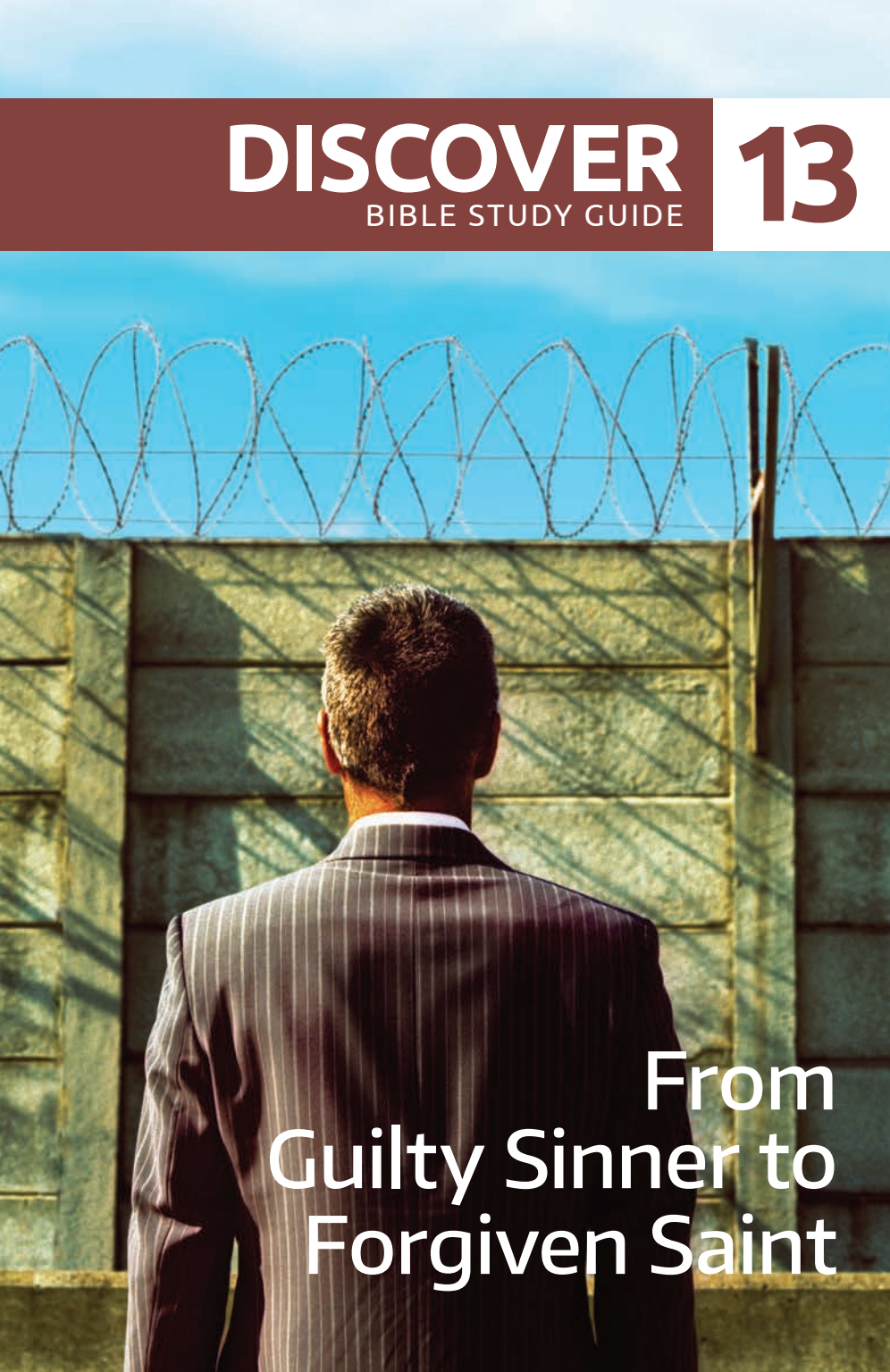


# DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

# 13



From  
Guilty Sinner to  
Forgiven Saint



**GREG CALLED** his friend Wayne. “I need you to come to the county jail,” he said. “I’ve been arrested!”

A few hours later, Greg, dressed in an orange jumpsuit with the words “County Jail” emblazoned across the back, sat at a glass window—an armed guard standing nearby. Wayne, sitting on the other side of the window, asked his friend, “What did you do?”

