". Moreover, it smuggles in the assumption that we have the ability and the right to stand in judgment of what God has said.

Secondly, he considers the tragedy and meaning of eating the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3. Our children, like our first parents want to become independent of mom and dad. Eve also thought that she wanted to become "independent from God" but she bought into the lie that the doctrine of judgment is not true. Satan sold the lie:

"⁴ The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Carson argues that there's a vast difference between God knowing good and evil and Eve knowing it. On the one hand, God omnisciently knows both good and evil, but He is not evil. On the other hand, Eve will become evil experientially through her disobedience, and she'll know it.

God alone has the prerogative to call something good or evil and is in fact what He does after completing all of creation, "it is very good." Here, the image bearer desires to possess the ability to call what they want "good or evil". By doing this, the image bearer *stands over against God*. This is what our present relativistic culture is all about. Carson calls this the—de-goding of God (so that "I" may be my own god). Herein lays idolatry and thus the tragedy—the creature's value is exalted above the Creators'.

Thirdly, he explains how defying God resulted in broken human relationships. Carson points out that in the Christian tradition death has varied views. Augustine, for example, held that both physical, spiritual death, the second death (i.e., lake of fire), and their nakedness before God is a display of His promise of judgment. Thus, they traded the knowledge of God for guilt and shame which no leaf can ever cover.

We have here *the loss of innocence* which can't be undone. Fortunately, the Bible goes forward to the cross. Carson argues that broken relationships with

God are akin to adultery. Human broken relationships result from the vertical relationship that's tattered, where blame shifting is manifest with Adam (*Eve is my problem*) and Eve (*the serpent is my problem*).

We also have the blueprint for *self-justification* which results when people cover up residing shame and guilt. That is, denial is king! Everything we do wrong is someone else's fault, "I'm the victim," its' one more evidence of idolatry. What resulted was that Eve wanted to control (*rule*) her husband, and Adam would *rule* her with brute strength. This is all too familiar describing the 21st century American cultural milieu. The marriage relationship is destroyed.

Fourthly, he explains that God promised in the gospel to remedy the alienation. Genesis 3:15 is sometimes called the "protevangelium," which means the first announcement of the gospel (that is, the "Good News" about Jesus). For it foretells the redemption Jesus' life death and resurrection would secure. This first promise of hope comes immediately after this cataclysmic treason takes place. Essentially, one will rise from the human race (the woman's seed) that will crush the serpents head. This occurs in a sense, when Christians are reconciled to God because of the gospel (Rom. 16:20). Satan along with his work, in this sense, is being destroyed.

Lastly, Carson accentuates what humanity needs most. Through idolatry, death came into the world. That is, by the evil that belittles and defies God's glory, death resulted. This is the anti-thesis to God's *shalom*—for it resists the peace, good order, well-being, human flourishing, and integrity that were part of God's design for the created order. Thus, our greatest need is to be saved from God's wrath who has pronounced death on us because of our idolatry. We need to be reconciled to God! *When things went awry, we tried to diminish God and thus we became impoverished.*

CHAPTER THREE: THE GOD WHO WRITES HIS OWN AGREEMENTS

(Pgs.43-54)

Carson so far has dealt with creation and the fall, in this chapter he considers the kind of being the Biblical God is in comparison to the gods of the nations and how our understanding should shape our approach to God. **First, there's what he calls the *Grandfather model of God*.** Here is a very common view where God is seen as really nice, unthreatening, and can thus be easily

dismissed without any consequences. This is very man-centered view of the universe.

Second, there's the Deist model of God. Here He's spectacularly great, utterly transcendent, disinterested and too impersonal. That is, the creation was just wound-up, and as a result, we are left to fend for ourselves.

Third, there's the Back-scratching model of God. Here He's needy, not omnipotent. This is common in polytheistic religions where the gods are legion (i.e., Neptune—god of the sea, Hermes—god of communication—in Greek world, and Mercury in Roman world). Relating to God therefore involves “tit-for-tat” where “you do for me God and I'll do for you”. It's the notion of “Let's make a deal!” This is much like the barter system where we mutually need each other for help.

Fourth, there's then the Biblical model of God. According to Acts 17:24 the God of Scripture can't be manipulated or bartered with contrary to the *Grandfather model*; ²⁴ *The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;* ²⁵ *nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.*” The I AM has no needs because He's the source of all life. He's the sovereign God who will neither barter with us nor *contra the back-scratching god model*, be domesticated by some priestly class because He's the infinite One. Yet, *contra the deist model of God* He does and delights to interact with humans. That's an amazing God. Carson asks, “If we have nothing with which we can barter with God, on what basis must any relationship with God be based?”

Fifth, in light of the above only sovereign grace is sufficient for interaction. Recognizing that we are finite, needy, contingent creatures allows us to see that we desperately need God. The only reason we're breathing is because this God with whom bartering is impossible, has sanctioned it. That's humbling! And because God needs nothing from creatures like us, the only hope that remains is His sovereign grace which was manifest in His promise to Abraham.

Sixth, God's promise is sovereign and unconditional. Carson points out that God graciously, unconditionally and sovereignly promised this pagan—Abraham—to bless the nations. This would be accomplished through the covenant God would establish and the rite of it would be circumcision:

Gen.12:2-3: *Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

Gen. 17:10 *“This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.”*

Unlike the surrounding nations and the way covenants worked, The LORD did things differently with Abraham.

Gen. 15: 8-18 reads, *He said, “O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?”⁹ So He said to him, “Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.¹¹ The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.¹³ God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.¹⁴ But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.¹⁶ Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”¹⁷ It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.”*

Carson explains the difference between the covenants of the nations as opposed to God’s with Abraham. The way covenants worked with the Hittite, Assyrian, and Babylonian nations was to pay them tribute for protection. That’s not a bad deal, unless said people broke their covenant, for then they’d be torn apart like these animals in between which Abraham and God just walked. That is, in this text the understanding is, “may I be cut off, be torn apart, if I break my covenant with my sovereign”.

The way the covenant was going to work with God would go so far as to demonstrate that God would take full responsibility for the fulfillment of the covenant all by Himself. That's amazing Grace! The former covenant(s) depend on both parties fulfilling their duties, but the latter covenant depends entirely on the sovereign (God) assuring it will be kept.

