

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

CONFERENCE SERIES

The Plan & Purpose of God

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STUDY ONE

THE FACT OF THE PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: A PLANNED CREATION

There is no doubt about the fact of the plan of God, and so of His purpose. It is clear in Scripture, as we shall see. However it is unthinkable that God would create without a purpose for that creation. In I Peter 4:19 He is called “a faithful Creator” which means that He must be faithful to that which He has created and seek to stand by it, and complete His purpose for it.

When we read the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 we are struck by the fact that creation was done in stages, that each stage was good, and that the completed creation was “very good”. We take it that creation, then is functional. This is seen from Gen. 1:31, Eccles. 3:11. I Timothy 4:4 says that everything created by God is good and to be enjoyed. A healthy view should be taken of creation. Psalm 104 and the sermon on the Mount show there is a good order in creation, whatever persons may seem to experience to the contrary. Passages such as Jeremiah 31:35-36 and Psalm 89:36-37 show that the order of creation is fixed in the sense that it is not arbitrary, and can always be depended upon to act according to certain principles.

At the same time the nature of creation is not static even though its principles are constant. God is present continually to every atom and molecule of His creation, or He would not be a Creator. The beauty of creation is not that it repeats itself monotonously, but that it goes on acting dynamically. Within it is an endless variety, and yet in all its diversity, and even because of that it is a unity since it comes from, and is always dependent upon,, the God that is the One Lord.

2. THE PLAN FOR THE CREATION

In the Genesis account of creation, and especially the creation of man there is no stated plan. Man is given a mandate to be fruitful, multiply and fill up the earth and have control over it. We might see a hint in “fill up the earth” in that the earth being filled so the mandate is fulfilled. However this is not stated. Nevertheless in our study on the plan and prophecy we will see that prophecies began with Abel and doubtless related to that plan. There has always been a plan, since certain passages tell us that God planned certain things before time, i.e. before creation. Especially there is Ephes. 3:9 where Paul says “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things”. “Created all things” can scarcely be a ‘by-the-way’ statement but must relate to the plan, i.e. the plan has been there from creation. It relates to creation.

In Ephes. 1:9-10 Paul says, “To us (the apostles) He has made known *in all wisdom and insight* the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He has set forth in Christ as *a plan for the fulness of time*, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth”. There is the plan. He planned to unify and head up everything in Christ. Whatever the “everything” or “all things” are, they are to be headed up in Christ. In Ephes. 4:10 it says, “He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things”. In Romans 8 the creation is subjected to vanity, i.e. to emptiness. This emptiness has to be removed. The “empty” has to be filled. Is this the same as unifying all things in Christ? In Col. 1:15-17 (cf. John 1:1-3, Heb. 1:2, 1 Cor. 8:6) Christ is the mediator of creation and all things are created “in him and for him”. Does he then simply unify what has become disunified? In Col. 1:19f it is said of Christ that “in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace (reconciliation) by the blood of his cross”. This surely is the plan - to make all things one.

This unifying, filling, and reconciling is surely what Christ prayed for in his prayer of John 17, “That they may be one”. He looked for this unity. He had given them his own glory (of love?) that they might become one as he was one with the Father, and the Father with him. If we take the creation to be a total unity and harmony as created by God then the plan must be that all creation, at the end, will be one.

3. THE FACT OF THE PLAN

We notice in Ephes. 1:9-10 that in order to understand the *fact* and *mode* of the plan we need “all wisdom and insight”. Similarly in 1:17 we need “a spirit of wisdom and revelation” to understand the things that will be. In I Cor. 2:6ff, Paul tells us that whilst he preaches the Gospel it can be understood simply, yet there is a further message for the mature, “We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glorification”. Here we notice that God’s plan cannot be understood without this “secret and hidden wisdom”, and that there is a plan which was worked out prior to creation. It is simply this “the glorification of man, God having prepared unbelievable things for them that love him”. In fact the Holy Spirit has to go into the depths of God and then impart those depths to us so that we can know.