It seems that Greg had committed a robbery 10 months earlier. In the meantime, he had accepted Jesus into his life as Lord and Savior. As a Christian, Greg decided to confess his robbery and turn himself in to the police. He was immediately arrested and thrown in jail.

When Greg’s trial date arrived, Wayne attended court with him. The judge was very interested in Greg’s story, since people don’t usually turn themselves in to the police. Wayne vouched for his friend’s conversion and told the judge that he believed Greg deserved a second chance.

The judge considered the evidence and the circumstances. He looked intently at Greg and finally said, “Young man, this is not your first offense. Based on your record, I should sentence you to prison. However, I am going to let you serve six months on

a work-release program and allow you to attend church services each week. If you violate this arrangement or break your parole, you will immediately be sent to prison. It is your choice, and for your sake I hope your word is good.”

Maybe you’ve heard pastors or friends talk about a coming judgment day. They might even compare it to standing before a judge to face your life’s record—just as Greg did. Or maybe you’ve read some verses in the Bible regarding the judgment and wondered what they mean. In this study guide, we are going to look at what God’s Word says about the judgment. We will learn why the judgment is wonderfully good news for those who have found security in Christ—just as Greg received good news from the judge regarding his sentencing.

# 1 | There Is a Judgment Day

The Bible tells us there will be a day of judgment.

**“He [God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31).**

The Bible clearly states that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). No one will be excused. No one can escape the summons. Whether we like it or not, whether we profess to be a Christian or not, like Greg, we must all appear before the Judge. “Each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12).

The prophet Daniel saw a vision of the judgment in heaven. He said:

**“I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white**

as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:9, 10).

Here Daniel pictures God the Father, the Ancient of Days, seated upon His eternal throne with countless angels standing before Him. Now notice what Daniel saw next.

**"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him" (Daniel 7:13).**

Here Jesus is pictured standing before the Ancient of Days, God the Father. The scene described in Daniel 7:9-13 is similar to a courtroom on earth.

**"If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).**

Doesn't it take a lot of the fear out of the judgment to know that our lawyer, the One who will stand up for us, is Jesus Christ, our Savior?

In Daniel's vision, everyone seems present except the ones who are on trial—you and me. However, the Bible says the court was seated, and the books were opened. Evidently, these books contain a record of the life deeds and decisions of those of us on trial.

**"God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14; see also Malachi 3:16; Revelation 20:11-15).**

Of course, God does not need record books or even a database. He knows all about each one of us. He even knows the number of

hairs on your head (Matthew 10:30). The record books are for the benefit of the universe, so there will be clear evidence regarding our life choices. It is a sobering thought, that “every idle word” that men speak will be taken into account “in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36, 37; Ecclesiastes 11:9).

## 2 | You Can Face the Judgment Unafraid

Daniel’s description of the judgment in heaven is awe-inspiring—and a little intimidating. If that were all that the Bible had to say about the judgment, it could easily discourage us. After all, who of us could withstand that kind of scrutiny? The Bible says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” and that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

However, there is more to the story. In fact, there is *great news!*

We’ve already seen that Jesus is our Advocate—our Lawyer—in the judgment, but He is also our Judge.

**“The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).**

Who will be our Witness in the judgment?

**“Grace to you and peace . . . from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness. . . who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:4, 5).**

Who takes our punishment—the sentence of death?

**“He [Jesus] was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. . . . And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5, 6).**

Think about it—Jesus is your Judge. Jesus is your Attorney. Jesus takes the witness stand on your behalf. And it gets even better. Jesus paid the penalty for your sins! That’s the good news of the gospel. With Jesus on our side, we don’t have to fear the judgment.

Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross enables Him to act as both a just Judge and a gracious Justifier. He can defend both His Father’s unchanging law and repentant sinners. When the watching universe asks the question, “How can an impartial judge declare a guilty person not guilty?” Christ can answer by pointing to His perfect sinless life that He lived on your behalf, and the scars in His hands from His death on the cross. He has absorbed the just penalty of sin with His own body.

