

The New Creation Excursion:

Link Between Heaven and Earth

John 1: 51

⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

CHRISTMAS TREE

JOHN 1:51 IS A TRULY AMAZING VERSE. I've been pondering it for several years now. It reads, "And [Jesus] said to [Nathaniel], "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." To the modern mind, this verse remains cryptic at every point save the most basic one. Yet, because we have the basic point, we are able to get the most important meaning from it. What is this basic point?

The language Jesus uses here comes from **Genesis 28:12** which reads in the ESV, "He [Jacob] dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and

descending on it!” You can see the obvious allusion to Genesis and so you can understand what Jesus is saying if you have some kind of understanding of this story in Genesis.

Why would Jesus speak this way to Nathanael? It seems out of place and frankly, bizarre. Part of the reason may have to do with his remark to Nathanael that “**Here is a true Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.**” Jacob was the consummate **deceiver**. Indeed, **that’s what his name meant!** If Nathanael really is a rather tainted fellow as I argued last week, then there may be a comparison being made between the two men. This is reinforced by the fact that Jacob becomes Israel and Jesus calls Nathanael “a true Israelite.”

Here are the basics we can discover from reading more of the Genesis account. This is the story where **Jacob is converted** or effectually called by Christ. As such, it sort of fits John here with the calling of the disciples. In his dream, the LORD affirms with Jacob the covenant he had made with Abraham, and Isaac his father (**vv. 13-14**). This is important, because it shows us that the function of the “ladder” was 1. **To deliver a message**, and 2. **To bring about some kind of legal decision** from heaven. The key to his conversion is the promise that is attached to the covenant, “**Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you**” (**vs. 15**). What a beautiful promise

to a man full of deceit. Isn't this just like our gracious God? It sounds just like Nathanael, as we saw last week.

At this point Jacob awakes and says, “**Surely, the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.**’ And he was afraid and said, ‘**How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven**” (vs. 16-17). Thus, Jacob names the place Beth-el or “**house of God**” and it still has this name to this day. So, on the most basic level, Jesus is making some interesting claims.

He is telling Nathanael that **God is in this place**—that is the body of Jesus. Just as we will see Ch. 2 when he calls himself the temple (**John 2:19-20**), Jesus is saying that he is the house of God. He is also saying that he is the “gate of heaven,” the one that bridges heaven and earth. John’s whole point up until now has been to show you that heaven and earth have been bridged from above rather than below. It is God who has come down to us. It is God who has provided a way in Christ whereby we might find our way back to him, back to the relationship we all lost in our first parents when we were kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

This is all fantastic stuff, and anyone who can read **Genesis 28** and **John 1:51** can figure it out without much help. But the image here is so much deeper. It is so much more powerful if you understand what it points back to and what it points

forward towards. That is what I want to spend the rest of the sermon helping you to see this morning.

Understanding Mythology

The things I'm going to discuss here have their **origins in mythology**. Just here, we run into a huge problem. Most of us have been taught that mythology equals fantasy, fiction, untruth, lies, and the like. When we had the choice to take a mythology class in high school, most of us ran as fast as we could to sign up for "**typing 101**." We don't like mythology and have come to view it as inherently evil. Therefore, we are not familiar with it and we do not understand it and it greatly impoverishes our understanding of the Bible.

Let me help ease your mind by using mythology in a way many of you are already comfortable with. It is the story of the Flood. **Plato** (428 – 348 B.C.) has a great line that shows how at least he understood this 2,500 years ago,

Athenian: Then what view do you both take of the ancient legends? Is there any truth to them?

Clinias: What legends are you talking about?

Athenian: Those which recount recurring destructions of humanity by floods, epidemics or from a variety of causes, when only a few survivors are left behind.

Clinias: Oh, those stories are entirely credible to anyone.

Athenian: Well then, let us discuss one of those mass exterminations, the one that was brought about by the Great Deluge.

