

# God's Majestic Plan – from Everlasting to Everlasting.

## CHAPTER 1.

### GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

#### Introduction

Our focus in the coming weeks will be upon God's Eternal Purpose "from the beginning of the ages," Ephesians 3:9. In his letter Paul gives us some insight into what he calls "the mystery." A "mystery" in Paul is not something mysterious or hard to understand, but something hidden which is now being revealed. In this "mystery" we see unfolding God's plan for His church, the people of God of all nations. We will find out what a sad beginning we had in Adam, but also our glorious future "in Christ" because of God's grace.

#### HOW IS THIS PLAN DESCRIBED?

In Eph. 3:11 it is described as **God's eternal plan**. Paul writes about "God's eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." Here we read of the eternal purpose of God for the universe. Note that the plan originated with God the Father. It is a divine plan that stretches from eternity to eternity. Psa. 90:2 proclaims, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth or the world, from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." He is in control, working out His eternal purpose.

#### WHO DOES THIS PLAN INVOLVE?

It involves **Jesus Christ**, God's Son (Eph. 3:11). It is said to be "accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." This eternal purpose is centred in and effected by Jesus Christ. So the Son executes the Father's plan. The **cross of Christ** and what He "accomplished" there is at the heart of this plan. In the OT everything looks forward to the cross and in the NT everything flows from the cross.

The plan concerns the church or **the people of God**. In Eph. 3:6 we read of Jew and Gentile together "fellow heirs of the same body." So the world-wide church community is God's "pilot scheme" for the reconciled universe of the future. Here we see the mystery of God's will unfolding, when in the fullness of the times all things in heaven and earth are brought together in Christ. You are part of that plan, if you are by faith in Christ part of the people of God. Also, **the Holy Spirit** is the one who brings about what God has purposed. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts and regenerates us, leading us to faith. Concerning the death of Christ, (which as we saw, was central to God's plan), Christ's offered Himself for us "through the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14). He is also the One who can "guide you into all truth," (John 16:13).

#### WHERE IS THE PLAN REVEALED?

Paul writes about "the revelation" of the mystery. It was revealed by the Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets, and is now set out in **the Scriptures**, the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation. 2 Tim. 3:16 reminds us that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" or is God-breathed. It is there that the plan unfolds.

The Scriptures show that the plan of God through the ages had a number of distinct developments which take place throughout the whole course of history. We can call it "the march of the gospel" determined from *before the ages* in eternity, to be carried out *in the ages*. This is why Paul calls it God's "eternal purpose." This "eternal purpose" is now revealed throughout the OT and NT, all 66 books. Over the course of human history, God has had a plan or a strategy to bring us into the family of the people of God, that we will finally dwell with Him through all eternally (Rev. 21:3-5, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away").

The Scriptures take us through God's purposeful progression in His relationships with mankind. Remember the Bible's revelations are restricted to God's government of earth and mankind with reference to salvation. Other things are hidden from our gaze (see Deut. 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..."). But the age of innocence before Adam sinned, is revealed, through to the "present evil age" of Gal. 1:4 and to the establishment of **the kingdom of God** in eternity. Our aim in the studies is to go through the Bible step by step or section by section to discover this unfolding of the history of salvation. We will see the unity of the Bible as what we can call "God's story and man's story" unfolds.

There was a time when God was alone. No sun, moon or star, no angel; there was only God the eternal, without beginning. This great God choose to create. He is the source of all that exists and came to be by His will and plan. (see Rom. 11:33-36, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen"). God's plan or His story starts in Genesis and unfolds first in the Old and then in the NT.

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## CHAPTER 2.

### THE OLD TESTAMENT

#### **Introduction**

Few people read the Bible, particularly the OT. Most Christians who read the Scriptures will concentrate on the exciting stories e.g., Noah's flood, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den — and they will skip over what they consider to be “the boring bits,” like Leviticus or one of the Minor Prophets. It is important to grasp that the OT and NT fit together, telling the one great story – God's story - pointing us to Jesus Christ and the establishment of God's final kingdom.

#### **Why Study the Old Testament?**

There are a number of reasons why a study of the Old Testament is important:

#### **The Old Testament is Practical**

No doubt the people of the Old Testament lived in a different culture and in a different age. Yet we go through the same kind of struggles, temptations, doubts and fears that they faced in the OT. By knowing about their lives we can learn what to avoid and which examples to follow. Paul tells us “Now all these things happened to them **as examples**, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come,” 1 Corinthians 10:11.

#### **Truth has not changed**

The things that applied in that day still apply today. Both Testaments reveal the same holy, merciful, and righteous God who must condemn sin but who desires to bring to Himself a fallen human race of sinners through the forgiveness only possible through Christ's atoning sacrifice as payment for sin: the Saviour's coming was promised in the OT, fulfilled in the NT. In seeking to have a relationship with God – to “walk” with God, as Enoch did (Gen. 5:24), or to be “Friend of God” as Abraham (Isa. 41:8; Gen. 18:17), the moral principles which are highlighted again and again in the Scriptures must also be followed.

#### **The Old Testament Presents Christ**

Christ is the hope and underlying theme of all the books of the Bible. On several occasions, Christ claimed that He is the theme of all of Scripture. When walking with the disciples on the Emmaus road, Luke 24:27 tells us that, “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

The Apostle Paul also believed that the Old Testament points to Jesus. He spoke of “the Holy Scriptures (the Old Testament), which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,” (2 Timothy 3:15).

In John 5:39-40, when answering the Jews, Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

#### **The Old Testament was Written for Us**

Paul maintains: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope,” (Romans 15:4).

## **The New Testament Doesn't Make Sense Without the Old Testament**

The writers of the New Testament assumed that their readers were familiar with the Old Testament. Why is that important? If you don't read the first half of a book, you will have problems understanding the characters, the plot, and the ending. In the same way, if we only had the NT, we would read the gospels and not know why the Jews were looking for a Messiah or why this Messiah was coming. Nor would we be able to identify Jesus as the Messiah through the many prophecies that were given concerning Him (e.g., He is the offspring of the woman, whose heel is bruised (Gen. 3:15); He is from the family of Abram in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3, 7; Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16); He came from the royal tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:20); He is from the family of David (Isa. 11:1; 1 Chron. 17:11-14); His birth place is Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); the way He died, pierced in His hands and feet as they divided up His garments, casting lots (Psalm 22:14-18). Also, the prophecy of His resurrection (Psalm 16:10); the many more details of His ministry (Isaiah 52:13-14, His face marred, 53:9, His burial in a rich man's tomb; 7:14, His virgin birth; 9:6-7, the Child born, the Son given, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of peace; Zechariah 9:9, His riding into Jerusalem on the colt; 11:12-13, the thirty pieces of silver cast in the house of the Lord, for the potter. See Matt. 27:3-10; His exaltation to the throne of God, Psa. 110:1). All from the OT! The Bible is not a human production it is from God and you can believe it!

## **The revelation in Scripture is progressive**

We should note that Christian writers on the OT speak of "progressive revelation." The OT gives the Law - which includes the commandments, but the NT makes it clear that God gave those commandments to show us our need of salvation and were never intended to be a means of salvation, "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God...by the law is the knowledge of sin," (Rom. 3:19-20).

The OT describes the sacrificial system that God gave the Israelites to temporarily cover their sins. The NT makes it clear that this system pointed to the sacrifice of Christ through whom alone salvation is found (Heb. 10:4-10); He comes to "do your will O God," for "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all." The OT tells us how paradise was lost; the NT reveals how paradise was regained for mankind through the second Adam (Christ) and how it will one day be restored. The OT shows that man was separated from God through sin (Gen. 3), and the NT shows that man can now be restored in his relationship to God (Rom. 3-5. See 5:16, "The judgment which came from one offence resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offences resulted in justification").

The OT, then, lays the foundation for, and was meant to prepare the Israelites for, the coming of the Messiah who would sacrifice Himself for their sins (and for the sin of the world).

## **GOD'S STORY/PURPOSE UNFOLDING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

**So, concerning the revelation of God's Eternal Plan of Salvation,** the OT is the first act in God's unfolding drama of redemption. It reveals who God is, and what His plan is for His people and for the world. We will consider this now.

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The unfolding of the eternal purpose of God is revealed from the beginning of the OT books.

#### **1. The Nature of the Old Testament**

As we stressed in the Introduction, one cannot fully understand the NT without an appreciation of the foundation laid in the OT.

There are 39 books in the OT. Over 98% of the OT is written in Hebrew (the rest, some six chapters in Daniel and roughly four chapters in Ezra are in Aramaic, a related language which uses the same alphabet

but differs in vocabulary and grammar). Both these languages are known as Semitic languages; they are written from right to left, and are fundamentally different from English or European languages. **Both Hebrew and Aramaic were originally written without any vowels** - the vowels were put in by Jewish scribes working from the **6th to the 10th centuries AD**.

## 2. The Content of the Old Testament

As we noted, there are **39 books** in the OT. We do not recognise the Apocrypha as part of the Scriptures. These are 7 more books, plus some additions to the books of Daniel and Esther. Eastern Orthodoxy accepts all of these plus 3 extra books! But they are all simply religious books, not seen as inspired, and not recognized as part of the Hebrew canon. In fact, they often stand in contradiction to inspired Scripture: for example, they teach that almsgiving saves from death and purges away sin; they affirm atonement after death; prayers for the dead; the pre-existence of the soul; creation out of pre-existent matter. All these doctrines are contrary to the teaching of the Bible. Note how 1 Peter 1:18-19 affirms that “you were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ...” To Simon the Magician, who offered Peter money to purchase the power to impart the Holy Spirit the apostle said, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift with money!” (Acts 8:18-20).

The 39 books have been set out in different ways. Generally, the arrangement of the books of the OT that we have in our Bibles follows the order in what is called **the Septuagint** - a translation of the OT into Greek initially made by Jews between 250 and 100 BCE. The **arrangement of the books** in what has come to be called the LXX (the Roman numerals for seventy; there were said to be seventy scholars that worked on the translation of the books into Greek) is as follows: the five books of the law, Genesis to Deuteronomy, as we will see, called **the Pentateuch**; **the Historical books**, Joshua to Esther; **the Poetical books**, Job to Song of Solomon, **the Prophetical books** of the prophets, with **four Major**, Isaiah, Jeremiah (with Lamentations), Ezekiel, Daniel and **twelve Minor Prophets**, Hosea to Malachi (they are just shorter, not less important).

**The Hebrew Bible** arranges the OT books rather differently, and has a **three-fold division** of the material, although the number of books is the same: **the Law, the Prophets and the Writings**. Like the others, it places the books of the **Law** first. But in the next section, the Prophets, there are two sub-sections: **The Former Prophets** (i.e. Joshua, Judges, Samuel & Kings) and **the Latter Prophets** (i.e. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets). The third section, **the Writings**, contains all the rest, beginning with Psalms, ending with Chronicles, and interestingly, including Daniel.