**“He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).**

Because of Jesus’ sinless life and death, our life of sin is exchanged—in a judicial sense—for His perfect life of righteousness. That is why God can forgive us and treat us as if we’d never sinned. He presents the record of Jesus’ sinless life as a replacement for the condemning record of our sinful life. This is exactly what we need in the judgment in order to stand before a holy God. What wonderful good news! We can face the judgment unafraid, secure in the grace and forgiveness of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

## 3 | Christ Came on Time

We have seen that the Bible assures us that the judgment in heaven is a reality. We have seen that, covered with Jesus’ righteous life, we can face the judgment unafraid. Can we know

anything further about this judgment? Does the Bible tell us when it will take place?

Actually, there is a prophecy in the Bible that sheds light on when the judgment begins—the judgment scene that Daniel saw taking place in heaven (Daniel 7:9, 10, 13). In the next two sections, we will examine this prophecy in detail.

What announcement did Jesus make as He began His public ministry following His baptism?

**“Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’” (Mark 1:14, 15).**

What did Jesus mean? What “time” was He talking about? Jesus was referring to a prophecy in Daniel that predicted exactly when the promised Messiah would appear. Here is Daniel’s prophecy:

**“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” (Daniel 9:25).**

The Hebrew word *Messiah* means “the anointed one” (the corresponding Greek word is Christ). Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism (Matthew 3:16, 17). He was the promised Messiah, the Prince. More than 500 years before Jesus’ birth, the prophecy predicted the exact year that He would appear as the Messiah and begin His saving ministry. The baptism and anointing of our Savior happened right on time.

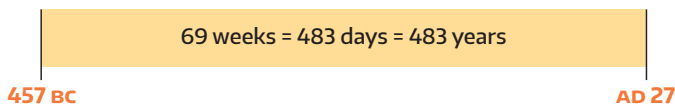
Let’s look at some key points in this important prophecy given by Daniel and see just how it foretold when Jesus would appear as the Messiah and begin His ministry on earth.

### **1. The prophecy says that there would be “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” from the command to rebuild Jerusalem**

**until the Messiah would come.** In symbolic Bible prophecy, each prophetic “day” equals one actual year (Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), so 69 weeks of seven days each equals 483 days, or 483 literal years.

**2. The Persian king, Artaxerxes, issued the command to rebuild Jerusalem in 457 BC (Ezra 7:7-13, 21-26).** Starting the 483 years in 457 BC brings us to AD 27. (Keep in mind there is not a year “zero” in calculating dates from BC to AD.) At this time, “Messiah the Prince” was to come. Luke recorded the date of Jesus’ baptism and anointing as the Messiah as “the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” (Luke 3:1-3), which in our dating system is the year AD 27. Jesus came right on time!

**3. At the very time predicted, in AD 27, Jesus began His ministry saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:14, 15).** The accurate fulfillment of this Bible prophecy is impressive confirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah—the God who came down to our world in human flesh.



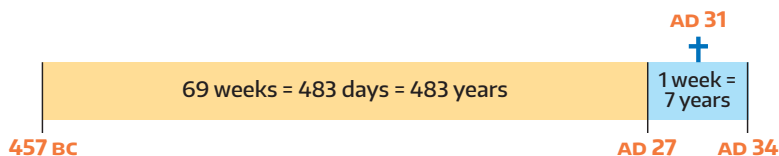
Daniel’s prophecy went on to give more details about the Messiah’s work and the judgment that would take place in heaven.

**“He [the Messiah] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week . . .” (Daniel 9:27).**

One week (seven days) would equal seven actual years, applying the prophetic “year-day” principle. For seven years—from AD 27 to AD 34—Jesus would “confirm a covenant,” or



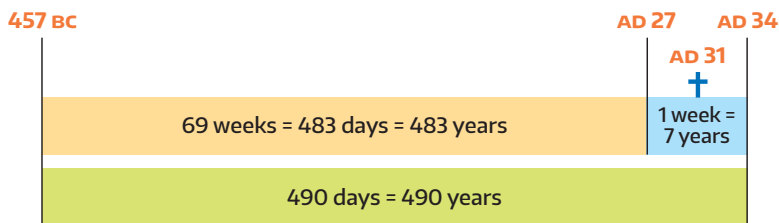
promise, that God had made to humanity.\* Shortly after Adam and Eve sinned, God made a covenant promise to them, stating that He would save the human race from sin through the death of Someone He would send (Genesis 3:15). Jesus’ death on the cross fulfilled that covenant promise.



