

17. The Saviour's Work – Part 1

Previously...

Immediately after Adam and Eve's Fall in the garden of Eden—which brought sin and death into the world—Yahweh promised to send a Saviour.



At just the right time in history, Yahweh did indeed send Jesus to earth as the Messiah.

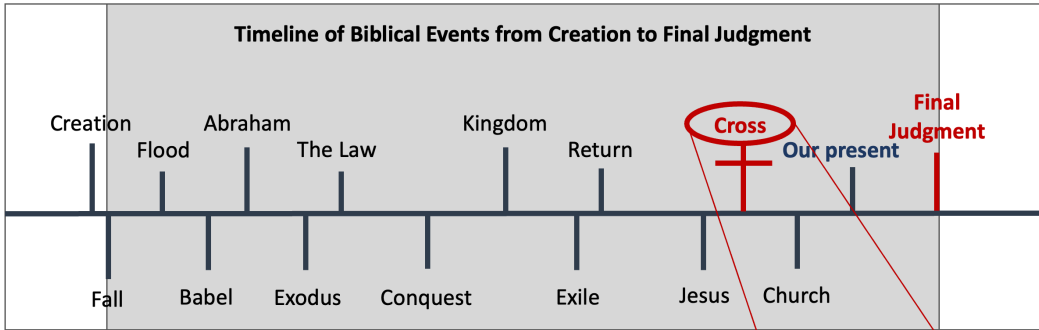
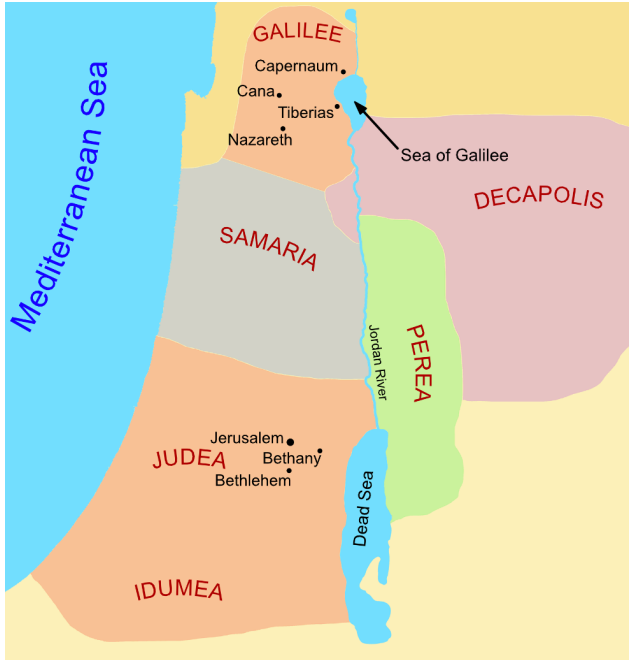
Jesus lived for about 33 years, spending most of His time in Galilee and Judea. He went about publicly teaching people about Yahweh and doing many miraculous signs to prove that He was both the promised Saviour and God Himself.

He healed the sick, raised to life those who died, controlled nature and fed thousands of people from five loaves and two fish.

But how was Jesus going to be the Saviour?

How was He going to save people from eternal death?

In other words, what was Jesus' "job" when He came to earth?

