

God's Master Plan

Explore Your Faith Teaching Series - Explo-4 ©

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OUTLINE

Introduction

Christianity is not some blind alley that we flounder along in the hope that it leads somewhere! God has a plan for all his creation. He has revealed it to us his written word, and through the person of the incarnate word (Jesus).

In the last session, we had a look at the ways in which God has revealed himself to mankind. In particular we looked at his revelation to mankind in the *written* word (the Bible), and in the *incarnate* word (Jesus). We also looked at how these two forms of revelation are in *total agreement* with each other. This therefore enables us to go to God's written word with confidence in *his faithfulness to fulfill all that he has promised*.

God's promises are not haphazard or whimsical but are *in accordance with a plan for his creation*. To understand his promises, and how we fit into them, we need to be in tune with **GOD'S MASTER PLAN**. (Note that God's 'promises' may be for *good* or for *bad*; for example heaven and hell are equally promised for appropriate classes of mankind. We need to know that **no one** is excluded in God's plan!)

What was god's intention when he created man? What spoiled it? How did god deal with the problem?

These three *seemingly simple* questions hold the key to the whole of God's relationship with the ones he created in 'his own image'. To answer these three questions is really to discover (or study) God's master plan of SALVATION and see its gradual unfolding over the centuries past and its continual unfolding into the future. This we intend to do from God's written word, by first having a look at the *big picture* and then zooming in on the details as individual studies at a later stage.

Starting at the beginning: -

1. The creation and fall

a. Man created "in his image"; given authority and dominion over all the earth; given access to the tree of life, but not given access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil upon punishment of death. (**Genesis 1: 26-31; 2: 15-17**).

Consider *why access to one and not the other? What were the vital aspects of relationship with God that were at stake here?*

b. Man falls through disobedience; sin is revealed (**Genesis 3: 1-13**)

(Consider *why this was wrong* . *Isn't it good to be able to discern between good and evil? To be independent required rebellion*).

c. God does as he has forewarned; the man and the woman are both punished; their punishment is representative of the race. (**Genesis 3:15-19**)

Note that God shows grace to both in the midst of judgment ; the human race would continue (promise to Eve); though he would have to work hard, the man would be able to produce food to live (promise to Adam).

Note also that Adam and Eve are not cursed; but the ground is cursed! *What does that tell us?*

d. God takes action against sin. Satan is cursed. **God reveals his intention to put away sin** (**Genesis 3: 14-15**). The Bible reveals this plan of God taking shape over thousands of years. In it, we see how this sovereign creator god is concerned for people from the least significant, to the greatest world leaders.

*[An important point to keep in mind as we continue studying the execution of God's plan from the book of Genesis on, is the fact that in each of the incidents where god punishes sinfulness, **he has already picked out one man and his family for the continuance of his plan!**]*

-God introduces the characteristic constituents of 'covenant' with Noah: (1) promise (**Gen. 6:17**); (2) sacrifice (**Gen. 6:20; & 8:20**; note, 'clean animals') (3) *law* (**Gen. 9: 1-8**); and (4) *sign* (**Gen. 9:8-17**). [Covenant is the subject of a thrilling separate study we will do later].

-When God sent the flood, his grace had already picked out one man and his family for salvation -Noah (**Genesis 6: 8**). Then we see the development of tribes ('nations') and God's action in confusing them at Babel (**Genesis 10 & 11**).

-But prior to the Babel incident, we see the emerging story of the family of Shem (one of the sons of Noah). In the same line, eight generations later we come across Nahor and then Terah who had a son called **Abram** (see **Genesis 11:10 –30**).

2. God calls Abram

-“All people on earth will be blessed through you’ (**Genesis 12: 3**).

Despite Babel, God has not turned his back on the world; rather, this is how the world will be yet recovered from the curse (**Genesis 3: 14 – 20**) and divisiveness (**Genesis 11: 9**) of sin; this is the line in which will be born the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head (**Genesis 22: 18; compare Gen.3:15**).

-God establishes *a covenant* with Abram. Fifteen years after his arrival in Canaan (**Genesis 12: 4; 17:1**) and 13 years after the Hagar compromise (**Genesis 16:16**), the Lord inaugurates the covenant agreement with Abram (see **Genesis 15** for scope of this covenant).

- God gives him *the sign of the covenant* in his flesh (circumcision) as a confirmation of God's promises to him. In other words, a sign not of what Abraham is pledging to God but what *God is pledging to Abraham. God changes his name from 'Abram' to 'Abraham'; 'Sarai' to 'Sarah'. (Genesis 17).*

Abraham's descendants through Sarah's line (fathers of the tribes of Israel)

	Esau's line (not considered here)				
Isaac ----- (sons)-----	Jacob's line (Israel's)				
	Wife	<i>Leah</i>	<i>Zilpah</i>	<i>Bilhah</i>	<i>Rachel</i>
		Reuben	Gad	Dan	Joseph**
		Simeon	Asher	Napthali	Benjamin
		Levi***			
		Judah			
		Isaachar			(**Ephraim)
		Zebulun			(**Manasseh)

The book of Genesis recounts the story of God's people until they migrate to Egypt. It tells of Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt, and how he rises in the Pharaoh's favour to a high position. There is a famine in the land where Israel's family lives. God speaks to Israel in a vision telling him to go down to Egypt, confirming again that he is the God of his father and that he will surely be with him. (See **Genesis 24** onwards). Israel's family ends up in Egypt, where they grow in numbers, to a point where they are feared by the Pharaoh and are taken into slavery. But this was only a temporary place. God was to take them up out of this place to the place he had promised to Abraham.

