

God's Eternal Plan



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Learn the big picture of the Bible story and how it is important to your life

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW31

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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Lesson 1:

The Beginning

The Bible is composed of 66 individual books. These books were written over a period of about 1,600 years by around 40 different authors. These books range from books of history, to books of poetry, to books of prophecy, to letters. These books discuss a period of time from the creation of the world to around the end of the first century A.D.

The Bible is no ordinary book! The book, itself, claims to be from God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Its claim to be from God can be validated in numerous ways (which we cannot go into in this lesson). And, this book that was written over a period of about 1,600 years by around 40 different human authors contains *no contradictions* – consistently telling one unified story! This fact demonstrates that the Bible is no ordinary book (for man could not accomplish this task without the guidance of God)!

The story of the Bible is the story of God's eternal plan! The story begins in Genesis 1 and comes to a climax in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts! Best of all – you and I are part of the story of the Bible (even though our names are not found in its pages)!

How do you fit into this Bible story? What does the story of the Bible mean for your life? We will investigate this question as we consider the "big picture" of the Bible by focusing on "God's Eternal Plan" during the course of this study!

This first lesson will discuss God, the creation of the heavens and the earth, the fall of mankind, and the spread of sin.

In The Beginning, God...

As we begin this Bible study series, let's go back to the beginning – and learn about some essential things!

In the beginning, God was

In the beginning, God was. In fact, God is eternal. As the book of God opens and begins to discuss the creation of this universe, you should notice something very specific and important: God already existed! Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Consider some characteristics of this God who existed in the beginning.

(1) God is eternal. In Revelation 4:8, God is proclaimed to be holy – and the one who was, is, and is to come. Genesis 21:33 identifies God as the "Everlasting God." Deuteronomy 33:27 calls God the "eternal God." Psalm 90:2 simply states, "Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." So, God has always existed, He exists today, and will always exist! He had no creator and there was no time when He did not exist.

(2) God is all-powerful. The omnipotence of God (the nature of being all-powerful) is also a very prominent subject in Genesis 1. For, in this chapter, God creates all things in the heavens and on the earth! One of the essential elements to "Godhood" (Deity, the nature of being God) is omnipotence (without limitations to His power). This attribute is clearly demonstrated repeatedly in the Scriptures. Revelation 19:6 identifies God as "the Lord God Omnipotent" and Genesis 17:1 identifies God as almighty!

(3) God is all-knowing. Throughout the Scriptures you also see very clear evidence of God's omniscience (the nature of being all-knowing). That is, there is nothing that God does not know! This, too, is one of the essential elements to "Godhood." Isaiah 46:9-10 states that God is able to declare the "end from the beginning" and knows "from ancient times things that are not yet done." In Romans 11:33-36, Paul praises God for His wisdom and knowledge: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" Or

who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

(4) God is ever-present. There is nothing that escapes God’s attention – anywhere! This is another attribute of God that is essential to being God – and one that is well documented in the Scriptures! Consider what is said in Proverbs 15:3: “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Furthermore, Psalm 139:3-12 is poetic demonstration that God sees us every place we go and that nothing escapes His attention.

(5) God is manifested in 3 persons. In order to properly understand the truths about God and God’s plan, you must recognize that three Persons compose the Godhead. That is, there are 3 separate Persons who each possess the nature of being God! These three are: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three have the same nature of being God and are fully united as one God; yet, they are individual Persons. Both Matthew 3:16-17 and Matthew 28:19-20 identify these three together. Also notice John 1:1-3 to see specific proof of Jesus Christ possessing the attributes of being God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” The plurality of Persons in the Godhead can also be observed from Genesis 1 (notice verses 2 and 26-27 to see the plural pronouns used in reference to God and the reference to the Spirit of God).

In the beginning, God had a plan

It is important to begin with the firm understanding that there is a God – and what it means for God to be God! If an individual starts from a different point besides accepting the reality of God, he/she is led into great error from the beginning (see Romans 1:18-32)! It is essential to accept the fact that God exists – and that God has a plan to reward those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6)!

But, God did not have just any plan – He had an eternal plan! This eternal, all-powerful, all-wise, and ever-present God had a plan in place that reflects these qualities! His plan was eternally in His mind (in place well before the foundation of the world). His plan reflects His supreme knowledge, power, and presence in the fact that God had a plan in place to redeem mankind from sin – before He created mankind and even before mankind existed! Take some time to

consider the following passages that speak of God’s plan to redeem mankind.

Matthew 25:34 says, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

Acts 2:23 says, “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.”

Acts 3:18 says, “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.”

Romans 16:25 says, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began.”

1 Corinthians 2:7 says, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.”

Ephesians 1:4 says, “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

Ephesians 3:8-11 says, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2 Timothy 1:8-9 says, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

1 Peter 1:18-21 says, “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you

who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

These passages may simply be summarized by saying: God had a plan in place to redeem mankind from His sins *from eternity* (an eternal plan of salvation)! God already had prepared this plan that would offer eternal salvation in Heaven to those who were in Christ Jesus – even before He created the world! Now, this does not mean that mankind did not or does not have free will! God did *not* individually determine for anyone to be lost or to be saved (this kind of teaching perverts passages like Ephesians 1:4)! Instead, God chose and predestined that those who would be “in Christ” would be saved eternally! Still, it remains the responsibility of each individual to be “in Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27)!

As we study the unfolding of God’s eternal plan, we should understand that it was once a “mystery.” Those who lived in Old Testament times did not fully understand this plan of God as we can understand it today. Consider.... Did Adam and Eve fully understand the promise God made in Genesis 3:15 – when God promised Satan that Satan would bruise the heel of woman’s Seed but that the Seed would bruise Satan’s head? Did Abraham fully understand the promise God made in Genesis 12:3 – when God promised to bless all nations of the world through the Seed of Abraham? Did the prophets fully understand the prophecies they made concerning the Messiah, the gospel, or the church?

I believe that we can conclude that none of these fully understood the mystery of God (hence, why it was called a “mystery”). Look at 1 Peter 1:10-12: “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into.” This passage clearly indicates that the prophets wanted to know about and made inquiry concerning this eternal plan of God; but, they were not given the information that they desired to have – because it wasn’t for their time. Even the angels are said to “desire to look into” the things concerning the gospel!

Therefore, please appreciate the fact that as you read the story of the Bible, you can understand the “mystery” that has now been revealed! Consider Ephesians 3:3-5: “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” ***Please, do not take the fact for granted that you have access to the revelation of this mystery – and have the opportunity to partake of its great blessings!***

In the beginning, God created the world

In the beginning, God created the world. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” As the Bible story begins in Genesis 1, God is in existence and is beginning His great creation of the universe! Let’s watch as we learn some very powerful and transformative facts about God’s creation of the heavens and the earth!

God Created The Heavens And The Earth

Genesis 1

Genesis 1 records God’s 6-day creation of the heavens and the earth. Day 1: God created light (1:3-5). Day 2: God created the firmament (expanse) to divide the waters from the waters (i.e. the sky) (1:6-8). Day 3: God created the earth and the seas by gathering the land and the waters together (1:9-10). He also created the plants (the grasses, the herbs, and the trees) (1:11-13). Day 4: God created the sun, moon, and stars (1:14-19). Day 5: God created the sea animals and birds (1:20-23). Day 6: God created the land animals and mankind (1:24-31).

How God created the heavens and the earth

After God created the heavens and the earth, He declared that everything was “very good” (Genesis 1:31-2:3). Now, it is important to observe, at this point, that there was no evil or any defect in God’s creation! God is entirely good – and cannot be involved in anything that is evil (1 John 1:5; James 1:13; Revelation

4:8)! Therefore, God created a world that was free from sin – and one that was entirely in His favor!

God also created mankind in a very special way. Genesis 1:26-27 says, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

God created mankind in His own image. Since John 4:23-24 identifies that “God is Spirit,” we can conclude that God created mankind with a spiritual element to his existence (a soul)! This spiritual element to mankind’s existence allows mankind to have a relationship with his Creator and seek to serve and worship Him! This spiritual element to man’s existence is also what would survive physical death (which would later enter the world).

After God created man, He placed man in the Garden of Eden. What a tremendous sight this must have been – a garden planted by God Himself! Truly this was a paradise on earth! Listen to Genesis 2:8-14: “The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.”

After placing man in the Garden of Eden, God determined to create a suitable companion for man. This God did by creating woman – and joining the man and the woman together in marriage (Genesis 2:18-25). At this point, everything was perfect! Mankind lived in a paradise and had access to the Tree of Life! Even though mankind had been created with free will, there was no sin yet to enter the world. So, there was no death, sickness, suffering, etc. In addition, the Bible paints the picture that Adam and Eve took part in a

relationship with God that was one of full fellowship with their Creator!

Why God created the heavens and the earth

We have seen that God did create the heavens and the earth. But, why? Why did the almighty and eternal God create the universe? Why did He create the universe in the way that He created it (i.e. why is it so large)? Why did He create mankind in His own image? Why did He give mankind free will?

This question of “why?” is central to understanding God’s eternal plan! This question is one that addresses the fundamental purpose of it all. For, in order to properly understand God’s plan, you need to understand the purpose for which God created the universe – and, specifically, mankind!

Fortunately, God has given us the answers as to why He has created the heavens and the earth! Consider the following passages.

Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.”

Psalm 57:5 says, “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth.”

Psalm 57:11 says, “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth.”

Isaiah 43:7 says, “Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.”

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.”

Acts 17:26-27 says, “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.”

The summary of these passages is simply this: All of creation glorifies God! Particularly, God expects those who have been created in His own image (mankind) to choose to glorify Him while they live on the earth! He wants mankind to choose to seek Him!

The Fall Of Man

The law

Man was created with free will. I have already made this point, but, it is certainly worth emphasizing again. God did not create mankind as robots to mindlessly follow Him. Rather, He created mankind with the ability to choose to serve and worship God – or not to do so!

As a result, one law was given to man in the Garden of Eden (in Genesis 2:15-17). The passage says, “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

He was not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (not even to touch it) – or he would die. This law that God gave in the Garden was not too difficult for them to understand. This law was not outside of their ability to obey. And, the consequence of breaking the law was understood (not that they would have fully understood what death was; but, they did understand that it was a consequence that would be given to them).

The temptation

Satan enters the Bible story in Genesis 3:1. He is seen as working through a serpent to tempt Eve. This temptation is recorded in Genesis 3:1-5: “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’” Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. 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.’”

In this temptation, Satan contradicts what God had told Adam and Eve, promising that they would *not* die if they ate of the forbidden fruit! In fact, Satan tells Eve that God just does not want her to experience the “benefit” that comes from eating the forbidden fruit!

The sin

Tragically, Eve was convinced by Satan. Even though she knew what God had told them concerning the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (evident from Genesis 3:2-3), she determined to listen to the serpent instead.

After being tempted by the serpent, Eve looked at the tree differently. Genesis 3:6 sadly states: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”

She was now intrigued by what the serpent had said – no longer viewing the tree as a threat and source of great consequence; but, as something that would produce pleasure! Then, Eve sinned. She violated the law that God had given, thereby committing sin (sin is the transgression/violation of God’s law – 1 John 3:4). She also gave to her husband, Adam – who also committed sin when he violated God’s law!

The consequences

Was God bluffing? Satan had, clearly, convinced Eve that God really did not mean what He said when He spoke of the consequences of taking the forbidden fruit. However, God demonstrated to Adam and Eve that He meant exactly what He said!

Consequently, spiritual death occurred that day. God had promised that they would die the day they took of the fruit. And, spiritual death (spiritual separation from God) occurred as the result of their sin that day – as their wonderful relationship with God changed that day!

Physical death and suffering also entered the world at that time. Read Genesis 3:16-24 to see the other consequences that came into the world because of their sin (including being cast out of the Garden and separated from the Tree of Life)! This world drastically changed at that time – going from a true paradise to a world that was decaying and full of sorrow! Furthermore, as Genesis 5:5 records, Adam died! Thus, physical death entered the world as the result of being separated from the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24).

The promise

God also punished the serpent and Satan. Genesis 3:14-15 records the first glimpse into God’s eternal plan: “So the Lord God said to the serpent:

‘Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.’” God would defeat Satan – even though Satan would inflict a temporary blow to God! Surely, those early readers of the book of Genesis during the Old Testament time would have had difficulty to fully understand the significance of this passage. However, we can look back – having the mystery revealed – and understand that this passage foreshadows all that would be accomplished according to God’s plan that He had in His mind from eternity, pertaining to the eternal salvation of mankind! So, we watch as this promise from God becomes reality as we read and study His word – and see His eternal plan being revealed!

