

Clear as a Bell

A **Biblical Evaluation** of
Rob Bell and Don Golden's text,
*Jesus Wants to Save Christians:
A Manifesto for the Church in Exile*



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'chapter 1' project

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Rob Bell and Don Golden's text,
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Past, Present and Future

Dear Reader,

Greetings! The e-book you've begun to read is but my first attempt to respond to some of the error that in modern Christian books must exist. We know that the Bible is the only book ever written without any error. We know, too, that some within Christendom work to comingle man's imperfect wisdom with God's perfect wisdom, for a variety of reasons.

Whatever the motive, the result is somewhere between **imperfection** and **apostasy**.

As some of you know from reading my posts at **the red pen**, I have worked for the past few months to relay my concerns to Rob Bell and Don Golden regarding the material found in the introduction and the first chapter of their last book, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile*.

As I have yet to receive any kind of response from either of them whatsoever, I feel it necessary to take the discussion (as to what is true concerning who Jesus truly wants and what God has mandated for today's local church) to the next level.

After speaking with several believers in Christ about reading materials, there seems to be a consensus: one should be able to get a good understanding as to how closely – or not – the author(s) will hold to biblical truths after reading the **opening chapter** of a book. Hopefully, this **chapter 1** project will become a model for other Christians who desire to take greater care in their reading.

My hope is that those who read will grow in the way of discerning what is truly Biblical and what is clearly manmade.

Please read with your own Bible at hand, ready to locate and read a passage at a moment's notice. Be ready, too, to be rather surprised at what passes for Christian material nowadays.

To God be the glory!



PS Please relay whatever comments or suggestions you might have to me at teacher@redpen.org.

Initial Letter to Rob Bell and Don Golden - 2/09

Dear Rob and Don,

Hello. Here's that first post as I attempt to hold your latest book, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* up to the truth of God's Word. I hope it is of value to you and whoever reads it.

To God be the glory,
Chris

PS Some brief housekeeping notes:

1. For the sake of time and clarity, I will be using +, -, + / -, and ? symbols.
 - A '+' will precede any passage where clearly your writing was in step with the truth of Scripture.
 - A '-' will precede any passage where clearly your writing strays from the truth of God's Word.
 - A '+ / -' will precede any passage wherein truth and error are mixed together.
 - A '?' will precede any passage that is questionable in some respect.
2. By using a small number of faithful translations, you and my students can see that I am not beholden to any one translation in particular. I use the KJV (King James Version), NKJV (New King James Version), NASB (New American Standard Bible) and ESV (English Standard Version).
3. I'll do my best to bear in mind the **context** in which you write. I want to do justice to your material, just as you would to mine, if the shoe were on the other foot.
4. Some brief explanation on my numbering system: The first character after the number sign, "o" in the expression above, refers to the number of the chapter I'm currently reviewing. The numbers that follow the decimal, "009" above, simply refers to the page number.

Title and Subtitle

- *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*

Your title implies that Christians aren't saved. This is, of course, a biblical impossibility. Jesus taught that many who consider themselves to be Christians would not enter the kingdom of Heaven.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." Matthew 7:21 (NKJV)

Christ is clearly referring here to those who are not truly "Christians" according to the biblical definition of the term. Unclear in an attempt to sound bold and **provocative**.

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? *A Manifesto for the Church in Exile*

Similar trouble with your subtitle. "A Manifesto" implies a statement or proclamation, yes, but what is "the Church in Exile?" **Unclear**.

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Introduction to the Introduction

Page 008

? “...the narrative of the Bible...”

This term is rather new and needs more **clarification**. Do you mean “the story” or are you referring to the responsibility we believers have to rightly interpret what we read in the Bible? **Vague.**

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+ “In the Scriptures, ultimate truths about the universe are revealed through the stories of particular people living in particular places.”

I agree almost completely. The truths revealed through the accounts in the biblical record are “ultimate,” as they communicated to us by the Most High God through His Word.

I would only ask you to replace “stories” with “accounts” to give correct right **credibility** to the events recorded for us in the Bible.

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? “...some of these words, such as *Egypt* and *the Jews*, have power to evoke feelings and thoughts and attitudes about the very pain and division in our world that this book addresses. We join you in this tension, believing that the story is ultimately about healing, hope, and reconciliation.”

While this statement may be intended to sound sensitive, it is actually fractious. There is no supposed “tension” here, as you call it, just as no right-minded American confuses our country today with the United States of America of 1776 when reading about current events. Please omit.

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+ “The word theology comes from two Greek words: *theo*, which means “God,” and *logos*, which means “word.”

Exactly right.

- “Theology, a word about God.”

Exactly **wrong**. Let me explain.

While *logos* literally means “word” in English, that’s not an accurate representation of how the root word is used in English language today. Look up any definition of any word ending with – *logy*, and you’ll find the word “**study**.”

Archeology isn’t simply words about ancient artifacts; it is the **study** of those artifacts as part of a larger investigation into the history of a particular region. *Dermatology* is “the branch of medicine devoted to the study and care of the skin.” ¹ To say, “My skin is itchy,” may be true, but it’s not dermatology.

To push the point home, though, I suppose one could make the following statement, “Zebras are white horses with black stripes,” and call it **zoology**. Did I make a statement regarding a particular animal? Yes. Is it true? Of course not. Therefore, we would have to call this **bad zoology**.

Likewise, any “word about God” which does not reflect the truth of Scripture is **bad theology**. Something to always keep in the forefront of our minds as pastors and teachers for the Lord.

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+ / - “We are part of a church, a community of people learning to live the way of Jesus together.”

A church is that, yes, but you’ve left out one really important detail. The people that make up the church, according to God’s Word, are supposed to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ. In our **postmodern** age, while some strive to blur and distort that simple truth, we must be ever mindful about communicating this truth clearly and faithfully.

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Introduction: Air Puffers and Rubber Gloves

Page 012

- “The first family was dysfunctional.”

While this is true, we could say the same of all families. Since we are all born with a **sinful condition**, a family is (in one sense) a group of sinners.

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- + “A farmer is settled...a shepherd is nomadic.”

In most cases, this is true. Some shepherds, though, have enough land that they do not have to wander to and fro.

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- “A shepherd doesn’t have a strong sense of boundaries, because he sees all land as a possible spot for him to stop and feed his flock.”

This statement is, I’m afraid, a **departure from reality**, unless you’re talking about “a shepherd who has no concept as to how he should manage sheep without making all the land-owners that he runs into really, really angry.”

You’re trying far too hard to build a polemic that simply isn’t there. To say that shepherds don’t have a strong sense of boundaries is akin to stating, “A doctor treats her patients with a complete abandon of what is medically legal simply because she did not train to be a lawyer.”

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- “And that would raise the question, Whose land is it, anyway?”

I see where you’re going. The shepherd would **have** to be separate from the land-owning farmer if you’re going to set up this question properly.

Let me answer, in brief. God owns the land (of course), but He desires for us to act as good and

faithful stewards of the land.

Does the farmer own the land he purchased? In a sense, yes. Is it still God's? **Absolutely.**

Could a shepherd ever own land in the way that a farmer does? Of course, and they have throughout the ages.

Not a viable execution of the set-up. Please rewrite.

Don't know what to make of your question pertaining to land ownership, but I assume it includes aspects of **resource distribution**. Time will tell, but this is already starting to smell like a treatise for a social gospel...



Page 013

- "The story of these two first sons (Cain and Abel) is actually a story of progress, innovation, and the inevitable forward movement of human civilization. The Genesis account reflects the transition that was occurring...a seismic shift was occurring as human society transitioned from a pastoral, nomadic orientation to an agricultural one. This was a huge change that did not come without a lot of strife. And, occasionally, murder."

Actually, you're wrong by one generation, and you've **completely** missed the point.

Genesis 3:23 states, "the LORD God sent him from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken."

The "seismic shift" was not seen in the difference between the occupations (and guiding principles of those occupations) of Cain and Abel. It occurred when Adam and Eve were **disobedient**.

As a result, they were evicted from paradise, and commanded to labor as farmers. They went from being in perfect, right relationship with their Creator to one that would be **fractured** throughout the duration of their lives on Earth.

This is an account of obedience and disobedience, plain and simple. It details the first **murder**, not human progress. It is a story of **envy** and **wrath**, not human innovation.

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? “There is a place called Eden, a paradise, a state of being in which everything is in its right place. A realm where the favor and peace of God rest on everything.”

Robert Schuller wrote something very similar in the text, *Self-Esteem*. He remarked that Hell was not a literal place, but that it was instead a **state of mind** wherein we have a wrong view of ourselves.

A quick read of Genesis 2 and 3 should clear up any question as to whether Eden was a literal place or a “state of being in which everything is in its right place.”

You realize that there is a **world of difference** between a literal place and a state of being. Please **reconsider**.

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- “The writer, or writers, of Genesis keeps returning to this eastward metaphor, insisting that something has gone terribly wrong with humanity, and that from the very beginning humans are moving in the wrong direction.”

Read Genesis 3:24 and tell me whether or not we have (since the Fall of Man) been moving in the wrong direction:

“He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” (ESV)

We know from the biblical record that Adam and Eve did leave Eden. This means that they obeyed God in terms of “where they were moving.”

We know that Cain did not obey God, but there have been plenty of examples of those who were moving in the “right direction,” that being God’s direction:

- Abel
- The nation of Israel
- Nehemiah
- Noah
- Moses
- Job
- Joseph
- David

I could go on and on. Each of those names listed above did, at some time, act in a way that was displeasing to God. Each, though, are known for acting in a way that **was** pleasing to God at various times.

This fact **completely invalidates** your premise. Please omit.

(By the way, the “eastward metaphor” that you’ve constructed is unnecessary in light of the fact that the message of the Bible is essentially one of God, His creation, the sin of man, our need for redemption, and the fulfillment of that redemption through the finished work of Christ. There can be no room for such contrivances when **truth** is spelled out completely and perfectly.)

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Pages 014-016

? “There’s a new invention at the airport...it has something to do with detecting the presence of explosive substances...keeping us safe is very, very profitable.”

I left out much of the rest here, since much of it reads like a **blog** (and was easy to jettison, to be honest).

Your main point here seems to be that there’s some problem with some company making a profit because they make devices that may or may not make us safer.

One has to wonder if you apply the same logic to **seat belts** in cars, since most of us are safe drivers and the data shows that the device increases our chances of being kept safe during an accident by a number less than 100%.