(**Plato**, *The Laws* Book III)

The Flood is a story that is told around the world, not only in the Bible, but in the oral traditions of over 270 diverse cultures from every continent on earth, including the islands of the oceans.¹ From Babylon to Barbados and Hawaii to Helsinki, they tell the story *in their myths*. The story tells of **their origins** as a people and of **their cosmology**, that is their view of the universe and how the heavens and earth made sense to them. And many of the details are similar to those in the Bible (such as a favored family and animals being saved from a universal deluge in a boat).

I say that you are probably comfortable with this fact, because even very conservative Christians groups like the *Creation Research Institute* and **Ken Ham** use these stories to help people see that the biblical story of the Flood was not made up. If so many diverse isolated people tell the same story, it must be true, even though details over time have changed. Indeed, the Bible shows us that at one time all of the nations were together and were only separated into different tongues after the Flood. So why wouldn't they all preserve the same story?

Cosmic Mountain

¹ A good summary of this can be found in **James M. Boice**, *Genesis Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 353-59.

There are two myths that have been preserved for us that relate directly to what Jesus tells Nathanael, and to what Jacob saw in his dream. You can see the first by understanding better what it was that Jacob actually saw. The ESV says that he saw a “**ladder.**” The other translation is a “**stairway.**” Medieval art usually depicts it as a **ladder**, and most people have this picture in this mind today. Songs like “**Climbing, climbing, climbing Jacob’s ladder**” reinforce this image pretty strongly.



Lambeth Bible (1140-50)
Canterbury, England



Psalter of Saint Louis 1256 AD
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

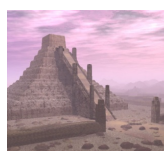
I think most people picture this as a golden ladder reaching up into the clouds, suspended by nothing, just hanging there. This is not what Jacob saw.

The *Bible Background Commentary* says, “From the fact that the messengers of God appear passing between the realms in Jacob’s dream, it is clear that he is viewing a portal to

heaven. Such portals are envisioned as stairways (as opposed to ladders) in ancient mythology.” Unless you are living in some computer designed video game, stairways are not suspended in the air by nothing. They are attached to buildings. Thus, the commentary references the famous **Tower of Babel**. Jacob saw something similar to the Tower of Babel, or better, that which the Tower was built to emulate.

But many people also have a picture of the Tower in their head which probably doesn't match the reality. I used to think of the **World Trade Center towers** as what the Tower must have looked like. I thought the purpose of the Tower was literal: to see if they could actually construct a building that would be tall enough that they could take an old fashioned elevator to heaven. How dumb were our ape-like ancestors? I was a kid. It made sense to me.

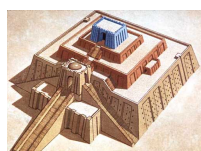
In reality, the Tower of Babel was something called a **ziggurat**. Ziggurats were built to emulate mountains. There were like pyramids with stairways, not anything like a modern sky scraper. They were built by civilizations from North and South America to the Middle East to China.



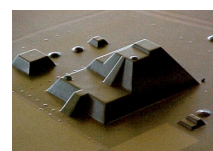
Artistic Rendition:
Tower of Babel



Top: Ur-Nammu (2,100 B.C.?) in Ur, Iraq
Oldest Reconstructed Ziggurat in the World



Monks Mound (Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site),
Collinsville, Illinois



Pyramid of the Moon,
Teotihuacán, Mexico

These ziggurats were viewed as **temples for the gods**, the place where the gods lived and interacted with the physical world. In fact, ancient ziggurats still survive in the old world and their names do too. “**Temple of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth,**” “**Temple Which Links Heaven and Earth,**” “**Temple of the Stairway of Pure Heaven,**” “**Temple of the Exalted Mountain.**”²

The Backgrounds Commentary continues “[these] ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia ... were built to provide **the stairway for the gods to come down and be worshiped in their temples.** Jacob is not seeing a ziggurat, but he is seeing the stairway portal between heaven and earth that ziggurats were designed to provide.”³ We can now see some reason why Jesus would use this image of himself, for he is God come down out of heaven to earth, and he is the dwelling in which God resides in all his fullness. John has made a big deal of this in his Gospel already.

But what does a ziggurat have to do with anything going on in the *Nathanael* story? What is the point of the image? As **Dr. Boice** says, “**The difficulty with this is finding a reason why Jesus should allude to Jacob in this context?**”⁴ I think the

² **John Walton**, “The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 159-60.

³ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament) Volume 1: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 106.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, Pbk. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 152.

“deceit” language with Jacob the deceiver provides some answer to that question. But the true answer lies in returning again to the context of the new creation week in which this story is found. The new creation takes us back to the original creation and the things that were created there.

One of these things is a place called Eden. Like the tower and the ladder, Eden is also a misunderstood place. If you ask me why, the answer is that we have forgotten the imagery because of our disdain for mythology. How is Eden misunderstood? Most of us think of Eden as a Garden. But the text says that there was a garden “in” Eden ([Gen 2:8](#)). The garden was smaller than Eden.

Eden is the source of a mighty river. It says, “A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers” ([Gen 2:10](#)). As the mighty [Colorado River](#) begins in Rocky Mountain National Park, many rivers often have their source in the mountains. Thus, when we go to [Ezekiel 28](#) we should not be surprised at all to find Ezekiel saying, “You were in *Eden*, the garden of God ... you were anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were *on the holy mountain of God*” ([Ezek 28:13-14](#)). He referred to it in [Ezek 28:2](#) as “the seat of the gods.” It is the place where they deliberated.

Who was on this holy Mt. Eden? It says it was an [anointed guardian cherub](#). Cherubim are heavenly beings and

a non-technical catch-all phrase for them is “**angels**.” In other words, angels were there on Mt. Eden. I know of three angels that are there in the Genesis story, actually four (well, sort of). There is the one most people think of as a snake, but he is really a heavenly being which Paul says “**disguises himself as an angel of light**” (**2 Cor 11:14**). This is Lucifer. The other two angels are actually called cherubim and they were placed at the gate of Eden to guard the entrance when God kicked Adam and Eve out of there (**Gen 3:24**).

Again, what did Jacob see in his dream? He saw a stairway where angels were ascending and descending. Then he called this the “**gate**” of heaven. What do gates do? They let people into one place and out of another. They also guard the entrance of those places. Type in “gate” into Google images and up will come mostly pictures of mansion of the rich and famous. If you’ve ever been to Hollywood, you’ve seen a lot of gates, because those people don’t want you coming into their residences.

The “gate of heaven” intentionally evokes the original “ziggurat” not made by men, but by the very hand of God. That ziggurat was Mt. Eden.⁵ Eden was not, of course, a ziggurat, but was the pattern from which the ziggurats were made. It was the place where heavenly beings intersected and

⁵ Types of Mt. Eden include Mt. Ararat, Mt. Sinai, Mt. Zion, Mt. Hermon, and Mt. Calvary (as we will see).

interacted with earth. The chief of these heavenly beings is God himself, who came to Adam and Eve as **the Angel of the LORD** in Genesis 2-3.

If you will indulge a moment longer, you may ask what this has to do with mythology. As we have been studying from time to time in sermons and Sunday school classes in our church, the Bible speaks of something called a “**divine council.**” **Psalm 82:1** says, “**God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.**” The language is very mythological, but as **C. S. Lewis** says, it is the myth that is also a fact.⁶ Anyone familiar with mythology will instantly recognize the council, for like the flood, it is found in almost every ancient culture on earth. The most familiar is probably **Zeus and the Olympians**, the gods who deliberate from the top of Mt. Olympus over the affairs of the earth in a kind of legal deliberation. But you find them with Egyptians, Mayans, Norse, Hindus and many more cultures too. Given that divine councils are legal gatherings on mountains emulated by ziggurats, is not a coincidence at all that it is a legal ratification of a covenant that is the purpose of Jacob’s dream of the stairway. That’s what happens in such places as this. What Jacob saw must have been something akin to a lively court room in an episode of Perry Mason or Law and

⁶ **C. S. Lewis**, *God in the Dock*, 66-67.

Order (but probably not Night Court), except that it was in full of ANGELS!