The Spread Of Sin

Cain and Abel

Sin did not stop with Adam and Eve. Instead, this was only the beginning point for man’s sinning. We watch as the next several chapters of the book of Genesis details how sin increased quickly upon the earth.

Cain and Abel (sons of Adam and Eve) both offered a sacrifice to God. However, God was only pleased with the sacrifice of Abel (Genesis 4:1-5). As a result, Cain became angry with his brother Abel and killed him (Genesis 4:6-8). This sin was also known by God and carried consequences (see Genesis 4:9-15).

The flood

Wickedness had filled the earth in the days of Noah. Read Genesis 6:1-5, 11-12. Particularly notice verse 5: “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

God determined to destroy this wickedness by means of a flood. Read Genesis 6:5-7; Genesis 7:4, 17-24. The wickedness upon the earth was so great that God was sorry that He had even created mankind on the earth – and determined to kill all of mankind (except Noah and Noah’s family – who found grace in the eyes of the Lord)! How quickly God’s perfect

creation had fallen into a complete state of wickedness – so much so that He desired to destroy it!

Throughout the Bible

Still, the flood did not stop sin. Even after this major “reset” in the world, sin still continued. The world would be repopulated from Noah and Noah’s family (8 people in total). Still, it would not take long for wickedness to fill the earth again.

The story of the spread of sin continues throughout the pages of Scripture! The Bible begins to focus on the people God chose to tell the story of salvation through (the nation of Israel). Yet, even these chosen people of God would often be guilty of sin – as well as the pagan nations around them!

The problem of sin

But, why is sin such a problem that God needed to have a plan in place to provide the remedy for sin?

(1) Sin is the transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, sin occurs whenever God’s creation (mankind) violates His laws while exercising their own free will! Sadly, all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). That is, every single person who has reached an accountable age has lived his/her life in a way that has not pleased God! Therefore, they have fallen short of their purpose of bringing glory to God at all times – and have failed to live life entirely according to His instructions.

(2) Since God is entirely holy and pure, sin separates mankind from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” This spiritual separation from God is due to the fact that sin is contrary to God’s nature (see 1 John 1:5-7).

(3) Sin results in the punishment of eternal death in Hell fire. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” So, eternal spiritual death (separation from God) in Hell fire is what we all *deserve* for sinning!

(4) Since those who commit sin deserve to spend eternity in Hell (Romans 6:23), it follows that mankind could not do anything to earn his own salvation. Thus, salvation is said to be not of ourselves in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Clearly, then, there was a need for a Savior to come into the world to redeem mankind from his sin! This opportunity to be saved from sin is the opportunity none of us deserve! It is truly the gift of God! Notice Romans 6:23 again, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We will watch closely as we study God’s eternal plan to see how God brings about the gift of salvation – and the requirements that He places upon such.

Conclusion

With the foundational elements involved in the book of Genesis established, the stage is set for the unfolding of God’s eternal plan. How would God respond to the problem of sin in the world? We have seen that God had a plan in place. But, how would God bring about the solution?

In the next lesson, we will focus on how God used the nation of Israel to accomplish His eternal plan of redemption!

Study Questions

Discuss some basic facts about the Bible.

What is the story of the Bible – and how do you fit into this story?

1. In The Beginning, God...

Explain who God is and discuss His existence prior to the creation of the world.

Did this eternal, all-powerful, all-wise, and ever-present God have a plan? List some passages that prove your answer. What was this plan about? Has this plan been revealed?

2. God Created The Heavens And The Earth

Briefly summarize each day of creation.

1. Day 1 –

2. Day 2 –

3. Day 3 –

4. Day 4 –

5. Day 5 –

6. Day 6 –

How did God create the heavens and the earth? How did God create mankind – and what did He do with man?

Why did God create the heavens and the earth?

3. The Fall Of Man

What law did God give to man in the Garden of Eden?

How was Eve tempted?

Why did Adam and Eve sin?

What were the consequences of this sin?

What promise did God make in Genesis 3:14-15? How does this promise connect with God's eternal plan?

4. The Spread Of Sin

Discuss how sin spread with Cain and Abel, the time preceding the flood, and throughout the Bible.

Why is sin such a problem that God would need to have a plan in place to provide the remedy for sin?

Lesson 2:

The Nation Of Israel

In our first study, we began discussing the eternal plan of God (Ephesians 3:8-11). We discussed the creation, the fall, and the spread of sin. We also discovered the nature of God in the beginning (i.e. that He was already in existence and that He had a plan). You might want to go back and review all of the passages that were introduced concerning the eternal plan of God. We also discussed how God created the heavens and the earth during the 6 days of creation – and established that He created everything so that He would be glorified. Unfortunately, those God created in His own image decided to violate God's law – and consequences followed (namely the consequence of spiritual death). Yet, God promised (in Genesis 3:15) that He would defeat Satan through the Seed of the woman. This is the first glimpse into God's eternal plan. However, sin continued to spread – as seen in the stories of Cain and Abel and the flood. The problem of sin is the reason for God's eternal plan – for, mankind could not save himself from his sin. Mankind could only be saved from his sin if God would provide a Savior!

The story of the Bible is this story of God's eternal plan to provide a Savior for the world! The story, as we've seen, begins in Genesis 1 and comes to a climax in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts! Best of all – you and I are part of the story of the Bible (even though our names are not found in its pages)!

How do you fit into this Bible story? What does the story of the Bible mean for your life? We will discover the answer to this question as we continue to

consider the “big picture” of the Bible by discussing “God's Eternal Plan” during the course of this study!

This second lesson will discuss how God chose the nation of Israel to be His own people – and how He used the nation of Israel to accomplish His eternal plan.

God's Covenant With Abraham

Our first study stopped around Genesis chapter 9, after the flood. However, the Bible story does not stop there. From this point, the Bible describes the lineage of Noah through his three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth). From these three sons, the whole earth was populated again (Genesis 9:18-19). Their genealogical records are given in Genesis chapter 10.

Noah to Abraham

After the flood had ended and Noah's family exited the ark, the Bible records the account of Noah becoming drunk and naked in his tent (Genesis 9:20-27). Ham saw his father's nakedness; but it was Shem and Japheth who actually took a garment and covered their father's nakedness. While this story may seem insignificant to the Bible story, the words of Noah (in Genesis 9:24-27) show its true significance: “So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said: ‘Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren.’ And he said: ‘Blessed be the Lord, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant.’”

So, Noah placed a curse on Canaan (the son of Ham), saying that Canaan would be the servant of Shem (and that Japheth would dwell in the tents of Shem). When you come to Genesis chapter 11 (verses 10-32), the Bible brings Shem's descendants into focus, pointing to the genealogy of Terah (the father of Abraham). Thus, it is through the descendants of Shem that God will reveal His eternal plan!

God's promises to Abraham

It is at this point that Abraham (called “Abram”) is brought into focus (Genesis 11:25-32). In Genesis 12:1, God called Abraham to leave his

homeland (Ur of the Chaldeans) and his family (who would have been in the same area). He was to leave his homeland in order to go to the land that God was about to promise to give his descendants (the land of Canaan). Abraham's obedience to this call involved great faith; but, was based on three promises from God (Genesis 12:1-5; Genesis 15).

Genesis 12:1-5 says, "Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan."

Consider the three main promises God made to Abraham. (1) The nation promise. God promised that He would make a great nation out of Abraham's descendants. (2) The land promise. God promised that He would give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan (the land Abraham was called to dwell in). (3) The Seed promise. God promised to bless Abraham. In fact, God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham. This third promise has direct relevance to the unfolding of God's eternal plan! It would be through the descendants of Abraham (the nation of Israel) that God would bring Christ (the Savior) into this world, thereby blessing all nations by providing them the opportunity to be saved!

The son of promise

While God had made these promises to Abraham concerning Abraham's descendants, Abraham was still childless. Therefore, Abraham questioned, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing that I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?...Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir" (Genesis 15:2-3). Still, God promised Abraham that he would have an heir come from his own body – and his descendants would be as innumerable as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:4-5).

Yet, as time went on and Abraham and his wife grew older, they remained childless. Then, Abraham's

wife (Sarai, who would later be called Sarah) convinced Abraham to have a child by Sarah's maidservant, Hagar. This Abraham did and conceived a son who would be named Ishmael (Genesis 16). In Genesis 17, God renamed Abram and Sarai to Abraham (meaning, father of a multitude) and Sarah (meaning, princess) – while again promising that He would accomplish His promises through them. In Genesis 17:19, listen to what God told Abraham concerning Abraham's proposal that Ishmael would be the descendant God should fulfill His promises through: "Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.'"

During this time, God also established circumcision as the sign of the covenant between Himself and Abraham. Although Abraham and Sarah both laughed at the prospect of bearing a child in their old age, God promised that they would bear a son who was to be called Isaac (Genesis 17:17-22; Genesis 18:1-15).

Then, according to the promise that He had made, God blessed Abraham and Sarah with a son. Genesis 21:1-7 records, "And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, 'God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.' She also said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.'"

Genesis 22:1-18 records how God then tested Abraham's faith by commanding Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice upon an altar. Genesis 22:1-2 says, "Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'"

Abraham proceeded to rise early the next morning and go to the place God had specified. Upon his arrival, Abraham and Isaac went up to the mountain alone to worship God – and Abraham

prepared for the sacrifice. Then, as Abraham had laid Isaac upon the altar and was about to slay him, the Angel of the Lord stopped him. Abraham had demonstrated his complete faith in God. He believed that God would fulfill His promises in some way – even concluding that God would be able to raise Isaac from the dead (see Hebrews 11:17-19).

The promise to Abraham's descendants

As the story continues, God continues to offer the same promises to the descendants of Abraham as He had made to Abraham prior. In fact, God had promised Abraham that He would establish His covenant with Isaac and with Isaac's descendants. Again, Genesis 17:19 says, "Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.'"

When Isaac's wife had twins sons (Esau and Jacob), God had promised that the older would serve the younger – and that there were two nations in her womb (Genesis 25:23). As you read Genesis 25:29-34 and Genesis 27, you see how Esau (the older son) sold his birthright to his brother, Jacob, and how Jacob later received Isaac's blessing (particularly note Genesis 28:3-4). This was all according to what God had said in Genesis 25:23.

In Genesis 28:12-15, God extends the covenant to Jacob, which He had made with Abraham prior, through a dream: "Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: 'I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.'"

Then, Genesis 29:31 through Genesis 30:24 and Genesis 35:16-21 records how 12 sons were born to Jacob through his two wives and their two handmaids. In Genesis 32:22-32 (particularly note verse 28), God changed Jacob's name to Israel, whose 12 children would become the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel.

Jacob's last words to each one of his sons are recorded in Genesis 49 – and are significant in the unfolding of God's eternal plan. Particularly note the statement that is made concerning Judah in Genesis 49:9-12: "Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk."

It was through Judah that the kings of Israel would come – and Shiloh (the Prince of Peace, the Messiah) would also come through the lineage of the tribe of Judah. Thus, God's eternal plan would be accomplished through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. Then, as you roll forward in the pages of the Old Testament (1 Samuel 8-16), you will see the fulfillment of this when Saul (of the tribe of Benjamin) was the first king of Israel; but, was removed, and then replaced by David (of the tribe of Judah).

God, then established His covenant with David – promising that there would be no end to his kingdom. This would be accomplished through the Messiah, who would come through the lineage of David (of the tribe of Judah) and set up His kingdom (Isaiah 7:13-14; Isaiah 9:6-7). Consider the following passages.

2 Samuel 7:12-16 says, "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."

Psalms 89:3-4 says, "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.' Selah"

Psalms 132:11-12 says, "The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: 'I will set upon

your throne the fruit of your body. If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I shall teach them, Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore.”

Thus, God established His covenant with Abraham and with Abraham’s descendants. This was just as God had promised to Abraham in Genesis 17:6-8: “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Therefore, the Israelites were God’s people during the Old Testament times.

God’s Covenant With The Nation Of Israel

Throughout the time of the patriarchs (i.e. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), God communicated His will directly to the heads of the households (patriarchs). For instance, consider how God communicated His will directly to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. In this passage, God not only commanded Abraham to leave his homeland; but, he also established His promises to Abraham. This was also observed in God’s commandment to Adam and Eve regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). Therefore, during this time, God did not have a written law. Instead, He communicated His will directly to the patriarchs.