As a covenant recipient, Abraham's loyalty is put to the test when God commands him to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22. The significance of Abraham's obedience can't be overstated. Pagans regularly showed their deities loyalty by sacrificing their children. God is testing Abraham to see if he would trust Him like pagans trust their gods. God is certainly not pleased in the killing of children. In fact, the sacrifice required would not be Isaac, but God himself would supply the sacrifice ultimately through *the* lamb—Christ.

Seventh, God's promise unfolds in history. God keeps his promise to Abraham, Israel eventually goes into the promised land, and through Isaac (not Ishmael) the promised blessing to all the earth would be fulfilled. Jesus was the seed of Abraham and the fulfillment of God's faithfulness. God provided "Himself" the sacrifice for sinners like me and you. The significance here is that God is faithful to keep his promises, unlike the rest of us. He remains forever faithful. He can't deny Himself. What a Savior!

Carson ends the chapter summarizing that God is the Creator and we are His creatures, God is our Judge because we are idolaters. While God is our Judge, He is also the God of the covenant who would make possible for us to address Him as Father, and we His children. God's initiative in dealing mercifully with image bearers is stunning, for He remedies our malady. We bring nothing to the table. The implications here are that "works righteousness" is obliterated, dependence on the sovereign One is our only hope, and there truly is no other god but GOD!

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GOD WHO LEGISLATES [Pages 55-70]

In this chapter, Carson ***first asks if it's possible for there to be "no absolutes" concerning what is true and categorically says "no"***. The reason is because of the nature of truth which *presses in on us* when we need air while being held under the ocean by a powerful wave. The *truth* is, if we remain

underneath without any breathing apparatus, they will eventually be making arrangements for our funeral.

Moreover, no one can be *position-less*. To *agree* or *disagree* argues for the inevitableness of absolutes. Moreover, regardless of our view, when disagreements obtain, there will be “excommunications” as the analogy from Tim Keller reveals in [pgs.55-56].

Interestingly, Jesus reminds us that if we remain in his word...the truth will set us free. Truth and freedom are different sides of the same coin. They can’t be separated.

Second, he considers from where we derive our expressions “Old Testament” and “New Testament” (i.e., the primary divisions of the Bible). These come from our understanding of the *covenant*. That is, God made a covenant with Abraham, Moses, etc. This of course is found in the law, the prophets, and the writings (i.e., the Old Testament). They are referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant, Mosaic Covenant, Sinai Covenant, The Law Covenant. But when Jesus arrives, everything changes. In the New Testament, there are a few references to the “old covenant” which preceded the “new covenant” which Jesus would introduce. This means that the covenant Moses gave was “old”. Thus, the terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament” are always referring to the *old covenant* and the *new covenant*.

Third, he contemplates the issue of God described as being jealous (Ex. 20:2-3; 34:12-14).

² *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ “You shall have no other gods before Me.”*

¹² *Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. ¹³ But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴ —for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God—”*

The term *jealousy* is attached to God’s exclusiveness. The first of the Ten Commandments affirms what our culture despises in the West—He’s exclusive. The reason for this is because of His ontological status—He’s Creator, Redeemer and Lover of His people. God is love! He rescued Israel from Egypt, from the slave market, and brought them out to worship him—the I AM! He is their

greatest good, and without stain. Unlike us, God's jealousy is to *protect* the object of His love from *outsider's* who will only *destroy* them.

God's committed to his people and as the covenant maker and keeper, there will be parameters He establishes to *protect* and to *nurture* His covenant people. To not do this would be to expose His people to destruction, and this He can't do because they are the object of His love. Thus, He is a jealous God.

Fourth, Carson explains the reason for why God prohibited Israel from making images (Ex. 20:4-6).

⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth."⁵ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

The reason for the prohibition is so that Israel would ever be aware of God's *transcendence*. That is, *the prohibition* is a safeguard against *domesticating* the Creator and maintaining the proper *distinction* between Creator and creature. Unlike the gods of the pagan nations, God can't be controlled because He is the "I AM". God can't be bargained with, manipulated, encapsulated or *controlled*.

Fifth, Carson explains the significance of the requisite sacrifice in order to enter the Most Holy place. According to Leviticus 16, God requires a sacrifice before anyone can enter his presence in the Most Holy place as first *a reminder of The Fall*. Remember, death entered through Adam's transgression and must be remedied through another's life. That is, entrance into the presence of this God is still obstructed. This is also *a reminder of our sinful, idolatrous bent*. And while we may be the people of God, we are still all terrible sinners. We need to be rescued. Most importantly, *Leviticus points us to the rescuer, redeemer, the savior to come* who is Jesus Christ the Messiah. They foreshadow His life and work for idolaters like us.

Sixth, Carson wrestles with reconciling God forgiving and punishing sinners. According to Exodus 32-34, God does the aforesaid. The fact is that the guilty are forgiven, but not by the law, for it is only by grace that forgiveness can be secured. God also punishes sinners and will not leave the guilty unpunished. So how can these two opposite poles be reconciled? He argues that a substitute is required for love and justice to be met out. Because God is not needy, and

can't be bartered with, only a *substitute will suffice*. Again, God accomplishes this through sovereign grace alone. Exodus 33:19 sums it up; *"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."*

Lastly, Carson explains toward what the Law of Moses points. The Law of Moses points forward to Jesus through the sacrificial system. A system rife with types pointing to Jesus (e.g., the goat, the ram and bull's blood, the tabernacle, etc.,) culminating in The Day of Atonement. On this day, *the substitute* is the *calling card* of the Law of Moses—actually of Jesus himself. The New Testament book of Hebrews attests to the fact that, *"the blood of bulls and goats could never make the one's offering them clean from their sin"* (Day of Atonement) which is why every year they had to do it all over again.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE GOD WHO REIGNS [Pages 71-83]

In this chapter Carson begins by focusing on what it means for God to be king. He ***first emphasizes that God is not a constitutional monarch.*** This means that His power isn't limited like the Queen's is limited in the United Kingdom, the kings is limited in Saudi Arabia and even more so Thailand's monarch is limited. But God is not limited.