I have to suppose that you would rather that these corporations make these goods on a voluntary basis, or are you positing that we shouldn’t have to live in such a world where such precautions are necessary?

My guess is the latter...but time will tell. **It always does.**

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Page 017

- “One can’t help but wonder, is there an enemy of America, hiding somewhere in a cave,

laughing? Already plotting some other way to harm us that will have nothing to do with airplanes? Or are they plotting nothing? Because they realize that whatever they might do next, it would be nowhere as destructive as what we're already doing to ourselves."

One can't help but wonder: is there some connection between this political discussion and the idea that *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*?

One can't help but ask: What are we "already doing to ourselves" that is so destructive? Far too **elusive** here.

So you have a political opinion regarding terrorists that would place you on the far left of the ideological spectrum. I get it. So why confuse your **fringe opinion** with what Jesus wants?

Jesus himself said that He came to save **those who were lost**. (The "lost" in Scripture clearly refers to those unsaved, unbelieving enemies of God.)

You're **muddying** the waters on a scale that you cannot imagine. Please reconsider this train of thought.

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- "The Germans...call it *ursprache* (oor-shprah-kah)...the primal, original language of the human family. It's the language of paradise that still echoes in the deepest recesses of our consciousnesses, telling us that things are out of whack deep in our bones, deep in the soul of humanity."

I'm glad you gave me this opportunity to point out the problem with your endnotes. For the sake of those readers at home, let me cite your endnote:

"*Ursprache* is a hypothetical parent language from which other languages derive...a universal language that gives meaning to all speech."

WOW. You've gone beyond muddying the waters. You're now citing a fictional language as evidence. **Totally off the deep end.**

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? "...American forces are now occupying this Middle Eastern country until peace can be fully realized within its borders."

One can't help but wonder: is this a manifesto for the church, or for the United States of America? Sounding more and more like **political diatribe** with every turn of the page.



- "This puts a Christian in an awkward place. Because Jesus was a Middle Eastern man who lived in an occupied country and was killed by a superpower of his day."

Not really, yes, yes, and no.

Not really: The fact that U.S. troops continue to help keep the peace in Iraq (similar to how U.N. peacekeeping efforts work) does not put me "in an awkward place" as a Christian. I may agree or disagree politically, but it really has no bearing on the mandate we have as believers:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:19-20, KJV)

Yes: Jesus was a Jew, and Israel does reside in the Middle East.

Yes: Israel was occupied by Rome during the life of Jesus.

No: He wasn't killed by any superpower. He was murdered by the Jews of that day. Peter, a disciple of Jesus and a witness to the fact, recounted as much in Acts 2:

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." (vv. 22-23, ESV)

Furthermore, it would be theologically correct to say that sinful man, you and I and every Gentile and every Jew who ever lived (other than Christ himself), are **directly responsible** for the death of Jesus.

It would also be theologically correct to say that it was essential to God's plan for salvation that Jesus be slain. We must stop short, though, of saying God the Father killed Jesus. To say that would be **contra-scriptural**.

I could cite more chapter and verse, but I'm sure you two (and the others reading) are already familiar with these passages.

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Page 018

? “The Roman Empire, which put Jesus on an execution stake, insisted that it was bringing peace to the world through its massive military might, and anybody who didn’t see it this way just might be put on a cross.”

A couple of problems here.

First, regardless of what the Roman Empire insisted, their agenda was clearly **conquest**. If you’re trying to make comparisons between early Rome and modern-day America that are beneficial for the Christian to consider, I exhort you to examine the various **cultural** comparisons, that the believer would be challenged to live in a way that is biblical.

Second, we Christians would do better to recognize the difference between having a political view that is in opposition to the state from the need to live in a manner different from the world in which we live.

Jesus said, in John 15:19, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (ESV)

For more on this, see John 15:19, John 17:14, James 1:27, 1 John 2:15, and James 4:4.

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- “The insistence of the first Christians was that through this resurrected Jesus Christ, God has made peace with the world.”

Not even close. In Matthew 10:34, Jesus said:

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (KJV)

How is this not in direct contradiction with what you wrote? We know that the Gospel has the power to save (that is, to reconcile **individuals** to God), certainly, but we also know (from **countless** other references in the Bible) that it will **divide** believers from unbelievers.

Please read such verses in **context** before making such universalistic statements, and **omit**.

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- “And the *ursprache* continues to echo within each one of us, telling us that things aren’t right, that we’re up against something very old...it appears that many Christians support some of the very things Jesus came to set people free from”

I would agree with you that people know “something isn’t right,” but I would go in a much different direction with this idea if I were you.

Sin is a very old problem indeed. Jesus did come to set people free from the bondage of sin. For some reason, though, it’s clear that you desire to convince readers that He came to set them free from something else entirely.

What would that be? Their **traditional** trappings? Their **western** mindset? **Conservative** principles? Again, this smells more and more like a treatise for a **social gospel** than anything remotely resembling the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Chapter 1 - The Cry of the Oppressed

Page 022

? "The first book of the Bible...Exodus? ...Many scholars see Exodus as the book in which the central story of redemption begins - liberation from Egypt."

Confusing. Just because the account of the Israelites' liberation from Egypt happened in the book of Exodus, that doesn't make it the first book.

In fact, wouldn't it be strange to begin with Exodus and follow up with Genesis? Give the account of the Jews being enslaved by Egypt, and then show how the world was created, sin entered the world, and so on? **Nonsensical.**



- Your endnote doesn't clear things up any either.

"The Old Testament refers to God much more often as "the God who brought you out of Egypt" (thirty-two times) than it does as God as "Creator" (six times). The exodus event is the context in which the creation story is given."

This doesn't prove that Exodus should be considered the first book of the Bible. Each time God was mentioned as "the God who brought you out of Egypt," it was simply for the sake of **reminding** the Jewish nation what God had done for them.

Just because a contemporary commentator, John Durham, says "The Book of Exodus is the first book of the Bible" doesn't make it so.

Weak argument. **Omit.**



Page 023

+ "The Hebrew word used here is *sa'aq*...the expression of pain, the ouch, the sound we utter when we are wounded."

This is a fair explanation of the original Hebrew word. Strong's concordance defines it as:

“to *shriek*; (by implication) to *proclaim* (an assembly): - X at all, call together, cry (out), gather (selves) (together).” ²

Certainly, “cry” takes on a different connotation when we’re talking about the cry of a group or a nation, as opposed to that of an individual, but it means essentially the same.

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? “But *sa’aq* is also a question...that arises out of the pain of the wound. Where is justice? Did anybody see that? Who will come to my rescue? Did anybody hear that? Or am I alone here?”

A little later, you write, “The Israelites are oppressed, they’re in misery, they’re suffering – and when they cry out, God hears. This is a God who always hears the cry...God *always* hears the cry of the oppressed.”

Your point about justice and rescue is thoughtful and does need to be investigated. We **will** be mistreated from time to time, even oppressed. Something at our core us tells us it’s wrong, and we typically desire relief or justice (or both) in the matter.

What’s missing from your depiction of Exodus, though, is something very central, something we cannot lose sight of: When the Israelites cried out, they cried out **to their God**.

It was not some half-hopeful plea to a nondescript listener, not knowing if anyone might hear. The Israelites knew a) who their God was, b) that He heard such pleas, and c) that He sometimes dealt very mercifully and kindly with them. That was their hope, and that hope was based on what they know of the faithfulness of God.

Please reconsider this. It’s vitally important for believers to know that they can bring their concerns directly to God, that Jesus is right now making intercession on their behalf, that God listens, and that He always answers, in His perfect timing according to His perfect plan.

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Page 024

? “When we’re on top, when the system works for us, when we are capable of managing our lives, what is there for God to do?”

If you actually believe that the Christian can “manage” their lives in a way that is pleasing to God

without His direct involvement and enabling, then you are giving yourselves **much more credit** than you deserve. Please pray about this and **reconsider this line of thinking altogether.**



+ / - “But the cry – the cry inaugurates redemptive history. These slaves in Egypt cry out and God hears and something new happens. Things aren’t how they were. Things change. These slaves are rescued from the oppression of Egypt.”

The Exodus account does indeed demonstrate God’s desire that the Jews be freed, which does serve as further evidence of His plan for the redemption of all who would believe on the name of Jesus Christ for salvation.

The folks at **Theopedia** supply this concise definition:

“**Redemptive history** is a general term to describe the study of God's acts of redemption from creation to the present. Although a broad field of study, all of redemptive history can be said to climax and culminate in the Cross, encompassing Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.”³

A very handy thing, these definitions...so long as we agree on them.

There is the potential in what you’ve been writing for you to stray dramatically from this much-agreed-upon definition, and retool it to say something more in the way of:

“**Redemptive history** is a term to describe the study of God and His creation, that all people everywhere seek social justice on this side of the grave in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Good thing God is perfectly just and wise in all things, knowing that the believer will experience injustices along their Christian walk, and that these injustices are to be endured as Christ endured the **lashes** and the **indignity** and the **Cross** for you and me.

(For more on this, please read Acts 5:41, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 4:12, 9:12, 2 Corinthians 1:6, 11:19, Galatians 6:12-17, Philippians 1:29, 4:12, 1 Thessalonians 3:4, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-6, 1 Timothy 4:10-11, 2 Timothy 1:12, 2:9-12, 3:10-12, 1 Peter 2:20-21, 3:13-17, Revelation 2:10-11.)

True, we should always pursue what is good and right in Jesus’ name, but look at the number of times we are called to suffer for our Lord’s sake. Rather than seek out justice on this side of the grave, we would do better to seek **contentment**, knowing that every situation in which God places us is for our good.

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Page 025

+ / ? “To understand how central Egypt is to the flow of the biblical story, we had to go back to the introduction to the Bible, space to the Garden of Eden.”

Exactly right, but I’ve got ask: what’s “the flow of the biblical story?” “Flow” is something we associate with the story structure of **fictional novels**, not God’s Word. Please reconsider using, lest readers of your text unintentionally give fictional novels the same place of honor that should be reserved for the Bible.

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? “This is a rapid, dramatic progression from Adam and Eve to their sons. We’ve gone from eating fruit to murder in one generation. Things are falling apart very quickly.”

It is true that things are falling apart as you say, but we must always strive to call things what they are so we are not misunderstood. Jesus called this **sin**, Paul called this **sin**, other prophets and apostles in the Bible called it **sin**, so we ought to call it **sin**. If you are not willing to discuss what theologians have referred to as “Original Sin” as indeed sinful, then you cannot claim to preach the gospel of Christ.