The Law of Moses

God chose to give the nation of Israel a written law to abide by. The book of Galatians informs us that the Law was added because of transgressions – until the Seed should come (Galatians 3:19). It was described as a tutor to bring the Jews to faith in Christ (Galatians 3:23-25). That is, the Law was given as a temporary system because of sin (either because of the wickedness that was being committed or in order to reveal the true nature of sin), until Jesus Christ (the Seed) would come. You can read about the giving of this Law in the book of Exodus (beginning around

chapter 19). Ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) served as the foundation of this Law.

The Law also consisted of regular sacrifices that were to be made – and a priesthood (composed of men from the tribe of Levi) who would administer these rituals and sacrifices on behalf of the people. You can read more about the Law that was established with the nation of Israel in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. When Moses had spoken the words of the Lord to the people, they entered into a covenant relationship with God – that He would be their God and they would be His people (and be obedient to God’s commandments).

Exodus 24:3-8 says, “So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the Lord has said we will do.’ And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.’”

Blessings or consequences

God would keep His part of the covenant; but, Israel was warned concerning the consequences if they failed to keep their part of the covenant with God. In addition, God told them how He would bless them if they would keep His commandments. Just prior to Moses’ death (and just prior to the Israelites going in to possess the land of Canaan), Moses encouraged the people to keep the commandments of God, saying that it would prove to be beneficial to them if they did.

Deuteronomy 5:32-33 says, “Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.” Also read Leviticus 26 to see what the Israelites were told concerning the blessings that would come from

following the Lord's commandments – and the consequences that would result if they failed to keep His commandments.

A shadow of things to come

The Law of Moses was but a shadow of things to come. It was not designed to be a permanent system. Galatians 3:23-25 makes this perfectly clear: “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” Remember, the Law of Moses (according to Galatians 3:19) was “added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.” That Seed was Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Law of Moses was only designed to be a temporary system of law to govern God's people (the Israelites) *till* the promised Seed would come into the world and establish His new (and better) law!

So, it was designed for a specific purpose, fulfilled that specific purpose (related to the nation of Israel), and has now been taken away. Colossians 2:14 says that this law has been nailed to Jesus' cross: “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Yes, the Law of Moses was not a perfect system (Hebrews 8:7) – in that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4) and the law itself could not give life (Galatians 3:21-22; Galatians 3:10-14). Instead, the Law of Moses was a foretaste of better things to come under the Law of Christ (see Hebrews 9:1-10:18). Christ's Law (the New Covenant) has since been established – and is far better! To see a discussion of how much better Christ's Law is compared to the Law of Moses, read the book of Hebrews! However, the Law of Moses was designed so that the Israelites would come to faith in Christ Jesus whenever He would come to earth (as we saw from Galatians 3:23-25).

A Brief History Of The Nation Of Israel

The story of the Old Testament is the story of the nation of Israel and how God called the nation of Israel to be His people and used them to bring the Savior into the world. Let's consider an overview of the Old Testament to watch as this story develops.

The patriarchs

The account of the patriarchs (i.e. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) forms the foundation for the nation of Israel. Their stories in the book of Genesis tell how God promised to make a great nation out their descendants, give their descendants the land of Canaan, and bless the entire world through their Seed (i.e. Genesis 12:1-3). Go back and review the things that we have already discussed concerning these promises. Their descendants were called the “Israelites” or the “nation of Israel.”

Egyptian slavery

Jacob had 12 sons. However, Jacob showed favoritism toward Joseph because he was the son of Rachel (who Jacob preferred over Leah, his other wife and Rachel's sister). He showed this favoritism by giving Joseph a coat of many colors. This action provoked jealousy from Joseph's brothers (besides Benjamin, the youngest). Joseph's brothers eventually sold him into slavery, telling Jacob that Joseph had been killed by wild animals. Joseph, meanwhile, was blessed by God and was caused to prosper wherever he went – and eventually became the second in command in all of Egypt (second only to the King/Pharaoh).

It was during this time (while Joseph was second in command in Egypt) that a great famine arose over all of the land. Having made provisions for this famine, food was available in Egypt – and Joseph was in charge of it. Unaware that Joseph had come to this position of authority in Egypt, Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt during the famine, seeking necessary provisions – and were eventually reunited with Joseph. It was in this way that God was providing for His people during this time of famine! Joseph's family would live in the land of Goshen (in Egypt) through this time of famine.

However, as time passed, Joseph and the Pharaoh both died. Later, a new Pharaoh came to

power in Egypt – one who did not know Joseph or remember his contributions to Egypt. Therefore, this king looked upon the Israelites as a threat (seeing that they were becoming strong in number) and determined to put them to hard labor, making them slaves of the Egyptians.

The exodus

During this time of slavery, the Pharaoh commanded that all of the male children who were born to the Israelites be killed (cast into the river). It was during this time that Moses was born. However, Moses' parents hid their child so that he would not be destroyed. They made an ark of bulrushes for Moses to lay in, and put the ark in the reeds by the river bank. It happened that Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe in the river at this time and Moses was discovered! However, Pharaoh's daughter chose to take Moses as her own son instead of having Moses killed.

As time went on and the children of Israel continued to be in captivity, God heard the cry of His people for help while they were in Egypt. God, therefore, called Moses through a burning bush to lead His people out of Egypt. Moses later went to Pharaoh and commanded that the Israelites be permitted to go into the wilderness to hold a feast for the Lord (and was given signs to perform in front of Pharaoh to demonstrate that God had sent him). But, when Pharaoh repeatedly refused to allow Israel to leave, God brought a series of 10 plagues upon the Egyptians (the last of which was the death of all the firstborn in Egypt – except among those who complied with God's instructions regarding the "Passover"). Israel was finally permitted to leave Egypt after the 10th plague; but, Pharaoh's heart was hardened once more and he pursued the Israelites with his military. It was at this time that Moses parted the Red Sea, allowing Israel to cross on dry ground – and destroyed all the Egyptians who pursued! Thus, God delivered His people out of the land of Egypt!

The wilderness wanderings

Israel was now on their way to possess the land that had been promised to Abraham (the land of Canaan). Although God was with Israel and provided for them, Israel often complained against Moses and against God while they were traveling in the wilderness (saying that they would have been better off staying in Egypt). Then, when they came near the land of Canaan and sent out spies to view the land, Israel did not trust in God enough to go into the land and possess it! Only

two of the 12 spies (Joshua and Caleb) gave encouraging reports about their ability to possess the land with God's help. The others said that Israel would not be able to drive out the inhabitants of the land. Since the children of Israel listened to the 10 spies who brought back negative reports and failed to trust in God, God sentenced all of the Israelites who were 20 years old and above to die in the wilderness (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb). This period of wilderness wandering lasted for 40 years.

The conquest of Canaan

When this time of 40 years was complete – and those who had rebelled against God had died – God led His people into the promised land, under the leadership of Joshua. Now, it is important to understand that Israel had been divided into 12 tribes (according to the 12 sons of Jacob). The land of Canaan, then, would be divided up among the tribes of Israel. Joseph's 2 sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) were each given their own territory and were recognized as "half tribes." Levi, the priestly tribe, was given no land inheritance. Instead, the Levites were supported by the rest of the Israelites for the services they performed. Israel, by the power of God, was able to possess the land of Canaan and drive out the inhabitants of the land. The victory of Israel over Jericho is an example of how God caused Israel to inhabit the land (read Joshua 6). However, the Israelites often failed to entirely drive out or destroy all of the inhabitants of the land (not due to the lack of ability; but, simply because of their own disobedience).

The period of the judges

Those who had been permitted by Israel to remain in the land of Canaan would often influence Israel to sin against God (often through their idolatrous practices). This angered God – and God would deliver the Israelites to the enemy to be oppressed. Then, when Israel would repent and cry out to God for deliverance, God would deliver them by means of judges. Later, they would go back into sin. This cycle continued throughout the book of Judges. Consider the sad conclusion to the book of Judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

The united kingdom

Israel, again, rejected God and demanded that a king be appointed to judge them like the other nations (see 1 Samuel 8:5-6). The book of 1 Samuel,

The Prophets

then, describes how God gave them a king – according to their desires. Saul (of the tribe of Benjamin) was the first king appointed over Israel. However, because of Saul's disobedience, Saul's kingdom was taken away from him by God and was given to David (of the tribe of Judah), a man after God's own heart. Remember, the scepter was not to depart from Judah, according to the words of Jacob in Genesis 49:10. David's son, Solomon, then became king after David.

The divided kingdom

After Solomon's death, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, became king. However, when Rehoboam acted on some bad advice, he made a decision that led to the division of the kingdom. The northern part of the nation of Israel rebelled against Rehoboam – and Jeroboam became king over these tribes (which would retain the name, "Israel"). The capital of Israel was set up in Samaria. Rehoboam continued as king over the southern region (which would be called "Judah"). Its capital would be in Jerusalem. During this divided kingdom period, every king of Israel was unfaithful to God, with only a few faithful kings in Judah.

The captivity

Remember the promise God made in Leviticus 26 concerning the blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. Because of the disobedience of Israel, Israel was given over to Assyrian captivity in 721 B.C. Judah was left alone during this time. However, due to the disobedience of Judah, Judah was given over to Babylonian captivity in 606 B.C. Thus, their downfall was a bit slower than Israel's – because they had a few faithful kings (while Israel had no faithful kings).

The return

The focus of the Bible story now becomes Judah. It is important to remember God's promises we have discussed regarding the coming of a Savior through Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:1-3) and that Jesus Christ (the King of Kings) would come through the tribe of Judah and David's descendants (Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:12-16). Jeremiah had prophesied that this period of Judah's captivity would last for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). Isaiah also prophesied that a remnant would return (Isaiah 10:20-23). You can read about this return of a small remnant of Judah to Jerusalem in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

During the Old Testament period, God used prophets. These prophets were charged with the responsibility of faithfully revealing God's message to the people (read Deuteronomy 18:20-22). Sometimes this message would contain warnings about disobedience, information about future events, etc. Most of the prophets you read about in the Bible revealed God's message to God's people (the Israelites). However, some also prophesied to other nations. A basic understanding of the prophets is helpful in understanding God's eternal plan because not only were these prophets revealing things that were relevant to people of that time; but, God was revealing His eternal plan through these prophets as well!

Then, consider the fact that, as the prophets revealed the words of God, they would not have perfect understanding themselves about the salvation that God was unfolding. 1 Peter 1:10-12 says, "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into."

Prophecies about the Messiah

Some of the prophecies that were made pointed to the coming of the Messiah (the Savior of the world). Some examples of these Messianic prophecies are: Isaiah 7:13-14; Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 53). There are over 300 Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

Prophecies about the gospel

Some prophecies pointed to the new covenant that would be established (this is the gospel of Jesus Christ). Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Joel 2:28-32 to see prophecies about the gospel.

Prophecies about the church

Some prophecies pointed to the establishment of Christ's church/kingdom (which would be an

everlasting kingdom). A couple examples of this are found in Isaiah 2:2-4 and Daniel chapter 2.

Conclusion

God's eternal plan is unfolding. We have watched its development through the promises made in the book of Genesis – and promises that were made throughout the Old Testament. Furthermore, we have watched as God is telling this story of salvation through His chosen people during the Old Testament period – the nation of Israel.

In the next lesson, we will continue to watch as the promise of a Savior is fulfilled and all nations of the earth are blessed through Him!

Study Questions

Review what you've learned thus far.

1. God's Covenant With Abraham

What significance does the events of Genesis 9:20-27 have on the Bible story?

What promises did God make to Abraham? What significance do these have in God's eternal plan?

Discuss the significance of Abraham's son of promise.

Discuss how God made the same promises to the descendants of Abraham.

2. God's Covenant With The Nation Of Israel

Why did God give His people a Law to follow? What did the Law consist of?

What would happen if Israel kept the Law and if they did not keep the Law?

How was the Law a shadow of things to come?

3. A Brief History Of The Nation Of Israel

What is the significance of the Old Testament story?

Discuss significant points related to each of the following:

1. The patriarchs –
2. Egyptian slavery –
3. The exodus –
4. The wilderness wanderings –
5. The conquest of Canaan –
6. The period of the judges –
7. The united kingdom –

8. The divided kingdom –

9. The captivity –

10. The return –

4. The Prophets

Who were the prophets and what was the significance of their work?

List some passages that prophesy about the Messiah, the Gospel, and the church. Discuss the significance of these prophecies.

God's Eternal Plan

Lesson 3:

The Messiah

In our last two studies we have established the foundational principles involved in God's eternal plan. We have seen that God did have a plan in place from eternity to redeem mankind from his sin. Then, we have discovered that God would choose the nation of Israel to be His special people – and would fulfill His promise of bringing the Savior into this world through them.