In the Old Testament, God is sometimes depicted as king over everything and everyone in the universe, and sometimes as king over Israel. On the one hand, *God's Kingdom* is over all because He is the creator and in a certain sense all creatures are in God's kingdom (e.g., Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35). This includes those who hate God.

On the other hand, *God is Israel's King* because He rescued them out of Egypt. He made a covenant with Israel which they broke, but God did not. They became His *nation*. As their history unfolded, God continuously sent Judges to rule over Israel during their cycles of rebellion, idolatry, and repentance. This rebellion is well depicted in the choice of *Saul* to be Israel's monarch, the goal of which was to be like the surrounding nations. Unfortunately Saul became an awful man-centered king (1 Sam. 8-31).

King David was another story. In principle what a good king looks like is that "he's a man after my (God's) own heart" (which David is known to be). Unfortunately, David would soon fall into horrible sin (e.g., adultery, murder, in

the end, a disorderly home). Yet, unlike Saul's reign, David experiences a measure of peace, security and prosperity.

After the aforesaid, **Carson secondly considers how the term "son" is tied to Christ as David's progeny.** In David's dynasty, there's a king that would become God's "son" at the beginning of his reign. What can this mean? Unlike our usage today, the term "son" or "son of..." gave one their family *identity* along with the family *trade* (e.g., Jesus, the son of the carpenter...). In 2 Samuel 7:11-17 the text reads:

"¹¹ even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. ¹² When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.""¹⁷ In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David."

Here, to become God's "son" is used to refer to kings. Now if God is the supreme king over his people, than when the human person comes in the line of David to reign, he will be acting as God acts. He becomes God's "son." In Isaiah 9:6-7 the passage reads:

"⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

A son of David here is called "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father". Carson points out that in Jesus' ministry, he continually announced the dawning of the kingdom. But when did Jesus' kingdom come? In Christian theology there's a phrase tethered to the kingdom of God known as "the now and the not

yet”. That is, the kingdom is here *now* and *secretly working*—THE NOW. But it’s also in the *future*—THE NOT YET. Only in the *consummation* (an eschatological term for the last days where God ushers in the new heavens and the new earth) will the NOT YET become the NOW.

Thirdly, Carson explains how the Not Yet relates to death itself. The Bible is clear that the last enemy Jesus must overcome is death itself. The text in 1 Cor. 15:25-26 reads:

“²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

The relevance for believers is that they no longer have to fear death for the 2nd death they will not taste. Death will die. This concept of defeat and remaining conflict is well depicted in the difference between D-day and VE-day in WWII.

In **D-day**, the War was over for all intents and purposes, but Hitler didn’t go down without a fight as the fiercest fights were forthcoming. This is akin to Christ’s first coming—THE NOW. He conquered death and the grave, but we still die. In **VE-day** Europe could finally rejoice because the remaining skirmishes were over, that is, victory in Europe was finally realized—THE NOT YET—the consummation. In light of Christ’s kingship even over death, Carson asks the reader if they belong to God’s kingdom or not, and how it is they know; sobering indeed.

CHAPTER SIX: THE GOD WHO IS UNFATHOMABLY WISE [Pages 85-100]

In this section of the book, Carson **first focuses on Biblical wisdom literature**. He points out that Psalm 1 is called a “wisdom psalm” because it shows us that there are only two paths to walk on in this life. There’s the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. The former will be remembered, the latter forgotten. There’s no “third way” by which to live (c.f., Mt. 7:24-29). Wisdom literature demonstrates the polarity’s of life (a notion utterly denied by pantheistic monism). There’s the way of the wise, and the way of the fool. There are only two ways, not a third.

These polarities in wisdom literature have two qualities: they are absolute and they establish parameters by which to live, an actual border for life. We either live for the self-existent holy Creator God, or for the needy, unholy creature man.

Secondly, Carson admits the scary reality that we neither always live as lovers of God nor always walk in His ways. Often we act like the wicked indeed (e.g., King David). The truth about us is that often the counsel of the wicked sounds really good, the Law of the Lord is not our delight. Jesus also emphasized the realities of two roads, two gates, and *only* two ways to live (Mt. 7: 24-29). This accentuates the holy from the unholy, the righteous from the wicked, and while it clarifies for us this state of affairs, it cannot save us.

Carson then considers the fool as illustrative of the bent of those who *lack* wisdom. The reason those who deny God's existence are considered fools (Ps. 14:1), is because the God who is there has disclosed Himself in nature and in the Scriptures (see Rom. 1:18-22). They are fools because they deny the obvious. They and we, are without excuse and yet, the denials persist which disclose how deep humanity's corruption goes, and how desperately we need God's amazing grace.

Thirdly, David is used as an example of how man's foolishness must be dealt with, "Against you only have I sinned" David says to God in (Ps. 51:4). But how does this make sense in light of the fact that he sinned against other people? Carson affirms that David understood that his sin was ultimately and most importantly, treason against His Maker. It's not that he didn't think that he was not guilty before the people, he was and knew it. But, he was so in touch with his offense toward the Holy One of Israel. The fact is that what makes sin so heinous is that it defies God. To defy the One who made us and will judge us on the last day is utterly absurd.

Fourthly, Carson considers the life of Job to provide an answer to the problem of innocent suffering. But the humility that follows is noteworthy. The innocent do suffer and in the most extreme cases, they are to trust in the person of the God who is there. In the end Job is a microcosm of what's forthcoming in the end—wrongs will be righted, and the Just judge will set things right. This too is *wisdom*.

Ecclesiastes warns us that we will all face God and give an account of our lives; we must all face Him in the end. Its "good news" in the sense that we are directed to focus on what really matters—living for God. That is, our ultimate pursuit in life must be to fear God and keep His commandments—because in the end, nothing else will matter.

Lastly, Carson considers how we are to live in light of coming judgment. *Judgment*—the first doctrine in Genesis 3 revealed, is denied by many professing Christians. Death approaches, and it is death we in our culture strain at avoiding, sanitizing, we speak of Sister Sue “passing away” or she’s “gone”. We can’t bear to say that she is “Dead.”