This tripartite division of the OT is very ancient - it's reflected in a 2nd C BCE Jewish writing which refers to “the Law and the Prophets ... and the rest.” “Psalms” is an abbreviated reference to the Writings in **Luke 24:44**. That Chronicles was the closing book in the Writings in the 1st C AD is reflected in **Luke 11:51**, where Jesus refers to the first and last martyrs in the OT canon, “the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the temple,” referred to in 2 Chron. 24:20-21.

## 3. The Message of the Old Testament: God's Plan Unfolds

Here we have the beginning of the gospel story, God's Story. As we have seen, in the OT we have the five books of the law, called the Pentateuch; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; the histories in Joshua to Esther; poetry from Job to Ecclesiastes and the prophetic books, four major and twelve minor prophets. Just a few more comments about the books of the OT as to how the plan of God unfolds there.

First, the story begins with the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT. The technical term often applied to what the **Jews called the Torah** or books of “the law” in scholarly literature is “**the Pentateuch**” - deriving from a Greek word meaning “**five-volume (book)**.” This title reflects the fact that the Torah is actually made up of five component parts - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five books are both **independent and interdependent**; independent in that they each constitute a distinct unit, but interdependent in that none of them gives us the complete story - for this, all five must be read - each book adds its own contribution, **like a serial on television, or even chapters in a book**.

Sometimes, a large segment of time is covered (e.g., in the book of Genesis), and sometimes a very short period of time is reflected (e.g., in the book of Deuteronomy, which covers only the short time when Moses delivered three addresses and final parting words as he and the new generation of Israel were encamped on the east side of the Jordan River, just outside the promised land). Moses' first address was on the acts of God, 1:1-4:43; his second address was on the law of God, 4:44-28:68; the third address on the covenant with God, 29:1-30:20; Moses' parting words and death, are found in 31:1-34:12. We should note in the book of Deuteronomy is the one central verse that continues the thread of the promise of the future Messiah: "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him," (Deut. 18:18).

There are many references to "Moses" as author in relation to the 5 books and some of the first from Jesus Himself, later Paul, e.g., Rom 10:5, "Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, the man who does those things shall live by them," quoting Lev. 8:5. See for Jesus, e.g., Luke 16:29, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them"; Mark 1:44, the healed leper should show himself to the priest, "as Moses commanded," see Leviticus 13-14; 7:10, 10:3, 12:26 "the book of Moses", John 5:46, Jesus, "He wrote of me".

- He had the ability Acts 7:20-22. He was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."
- He was a writer, at times instructed by the Lord, "Write this for a memorial in a book..." Exod. 17:14; 24:4; 34:27-28.

In Leviticus we have references to several places where the Lord revealed things to him and we can assume he wrote them down right away. It is true for Numbers as well; "the Lord said" is found many times. See also 33:1-2 – Moses writing down the stages of Israel's journey "at the command of the Lord."

- He had a unique relationship with God. Exod. 33:11, Deut. 34:10-12 "whom the Lord knew face to face." God could bring His message through him.
- He had a concern for God's people which would also move him to record the history of the nation from the beginning i.e., from creation especially to Abraham.

In the West many scholars developed in the past 200 years the "documentary theory." Seeks to separate 4 sources (others used written works) JEDP.

Wellhausen (1883), claimed that it is all later than Moses. J is where the characteristic name for God is the "tetragrammaton" YHWH, rendered in English as "Jehovah" or "Yahweh". E uses the name *elohim*. D is basically the Book of Deuteronomy, and P contains the "priestly" (or Levitical) legislation.

But nothing should lead us to doubt the hand of Moses – small clue in Gen 47:11 which speaks of "the land of Rameses" for the territory of the Israelites – Moses was a contemporary of Rameses II. Ezra is considered to be responsible for the final form of the Pentateuch.

The geographical setting for the Old Testament is mainly Palestine, but includes the wider regions of the Ancient Near East: Mesopotamia (modern Iraq); Persia (Iran); Aram (Syria); Phoenicia (Lebanon) and Egypt. For Moses, **the story begins** with the earlier sections of Genesis from the **creation events**.

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## CHAPTER 3.

### THE STORY BEGINS: CREATION TO CANAAN

**Note the contrast of the beginning and the ultimate end.**

#### GENESIS:

God creating the heaven and the earth (1:1)  
Satan's first attack on man (3:1)  
God made darkness and light (1:5)  
The sea (1:10)  
The curse (3:14-17)  
Man driven out (3:24)  
Death and pain, sickness introduced (2:16-17, 3:16)  
Way to tree of life closed (3:24)  
Paradise lost

#### REVELATION:

Creating new heaven and new earth (21:1)  
Satan's final overthrow (20:10)  
No more night (21:23, 22:5)  
No more sea (21:1)  
No more curse (22:3)  
Man dwells with God (21:2)  
No more death or pain (21:4)  
Access to the tree of life (22:14)  
Paradise regained (2:7)

#### (A) The Primeval Period

The first period covers the creation of the world, the time of the flood to the tower of Babel in the 2nd Millennium BCE. The opening chapter of Genesis paints the broad canvas - sketching the creation of the natural world and of mankind. The focus then narrows to the story of Adam and Eve and the fall of man. The first part of Genesis, usually called **The Prologue**, outlines the three failures of mankind: the fall in the Garden of Eden, the flood and at the tower of Babel, the confusion of tongues, leading up to the call of Abraham and his descendants. We should mention the fall of man.

God lovingly cares for the man He has made, placing him in a beautiful garden and providing for all his needs, including giving him a helper and companion. Adam and Eve are given great responsibility, but God is in charge, and it is God who sets the rules, including just one prohibition which, if we rightly understand it, was designed to protect them (Gen. 2:8-9; 16-17). Among all the trees God planted "the tree of life" and "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." What was "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"? We can say that this was to have the full knowledge that was God's. See 3:5: "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The temptation to possess such knowledge meant that Satan was holding out to Eve first and then Adam the path of the way of independence from God. They will not need Him; they can be free of Him; they will know all things. To take this path is to be in rebellion of God. We are told that "the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil," (Gen. 3:22). So "lest he put out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat and live for ever," God drove him from the garden and placed cherubim and a flaming sword "to guard the way to the tree of life," (Gen. 3:22-24). His fellowship/relationship with man (Gen.

3:8) was broken by sin. Both Adam and Eve came under the judgment of God – and Adam's headship meant that as Rom. 5:12 affirms “all sinned” in Adam, all the race to come from him, were brought down under condemnation. We know not only the wrath of God because of personal sin – the fruit of our fallen nature, but because we were condemned in Adam.

Yet here in 3:15, at the very beginning, we see the initiation of God's plan of redemption. There is good evidence in the NT for seeing here the protevangelium, the first glimmer of the gospel. God prophesies the coming of the Seed of the woman, Christ, whose heel will be bruised – but in doing this He will bruise Satan's head, deal with sin and save the repentant sinner. He can deliver us as he delivered Adam. How? He believed what God would do (in v.20 Eve is named “the mother of all living.”). So we must believe what God has done.

Here God is pointing to a time in the future when a son of Eve, a human being, will destroy the evil one. As we explained, this is a prophecy of the work of the Lord Jesus. He defeated Satan through His death on the cross (and cf. Rom 16:20, “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”).

We mentioned three failures of mankind, the fall, the Flood and the Tower of Babel. We can see two streams or opposite progressions/contrasting lines in Genesis: a) God's orderly creation – the “godly” seed down the generations to Abraham, a man blessed by God; b) The degenerative work of sin leading to the Flood and the folly of Babel. Here is recorded man's sinful desire to exalt himself and to create his own kingdom apart from God. God confounds the languages and scatters the people and the nations emerge. But He also chooses one man, Abraham, and the book of Genesis now concentrates upon him; chapter 12f. Abraham's family grows in Genesis and emerges to be a nation in Egypt.

### **(B) The Patriarchal Period**

Here the story covers the time of Abraham and his seed (2100-1700 BCE), God's covenant is with a single family through whom “all the families of the earth” will be blessed, 12:3. So in Genesis 12-50 we have the origin of Israel. They will emerge as a nation in Egypt as Exodus will reveal.

But the crucial point is the carrying on of the purpose and plan of God. The “seed” of Abraham through whom blessing will come to the nations is Christ Himself. Jesus in Matthew 1:1 is announced as “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” Here already is God's answer. Note also how Gen. 12:7 “in your descendants...” (lit. “your seed” singular) is picked up by Paul in Gal. 3:16, “He does not say 'as to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your seed,' who is Christ.” The story of Abraham continues, with Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham's impatience with God's promise led to Ishmael being born; Gen. 15:5, “Look now toward heaven...so shall your descendants be”; 16:2-3 where Abraham “heeded the voice of Sarai,” not the Lord, and the result was the child Ishmael from Hagar, Sarai's servant.

Then Jacob and Esau; Joseph and his brethren. One recalls Hebrews 11:9-10 with Abraham dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, as “he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” and how in 13-16 we learn “now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, as he has prepared a city for them.” The book finishes with the family of Abraham in Egypt and you know that the story cannot end at this point. The book is only a spring-board to greater things in the rest of the scriptures. Note in passing, Abraham's faith was tested when in Gen. 22 he was to offer up his son Isaac to whom the promises were made. We are told in Hebrews 11:19 that he had the faith to believe that “God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” In the NT, in John 8:56 we read that by faith “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” In Galatians 3:8 we read about Scripture – that is the promise God made to Abraham about giving him a seed, recorded in Genesis 15, that it “preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’.” So, Abraham's faith was faith in a promise of God which contained the promise of Christ. The gospel story is being continued.



### **(C) The Period in Egypt and the entrance into Canaan (1700-1500/1300 BCE).**

Like the previous book, Exodus is a foundational work for understanding the OT as a whole. The exodus, its first major topic, establishes one of the main theological themes of the OT (and indeed the message of the Bible as a whole - namely, **redemption** or deliverance. After the opening verses it quickly becomes apparent that a considerable period of time has passed from the close of the Genesis account (some 300 years) and that the situation for Abraham's descendants in Egypt has radically changed. Jacob's large family has multiplied numerically (Exod. 1:7, "The land was filled with them"); so that they are now perceived by the new dynasty as a potential threat to Egypt's internal security. Drastic measures to curb this "threat" are adopted by the ruling Pharaoh or king of Egypt - a policy of "**ethnic cleansing**." The Hebrews are subjected to abject slavery as well as attempted **genocide** of the male children (Exod. 1:11-22), and it is at this juncture that Moses, the key figure throughout Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch, is introduced to us. God had raised up this man to lead His people out of Egypt, and it is this departure (or *exodus*) from Egypt which gives the book its title in the English Bible.