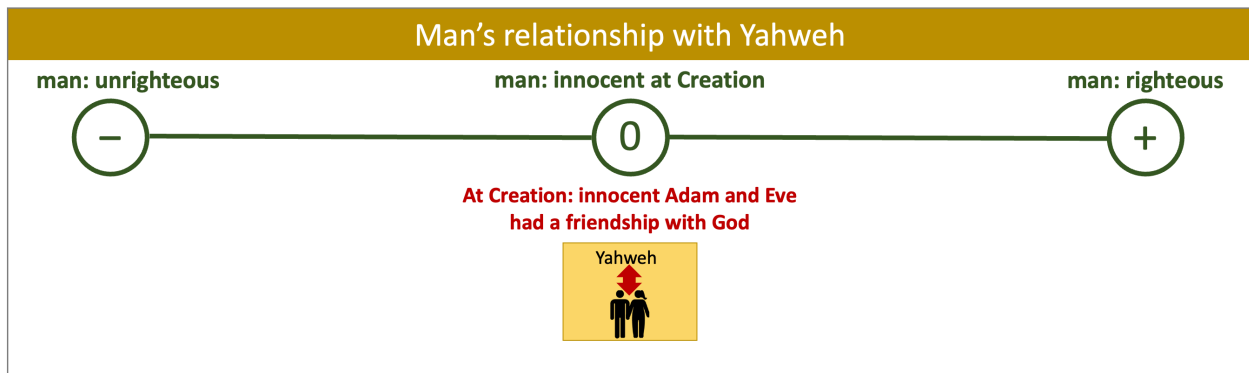


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|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 How the world came to be | 2 Why there is evil in the world | 5 God revealed His standards | 6 God taught about Himself | 9 The Saviour's work | 10 The present age |
| 3 God judged the evil world | 4 God's plan to reach the world | 7 How God's people failed | 8 God's rescue plan | 11 How the world ends | 12 God's invitation |

WHAT IS MANKIND'S PROBLEM?

Before we discuss what Jesus came to earth to do, we need to better understand mankind's problem with sin.

When Yahweh first created Adam and Eve, they were innocent as they had not done anything, either good or bad yet. Being innocent, they could enjoy friendship with the righteous God.

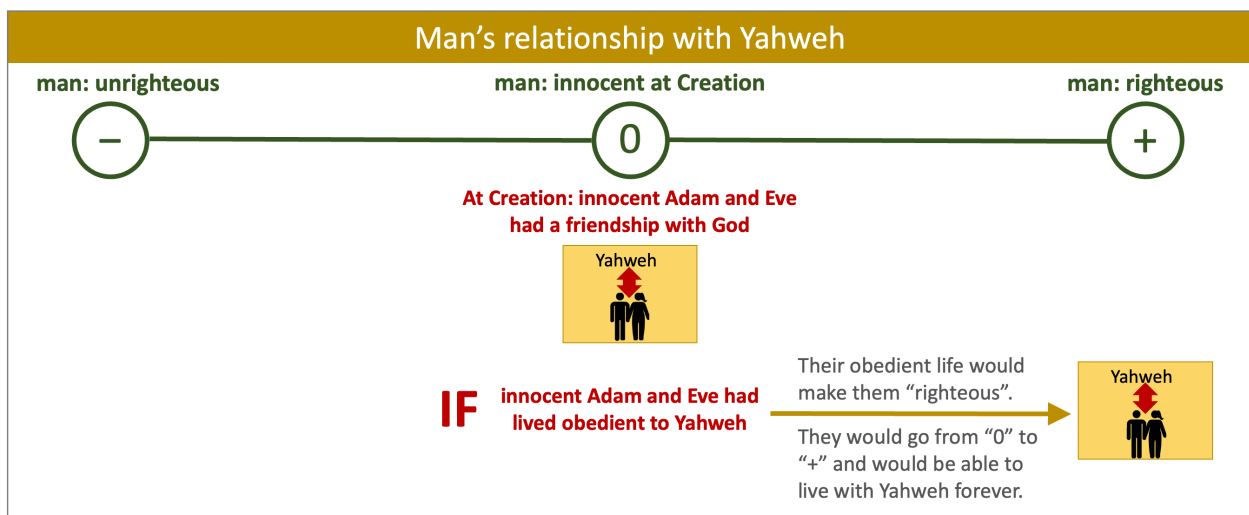


Yahweh gave Adam and Eve one command, which was not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Day after day, as they lived and made the decision to obey God's command, they would have done what was good and right in His sight.

In this way, they would have "gained righteousness" and therefore been able to continue living with Yahweh forever. This was Moses' explanation of how a person could "gain righteousness".

Deuteronomy 6:25

For we will be counted as righteous when we obey all the commands the LORD our God has given us.



However, instead of trusting Yahweh and obeying His command, Adam and Eve mistrusted Him and disobeyed His one instruction. They rebelled and sinned against Him. They broke off their friendship with God. This act of disobedience caused them to become unrighteous before God.

Not only that, this sin impacted every one of their descendants.