When we die, regardless of the cause, the ultimate reality is that we stop breathing. There’s no life in us anymore. We’re separated from; our body, our loved ones and the life we once knew. Now we must face God. This is sobering.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE GOD WHO BECAME A HUMAN BEING [Pages 101-119]

Carson begins this chapter by **first pointing out that before Jesus was born, the prophet Jeremiah promised a new covenant.** What this promise implicitly says about the old (Mosaic) covenant is that in some sense, it is becoming obsolete (Jer. 31:31-34):

³¹ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³ “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Secondly, Carson explains how in Jesus God became human. For starters, “Jesus” name means “Yahweh saves.” This is the covenant name of God given to Moses at Sinai. The importance of this name in Mathew’s gospel is that it sets forth the entire theme of the book; namely that Yahweh has come to save his people from their sins (in Christ).

He then explains the doctrine of the Trinity to mean that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God. Not three Gods, only one. One way of explaining this, is that the Word shares one substance with the Father, but is

distinguishable from Him. That is, there are three distinct persons within the Godhead who are equally the One God, co-existing, co-equal, and co-eternal.

In John's prologue (John 1:1-18) it's clear that the "Word" is simultaneously God's own peer and God's own self? In verse 1 this is emphatic: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" God reveals himself to the prophets through his *word*; God creates through the spoken *word* in (Gen.1; Ps.33:6); God transforms his people through the *word* (Ps. 107:20), and Jesus is God's self-revelation, self-expression; God's own agent in creation; and he comes to save and transform his people.

Thirdly, Carson explains what the incarnation means. It means that the Word becomes a human being (i.e., the infleshing). God becomes something that previously before the incarnation, he was not. What John does not say is that the Word *merely* clothed himself in animal humanity, pretended to be human, coexisted with a man called Jesus, nor is all of God exhausted in Jesus. But John does say that the Word (God's own peer) became a human being. Jesus is the "God/Man. God in his divinity cannot change, but in Christ's humanity there's a distinct addition: a human nature. This is mind baffling.

Fourthly, Carson makes the connection between the Old Testament Tabernacle and New Testament incarnation. He does this by thematically connecting John 1:14-18 on the one hand and Exodus 32-34 on the other hand. He explains that the *Tabernacle and Temple*, point to the fact that Jesus is the ultimate meeting place between a holy God and rebellious sinners. He is said to have "*tabernacled among us*". This is where the meeting place of peace with God can be found in Jesus Christ.

Glory is what Moses wanted to see of God on Sinai, but when Jesus tabernacled among us the wonder of his glory, God's glory, is seen in the miracles and ultimately on Calvary's tortuous bloody cross. Grace and Truth (Love and Faithfulness) God reveals himself not only as the One who punishes evil doers but is also kind and forgiving. Full of grace and truth is that which brought him to the cross to pay for our sins. Here is where *justice and love* kiss!

Grace and Law means that we have received grace in place of grace already given. The gracious gift of the Law was superseded by the ultimate revelatory expression of God in the 2nd person of the Triune God who through his sacrificial death on Calvary's bloody cross purchased the redemption price required for

wrath doomed sinners to be rescued and thus adopted into God's family. It's found in the new covenant, which replaces the old covenant.

Seeing God can only be accomplished through seeing Jesus. We cannot look directly on God, according to John 1:18. What is at present, the closest we can come? Presently, we can see the character, holiness, wrath, forgiveness and glory of God in Jesus. He is the ultimate revelation of God the Father—he is the incarnate son of God.

And as such, Jesus most spectacularly showed that he is full of grace and truth on the cross. Both God's justice and love are fully expressed there. This field will forever be marveled on by the redeemed age without end.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE GOD WHO GRANTS NEW BIRTH [Pages 121-134]

In this chapter Carson addresses the issue of new birth in light of the Bible's storyline. ***He first considers our human dilemma and the three things we people need.*** They are; *to be reconciled to God, to be morally transformed* or else our rebellion will continue to perpetuate itself, and we also need *the effects of sin somehow to be reversed.* These include not only our interrelationships but also death itself. Otherwise, death just keeps on winning as the universe keeps on decaying, creatures continue to go through pain, sorrow and disappointment.

Carson notes that *justification by faith alone* remedies these three problems, but it's by no means alone. For, Jesus is the revelation of God himself—*incarnate deity is He.* Thus, he can authoritatively speak to our plight—we are God's enemies. But on Calvary's cross, Jesus rectifies the enmity for it was there that God's justice and mercy kissed the earth and brought hope to our doom.

This hope comes through *new birth* which produces *inner transformation.* This is not complete until Christ finishes the work of sanctification in our lives through glorification. Thus, we are continuously to be in the process of becoming increasingly more like the Son of God. Here, our motives are of the utmost importance for outer transformation varies from person to person be it the rescued drug-addict or the straight-laced person seeming to be "squeaky clean."

Secondly, Carson explains what "new birth" or what "born-again" means in Jesus' mind. In our world, the term's "new birth" or "born-again conjures up a

car changing its name (e.g., from *Datsun* to *Nissan*) or a delegate changing from one political party to another (e.g., a *Democrat* becomes a *Republican*).

But for Jesus these terms point to the impossibility of man to do a single thing to attain salvation which utterly crushes human pride. And if this language of “new birth” is based on *the decision* of the one being born, it’s frankly bizarre. It’s weird because in our usage when a person is “born” their volition is never in the equation. Some other agent is always responsible for their existence. Moreover, to be born-again in Jesus’ view *guarantees* that one will see the kingdom of God.

Carson reminds us that what we really need are not new institutions but new men and women; what we need is not new laws but new lives; what we need is not new creeds but new creatures; what we need is not new power plays but new people.

Thirdly, Carson compares the difference in the flow of logic between Barna’s view and the Bible’s concerning new birth. Concerning Barna’s position (this is a group dedicated to gathering statistical information about the role of Faith in America, known to possess the nations’ most comprehensive databases of spiritual indicators) Carson sees a radically man-centered approach, not a Biblical one. For *being born-again* depends solely on ones profession of faith, saying a prayer or going to church. But a mere profession or decision by an individual is not what’s required. Instead, what’s required is a radically transformed life.