God anointed Aaron to go with Moses to be the spokesman and they persuaded the people of Israel to follow them but Pharaoh would not let them go. Then God sent 10 devastating plagues on the Egyptians, the last plague being the death of the firstborn in every home whose doors were not marked with the blood of the lamb (Exod. 12:1-13).

God commanded the Israelites to celebrate yearly the Passover, to recall that when the angel of judgment passed through the land of Egypt, the promise was given, "when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two door-posts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you," (Exod. 12:23). We can maintain that the Passover demonstrates the principle that God saves by substitution. His people deserve to die for their sin, but another dies instead. We are being prepared for a greater act of deliverance, of which the Passover was only a shadow. Just as the Passover lamb dies for the sins of others, so Jesus died as a substitute. When John the Baptist saw Him he said, "Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29). It is no coincidence that Jesus died at Passover time (Matt. 26:19; John 19:31). The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt points forward to this greater redemption Jesus achieved on the cross - as Paul specifically points out: "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us," (1 Cor. 5:7).

This **redemption** by God also gave them **deliverance**. After the death of the firstborn Pharaoh finally gave in and agreed to let Israel go (taking with them the treasures of Egypt, Exod. 12:35-36); but as soon as they left, Pharaoh changed his mind. He sent his army after them until Israel was cornered with mountains on either side and before them the Red Sea. But God parted the waters and led them through on dry ground (Exod. 14:21-22). Then the waters closed in on Pharaoh's armies (Exod. 14:28-29). Once again, that act of salvation or deliverance foreshadowed what God achieved through the death of Christ. We were enslaved to the powers of sin and the devil, but God defeated them through the cross and has set us free! (Col. 2:15).

The book's second major theme is that of **relationship** - God delivers His people from bondage so that He can bring them into a special relationship (the technical term used in the Bible is *covenant*) with Himself. It is through this special relationship between God and His people that the divine purpose for the world is to be worked out. Israel is to be a witness to the nations; by conformity to the moral and ethical principles enshrined in the covenant stipulations, she was to reflect God and attract others to Him.

God gives them the law and of course the sacrifices when it was broken. The law is given by God on Mount Sinai. It is not intended to be the means by which anyone gets right with God. The Israelites are already God's people through His grace. God reminds them of that truth in the introduction to the Ten Commandments - see Exod. 20:2, He had already brought them "out of the house of bondage." He redeems them before they receive the Law. Their obedience is not to be a desperate attempt to earn His

salvation; it is a response to the salvation He has already achieved for them. But, although obedience to the Law is not required for membership in the covenant people of God, it is required for the enjoyment of blessing within the covenant. God promises to bless His people; they in turn must obey Him (Exod. 19:5). As God's people, they must live in a certain way. The sacrifices would enable them to preserve their relationship with Him.

God's Law has value for the Christian in three ways: a) it reveals our sin (Rom. 3:20, "by the law is the knowledge of sin"); the reason for giving the law was that the transgressor might see his real state and, smitten with guilt, humbly come to repentance. b) it points us to our Saviour (Gal. 3:23-24, the law is "our tutor" or by it we were "kept under guard" before faith came, and "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us," 3:13). It becomes clear that as Christ was the goal of the covenant with Abraham, so He is the goal of the covenant with Moses, uniting the whole of the OT prophetic hope. c) it reveals God's standards. God's "holy nation", (Exod. 19:6) was set apart to belong to Him, to reflect the character of the holy God (Lev. 11:44, "you shall be holy, for I am holy"). Jesus said that all the law's commands rest on two principles, love of God and love of your neighbor, (Matt. 22:37,39).

Here was God's intention from the beginning – fellowship with man, Gen. 3:8, God was "walking in the garden in the cool of the day"; but the possibility of fellowship was destroyed by sin "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden." Yet God was still seeking a way to dwell among His people, Exod. 25:8, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." To do this meant the provision of all the sacrifices which we read of in Leviticus. In fact, the two dominant threads which run through the fabric of the third book, Leviticus, are the goal of **holiness and the need for forgiveness**. God demanded that His people reflect His holiness. Lev. 19:2 could be read as the book's key text; to Moses God said, "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." Just as He was, so they must be holy both in their formal religion and in their personal morality. We can stress this; as the divine partner in this covenant relationship was holy, so he insisted that the human partners reflect the principles of holiness in both their religion and their daily lives. Their God had planned or provided a way to maintain His relationship with them through sacrifice, e.g., "Then he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill it...So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him," (Lev. 4:33-35).

To reaffirm, the purpose of redemption is relationship. As we have noted, God instructs Moses how to construct the Tabernacle, the tent in which His presence is to be focused among them as they travel to the promised land (in Exod. 25:22 God said, "There I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the Testimony, I will speak with you about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel." Again in Exod. 40:34-38, the cloud was on the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. We are told "But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up...throughout all their journeys."). So, God is among His people once again; specifically, He is above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant, behind the veil in the Holy of Holies. The cloud is guiding them day by day in all their steps.

Just to stress again *how* the LORD GOD could dwell with them. God's presence with His people is wonderful, but it also creates a problem. How can the holy God live among a sinful people without destroying them? From the very start the Israelites could not keep God's law, and deserved to face His judgment as a result. The sacrificial system was designed to deal with this problem. Sacrifices were offered every day in the tabernacle for the sin of the people. There was also an annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), on which the high priest was to take two goats. He was to kill the first goat as a sin offering and then sprinkle its blood on the atonement cover in the Holy of Holies. The Israelites deserved to die for their sin, but God provided the goat as a substitute, to die in their place (Lev. 17:11). The people could live because the animal died. The results of that atonement (reconciliation) were seen in what happened to the

second goat. The sins of the people were confessed over it and then it was driven far away. God has dealt with sin and can thus continue to live with the Israelites. Christ, of course, will supply a better sacrifice. God lives with His people, but they dare not get too close. Only one man, once a year, can enter the Holy of Holies: the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The sacrifices enable some relationship with God, but it is not a close one. They never fully deal with sin. They point to the perfect sacrifice that Christ would offer on the cross. His death deals with sin once and for all; it never needed to be repeated. In the OT the High Priest went in once a year to make atonement; but he always came out again. Hebrews 10:1-4 points out that the yearly sacrifices could not “make those that approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.” In those sacrifices there was really only “a reminder of sins every year.” The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. But then there was CHRIST and His coming! While the High Priest had to go in and come out again year by year we are told that “this man” in the body provided for Him (10:5), coming to do God’s will (10:9) “after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God.” He did not come out again, since there was no need of a further sacrifice! The work was done perfectly! His sacrifice removes our sin and opens up the way into God’s presence “by the blood of Jesus...through the veil” to all who trust in Him (10:19-20). When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple in Jerusalem (the permanent replacement for the temporary tabernacle) in torn in two by God (Mark 15:38). The door to God’s presence is now wide open for all who will go in. Note that, throughout the Bible, as we noted, God saves by providing a substitute to die in the place of others. The different sacrifices in the OT point ahead to the perfect sacrifice offered by Jesus when He died on the cross.

A sacrifice for a man: Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22:13 “instead of his son”); A sacrifice for a family: the Passover (Exod. 12:3 “a lamb for a household”); A sacrifice for a nation: the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15 “the sin offering which is for the people”); A sacrifice for the world: the death of Jesus (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2 “not for ours only, but also for the whole world”)

What of Numbers and Deuteronomy? First, Numbers, covers a period of about thirty-eight years. The book has this name as it involves the numbering of the children of Israel (ch. 1 & ch. 26). The Hebrew title however means “in the wilderness.” The people are 1. At Sinai ch. 1-10 – In Service; 2. In the Wilderness chs. 11-19 - In Failure (in chs. 13-14 we have recorded the rebellion at Kadesh. The generation will die in the wilderness, apart from Caleb and Joshua, who brought a “faith” report when sent with the other ten to spy out the land of Canaan). 3. On the Border ch. 22-36 - In Renewal (the new generation). Second, Deuteronomy, the last book in the Pentateuch, is dominated by the themes of the **renewal of the covenant** with the new generation and of the **Land**. Moses delivers four discourses throughout the book, reviewing the past, to the new generation in the plains of Moab just on the edge of Canaan. Moses already has evidence (Num. 20:1-6) that the new generation were no better than their fathers. Miriam (Moses’ sister), Aaron and Moses all die before the people enter the land. Joshua will bring them in.

# God's Majestic Plan – from Everlasting to Everlasting.

## CHAPTER 4.

### CANAAN; ISRAEL & JUDAEA; EXILE & RETURN

We will see that the major story unfolded in the OT covers from the call of Abraham c.1950 BCE to the rebuilding of Jerusalem in 445 BCE. The focus is chiefly on God's chosen people, the seed of Abraham, and their relationship with God. However, while it contains history, the OT is not a history book - and this is clearly indicated by the title that the Hebrew canon gives to Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings - the Former Prophets! The emphasis is on theology rather than chronology. If a secular historian had been responsible for the writing and/or editing of the historical books of the OT, they would have had a completely different shape and emphasis. It is important that we bear this fact in mind when we read these books in our OT - we must pay attention to the spiritual truth being conveyed through the historical events being recorded. Thus, most of the writers supply us with an historical canvas on which to peg the spiritual lessons they are communicating. But we must discern the eternal purpose of God unfolding stage by stage – through the prophesies and pointers concerning Christ – leading up to God's final goal or final kingdom.

The entrance to Canaan was under Joshua and they defeated the seven nations there and possessed the land. A possible structure of Joshua could be:

1 Entering the Land 1:1-5:15

2 Conquering the Land 6:1-12:24

The military campaigns are vividly described, by which a bridgehead was established and the land was 'conquered' - at least in a provisional sense.

- The Central Campaign 6:1-9:27 Jericho and Ai
- The Southern Campaign ch.10 Gibeon and Beth-horon
- The Northern Campaign ch.11 Merom

3 Possessing the Land ch. 13-24

**i) chs.13-22** focus on **the allocation of the promised land** among the various tribes that constituted the new nation of Israel. This section illustrates that the initial "conquest" was far from complete - large sections of the land remained under Canaanite control. To Joshua the LORD said, "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed," (13:1). A large "mopping up operation" had still to be undertaken by many of the Israelite tribes.

**ii) chs.23-24** relate **the last days of Joshua**, his farewell address to the people at a ceremony of covenant renewal, and finally his death.

Sadly, by the end of the book of Joshua the possession of the land was not complete. Judges 1:27-36 reveals again and again that the victorious tribes of Israel "did not completely drive out the inhabitants" but they intermarried with those who followed false gods; Jud. 2:7, 11-16 reveals, "The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua...and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which he had done for Israel." But "another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that He had done for Israel." So, they "did evil...and served the Baals" and "they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them." So, they could no longer withstand their enemies and "they were greatly distressed," (Jud. 2:11-15). This was the reason for the raising up of the Judges to deliver them when they ended up in bondage.