Verse 45 in 1 Corinthians 15 is but one place where God makes it very clear to us how essential the truth of Original Sin is to the gospel message of Christ. Compromise on that, and you’ll compromise on anything. (Actually, once you compromise on that, you’ve compromised on **everything**.)

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- “Not only that, but right after the murder, a close descendant of Cain’s Lamech, laments that if “Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.” The escalation of societal violence is so intense that a close relative of Cain’s says things are eleven times worse than they were before.”

Nope. **Not even close.**

Lamech makes no such reference to the society in which he lived; therefore this cannot be considered a reference to “societal violence.” It has everything to do with a single man’s understanding that his sins exceeded those of Cain, and that his punishment should be that much more severe than Cain’s was.

This verse is about sin and man’s understanding of God’s justice. Please omit this portion entirely.

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+ “And then by chapter 11, people have gotten together to build a tower that they are convinced will make them gods.”

True, the people under Nimrod committed themselves to building a tower, and they did seem committed to glorifying themselves. Unfortunately, the same could be said of us...lest we truly die to ourselves that Christ would live in us and through us.

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Page 026

- “The story is a tragic progression: the broken, toxic nature at the heart of a few humans has now spread to the whole world. What started in a garden is now affecting the globe. The word for this condition is *anti-kingdom*.”

No, the word for this condition has been (since the writing of Scripture) and continues to be **SIN**.

Why do you dance around it so? Jesus didn’t, so we shouldn’t either. One has to **wonder**, though.

Your **endnote** is equally interesting:

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- “Joe Ehrman, the NFL defensive lineman turned preacher / social activist, used the term *anti-kingdom* in his teaching at Grace Fellowship Church in Timonium, Maryland.”

So what? We shouldn’t care if the smartest, most intelligent educated pastors through the last

2,000 years used a particular term or not. What matters is whether or not a term is **biblical**.

Because you're using a term that is vastly different from that the Bible itself uses, one must conclude that you intend to create a new definition on a par with **sin**, giving it the seriousness that **sin** deserves.

I ask you: What is **more serious** than the problem of sin?

The title of your book refers to Jesus saving Christians. The Bible clearly refers, again and again and again, how sinners can be saved (e.g. how it is that they can be rescued from the just punishment they deserve) if they would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

It sounds more like the title of this book should've been:

Rob Bell and Don Golden Want People to Be Convinced and Involved in the Goal of Social Justice – A Manifesto for All People (whether they be saved or not) – in Jesus' Name



- "There is God's kingdom – the peace, the *shalom*, the good that God intends for all things. And then there is what happens when entire societies and systems and empires become opposed to God's desires for the world."

You say that God's kingdom is "the good that God intends for all things." To test this, let's look at what God's Word says about what will happen to **unrepentant sinners** (as we know that such people are included in the term "all things").

A brief examination of Revelation 21:3-8 should do the trick. The Apostle John writes:

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. **But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.**" (ESV – emphasis mine)

Think there's much in the way of peace for unrepentant sinners after this life? Me neither.

Also, for more about the Kingdom of God, we need a less obscure reference (apologies to Pastor Ehrman). From **Theopedia**:

“The presence and coming of the **Kingdom of God** was the central message of Jesus. For example, "his teaching was designed to show men how they might enter the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:20; 7:21). His mighty works were intended to prove that the Kingdom of God had come upon them (Matt. 12: 28). His parables illustrated to His disciples the truth about the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:11). And when He taught His followers to pray, at the heart of their petition were the words, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). On the eve of His death, He assured His disciples that He would yet share with them the happiness and the fellowship of the Kingdom (Luke 22:22-30). And He promised that He would appear again. on the earth in glory to bring the blessedness of the Kingdom to those for whom it was prepared (Matt. 25:31, 34).”⁴

The term "Kingdom of God" occurs four times in Matthew (12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43), fourteen times in Mark, thirty-two times in Luke, twice in the Gospel of John (3:3, 5), six times in Acts, eight times in Paul, and once in Revelation (12:10). Matthew actually prefers the term "Kingdom of heaven" which he uses over 20 times in his gospel.

While Matthew primarily uses the term “kingdom of heaven” and other gospel writers (notably Luke) use the term “kingdom of God,” it is clear that these two expressions mean exactly the same thing (e.g. compare Matt. 5:3 with Luke 6:20). In the past some have tried to maintain a distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God; however, the vast majority of theologians today recognize the terms as synonymous.”

This is, of course, open to debate (on this side of Heaven). These definitions help to show a stark contrast, though, between a biblical conclusion and your “anti-kingdom” definition.

“Graeme Goldsworthy has summarized a definition of the Kingdom of God as 'God's people in God's place under God's rule.'

Anthony Hoekema has described God's Kingdom as 'the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ, the purpose of which is the redemption of his people from sin and from demonic powers, and the final establishment of the new heavens and the new earth.'

George Eldon Ladd notes that "The primary meaning of both the Hebrew word *malkuth* in the Old Testament and of the Greek word *basileia* in the New Testament is the rank, authority and sovereignty exercised by a king. A *basileia* may indeed be a realm over which a sovereign exercises his authority; and it may be the people who belong to that realm and over whom authority is exercised; but these are secondary and derived meanings. First of all, a kingdom is the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king.”⁵

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? “Imagine a slave girl living in Egypt asking her father why he’s got a bandage on his arm. He tells her he was beaten by his master that day. She wants to know why.”

Unless the girl is very, very young (or out of it), she will **already** understand – in general terms – why it is that her father was beaten that day.

Slaves who are beaten understand this basic fact: someone who has every legal right to do so – without every being asked “Why?” – **owns** them. (A better question: How is right for us to be owned as though we are cattle?) She might instead ask “How did this happen?” but never “Why?”

Please reconsider changing the question.

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- “...his master is part of a larger system, a complex web of power and violence and industry and technology that exploits people for its expansion and profit. The bandage on the father’s arm is from a wound inflicted by one man, and yet it’s also from an entire system of injustice. This girl’s family is facing an evil in the individual human heart that went unchecked until it gathered a head of steam and is now embedded in the very fabric of that culture.”

Actually, **sin** is the evil in every human heart that has embedded itself in the very fabric of the human race since the Garden of Eden, not the Exodus account.

Also, this idea that sin “gathered a head of steam” in Egypt is very interesting. Was not **corporate mankind**, minus Noah and his seven family members, guilty of disobeying God to the point of being obliterated? How is their corporate sin less heinous than that of the Egyptians?

Lastly, if sin weren’t terrible on a personal, individual level, **Jesus wouldn’t have come to save sinners from the consequence of sin.**

You’re taking the train off the tracks here.

This statement regarding the “complex web of power and violence and industry and technology that exploits people for its expansion and profit” would make Karl Marx, Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro proud. Perhaps the title of your book should be:

Rob Bell and Don Golden Want to Convert Capitalists: A Manifesto for the Socialist Church



Page 027

- “Egypt is an anti-kingdom. Egypt is what happens when sin builds up a head of steam. Egypt is what happens when sin becomes structured and embedded in society.”

Again, the term “anti-kingdom” simply isn’t biblical. In Titus 2:2, the Bible speaks of our need “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...” (ESV)

There is a huge chasm of disagreement among Christian pastors and teachers regarding the term “Kingdom.” You would do better to speak of **worldliness** (as a result of sin corrupting the world in which we live) rather than create a new term that blurs doctrinal matters to such a degree.



? “Egypt shows us how easily human nature bends toward using power to preserve privilege at the expense of the weak.”

Careful. **Your politics are showing.**

As I read your statement, Jesus’ parable of the laborers in the vineyard comes to mind. Our Lord could’ve easily spoken of how unjust it was for one fellow to earn so much more than the other.

Instead of preaching a social gospel, Jesus gave them a glimpse of the **inheritance** that believers will have in Heaven, regardless of how early or late one is in being born again. He taught that there is no room for an **entitlement attitude** when it comes to eternal matters.

Instead of promoting the need for social equity for all, Jesus demonstrates that **godly contentment** – regardless of how unfairly we might be treated by those over us – is the goal.

I’m so glad Jesus’ teachings never strayed from the will of God and the truth of Scripture. Aren’t you?

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Page 028

- “Exodus is about a people, a tribe, a nation being rescued from slavery. It’s about liberation from occupation. It’s about the insurgent power of redemption from empire.”

Some of this is off the mark; some of it is downright troublesome.

The Exodus account is first and foremost about **God** and His **love** and **faithfulness** toward the Israelites expressed in His rescuing from slavery.

Terms like “occupation” and “insurgent” and “empire” will undoubtedly remind readers of current conflicts in Iraq, Israel and Afghanistan. Most people understand that, in each of these cases, the insurgents are those radical Muslims who have no qualms about **strapping a bomb** to their back and blowing up a bus full of people.

Surely, you're not comparing the power of God (which you state as “the insurgent power of redemption”) with the insurgent forces in Iraq who are bent on mindless violence in the name of a false god?

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? “And what happens at Sinai is revolutionary, not just for these former slaves, and not just for the story of the Bible, but for all of humanity.”

What happened at Sinai that was revolutionary?

God spoke to Moses, but He had spoken to humans before.

God gave man commandments to follow, but that wasn’t the first time.

The word “revolutionary,” when placed in context with other words like “occupation” and “insurgent” and “empire,” can mean only one thing: the goal of **social justice**.

The Great Commission, given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, calls upon every Christian to be about God’s business of **baptizing** and **making disciples**, not raising a call to arms for the cause of social justice.

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Page 029

- “God hasn’t talked to a group of people since Eden...there have been exchanges with individuals – such as Abraham and Noah – but not with the masses.”

Actually, at Sinai, God spoke directly to Moses, and Moses delivered the message to the people, **as commanded by God.**

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- “Sinai is an answer to God’s question to Adam, “Where are you?” This moment at Sinai is about the reversal of the consequences of Eden. Sinai is the breaking of the silence. God is near. God is about to speak.”

That’s it. You’ve crossed so great a line here that one must call it what it is: **apostasy**. It’s out-and-out apostasy to claim that anything but the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ reversed the consequences of sin.

Actually, what happened at Sinai – God’s giving of the **Law** to man – was a **further consequence** of what happened in Eden. They needed to be given the Law so that they knew how to live lives that were pleasing to God. (If the first couple had never transgressed, there would be no need for God to give them the Law.)