The Bible’s view however is radically God-centered and humbles our pride, for its’ the impossible which is required to be born again. We must start over, we must become something we can’t do ourselves, because in ourselves it’s impossible and we know it or do we? Regardless, *nothing less than transformation* must occur for assurance to be Biblically grounded.

Fourthly, Carson peers into what the meaning of “born of water and the Spirit” according to (Jn. 3:5) is. He affirms that it means to be born-again; it’s a parallel meaning, not two births, but one. In fact the reason in John 3, Jesus could speak with such knowledge and authority about new birth is because the revelation was divine; that is, it was God the Son speaking of what only God knows. God the son is the revelation and this is stunning. He comes from heaven

and hence he speaks of what he knows. His identity grounds his authority to speak and to know.

Fifthly, Carson rightly challenges us that to eventually understand Christianity we are going to have to come to terms with the claims it makes.

This starts what we will do with Jesus. If you accept what he says then you must bow to him, but if we dismiss his claims we deny his very identity which is not good. One correlation to Christ's identity is the connection between the account of new birth in John 3 and the Old Testament account of the bronze serpent in (Numbers 21:6-9)

"⁶ The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. ⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." ⁹ And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived."

The problem of the serpents was death at the door and the remedy was looking at what was killing them—snakes—which were on the pole (this prefigured the cross) and by doing so would save the people. Bizarre as it may seem, looking at the bronze serpent on the pole was God's way of rescue, and that was a type of the cross of Christ. That is, in order for people to be delivered from death they must put their trust in the provision of Christ's cross. But if that provision is rejected, only death awaits. Carson asks, "Have you been born-again?" At times I've doubted my conversion based on struggles with sin, actually feeling as if God did not care for me. But then again, I've seen my affections turn Godward increasingly as the years of struggle and sin persist. My struggle sounds like the one described by the apostle Paul in romans 7.

CHAPTER NINE: THE GOD WHO LOVES [Pages 135-149]

The Bible says that God is love, but it also says that God is just, holy and good. In the area of judgement and discernment many seems American Christians that are very confused, affirming things that flatly deny the Scriptures plain teachings on said matters.

First, Carson considers the difference between being morally discerning from being judgmental. He argued that having moral discernment deals with making distinctions that are based on revealed truth, where we humbly recognize our need to first deal with our own shortcomings in order to be able to see for the aid of another (Mathew 7:1-6)

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ²"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵"You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. ⁶"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

To be judgmental is based on a hypocritical disposition where self-righteousness is in the heart. This Jesus always condemns.

Second, Carson lists five ways the Bible speaks about the love of God. There's love within the Trinity. This is a perfect love:

*"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand."
(Jn.3:35)*

"For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, ²³so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." (Jn. 5:22-23)

“but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me Get up, let us go from here.” (Jn.14:31)

Then there’s love and God’s general care over the creation (Mt.5:44-47). This extends to friends and foes alike.

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶“For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷“If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”

What follows is God’s Love that invites, commands, and implores (Ez.33:11).

This is where God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; *“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”*

Then there’s God’s Love that’s selective (Mal.1:2-3). Here He chooses one and not another:

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob; ³but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”

Finally there’s God’s love that’s conditional (Jude 21). This is where those in covenant with God experience his pleasure and displeasure based on obedience to Him: *“keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”*

Third, Carson answers the question of the extent of God’s love. To answer, “does God love everyone in the same way” is dependent on what is meant. God does send the rain and the sun on both the righteous and the wicked, so the

answer in this sense is *yes!* But He chooses Israel over all the other nations as his special possession. Thus in this sense, the answer is *no!*

Having said that, Carson considers the famously read/heard text of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world,” and points that what makes God’s love so wonderfully admirable is grounded on the objects of His love—humans.

That is, we who are God hating, self-absorbed, murderous people, are nevertheless loved by God. He loves all nations and ethnicities—Jews and Gentiles. He does this not because we are so loveable, but because God is that kind of God. He’s amazing!

Fourth, Carson explains why the measure of God’s love for us is Jesus.

God gave us Himself in essence, the cost of which was the life of his treasured Son for God-haters! ***Consider Jesus’ tenderness*** when he had compassion on a leaderless people; how he embraced little children; how Isaiah speaking of Jesus said that a bruised reed he would not break. He is a *tender* God. And while he rebukes the hardened one’s; He also weeps for them:

“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” (Mt.9:36)

“But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Mt.19:14)

‘BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL-PLEASSED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. ¹⁹ “HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. ²⁰ “A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. ²¹ “AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE.” (Mt.12:18-21)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. ¹⁶ “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is

nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.”
(Mt.23:15-16)

Then, consider Jesus’ individual-ness. When he approached the rich young ruler he dealt with him in a very different way than he approached the Samaritan woman. They were both broken lives who were both addressed truthfully yet compassionately. What a Savior. The rest he offers to all who are weary and burdened is precious:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Mt.11:28-30)

Then consider His crucifixion. He loved us to the end “forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” (Lk.23:34) *Forsaken* by the Father on Calvary (Mt.27:45-46)

“Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

Fifth, Carson explains the purpose of God in giving us His Son. It was that we might have life. God gave his son not to *condemn* but to *save* the world! He came in order that *those* already condemned may be delivered, rescued and set free. To not believe means that people remain condemned. Whereas to believe means that one has been rescued from impending doom.

Carson concludes the chapter by explaining that God’s love will rightly stir in us gratitude and joy as we consider our weakness and need as finite creatures who are rightly dependent on an all-wise infinite God that has revealed himself in the creation and ultimately in his precious son. Nothing do I bring, to the cross alone I cling.

CHAPTER TEN: THE GOD WHO DIES AND LIVES AGAIN [Pages 151-167]

Carson first addresses the reason for why the Bible insists that Jesus was born in order to die. When we read biographies, never do we see, regardless of

the person and their import; never is it emphasized that they were born to die. Not Buddha, not Muhammad even though their deaths were recorded, it's not the purpose for why they were born. But the Gospel accounts are different.