### **(D) The Time of the Judges (1400 - 1100 BCE).**

The book of Judges is named after its principal subject matter - stories about the *Judges*. These were not judges in the modern sense (i.e. magistrates in a court of law); rather, they were military leaders and national heroes, raised up by the Lord to deliver his people in times of political and spiritual crisis. The pattern continued of salvation, then return to bondage set out in Jud. 2:16-19, with twelve judges raised up by God. We can outline the book as follows:

**i) chs.1:1-3:6** introduce **the period of the Judges**. The extent and limits of the conquest under Joshua are again outlined, and the cycle of spiritual apostasy which followed the death of Joshua is concisely set out.

**ii) chs. 3:7-16:31** recount **the exploits of the Judges**. Of the dozen judges mentioned, 6 are described in only summary fashion (Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon) - these six are thus often referred to as the "minor judges" - not because they were less important than the rest, but simply because we are given so little information about each of them. The exploits of the major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson) are recounted in much more detail, as are the political and spiritual crises from which they delivered Israel.

**iii) chs.17-21** reveal **the degradation under the Judges**. These chapters contain two stories which illustrate **the sad spiritual and moral climate of those days**. The first story (Micah's image of silver and the Danites, their slaughter of Laish and the setting up of the false worship and priesthood) is a sad commentary on the spiritual apostasy of Israel in the Judges period. The second story (the Benjamite rape of the Levite's concubine) illustrates especially the moral degradation of this dark period in Israel's history. We could summarize:

Ch. 1-2 DEFEAT – CAUSES OF FAILURE (incomplete obedience 1:1-2:5; idolatry 2:6-3:4; intermarriage 3:5-6).

Ch. 3-16 DISOBEDIENCE – COURSE OF FAILURE (disobedience – bondage – misery – deliverance and rest – compromise).

Ch. 17-21 DISGRACE – CURSES OF FAILURE (shameful idolatry – immorality – anarchy. "In those days there was no king in Israel." 17:6).

These were dark days in Israel, Jud. 21:25 states, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." But the important fact is that God had not forsaken His people. This is clear from the little Book of Ruth. God not only leads Ruth out of her own nation of Moab to find refuge "under His wings," (Ruth 1:15-18; 2:12), but through her marriage to Boaz into the line of Christ! (Ruth 4:13-22). See the end of the Book, "Boaz begot Obed; Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David." (See also Matt. 1:5-6, where we read, "Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, and Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king").

### **(E) The Period of the United Monarchy (1050 - 930 BCE).**

This was when specially David is king. The wonderful fact of God's plan is spelled out in 2 Samuel 7:24-29 concerning the "house of David, let it be established before you." This promise is partially fulfilled by Solomon, but it is finally fulfilled only by the Lord Jesus, "great David's greater son," the one whose reign puts Solomon and his wisdom into the shadows, (Luke 11:31, "a greater than Solomon is here"). See also Matt.1:1 "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David..." Again, Matt.1:20, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

Solomon become the next king. During his reign, Solomon made Israel a world power and great wealth flowed into the kingdom. He had such great wisdom from God that people came from distant lands to hear him. He taught many proverbs and wrote Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

Solomon built the marvelous Temple and God's favour was with him. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon praised the Lord who had kept all His promises (1 Kings 8:56). God's people are in God's place

under God's rule and are enjoying God's blessing. The people were as numerous as the sand on the seashore (1 Kings 4:20, cf. Gen.32:12); the whole of the promised land was under Solomon's control (1 Kings 4:21, cf. Exod. 23:31); and they are enjoying God's rule and blessing (1 Kings 4:25). They are even becoming a blessing to the nations (Queen of Sheba, 1 Kings 10:1-13).

Solomon's dreadful failure was in disobeying God by taking many wives, and marrying the daughters of foreign kings. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He allowed them to build altars to "Astarte" (Ishtar in Babylonia and Astoreth in Phoenicia) the fertility goddess and other pagan gods (1 Kings 11). Therefore, though Solomon was given great wisdom, his heart led him astray. Toward the end of his life troubles began to appear through powerful factions, and enemies rose up both within and without the nation. For David's sake, God delays His judgment until Solomon dies, but then He causes civil war to break out and the kingdom begins to fall apart.

#### **(F) The Separate States of Israel and Judah (930 - 722 BCE).**

Ten Northern tribes break away from the house of David in Rehoboam, the son of Solomon's time. They followed Jeroboam, made him king; he set up the two golden calves in Bethel and Dan. In 1 Kings 12:30 we are told, "Now this thing became a sin..." as feasts were established and priests appointed so the people could worship without going to Jerusalem, to the temple.

#### **The Last days of Israel with the fall of Samaria and the end of the Northern Kingdom; the Last Days of Judah (722/1 - 587/6 BCE).**

Both depart from God and engage in all the practices of the worship of the false gods. Both are carried away, Israel (the Northern Kingdom) first in 722 in the Assyrian captivity.

This idolatrous worship is Israel's great sin throughout its existence. God sent again and again His prophets to challenge their lawbreaking, but they refused to listen. In spite of all His longsuffering, with all the evil and moral degradation, the time had to come when God must act in judgment. The Northern Kingdom consisted of 10 of the tribes (excluding Judah and Benjamin). It lasted for about 210 years. The kings of Israel were almost all evil. There were 9 dynasties (family lines of kings) and 19 kings, 8 of whom met a violent death. The summary of the reign of each of Israel's kings can be summed up in the following: ". . . and he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin by which he had made Israel to sin," (1 Kings 15:34).

#### **The Babylonian Exile (604 - 539 BCE).**

Judah, the Southern Kingdom continued until 586 when Nebuchadnezzar came and the Babylonian Captivity, lasting some 70 years occurred, (586 - 539 BCE). Here is the story. By 610 BCE the Assyrian Empire had collapsed under Babylonian attacks, and Babylon prepared to march against Egypt, which had been helping the Assyrians. Against Jeremiah's advice, Josiah intervened and was killed at Megiddo. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, went out and defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. He marched on to Judah, in 605, during Jehoiakim's reign, and took thousands of Hebrews back to Babylon (including Daniel). Nebuchadnezzar made another attack in 587 when he heard of rebellion in Judah, again taking captives (including Ezekiel the prophet). Only a remnant of the weakest, poorest, and least threatening Jews remained in the land. Nebuchadnezzar set up a puppet king (Zedekiah) of David's line to sit on the throne of Judah and made him swear an oath of allegiance (2 Chron. 36:10-12). Zedekiah then rebelled and allied with other enemies. So, Nebuchadnezzar came back for the last time (586 BCE) to reduce Jerusalem to rubble and send the Temple up in flames. Zedekiah was forced to witness the slaughter of his sons, then his eyes were put out, and he was carried off to Babylon. The Kingdom was over, (2 Kings 24:13-14 13). A couple of verses are important here. The fact that there was no other remedy for the idolatry of Judah. See 2 Chron. 36:15-16, "The Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers...they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till *there was no remedy.*" Yet God is not finished with His people. In 2 Kings 25:27-30, see the grace to Jehoiachin, released from prison and "he ate bread regularly

before the king all the days of his life.” Again 2 Chron. 36:22-23, the proclamation of Cyrus for the Jews to return and build the temple. There is hope! Also, the book of Esther details how God preserved His people from destruction thwarting the plans of Haman through Mordecai and Esther. God is not finished with them.

### **(G) The Rebuilding of the Temple and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem (538 - 445 BCE)**

This part of the story is told in Ezra (rebuilding the temple) and Nehemiah (rebuilding the walls) and in what are called the Post-Exilic Prophets, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi.

Regarding Ezra, there are amazing examples of providence demonstrating how God inclined the hearts of a number of political leaders, Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerses, to favour and protect God’s people and to show their support in the work of rebuilding the city and the temple (Ezra 1, 4, 6, 7).

Regarding the Post-Exilic Prophets, the last book Malachi, indicates that there is really failure following the return - **Blemished Sacrifices; Burdensome Worship** see 1:13 “You also say ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ And you sneer at it,” Says the LORD of hosts. “And you bring the stolen, the lame and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?”; **Broken Vows** in marriages “The LORD has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant,” (2:14); Failure in giving; responding with **Bitter Words** “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed you?’ In tithes and offerings,” (3:8).

There have been attempts to alter the harsh ending of the book. But it is clear that this book and the OT finishes with a warning that failure to respond to this preaching would result in judgment on the nation, “Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse,” (4:6). Genesis reveals the entrance of the curse into the human family (Gen. 3); the last word of the O.T. shows the curse still persisting (Mal. 4:6). The curse in Scripture has the idea of being set apart for destruction, (Jos. 7:11-15; Deut. 13:12-18; 20:16f.). At the end of the *first* book in the OT we read of a “coffin in Egypt,” Gen. 50:26; here in the *last* book at the end of the OT a “curse.” Throughout all there is failure. But the Second Man in the NT will change all this. There is still hope when it comes to the purposes of God.

It was good for the Israelites to be rescued from slavery to the Egyptians, but that rescue is just a pale shadow of the perfect redemption achieved by Jesus on the cross (John 1:29; 1 Cor.5:7). It was wonderful for the Israelites to have God’s presence in the tabernacle and the temple, but those buildings were just shadows of the One in whom the presence of God was perfectly revealed (John 1:14). And, it is true that David and Solomon were great kings; but Jesus is far greater (Mark 12:35-37; Luke 11:31). God has not forgotten His promises — and the prophets’ calling is to explain that great truth. They stress that the decline and fall of Israel and Judah is not out of God’s control. He will establish His kingdom in and through Jesus, a kingdom which will encompass all nations, Matt. 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” We should note the contrast below. Three texts in Matthew to note:

Matt. 1:23 “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” God is still seeking – as in Eden and the tabernacle – to establish fellowship with man. Adam’s sin destroyed this fellowship; but Christ the Son came to provide a way...

Matt. 27:46 “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying... ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.’” In bearing our sin He had to experience divine forsakenness to open up for us the possibility of divine fellowship.

Matt. 28:20 “...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” For true disciples fellowship is restored right to the end of the age - always.

# God's Majestic Plan – from Everlasting to Everlasting.

## CHAPTER 5.

### GOD'S PURPOSE UNFOLDED IN THE NT

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament continues to reveal the whole plan and purpose of God through the Four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles, the General Letters and the Book of the Revelation.