Of course, in order to fully appreciate the value of God's eternal plan, we must remember the serious nature of sin (as we established in lesson 1). Sin separates mankind from God (who is entirely holy). Once again, Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear."

This holy and righteous God demands life as a payment for sin. He says, "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). However, the animal sacrifices that were given according to the Law of Moses simply were not sufficient in taking away sins. Hebrews 10:4 says, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." Therefore, God sent His only begotten Son to the earth as His sacrificial Lamb! John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." In John 1:29, when John, the baptizer, saw Jesus coming toward him, he proclaimed, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

This story of salvation (revealed through the pages of the Scriptures) is essential to you! Your salvation hinges upon the sacrifice that Jesus Christ (the Messiah) made on the cross! This is how the Bible

story is important to your life. Remember, God's promise to Abraham (in Genesis 12:3) was that through Abraham's descendants all nations of the earth would be blessed. This includes you and me! Yet, as we will discuss in the next lesson, He also requires some things from us in order to be saved.

This third lesson will focus on the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and promises God made to bless the entire world through the Seed of Abraham. This is the story of Jesus Christ – the Messiah (the anointed one), the one God had predetermined (according to His eternal plan of redemption) to send to this world to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world and the one He had anointed to be King over His people!

The Messiah In Old Testament Prophecy

Over 300 Old Testament prophecies about Jesus!

Scholars say that there are over 300 individual prophecies about Jesus Christ (the Messiah) made in the pages of the Old Testament! Clearly, this is the central storyline that is being told in the Old Testament – how God is using His people (Israel) to bring the Savior into the world! While we cannot consider all of these 300+ prophecies during the course of this lesson, I do want to discuss a few.

Genesis 3:15

"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

As we discussed in lesson 1, this is the first mention in the Scriptures concerning God's plan to save mankind from his sin! This promise comes right after mankind had sinned for the first time (i.e. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden). Specifically, this promise is directed toward Satan (the enemy of God and man). In it, God promised Satan that, although Satan would temporarily wound the woman's Seed ("you shall bruise His heel"), the woman's Seed would destroy Satan ("He shall bruise your head"). This reference is to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ (the Seed of woman) would provide the victory over Satan, even

though Satan would inflict a temporary wound to Jesus Christ (by putting Him to death)!

Genesis 12:3

“I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1-5 was a central passage in our last study, as we observed the promises that were made to Abraham. Specifically, this promise (in verse 3) that God would bless all nations of the earth through the descendants of Abraham. Now, in our last study, we saw the fulfillment of the first two promises God had made to Abraham. First, God made a great nation of Abraham (i.e. his descendants became numerous and the great nation of Israel). Second, God gave the descendants of Abraham (the Israelites) the land of Canaan. These promises were fulfilled in the Old Testament. However, God had not yet fulfilled this third promise by the end of the Old Testament (concerning all the nations being blessed through the descendants of Abraham). Jesus Christ would be the fulfillment of this promise! Jesus came through the lineage of Abraham and would offer the forgiveness of sins to the entire world (regardless of nationality)!

Genesis 49:10

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”

As we discussed in lesson 2, Judah would be the tribe of Israel from which the kings would come. From the time of David to the fall of the kingdom of Judah, there was a king on the throne from the tribe of Judah – despite the efforts that were made to overthrow them and change the lineage! Shiloh (a reference to Jesus Christ) would come from this tribe and would be King in His own right!

2 Samuel 7:12-16

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom

shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”

David’s kingdom would be established forever, according to the promise in this passage. That is, through the lineage of David there would be a kingdom that would last forever. Christ Jesus, coming through the lineage of David, would be the King who would reign over this kingdom. However, this kingdom would *not* be a physical kingdom. Instead, this kingdom would be a spiritual kingdom (read John 18:33-38)! This fact would disappoint many of the Jews who were living during the time of Christ (as they were looking for someone who would restore the physical kingdom of Israel back to its “glory days,” when David and Solomon reigned). As a result, many of them rejected Jesus as the Messiah!

Isaiah 7:13-14

“Then he said, ‘Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.’”

Isaiah is often called the “Messianic Prophet” because of the frequency and number of Messianic prophecies in the book of Isaiah. This specific prophecy points to the fact that Jesus Christ would be born of a virgin and that His name would be “Immanuel.” Certainly, this would be no ordinary event! Clearly, the one who would be born of a virgin would be proof that He was the Messiah! Also notice that this is specifically addressed to the “house of David” (we have already observed the reason why this is so!).

Isaiah 9:6-7

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

Once again, we observe that Jesus Christ would come through the physical lineage of David and would reign over an everlasting kingdom! He would be called “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”! We will talk more about this

kingdom in lesson 5, when we talk about Christ's church.

Isaiah 53

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked — But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”

While the other passages we have observed point toward more of a triumphant scene for the coming Messiah, here is a passage that describes what He would have to endure in order to provide that victory over Satan and establish His everlasting kingdom. He would need to willingly offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the entire world! He would bear our grief, carry our sorrows, be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities – so that we could be healed through Him! He would not be

forced to endure this oppression, affliction, and death. Instead, He willfully endured it all – allowing Himself to be led as a lamb is led to the slaughter!

Christ fulfilled all of these prophecies!

Again, this is only a sample of the more than 300 Old Testament prophecies about the one God would send into the world to redeem mankind from his sin! Every single one of these prophecies found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ! Thus, Jesus Christ proved to be the Messiah!

In John 1:41-42, Andrew found his brother Simon (Peter) and declared, “We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ)” – and brought him to Jesus. In John 4:25-26, a Samaritan woman said to Jesus, “I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When He comes, He will tell us all things.’” To which, Jesus responded, “I who speak to you am He.”

The Fullness Of Time

Galatians 4:4-5

Many years passed from the time that God first promised to destroy the work of Satan in Genesis 3:15 to the coming of Jesus Christ! Yet, God never forgot His plan or His promises! Instead, the Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ came into the world when “the fullness of time had come.” Galatians 4:4-5 says, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” God knew what time would be the right time – and He was waiting for that time! Then, when that time came, God sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, into the world....

The birth of Christ

Mary, a virgin who was betrothed to Joseph, conceived. It was revealed to Joseph that the child conceived in Mary “is of the Holy Spirit” and that Mary would “bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21). Then, Joseph took his betrothed from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered (Luke 2:4-6). It was during this time in Bethlehem (during the days of King Herod) that Jesus was born (according to prophecy, see Micah 5:2).

Luke 2:7 says, “And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Being warned of the desire of King Herod to destroy Jesus, Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt. During this time, Herod instructed that all male children under two years old in Bethlehem be put to death (Matthew 2:13-18). Then, after Herod’s death, Joseph was called back to the land of Israel, to his homeland of Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23). This was the fulfillment of three additional Old Testament prophecies (see Matthew 2:15, 18, 23).

One of the important factors about the birth of Jesus Christ is His genealogy – as we have already seen that the Old Testament Scriptures made very specific promises regarding the physical lineage of the Messiah! Take some time to read the genealogical accounts that are given in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38. As you read these, you may notice that there are some points of difference between the two accounts. One of the plausible explanations is that, perhaps, one records the lineage through Joseph and the other records the lineage through Mary (demonstrating that Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecies about His lineage either way). Still, one thing can be certain from observing these texts: Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning His lineage! Jesus Christ came through the lineage of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David – just as God had said He would!

The Deity Of Christ

While Jesus Christ came through the lineage of these men, there was something different about Jesus! Remember, His name was to be called “Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:13-14). As Matthew records the birth of Jesus, notice what is said in Matthew 1:23: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Therefore, Jesus was born in the flesh; but, was not *only* flesh (He was not *just* a man)!

Instead, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ (before coming to earth – and while on the earth) was God! That is, He maintained all of the characteristics of Deity (the nature of being God), as we discussed in lesson 1. John 1:1-3 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

Thus, as we continue to learn about the life of Jesus, we must remember that Jesus perfectly possessed both the natures of man and God! He is, therefore, rightly declared to be the “Son of Man” and the “Son of God” at the same time (see John 5:27 and John 1:49)! So, whenever we read about Jesus being born of a woman, we need to understand that Jesus willingly left Heaven in order to come to the earth and fulfill the plan of God (see Philippians 2:5-11)! Therefore, as we continue to study the story of Jesus, remember that He willingly left Heaven (a place without suffering, pain, and death) to endure hardship, torture, and death – for you and for me (according to the prophecy of Isaiah 53)! 2 Corinthians 8:9 states (concerning Jesus), “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

John, the Baptist

Just prior to the birth of Jesus Christ to Mary, John was born to Elizabeth (read Luke 1). John was chosen by God as the one who would be sent ahead of Jesus, in order to prepare the people for Jesus’ ministry. You can read about some of John’s ministry in Matthew chapter 3. His work and ministry was also prophesied in the Old Testament (see Matthew 3:3). It was John who made the following announcement as he saw Jesus coming toward him: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Jesus was also baptized by John in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:16-17).

The Life Of Christ

Christ’s teaching

Jesus Christ was the Master Teacher. His ministry was focused on seeking and saving those who were lost (Luke 19:10). A central focus of Christ’s ministry and teaching was the coming of His kingdom. This theme is especially seen in the gospel of Luke (i.e. Luke 9:27). He taught concerning what His kingdom would be like and the true nature of those who would be kingdom citizens.

One of the ways in which Jesus taught was parables. This, too, was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (read Matthew 10:34-35). A parable was simply an earthly story that was taught in

order to convey a spiritual truth or application. Jesus taught many parables related to things the people would have been familiar with (i.e. planting and harvesting, a treasure, a lost sheep, a supper, etc.).

As Jesus taught, He was establishing the foundation for His new law (read Matthew 5-7 and notice how many times Jesus contrasts His teaching with the Law of Moses or with the leading opinions of the day). Now, it is important to remember that Jesus lived under the Law of Moses. However, He was establishing His new covenant (which would come into effect after His death). Yet, as Jesus taught concerning His new law, He did not do so to overthrow the Law of Moses. Instead, Jesus was fulfilling the Old Law and working to establish the New Law. In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

Christ’s miracles

Jesus worked many miracles while He lived upon the earth. You can read about Jesus feeding thousands of people with only a few loaves of bread and a few small fish, walking on the water, cleansing lepers, healing the paralyzed, causing the blind to see, and even raising the dead! These supernatural events were much more than Jesus just showing compassion on those who were suffering (though He certainly did show compassion). Instead, these supernatural events demonstrated to the people that Jesus was who He claimed to be (the Son of the living God)!

Consider how this is demonstrated in Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Jesus, possessing the perfect knowledge of God, declared to the woman that she had no husband presently and had five husbands previously (John 4:16-18). As Jesus had been speaking with her, she said that she knew Messiah was coming (John 4:25). Then, Jesus declared to her, “I who speak to you am He” (John 4:26). Then, notice what the woman told others in John 4:29: “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” Clearly, Jesus’ miraculous knowledge demonstrated to this woman that He really was the Son of God and the Messiah!

Christ’s sinless life

While Jesus did possess the nature of being God, He was also fully human while He lived on the earth. As man, Jesus was tempted throughout His life

on earth. One specific example of Jesus being tempted is recorded in Matthew 4:1-11. On this occasion, Satan tried to convince Jesus Christ to sin three times by using things that would have appealed to Jesus’ fleshly nature. However, Jesus responded to each temptation (both here and throughout His life) in a way that pleased God, refusing to give in to the temptation! Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus Christ was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Jesus lived perfectly according to the Law of Moses (the Law that He lived under). This is significant in that Jesus Christ was going to lay down His life as the sacrifice to take away sin! Therefore, if Jesus would have committed sin, He would not have been acceptable as the sacrifice for sin! God demanded a sacrifice that was entirely without blemish. If Christ would have sinned, God would have needed another to make a sacrifice for sin! However, John writes the following concerning Jesus: “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

Many other works...

The space allotted for this lesson does not permit us to study all of the wonderful things Jesus did while He was on the earth, that are recorded in Scripture. But, even if we could, we still would not be able to know everything that He did! For, the Scriptures record that “there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25)!

Yet, the things that are recorded in the Scriptures are sufficient to lead us to fully believe in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and Son of God! John wrote, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but 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” (John 20:30-31).

Christ's Death, Burial, And Resurrection

Christ's death

Remember that Jesus was (and is) God. Therefore, He had the knowledge of God while He lived on the earth – including the knowledge that He was going to die and how He was going to die. Jesus, then, could even predict His own death and resurrection! For instance, in Matthew 16:21 says, “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” Yet, despite knowing what was awaiting Him at the end of His life, He came to earth anyways and went through with it all!