In these biographies of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ it's clear that his disciples did not understand why he insisted that he had to die; that Jesus understood that the Father's purpose in him was to die; that his death was on his own initiative and that his death was not that of a martyr, but that of one willing to sacrifice (Jn. 10:17-18)

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

In Paul's account, the apostle makes clear that which is of first importance in (1 Cor.15:1-4ff.,) specifically that Christ died according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Miss this, and we *strip Christianity of its substance*. It's the doing away of our basis for belief, conduct, and understanding.

Secondly, Carson speaks of the ironies of the Cross. An irony is a word in its context that means exactly the opposite of what is said. This section is very sobering and penetrating to my soul for it deals with the cross. ***First, Carson relates that the man who is mocked as king, is King*** (Mt. 27:27-31)

"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, " Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. ³¹After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.'

Jesus is not just the king of the Jews, but also of the universe, and yet he humbly served his persecutors rather than exercise his power to destroy them (Mt. 20:25-28).

The second irony is that the man who is utterly powerless is transcendentally powerful (Mt. 27: 32-40)

“As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,³⁴ they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.³⁵ And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.³⁶ And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there.³⁷ And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”³⁸ At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.³⁹ And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads⁴⁰ and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

Jesus became the great meeting place between God and man—He is the *temple of meeting*. He’s the *temple* of the living God.

The third irony is that the man who can’t save himself saves others (Mt. 27:41-42)

“In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying,⁴² “He saved others; He cannot save Himself He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.”

“Saving” in this gospel refers to saving people from their sin: from its guilt, its consequences, its eternal effects, and its power in this life. Thus, the ultimate meaning behind physical healing, is the eternal effects of Christ’ rescue in this fallen evil age. Had he saved himself, we would be lost. It’s the very purpose for

hanging on that cross so that he may bear the iniquity of us all in his body. Had he saved himself, I would be damned!

Fourth, the man who cries in despair trusts God (Mt.27:43-51)

⁴³"HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" ⁴⁷And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.

⁴⁹But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." ⁵⁰And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ⁵¹And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

Access to the holiest place has been purchased only because the son was in the darkest place for us. That's amazing grace indeed.

Thirdly, Carson unpacks the issue of God dying. In one sense it's incorrect to say that God died, but Jesus is the one who died, not God the Father. Thus the reason for some texts in the New Testament to warrant the truth that in one sense, when Jesus died, God died is to accentuate the cost that was paid for my ransom (Acts 20:28; Rom.5:8). The truth is that you can trust a God who is not only sovereign, but One who also bleeds for you!

Fourthly, Carson unfolds the reason for why Thomas doubts that Jesus had risen from the dead. This disciple did not want to be duped. Can you blame him...no?! He believed that Jesus was the Messiah and all his hopes were dashed to the ground. That's a lot of pain. He wanted to be sure that the body that died on the cross was the same body he would handle.

When Jesus appeared and Thomas saw he exclaimed, "My Lord and My God!" Why does he say so much, rather than a smaller and weaker—you are

alive! Perhaps because of all that Jesus had said and taught privately to the disciples; (e.g., before Abraham was I am, he who has seen me has seen the Father,). It's quite possible that the elation and utter joy expressed the overflow of the revelation of Christ and his previously spoken words pointing to himself, that Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord, and My God." How utterly personal is that?!

Lastly, Carson tackles the issue of why it is that in the ultimate sense God alone can forgive sins. This is because only the offended party can forgive. According to Scripture God is always the *most* offended party (Ps. 51:4; Mk. 2:5, 7) David and the paralytic. "Who can forgive sins but God?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE GOD WHO DECLARES THE GUILTY JUST [Pages 169-185]

In this chapter Carson tackles the issue of how and why God can and does declare the guilty just. It's largely Paul's argument in Romans 1-11 and is perhaps the most misunderstood aspects of the gospel transculturally.

First, Carson explains why it's impossible to be acquitted with justice on the ground of the good things we do. The reason is because we are all law breakers: those *with the Book*, and those *without the Book*. All of us have broken even our own *lesser* standards. It's ridiculous for the *murderer to appeal* to his "good deeds" before the judge after he in fact has been properly convicted of committing the crime. How much more before the judge of Creation?! And yet, people tend to flock to this absurdity when it comes to eternal matters.

Second, the main theme of Romans 1:18-3:20 is precisely how everyone is justly guilty before God. All are under judgement; all are guilty, because they have denied God the Creator. They have thus become fools and Paul reminds us that there are none righteous, none who understands, none who seeks God, none who does good, not even one—their deeds and words condemn them, none who fears God. Humanity is the core of all the evil there is, for in wanting to go our own way we have all disowned the God who is there, The One, who has made us.

Third, Carson explains several ways in which the Old Testament anticipates the arrival of Jesus. There's the sacrificial system of the blood of bulls and goats which *testify to* what was to come in the new covenant. Here the high priest came with sacrifices into the holiest place on the Day of Atonement—all pointing to Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Then, there are the *Ten*

Commandments which anticipate a day when murder and adultery will not only be prohibited but unthinkable in the new heavens and new earth. And there's also the anticipated day from the law when the righteousness of God would be revealed in Christ.

Fourth, Carson considers how God's righteousness is available to all people without racial distinction but on the basis of faith. The reason it's good news for the above mentioned caption to be true is because *all* are guilty before God, *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. *All* means everyone under heaven's sky, on earth's dirt and in the oceans water. Carson then explains three terms related to our salvation in Christ.

There's *righteousness*, which is achieved through Christ's redemption. This redemption involves buying back from the slave market one who is indebted to another and has absolutely no possible means to pay for the debt. A redeemer is one who purchases the one in debt and delivers him and his family from slavery to another. Biblically, Jesus justifies us freely *through faith by the redemption of his blood*. Thus, believers are *justified* before the God of heaven!

Then there's the act of *propitiation*. Propitiation is that sacrificial act whereby God becomes favorably disposed to us. He is set over against us in wrath, but now by *the sacrificial act* of His son, He has become favorable toward us.

Another term is *expiation*, which is the act whereby God wipes out sin from the board, sin here is cancelled. The object of expiation is *sin*, while the object of propitiation is *God*. The text says that God *propitiated* God through the sacrifice of His son. This is mind boggling in light of the fact that in the pagan world those offering sacrifices for propitiation to the gods were the worshippers. Not so in the Bible, *God propitiates God*. Thus, turning away of God's wrath and the cancelling of sin are achieved by both expiation and propitiation.