One way to consider the unfolding of the purpose of God is to examine the teaching about the kingdom of God and the announcement of the fulfillment of the prophecies of the inauguration of the new covenant. Although we have not mentioned it in our past survey the unfolding of the gospel story and the purpose of God has gone through different stages with how we have highlighted individuals like Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses. OT writers have attempted to set out various covenants which God made with them. Covenants were common in Palestinian culture and in the ancient Near East, where they would form the basis of relationships in both personal and commercial life. Sometimes they would be conditional, at other times unconditional.

While the word “covenant” is not used in Genesis until 6:18 when God establishes a covenant with Noah one should understand God's dealings with Adam in covenantal terms. Eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was the condition and breaking it would bring death. Keeping the covenant would mean living forever. Therefore, we can speak of the Adamic covenant. In the Adamic covenant, Adam represented all people. The phrase “in Adam” is a term of federal headship which means that he was our representative. This is why the Bible says that sin entered the world through one man (Rom. 5:12). Furthermore, the Bible tells us that “in Adam all die...” ([1 Cor. 15:22](#)). The Adamic covenant was not just with Adam, but is also representative of those who were in him, his descendants.

Other covenants followed – the covenant with Noah, that God would never again destroy the earth with a flood, (Gen. 9:8-17); the Abrahamic concerning his seed and the promised land, (Gen. 15:4-21; 17:4-8); the Mosaic law covenant with the nation redeemed from Egypt (Exod. chs. 19-24); and the covenant with David, where the kingly line is established through his house for ever, (2 Sam. 7:5-16).

To return to Adam, after he failed to keep the first covenant, God instituted the covenant of grace which was the covenant of redemption found in Christ Jesus. This is the “new” covenant prophesied in Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 36:25-28. The new covenant spoke of an inward change, with the enabling of God's Spirit regarding the demands of the law, pardon for sin and a new relationship with God in knowing Him. We now remember the fulfillment of the new covenant promises in the NT through Jesus Christ and founded upon his shed blood, dying for us, paying the price for our indebtedness, (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:8-13; 10:15-18).

#### The Kingdom of God

But the progress of the purpose of God is also seen in kingdom of God language. The kingdom of God was of course the dominant theme in Jesus' teaching. He began His public ministry by proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” (Matt. 4:17); “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel,” (Mark 1:15). He taught that His mission was to introduce the kingdom in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Although the expression “kingdom of God” does not appear in the OT, the concept certainly does. God is king now both of Israel and all the earth, (Gen. 14:19 “God Most High, Ruler of heaven and earth”; Exod.15:18 “the Lord will reign forever and ever”; 2 Kings 19:15; Isa.43:15). Yet a day is coming when His kingship will be more fully and



effectively manifested through a coming king. (Isa. 9:2, 6, 7; 11:1; 24:23 Jer.23:5; 33:15; Ezek.34:3; Dan.7:13f; Micah 5:2; Zech.14:9). Then God's redemptive purposes will be complete. We remember Matt. 2:2, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" This king has come!

But the kingdom of God is both present and future. There are many verses which point to the kingdom being present in Jesus' ministry. This "present" aspect of the kingdom must be considered first.

### **The Kingdom is Present**

As we have already seen, the ministry of Jesus began with an announcement of the arrival of the kingdom, Mark. 1:15, a kingdom which was promised in Is. 52:7.

In Matt.11:2-6 Jesus is the "coming one" whose healing miracles fulfil Isa. 35: 5-6. Kingdom of God is *entos humon* (Luke 17:21) = "within you,"; "in your reach"; "among you"; "in your midst."

Through Jesus, His teaching and healing, God's kingdom comes to men. Jesus is the one who fulfills Daniel 7:13-14 and brings the kingdom to men. This passage parallels Matt. 16:28 (Son of Man coming in His kingdom); Mark 9:1 (Kingdom of God come with power); Luke 9:27 ("some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God").

Jesus' miracles provide evidence that He brings God's Kingdom (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20, "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you"). Jesus comes and "binds the strong man" (Satan) and then releases his captives (Matt. 12:29; Mark 3:27). To be a disciple of Jesus is the same as being in the kingdom; cf. Matt. 19:29 ("for my name's sake"); Mark 10:29 ("for my sake and the gospel's") and Luke 18:29 ("for the sake of the kingdom of God"). Following Jesus = being in the kingdom Luke 9:57-62. Being a disciple, being in the kingdom, being saved, having eternal life are shared experiences, (Mark 10:14-26). One should also note that in John's Gospel another dimension is added. To be in the kingdom one is "born again," John 3:1-10. A spiritual birth is required to be part of His kingdom and have eternal life.

When John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to ask, "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them," (Matt. 11:3-4). This ministry fulfilled the prophetic hope associated with the coming kingdom in Isa. 29:18-19; 35:4-6.

Therefore, Christ's compassionate dealings are a picture of God's gracious kingly rule. His parables also give us a picture of the kingdom's growth and power (see e.g., Matt. 13:1-52). His teaching about prayer often has the kingdom as the subject. His teaching about God as Father concerns one who is also King of the kingdom. His death as Suffering Servant opens the kingdom to those who belong to Him. The kingdom creates a new community – the new Israel which confesses Jesus as Messiah. The nucleus was the 12 disciples.

So, there is NT unity. To be "In the kingdom" (Synoptic Gospels, Matt./Mark/Luke) is to be "in Christ" (Paul) and to "have eternal life" (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:61-68; 20:31). Acts combines the preaching of the kingdom and the preaching of Christ (Acts 8:12; 28:31, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ").

### **The Kingdom is also Future**

As we saw, the kingdom is present now (Luke 17:21) – tax collectors and harlots are already entering the kingdom (Matt. 21:31). But it is yet to come – hence the prayer "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). Many to come from East and West to sit at table in the future kingdom (Matt. 8:11). Jesus is to drink wine in the coming kingdom of God (Mark 14:25); then there will be deliverance from mortality and perfected fellowship with God (Luke 20:34-36 cf. Mark 12:24-27). Final salvation involves the whole man.

Resurrection life will have things in common with the angels. Evils of physical weakness, sickness and death will not be in the life of the kingdom of God (Matt. 25:34, 46, “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”; “these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”).

### **Our Personal Experience of Kingdom Blessings and Kingdom Power**

The Scriptures speak of the power of Satan and evil spirits. For the O.T. background, note the reference to “Satan” in Job 1-2; 1 Chron.21:1. In the Gospels, Satan opposes God’s purposes in Jesus. In the temptations he claims authority over the world and tries to keep Jesus from obeying God’s will and fulfilling His role as the Suffering Servant of the Lord, see also Mark 8:31-33, “Get behind me Satan!” But there is no absolute dualism in Judaism and Gospels. God is sovereign. Evil must fall.

The Scriptures speak of Satan’s activity – binding the woman in Luke 13:16; he snatches away the word, Mark 4:15. Remember that the weeds which were sown “are the sons of wicked one,” Matt. 13:38; we saw above how he speaks through Peter Mark 8:33; enters Judas Luke 22:3; attacks again Peter, Luke 22:31. Evil spirits possess men’s personalities e.g. Mark 1:23f; 5:2f. Demon possession has physical and mental effects, but is not to be explained away as insanity.

The Gospels also speak about the value of man and the reality of sin. The value of man – his soul is much more valuable than the whole world (Mark 8:36); he is created by God (Matt.19:4); cared for by God (Matt. 5:45; 6:26; 10:30). Man is made for fellowship with God, as we noted, but is out of touch with God – “lost”, Luke 15; 19:10. Israel (the covenant people) are “lost sheep,” Matt. 10:6.

There is a universal call to repent, Mark 1:15. The alternative is to perish, Luke 13:1-5. Men are sick with a deadly disease; they are “sinners,” Matt. 9:12-13. All of the disciples of Jesus are affected by the fall – “if you being evil” Matt. 7:11. The source of sin is the human heart Matt. 15:19f; Mark 7:16f. The Sermon on the Mount has been described as “The most terrible indictment of human nature in all literature” and there is no account of sin to match the Sermon.” Here sin is not just violations of negative commandments but is basically an inward attitude and motive. When men do their duty – they are still unprofitable servants, Luke 17:7-10. Men have no merit before God, Luke 18:10-14; the tax collector prays, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

God determines time of death – often when men least expect it, Luke 12:16-21. He is man’s judge, Matt. 25:41f. He can condemn to hell, Matt. 10:28. Men need to be rich towards God, Luke 12:16-21; Matt. 6:19f. Men are created for sonship with God. This is not theirs by nature but is God’s gift.

### **Jesus brings to us the blessings of the kingdom**

There is victory over Satan and the evil spirits. Exorcisms were prominent in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus healed by His mere word (Mark 1:27). Jesus’ exorcisms and healings were signs, as we noted above, of the advent of kingdom Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20 (Matt.= “by the Spirit of God”; Luke = “with the finger of God” cf. Exod. 8:19; Psa.8:3). Jesus binds the strong man, Mark 3:27. His power is broken.

Evil = already curbed by Jesus before end of the age. But Satan not yet destroyed cf. His activities in Matt. 13:19, snatching away the seed; Mark 8:33, speaking in Peter; Luke 22:3,31, sifting Peter. We can say that the final victory is not yet, but it is certain. The 70 disciples were also victorious over Satan, (Luke 10:9,17-18, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”) Judaism saw victory over evil only at end of the age; but in Gospels God already acts in Jesus to overcome evil and to heal.

Jesus also brings to us the gift of salvation. As we noted, to be in kingdom (v.23) is to have eternal life (v. 17) and to be saved, (v.26); (see Mark 10:17-26). The kingdom is the gift bestowed on the little flock, (Luke12:32). Possessing the kingdom is having something (or Someone) more valuable than any other

gift, (Matt. 13:44-46). We must seek it here and now (Matt. 6:33) and receive it as children, (Mark 10:15). Those who ask, receive, (Matt. 7:7); it is for the “poor in spirit,” (Matt. 5:3,10).

The Beatitudes envisage present blessedness, leading to blessing in the final consummation (there is both a present and future emphasis).

There is a present salvation in the parables of Luke 15 and for Zacchaeus, Luke 19:10 (cf. Ezek. 34:16,22). Jesus also exercises the divine prerogative in forgiving sins, Mark 2:5, 10 (cf. Psa. 103:3; Isa 43:25). Forgiveness was the gift promised in the Messianic age Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36: 22-28; Micah 7:18-20.

Repentance and a cry for mercy, based on sacrifice, brings justification and the gift of righteousness, (Luke 18:9-14). There is conduct which God requires which is the fruit which comes from the tree made good by God, (Matt. 7:17f; 12:33-35). Obedience to God’s will is proof that the kingdom is possessed, (Matt. 7:21f). Thus in the ministry of Jesus the kingdom comes. It is an actual foretaste of the eschatological salvation.