What was to happen in the middle of this “week”?

“... but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (Daniel 9:27).

Jesus was crucified in AD 31, in the “middle of the week.” At the moment of Christ’s death, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). The sacrifices and offerings of the temple were now fulfilled by the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Fulfilling prophecy down to the letter, Jesus brought “an end” to any further need for animal sacrifices (Daniel 9:27). Since the time of Christ’s death, we have direct access to God through Jesus, the Lamb of God and our High Priest.



\*The significance of the date AD 34 and other details of the prophecy will be studied in our *Focus on Prophecy* course, which you can study following the *Discover* course.

## 4 | The Assurance of Sins Forgiven

According to Daniel’s prophecy, why did Jesus die?

**“[The] Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself”  
(Daniel 9:26).**

At his death on the cross, Jesus was “cut off, but not for Himself.” Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. He died, not to pay a penalty for His own sins, but for your sins, my sins, and the sins of the entire world.

How can we know that God has forgiven all of our sins and accepted us?

**“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).**

**“The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanses us from all sin”  
(1 John 1:7).**

In the judgment, God not only declares us forgiven, but He also declares us righteous—based on our acceptance of the gracious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior.

According to a story in *Real Simple* magazine, on the morning of August 10, 2011, a drunk driver swerved into Nettie Gibson’s lane, crashing into her car head-on. A quick flash of silver—that’s all Nettie remembers now about the terrible accident. Her injuries were extensive, requiring 10 hours of emergency surgery. Convinced she was going to die, she dictated to a nurse a short goodbye letter to her 13-year-old son.

Nettie didn’t die, but her life was never the same. She learned that the woman’s blood alcohol level at the time of the accident was well above the legal limit. “But who’s drunk at 8:15 in the morning and driving around?” Nettie demanded angrily. Because

the driver only had minimal auto insurance, Nettie was saddled with huge medical bills. On top of all that, she lost her job. She became depressed.

Then a year later, in court, Nettie attended the sentencing for the woman who had brought such hardship and suffering into her life. “The woman looked so scared,” Nettie recalls. “I couldn’t imagine what was going through her head.”

Afterward, she approached the woman’s attorney. “Please let your client know that I forgive her,” she said.

Today, Nettie says, “I decided to choose forgiveness over hate.”

God the Father and Jesus the Son have chosen to forgive you and me. “The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

## 5 | The Time for the Judgment to Begin

As we have seen, the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 accurately predicted when Jesus would begin His public ministry and die on the cross. These 70 prophetic weeks, or 490 actual years, began in 457 BC and ended in AD 34. They are the opening portion of an even longer time prophecy shown to Daniel.

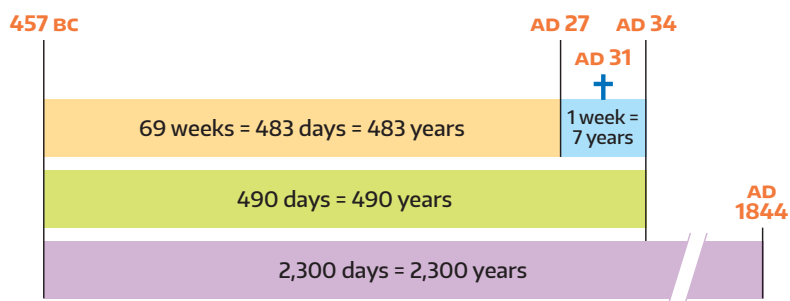
According to him, what was the length of this longer prophecy, and which event would mark its end?

**“How long will the vision be? . . . And he said to me, ‘For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed’” (Daniel 8:13, 14).**

This prophecy reveals a time period of 2,300 prophetic days, at the end of which “the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” What does this mean?

Just as the 70 weeks (490 days) are 490 actual years, so the 2,300 prophetic days are 2,300 actual years (Ezekiel 4:6). Both time periods started in 457 BC when Artaxerxes issued the decree to “restore and rebuild Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:25). Counting 2,300 years following 457 BC brings us to AD 1844 (remember, there is no year “zero” when crossing from BC to AD).

In the Old Testament, the sanctuary was cleansed each year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). This was a time of judgment for Israel and represented God’s final judgment day in heaven when “the court was seated, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:10). What this prophecy is telling us is that God’s judgment in heaven began in 1844 at the close of the 2,300 years.