When the time for Jesus' betrayal and death was drawing near, He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking that there might be some other way to accomplish His will (consider Luke 22:42-44). However, Jesus remained devoted to His Father and accomplishing His Father's will – even when there was no other way provided!

Jesus was then betrayed and denied by His own apostles whom He had chosen. These 12 apostles had been with Jesus through His earthly ministry. However, Judas (one of the 12) agreed to betray Jesus into the hands of those who would crucify Him. Peter (another of the 12) denied any association with Jesus when he was asked concerning such after Jesus had been arrested. All of the other apostles fled.

Upon being betrayed by Judas, Jesus was arrested by those who desired to kill Him. Jesus was then given an unfair trial by the Jewish Sanhedrin and by Pontius Pilate (the governor). Through these trials, Jesus quietly endured being accused of sin that He did not commit. During His trial before Pilate, the Jews even agreed to have Barabbas (a known prisoner and murder) released instead of Jesus! Instead of releasing Jesus, the crowd demanded that Jesus Christ (the sinless Son of God and the Messiah) be crucified! Jesus was then mocked – being stripped of His own clothes and clothed with a scarlet robe, a crown of thorns put on His head, and a reed put in His right hand. Then, they bowed before Him and mocked, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matthew 27:29). Throughout this process, Jesus was even scourged (a severe beating that many prisoners would not live through) and spat on.

After all of this, Jesus was led away to be crucified (Matthew 27:31). Crucifixion was considered to be the most horrible form of death and was reserved for the worst criminals. Jesus Christ was stripped of His clothing and laid upon the cross. His hands were fastened to the cross with nails that were driven through them. His feet were fastened in the same way. The process of crucifixion was intended to be full of agony and humiliation. Jesus' crucifixion and death are recorded in Matthew 27:32-56 (as well as in Mark, Luke, and John).

In Jesus' last breaths, He said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Then, bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. Jesus Christ, the Messiah had died. However, these words remind us that He fully accomplished the eternal plan of God and that He fulfilled the mission God had sent Him to do!

Christ's burial

After Jesus died, His body was taken down from the cross and was buried in the tomb owned by a man named Joseph (of Arimathea). A large stone was rolled against the door of the tomb. Guards were even appointed to watch over the tomb of Jesus (to ensure that none of Jesus' disciples would come to steal the body of Jesus). Read Matthew 27:57-66.

It is at this point that we are left to wonder, “Has God been defeated?” However, remember that God had told Satan that Satan would bruise the heel of woman's Seed (a temporary blow); but, that God would bruise Satan's head (a catastrophic injury), according to Genesis 3:15. Satan had been successful in filling the Jews with envy and hatred toward Jesus Christ, resulting in Christ's crucifixion. However....

Christ's resurrection

On the first day of the week (the third day), Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb. Then, there was a great earthquake as an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven and rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it. The angel appeared like lightning, and his clothing was white as snow. The guards even shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel then informed the women that Jesus was not there – that He had risen from the dead and they could see the place where His body had laid. They were to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead! As they went to tell the disciples, Jesus appeared to them. Read Matthew 28:1-10. In fact, the risen Christ appeared to many – i.e. to all of the apostles, and was even seen by over 500 at once (1

Corinthians 15:3-9)! Jesus Christ had truly risen from the dead – and has provided the victory over Satan and death!

Jesus remained on the earth a short period of time after His resurrection. During this time He commissioned His apostles to go into all of the world and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15-16) and to wait in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4-8). After this period of time on the earth, Jesus Christ was then taken up in the cloud, out of sight into Heaven. Acts 1:9-11 says, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”

These two men (probably two angels) promised that Jesus would come again in the same manner as those individuals had just witnessed Jesus go into Heaven! For this return of Jesus Christ, His people continue to eagerly wait (read 2 Peter 3:10-14).

Jesus Christ, God’s Sacrificial Lamb

Putting it all into perspective

What does the fulfillment of these prophecies through Christ’s life, death, burial, and resurrection mean to your life? Let’s review some points to help put this all into perspective before closing our study.

God is holy

God is entirely separated from all that is evil (1 John 1:5; Revelation 4:8). Therefore, He calls upon His people to be holy in order to be in fellowship with Him. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

Sin separates the sinner from God

Whenever mankind violates the law of God, he sins (1 John 3:4). The consequences of this sin are separation from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) and eternal punishment in Hell fire (Revelation 21:8). This is simply because God cannot be in fellowship with evil

(it is contrary to His nature)! Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God’s love provides grace and mercy

Fortunately, God loves us and does not want man to be eternally condemned to Hell. He wants to save us! However, God’s justice demands life as the payment for sin. Under the Law of Moses, God instituted animal sacrifices for His people to make in order to be forgiven of their sins (Leviticus 17:11; Leviticus 16:30). However, the blood of bulls and goats was not sufficient in taking away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). So, God appointed His only begotten Son to come to the earth, live a sinless life, and offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice (once for all) to take away the sins of the world and appease His wrath (see Romans 5:6-11)!

Thus, Jesus Christ was God’s sacrificial Lamb – and we can be cleansed by His blood (Isaiah 53; Matthew 26:28; John 1:29; Hebrews 10:11-18)! 1 Peter 1:18-21 says, “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

Thus, Jesus Christ paid the price that was due by the sinner. 1 Peter 2:24 says (concerning Jesus), “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 says (concerning Jesus), “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Christ’s resurrection offers hope

Peter demonstrated the importance of Christ’s resurrection when he preached in Acts chapter 2. Paul demonstrated the importance of Christ’s resurrection to our eternal salvations when he wrote 1 Corinthians 15. For, he states, “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:16-19). Christ’s resurrection provides the assurance that God will raise the dead and

that those who are faithful to Christ will be victorious through Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:57-58)!

*Genesis 12:3 –

Conclusion

*Genesis 49:10 –

“It is finished!” (John 19:30). Jesus has fulfilled the plan of God to bring about salvation for every nation! “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15). Without Christ, we would be without hope and without God in the world; but, with Christ, we are brought near to God by the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:11-13)!

*1 Samuel 7:12-16 –

*Isaiah 7:13-14 –

Romans 5:6-11 provides an excellent summary of the significance of Jesus’ sacrifice: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

*Isaiah 9:6-7 –

*Isaiah 53 –

Would all of the 300+ prophecies about Jesus Christ be fulfilled in Christ?

While God has provided salvation through Jesus Christ to all nations, He does require something of men in order to partake of the blessings in Christ. These promises and instructions are contained within the message of the gospel, which will be our focus in the next lesson!

2. The Fullness Of Time

When would God send Jesus Christ into the world to accomplish His eternal plan?

Study Questions

What was significant about Jesus’ birth? What is significant about Jesus’ genealogy?

Review what you’ve learned thus far.

What was different about Jesus (i.e. Matthew 1:23)?

1. The Messiah In Old Testament Prophecy

Review the following Old Testament prophecies that were made concerning Jesus.

What was the role of John, the Baptist?

*Genesis 3:15 –

3. The Life Of Christ

Discuss some significant points concerning the teaching of Christ.

What was the significance of Jesus' miracles?

Was Christ tempted? If so, how did He respond to these temptations? What is the significance of this?

4. Christ's Death, Burial, And Resurrection

Discuss what Christ endured prior to and including His crucifixion.

As Jesus was put to death and buried in the tomb, was God defeated?

What happened on the third day? What was said in Acts 1:9-11?

5. Jesus Christ, God's Sacrificial Lamb

What does the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies through Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection mean to your life?

Lesson 4:

The Gospel

In our last three studies we have established the foundational principles involved in God's eternal plan and we are beginning to see its fulfillment. We have seen that God did have a plan in place from eternity to redeem mankind from his sin. Then, we have discovered that God would use His chosen people (the nation of Israel) to bring this Savior into the world. This promise of the Messiah has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ – who came to earth and offered Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

After Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose from the dead, He lived on the earth for a short period of time before ascending back into Heaven. Just prior to His ascension into Heaven, Christ gave some final instructions to His disciples. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15-16; also read Matthew 28:18-20). Clearly, the preaching of the gospel was of extreme importance to Jesus. Again, remember that these are some of His last words to His disciples. Jesus wanted others to learn the gospel's message! But, why would Jesus so eagerly desire others to learn the gospel? What is this thing called the “gospel” all about? Why is it so important?

This story of salvation is the theme of the gospel's message! Your salvation hinges upon learning and obeying the gospel's message! As we will discuss later in this lesson, the gospel of Christ is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16)!

This fourth lesson will focus on the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the gospel (the new covenant God would make with mankind) – and how to apply the message of the gospel to your life.

The Gospel In Old Testament Prophecy

Prophecies concerning the gospel

Although there are far fewer prophecies made in the Old Testament concerning the gospel than was true about the prophecies concerning the Messiah, the Bible story still points to the fact that a new covenant would be established in the “last days.” At this point, it is important to remember that the Law of Moses was intended only to be a temporary covenant that God established with His people (Galatians 3:19-25), as we discussed in lesson 2.

Genesis 12:3

“I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This was one of the prophecies we focused on during our previous study concerning the Messiah. Specifically, God promised Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his Seed. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is the fulfillment of this prophecy – since Christ provided everyone with the opportunity of salvation. But, notice what Paul writes concerning this promise in Galatians 3:7-9: “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” Therefore, not only does Genesis 12:3 (the verse quoted in Galatians 3) prophecy concerning the Messiah; but, also concerning the message of the gospel! This can be understood through the fact that the gospel offers all nations the opportunity to partake of the blessings provided through Jesus Christ!

Jeremiah 31:31-34

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after

those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

In the book of Hebrews, the prophecy in Jeremiah 31 is quoted to prove that a new covenant had been prophesied (see Hebrews 8:8-12). Specifically, the passage begins by emphasizing the fact that if the first covenant (the Law of Moses) had been faultless, then there would have been no need for a new covenant (Hebrews 8:7). Yet, the Law of Moses was designed as a temporary covenant – to lead the Jews to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:19-25)! This new covenant would not be based on fleshly laws or physical lineage (as much of the Law of Moses was). Instead, this new covenant would be based upon a willful decision to serve the Lord. It follows, then, that there would be no need for one to tell another to "know the Lord" – because all who would follow the gospel would know the Lord! Furthermore, God would be merciful to the unrighteousness of those who submitted themselves to the new covenant, forgiving their unrighteousness and lawless deeds!

Joel 2:28-32

"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the Lord has said, Among the remnant whom the Lord calls."

This passage is a significant one concerning the establishment of the church (which we'll discuss in our next study). However, this passage also identifies the message of the gospel! You should observe the fact that Peter quotes from this passage on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 (Acts 2:16-21). The significance of this is seen in the fact that the gospel of Christ is first proclaimed on this day – and the church

of Christ is established! The things that were transpiring on this day in Acts 2 were the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Included in Joel's prophecy is the fact that whoever would call upon the name of the Lord would be saved. Thus, when the gospel's message was proclaimed and folks desired to know how they needed to respond to this message (Acts 2:37), Peter gave them instructions concerning what they must do in order to be saved (Acts 2:38). In being obedient to these instructions (repenting and being baptized), about 3,000 individuals successfully called on the name of the Lord that day and were added to Christ's church (Acts 2:41, 47)!

The gospel fulfilled all of the prophecies!

Every prophecy that has been made in the Old Testament concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ has been fulfilled. The Old Law, having served its purpose and having been fulfilled, has been taken out of the way – and has now been replaced by the new covenant (the gospel of Jesus Christ)!

The Gospel: God's Good News

"Gospel" = "good news"

The Greek word that is translated "gospel" simply means "good news." While there are many different types of "good news" that mankind could receive, there is no better news than the "good news" of Jesus Christ! But, what makes the "good news" about Jesus Christ so good? Let's investigate.

The good news originates with God

The good news that we are about to investigate does not originate from a fallible human source. Instead, this good news originates with God! This is the God who is said to be incapable of lying (Titus 1:2) and who is entirely trustworthy/faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, whenever God speaks this good news (through the inspired writers), you can be assured of the fact that this good news is absolutely true! In John 17:17, Jesus said to His Father, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." In fact, this good news is being provided by God (through His grace and mercy) to mankind (who was hopelessly lost in his sin)!