### **The Demands of the Kingdom:**

Jesus is to come before family ties, (Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26 has “hate” i.e. “love less”). Effort involved, “strive” (*agonizomai*) (Luke 13:24). Costly decision – prepared for the sword (persecution?) and division, (Matt. 10:34-35). But it is worthwhile (Matt. 13:45-46).

Repentance – a change of mind about God and sin. Leaving sin and returning to God, (Mark 1:15). Repent or perish, (Luke 13:1-5).

Submission to God. Seek first God, His kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33). This involves the denial of self, taking up the cross and following Jesus, (Mark 8:34).

Every hindrance to be removed, e.g. riches, in the case of rich young ruler, (Mark 10:21); remove hand, foot and eye, (Mark 9:43f). Nothing must be allowed to keep you back from entering the kingdom.

Urgency required, because the door may be shut, (Matt. 25:10f.; Luke 13:25-28).

After entering the kingdom men live in obedience to the will of God. This new life is pictured in the Sermon on the Mount.

Also, faith is clearly presented as the way to kingdom blessing, Matt. 8:10; 9:2 faith and forgiveness are linked; also 9:22, 29; 15:28; 17:20; 24:10; Mark 2:5; 4:40; 5:34; 10:52; 11:22; 16:14; Luke 5:20; 7:9, 50; 8:25; 8:48; 17:5-6, 19; 18:8, 42; 22:32; John 3:16-17, 36; 7:38-39; 12:42-43).

We looked at the garden of Eden and the fall. But in His great love God promised to put things right again and re-establish His kingdom on earth. We have seen that the rest of the Bible has told the story of the fulfilment of that promise: partially in Israel’s history in the OT period, and then perfectly through Jesus Christ. So, as we have stated, the Bible is about God’s plan of salvation: His promise to restore His kingdom, and then the fulfilment of that promise through His Son Jesus. By His death and resurrection Jesus did all that was necessary to put everything right again and completely restore God’s kingdom. But He did not finish the job when He was first on earth. He ascended into heaven and made it clear that there would be a delay before He returned. The delay is to enable more people to hear about the good news of Christ so that they can put their trust in Him and be ready for Him when He comes. The New Testament outlines the progress of the gospel across the Mediterranean world. We will see this as we look at the books of the NT, the Four Gospels, The Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles, the General Letters and the Book of the Revelation.

# God's Majestic Plan – from Everlasting to Everlasting.

## CHAPTER 6.

### THE STORY UNFOLDS IN THE NT

The books of the New Testament can be summarized as follows:

4 Gospels & Acts - HISTORICAL

Epistles [Paul, Peter, John & Jude] - DOCTRINAL

Revelation – PROPHETICAL

Who were the Gospels sent to and what do they teach us of the purpose of God unfolding throughout the ages?

#### **Matthew**

A Gospel with a message particularly for the Jews, showing them the failure of Israel the nation and the emergence of the new world-wide people of God – see Matt. 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” The genealogy in Matt. 1:1-2 goes all the way back to Abraham. Also, the OT quoted 41 times in Matthew, with 12 taken not from the LXX but directly from the Hebrew. So, there is a stress on reaching first Jews, bringing the readers to see the fulfilment of prophecy in Jesus who was the true Messiah. There is a strong emphasis that Jesus is Son of David (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30,31 (only parallels here in Mark and Luke) 21:9,15. Matthew can be identified as the gospel of the King – see Matt. 2:1-2, the question of the wise men from the east, “Where is he who is born king of the Jews?” We note the first question after the fall of man into sin in Gen. 3:9 as God takes the initiative in seeking the recovery of sinners, “Where are you?” Now we have the answer, the way of redemption of the lost, the coming of Christ, “Where is HE?” His kingdom is based on His death for us, belief and repentance.

In Matthew we see the failure of Israel and the condemnation which she brought upon herself. John the Baptist reminds us in Matt.3:7-10 that God can raise up children not nationally related to Abraham. See also 8:10-12, where Jesus responds to the faith of a Gentile, the centurion, seeking healing for his servant, “Assuredly. I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” Many, Jesus says, will come from east and west and “sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” But the sons of the kingdom (the Jews themselves) “will be cast out into outer darkness...” The unrepentant Jewish cities where Jesus preached are worse than Sodom, 11:20. We have the climax of Israel's guilt in “this generation”, 11:16-24; 12:38-45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:26. Three parables are told against the Jewish leadership in 21:28-22:14. The cry of the nation is sounded out in 27:21-25 as Jesus stood before Pilate; all the people say, “His blood be on us and on our children.” So, in 21:43 we have the way the story unfolds as Jesus prophesies concerning the rejection of the nation and the new people of God, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” In the Upper Room He institutes the Lord's Supper and announces the basis of the blessings the new people of God receive. “Then he took the cup, and gave thanks...For this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed *for many for the remission of sins*. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new in *my Father's kingdom*,” (Matt. 26:27-29, italics mine).

In Matthew therefore we see the emergence of the church made up of all those who come to repentance, both Jews and Gentiles alike. Only in Matthew does the word “church”, ekklesia occur, Matt.16v19; 18v17. The Gospel deals with practical matters like confession to a wronged party, 5:23, seeking the

recovery of those who have offended, 18:15-20, divorce, 5:31-32; 19:1-9, how to pray (the Lord's prayer in Matt.6). A universal strain runs through the gospel. See 2:1; 3:9; 4:15-16; 8:10-12; 12:21; 13:38; 21:43; 24:14,21; 26:13; 28:19-20.

### **Mark's Gospel**

What of Mark's Gospel? A number of suggestions have been made regarding the purpose of Mark's gospel. (a) **EVANGELISTIC PURPOSE.** Mark informs us that what he gives to us is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," (1v1). He is not writing a biography but endeavouring to set forth the good news about Jesus Christ. This explains also why one third of the work is devoted to the last three weeks of the life of the Lord, since the cross and the resurrection are central features in the Christian gospel. Mark's Gospel has in fact been described as a passion narrative with an extended introduction. (b) **COMMUNITY PURPOSE.** Mark seeks to encourage those who were being persecuted for their faith, see Mk. 8:34-38; 10:30; 10:38ff; 13:9-13. Mark also deals with the true nature of discipleship and stresses that being a follower of Jesus means being prepared to go the way of Jesus, denying self-centeredness and self-interest, which is really the way of the cross, Mark 8:34-35, "Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (c) **CHRISTOLOGICAL PURPOSE** Mark wished to show the true nature of Jesus, i.e. that he was truly God and truly man. The Son of God appears to be an important title in the gospel - see 1:1; 1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32; 14:36,61; 15:39. Mark also stresses Christ's humanity, that He was truly man, not just that He seemed to be (this was a view in the early days called Docetism). In Mark's gospel human emotions are ascribed to Jesus i.e. anger, or indignation in 3:5; 10:14. Jesus sleeps on a pillow Mark.4:38. He has compassion in 1:41; 6:34; 8:2. (d) **UNIVERSAL PURPOSE.** The gospel was meant to have a strong appeal to the outcast and the Gentile, groups regarded as outsiders and religiously impure i.e., we read of those possessed of unclean spirits 1:23-26; the leper 1:40-45; tax collectors and sinners 2:15-17; a man who lived in a ritually unclean place 5:1-20; a woman who was unclean 5:24ff. The evangelist also stresses Jesus moves beyond the geographical boundaries of Israel and accepts the faith of Gentiles Mark.3:7-8; 5:1-20; 7:26. In this last incident Jesus is in the region of Tyre and Sidon and is approached by a Greek woman born in Syrian Phoenicia, seeking healing for her daughter. When He says, "it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs," she replies, "Yes Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs." The evangelist also noted that at that the moment of Jesus' death the veil of the temple is torn in two, symbolising that access to God's presence is now open to more than just the Jews, Mark 15:38-39 and a Gentile soldier confesses him, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!"

### **Luke's Gospel**

(a) His purpose is expressed in the prologue, an introduction which can cover both the Gospel and Acts, Luke's second volume. Luke had investigated the facts and he was writing firstly to give assurance to the reader. The person named is Theophilus (see also Acts 1:1). The use of "most excellent" in Luke 1:3 was a term of respect for a very distinguished member of Roman society, who may have helped him launch the work. He wishes that he may "know the certainty of those things in which he has been instructed."

Luke stresses that Christianity was not just a sordid religion which came from the Jews. Christianity is of divine origin and is a world religion, to be preached among "all nations," (Luke 24:47). It was no newfangled teaching, the latest, bright religious idea in circulation. Luke shows that Christianity is as old as God's purposes. See how the Gospel of Luke majors upon fulfilled prophecy e.g. 1:70; 4:16-18, 18:31, 21:22, 22:37, 24:25-46. Luke shows that the Roman government was favourable to Christianity and protected people at times and often Roman officials admit that there was no basis for the accusations brought against Jesus and Paul, Luke 23:4; 14-16; 20-25; Acts 3:13; 18:12-16; 25:25; 26:31-32 (Agrippa, "This man might have been set at liberty..."). It was the Jewish authorities who were often responsible for any trouble, Christianity was not a revolutionary movement. Therefore in a sense Luke is the first of a number of apologists.

b) Luke's aim is also to write serious history e.g., 6 fold date in Luke 3:1f. He is the only writer to mention Roman Emperors by name, e.g. Luke 2:1; 3:1; Acts 11:28; 18:2. He has traced Christian beginnings from the forerunner of Christ to the detention of Paul at Rome. We ought to take note of the claim that in doing so he has used great care.

c) Luke also has an evangelistic purpose for he is intent on proclaiming the good news, the story of salvation aimed at leading people to faith and to confirm that faith. See for example the many references to salvation, Luke 1:47 "God my Savior", 69 "a horn of salvation for us"; 2:11 "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord", 29 "my eyes have seen your salvation"; 19:10 "to seek and save the lost"; also Acts 13:26, 16:31, 28:28. In the 19:9 reference Jesus can announce to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house," and "repentance" is found 5 times; "mercy" 8 times and "forgiveness" also 5 times. The kingdom has come! (Luke 11:20, 16:16, 17:21).

(d) Luke has a general pastoral purpose. Such a work prepared the church for evangelism for it helped them to know the character of their message. The Gospel would strengthen faith and corroborate gospel facts.

(e) The Gospel was also a refutation of Docetism – that Jesus only "seemed" to be a man, see the genealogy of Christ in 3:38 where Jesus is traced back to Adam as "the son of Adam, the son of God." This may be why Luke put such emphasis on Christ's death, burial and bodily resurrection e.g. 24:39-43; 23:50-56. Jesus says, "Handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have."

(f) What Jesus accomplished is for the people throughout the whole world. This is seen in 2:10 "all people" and 14 "good will toward men!" Also, Jesus is the Light for the Gentiles 2:32, and "all flesh" shall see the salvation of God, 3:4-6; note the blessing upon two non-Israelites in Luke 4:25-27, the widow in Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. In Luke 9:54 Jesus refused to call down fire on a Samaritan village. Luke 10:33 reveals the hated Samaritan is the hero and in Luke 17:16 in the healing of the 10 lepers, the one who returned to give thanks was a Samaritan.