Romans 5:12

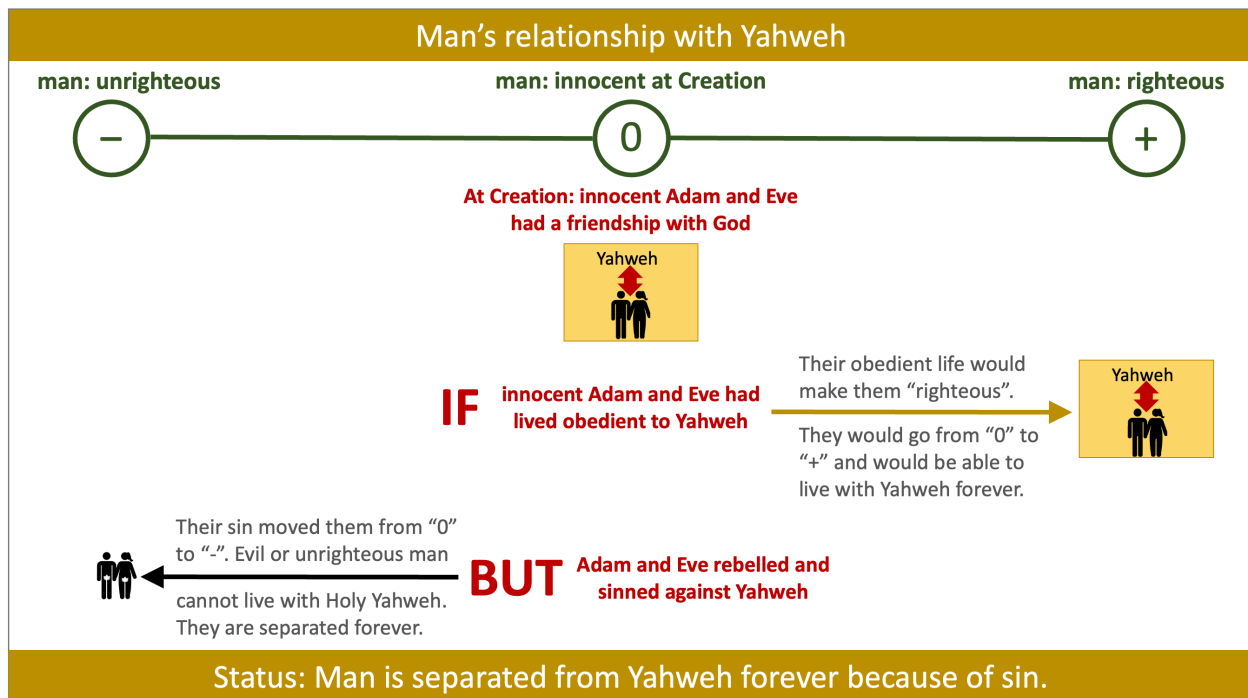
When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

Because of Adam and Eve's choice to distrust God, they were banished from Yahweh's presence and had to live outside the garden of Eden. Likewise, all their children too, were born outside the garden of Eden. They were all born separated from God.

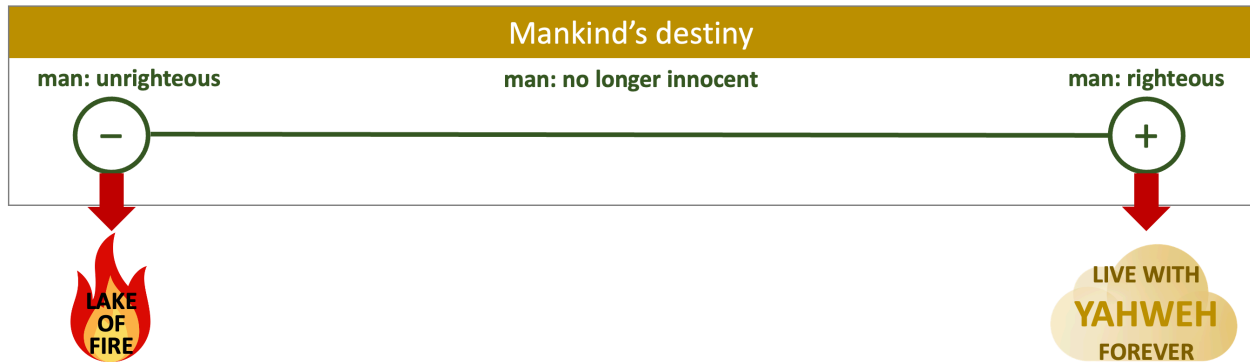
Adam and Eve's rebellion had corrupted them. This means their rebellion spoilt their innocent nature.