Repent of this apostasy, and know that several are praying that God would change your mind on the matter.

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? “I believe that this is the only faith tradition in human history that has as its central event a god speaking to a group of people all at one time.”

What are you driving at?

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Page 030

- “And it (a god speaking to a group of people all at one time) happens in the wilderness, which has global implications. Because the Sinai event happened in the wilderness and not in the midst of a nation or city or province where someone could make ownership claims, it was for all the people of the world.”

Your endnote helps to give due validation to this idea:

“Somebody somewhere pointed this out to us, and we don’t remember where or when or who.”

First of all (again), God spoke to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Then Moses delivered God’s message to the nation of Israel.

Secondly, Moses delivered God’s message to the **Israelites**. How can you possibly say that it was for the people of the world when it was a specific message to **God’s chosen leader of that chosen nation for that particular time?**

Lastly, why would anything have a heightened value just because it occurred **outside?**

This kind of conjecture is **anti-Biblical**, and it’s actually very **pedestrian**. A freshman in Seminary should be able to see the problems here for what they are without breaking a sweat.

Why can’t **you** see the problems with these faulty conclusions you arrive at?

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? “The word covenant is the Hebrew word *berit*. It’s where we get the word testament, as in Old or New Testament. *Berit* carries the idea “to cut a deal.”

Why on earth would you use this type of language? A criminal “cuts a deal” with the District Attorney if his sentence can be pled down somehow (usually due to the fact that the criminal can supply the D.A. with information to help with some more important case).

“Cut a deal” implies **leverage**. Why would God need to use leverage in His contract with the nation of Israel?

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Page 031

? “God invites the people to make a covenant – a marriage of sorts. The divine and the human, coming together in a sacred wedding ceremony.”

“Contract” is a better term than “marriage” here, but most will understand what you mean. God does not “invite,” though. He tells Israel how it's going to be if they remain obedient, and how it's going to be if they don't.

It's not as though they're given thr freedom to not be involved in the covenant. Remember: **God chose them to be His nation.**

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+ / ? “God continues, “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Priests? A priest mediates the divine. To mediate is to come between. A priest comes between people and a god or gods.”

This is mostly correct for that time and for God's purposes, although I would advise you to stay on topic and stick to **Judaism** and the **God of Israel.**

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? “A priest shows you what his or her god is like. When you go to a temple or shrine and you see the priest there – what they do, what they say about it, the rituals they perform – you get a sense for what their god cares about, who their god cares about.”

This is also confusing. Do you mean to say that the priest **always** exemplified the character of God the way Jesus always perfectly demonstrated the character of His Father to those who witnessed His earthly ministry? **Unclear.**

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- “So when God invites the people to be priests, it’s an invitation to show the world who this God is and what this God is like.”

Whoa. Full brake.

God did tell the nation of Israel that they would be for Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” **Nowhere** did He state that each and every individual was going to act as His priest!

It’s akin to saying, “Our monarchy will have a monarch and a faithful followers,” and then concluding that each person in the monarchy is to be a monarch.

Repent and omit.



- “The text reads, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh.’” Like God? God is telling Moses that Pharaoh will see him as God, or at least “like God”? ... What’s going on here? The answer leads us to a universal truth: God needs a body. God needs flesh and blood. God needs bones and skin so that Pharaoh will know just who this God is he’s dealing with and how this God acts in the world.”

God needs a body? Really? Let’s break this down.

God could’ve chosen to write on a hillside in **hellfire** that Pharaoh should let His people go, but He didn’t.

God could’ve spoken audibly to Pharaoh, but He didn’t.

God could’ve simply thrown the last plague upon all of Egypt to begin with, parted the Red Sea, and evacuated the Israelites without Moses’ involvement (which would have certainly convinced Pharaoh of who it was that he was dealing with), but He didn’t.

It wasn’t that God needed to use some imperfect vessel for His plan to be carried out, but that God **chose** to use Moses the way a football coach uses a quarterback to execute a particular play. (Can a passing play happen without the quarterback throwing the ball himself? Sure can.)

Using Moses in a leadership position was essential for Moses to **grow in godliness**, and for the nation of Israel to grow to trust in Moses as God’s instrument, so that he could faithfully lead them to the Promised Land. Your myopic view dismisses the reality that **God knows the beginning from the end**, that His plans are about more than the here and now.

To place such limitations upon an infinite God is **an attempt to humanize God**, plain and simple.

Please, please, please omit.



Page 032

? “But God doesn’t just invite them to be priests; he invites them to be a “holy nation.”

Again, God doesn’t invite anyone to be anything. God **declared** that they would be for Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” **When a king declares, it’s hardly the same as saying he has made an invitation.**



- “The word nation takes us back to Genesis. Genesis is about the progression of sin, violence, and death – what started with one son killing the other quickly led to an entire civilization in opposition to God.”

Well, it would be fair to say the book of Genesis did include those things, certainly, but I disagree that Genesis is **mainly** about those things.

Genesis is the account of **Creation**, first and foremost.

Secondly, and equally as important, it gives the account of **man’s separation from God**.

Lastly, and (again) equally as important, it promises a day when Satan will be defeated:

“The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:14-15 (ESV)

Defeated by whom? Who else but the Lord Jesus Christ, of course?

Genesis is, then, the first recorded reference to **Jesus**. Please don’t minimize the importance of these great and wonderful things while you’re writing about the importance of your positions.

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+ / - “And God’s response (to institutions and cultures and structures that are anti-kingdom) is to form a different kind of nation, a “holy” one shaped not by greed, violence, and power but by compassion, justice, and care for one’s neighbor.”

With our limited understanding, it would be correct to say, “God responded.” Because we know from the Bible that God is eternal, though, and that His plans were established from before creation, we understand that God never responds. **He always relays what He had always previously planned.**

Also, “holy” means something far different than compassionate, just and caring. “Holy” literally means “pure” and “**set apart by God.**”

The two of you write as though the Israelites were to now be a nation of peace, love and happiness, spreading their **hippie love-speak** through the world, that others might know God.

You’re forgetting that God said, “The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, *and* he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: *and* Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said.” Deuteronomy 31:3 (KJV)

Our God has, at times, **acted violently.** Jesus Himself picked up a cord of rope to drive out the money-changers in the temple.

Please try and remember **all** of the aspects of our God, that He is to be **feared** as well as adored, at all times as you endeavor to speak to others on His behalf.

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+ “Up until now, God has been speaking to the people through Moses. But a point comes when God speaks directly to the people, beginning with the words, I am the LORD your God...”

YES! You’ve got it! (Now delete your previous statements that refer to God speaking to the Israelites at Sinai prior to this moment in time.)

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? “The only way to understand this covenant relationship between God and the people is to understand what they’ve already been through together.”

I would prefer that you use “the goodness of God experienced by the Israelites” to “what they’ve been through together.” What you have down sounds too much like some **sappy love song** to be effective in giving due credit and reverence to God.

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- “Their relationship is rooted in an act of deliverance that God has performed on their behalf.”

Nope. This relationship is rooted in **God’s love** for His chosen people, period. It goes way beyond some single moment or expression. It is rooted in the character of God, eternal and true. Please omit.

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+ / - “This is not an abstract god who floats above the blood and dirt and pain of the world. This is a god who is fundamentally defined by action on behalf of the oppressed.”

You are right when you say that He is “not an abstract god who floats above the blood and dirt and pain of the world.” We know that God cares about the small details of each of our lives.

You are wrong, though, when you write that God is “fundamentally defined by action on behalf of the oppressed.”

Had God never created the world and the universe, He would still be “fundamentally defined” by **who He is**, not by what He has done. Remember His answer to Moses in the wilderness?

When asked of His identity, God simply stated, “**I AM.**”

I’m not debating the significance of what He did for the nation of Israel in bringing them out of Egypt, nor am I going to quibble over the fact that God did identify Himself after the Exodus as “the Lord...who brought you out.”

We must always remember, though, that God is defined by who He is, not by what He has or has not done. In this, He is different from you and I, as He should be. **He is God.** To think that we could ever properly define Him while we yet remain on this mortal coil is quite **presumptuous.**

Also, you forget the plight of those who were later “oppressed” by the nation of Israel under the command of God. Please don’t **cherry-pick** such terms at the expense of a contextual reading of Scripture...



Page 033

+ “Many people are familiar with the Ten Commandments, which are often portrayed as strict rules given by a fire-breathing God to keep people in line.”

You are at least **98% correct** here. Let’s look at a passage that comes immediately after Moses shares the Ten Commandments with the Israelites, and see what the Bible says.

“Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." Exodus 20:18-20 (ESV)

Clearly, these strict rules **were** given by God to keep people “in line,” as you put it. (We can’t say with any certainty that God “breathed” the light show that day, so I’ve got to give you a **two-point deduction**.)



- “But when they’re seen in their original context, the commandments take on all sorts of new meanings.”

Oh boy. Here we go. Why in the world would we need to create new meanings for a biblical passage when God clearly spells out His reason for the commandments?

Better question: By what right do you create such new meanings when God has so clearly spelled out the one true meaning?

Best question: **Why isn’t God’s reason for the Ten Commandments good enough for you?** Please repent that you would line up your position with God’s position on the matter.

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- “Remember, these people have been living, up until very recently, as slaves. Slavery is a fundamentally inhumane condition.”

You forgot to mention the fact that slavery is a condition that **God does not forbid**. Hard for us to understand or agree with, but God has allowed for slavery to be part of the human condition at least since Abraham's time.

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- “Being owned as property robs people of the dignity and honor of being a human.”

We must also remember that the historical context of slavery during ancient times was at times **different** than that of recent days in this country. Many historians believe that the slave-owner/slave dynamic of those times is very similar to that of the employer/employee relationship we see today.

Dr. Herbert Lockyer wrote, “In the ancient world, service and slavery were closely related, so much so that one can scarcely distinguish the one from the other. The original words used for “servants” and “service” carry a variety of meanings between which it is not always easy to determine what is meant.”⁶

Clearly, the Israelites were slaves, subjects under Pharaoh and the Egyptians. We can't paint every situation wherein the term “slave” is used, though, with **so wide a brush** as to suggest that all slaves everywhere at every time were treated as badly.

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? “This has deeply affected how these Israelites see themselves and the world around them. What God begins here at Sinai with the Ten Commandments is the long process of teaching them how to be human again.”

As though they had stopped thinking and acting as humans while in Egypt?

What of Moses' mother? I think of her sacrifice, the giving up of her son so that he might live, as a wonderful expression of love.