God's purpose is reaching out to all men and through what Christ accomplished on the cross, "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," Luke 24:47.

### **John's Gospel.**

The Gospel can be said to have a Prologue (1:1-18) and an Epilogue (21:1-25) with two central sections in between, 1:19-12:50 and 13:1-20:31. These central sections can be divided into The Book of Signs 1:19-12:50 and The Book of the Passion 13:1-20:31. In the first Jesus is introduced with "His own" nationally. See John 1:11-13, "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him."; in the second half of the Gospel He is with "His Own" spiritually. John 13:1 "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

As far as purpose is concerned we should note the following:

(1) John's statement in John 20:31. "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." The words/signs/discourses were selected for this purpose – that the readers might be convinced who Jesus really was. The signs throughout the Gospel undoubtedly were meant to bring people to believe.

Jesus performed many signs (20:30). Seven only are recorded.

(1) 2:1-11. Changing water into wine at Cana.

(2) 4:46-54. Healing the royal official's son at Cana.

(3) 5:1-15 Curing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda.

- (4) 6:1-15. Multiplication of the loaves in Galilee.
- (5) 6:16-21. Walking upon the sea of Galilee.
- (6) 9:1-12. Healing the blind man in Jerusalem.
- (7) 11:1-44. Raising Lazarus from the dead.

But who was it written for? The combination of biblical quotations and also allusions to the OT are evidence that it was written people who had some knowledge of these things, i.e., Jews scattered from Jerusalem and Gentile proselytes to Judaism. The book often translates Aramaic words e.g., 1:38; 9:7. It also explains Jewish customs, 2:6; 4:9. The fact it emphasizes words like light, life, logos, truth, eternal life rather than the kingdom of God means that it is all meaningful to Greeks. We find a great interest in people outside Palestine, 7:35; 11:52; 12:20, and the Gospel does explain customs of Palestine. But as far as Jewish interests are concerned there is a great deal in the book about the fulfillment of scripture and on Jesus as the Messiah, 1:41,45; 3:14; 4:26; 5:39; 6:39; 7:41-42.

- (2) Responding to the heresies of the time.

Docetism – Jesus only appeared to be human - was very much in John's mind when wrote the first epistle. The threat was to the whole concept of incarnation. So, in the Gospel also John stresses the humanity of Jesus, 1:14; 4:7; 11:35; 19:28, 34-35. Jesus of course, was also Son of God from the beginning (eternity) as in the prologue, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," John 1:1

Was there a 'Baptist' sect at Ephesus? See at Ephesus the reference to a community of "John's disciples," Acts 19:1ff. Was John responding to those who would make John the Baptist more than he was? See e.g., 1:6-9, 19-27, 35-37; 3:28-30; 10:41. Note from among these Scriptures the following statements about John and Jesus. "He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light"; "I am not the Christ, but 'I have been sent before him'."; "He must increase, but I must decrease"; "Then came many to him and said, 'John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this man were true'."

John's Gospel is a protest against sacramental literalism, or a crude sacramentalism – making too much of the act of baptism and understanding the elements of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper as *more* than just symbols. Actually, this will be the reason why John's Gospel does not describe the actual baptism of Jesus, just John the Baptist's witness of it in John 1:32-34; nor do we have the ordination of the last supper. In John 6 eating the bread and drinking the blood means receiving Christ, believing in Him i.e., appropriating Christ by faith. See also 6:63, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life." It is believing the "words" or the Gospel that brings life.

- (3) There is a very strong emphasis on the guilt of the Jews as a nation. It was noted that the phrase "the Jews" is 5x Mt, 6x Mk, 5x Lk. but 70 times in John.

(4) Was it also to correct false views about second coming? There is an emphasis on realized eschatology where men are already judged/have eternal life(3:18, 36). But still in John we have a future coming e.g., 14:3, 5:28. There is a tension in the gospel - we have present blessing in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Parakletos, the one sent alongside to help us and guide us into all truth - but there is also a future hope.

# God's Majestic Plan – from Everlasting to Everlasting.

## CHAPTER 7.

### THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, PAUL'S EPISTLES, GENERAL LETTERS & BOOK OF THE REVELATION

**The Acts of the Apostles** gives more information of the advance of the purpose of God toward that final kingdom.

Acts 1-7 Jerusalem – Birth of the Church

Some have found certain parallels between Luke's Gospel and Acts, both of course written by Luke and addressing first Theophilus. Just to mention a couple. The Gospel features Jerusalem, while in Acts Paul is taken *from Jerusalem to Rome* (Luke 19:41-44; 23:28-31; Acts 23:11-35; 28:16-31), reminding us that the Good News will reach out to the whole of the Empire. The birth of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ is at the beginning of Luke; the birth of the NT church is in Acts 2 & 3. One other significant fact to note. The baptism of Jesus with water as he prays in Luke 3:21-22, when he is anointed with the Holy Spirit is paralleled by the baptism of the Christian community with the Spirit as they pray in Acts 2. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth," (Acts 1:8). Acts really gives us the spread of the Gospel and often gives us summary statements (e.g., 6:7) of the ingathering of the people of God into His kingdom.

Acts 8-11:18 Judaea and Samaria - 8:1-4 Scattered from Jerusalem "except the apostles" by the persecution instigated by Saul of Tarsus, the ordinary believers spread the word (it was personal witness, believers telling what had happened to them, that was the most effective means of evangelism in the early church); 8: 5-25 Samaria receives the Gospel and the believers, the Holy Spirit; 8: 26-40 the last "group" related to Judaism/Jerusalem. Geographically Ethiopia and the Eunuch remind us of the prophecy in Isaiah 56: 4-8 – gathering the outcasts of Israel. The gospel will go out through Gentile areas.

Acts 9-10 The Conversion of the Apostle to the Gentiles (Paul and Ananias). Note the summary statement 9:31 and then the Conversion of Cornelius (Peter and Cornelius) (Peter reports in Acts 11:18 to the Jerusalem Jews – they rejoiced but sadly, did not go).

Acts 11:19 – 21:14 Antioch and Europe - Barnabas and Saul, the First Missionary Journey and the Jerusalem Council – where the fact that Gentiles could be accepted without circumcision was confirmed; Europe. (see again summary statements 12:24 –Herod could not stop the spread of the word – and 16:5 with another missionary journey and 19:20).

Acts 21:15 – 28 Jerusalem and Rome. The gospel, beginning at Jerusalem, is reaching the heart of the Roman Empire. In thirty years they have carried the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Note the significant moment in Rome as the leaders of the Jews in that city really reject their Messiah again. Paul quotes Isa. 6:9-10 of the blindness and hardness of heart of the people and announces, "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Acts 28:28). Finally, 28:31 is the last summary statement.

#### **Paul's Epistles**

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, 21 are epistles. It may be surprising, but they are the earliest part of the New Testament, some written shortly after the churches were established. There are 13 of these epistles which have the name Paul as the author - **Hebrews** is anonymous, although many have also ascribed it to the apostle Paul. The rest of the seven epistles are known as **General Epistles** in spite of the fact that some have what appears to be, a local destination.



Letter writing was a common feature in the ancient world because of the problems of distance and methods of communication. As far as the Christian church was concerned, it was the spread of the gospel to widely separate locations and the necessity of keeping in touch with and bringing instruction to the new converts which led to the letters being produced by the apostolic leadership.

Paul's writings were "occasional writings", written for a particular purpose and particular situation. He usually wrote with a pastoral purpose, to warn against false teaching, to build up or encourage new Christians or answer inquiries from church members. His letters were treasured, copied, circulated and their authority was recognized.

The letters of Paul can be classified in various ways. 1. They can be divided into four groups.

**Ecclesiological** 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

**Evangelical** 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans.

**The Captivity Epistles or Prison Letters** (written while the apostle was "in chains" as the "prisoner of the Lord" i.e., under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30-31) are Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians.

**Personal** 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, written to two members of Paul's mission team. Often they would be sent into different cities where Paul had planted churches. They are better referred to as Apostolic delegates than "settled" local Pastors.

Again, another way - perhaps a better one- is to divide them into three groups.

### **The Travel Letters.**

These are really missionary letters, written to express Paul's love, interest and concern for his new converts. We find Paul anxious lest his children be discouraged or led astray even by those who claim to be apostles or disciples of Christ. He writes to answer their queries, to remind them how Christians ought to live, to bring to them assurance and to outline what the true gospel really is. It is in this group that we place the first six epistles:

Galatians, Paul's first letter, was written because the churches in the Province of Galatia were on the point of departing from the true gospel. They were being encouraged to add circumcision and submission to the law of Moses to their faith as necessary for salvation. In 2:16 Paul reminds Peter, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Regenerated by the Spirit, they have received the promise of justification through faith alone and God has given them that same Holy Spirit to endue them with power and produce "the fruit of the Spirit" in their lives as they "walk" in Him (Gal. 5:16-26). They must seek continuously to "sow to the Spirit" and not "sow to the flesh," Gal. 6:8.

Next, 1 and 2 Thessalonians are also early letters which focus upon the encouragement of a newly planted church, encouragement to continue in spite of opposition and give them understanding regarding the comfort and challenge of the Lord's return. Paul exhorts them as new believers to adopt a different Christian lifestyle from the pagan culture in which they live and witness. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from sexual immorality...like the Gentiles who do not know God...For God did not call us to uncleanness, but to holiness," (1 Thess. 4:1-8). He comforts those who have lost loved ones with the promise of being "caught up together," (1 Thess. 4:17); They must "recognize those who labour" among them, are over them and "esteem them very highly in love" and "be at peace" among themselves. "Rejoice always, Pray without ceasing...Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil," (1 Thess. 5:12-22). In his second letter to the church contains a corrective to wrong teaching about the second coming; they must "stand firm and hold to the traditions" that they were taught "whether by word or our epistle." The expectation of the Lord's return should not result in them giving up supporting themselves, "not working at all." Paul had exhorted them about this even when he was with them that "If anyone will

not work, neither shall he eat.” Rather, they must “work in quietness and eat their own bread,” (2 Thess. 3:6-12).

Next, 1&2 Corinthians. In the first letter, following the opening greeting and praise, Paul reveals that on the basis of reports (1:11) he discusses the conflicts in the church, (1 Cor. 1:10 – 4:21). They were making too much of individual leaders; so Paul emphasizes the unimportance of the individual preacher. He has sent Timothy and plans to come himself (4:17-21).