From then on, this spoilt nature, or the spiritual sin nature, would remain in them and when they had children, they would pass on the corrupted sin nature to all their descendants as well.

This means that every single descendant of Adam and Eve has since been born separated from God.



In other words, every person today is born separated from God. And the destiny of those who are unrighteous and separated from Yahweh is clear: it is the lake of fire. Only those who are counted as righteous will be able to be reconciled with Yahweh and have eternal life.



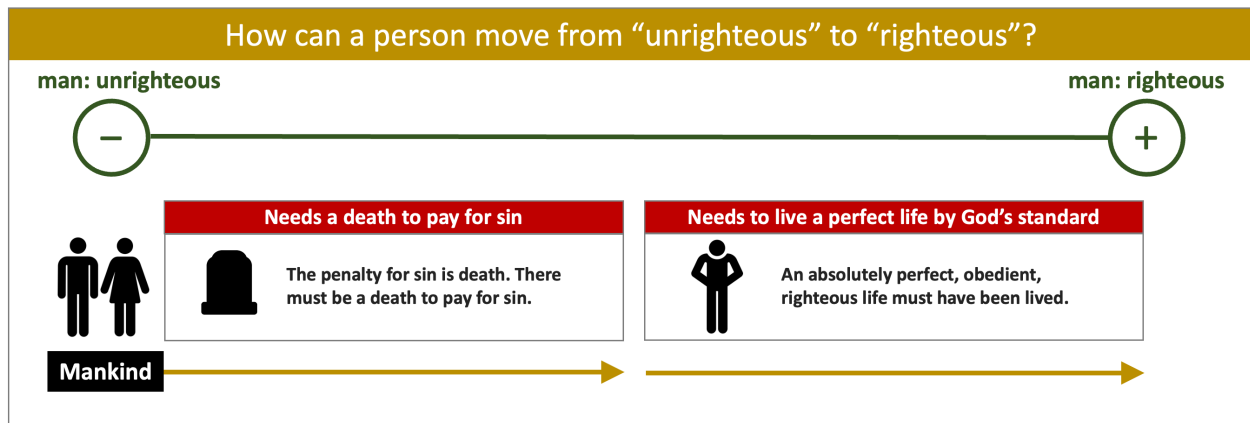
To avoid the lake of fire and be reconciled with Yahweh, a person must somehow move from “unrighteous” (“-“) to “righteous” (“+”). But how does this happen?

First, mankind's death penalty for sin must be dealt with:

- The sin problem in man needs to be eliminated. Because the penalty for sin is death, people would have to pay for their sin by dying for their own sin.

Second, mankind needs perfect righteousness:

- People need to live an absolutely perfect life: one of full obedience to God without a single sin, bad thought, word or action throughout their whole life.



However, this is not good news for mankind! Why?

- **Death:** If people were to die for their own sin, it means they would be in the lake of fire forever.
- **Perfect life:** Moreover, the Bible's record of the history of mankind from Adam and Eve down to Abraham shows that humans are not able to live a perfect life in God's evaluation.

This means that it is impossible for people to get themselves to “righteous” (“+”).