When we realise we need wisdom to understand we note that it is because this is not the world’s world-view. It is not its time view. It is not its plan. It is not its goal-view. That is why Paul uses the term “mystery” time and again. It is a term which means “an open secret to the initiated but a closed one to the uninitiated”. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit. He laughs at such “mysteries”. In Ephes. 3:1-11 Paul speaks further on the mystery. He suggests that some of this plan was not made known in other generations. That is he thinks some things were kept back until the generation which first heard the Gospel. This could well be part of what Christ meant when he said the Spirit, on coming, would lead them into *all the truth*, the inference being that they had not seen it all. Also the Spirit would

show them “things to come” implying that this knowledge was also deficient. What then were the special things (or thing) of *the mystery*?

The answer is that “the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel”. This may not sound startling to us but then it was startling both to Jews and Gentiles who would believe with difficulty that the church was what mattered, and that Jews now had no advantage over Gentiles. What had been promised to Israel was also for the Christians come from Gentile origins. Paul then goes on to say in vs. 7-11 that he is a minister to reveal these mystery-things. He says that the plan of the mystery has been hidden for ages in God, i.e. to this point had not been fully disclosed. There is more than a note of this in Rom. 16:25-26 where Paul equates the Gospel with “the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of *the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the Eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith*”. “The obedience of faith” is a term which Paul uses **before in Rom. 1:5 and 15:18**. It means the Gentiles too obey God and become one with His people the Jews who obey Him.

Some Problems

Whilst we cannot here go into the nature of the plan and its operations we must see that it relates (a) To the Gospel and (b) To the unity of God’s people and (c) To the unifying, reconciling and harmonising of all things, and not only Jew and Gentile. We might call this the Gospel, or say that it comes to fruition through the Gospel.

The main things to see is that it is the will of God. In Ephes. 1:3-14 the will of God is shown in (a) Choosing us to be holy and blameless and making us so, (b) Setting our destinies (beforehand) to be sons of God, (c) Making us to the praise of the glory of His grace and (d) Making us to be to the praise of His glory. What concerns us is the statement of Ephes. 1:11, “In him, according to the purpose of him

who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will...” This suggests that what God wills to do He will accomplish, and that is about the hub of the matter. It is supported by 3:11 “This was according to the eternal purpose which *He has realised* in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Even though much of that will may have to be worked out in its details in time, yet it has essentially been worked and sealed by Christ.

4. CONCLUSION: THERE IS THE PLAN AND PURPOSE

We need not state here what is the goal of the plan except to say that God’s creation will prove to be ‘successful. That there is the plan we have seen. We may add a couple of pointers. In Acts 3:21 it is written, “Jesus, whom the heavens must receive until the time for establishing all that God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old”, and Revelation 10::1-7 which closes, “.. in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel *the mystery of God*, as He announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled”.

We need insight and wisdom. We need to be prepared to do this will, and to share in its outcome. Such knowing and doing may well cut across our own plans, our own knowing and doing - for ourselves!

STUDY TWO

THE GOAL OF THE PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: ALL IS PURPOSE

We need to repeat, from our last study, that creation is hopeless unless God has planned it. Human beings, for the most part, seek to plan their lives, even their days and hours. They consider it is part of being human to exercise their will, and to have purpose. Many things may prevent the fulfilment of that purpose, nevertheless they persist. To surrender that freedom of choice to another is opting out of being human. Doubtless man uses his will for perverse purposes, but the principle stands: man needs a goal. The Biblical view is that God has planned a terminal goal in time and space for His creation. We now proceed to look at the general goal, and the many goals within that which relate to creation and man.

2. THE GOAL AND GOALS OF THE PLAN

(i) The General Goal

In our last study we saw that God is called “faithful Creator” (I Pet. 4:19). This must mean (a) He creates a good creation (Cf. Gen. 1:31, I Tim. 4:4, Eccles. 3:11, I Tim. 6:17, Psalm 104), (b) He preserves that creation, providing for it (cf. Sermon on the Mount, Psalm 104 etc.), (c) When man falls, and creation is subjected to vanity He redeems man, and rehabilitates creation, Ephes. 1:4ff, Rom. 8:18f.