Fifth, Carson explains what is meant when Paul says that in the cross God is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus. *God's holiness* must be maintained. Therefore He must punish sin which He did through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. He maintained *Justice!* *God's love* has been demonstrated by paying for our sins on the cross. He displayed *Love!* Unlike so many understand today, in the Bible faith is related to truth. If it's not true, it's worthless.

In the Bible, Faith doesn't mean that which makes you feel good and is not subject to verification. Rather, it deals with that which is stated and argued as

actually occurring in space-time history. Paul does this in 1 Corinthians 15 where he affirms that if Christ has not truly been raised from the dead the first witnesses are all liars. Again, if Christ has not truly been raised from the dead we are still in our sins. Then if Christ has not truly been raised from the dead our faith is useless. And that if Christ has not truly been raised from the dead we are to be pitied more than anyone else. Our lives are a joke precisely because we consider that which is false to be true.

Conversely, if the resurrection is actually true, then all others rejecting the truth of these claims are sadly under the wrath of God and the “joke” is on them. That’s sobering, sad, and must cause our hearts to live under God as we endeavor to shine in this world for Christ.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE GOD WHO GATHERS AND TRANSFORMS HIS PEOPLE [Pages 187-200]

In this chapter Carson first notes why scaling and measuring Christian commitment from nominalism to fanaticism is mischievous. The reason is because the grace of God truly humbles us. It is radically loving, forgiving, and generous. That is because unlike other religions whose focus is on *effort* and *moral improvement*, such that the result is self-righteous, bigoted, over-confident, condescending people, Christianity is different when one is biblically faithful.

For Christianity underscores the fact of *grace* that *transforms* a Biblically faithful living out of the regenerated life where salvation is by grace, and is based on Christ’s work on our behalf, not on our own achievements. This changes everything! Even though true Christians have done awful things (e.g., *Crusades*, *Slavery*, etc.), it’s the very Christian message previously ignored that challenged and eventually toppled these enterprises.¹ Christianity has often apologized for the Crusades but Islam has not.

Second, Carson considers the fact that something has to be ultimate. If God is not ultimate then it will be the creature’s creation; be it the State, the Dictator, or any other idea. The reason for this is our “mannishness” which is

¹ I don’t think that all of the Crusaders were evil, but those who in their activity crossed the boundaries between what is clearly contra Christ’s teaching to hate what is evil and cling to that which is good. See Rodney Starks book, *GOD’S BATTALIONS: The Case for the Crusades*, © 2009 by Rodney Stark, Harper One, Harper Collins Publishing Company, New York, NY

designed to worship the Creator and when He is not then inevitably the image bearer concocts something to worship.

The gospel calls out people, gathers them together, and transforms them. Thus, any so-called Christianity that does not incorporate the aforesaid reality into its vision, is not worthy of the name it carries. For according to Ephesians 2:8-10 believers are saved by grace through faith in order to do the good works God *prepared* for them to walk in. This means that new birth *necessarily* produces the fruit of the “new creation,” and while good works don’t secure our salvation, they attest to the genuineness of it. *Transformation must occur!*

Third, Carson considers whether or not one can be a biblically faithful Christian and separate themselves entirely from a local church. He answers absolutely not and rightly so! Consider Paul’s take in (Ephesians 2:11-22):

“¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷ AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; ¹⁸ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

The church is God's *household* where we are being built up into a *holy temple* where Christ Jesus is the chief *cornerstone*. In the Old Testament circumcision was the mark pointing to the one who belonged to the redeemed community. In the New Testament baptism is the initiation one receives in order to join the Church. This flows from the reality of new-birth in the early church.

In this community God speaks, sanctifies, transforms, and puts many into leadership positions. The church is not a building, but rather the gathered people of God. Thus, Biblically faithful church people (while not perfectly) are the people of God who reflect His character among themselves and the world.

Fourth, Carson speaks to the reasons for why Christians are moved to obey from a posture of gratitude for what Christ has done. He points out that looking at things is utterly transforming because they force us to see that empty handed we came to the cross and filled with treasure we leave. Where we once thirsted, now we are satisfied and this is apart from anything we do or bring, because it's all based on what Christ has done and given to us—new creation! (Eph. 4:17-5:10)

And while moral structures are definitely here, they are never nor ever can be the basis for gratitude when we see the gospel exemplified on Calvary's cross. We've been so deeply forgiven, how can we hold a grudge? We've been given the Spirit securing our future inheritance how then can we be stingy and cling to fleeting treasure? We are destined to be with Almighty God Forever! Hence, everything changes!

Fifth, Carson considers why greed is labeled idolatry. The reason is because what you most want becomes your god. It displaces God who is ultimate, it makes me long for that which *is contingent, finite*, and at the end of the day—*what will fail me!* It's the looking for our *identity* in someone or something other than God, that's why it's labeled greed.

Sixth, Carson accentuates that for the Christian suffering is both a privilege and a sign of grace. Suffering transforms our attitudes when we obey *Jesus' command to follow him*, "take up your cross and follow me". This is stunning and too often utterly missed in the church. Crucifixion was brutal, it was torture. (Mt. 16:24). Death to self-interest is the point. Though most of us will not be tortured for our faith, all of us face the issue of saying to God, "*My will, not*

Yours' be done, sorry--God". The scripture reveals that it's been *granted* to us not only to believe on Christ but also to *suffer* on his behalf (Phil.1:29).

Both *belief* and *suffering* are *equally gifts from God to us*. This is so counter-intuitive that unless it were so clear, I would today still miss it as I read these same words early in my Christianity and just glossed over them as impertinent to my situation. Amy Carmichael and Jacob DeShazer have stories that depict a life of self-sacrifice where self-pity was not nurtured, but the transforming power that the gospel brings was exemplified.