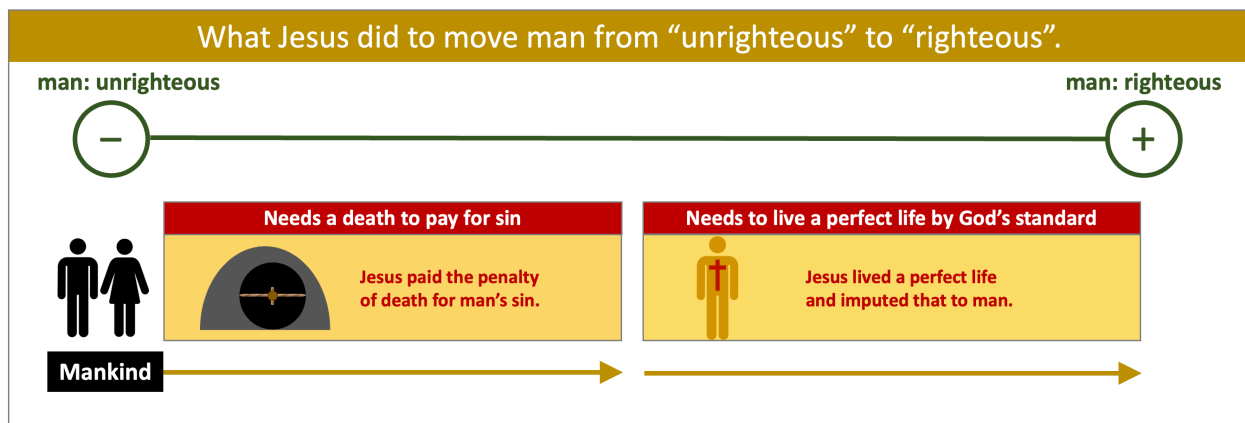
Here is where the Saviour comes in.

WHAT JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO DO

Die: Jesus came to earth to die in mankind's place. Jesus would be mankind's substitute. This was how Yahweh planned to punish mankind's sin without punishing mankind.

Live a perfect life: Jesus also came to earth to live a perfect life by God's standards. And then He would credit His perfect life to mankind's account. This means that Yahweh would see the perfect life that Jesus lived and count it as though mankind had lived this life.

This is how Jesus would get mankind from "unrighteous" ("-") to "righteous" ("+").



We will look closer at both of these two works of the Saviour.

1. Jesus came to live a perfect life

For Jesus to be able to give a record of a "perfect life" to mankind:

- Jesus had to be entirely without sin from the moment He was born.
- And then, in His lifetime, He needed to have committed no sin.

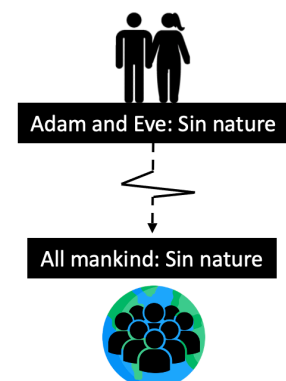


a. Because Jesus was born of the virgin, He was born perfect, without sin.

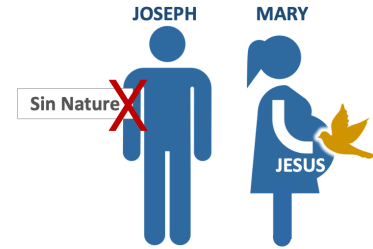
The problem with all of Adam and Eve's descendants is that all would be born with Adam's spoilt spiritual sin nature.

Jesus is God and it is impossible for Him to have any sin in Him because He is infinitely righteous.

So, for Jesus to be born perfect, He could not be born in a "natural" way, as all "natural" descendants of Adam have the sin nature.



So, while Yahweh didn't provide all the details, the Bible states that God the Holy Spirit performed a physical and spiritual miracle in Mary that made Jesus her physical son. He was the "seed of the woman", a human with no human father. And this virgin birth, where Jesus did not have a biological human father, prevented Jesus from getting Adam's sin nature.



This meant that Jesus was born with a physical human body just like ours, but He had absolutely no sin in Him.

b. In Jesus' lifetime, He committed no sin. He was perfect.

Earlier, we saw that God had given the nation of Israel His standard of right and wrong in the Mosaic Law. God told them that if they wanted to be righteous, they had to obey all 613 laws all the time. Israel failed. The nation of Israel was never able to live righteously by God's laws or His standard of righteousness.



However, Jesus achieved this. While on earth, Jesus obeyed the full law perfectly. In fact, Jesus said that He did not come to throw away the Mosaic Law, but He came to fulfil it, meaning that He would achieve Yahweh's standard of righteousness completely. This is what He said.

Matthew 5:17 (NIV)

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them."

And this is what Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, testified about Him.

1 Peter 2:22

He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.

Because Jesus was born without sin and He committed no personal sin, Jesus was totally sinless. He was perfect.