In Study One we saw that God has planned three things for the entire creation, or what the N.T. calls ‘all things’. They are:- (a) God will unify all things (Ephes. 1:9-10), (b) He will fill all things (Ephes. 4:10,

cf. 1:22, 23), (c) He will reconcile or harmonise all things (Col. 1:20-21, cf. Col. 1:3:13). We recognised that this means all creation will be renewed, and in fact glorified, or, as we may say, quaintly, 'eternalised'. This renewal is described in Isaiah 65, 66 and Rev. 21.

Within this general goal are included many elements which constitute the whole goal. They cause us to look particularly at man, at the powers of evil and at the creation itself.

(ii) The Particular Goals

Part of God's activity as 'faithful Creator' is first creation, then preservation of His order of creation, and providence in sustaining it. In these three elements the Father, the Son, and the Spirit work (cf. Heb. 1:2, Col. 1:17, I Cor. 8:6, Psalm 104:29-30). So God leads and governs His universe. We can say that the Father and the Son are one, and with them also, as one, is the Holy Spirit. None of the Persons is dependent on creation, but rather the reverse is true - the Creation is dependent upon the Godhead.

We see in Rev. 4:11, that creation was created according to, and for, God's will. That is enough. Hence in time what God does is according to what He has willed. For example in Gen. 25:23, Malachi 1:2, and Rom. 9:11, 12 we are told God loves *Jacob* but hates *Esau*. This of course is not emotional hatred but covenant choice. In Gen. 49:10 prophecy gives *Judah* prominence, and later *David*, and then David's "greater son", in all this the goal of Gen. 49:10 that Messiah reign over all the peoples is not lost sight of, but is in fact fulfilled. At the same time God has a particular purpose and goal for persons.

(a) God's Goal for Man

Psalm 139:16 says, "Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them". Psalm 31:15 says, "My times are in thy hand", whilst Job 14:5 has it, "Seeing his (man's)

days are determined, the number of his months is with thee, and thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass". These Scriptures, amongst others show that God has a time for every man. Nothing is haphazard or unplanned. Hence in Psalm 90:12 the Psalmist says, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom", meaning, "Let us see how You have planned our days. Let us discover the plan and live thereby".

Added to this is the idea that the names of God's people are written in the book of life. The godly of Israel are told this in Exodus 32:32, Psalm 87:6, Ezek. 13:9, Jer. 17:13, Psalm 69:28. This idea is carried through into the N.T. in Luke 10:20, Rev. 13:8 and 20:12.

We have already seen that God does all things according to the counsel of His own will (Ephes. 1:11 and 3:11). The words plan, counsel, will, good pleasure (delight), purpose, foreknowledge (prescience), election and foreordination are found in Ephes. 1:4,5,11, 3:11, Phil. 2:13, I Thess. 1:4, Rom. 8:28, I Pet. 1:2, and II Tim. 1:9. They all point to the planned aspects of God's will. Some O.T. Scriptures which accord with this are, "For Yaweh of hosts has purposed and who shall annul it? His hand is stretched out and who shall turn it back? (Isaiah 14:24-27): "... declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure'" (Isa. 46:10): "The counsel of the Lord stands fast forever, the thought of his heart to all generations". (Psalm 33:11).

What, then, are these plans for man? They are as follows:-

1. God's plan for His elect persons for salvation. (Gal. 4:4-5, II Tim. 1:9, II Thess. 2:12-13, I Thess. 4:16, 5:9).
2. His plan for the blessedness of His people. (Ephes. 1:5)
3. His plan for their sanctification, or holiness of being. (Ephes 1:4, I Pet. 1:2, II Thess. 2:13, I Thess. 4:7).

4. His plan for their filiation. (Ephes. 1:5, cf. Rom. 8:28-30, I John 3:1-3).
5. His plan for their eternal life. (Acts 13:48 (Cf. John 17:1-3))
6. His plan for their glorification. (Ephes. 1:6,12, cf. Isa. 43:6-7Rom. 8:28-30).

When we look at all these elements we may indeed marvel at God's grace, but at the same time we may miss something of the thrust and nature of that planning.