Ezekiel goes on to speak about how this guardian cherub was “in the midst of the stones of fire.” As scholars have noted, this is a figurative way of describing other heavenly beings full of brilliance and light.⁷ **Stones and wood** are often associated with heavenly beings. This is why ancient peoples made their idols out of these materials. They thought perhaps the gods might indwell the material if they worshiped and prayed before the object. This can be seen easily in the pagan stories. One of the best examples I have found is a story of Baal which reads, “For a message I have, and I will tell you, a word, and I will recount to you. *The word of tree and the whisper of stone, the converse of Heaven with Hell, of Deeps with Stars. . . Come and I will reveal it. In the midst of my mountain, Divine Sapan, In the holy mount of my heritage, In the beautiful hill of my might.*”

I realize this is all very strange to us, but this *was* the ancient mind and how they viewed reality. They believed that on a cosmic mountain, angels dwelt up high and men dwelt at

⁷ This is an old interpretation. Gregory the Great said, “He gave the names of nine stones, since there are nine ranks of angels. The first angel was adorned and covered with these nine since when it was set ahead of the whole multitude of angels, it was more illustrious in comparison with them.” Gregory the Great, “Forty Gospel Homilies 34,” also [1 Enoch 18:6-9](#) (compare [Bundabishn 2.4](#) and [Venidad 19.32](#)); [Pseudo-Philo 25:11-12](#); [Gilgamesh Epic](#); [KTU 1.3.iii:20-25, 28-31](#); [Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48, Hermeneia](#) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 93.

the base. The mountain itself was a figure that represented the intersection of the two worlds. One scholar writes of this place that in this ancient mind it could be, “A center of fertility, the primeval hillock of creation, the meeting place of the gods, the dwelling place of the high god, the meeting place of heaven and earth, the monument effectively upholding the order of creation, the place where god meets man, a place of theophany.”⁸

Most of this fits the context of Genesis. The **hill of creation** fits the context of John’s gospel, as he is telling us about the new creation. Thus, for Jesus to say that he is the place where angels ascend and descend, he is in effect saying that he is the source and location of the new creation. Beloved, if you want to have true life and new life, there is only one place to get it. You must go to the source, to the only bridge between our two worlds, to the son of God who came down as the son of man. For these angels ascend and descend upon the son of man.

By the way, “**Son of man**” is an important term that Jesus uses. John has been using “Son of God” until now. Why the change? It intentionally evokes **Daniel 7, a divine council scene** in which there are many thrones placed and heavenly beings are sitting upon them in judgment. As the Ancient of

⁸ **Richard J. Clifford**, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 5. This is the classic study on the cosmic mountain.

Days takes his seat, behold, one like a son of man came to the Ancient of Days and was presented to him. Then the judgment was rendered, and the son of man was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him (**Dan 7:9-14**).⁹ All of this is going to be fulfilled before Nathanael's eyes. But when?

Jesus says, “**You will see greater things than these.**” These greater things certainly begin to show themselves in the miracles, the casting out of demons, and the great teaching of Jesus.¹⁰ But they reach their climax at the cross. Some scholars have argued that the cross is the “ladder.”¹¹ Others have said that this misses the point.¹² Nothing we have seen so far would lead us to think of the cross. And, if viewed only from the perspective of the Jacob story, I would agree that it misses the point. However, there is another piece of mythology that strikes me as relevant to what Jesus says.

⁹ On the connection with Daniel 7 (even though he misses the divine council point), see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 164.

¹⁰ “You shall see” relates not to a future beyond the death of Jesus (as in Mark 14:62), but to the entire gamut of the action of the Son of Man for the kingdom of God: from the heaven that became open at his baptism, the blessings of the saving sovereignty will be poured out through him—in the signs he performs, the revelation of his word, the life that he lives, the death and resurrection that he accomplishes (his “lifting up”), till the goal is attained when the Son of Man welcomes the redeemed to the Father's house (14:3). George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 28.

¹¹ J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 416.

¹² Carson, 163.

World Tree

The other myth is one you may have never thought about, but which you are familiar with in a setting you may have never realized. It is actually identical in meaning and function to the cosmic mountain. Most Americans celebrated Christmas at some point in the past two weeks. This celebration involves symbolism of which most people are oblivious. It is called the **Christmas tree**. Some people will suggest that you can find the Christmas tree in the Bible, and indeed in my old NIV Study Bible I underlined and wrote “Christmas tree” in a passage in **Jeremiah 10:3-4**¹³ over 20 years ago.