At times like this, you paint with **such a wide brush** that you paint outside the lines of reality and what is reasonable.



- “These commands are vital truths about what it means to live in authentic human community.”

For all those readers from the South, I must ask: **What in tarnation are you talking about?**

What is “authentic human community?” And is there really such a thing as a “**fake** human community?”

I hope you’re not suggesting that God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments so that they might live in such a **perfect** way that His Kingdom would be established here on Earth.

As I stated last time, Exodus 20 is very clear: God gave them the commandments so that they would not sin. To state otherwise, when God so clearly points out His reasons in v. 20, is to take a position that is anti-Biblical and therefore anti-Christian.

It is an **entirely secular position** to believe that God desires for us to build a **utopia** that should be quickly abandoned by anyone who claims the name of Christ.

Like sinners could build anything perfect anyway. Come on. You know better.



- “The first commandment instructs the people to “have no other gods.” Their humanity is directly connected to their ability to remember their liberation, which was a gift from God.”

The trouble here is that you place the emphasis on the people, not upon God.

First, “their humanity” refers to that which the Jews have in common with the rest of humanity: **sin**.

Second, and more importantly, commanding the Jews to “have no other gods” wasn’t connected to “their connected to their ability to remember their liberation” whatsoever. It’s not about the Exodus experience. It’s about the fact that God is a jealous God.

Exodus 34:14 states, "...you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (ESV)



- "If they forget God...they are at that very same moment forgetting their story. If they forget their story, they might forget what it was like to be slaves, and they might find themselves back in a new sort of slavery."

Sorry, but this is also incorrect in a number of ways.

First, the word "forget" is the wrong term to use. To "have other gods," one goes far beyond the sin of forgetting God. They have in fact **consciously chosen** something or someone over and above the one true God. This not some absent-mindedness; it is a **choice**, borne out of temptation, fulfilled in sin.

Next, you place an over-exaggerated importance upon the "**story**" of the Jewish nation. Their story is nowhere near as important as is their **obedience** to the God to which they owe everything, their creation, their liberation, their very lives.

Lastly, the consequence of finding "themselves back in a new sort of slavery" is minor compared to the sort of slavery they experienced in being **shackled to sin**. (A quick read of Galatians 4:1-9 will shed light on this.)



? "In the ancient Near East, people conceptualized their many gods using images. They made statues and carvings and idols as physical representations of the divine beings they believed controlled their fate."

Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

At times, people did make idols to represent beings they worshipped. At other times, though, they worshipped **the idols themselves**. (See the context surrounding the Mt. Sinai conversation and the relating of the Ten Commandments for more on this.)



- “A statue or carving gives shape and size and depth to the divine. An idol helped people understand just who their god was and what their god was like.”

NOPE. ABSOLUTELY NOT.

The reason for the commandment is because God understands the **human heart** and our **sinful nature**. God knows our propensity to create God’s that suit the lust of our flesh.

He understands that an idol does not help “people understand just who their god was and what their god was like.”

God understands that an idol helps people to **remain apart** from Him. He understands that an idol is an **offense** against Himself, and that they are not to be tolerated whatsoever.

Please don’t make idols out to be anything than what they are: **sinful**.



Page 034

- “But this exodus God is different. This God is inviting these people to be priests, to show the world what this God is like through their lives. This God doesn’t need images in the form of wood or stone or marble, because this God has people. This God is looking for a body.”

First off, “this exodus God is different” because He is real. Others gods are false. Please don’t attempt to distinguish Him from them in any other way. To do so is confusing for the reader.

Also, as we’ve already covered, God did not invite each of the Israelites to be priests, that the world would see what “God is like through their lives.” The priest was **one person** with very specific tasks, including (first and foremost) acting as the representative of the people to God (and vice versa).

Lastly, you have truly taken this false teaching **one step beyond**. God doesn’t need images, and He doesn’t need a body. He is complete in and of Himself. To say anything contrary to that fact is **pure apostasy**. Please omit.



+ “The command about idols and images leads to the third commandment, the prohibition

not to ‘misuse the name of the LORD your God.’”

I myself prefer the KJV and other translations that use clearer language than “misuse,” but this will suffice, I guess.



- “The Hebrew word for “misuse” here can also be translated ‘carry.’”

It is true that the word “**נָסָה נִשָּׂא**” (or *naw-saw'*, *naw-saw'*) can be translated “carry,” but it can also be translated in a number of other ways. From *Strong’s Concordance*:

“to *lift*, in a great variety of applications, literally and figuratively, absolutely and relatively: - accept, advance, arise, (able to, [armour], suffer to) bear (-er, up), bring (forth), burn, carry (away), cast, contain, desire, ease, exact, exalt (self), extol, fetch, forgive, furnish, further, give, go on, help, high, hold up, honourable (+ man), lade, lay, lift (self) up, lofty, marry, magnify, needs, obtain, pardon, raise (up), receive, regard, respect, set (up), spare, stir up, + swear, take (away, up), utterly, wear, yield.” ⁷

To determine which usage of the word fits best, one must look at the **context**. Since one doesn’t literally “carry” a name, your idea is **off-base**.

“Regard” or “magnify” both work much better because both can be applied to one’s name.



- “God has redeemed these former slaves and is now inviting them to be representatives in the world of this redemption and the God who made it happen.”

Please don’t use “redemptive” terminology here. Such language should be reserved for **the only true redemption** that is through repentance and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also, this idea that the nation of Israel was supposed to go out and essentially **evangelize** to the rest of the world is completely **contra-Scriptural**.

God did not give the Great Commission to the nation of Israel so that social justice would win the day. He gave it to the **New Testament Church** (that sinners would be won to Christ) many centuries later...and you know it.

Please reread Matthew 28:18-20 and ask yourself what it really means, not what you want it to mean. Please, for your sake, stop playing **Editor** with God's Word.

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? "The command is certainly about the words a person speaks. But at its heart it is far more about how Israel carries herself as those who carry the name of God. Will she act on behalf of the poor and oppressed? Because that is how this God acts."

Nope. At its heart is the reality that because God is holy, loving and omnipotent, He is to be **revered**, not blasphemed.

Also, your reference to the poor and oppressed is entirely disconnected from any true teaching of the Old Testament. Where does it say in Exodus (or anywhere else in the Old Testament for that matter) that the Israelites were to be a shining light for the poor and oppressed?

Historically, the Jewish people themselves have been oppressed. Why does this not enter into your train of thought? You've got to rethink this one if you're going to be at all accurate.

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- "The Sabbath is the command to take a day a week to remind themselves that they aren't in Egypt anymore..."

You find no correlation whatsoever to the fact that God rested on the seventh day after **six days of Creation**? You're trying too hard to make the **square peg** fit into the **round hole** to sound at all reasonable. Please omit.

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- "The Ten Commandments are a new way to be human, a new way to live and move in the world, in covenant with the God who hears the cry of the oppressed and liberates them. Everything about the rest of the commandments speaks to this newfound liberation."

Really? A "new way to be human?" The commandments speak "to this newfound liberation?"

I'm sorry to burst your bubble, but each of the commandments is a **prohibition**, not a freedom. Each is meant to direct the people in how **not to think, speak and act** so that they **would not**

sin.

It's like you've taken a **god-sized bottle of whiteout** to Exodus 20:20:

"Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." (ESV)

+ **?** **-**

Page 035

+ "Do you hear the echoes of Egypt in the command? (Exodus 22:26-28) If they begin to oppress on an individual basis, God says that when the oppressed cry out, 'I will hear.' The warning is sharp here: don't become another Pharaoh, because God acts *against* people like Pharaoh." (Bible reference embedded by reviewer)

The "echoes of Egypt" is a connection that is fair to make here, I think. (I would have written it, "Don't be disobedient just like Pharaoh," but that's just me.)

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- "They're commanded, "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner...Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan...Do not deny justice to your poor people. And God continually warns, 'If you do [any of this] and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry.' It as if God is saying, "The thing that has happened to you – go make it happen for others. The freedom from oppression that you are now experiencing – help others experience that same freedom. The grace that has been extended to you when you were at your lowest – extend it to others. In the same way that I heard your cry, go and hear the cry of others and act on their behalf...God's desire is that they would bring exodus to the weak..."

At this point, you're simply **re-hashing an argument** from earlier – that God desired that the nation of Israel act as His instrument for social justice throughout the world at the time – and using various cherry-picked commandments (that have to do good and right treatment toward people) to back it up.

I'm still awaiting your response to the question: What about all of the times that God commanded Israel to be His instrument of **justice** against their disobedient neighbors?

New question: What about those times that **Israel** was disobedient? Are you saying that it was

wrong of God to discipline the Israelites in such a way that the Babylonians enslaved them? If you are suggesting that it was wrong for them to be oppressed in any way, shape or form, then you are seriously putting into question whether or not God has the right to discipline His children. **Please reevaluate.**

Look at the Exodus and Sinai accounts **contextually**. If you factor in what took place after (wherein Israel was, at times, the despotic nation, while it was, at other times, the disciplined nation), you simply can't arrive at the position you've arrived at.

Unless you're **consciously** choosing to ignore the context, that is?

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Page 036

? "God's words to the people through Moses begin with 'if you obey me fully.' It's an invitation, an opportunity...which raises the question, Did they? Were they true to the covenant? How did they respond to the invitation?"

This will be **very confusing** for most readers, and I ask that you break this down in a manner that is more understandable.

If you're asking the question, "Did the Israelites obey God fully with the commandments He gave to them?" the obvious answer is "No, they didn't." (Read the remainder of the Old Testament for evidence.)

If you're asking the question, "Did the Israelites obey God fully with the command to display His goodness and His compassion and His mercy to their neighboring nations?" the obvious answer is "No, they didn't."

They didn't because **that wasn't what God commanded them to do**. God didn't "invite" them to fulfill some social mandate; He commanded to live **holy and righteous lives** before a **holy and righteous God**.

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- "Generations later...a queen from the land of Sheba comes to visit Solomon. She's from far away, from a different kind of people, with a different religion. And she wants to know more about these people and their king and their God in Jerusalem. Wasn't this what Sinai was all

about?”

Again, the commandments were given to the nation of Israel “**that they would not sin.**” My homework assignment for you is this: read Exodus 20 at least 100 times, shouting at the top of your lungs when you get to **the last phrase in verse 20.** Perhaps then you’ll stop dismissing the reality of God’s reasons for what He has done.