Good news about salvation

Mankind was hopelessly lost in his sin. There was nothing that man could do in order to justify Himself! Man was separated from His Creator (Isaiah 59:1-2) with no way to reconcile himself to God (as we discussed in lesson 1)! If God would not have provided a Savior, man would have been eternally condemned to suffer in Hell fire as the consequence for sinning (Romans 6:23)! Carefully read Romans 5:6-11 (a passage quoted at the end of lesson 3) to see that it is only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we have the opportunity to be saved from the wrath of God (which He will show to those who die in their sins) and to be reconciled to God! Therefore, the gospel of Christ is identified as being “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Also consider how 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 demonstrates that God has reconciled us to Himself by providing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! It says, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

The gospel, then, is the “word of reconciliation”! The gospel details the love of God that provided His grace and mercy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (as discussed in lesson 3 of this course). The gospel explains how the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to your eternal salvation. Furthermore, the gospel of Christ explains the responsibility that you have in being obedient to its teachings (which we’ll consider a bit later in this study)!

Good news about a new covenant

The Law of Moses (as introduced in lesson 2 of this study) was not faultless (Hebrews 8:7). Now, this does not mean that there was some error or oversight made by God when He gave Moses the Law. Instead, the Scriptures teach us that the law was perfect (Romans 7:12; Psalm 19:7). It was designed in the way that God desired – to fulfill the temporary purpose for which it was designed (Galatians 3:23-25). However, the Law of Moses was based on many fleshly ordinances which were to be obeyed and contained an earthly priesthood. Then, when an individual would violate any one of these ordinances, that individual was trapped in sin (see Galatians 3:10-12). The only way that was designed to forgive their sins was through

animal sacrifices, which would be performed by those in the priesthood. Yet, Hebrews 10:1-4 tells us that the blood of bulls and goats was insufficient in taking away sin!

Now, was God lying whenever He told those under the Law of Moses their sins would be forgiven when they offered the animal sacrifices (i.e. Leviticus 5:10, 13, 16, 18-19)? No, not at all. In fact, their sins could be forgiven when they complied with the Law God had given them – but, only because God knew that He would offer His only begotten Son as the sacrifice for the sins of the world – who would become our new and better High Priest (Hebrews 9:11-15)! Therefore, the components of the Law of Moses served as a shadow of better things that were to come in Jesus Christ that were based upon faith (Hebrews 10:1-4; Galatians 3:23-25)!

The new covenant was established by Jesus Christ – upon fulfilling the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-18). The blood that He shed was the blood of the covenant – and the instructions and promises contained in this new covenant serve as Christ’s testament He has given for people to follow today (Hebrews 9:16-22). This new covenant, having now been established, means that the old covenant has been taken away (in fact, the Scriptures teach that it has been nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ, Colossians 2:14)!

This new covenant is not based on physical promises (like God had made to the Israelites under the old covenant) or composed of a physical priesthood (like the tribe of Levi composed under the old covenant). Instead, this new covenant is based upon the better promises (Hebrews 8:6) of partaking of all spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3-7) – such as the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Heaven to those who will give their lives entirely to the Lord, faithfully serving Him in the ways He instructs (i.e. Hebrews 10:19-23)! In addition, all who are Christians are considered to be part of God’s royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), with Christ Jesus serving as the High Priest (Hebrews 9). Our acceptable service to God, then, is to offer our lives as living sacrifices to Him (Romans 12:1-2) – and our acceptable worship is offered to God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24)!

This new covenant contains a new law that must be obeyed, that is revealed throughout the pages of the New Testament! Consider that Paul says his writings contained the “commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37). Paul also wrote that God will judge “the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:16). So, the “gospel” is not

limited to the words Jesus spoke while He was on the earth. Instead, it is the totality of God's revelation in the New Testament!

James calls this new covenant the “perfect law of liberty” in James 1:25. It is a law of liberty in that there is freedom from sin offered through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. However, this is *not* license to do whatever you desire to do – regardless of what God says (read Romans 6). Instead, James says that you must be a doer of the word and not be a hearer only (James 1:22-25). This new covenant contains new commandments that are perfectly aligned with God's purpose for His new covenant (to draw a people to Himself who will be devoted to giving Him glory, honor, and praise throughout their lives). We'll talk more about obedience to this law as we continue this study.

For now, consider Hebrews 2:1-4, as the author discusses the great attention we must pay to the faith of the gospel (which produces salvation), lest we drift away from it: “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

There Is Only One Gospel

The faith of the gospel

How many gospels are there? If you listen to all of the different doctrines that are taught in the name of “Christianity” today, you might start to believe that there are many different gospels. In fact, there are many different gospels in the world today (every one of the thousands of different churches teach and practice a different gospel)! However, the Bible only approves *one* gospel!

The phrase “the faith of the gospel” occurs in Philippians 1:27 and Jude 1:3. The faith of the gospel is something that is to be pursued in unity and earnestly contended for! Philippians 1:27 says, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear

of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” Jude 1:3 says, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

But, what does this phrase (“the faith of the gospel”) really mean? When the word “faith” is used in this sense, it does *not* have reference to someone's personal convictions (this idea would make no sense in those passages, see also Acts 6:7). Instead, it has reference to the religious belief, teaching, and practice that has been designed and instructed by God. It is in this way that the Bible teaches there is only “one faith” (Ephesians 4:5). So, there is only one form of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice that is outlined in the one message of the gospel of Christ.

Hold fast the pattern!

2 Timothy 1:13 instructs, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” The message that is contained within the gospel of Christ, then, forms the “blueprint” for what is acceptable and what is unacceptable to God. There is a blueprint regarding what God requires for salvation, the church, worship, Christian living, and every other matter that is related to living in a way that is pleasing to God (2 Timothy 3:16-17)! If, therefore, we decide not to obey this blueprint, we are guilty of sin (1 John 3:4; 2 John 1:9-11). In addition, man does not have the freedom to make changes to this blueprint. Revelation 22:18-19 says, “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Beware of false gospels

Consider what Paul said in Galatians 1:6-9: “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so

now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

Paul makes some very important points in this passage. (1) There is only one true gospel. (2) There are many who pervert/change this gospel message and form different gospels (which are really false gospels). (3) False gospels must be rejected – no matter who teaches them. (4) Many are deceived by false gospels. That this passage contains some important warnings for us today concerning false gospels is plain to see. However, this is not the only passage that contains this sort warning about false gospels and false teachers! Also read Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; and 2 Peter 2:1-3. Each of these passages demonstrates the truth that there are those who are deceiving individuals into following a false gospel – instead of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, even though these individuals are religious, they are not obeying the faith of the gospel of Christ – and are in great spiritual danger (Matthew 7:21-23)!

What The Gospel Does

Only the gospel accomplishes the following

As you consider the presence of many false gospels that are taught and practiced in this world, you must understand that only the one true gospel accomplishes the things that we will highlight in this section! False gospels may make the same promises as the true gospel (i.e. the promise of eternal life in Heaven), however, they are empty promises!

Calls sinners to God

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 tells us that God calls us to Himself through the message of the gospel. “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is the only way in which God calls people to come to Him today! Therefore, if you ignore the message of the gospel, you ignore God’s call! He is calling you to come to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins – so that you can spend eternity with Him in Heaven! Through the message of the gospel, God is

calling you to partake of the spiritual blessings He has made available through Jesus Christ!

Converts sinners to God

The message of the gospel tells us what we must do in order to be saved from our sins. We’ll talk about what those instructions are in a few moments. For now, simply appreciate the fact that sinners are turned away from their sin and dedicate themselves to live for God through the message of the gospel! Perhaps there is no better example than the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” Clearly, these individuals were involved in many different sinful activities. However, when they obeyed the gospel of Christ (Acts 18:8), they turned from those sinful ways and were forgiven!

Saves sinners from spiritual death

Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Those who hear and obey the saving message of the gospel will be saved from the spiritual consequence of their sins – eternal spiritual death in Hell fire (Romans 6:23; Revelation 21:8). This salvation is given to everyone who will truly believe (which includes obedience) – regardless of race, ethnicity, or any other factors!

The Gospel Must Be Obeyed

The faith of the gospel must be obeyed

The faith of the gospel is not something that must merely be heard or understood; but, it must also be obeyed. Acts 6:7 makes reference to the fact that a “great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” Romans 1:5 makes reference to the “obedience to the

faith.” Romans 16:26 also makes reference to the “obedience to the faith.”

So, all of the doctrines and instructions God has given in the gospel, He has given to be obeyed! In fact, His gospel is powerless to save sinners from spiritual death if they will not believe and obey it – as He has required!

Faith without works is dead

That faith is essential for salvation cannot be disputed (i.e. John 3:16; John 8:24; Romans 1:16; Hebrews 11:6). In addition, we know that we cannot earn our salvation by our own good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, the Bible also plainly teaches that we are not saved by faith only! James 1:22-25 teaches that we must be doers (i.e. obedient) of the word and not hearers only. James 2:14-26 teaches that faith without works of obedience is a dead faith (especially notice verse 24).

Furthermore, consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” Clearly, the gospel demands faith; but, not faith only – for Jesus has said that some who believe in and profess allegiance to Him will be lost because they have not been obedient to the Father’s will!

In fact, the Bible teaches that true faith cannot be separated from works of obedience! This is seen from James 2:14-26 and Hebrews 11. These works that are required, then, are not meritorious works (like those that are said to be unable to save us in Ephesians 2:8-9). Instead, these works are simply works of faith and obedience!

Jesus Christ, the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him

Hebrews 5:9 says (concerning Jesus Christ), “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” This is plainly seen from the passage in Matthew 7:21-23. Jesus will not save all those who merely profess faith in Him and call Him “Lord” of their lives. Instead, He will save those who are obedient to God (through obeying the message of the gospel)! In fact, Jesus said that

obedience is required in order to truly love Him: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will be everlastingly punished in their sins. Remember, Jesus will tell those who do not obey God: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23). 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 also makes this very clear. When Jesus Christ returns in final Judgment, He will take vengeance on those who “do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” and do not know God. These individuals (who were disobedient to the gospel’s message) will be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

What The Gospel Requires

Die with Christ

Jesus Christ willingly gave His life on the cross for you – so that you could be saved from the eternal consequence of your sins. However, He did *not* do so in order for you to continue living in your sins! Instead, the Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ gave His life for you in order that you would give your life to Him! Thus, the Scriptures discuss the importance of those who follow Christ to have been crucified with Christ.

- 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”
- Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”
- 2 Timothy 2:11 says, “This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.”
- Colossians 3:3 says, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
- Colossians 3:5 says, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth:

fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

- Romans 6:2 says, “...How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”
- Romans 6:8 says, “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”

Now, as you reflect on these passages, you should be impressed with the frequent usage of this language in the writings of the apostle Paul (as he was writing to those who were Christians). Clearly, God expects individuals to give their lives entirely to Him. But, this is not unique to Paul’s writings. Jesus Christ, Himself, taught that those who desire to be His disciples must be entirely devoted to living for Him (see Luke 9:23-26; Luke 14:25-33).

But, how do we die with Christ and live for Him? The answer to this is found through obeying the gospel’s plan of salvation (what you must do in order to be saved from your sins and have everlasting life in Heaven).

The gospel’s plan of salvation

Although mankind answers the question, “What must I do to be saved?” in many different ways, let’s consider what God says (as He will be the one who will judge us on the Last Day)! What does the gospel require of you in order to be saved?

(1) Hear His word. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Hearing God’s message and instructions, necessarily, comes before an individual can believe and obey them (Acts 18:8)!

(2) Believe. Faith/belief in God and Christ is essential for salvation. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). The Bible consistently points to the essential nature of faith (John 3:16; John 8:24; Romans 10:9-10; etc.). However, the Bible also teaches that faith without works of obedience will not save us (James 2:14-26)!

(3) Repent. God now “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30-31). Repentance involves a change in mindset regarding past sin (to view past sin with abhorrence and to determine to live differently in the future). Repentance is commanded often in Scriptures (i.e. Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19).

(4) Confess Christ. Romans 10:9-10 says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” The confession that is commanded in this passage is not a confession of sin; but, is the confession with the mouth of the Lord Jesus. A good example of this confession is found in Acts 8:37.

(5) Be immersed in water (baptized). Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but, he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Paul wrote that we are “baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:27) – that is, baptism brings us into union with Jesus Christ. Peter wrote that baptism “now saves us” – just as water saved Noah and his family (1 Peter 3:20-21). Clearly, the Bible teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation. Baptism is the point at which an individual becomes a Christian and is forgiven of his/her sins. It is at this point that the sinner is washed, justified, and sanctified through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)! It is also important to understand that the Bible teaches the action involved in being baptized is immersion in water (not sprinkling or pouring – and not Holy Spirit baptism). In fact, baptism is described as being a “burial” in Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12. Therefore, that old man of sin we put to death is buried with Christ in baptism and we are raised to walk in newness of life!