## 6 | The Heavenly Sanctuary Cleansed—A Judgment

According to the prophecy, in 1844, at the end of the 2,300 years, “the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” God’s people have had no physical sanctuary on earth since AD 70, when the Romans destroyed the temple at Jerusalem. Therefore, the sanctuary to be cleansed, beginning in 1844, has to be the sanctuary in heaven, of which the earthly temple was only a copy.

What does the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary mean? In the Old Testament, the sanctuary was symbolically cleansed each year on the Day of Atonement. This was a solemn day of judgment for the Hebrew people, because those who refused to confess their sins and seek forgiveness were “cut off from [God’s] people” (Leviticus 23:29). The Day of Atonement and the cleansing of the Old Testament sanctuary represented God’s judgment day, which began in 1844 and involves the cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven.

What the High Priest did symbolically once each year on the Day of Atonement, Jesus does “once” for all time as our High Priest in the sanctuary in heaven (Hebrews 9:6-12). On the great judgment day, He removes from the sanctuary the confessed sins of all who have accepted Him as Savior. This is the work of judgment that began in 1844.

## 7 | Facing Your Life Record in the Judgment

The judgment now going on in heaven investigates the records of all the righteous—both living and dead—in order to validate in the minds of the onlooking universe who will be among the saved when Jesus comes.

In the judgment, what happens to the sins of those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior? God says:

**“I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins” (Isaiah 44:22).**

As our Judge, Jesus removes forever all of the sins of the righteous from their life record in heaven. He separates our sins from us “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). It is as if we had never sinned. No wonder we can face the judgment unafraid!

If you had the opportunity to alter your life record, what changes would you make? The good news is that Christ does this more thoroughly than you ever could. When your name comes up in judgment, it will be an easy matter to face your life record—if you have accepted Christ as your Substitute, your Savior.



Are you ready for Jesus to come?

Or is there something you've been hiding from Him? Do you have an open and honest relationship with the One who longs to be your Advocate?

As we consider the judgment going on in heaven today, we don't have to anxiously review our past for some sin that we may have forgotten to confess. We should be motivated to put everything on the table before God—no secrets, no games.

**“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).**

Confessing our sins simply means facing them and agreeing with God that He is right when He convicts us of them. No excuses. Then we accept His forgiveness and acknowledge our need of His power and grace.

The book *The Heart of Virtue* tells a story of King Frederick William I. While visiting a prison, he listened to a number of pleas for pardon. The inmates tried to convince the king that judges, witnesses, or lawyers were responsible for their imprisonment. From cell to cell, the same story of wronged innocence continued.

However, in one cell, the inmate had nothing to say. Surprised, the king joked, “I suppose you are innocent, too.”

*Continued on page 16*

# WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. Can you hide anything from God? (Psalm 44:21)

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2. Who will judge you in the day of final judgment in heaven?  
(John 5:22)

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3. If you confess your sins and accept His forgiveness,  
how completely does God remove your sins from you?  
(Micah 7:18, 19; Psalm 103:12)

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4. Will anyone be able to avoid being judged on judgment day?  
(Romans 14:10)

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5. What important criteria will Jesus use to evaluate our lives on  
the day of judgment? (Matthew 25:31-46)

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“No, your Majesty,” the man answered, “I am guilty and richly deserve all that I get.”

The king called out loudly, “Come and [release] this rascal quick, before he corrupts this fine lot of innocent people!”

How do we prepare for the judgment? Simply by an honest confession of the truth. Simply by acknowledging that we richly deserve the penalty of death for our sins, yet Another has taken our place and given us a wonderful pardon.

What does God promise He will do if you give Him your life?

**“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:26).**

Won't you make a commitment to God right now that, whatever happens, you'll keep your relationship with Christ authentic, honest, and sincere?

## My Decision

- I choose to surrender every sin to Jesus so that He can stand in my place in the judgment day.
- I thank God for His sacrifice that He so graciously applies to my sinful life. I ask for His power in my life so I can live for Him.

## My Prayer

*Dear Father in heaven, thank You for the gift of Jesus who died, not for Himself, but for my sins. Thank You for appointing Him as my Advocate, High Priest, and Judge. I accept His promise to deliver me from a sinful, empty way of life and prepare me for heaven. I ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.*



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