+ **?** **-**

+ / - “God was looking for a body, a nation to show the world just who God is and what God is like.”

Yes and no. God doesn’t need a body, but He was and is still interested in people understanding who He is and what He is like.

+ **?** **-**

Page 037

- “God was looking for a body, a nation to show the world just who God is and what God is like. And now it’s happening: foreigners from the corners of the earth are coming to ask questions and learn about just who this God is.”

I’ve given this some thought. I finally understand what the main problem with this line of thinking is.

You are citing Solomon’s meeting with the queen of Sheba as though that was the **main reason** for the commandments in the first place.

Not so.

The fact that people from other nations will understand something about the one true God from how well the nation of Israel keeps His commandments is purely **incidental.** Exodus 20 says nothing about the kind of evangelistic outreach that you’re suggesting was somehow His primary motivation for giving them the commandments.

Your premise is simply **untrue.**

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? “...after surveying his kingdom, she says, “Because of the LORD’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness.” Notice that she doesn’t say he *is* maintaining justice and righteousness – only that there can be only one reason why he has received so much blessing from God.”

The **NASB** of 1 Kings 10:9 reads as follows, “...He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”

This translation is superior to the NIV that you supply in your text for at least one important reason: it contains the verb, “to do,” which is straight out of the original Hebrew. **Strong’s Concordance** tells us that the Hebrew word **עָשָׂה** means:

“**to do** or **make**, in the broadest sense and widest application: - **accomplish**, advance, appoint, apt, be at, become, bear, bestow, **bring forth**, bruise, be busy, certainly, have the charge of, commit, **deal** (with), deck, + displease, **do**, (ready) dress (-ed), (put in) **execute** (-ion), **exercise**, fashion, + feast, [fight-] ing man, + finish, **fit**, fly, follow, **fulfil**, furnish, gather, get, go about, **govern**, grant, great, + hinder, **hold** ([a feast]), indeed, + be industrious, + journey, **keep**, **labour**, **maintain**, **make**, be meet, observe, be occupied, offer, + officer, pare, **bring** (come) **to pass**, **perform**, **practise**, **prepare**, **procure**, **provide**, **put**, requite, sacrifice, serve, set, shew, sin, spend, surely, take, thoroughly, trim, very, + vex, be [warr-] ior, **work** (-man).”⁸

Clearly, the queen of Sheba has observed that Solomon **was** in fact maintaining justice and righteousness.

I have no idea why you would put this into question...yet. Give me time.

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Page 038

- “And what does she mean by ‘justice and righteousness’ (in 1 Kings 10:9)? Freedom, liberation from violence, protection from anything dehumanizing. She understands that God has given all of this wealth and power and influence so that Solomon would use it on behalf of those who are poor, weak, and suffering from injustice...Sheba gets it. So what did Solomon do with his wealth and power and influence...Solomon had slaves.”

Two problems:

1. If you read the queen of Sheba's remarks apart from the chapter that preceded this account, then you might be able to truthfully state the facts as you did.

A clear reading of 1 Kings 9 and 10, though, will force us to have a correct understanding of the **context** (if we are interested in having a correct understanding, that is).

1 Kings 9:15 recounts for us: "And this is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon drafted to build the house of the LORD and his own house and the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem and Hazor and Megiddo and Gezer..." (ESV)

The queen of Sheba saw all that had been built by the slaves (and 550 of Solomon's chief officers, according to verse 23), and **did not chastise** the king for having used forced labor to accomplish these ends. Instead, she looked around, asked him questions, and concluded that he was ruling **justly and rightly**.

Clearly, we cannot say – with any certainty whatsoever – that Solomon was oppressive in his handling of the slaves who built these buildings. Instead, we **can** say – with near 100% certainty – that his treatment toward the slaves was probably **very different** from our 21st century idea of slavery.

We Americans almost always think of the slaves in our own country prior to the Civil War. To be fair to history, we must remember that not every culture has regarded their slaves with the same level of indignity as did many American slave-owners.

Even the word, "slave," has meant different things to different cultures throughout time. Let's be fair and accurate with regard to **historical-cultural differences** that will exist as we strive to better understand the biblical account in 1 Kings 9 and 10.

2. There's absolutely nothing in 1 Kings 10 that would suggest that the queen of Sheba "understands that God has given all of this...so that Solomon would use it on behalf of those who are poor, weak, and suffering from injustice."

Her comment was not based on some future hope that she had for Solomon; it was instead rooted in her understanding of Solomon and the work He had hitherto accomplished for God and the nation of Israel. **Period.**

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ancestors was the exodus, right?”

It's really not accurate to say that the Exodus was the “defining event” for the nation of Israel simply because God used that particular phrase, “the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” (See the rest of the Torah for the number of different terms God used for Himself.)

It would be **more accurate** to say that Exodus was – when examining those special times when God's power and authority was witnessed and experienced by His people – as definitive as was the eviction from the Garden of Eden. It was as definitive as the Flood.

We can't say, though, in light of those two events that the Exodus has some special distinction which should not be extended to the **Fall of Man** or the **Flood**.

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? “And now Solomon is building a temple for the God who sets slaves free...using slaves? In just a few generations, the oppressed have become the oppressors. The descendants of people who once longed for freedom from Egypt are now building another Egypt.”

Again, the oppression of which you speak is **totally speculative** on your part, looking events of an ancient culture with our 21st-century Western thinking. See posts from earlier this week on this subject and **reconsider**.

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Page 040

- “Solomon isn't maintaining justice; he's now perpetuating the very injustice his people once needed redemption from and, in the process, building a kingdom of comfort. He dines in his palace and strolls on terraces constructed by human suffering.”

Very inconsistent. You say that the queen of Sheba “gets it.” She can't declare that Solomon is maintaining “justice and righteousness,” though, unless her idea of justice and righteousness is that is **just** and **right** for kings and queens to use slaves for the construction of such facilities.

What does the **context** say? There is **absolutely nothing** whatsoever in the text of 1 Kings 9-10 (or anywhere else) that Solomon sinned in his building of the temple and other structures with the use of slave labor.

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+ “But it isn’t just his comfort and indifference that stand out; it’s what exactly he builds. In the section where we’re told he was using slaves to build God’s temple and his palace and the terraces, it also says that Solomon used these slaves to build ‘Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer.’ So what are Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer? They’re military bases.”

Probably. These were cities, yes, and 1 Kings 15-19 do refer to these (and other cities) being used “for his chariots and the cities for his horsemen.”

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? “Solomon is using his massive resources and wealth to build military bases to protect his... massive resources and wealth.”

Why is it that you assume he had such a sinful motivation? The LORD **never** judged him for protecting his cities as you do, which leads me to believe that you’re wrong.

In fact, it’s at least as plausible that Solomon, the king of the nation of Israel, fortified the cities for one simple purpose: **to protect God’s chosen people.**

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Page 041

- “Jerusalem is the new Egypt. There’s a new Pharaoh on the scene, and his name is Solomon...”

Nowhere in Scripture does God refer to Jerusalem as “the new Egypt,” nor is Solomon referred to as the new Pharaoh. Your **premise** disagrees with God’s Word, so it goes to follow that your **conclusions** would, too.

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- “Solomon is buying horses and chariots, but he’s also selling them. Solomon has become an

arms dealer. He's now making money from violence. He's discovered that war is profitable."

This is the standard **politically liberal position** that says:

"Since war is bad, weapons used in war must be bad. Hence all guns are bad."

But **every child at the schoolyard understands** that the stick can:

1. Be used by the bully to do one great harm, and
2. Be used to **ward off the bully.**

Solomon could not know at the time (mentioned in 1 Kings 10:29) what the Hittites and Arameans would later do with these resources, but we must err on the side of caution (since God's Word does not condemn Solomon for it), and assume that Solomon was making a good and wise decision **at the time.**

Besides, when Israel would later turn to false gods, it was then **and only then** that God allowed them to become oppressed once again. If God had a big problem with these transactions, He would've corrected Solomon right then and there, and He would've said so...**but He didn't.**

Kind of blows a **big gaping hole** in your position. **Please omit.**

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+ "Shortly after we read that Solomon 'had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray...His wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God.'"

You're right. This happened shortly after the importing and exporting mentioned in 1 Kings 10:28-29.

+ **?** **-**

Page 042

+ / - "But the point...is not the numbers; its how his wives affected Solomon. They turned him away from God, and 'his heart was not fully devoted.'"

While you are correct about Solomon turning away from God (when he followed after the idols of his wives and concubines), you should not minimize the sinfulness of his **lifestyle** that led to his idol worship.

The fact that Solomon allowed himself to take hundreds of wives and concubines is proof that Solomon had turned from God **before** his worship of false idols. This corresponds perfectly with what we read in 1 John 2:15-17:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (ESV)

A **good admonition** for all of us to remember as we strive to live as Christ lived.



? “This passage forms a significant contrast with what we learned earlier about the slaves and military bases. Those were systemic evils...but now we learn about a different kind of failure...the turning of an individual’s heart. Solomon breaks covenant with God.”

Confusing. You mention the “turning of an individual’s heart.” Are you saying Solomon broke covenant with God with his use of slaves, or the building of his cities, or his numerous sexual sins?

I understand what you mean by “systemic evils” (in that some will always point to the use of slaves or a military as “evil” systems), but I don’t know that you can separate the **individual** (Solomon) from the fact that he made the **decisions** that resulted in the kinds of systems you’re talking about.

Please **rework** for clarity.



? “Sinai was a marriage covenant between God and the people...and so the first commandment was that the people couldn’t have other lovers. The relationship simply wouldn’t work if they were unfaithful.”

I know what you’re getting at here with faithfulness (and the problems that Israel faced because

of their waywardness), but more **clarity** is needed to help the reader through this concept.

If we think of the word “lovers” as God thinks of it, we must consider the physical union between a husband and a wife that is borne out of a good and right love for one another.

While the term “marriage covenant” isn’t altogether bad to use (between God and Israel), I ask that you remove the term “lovers” for this reason: in the marriage bed, lovers are equals, while God and His chosen people are not equal. God is supreme over Israel, so this analogy must be **discarded** in favor of one that better represents the relationship between God and Israel.

One more thing to consider. You write, “The relationship simply wouldn’t work if they were unfaithful,” as though you were referring to **a boy and his girlfriend**. This doesn’t correspond well with the unique relationship between God and Israel.

When the Israelites were unfaithful to God, the result was **much worse** than “it simply didn’t work out.” **There were always consequences.** (This is true for the rest of us, too.)