On the basis of a further communication (5:1) we have a discussion of a sexual issue where discipline was required and the problem of legal disputes between Christians (6:1-11) From the questions the Corinthians sent to him, Paul discusses: marriage issues (7:1-40); eating food offered to idols (8:1-11:1); problems related to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and the place of the Spirit's gifts in the church meetings (12:1-14:40). In 15:1-58 there follows a discussion of the resurrection of Christians.

In 2 Corinthians Paul expresses his thankfulness for all the comfort he had received throughout his recent afflictions and the readers are urged to share in his ministry by their prayers.

In 1:12- 2:17, he seems to have been charged with fickleness on the grounds that he had changed his plans. His relationship with them had been severely strained, but the delay in his coming had allowed time for the repentance of the man who had caused particular offense and who now needed sympathy, which the readers are urged to give (2.2-17). He writes of the character of the ministry (3.1 - 7:16)

The apostle next dwells upon the credentials for preaching the gospel, having been prompted to do so because his own had been challenged. The ministry is in the service of a new covenant (ch. 3), making it superior to the old, and since the old was so glorious that Moses, its chief minister, had to veil his face, how much more glorious is the ministry of the new. The ministry also imposes tremendous responsibilities (4:1-15) Although it is of divine origin, its ministers are compared to earthen vessels. Yet the life of Jesus is manifested in these. Everything must be carried out in the light of the judgment seat of Christ (4.16 - 6:2). We are ambassadors announcing a message of reconciliation to God.

Regarding giving to God, the Corinthians had already shown themselves willing to share in the collection scheme for the poor at Jerusalem, but their resolve had apparently not been implemented and Paul explains what he expects of them. He writes of the Lord Jesus, though rich, becoming poor for us and the extraordinary liberality of the Macedonians to spur them on to greater effort. He answers the misrepresentations they have brought against him. His apostleship is not in the least inferior, and he challenges anyone to produce a list of sufferings for Christ comparable with his own. He can boast of having received some inexpressible revelations, (11:1 - 12:13).

Romans gives an outline of the apostolic gospel of righteousness by faith. It can be considered as follows:  
Ch 1:1-17 The Message of Righteousness of which Paul is “not ashamed,” (1:16).

Ch 1:18 - 3:20 The Need for Righteousness. The Gentiles and the Jews, in fact all mankind are “all under sin,” (3:9) with the whole world guilty before God.

Ch 3:21 - 31 The Way of Righteousness is to be “justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” (3:24).

Ch 4:1 – 25 The Imputation of Righteousness as seen in Abraham who “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,” (4:3).

Ch 5 The Blessings of Righteousness, including peace with God, a new standing in grace, a certain hope and the “Holy Spirit given to us,” (5:1-5).

Ch 6 The Challenge of Righteousness. The man we were was crucified with Christ at the cross and so we should not let sin reign in our bodies, but rather yield our members as instruments of righteousness. (6:1-14).

Ch 7-8 The Fulfillment of Righteousness. Righteousness can be manifest in us as we walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Ch 9-11 The Defense of Righteousness. God has been righteous in his dealings with both Jew and Gentile. The Gentiles have received mercy through the Jews' disobedience. But God has not cast the Jews finally away.

Ch 12-16 The Response to Righteousness. See 12:1 because of the "mercies of God" we ought to "present" our bodies as "a living sacrifice."

### **The Captivity Epistles.**

These letters were written by Paul during his detention at Rome recorded in Acts 28v30. Colossians affirms that in Christ alone "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge", (Col. 2:3); Ephesians, as we noted reveals God's eternal purpose to head up all things in Christ; Philemon is calling for grace for Onesimus – as God has had mercy upon him and Philippians presents Christ as our Life, our Example, Goal and Strength, (Phil. 1:21; 2:1-11; 3:12-16; 4:11-13). The last witness to Christ in in 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," (4:13). In all of these letters Paul speaks of his imprisonment or his "bonds in Christ". God stopped him on his missionary travels but continued to use him in his confinement! The years under "house arrest" have given to the church a treasured section of the NT scriptures.

### **The Pastoral Letters.**

In this final group we meet Paul the veteran writing to his trusted younger colleagues Timothy and Titus. As he realized that he was drawing near to the end of his ministry, he wanted to be sure that there was a continuance of the apostolic teaching from men who would follow him. These two men were in that succession, but it was not to end with them, 2 Tim 2v2, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

It is not easy to fit the Pastoral Epistles into the framework of the Acts and so it is usually understood to follow it. After two years in Rome Paul was released and probably returned to the east to help the churches again. He will have written the two letters, 1 Timothy (1:3 in Macedonia) and Titus (in 3:13 Paul is encouraging his missionary delegate to leave Crete and meet him in Nicopolis approx. AD64-65; so, the letter will have been written around that time). He was then rearrested and again taken to Rome, where he wrote the final epistle, 2 Timothy - see 1:17; 4:6-18. These letters do not contain the same kind of teaching as the earlier letters for their purpose is different. They are expressions of concern to remain true to "the faith," the body of apostolic doctrine and give directions for the appointment of church elders to replace those removed because of heretical teaching, like Hymenaeus and Philetus. See 2 Tim. 2:17-19, the teaching that "the resurrection is already past" - a certain kind of realized eschatology, claiming that believers were already in a glorified state and so "forbidding marriage," 1 Tim. 4:3. Titus sets out for the younger fellowships on Crete teaching to be passed on by Paul's younger colleague for the Church (Titus 1:5-16); for the Household (2:1-15) and the Christian lifestyle, to impact the society in which they live are witness, (3:1-14). "Let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent need, that they may not be unfruitful," (3:14). Second Timothy is an affectionate call to Timothy to be faithful. He must continue to preach the inspired word, as Paul will soon hand on the task to him. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith...Be diligent to come to me quickly..." (2 Tim. 3:14-4:9). Paul's references to his earlier experiences are meant to be an encouragement to his younger colleague.

The General Letters will be Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude and the Book of the Revelation. Here the story of God's purpose will come to a conclusion.

In considering Hebrews, it is thought that the first readers were Jews that had come into the Christian community. They were meeting opposition from other Jews, sometimes in families, where they would be disinherited (10:32-34). They had been ridiculed in public and some cast into prison. Many had accepted this adversity "joyfully," but others were in danger of compromise, (10:32-39). Why could they not "apostatise" to the God-ordained religion of Judaism and return to the temple, the priests and sacrifices in Jerusalem?

The writer will show them that the loss of ritual glories was more than compensated by the “better things” - better priesthood than the Aaronic, better sanctuary in heaven, better sacrifice offered by Christ Himself, “one sacrifice for sins forever.” Also, a better covenant or ‘greater things’ - Christ greater than angels, Moses, Joshua and Aaron. Why would you go back to the temple when there was need of “no more offering” and to an earthly priest, when Christ was your high priest gone into heaven to sit down at the right hand of God? Why do you need to seek access to the temple, an earthly sanctuary, when you have access into the holiest “by the blood of Jesus” and to the heavenly “throne of grace,” (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22).

Just a brief summary of the other books:

James is said to be addressed to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” It is possible to associate this with Acts 8:4, 11:19, those who were scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution which arose over Stephen. These would be “former parishioners” of James whom he now addresses in this pastoral letter. The main theme is the pattern of life according to the “royal law,” 2:8, which refers to the teaching of Jesus handed down to the church. The same law is actually called a “law of liberty” in 2:12. This is a phrase which we meet in 1:25 and there it is linked back to “the word of the gospel,” 1:18. So, the reference is the whole law as interpreted and handed over to the Church in the teaching of Jesus. It refers to the sovereign rule of God's kingdom. It highlights here the themes of trials, wealth, obedience, true faith, speech, repentance and prayer.

In 1 Peter believers have been born again to a living hope (1:1-5). Suffering has a refining effect (1:6-8); they are to be holy and accept whatever suffering comes as the will of God (1:13-21). They should grow up and seek maturity and as God's people to be ready for mission (2:1-10); The Responsibilities of Being God's People (2:11-4:11) - as sojourners (2:11-12), as citizens (2:13-17), as servants (2:18-25), as wives and husbands (3:1-7), as brethren (3:8-12); Suffering the fiery ordeal and faithfulness (4:12-19); Exhortation to unity, humility, and diligence (5:1-11).

2 Peter give us the themes of the cultivation of Christian character (1:5-21); condemnation of false teachers (2:1-22); the certainty of Christ's return (3:1-18).

In 1 John, because of the heretical teaching of those who have withdrawn from the Apostolic fellowship (1 John 2:19), the epistle covers the theme of marks of being born of God – the doctrinal test (Jesus – the incarnate Jesus is at the same time the Divine Son of God); the moral test, “Whoever is born of God does not (practice) sin,” (1 John 2:9); and the social test of loving the brothers and sisters of the Christian community, (1 John 3:10-19).

Jude has emphasised that believers in these days of departure from the truth, must accept the responsibility to contend for the faith “once for all” entrusted to the church (vv.1-19); recognise our responsibility for our spiritual condition/life (vv.20-21) and engage in practical loving concern for those led astray (vv.22-25).

Revelation is a book which we can say is centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we find Christ in the midst of the churches chs. 2-3; Christ in the midst of the throne chs 4-5; Christ in the midst of the nations with seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls chs. 6-18; and in the midst of the New Jerusalem chs. 19-22.

The book should be read in the light of its own time and the particular situation of the Christian community under the cruel might and power of the Emperor and Rome. The author's purpose is to give a prophetic interpretation of the difficult situation of the church in the end-time *from the perspective of the eschatological future*. The real point here is that to begin to understand Revelation one must be transported back to John's day and see him prophetically addressing the threatened church as to what will happen in the future. Thus the people of God are being made aware how God will undertake for them, since the

future of the world is in his hands. Rather than compromise with the Roman powers, which some may have been advocating, as the letters express, the Lord calls for faithfulness unto death (e.g. Rev 2:10). Therefore, in understanding Revelation we must seek to get back into John's time and see what God revealed about the future from that perspective.

It is possible then that the best approach to Revelation is a blending of what has been called the preterist and the futurist view. A moderate futurist view will find no need to only see the church in chapters 1-3. The seven churches cannot be only a forecast of the seven ages of church history. They were actual churches in a threatened situation, but the church as the people of God will also be seen in the later chapters. The primary purpose of John throughout the whole book is to call God's people to be faithful until the final outworking of God's purpose and the end of the world. The overall message - the Lord God omnipotent reigns - and its subsequent call to faithfulness is vital and no doubt will become increasingly more so, in the age in which we live.

One day Christ will return. There will be a great division. His enemies will be separated from His presence in hell, but His people will join Him in a perfect new creation. The book of Revelation describes a fully restored kingdom: God's people, Christians from all nations, in God's place, the new creation (heaven), under God's rule and therefore enjoying God's blessing. See Rev 21:1-5.