Upon closer inspection of that text, however, you see that Jeremiah isn't talking about a Christmas tree, but simply good old fashioned carved/chiseled idols that are overlain with silver and gold. As the context says, “**Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field**” (**Jer 10:5**). They have form and shape and look like creatures, not trees decorated with tinsel, bulbs, and lights.¹⁴

Yet, the origins of the Christmas tree do go back to times past even Jeremiah. Again, many ancient cultures speak about

¹³ “For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter” (Jer 10:3-4 NIV).

¹⁴ I'm not suggesting that pagans didn't have something of an offering of presents under the tree, because it they may have. Jeremiah, however, doesn't seem to have this in mind.

this “tree” in their mythology. You find the same basic story in Hindu, Inca, Mayan, Babylonian, Assyrian, Germanic, and Scandinavian mythology. They call it the World Tree. Notice how in the Eden story, the trees are so prominent? The trees evoke the World Tree myth (with the historical reality caveat). Again, it is a way of viewing the universe and understanding heaven and earth.

If you saw the movie *Avatar*, you saw the World Tree. If you have played *World of Warcraft*, you have seen the World Tree. If you have read about the Lady Galadriel in the *Lord of the Rings*, you have read about the World Tree. It is in our pop-culture consciousness, whether we know it or not. Hollywood exploits it and we would be better if we knew what they were doing to us.



World Tree in Hyjal, *World of Warcraft*
Blizzard Entertainment



The Mighty Mellim of Caras Galadhon
Ted Nasmith



“Hometree,” in the movie *Avatar*
20th Century Fox

The most well known World Tree is in Scandinavian mythology. They call it Yggdrasil (*‘ig-drə-sil*). *Yggdrasil* is the “home of the gods” where they give judgment every day.¹⁵ From the base of the tree come three giant maidens who are

¹⁵ Prose Edda: *Gylfaginning* 15.

called “mighty in wisdom.” “Laws they made there, and life allotted | To the sons of men.”¹⁶ It is upon the World Tree that **Odin** sacrificed himself, “I know that I hung on a windy tree | nine long nights, | wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin, | myself to myself, | on that tree of which no man knows | from where its roots run.”¹⁷ It is primarily from Yggdrasil that the idea of the Christmas Tree—with its star/angel on top, lights, and well at the bottom—is derived.¹⁸ It reminds me of both the Garden of Eden and the Trees there, as well as the death of Christ on the cross. **C. S. Lewis** believed that such things were not coincidences, nor are Christians and Jews borrowing from pagans. Rather, this is deeply imbedded in the consciousness of humanity ever since the promise was given to Eve of a Savior. The archetype comes out in their own perverted stories!¹⁹

The World Tree is in the Bible. In **Daniel 4:10-17**, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a giant tree. Its “top reached to heaven” (**vs. 11**) and the watchers came and talked to him. Daniel tells the king that “the tree you saw ... it is you” (**Dan**

¹⁶ *Völuspá* 20.

¹⁷ Poetic Edda: *Hávamál* 34.

¹⁸ See the fascinating discussion by **Robert N. St. Clair**, “The World Ash Tree: The Mythical Origins of the Christmas Tree,” at: <http://epistemic-forms.com/R-World-tree.html>

¹⁹ “God is more than a god, not less; Christ is more than Balder, not less. We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about ‘parallels’ and ‘Pagan Christs’: They *ought* to be there – it would be a stumbling block if they weren’t.” Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 67.

4:20-22). The word for a “tree” (*‘elon*) in Hebrew is very similar to all kinds of words for God/gods in the OT.

