

Christ Church Liverpool
The Training Field, Autumn 2007
Masterplan
The unfolding purposes of God in the whole Bible: Session 7
The Gospel for the World

Last time we saw that the gospel writers show us how Jesus fulfils all the promises of the Old Testament. In particular we saw that he is:

- The serpent crusher who will undo the curse of Genesis 3 and defeat Satan (Luke 10:18-20)
- Abraham's descendent who is God's people (Matthew 4:1-11), God's place (John 2:12-25) and brings blessing to all nations (Matthew 11:28-30)
- A King in David's line who will reign forever over God's people (Matthew 21:9)

But we were left not having established how it is that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the means by which these things can be brought about.

In order to do that we need to return to the Old Testament theme of salvation through substitution.

Salvation Through Substitution

The key assumption of the Old Testament: Sinners (rebels) deserve to die under God's just judgment (Genesis 3). There are lots of figures in the Old Testament who show us the reality of the need for someone to die to pay for sin.

For example in Genesis 3 God tells Adam and Eve that they will die – and in Genesis 5 their deaths, and those of these ancestors are duly recorded: "and then he died."

But there are plenty of instances too where, although every human being does die eventually, death is averted through the offering of a substitute – another dies instead.

The first example of that is what?

The animals who die in the garden to make fur coats for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21).

But there are three main substitutes presented to us in the Old Testament:

Substitute 1: The Passover Lamb

Remember the story. God's people have become very numerous but they are in slavery in Egypt, kept prisoner by Pharaoh. God promises to set them free but both Moses and the people are reluctant to challenge Pharaoh. God demonstrates his contempt for Pharaoh's wickedness and his desire to free his people by sending a series of 10 plagues on Egypt, the last of which is the death of every first-born male – both human and animal.

Read Exodus 12:1-7 and 12-13.

- On what basis does God distinguish between Egyptians and Israelites?

Read 1 Corinthians 5:7

- How does Paul describe Jesus? What does this mean that Jesus' death on the cross did?

Substitute 2: The Day of Atonement Sacrifices

Brief history of what happened after Exodus – travel into desert.

Big question of this period is how can a pure and good God live with wicked people without them being destroyed?

Answer is that God institutes a system of animal sacrifices, the centrepiece of which is the Day of Atonement:

Read Leviticus 16:5; 15-25.

- What is the significance of **blood** in these passages?
- What does the day of atonement achieve?

The atonement is a ransom payment, which delivers a guilty party from punishment and appeases the offended party. In the case of the Israelites the offended party is God. The offence (the Israelites sin) is dealt with in two ways:

- (a) By the slaughtered goat taking God's judgment (death) and averting God's anger (wrath). Theologians sometimes call this "propitiation".
- (b) By the scapegoat taking away the people's sins into the desert (where, of course, the goat will die). Theologians sometimes call this "expiation".

Read Hebrews 9:12, 9:28 and 10:4

- How is Jesus like the day of atonement sacrifices?

Notice both "bear" and "take away" sin!

Substitute 3: The Servant of the Lord

Read Isaiah 53:2-12

- What does the passage say about what the servant does?
- Look at the following New Testament passages. How does Jesus fulfil the prophecies of the servant?

Mark 10:45

1 Peter 2:22

Taking the gospel out...

Much of the New Testament hints at the spread of the message about Jesus from its origins in Jerusalem to other parts of the Roman world.

But the book of Acts, which is really the second half of Luke's gospel, tells the story explicitly.

1:1 starts "In my former book, Theophilus" – a reference to the gospel which was written for the same friend.

The main agenda of the book of Acts is set out in 1:8

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Which means that the purpose of the book of Acts is not, as some people seem to think, a manual on church governance or a list of the signs or miracles we can expect to see happening.

It is the history of the fulfilment of this promise that Jesus made to the disciples.

What we see in the book of Acts is the beginning of the spread of the good news about Jesus in ever widening gospel circles until the end of time and the coming of the king.

The book has six major sections which describe the way that the gospel spreads into new areas. We’re going to look at some verses from each section and I want you to fill in the table on your handouts. How does the great pattern of God’s people, God’s place and God’s rule/blessing get closer and closer to its final fulfilment in each one...

Section	Verses to read	God’s people?	God’s place?	God’s blessing?
1:1-5:42	2:22; 37-47	Jews only	The temple?	Fellowship, sharing, praise, favour
6:1-9:31	7:48; 7:59-8:8	Jews and Samaritans	Not the temple	Deliverance from evil, great joy
9:32-12:25	10:934-48	Jew AND Gentile	All people throughout the land	As above!
13:1-15:35	13:4-12; 16	Jew AND Gentile	Asia Minor too	As above!
15:36-19:20	17:22-34	Just gentiles here!	Europe	As above!
19:21-28:31	28:16; 30-31	The whole world	Rome – capital of the world	As above!

God’s plan and purpose has reached Rome – exactly as Jesus said it would. Rome is REPRESENTATIVE of the ends of the earth – even though it actually isn’t! We know that isn’t the end of the story because:

Paul himself planned to go to other places – like Spain (Romans 15:24) beyond Rome. The fact that there are 6 cycles suggests the absence of a 7th!

The finality of the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham is only achieved in Revelation 7:9-10 when John sees the final gathering of God’s people after the return of Christ:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."

For us that means that evangelism is absolutely central to the gospel and the NT. If we are not obsessed with evangelism then we are not being NT Christians!

Finally let’s look very briefly at the very end of God’s plan and purpose. We get the fullest picture of what this will be like in the last chapters of the Bible in Revelation.

Read Revelation 22:1-5.

Do you see that we're back to the garden? The river. The tree of life. The absence of a curse.

But now it isn't just the Lord God who walks in the garden. Rather the very throne of God has come to the new earth and at the very centre is the throne of the Lamb – the Lord Jesus Christ. The one all this book has been about and the one who through his own death has brought to us the absolute certainty, that if we will only trust his promise, we will be there to share eternity with him.