(b) God's Goal for His People

It is only when we come to see this goal, that is the corporate calling of His people that we can see the true nature of the goal. In fact we first see the true nature of God. He is the King of His people. He is the Father of His people. He is their Covenant Head. To think of the individual salvation of each person without seeing that sonship (adoption, filiation) implies familyhood and covenant people, is also to miss the nature of God as Father and King.

We need then to see the whole theme of the people of God, a subject so wide as to make its treatment impossible in this paper. From Gen. 49:10 to Phil. 2:11 we see God bringing all the peoples under Christ. We recognise this note in Rom. 1:5, 15:18, 16:25-26. We see it in the prophecies such as include "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (cf. Jer. 31:31-34), and in the ultimate picture in Rev. 7:9ff. In another way we can say that God is bringing in His Kingdom in His fulness so that (as according to the Lord's prayer) His will may be done on earth as in heaven, i.e. He will raise up the community of those who now, through the grace of love, voluntarily are committed to Him as the true community, the people of God, the people of the Kingdom.

We see that the plan for His people includes the plans for each person within that people. For them to be redeemed from evil, to be given blessedness, to be made holy, and to be holy children of the Father is

the fulfilling of His goal to show forth His glory (Ephes. 1:6, 12-14, Is&. 43:6-7). In other words, we see Him as Father and Redeemer and these elements accord with Him being Creator.

(c) God's Goal for His Creation

It is axiomatic in Scripture that creation shows God (Psalm 19:lff, Rom. 1:20-21). Theodicy, which is the justification of God in a creation which has within it sin and evil, seems to fall down whilst wrong elements exist. God's goal is the purging of His creation, and the renewing of the heavens and earth until only purity obtains (e.g. II Peter 3:9, Isa. 65 and 66, Rev. 21 and 22, etc.). This is the time when the "knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea". In other words God's creation will ultimately show - without impediment - the true glory of God.

3. CONCLUSION: THE GENERAL AND PARTICULAR GOALS

So significant is the plan of God with its many planned elements that we must see it whole or confuse its elements. We mean that God fails as Creator unless His ultimate intention is fulfilled - that of a pure creation, the obedience of the peoples, His Kingdom fulfilled, and His children blessed, holy, and glorified. One element must never be considered apart from another. The children of His glorified family, are the subjects of His Kingdom. So both His Fatherhood and Kingship shine forth. His Creatorhood is both vindicated and fulfilled by the liberation of His creation from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

All of these elements show His Creatorhood, Redeemerhood, Fatherhood and Kingship. The defeat and banishment of evil show His triumph as the Holy God and Father. All of these elements also show the full nature of the true Son and true Sonship. They indicate

powerfully the nature of the Holy Spirit in His creative, redemptive and resorative powers. In this sense they show the ultimate nature of fatherhood, sonship, family-being and spirithood of all God's elect. In this sense the goals show unceasingly the true glory of the , Godhead, and of manhood, especially since the latter is in the image of the former, and is filled out to perfection.

This, then is the goal of the plan.

STUDY THREE

THE PROPHETS AND THE PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: THE GOAL OF HISTORY

We have seen that prior to creation God as Father, Creator and Redeemer, planned the goal of creation. The Fatherly goal is the completed family, the Creator goal is the perfected creation, the Redeemer goal is to redeem both man and creation so that creation is fulfilled.

We have also seen that much of this goal is not nominated fully until the pages of the N.T.. It may be that germinally the plan is stated in the O.T., yet it only comes through clearly in the N.T., and this is for fairly obvious reasons. Man is not ready for all the revelations, and time must pass before some of these are seen in their true light. However, what concerns us is that God does not leave us in the world without telling us what He is about. This is in conformity with the idea that man works with God in history. God has His goal, and so man has his goals (and goal) within God's goal.

Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets". In other words, all that man has *needed to know*, God has revealed that.

2. THE BEGINNING OF PROPHECY

The first prophecy we read in Scripture is Genesis 3:14-15. In this God says to the serpent, "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”. This is a significant prophecy because the serpent has sought to thwart the entire plan of God. A man will arise who will crush evil underfoot on the heels of this prophecy comes Abel, the first nominated prophet (Luke 11:49-51). His brother Cain is called a child of the devil (I John 3:10-12). His conflict must be to some degree because of Abel’s prophecy. The family would have known the prophecy of Genesis 3:15.