Ancient Word	Reference	Contextual Meaning
<i>‘elohim</i>	Gen 1:1 etc.	The God of Israel
<i>‘elohim</i>	Genesis 6:2, 4; Job 1:6, 2:1; 38:7	sons of God
<i>‘elim</i>	Exodus 15:11	gods
<i>‘elim</i> (<i>‘eylim</i>)	Exodus 15:27	location of 70 palm trees in desert
<i>‘elohim</i>	Deuteronomy 32:17	demons
<i>‘elohim</i>	Deut 32:43 (LXX, see DSS)	Angels (<i>aggelos</i>)
<i>‘elohim</i>	1 Samuel 28:13	spirit of Samuel
<i>‘elim</i>	Ps 29:1; 89:6	sons of God
<i>‘elyon</i>	Ps 82:6	sons of God
<i>‘el</i> (<i>‘eyl</i>) ²⁰	Ezekiel 31:11	mighty leader, god, or tree
<i>‘eleyhem</i>	Ezekiel 31:14	trees of Eden (terebinth tree), haughty(?)
<i>‘elon</i> ²¹ (<i>‘eylan</i>) ²²	Daniel 4	tree-king Nebuchadnezzar

ROOT: *‘el* probably derives from “mighty” or “first in rank.”²³

In the OT, Messiah is often prophesied as some form of a tree. He is the “stump of Jesse” (Isa 11:1). He is the “righteous branch” (Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5 etc). God says, “I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me” (Hosea 14:8). In John’s gospel Jesus calls himself “the vine” (John 15:5). In other words, the figure of the World Tree fits the theology of the ladder of Jacob quite well. Thus, like the mountain as the home of the dwelling of God, so also Jesus is the center of the cosmic universe, the tree upon which all things meet together.

²⁰ This is the construct form of *‘ayil*.

²¹ Some have suggested that *‘elon* (often meaning ‘sacred tree’), might be a back-formation of the plural *‘elonim* (gods). See William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1968), 165-166.

²² *‘eylan* is the Aramaic. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 989.

²³ “*‘elohim*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 1, G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.J. Fabry eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 273.

Conclusion

What we have seen in this cryptic line from Jesus that takes us back to the story of Jacob and even earlier to the Garden of Eden has **profound implications** for the rest of our Gospel. When Jesus says that we will see greater things than calling a man out who is himself doing something (probably bad) under a fig tree, something he thought no one could know about, he means it. These things will be miraculous, monumental, history altering. We will begin to see these in the very next chapter when we complete the last day of the first week of Jesus' public ministry.

These things will culminate when we are taken to the **Garden of Gethsemane** and the anguish of soul that Jesus is under the night before his death, so much so that angels must come and assist him. For as **Chrysostom** notes, “**On him as on the king's own son, the royal ministers ascended and descended, once at the season of the crucifixion, again at the time of the resurrection and the ascension, and before this also, when they “came and ministered to him.”**”²⁴ Then we will be taken to the cross, to that place of shame and scorn, but of great power where Jesus would have called down 12 legions of angels if it had not been his Father's will to die there for our

²⁴ **Chrysostom**, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 21.1. Cited in **Joel C. Elowsky**, *John 1-10*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 87. See also Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Luke & John*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884-1885), 190.

sins. There ... on a **tiny cosmic mountain** (**Luke 23:33** KJV). There ... on that **rugged wooden tree** upon which the God-man was cursed (**Gal 3:13**). There ... where heaven and earth intersected in the death of the son of Man who rose to inherit the world, as the judgment was rendered in the death of Christ for all who look upon the Son on the Tree: Not Guilty! The verdict from heaven has been rendered from the holy mountain.

This is the message. This is the verdict. This is the covenant that was made in Christ's blood for all of us people full of deceit just like Jacob.

What then must you do? Look to what Jesus is promising the disciple here: **“Heaven-sent confirmation that the one they have acknowledge as the Messiah has been appointed by God ... Now everyone must recognize that this same God has appointed Jesus as his Messiah.”**²⁵ **“It is no longer there, at Bethel, that God reveals himself, but in Jesus.”**²⁶ The distance has been bridged. God has come down and has intersected personally with human beings. The way to the Tree of Life has been opened again. Hide yourself under the shadow of His leaves, which bring healing to the nations. Go to the rock, the mountain; trust in him and banish all fear and sadness away.

²⁵ Carson, 163-64.

²⁶ Ibid., 64.