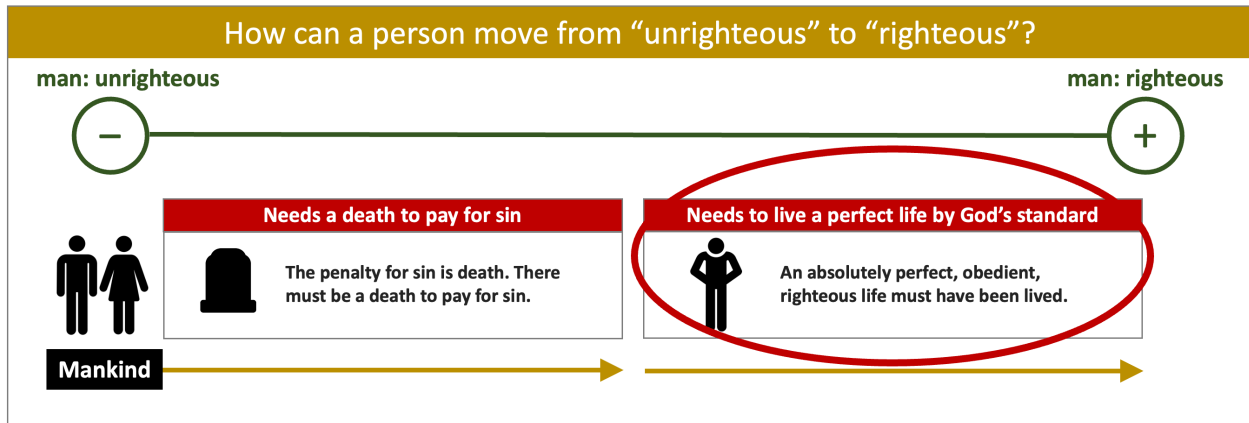
For Jesus to be the Saviour, He had to be sinless

As a man, Jesus needed to have a sinless perfect life because this was exactly the kind of righteousness that is acceptable to God. Jesus would live this perfect life, then credit, or deposit this perfect life into people. This was how Paul, a disciple of Jesus, explained it.

Romans 5:18–19

¹⁸ Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. ¹⁹ Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

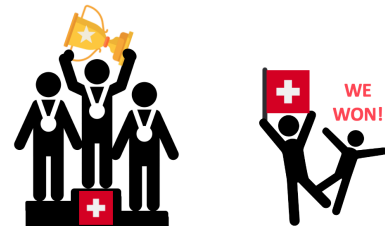
Paul was saying that Jesus' "one act of righteousness" was His perfect life of obedience which He placed into mankind's account. And because of that, mankind could be counted as righteous and could have a relationship with Yahweh.



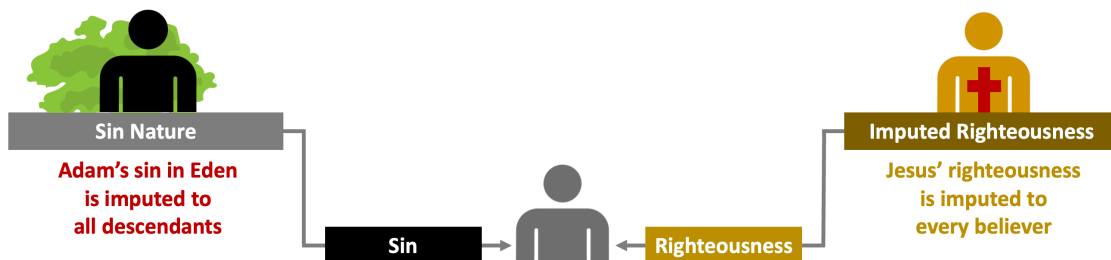
Some people get really upset when they understand what Paul is saying. Specifically, they get angry when they realise that mankind’s sin problem started with Adam and Eve. They feel God is unfair to impute to them a sin that they themselves did not commit. They were never in the garden of Eden.

However, it is important to understand the idea of “representation”. In fact, we see this same idea of a “representative” working today as well. For example, in any international sports event, countries will send their teams to compete.