(6) Remain faithful. When you hear God’s word, believe, repent of your sins, confess Christ, and are immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins, you have become a Christian – and are added to Christ’s church (Acts 2:41, 47)! However, this does not mean that you are “once saved, always saved”! Instead, the Bible teaches that you must be faithful to the Lord unto death in order to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). This will involve doing all of the things God has commanded you to do as a Christian (i.e. teach the gospel to others, do good to all as you have opportunity, be transformed in your character, live a holy life, etc.).

This plan has often been perverted!

The gospel’s plan of salvation (as we’ve just discussed) is not difficult – and can be obeyed by anyone who is willing! However, most (so-called) “Christian” churches, pastors, preachers, etc. have

perverted this plan of salvation. Instead of teaching this God-given plan of salvation, most churches teach a (so-called) “plan of salvation” that involves “faith only,” the “Sinner’s Prayer,” infant “baptism,” etc. Furthermore, most have said that baptism is not necessary for salvation – or that baptism can be accomplished through sprinkling or pouring instead of being exclusively by immersion. Do not listen to these false gospels – as they will lead to your eternal condemnation (remember Galatians 1:6-9 and 2 Peter 2:1-3)!

Conclusion

This gospel which was prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures has now been fully revealed (once for all time). Romans 1:1-5 records that this “gospel of God” was “promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all the nations for His name.”

Romans 16:25-26 says that the gospel Paul preached and the preaching of Jesus Christ was “according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began” but has now been “made manifest” and “by the prophetic Scriptures” has been “made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith.”

Therefore, God has revealed the mystery of the gospel through the Holy Spirit by making it known to the apostles and the prophets – so that we can understand this mystery when we read the things that have been written (Ephesians 3:3-5)! This is the great message of salvation that reveals the eternal plan of God and calls upon mankind to be obedient to Him so that he can be saved eternally!

Those who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ are forgiven of their sins (Acts 2:38). They are “born again” (John 3:3-6) and are new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). They are no longer slaves of Satan and sin; but, are slaves of God and righteousness (Romans 6). As a result, they are now walking on a path that leads to everlasting life in Heaven instead of one

that leads to everlasting punishment in Hell (Romans 6:20-23)!

Those who obey the gospel are also part of Christ’s church (His kingdom). In Acts 2 (the day the gospel was first proclaimed and the new covenant had been established), those who responded to the gospel in obedience (in verses 36-41) were those who were added to Christ’s church (verses 41 and 47). This one church of Jesus Christ is the collection of God’s people who will be saved eternally – and will be the focus of the next lesson in this study!

Study Questions

Review what you’ve learned thus far.

1. The Gospel In Old Testament Prophecy

Review the following Old Testament prophecies that were made concerning the gospel.

*Genesis 12:3 –

*Jeremiah 31:31-34 –

*Joel 2:28-32 –

Did the gospel fulfill these prophecies?

2. The Gospel: God’s Good News

What does the word “gospel” mean?

What is the origin of the gospel?

How is the gospel good news about salvation?

What kind of commitment does Jesus Christ require of you?

How is the gospel good news about a new covenant?

What is the gospel's plan of salvation?

3. There Is Only One Gospel

How many gospels are there? What does the phrase, "the faith of the gospel" really mean?

Has this plan of salvation been perverted?

What is the instruction in 2 Timothy 1:13? What is the significance of obeying this blueprint?

Are there any false gospels? List some passages that demonstrate your answer.

4. What The Gospel Does

List and explain some things the gospel does:

5. The Gospel Must Be Obeyed

Must the faith of the gospel be obeyed?

Is "faith only" acceptable to God? What is true faith?

Is obedience to the gospel of Christ essential to salvation?

6. What The Gospel Requires

Lesson 5:

The Church

This fifth (and final) lesson in this series will focus on the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom/church – and helping you understand the true nature and importance of the church of Christ.

The Church In Old Testament Prophecy

Prophecies concerning the church

In our last four studies we have observed the unfolding of God's eternal plan to save mankind from his sin. The plan that had once been considered a "mystery" has now been revealed (see Ephesians 3:3-5, 8-12)! We have watched as God promised to send a Savior into the world through whom all nations would be blessed. We have watched as God used His chosen people (the Israelites) to bring this Savior into the world. We watched as this Savior was born of a woman, lived a sinless life, gave His life as the sacrifice for sin, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven. We have watched as a New Covenant was established – and discussed some essential elements of the gospel's message.

Now, there is one final piece that we must investigate as we consider God's eternal plan. We have already considered passages that talk of an everlasting kingdom which God would establish. But, as of yet, we have not focused on that kingdom. What is this kingdom? Has it been established? Why is this kingdom important to your life on earth? I hope that this final study will help you to understand how the Bible answers each of these questions.

I hope that you are already seeing how the story of the Bible is relevant to your life. You were the one who had sinned (as all have sinned, Romans 3:23). Therefore, you were in need of the Savior God sent into this world. You have the need to hear and obey the message of the gospel (knowing that those who do not obey the gospel will be eternally punished in Hell, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). In the same way, the church (which is Christ's kingdom) is important to your eternal salvation (as I hope to demonstrate during the course of this lesson). You need to be part of Christ's kingdom/church!

As we considered some of the prophecies that were made concerning the Messiah, we noticed that some of those prophecies pointed to the everlasting kingdom He would reign over. At that point, we were focused specifically on the Messiah. However, we now want to think about the kingdom the Messiah would be King over (you might go back and notice some of the prophecies we considered in lesson 3 that related to the rule of the Messiah – since we will be discussing other prophecies during this lesson).

Before we consider these prophecies, though, I need to make mention of the fact that the terms "church" and "kingdom" are used interchangeably in the Scriptures. Observe this fact from Matthew 16:18-19: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." We'll talk more about this as we go through this lesson.

Isaiah 2:2-4

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore."

This is a prophecy concerning the church. Notice the specific prophecies about the church that are contained in this reading. (1) All nations would have the opportunity to be part of this kingdom (church). (2) Out of Zion (Jerusalem) the law would go forth. (3) The kingdom (church) would be peaceful. (4) This would occur in the last/latter days.

Daniel 2:31-45

“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all — you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver,

and the gold — the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

This also is a prophecy concerning the church. In this passage, Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The dream was concerning a statue (which represented four earthly kingdoms). It had a head of gold (representing the Babylonian kingdom), a chest and arms of silver (representing the Medo-Persian kingdom), a belly and thighs of bronze (representing the Grecian kingdom), and legs of iron with feet partly of iron and partly of clay (representing the Roman kingdom). In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, there was a stone that struck this image and broke it into pieces. This stone represented the kingdom of God that would be established, which would be greater than all of the others! This kingdom would be established during the time of the kingdom that was represented by the legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay (the Roman kingdom). Therefore, notice the prophecies that were made concerning the church in this passage: (1) God's kingdom would be everlasting. (2) God's kingdom would be established during the reign of the Roman Empire. (3) God's kingdom would begin small and grow larger.

Joel 2:28-32

“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the Lord has said, Among the remnant whom the Lord calls.”

This passage contains another prophecy concerning the church. Notice that Joel's prophecy was actually repeated by Peter in Acts 2:17-21 (when Peter says that it was being fulfilled on the day the church was established)! Notice the prophecies that are made concerning the church in this text. (1) God's Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. (2) The one who calls on the name of the Lord would be saved. (3) This would happen in the last days (remember, Peter says this was being fulfilled in Acts 2:17-21).

Micah 4:1-5

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all people walk each in the name of his god, But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God Forever and ever.”

This, too, is a prophecy concerning the church. Notice the specific prophecies that are made concerning the church in this passage. (1) It would be established in the latter/last days. (2) It would be superior to all other kingdoms. (3) People of all nations would be part of this kingdom. (4) It would be established in Zion (Jerusalem). (5) The law would go forth from Jerusalem. (6) The kingdom would be a peaceful kingdom.

The church fulfilled all of the prophecies

Every one of these prophecies that were made concerning the kingdom of God finds their fulfillment in the church of Christ. Unfortunately, time does not permit a detailed examination of the fulfillment of these prophecies; yet, as you make a study of these prophecies, you will discover that only the church (Christ's kingdom) is the fulfillment of them – as it was established during the days of the Romans, in Jerusalem, at the beginning of the last days (the gospel age), inviting people of all nations to join it, etc.

Then, before we move on in our study, I want to take a moment to consider Luke 9:27. Jesus said, “But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God.” Before you draw any other conclusions about the nature of Christ's kingdom, please understand that Christ Himself taught that His kingdom would be established within the lifetime of many who were living at the time He was on the earth! Therefore, if Christ's

kingdom has not yet been established, Christ has lied! Yet, we can know that Christ did not lie (Hebrews 4:15) – and that the church is His kingdom, which was established during the lifetime of many in Jesus' audience in Luke 9:27!

The Establishment And Growth Of The Church

Wait in Jerusalem

Jesus did a great deal of preaching concerning the coming of His kingdom during His earthly ministry. As we have already noticed, He even gave a time reference as to when His kingdom would be established (within the lifetime of many who were living at that time, Luke 9:27).

During His lifetime, Jesus promised that He would build His church. Again, in Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” In order to build His church, He would have to die on the cross to redeem those who would become His people (Acts 20:28). Therefore, this church would not be established until *after* His death, burial, and resurrection.

Just prior to His ascension to Heaven, Jesus told His apostles to wait in the city of Jerusalem. “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Acts 1:4-8 says, “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’”

Acts 2

It is important to read the promises that Jesus made in Acts 1 (and the parallel account in Luke 24) because Acts 2 is a continuation of the story – and the fulfillment of the promises. In Acts 2, the apostles are waiting in Jerusalem (read Acts 1:12-14). Remember, it was prophesied that Christ's kingdom/church would be established in Jerusalem – and that the law (the word of the Lord) would go forth from Jerusalem!

In Acts 2:1-4, the text records how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles – and they began to speak in tongues. Now, this gift was not given to all of the 120 disciples who were waiting in Jerusalem. Instead, the promise Jesus made was only to the apostles – and only the apostles received it (consider the pronoun “they” and “them” in this passage as reference to the apostles, Acts 1:26).

As Peter and the other apostles were questioned concerning the events that were transpiring, Peter stated that what was happening was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:17-21, which we noticed in Joel 2:28-32)! Therefore, this was the beginning of the last days (which is a reference to the gospel/Christian age – the last period of time before Jesus Christ will return and end this world). All of the things Joel prophesied are said to be fulfilled in the events that were transpiring!

As you continue to read the account in Acts 2, you should observe the fact that the apostles preached the message of the gospel to those Jews who were present for this occasion. As you consider this chapter, you notice that the preaching of the gospel included the message about Christ's sacrifice and resurrection – as well as about what individuals must do in order to be saved. Remember, it was prophesied that the word of the Lord (the law) would go forth from Jerusalem!

As individuals heard the message about Jesus Christ, some wanted to know if there was anything they could do to be saved! They asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). To their question, Peter responded, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Those who believed and obeyed the gospel's message, therefore, fulfilled Joel's prophecy that “whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved” (Acts 2:21) – since calling on the name of the Lord involves the obedience to the gospel (according to Acts 22:16). There were about 3,000 individuals who

were obedient to the gospel's message by repenting and being baptized that day (Acts 2:41).

Acts 2:47 records the following, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This is the first time that the church is referred to as being in existence! Prior to Acts chapter 2, the church (or, Christ's kingdom) is always referred to in the *future* tense (i.e. “I **will build** My church,” Matthew 16:18 – emphasis mine, EMK). After Acts chapter 2, the church (or, Christ's kingdom) is always referred to as being in existence (i.e. when people were then “added to the church” – Acts 2:47). Notice what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13: “He **has delivered** us from the power of darkness and **conveyed** us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (emphasis mine, EMK). Certainly, Acts 2 marks the establishment of Christ's church/kingdom!

Acts – Revelation

The remainder of the New Testament (from Acts 2 through Revelation) is devoted to describing how the church grew throughout the first century (A.D.), even though it faced numerous obstacles and persecution. Much of the New Testament contains letters that were written to local churches and individual Christians to teach, rebuke, and encourage them to live in the way that is pleasing to God! Not only do we profit from learning about the history involved in these Bible books, but, they contain the doctrine of Christ (the pattern) to which we must hold fast (2 Timothy 1:13).