Please don’t fail to remember this. God’s commandments aren’t only for the sake of His greater glory, but they’re in place so that the Israelites would live lives free from the **consequences** of murder, theft, envy, and so on.

God **always** has our best in mind, especially when He tells us how to live.

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+ “Solomon’s many wives and his infidelity to God are representative of the infidelity of all the people – they’ve turned from God. Tragically, Solomon’s people had been warned that this could happen.”

Exactly right. Your further reference to Deuteronomy 17:16-17 bears that out.

+ **?** **-**

Page 043

+ / - “Jerusalem is the new Egypt, Solomon is the new Pharaoh, and Sinai has been forgotten.”

Again, while the nation of Israel had oftentimes disobeyed the Law given to them by God at Mt. Sinai, we would be **amiss** to refer to Jerusalem as “the new Egypt” or Solomon as “the new

Pharaoh.” (See earlier posts for my case against the use of such phrases.)

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- “This puts God in an awkward place. Remember, God is looking for a body, flesh and blood to show the world a proper marriage of the divine and human.”

We **finally** get to your **premise**. (A little late waiting for the big ‘reveal’ until page 043, but it’s your book, not mine.)

You write as though God’s relationship with Israel is the **template** for all other nations to follow. To suggest this is simply **contra-biblical**. Remember what God told Abram in **Genesis 17:4-8**?

“As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” (KJV)

Nowhere in the Old Testament does God tell a nation other than Israel that He will be their God.

Nowhere in the Old Testament does God establish a like covenant between Himself and a nation other than Israel.

This is a **unique covenant**, but you write as though it was the pattern of the time for other nations to follow. I still don’t fully understand why, but I ask that you look again at the very singular nature of God’s covenant with Israel.

I can’t guess your motives for reading into the text to such a degree, but you know that we ought to take into account **the fullness of Scripture** before reaching such **erroneous conclusions**.

Please stop treating the Bible as though we have the authority to take a black magic marker and scratch off those portions that interfere with what we’d like it to say...as though as we were God...

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- “The Hebrew Scriptures have a very simple and direct message: God always hears the cry of the oppressed; God cares about human suffering and the conditions that cause it.”

First, I assume that you are speaking of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) when you refer to the Hebrew Scriptures. That’s totally fine.

What’s not fine, though, is that you making “the cry of the oppressed” sound as though it’s the most important thing. The “simple and direct message” of Genesis and Exodus (the only two books of the Bible to be mentioned so far in your text) is this:

God is God. He alone is great, and worthy of all praise. To love and praise someone or something else is a great sin, for God created you, He loves you, and He commands that you obey Him. If you disobey God, He will justly discipline you, with the good and right intent of restoring you unto Himself.

To suggest that some other message is “the message” of those books is altogether off-kilter.

Second, I must take issue with your statement, “God cares human suffering and the conditions that cause it.”

God **does** care about human suffering. In fact, why He allows it to happen would be a great mystery if not for what it says in 2 Corinthians 4:16b-18:

“Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (ESV)

So God cares about our suffering, that much is certain. We Christians can go one step further and state that, without a shadow of a doubt, our temporary sufferings and trials are **for our own good** (eternally speaking, that is).

Your primary position, though, is that those who are suffering should be released from their trials, and their oppressors should be brought to justice.

Where do you find in the Bible that this emphasis is the same as **God’s main emphasis**?

Is not the God of the Pentateuch the same God who allowed **Job** to experience his many trials and temptations?

Is He not the same God who allowed His own son, **Jesus Christ**, to take upon Himself the punishment for our sins?

Your premise suggests that, if He were more concerned about eradicating all human suffering than He was any other plight known to man, God would've surely sent the **twelve legions of angels** (whom Jesus referred to in Matthew 26) to stop the Roman soldiers before they could lay a hand on Him. God would've had some other plan for the redemption of man, something that did not include the suffering of our Lord. **But He didn't...**

...and that's the whole point, isn't it? We learn in the Old Testament that the **shedding of blood** was necessary to make atonement for sin. So Jesus, the very Lamb of God, **had** to suffer and die so that those who would repent and believe on His name would not have to. This is **the true gospel**, and I'm glad to have the opportunity to proclaim it here for those who are reading.

Good thing God cares more about our **sin** problem than He does about our temporary troubles. **Good thing, indeed!**



- "At the height of their power, Israel misconstrued God's blessings as favoritism and entitlement. They became indifferent to God and to their priestly calling to bring liberation to others."

"Favoritism and entitlement" is at the heart of your **misunderstanding** of Exodus.

You simply cannot and will not concede the point that, according to God's Word, He **did** favor Israel over other nations, that they **were** entitled to blessings that were not extended to every other nation under the sun.

My first question:

The Bible refers to nations other than Israel as pagan nations. Where do you find in the Scriptures that (during the time of Exodus) Israel was something other than **God's chosen nation**, to be set apart from these pagan nations and their pagan beliefs?

Second question:

Where do you find in the Scriptures that (during the time of Exodus) pagan nations were to be **liberated** by God's chosen nation?

Chapter and verse, please!

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? “There’s a word for this. A word for what happens when you still have the power and the wealth and the influence, and yet in some profound way you’ve blown it because you’ve forgotten why you were given it in the first place. The word is exile.”

If you’re talking about Israel abusing their position and influence in some way that was disobedient to God’s command, then yes, they you are correct. At times, the nation of Israel did disobey their God.

You should note, though, that every other nation, people group, tribe and individual have done disobeyed God at some point in their history, too, to be completely fair.

To be completely fair, though, you still need to answer the second question above, or your premise here is without biblical support and should be omitted **entirely**.

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Page 045

? “Exile is when you forget your story. Exile isn’t just about location; exile is about the state of your soul.”

A little too **abstract** for most readers. Please omit.

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- “Exile is when you fail to convert your blessings into blessings for others. Exile is when you find yourself a stranger to the purposes of God.”

You’re clearer here, but one thing is still uncertain:

Who are you writing to?

Your title more than suggests that you are writing to Christians (as those whom “Jesus Wants to Save”), yet your statements regarding “exile” seem so general that they suggest you are writing to all people, regardless of their spiritual position.

This is very important for two simple reasons.

First, an unrepentant sinner will always fail to convert their “blessings into blessings for others.” Their nature is to satisfy the longings of their flesh – **period**.

Second, someone who has not repented and placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation is (of course) “a stranger to the purposes of God.”

The Bible is very clear on this. Only those who are **saved** have within them the Holy Spirit. (Countless passages on this one. I’m sure I don’t need to remind you.)

Only those who are **indwelled** by the Holy Spirit will be able to understand what they read in the Scriptures. 1 John 3:24 states:

“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.” (ESV)

Without knowing for certain who you are writing to, one cannot know whether or not you are holding to biblical truths or not in regards to salvation and the Christian life in general.

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+ “And it’s at this time that we meet the prophets, powerful voices who warned of the inevitable consequences of Israel’s infidelity.”

While it is true that the O.T. prophets gave warnings to Israel regarding obedience to God, your endnote is **very troubling**, and in need of further examination.

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- “Assuming a prophet is simply someone who speaks for God, you could say that the queen of Sheba gets the whole prophetic thing started when she affirms the justice and righteousness intentions of God during her visit with Solomon. Not long after her visit, the prophet Ahijah announces Solomon’s downfall (1 Kings 11), followed a few generations later by the prophet Jehu (1 Kings 16). Pretty soon you come to the prophets who were famous enough to get their own books in the Bible...” (p. 193)

A prophet is “simply someone who speaks for God?”

The **queen of Sheba** got “the whole prophetic thing started?”

Are you aware that God gave prophecies to man **before** Solomon and the queen of Sheba?

Are you aware that it’s **God** who initiates prophecy to man, not the other way around?

This is very **characteristic** of the troubles one is going to have when they attempt to string a few truths together the way a **radio host** will “join” one topic to another.

Very dangerous to do this, Pastors. Please **re-evaluate** and **repent...please...**



? “Hear this word, people of Israel, the word the LORD has spoken against you – against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: . . . ‘See the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people. They do not know how to do right,’ declares the LORD, ‘who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted.’”

Why are you so very **selective** with this passage from Amos 3? Time will tell (most probably), but let’s read all 15 verses of Amos 3 in the meantime, just to make certain we understand the context before moving forward.

“Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet? Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing? Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? "For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?" Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, and say, "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst." "They do not know how to do right," declares the LORD, "those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds." Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered." Thus says the LORD: "As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed. "Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, "that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of

ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end," declares the LORD.' (ESV)



- "One of Amos's first charges is that some people are being neglected while others are stockpiling surplus."

This is true, but you are widening the umbrella beyond that which it was meant to cover.

The charge against Israel was that some of her own were in captivity and that they had not yet acted to free them.

The charge against not knowing "how to do right" and the activity of storing up "violence and robbery in their strongholds" is laid against Israel, but they are not charged with turning a blind eye to "social injustices" done against other nations. Read the opening verses above and see for yourself.

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth," said the LORD to His chosen nation." Of this verse, **Adam Clarke** said,

"I have taken no other people to be my own people. I have approved of you, loved you, fed, sustained, and defended you; but because you have forsaken me, have become idolatrous and polluted, therefore will I punish you. And the punishment shall be in proportion to the privileges you have enjoyed, and the grace you have abused." 9

Favoritism? **Absolutely.** Got a problem with that? **Get over it.**



Page 046

? "The prophet Isaiah tells the people of Israel that when they pray, God says, 'I will hide my eyes from you' because 'your hands are full of blood.' God sees their military bases, chariots, and warhorses for what they are – unacceptable costs of empire."

You cite a few choice portions of Isaiah 1:15 here, but you're missing the **context** of the verse. Read verses 11-15:

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the

burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is iniquity*, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.” (KJV)

Looking at vv. 11 and 12, we see that the blood has to do with the **animal sacrifices** that God’s people were offering to Him, sacrifices that were not accepted by God due to their iniquity.

Where do you read that the blood on their hands is associated with a military buildup or warfare?

Context, context, context...



- “Isaiah declares that God hates ‘with all [his] being’ their feasts and festivals and ‘evil assemblies.’ God calls their *church* services ‘evil assemblies’? God hates their religious gatherings?

While the text does state that God considered “even the solemn meeting” to be an iniquity, you must take care not to **over-generalize**.

God commanded the nation of Israel to make burnt offerings back in the book of Exodus, though He is now (centuries later) telling His chosen nation that their collective sin is such that He will not accept their offerings. Verses 19 and 20 answer any lingering questions like, “What are we to do now?”