Seventh, Carson reflects on John Newton's life and the lesson we can learn from him. It goes something like, "that while I sin and do fall down, The Lord does lift me from the ground, And while I hate the sin I see, I'm not the man I used to be, For grace has given me new life, And when in death I close my eyes, Christ's loving arms will be my prize. That's profound.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE GOD WHO IS VERY ANGRY [Pages 201-211]

First, Carson opens the chapter by considering why talk about the wrath of God tends to make people so uncomfortable. In our culture according to Carson, "...it is hard to think about this topic because anger is often connected in the public mind with intolerance, narrow-mindedness, and bigotry". And yet, according to the "eternal gospel" in Revelation 14:6-7 the herald calls every nation, tribe, language and people to fear the God of all creation and give Him glory and worship for His judgment has come. And the impending doom of paganism (e.g., Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great) is that of a "society that's been set free of God is its own worst enemy":

"⁶ And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; ⁷ and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

Second, Carson considers how Revelation 4&5 unpack the gospel. According to Carson, revelation 4-5 unpacks for us what the gospel is. Chapter 4 reveals that God is the God of creation and the entire created order is dependent

on Him to live move and have its being. Chapter 5 reveals God’s purpose for judgment and blessing and only the Lion, who is the Lamb, can open the seals.

Third, Carson looks at the meaning of two agricultural metaphors found in Revelation 14:14-20. The grain and the treading of the wine press are teaching about the final judgment.

“¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.” ¹⁶ Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

¹⁷ And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.”¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. ²⁰ And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.”

Grain Harvest means that a set time is coming when the harvest will happen, and there’s *no escaping it*. It speaks of the goal of history, and end in sight, where time will be no more after the final judgment.

The Treading of the Wine Press means to emphasize the violent thoroughness of God’s wrath when it is finally poured out. This imagery is horrific—it’s about the trampled blood of people by God’s thorough wrath.

Fourth, Carson addresses the issue of manipulation when we talk about hell. Many have charged that talking about hell is manipulative. Carson rightly emphasizes that it’s not manipulative if it’s true. After all, Jesus spoke of hell

more than any other person in the Bible and he warned people of impending doom (Mt. 10:28). However, if it were a lie, then it would be manipulative and the charge would be warranted. But, if it's true, to not sound the alarm is vicious, cruel, and unloving. Jesus warned people, we must also...but many times we have not. That's troubling!

When we preach about hell we want to be faithful to Christ's attitude about it, not betray Him. Moreover, we who have been pardoned by the sovereign grace of God through the Son were once under God's wrath. We're no better than any other person. We are beggars/prisoners who know where to find bread, and who have received pardon. Plain and simple!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: *THE GOD WHO TRIUMPHS* [Pages 213-224]

In this final chapter, *Carson first explains what it means "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also" from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.6:21)*. He explains that it means we are to choose our treasure, not guard our hearts. Here Jesus presupposes that our hearts will follow our treasure. The term *heart* is that aspect of our being created in God's image that contains what we think, cherish, and who we are. It's not merely our emotions. The heart is that apparatus of the soul where we eat, drink, breath, sleep and dream of (x).

Our imagination lingers on those things we treasure most. Unfortunately, good things become bad things when they keep our appetites *only* on the present state of affairs, at the expense of the *new heaven/earth* that are forthcoming. This however does not happen in places like the Sudan/China where persecuted believers await the deliverance from said evils.

Moreover, unlike the Greek dualism of salvation—consisting of the flight of the soul from the earthly and transitory to the spiritual and eternal, the Biblical view is where—man is always placed on a redeemed earth, not a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence.ⁱ The future of this earthly existence is specifically described in the book of Revelation.

Second, Carson explains the forthcoming New Jerusalem. When the scriptures describe the New Jerusalem being built like a cube, we must understand that its' symbol laden. The only place a cube is found in all of scripture is the tabernacle—the Most Holy Place. This is where the Ark of the Covenant lay, the place of meeting with God—on the Day of Atonement. This was

the place where God manifested his glory when the blood of sacrifice was poured on it.

The New Jerusalem, the entire city is a cube which is a way of saying that we will forever be in the presence of God. We will no longer need a mediating priest, neither a blood sacrifice, equivalent when the veil was rent in two after the crucifixion. So not only is it described as a cube, but it's also described in terms of negation—*what is not there*.

³ *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."* (Rev.3-4)

Carson is of the view that the reason we speak of the New Jerusalem in terms of negation rather than in a positive description is because it's easier to describe it negatively in light of the effects of the fall in our lives. The negative description assures us there will be the absence of: *tears, pain, mourning, death and nothing bad*. The positive side is incalculable pleasure. We have yet to experience *anything* like this!

There are also many things missing from this city: the *temple, sun and moon, impurity*. The reason for the temple missing is because God Himself will be there. Here the heart of God is revealed for in a real sense we're in His heart!

The sun and moon are lights no longer needed in *light of Gods glory* and the Lamb our *lamp*. The ancients were given structured times through these two lights. Moreover, they experienced much danger when night came—hence cities were closed at night for safety. Thus when it comes to this city there will be no more danger, curse, sin or rebellion because God is in the midst. Thus, an immaculate perfect moral state will obtain. Such a thought is utterly foreign to any of our references to life. And yet, an absolute God-centeredness will be the norm because that is *the way it should be*. This means that the culture in the new heavens and new earth will be infused with absolute *shalom*—whose measureless source is the God of heaven and earth.

When it comes to the best *feature* of the New Jerusalem, is the its' peacefulness. This peaceful habitation of the lion and the lamb will be amazing. It's the unfettered, unhindered beatific vision that will be most joyfully glorious.

It is the contemplation of the manifold perfections of our spectacular, unimaginable God. Here, we see face to face and live for our sins have “been burned away”.

Third, Carson explains what it means to live now in light of the new heaven and the new earth. He points to the need that we understand that all I have is Christ; to live is Christ and to die is gain; God alone is our true heart’s desire; it is truly making it our aim to: *love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and you’re your strength.*

Friend, are you ready for the new heaven and the new earth? I’d like to say yes honestly and truly. I fear that this world and the cares of this life want to drag me down so often. I want to be more vigilant, resting in His grace that empowers me to say no to ungodliness and embrace the holiness purchased for me to walk in by Christ’s blood. Lord, help me thirst for the new heaven and earth and help me be the light that I am. (SDG)

¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, pg. 368, © 1977 Eerdmans Publishing House]