The Church: The People Of God

What was established in Acts 2?

We have spent some time to demonstrate that the church was established in Acts chapter 2, fulfilling the prophecies made in the Old Testament. However, we have not yet discussed the *nature* of the church that was established in Acts 2.

Let's begin by dispelling some false ideas about what was established in Acts chapter 2. (1) A group of denominations was *not* established. Though many folks view the “church of Christ” as being a collection of “Christians” from the many denominational groups (i.e. from the Baptist church, Methodist church,

Lutheran church, Catholic church, etc.), this simply does not fit with the Scripture's description of the church – and these man-made denominations did not come into existence until much later than the first century A.D. (when the church of Christ was established). (2) An earthly organization was *not* established. Though many folks view the church as being an earthly organization that is governed by an earthly body/leader, this does not fit with the description of the church in the Bible! Furthermore, the first century church was not a business that was focused on making money and filling buildings! (3) A social club was *not* established. Now, this is not to say that the Christians were not social people or did not spend time socializing with one another. Yet, the church in the Bible was *not* responsible for providing social and recreational activities for its members (like many churches are guilty of doing today). (4) A political machine was *not* established. While the first century church had a great impact on society through the preaching of the gospel, the mission of the church was *not* to bring about social reforms or political changes! The mission of the Lord's church was a spiritual mission that was focused on the salvation of souls through obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Instead, as we will continue to see, what was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was the collection of God's people who would give their lives to Him and live according to the New Covenant (the gospel), resulting in the salvation of their souls! You see, the Scriptures continually make reference to the church as the collection of God's own special people!

God's own special people

Under the Old Covenant, God chose the nation of Israel to be His own special people. They were responsible for keeping the Law of Moses (the Old Covenant) and God would use them to accomplish His purpose. God wanted the Israelites to be a people who would dedicate themselves to Him (see Deuteronomy 10:12-13). However, the Israelites consistently rejected Him and turned to other gods (idols). Furthermore, when God sent His Son into the world, it was the Israelites who rejected Jesus as the Messiah!

However, when the nation of Israel consistently rejected God, God continued to desire a people who would chose to dedicate their lives to His service. Therefore, Jeremiah prophesied concerning the New Covenant that would be established in which God's people would willfully serve Him and know Him

– and God would forgive their sins (Jeremiah 31:31-34; compare with Hebrews 8:8-12).

Those who obey this New Covenant (the gospel) are now God's people! Peter wrote to those who were Christians concerning how Christ had been rejected and those who come to Christ (through obedience to the gospel) are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10). But, had God failed to fulfill His promises regarding the nation of Israel?

Not at all! Read Romans 9-11 for a detailed discussion of this point. In this passage, Paul summarizes how all those who are obedient to the will of God are part of spiritual Israel – and those Israelites (according to the flesh) who are disobedient are cut off! So, all Israel will be saved (spiritual, not physical Israel). This is the church of Christ: God's special people who belong to Him! The day of Pentecost (Acts 2) marks the first time that individuals heard and obeyed the New Covenant (the gospel), thereby becoming part of God's church!

The church of Christ

It is only fitting that those who would be purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ and would follow Christ would be called by His name (and not the names of men)! Therefore, Jesus referred to the church as “My church” (Matthew 16:18). It is called the church of God in Acts 20:28 (remember, Jesus is God – John 1:1). Local churches (which we'll talk about momentarily) were called churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). Individual members of the church of Christ were identified as being disciples of Christ and Christians (Acts 11:26)!

Descriptions of the church

Not only are the people of God referred to as the church of Christ, but, the Bible also uses some other terms to describe them and their relationship with God and Christ. As we study these descriptions of Christ's church, let's keep in mind that those who compose Christ's church have been called out of darkness and into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9-10). Therefore, these people are separate from the world – and its sinful ways (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)!

(1) The kingdom of God/Christ. The church of Christ is described as the kingdom of

God/Christ. We have already seen how the church is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom – as well as Jesus’ own statement concerning the kingdom in Luke 9:27. You should once again notice that the two terms (church and kingdom) are used interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19 by Jesus Christ. It is important to recognize that Christ is the King over His kingdom – and Christians are kingdom citizens who submit to the rule of Jesus Christ and enjoy the blessings that kingdom citizenship brings!

(2) The body of Christ. The church of Christ is described as the body of Christ. Colossians 1:18 says, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” You should also consider how this figure is used in Ephesians 1:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. As these passages help us to understand, Christ is the Head. That is, He possesses all authority over the body (church). Therefore, those who are in Christ are individually members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) who submit to the rule of Christ and find their life in Him, while each performing various important functions!

(3) The temple of God. The church of Christ is described as being the temple of God. Of course, you should consider the place that the temple (and the tabernacle previous to it) had in Old Testament worship. It was, indeed, a holy place in which God would be worshiped and sacrifices would be brought to God. Today, the church is said to be the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” You should also notice that the same is said concerning each individual Christian in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. This figure simply should help us to appreciate that God’s Spirit dwells in His people through His word (see Ephesians 2:19-22) and that His people are expected to live holy lives that are conformed to His standards (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16), offer themselves as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2), and worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

(4) The household of God. The church of Christ is described as being the household of God. In Ephesians 2:19, Paul wrote that Christians were “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” 1 Timothy 3:15 also says that the church of the living

God is “the pillar and ground of the truth.” The church is God’s family. Every Christian is an adopted son/daughter of God, the Father (Romans 8:16-17). Therefore, Christians are frequently referred to as being brothers/sisters with one another. Consequently, Christians are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus – looking for the inheritance that God will give to those who are His children (Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:11).

There Is Only One True Church

How many churches are there?

Today, there are thousands of different (so-called) “Christian churches” that all claim to be – or to be part of – the one true church. Yet, each of these different churches believe, teach, and practice a different gospel from one another.

But, where did all of these different churches come from? The Bible actually gives us an answer to this question! While we cannot investigate this answer in great detail at this point, read 1 Timothy 4:1-5. This passage clearly teaches that a falling away (apostasy) from the faith of the gospel would take place. Though many factors contributed to this, one of the contributing factors was false teaching (see 2 Peter 2:1-3). Thus, the gospel was perverted and different churches were formed. This has continued for almost 2,000 years – and we see its ongoing results today!

The next logical question is: Can everyone be right? That is, are all of these different (so-called) “Christian” churches that believe, teach, and practice their “Christianity” differently right in the sight of God? Read Matthew 7:21-23 and Galatians 1:6-9 to find the simple answer to this question. These passages teach two main points that we should consider. (1) Even those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ and call Him “Lord” will be lost if they do not obey God’s commandments. (2) We must not accept any other gospel than the one true gospel. Clearly, these passages help us to see that God is *not* pleased with all of these churches (or even with most of them)!

One body

In Ephesians 4:4, Paul said that there is “one body.” Now, I ask you, “What is the body?”

Remember that Colossians 1:18 (and other passages) says that it is the church. So, how many churches are there? The answer is: ONE! That is what the Bible says.

However, Ephesians 4:4 is not the only passage that demonstrates the fact that there is only one church. There was only one church that was promised to be built. Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). Notice that the word “church” is singular – not plural. Jesus only promised to build one church!

Then, as you study the establishment of the church in Acts 2 and study throughout the remainder of the New Testament, you observe the fact that there was only one church that was established. Again, Acts 2:47 tells us that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This is the reason Paul said there is “one body” in Ephesians 4:4 – since only one church had been established!

Who composes this one true church?

So, how do you know who composes the one true church – and who are members of “counterfeit churches”? The answer is simple. If you recall, we established (in lesson 4) that there is only one system of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice (as seen in the phrase “the faith of the gospel”). Therefore, those who live according to “the faith of the gospel” are part of the “one body.” Those who fail to live according to “the faith of the gospel” are not part of the “one body.”

Therefore, those who are part of the “one body” (one church) include: Those who have not sinned (i.e. babies, young children, others who do not possess the mental ability to commit sin), those who have become Christians (by obeying the plan of salvation we established in lesson 4 – hear God’s word, believe, repent, confess, be baptized), those who are living faithfully (as is the responsibility of all who become Christians, as discussed in lesson 4), and those who have died in the Lord (those who were faithful unto death).

The Local Church

An accommodative term

Up to this point, we have focused on the “universal church” (the collection/totality of God’s

people). In this sense, there is only one church. However, the Bible *does* talk about churches (plural) in the sense of local churches (i.e. Romans 16:16 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”). The term “local church” is an accommodative term and does not appear in the Bible. Yet, it does properly convey the idea that is presented in the Scriptures.

A local congregation of Christians

The Bible speaks of local churches in Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, Rome, Thessalonica, Antioch, Jerusalem, and many other places. However, these were *not* different denominations! In fact, they were all expected to believe, teach, and practice the faith of the gospel. Consider the unity that God commands in 1 Corinthians 1:10: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” A local church is simply an assembly/congregation of Christians who have joined themselves together in a local geographic area.

Must follow the NT pattern

There is a pattern for a local church to follow. This pattern is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. All local churches, therefore, must strive to hold fast to this pattern (2 Timothy 1:13)! God has provided this blueprint – and man is not free to make changes to the blueprint concerning the local church (or any other aspect of the blueprint)!

There is a pattern for local churches to follow regarding their worship. This pattern for worship involves 5 elements: (1) Singing (not playing musical instruments, see Ephesians 5:19), (2) Praying (1 Corinthians 14:15), (3) Preaching the gospel (Acts 20:7), (4) Taking the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week (on the first day of every week – and not on any other day, Acts 20:7), and (5) Taking up the collection on the first day of the week (and not on any other day, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). This is the Bible’s pattern for the worship of a local church.

There is a pattern for local churches to follow regarding their work. The Bible’s pattern for the work of the local church involves 3 elements: (1) Benevolence toward needy Christians (and only toward needy Christians, Acts 4:32-37), (2) Evangelism (1 Thessalonians 1:8), and (3) Edification (Ephesians

4:11-16). This is the Bible's pattern for the work of a local church.

There is a pattern for the organizational structure of a local church. The Bible's pattern for the organizational structure of a local church is summarized in Philippians 1:1 as: (1) Elders/pastors/overseers (who must meet the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), (2) Deacons (who must meet the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13), and (3) Saints (a term that refers to everyone who is a Christian). This is the Bible's pattern for the organizational structure of a local church.

I realize that this is only a very brief overview of the local church – and encourage you to study this subject further. However, I simply want to emphasize that there is a pattern regarding all of these things in the Bible. Therefore, if you desire to practice New Testament Christianity, you must make sure that the local church you are associated with follows the New Testament pattern in all areas! Demand Bible authority (book, chapter, and verse) for everything that is taught and practiced!

Conclusion

Those who are obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ (the faith of the gospel) are part of this one true church you can read about in the Bible. Why is this so important? It is important because God has promised to save those who are in His church (those who are His people). Only to those who were Christians (part of the church of Christ), Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4)!

So, how is the Bible's story of God's eternal plan important to your life? This story describes your holy and eternal God who loved you so much that He had a plan to redeem you from your sin by sending His only begotten Son to die on the cross for you. However, He has given you instructions that you must obey (found in the gospel) in order for you to become part of His church and be numbered with those who will be saved for all of eternity! The question for you is: How will you respond to God's eternal plan? Will you obey Him – or disobey Him?

Study Questions

Review what you've learned thus far.

1. The Church In Old Testament Prophecy

Review the following Old Testament prophecies that were made concerning the church.

*Isaiah 2:2-4 –

*Daniel 2:31-45 –

*Joel 2:28-35 –

*Micah 4:1-5 –

Did the church fulfill these prophecies?

2. The Establishment And Growth Of The Church

Why is Jesus' instruction to His apostles to "wait in Jerusalem" significant?

Discuss the events of Acts chapter 2 – and their significance.

What is the remainder of the New Testament (Acts – Revelation) about?

3. The Church: The People Of God

What was established in Acts 2? Also, what was *not* established in Acts 2?

5. The Local Church

What is a local church?

What choice did the Israelites consistently make? How is the church God's special people today?

Is there a pattern for local churches to follow today? If so, briefly describe that pattern.

Why is the church called the "church of Christ"?

***How will you respond to God's eternal plan? Will you obey Him – or disobey Him?**

Briefly describe the following ways the Bible describes the church:

(1) The kingdom of God/Christ –

(2) The body of Christ –

(3) The temple of God –

(4) The household of God –

4. There Is Only One True Church?

How many churches are there today? Where did they all come from? Can everyone be right?

How many churches does the Bible say that there is?

Who composes this church?