Let’s say Switzerland’s swimmers win their race. People can congratulate any Swiss and say, “Congratulations, you won the race!” Not every Swiss swam in the race, only the team representing Switzerland. But when their representatives win, their victory is credited or imputed to every Swiss citizen. Likewise, if they lose, people can say to any Swiss, “Oh, sorry you lost.”



Innocent Adam and Eve represented all mankind in the garden of Eden. In fact, being innocent, they had the best chance among all human beings of success in obeying God and gaining righteousness. Unfortunately, they failed.



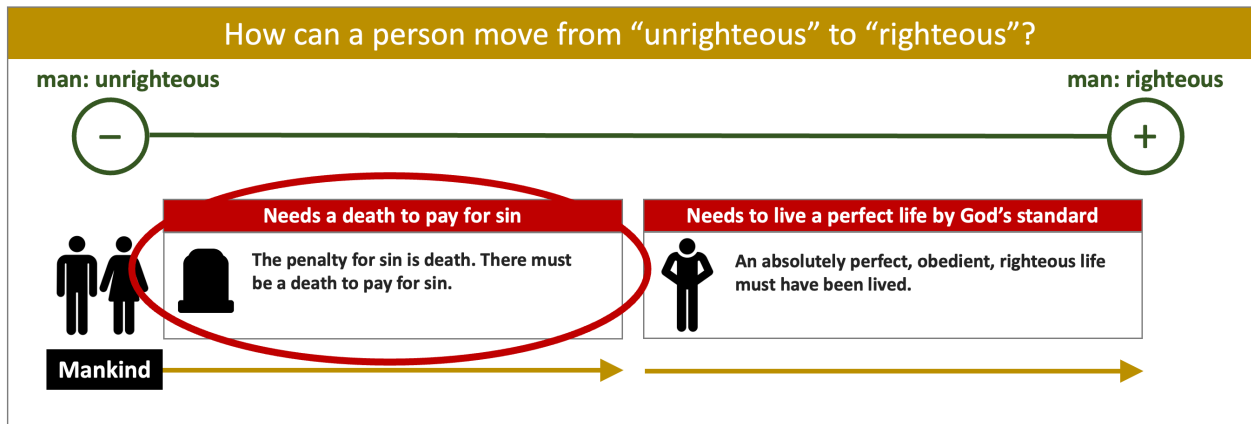
However, the good news is that Jesus also imputes. He imputes His one perfect life of obedience to people. And that is how His “one act of righteousness”, His perfect life of obedience, can be credited to a person so they can be counted as righteous before Yahweh.

So, living the perfect life of obedience was one work or job that Jesus came to do. However, there was a second: He also came to die for mankind.

2. Jesus came to die for all mankind

Jesus living a perfect life and crediting that to mankind would provide a person with a completely righteous life.

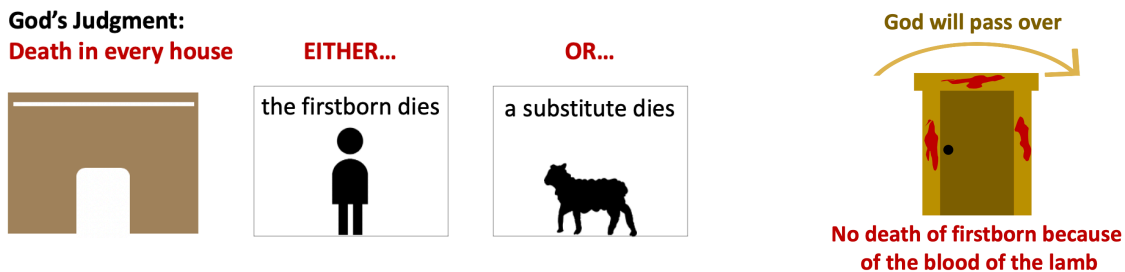
However, because mankind has sin, man also faces a death penalty.



Mankind needs a death to pay for sin. And actually, people can die for their own sin. The problem, however, is that if they were to die for their own sin, they would remain in eternal death, that is, separated from God forever in the lake of fire.

In His mercy, Yahweh told people how He intended to punish mankind's sin without punishing man: He would accept a substitutionary death.

God taught this using the tenth plague as He saved the nation of Israel out of Egypt. In that plague, all firstborns were sentenced to die. However, God accepted the death of a lamb in place of the firstborn.