“If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*. (KJV)

God does not hate their religious gatherings **per se**, but rather He hates sin and hypocrisy, and deals with those who sin according to His will.



- “What is God to do with a religion that legitimizes indifferences and worship that inspires

indulgence?”

Very confusing here. Since this statement comes after your references to Amos 3, one has to conclude that you're referring to **Judaism**. One has to ask:

Why on Earth would you conclude that Judaism “legitimizes indifferences and worship and inspires indulgence?”

You could say truthfully that the nation of Israel did in fact become indulgent. Because of their indulgence, some Israelites remained enslaved.

You cannot, though, truthfully say that the religion of the nation of Israel, Judaism, is a religion that promotes such indulgence.

God was the author of Judaism, just as He is the author of the Christian faith. To say that something is wrong with a belief system that God institutes simply because of man's disobedience is equivalent to stating that God Himself is **guilty of wrongdoing** (or evil, if you will).

Please don't go there.

+ ? -

+ “What is God to do when the time, money, and energy of his people are spent on ceremonies and institutions that neglect the needy?”

Great question. (Amos 3 answered it, of course...)

+ ? -

? “God doesn't have a problem with eating and drinking and owning things. It's when those things come at the expense of others' having their basic needs met – that's when the passionate rants of the prophets really kick in.”

Your first sentence here is correct, but we need to wrangle a bit with the concept of “...when those things come at the expense of others' having their basic needs met...”

Talk like this is so very **vague**. Taking into account the rest of what we've read so far, one must conclude that you are suggesting the cornerstone of the socialist position: **redistribution of**

wealth.

But our Lord said, “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.”
Matthew 26:11 (ESV)

This means that, despite our attempts to insure that everyone is well fed, clothed, housed and taken care of, we will **always** have poor people.

This means that some will never have “their basic needs met” (as if we could get everyone to agree on what “basic needs” are, anyway).

Sounding more and more like a broken record. Please reconsider **retracting** what you’ve written in this text, as much of it flies in the face of **clear doctrine.**

+ **?** **-**

Page 047

? “And that word Amos uses: oppression? We first heard that word in Egypt.”

Have to ask, even though this won't sound very loving: **So what?**

The Old Testament uses the word “sin” (with all of its variants) in **288 verses**, while the word “oppress” (with all of its variants) is found only **23 times.**

You’re **grasping at straws** when you’d do better to re-examine your position altogether.

+ **?** **-**

+ “God is patient but also pragmatic. God has a plan.”

Absolutely correct.

+ **?** **-**

+ / - “God cares about the suffering of the world and will not allow the indifference of his

people to stand in the way of his plans to relieve that suffering.”

Again, not to play a broken record, but – since you’re **two out of three** – here goes:

Yes, God cares about suffering of people in the world, and yes, He will not allow anything to stand in the way of His plans.

Sometimes, though, it is not God’s plan to relieve the suffering of man. **Job** comes to mind as the perfect example of one who suffered terribly, and God allowed it to happen.

Did God’s plans fail as a result? **Not at all!** Because of Job’s faithfulness, God was glorified.

End of argument.

+ ? -

+ “Amaziah the king, a descendant of Solomon...hates this message...the scene is overwhelming. A simple shepherd confronting the most powerful man in the nation...”

Your summary of Amos 7:14-17 here is **right on**.

+ ? -

Page 048

- “...the prophets came to remind the people of Sinai, to bring the people back to the covenant they made with their God, to help them remember that God is looking for a body.”

Again, it was God’s desire that His chosen nation, Israel, would be obedient to His covenant, but it is **fallacious** to say that He was “looking for a body.” (See earlier posts.)

+ ? -

- “It’s written in 2 Chronicles that God sent them these prophets because God ‘had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.’ God want to live among the people in the sacred union of the divine and human, but they aren’t interested.”

The passage you refer to here is 2 Chronicles 36:15, and the text does mention God's "dwelling place." The dwelling place is a reference to either the **Tabernacle** or the **Temple** (depending on what point in time we're discussing). Here then it is clearly a reference to the temple in Jerusalem.

By the way, to say "God wants to live among the people" is really not biblical. God is a spirit who does not live in a habitation the way we do. It would be better to say, "God wants to **commune** with His chosen people," I think.



+ / - "Amos gets kicked out of the palace, Jeremiah gets beaten up and put in stocks and thrown in a pit, and the people don't change. They don't remember Egypt. They've forgotten Sinai. They're too comfortable."

It is entirely fair and right to take Amos, Jeremiah, the bondage in Egypt, and God's covenant at Sinai and place them together in a sentence like this for the sake of making a point.

Just not that one. The problem with the Israelites was not their affluence, but their affluence was a **consequence** of their root problem.

What was their root problem? (Everyone say it with me...) **SIN!**

If you called someone's cardboard shack a mansion, I'd call you crazy (and insensitive). In the same way, it's wrong – **crazy-wrong** – to call "sin" something other than what it is. **Stop it.**



Page 049

- "The system works for those with the power and influence to change the system. They can't hear the cry."

Actually, I would put it like this:

"I would say that sinful people build systems, built with the intent of gaining power and influence. They might influence the system so that those who are under oppression are set free, but sinful creatures will **always** follow their own lusts. It's not that they can't hear the cry; they won't allow themselves to."



- "And so God suffers."

To be fair, I must also include the footnote you supply regarding this statement.

"People are reluctant to ascribe human characteristics to God, such as suffering or searching, because it implies that God changes or is incomplete. But a God who suffers over the human condition and searches for a body to relieve that suffering is a critical aspect of Jewish theology. Abraham Joshua Heschel titles the whole of his philosophy of Judaism, "God in Search of Man," claiming that "not only does man need God, God is also in need of man. It is such knowledge that makes the soul of Israel immune to despair" (Heschel, God in Search of Man, 196). Jewish theology seems quite prepared to accept a God who become man, while Christian theology embraces the belief that God already has."

Please tell me you're kidding.

Please tell me that you don't honestly believe that God is suffering in any way, shape or form.

Please tell me that you don't believe that God is searching in the way that the Christian longs for and yearns for God.

Please tell me that you don't believe that God needs a body to relieve suffering.

Please tell me that you don't believe Heschel's incorrect assessment of Judaism.

Please tell me that you don't believe God has some need in the way that we have needs, that He is incomplete in some way.

Please tell me that you don't believe that, despite the fact that God has chosen the nation of Israel to be His chosen people, the "soul of Israel" is in some way immune to despair. (Read the book of Jeremiah and you'll understand what I mean.)

Please tell me that you understand that Jesus Christ was, when He lived on this earth, fully man and fully God, all at the same time.

Please - **PLEASE** - repent and retract your comments. They are an **affront** to the creator God who is wholly complete in and of Himself. They are an **insult** to the one who made you and loves you.

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+ / - "Everything falls apart, the temple is destroyed, many are killed, and those who survive are carried off to a foreign land called Babylon. And in Babylon, the survivors become 'servants.' And what is a servant who serves against their will? A slave. The Israelites find themselves in a foreign land. Does this sound familiar? Sounds a lot like Egypt, doesn't it?"

Yes, yes and no.

Everything that you say in this passage is true, but you omit some very important items.

You keep coming back to Egypt. If you're bound and determined to keep the references to Egypt in your text, I would ask you to consider the following:

Egypt serves a very important example for the Christian not to follow. Just as Israel was God's chosen people, the believer who comes to faith in Christ has been **elected** by God to be His dear child.

(Yes, Virginia, I said elected. Do a word search for the word 'elect' in the KJV, NJKV, ESV or NASB - faithful translations - and you'll be **flabbergasted**. You'll be beside yourself. But you won't have a clear-cut answer to outright dismiss the number of times God stresses the fact that He has always called out His own.)

Just as Israel turned from God in her disobedience, so does the Christian continue to sin.

Just as Israel experienced the consequence of slavery in Egypt, so does the Christian struggle with strongholds of sin in his or her life.

To attach some significance (to Exodus and Egypt) other than the problem of sin is of greater importance in the life of the Christian is to make God a **liar**, and Jesus a **fake**.

The fact that He taught us several things about the kingdom of God, how to live on this earth, and much more does not undermine the most important reason He came:

Christ Jesus came to save sinners. Period. Exclamation mark.

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Summary of Findings

As the title and subtitle suggest, this book attempts to redefine what it is that God (Jesus) wants for Christians and the local church today.

Authors Bell and Golden at times deliver accurate exegesis of Exodus.

Most of the time, though, they stray from literal interpretation and exegesis into the realm of **pure fantasy**.

Throughout their book, Bell and Golden **twist** Scripture from what the text clearly means (when read in context and when read in respect to what is taught elsewhere in Scripture). One must realize, though, that they must do this if they are to see their desire for a social gospel in any way, shape or form “validated” by the authority of God and the Bible.

Most Christians today do not read a book like *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* with their Bible in front of them. Truly, if it were not for the epidemic of biblical illiteracy today, this text would not be considered by most Christians today.

Because so much of the first chapter of this book was clearly counter to accurate and true Bible teachings, because I am committed to defending the truth of Scripture at all costs, I submit the following grade without reservation:

F

Bibliography

¹ www.dictionary.com.

² e-Sword.

³ www.theopedia.com.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ www.apologeticspress.org/articles/368

⁷ e-Sword.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ e-Sword.

Final Letter to Rob Bell and Don Golden

Dear Rob and Don,

Hello again. This is my final letter to you regarding your text, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile*. I'll be brief.

Please read what you've written and taken into consideration what the Bible says.

Please ask God that He would help you to see what I (and some others) have seen as very problematic in regards to your teachings.

Please ask God that He would give you both discernment to re-evaluate and the humility it takes to do so.

Please consider that what you have written is flawed, that you might be humble enough to give it another look.

Please consider recanting from this position of what is so clearly **apostasy**, for the Lord's sake, for the sake of all who might read your material (whether they be saved or not), and for your own.

And finally, please understand that it is not my intention to damage your reputation. Instead, it is my hope that you would come to the truth of Scripture as God intends for us to understand it, become convicted of sin by it, repent, and live to faithfully serve the One who saved you by growing in the knowledge of it.

May God cause all three of us to be surrendered to His truth and His will for our lives,

Chris

PS If you choose to respond, that would be **fantastic**. It would be beneficial for readers to see the primary writers involved in a continuation of this discussion.