3. God raises up his servant Moses

-God remembers his covenant with Abraham and is concerned about his people (**Ex 2:24**) He now raises up his servant Moses to liberate them from bondage, to inaugurate his earthly kingdom with them by bringing them into a special *national covenant* with him and to erect within Israel his royal tent.

This account of redemption from bondage, leading to consecration in covenant and the pitching of God's royal tent in the earth, all through the ministry of a chosen mediator, discloses God's purposes in history- the purpose he would fulfill through Israel and ultimately through Jesus Christ, the supreme mediator!

-God introduces a foundational theology where he reveals his name, his attributes, his redemption, his law, and how he is to be worshipped. God introduces the concept of a covenant mediator, the concepts of priesthood and sacrifice, and the roles of prophets and priests in a new covenant relationship- the Sinai Covenant (the Law). (**Important: Consider why the law was given –see Paul's account in Romans**).

4. God speaks through his prophets (NB. 'Prophecy' = 'foretelling' and 'forth-telling')

There are two branches in the stream of messianic prophecy-Kingly Messiah & Suffering Messiah.

For example, Isaiah, looking forward to a new king seated on David's throne, spoke prophetically of 'a shoot coming up from the root of Jesse' (**Is. 11:1, 10**). This prophecy was taken up and applied to Jesus by Paul in **Rom. 15:12**. Because he was the father of King David, Jesse is also mentioned in the genealogies of Christ in **Matt.1: 5** and **Luke 3:32**.

-Isaiah also prophesies about the coming of the suffering servant (**Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12**). The combination of this motif with that of the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11 presents us with the basis of the apostolic teaching that the Messiah of David had to suffer first and then be seated in glory. The prophetic message anticipates the future unfolding of God's plan in the ministry of the Lord Jesus and of the message of the apostles.

-Prophecies in these two specific streams come from Genesis, Numbers, Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Hosea, Deuteronomy, Psalms & Zechariah. *We will examine these and their fulfillment in another session.*

-In addition, there were other general prophecies of Christ.

-Some prophecies are yet to be fulfilled (e.g., Christ's Second Coming, judgment etc.).

Consider the role and importance of prophecy in God's master plan!

5. God sends His Son (Christ fulfills "THE LAW". Now the covenant is in Christ's blood).

-The gospels record his birth, life, death and resurrection "in fulfillment of Scripture".

-Jesus had proclaimed that 'the kingdom of God is near' (**Mk.1: 15; Mt.12: 28**); the longed-for 'day of salvation' has now arrived.

-However, Jesus' teaching about the kingdom has two aspects.

Through his proclamation and ministry, climaxed in his death and resurrection, the reign of God is now a reality in human history. As men and women trust in him, they enter the promised kingdom (**Lk. 17:20 ff, 18: 28-30**). But there is also the aspect of the 'kingdom to come'. *We are living in the tension between these two aspects the 'already' and the 'not yet'*. This period between Christ's first advent and his second advent is called 'the end times'.

-With time, the gospel spread to the gentiles (note, this was god's plan!), where the whole notion of kingship was likely to be misunderstood, as Jesus himself acknowledged (**Mk 10: 42 ff**). Other concepts were used to convey the Christian claim about Jesus. The central focus of the 'good news of the gospel' was no longer the 'kingdom of god'. Now the good news was about '*salvation*' (**Acts 16:30 ff, Rom. 1:16 ff**) and incorporation '*In Christ*' (**Rom. 8:1; Phil. 3:9 ff**).

-God's redemptive plan is revealed in the church, the reconciling of Jew and Gentile. Paul describes this as a "mystery" revealed to him. In it God displays his "manifold wisdom" in the heavenly realms so that, ultimately, all things will be brought together under Christ "when the times will have reached their fulfillment" (**Eph. 1:10**).

(Read the first three chapters of Ephesians to understand this revelation; note particularly Eph.3: 6.)

Consider: *where do we fit in God's master plan?. See also Romans 11. Does this comfort you? Are you special?*

6. God sends his Spirit.

-Jesus promises the Holy Spirit (see **John 14: 13ff**)

-The promised Holy Spirit comes (see Acts 2) on the Feast of Pentecost

Important Note: The Holy Spirit has always been around, from the very beginning of time. However in the OT we see his influence in the *coming upon people* to do his work. Since Christ's ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit has come to dwell, that is, take up residence, in each believer.

7. Essential aspects of God's redemptive plan yet to be fulfilled.

Consider: what might they be? (Clue: Remember how man was created? God's original plan?)

-Second coming of Christ

-Resurrection from the dead

-Eternal judgment [punishment and rewards]

-Sin and Death permanently put away.

All of these are dealt with as individual studies.

Conclusion