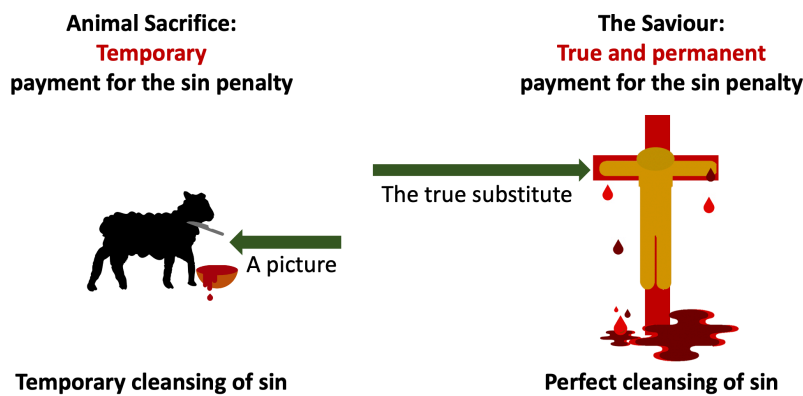
Yahweh was actually showing people how He planned to save mankind from eternal death: a substitute would die in their place.



However, it could not be just any substitute. This substitute had to fulfil two important criteria.

a. The real substitute had to be a man

While Yahweh was teaching mankind that He would accept a substitutionary death, He accepted animals as temporary substitutes. However, the real substitute had to be a real man.



This was because animals are not of the same value as man. This is how God explained it.

Hebrews 10:4–7, 10

⁴ For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God,

“You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings.

But you have given me a body to offer.

⁶ You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin.

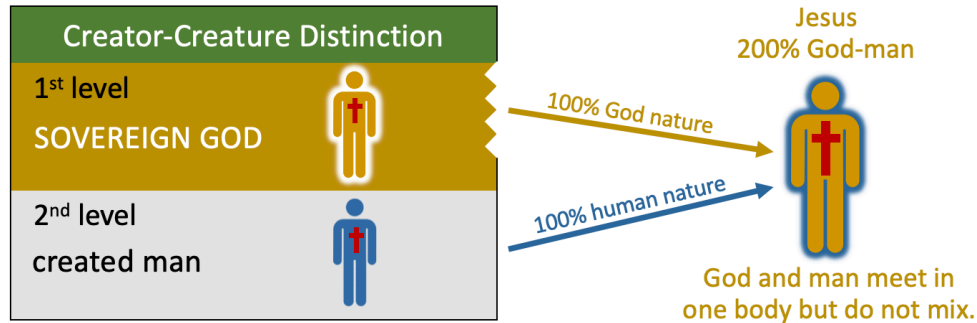
⁷ Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God— as is written about me in the Scriptures.’”

¹⁰ For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.

Jesus was a real man. Jesus had flesh and blood, just as human beings do. So Jesus was an acceptable substitute for mankind.

Hebrews 2:14–15

¹⁴ Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. ¹⁵ Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.



b. The real substitute had to be sinless

If the substitute had any sin, he could not be mankind's Saviour. Why? This is because he would have had his own sin to pay for. So he would not have been able to pay for other people's sin.

But because Jesus had absolutely no sin in Him, He could be the Messiah, the sufficient sacrifice.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

As Saviour, Jesus willingly took on mankind's sin penalty (eternal death) by dying on the cross. This was how Peter, Jesus' disciple, explained it.

1 Peter 1:18–20

¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰ God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.

Jesus fulfilled both these criteria: He was sinless and He was a man. Actually, He is the only one in all of heaven and earth who could ever fulfil both these criteria. No one else can.

- Spirit beings like good angels can't: they are not human.
- Human beings can't: they are not sinless.

This means that only God Himself can be mankind's Saviour.

So Jesus willingly took on the role of substitute for all mankind. That was one of the things He came to earth to accomplish.

What happened next?

Jesus came to earth as the God-man to live a perfect life and to die in mankind's place as the perfect substitute. But how did He end up dying? And did He stay dead? We will look at what the Bible recorded about these matters in the next lesson.



Bible reading for review

Genesis 1:1–3:24; Romans 3:9–5:21