That early prophecy has great strength is shown in Hebrews 1:1, “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets”. He kept them up in the plan, not only by predictive prophecy but by hortatory prophecy. Enoch, “the seventh from Adam” (cf. Jude 14, Gen. 5:18-24) gave a prophecy which accords with the end-age (cf. Jude 14, Matt. 25:31, II Thess. 1:7). Genesis 3:15 was enough to tell us of the defeat of evil. Other prophecies fill in the concept of the Crusher (of the Serpent’s head) and the Crushed.

3. STAGES OF PROPHECY

Revelation 19:10 states a general principle, “The spirit (Spirit?) of prophecy is the testimony of, Jesus”. This must mean that in some sense Jesus has been the theme of prophecy. . This is substantiated by Luke 24:27. However, Hebrews 1:1-2 divides God’s utterance into two series - (a) The prophets speaking to the fathers, and (b) The Son speaking to us, i.e. from the time of John the Baptist, onwards. We will consider prophecy under these heads.

(i) Prophecy to the Fathers

The following table sets out the eras of prophetic communication:-

- (a) *Abel to Noah* (cf. Abel; Gen. 5:21-24 & Jude 14-15, II Peter 2:5, Gen. 6:3, I Peter 3:20).

- (b) *The Period of the Patriarchs* (Gen. 20:7, Heb. 1:1-2, cf. Jacob & Gen. 49, Joseph; Gen. 41:37-39, 50:24).
- (c) *The Exodus and the Settlement*. Moses is the true prophet (Deut. 18:15ff). A number of the elders prophesy (Num. 11, cf. Num. 12:6). Balaam the Midianite prophesied for Israel's good. In settling into Canaan, Israel needed prophets to give local prophecies, which they did (Judges 6:7f). This in some measure continued until the time of Samuel.
- (d) *Samuel to Malachi*. A reading of Acts 13:20 and 3:24 indicates that Samuel commenced a new series of the prophets which culminated in Malachi (cf. Luke 11:51, Zechariah). This includes that which later came to be called "the major and the minor prophets" (Isaiah to Malachi), but many of the non-writing prophets have very significant ministry, e.g. Elijah and Elisha.

(ii) The Interim in Prophecy

This period is the concluding of the "in times past" (Heb. 1:1) series, and the introduction of a new prophetic era. John rounds off the old series

In fact, the series which Samuel commenced, technically finished with John the Baptist. He was a prophet and "more than a prophet" since he saw his own prophecy fulfilled, as also the prophecies of the former prophets.

(Luke 7:16ff, Matt. 11:9-10). Yet Jesus is the true prophet (John 1:21, Acts 3:22f, cf. Deut. 18:15ff). Jesus, in fact, is the fulfilment of the prophecies and carries prophecy to its peak. He is "more than 'more than a prophet'".

(iii) Pentecost to the End: Current Prophecy

Acts 1:8 says that those upon whom the Spirit comes will receive power and (so) witness to Christ. This links with Rev. 19:10 “the witness (testimony) of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy”. Peter, in explaining the phenomena of the coming of the Spirit, quotes Joel 2:28f, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, upon your sons and your daughters, and they shall prophesy...”. Doubtless what was uttered at Pentecost was prophecy. Doubtless this form of prophecy was to continue (under the continuing outpouring of the Spirit) until “that great and terrible day of the Lord comes”. This then is the era of prophecy. Nevertheless there are also nominated prophets in Acts (e.g. Agabus and others such as Silas and Judas (cf. 11:28f, 15:32f). In the book of the Revelation two *witnesses* appear in time, who prophesy (Rev. 11:1ff).

(iv) Conclusion

The point of looking at these series of prophetic communications is to see that the plan of God is constantly known through these utterances. In fact Paul insists that the N.T. church is built upon the substance of what the prophets and the apostles teach (Ephes. 2:20). The apostles when preaching claim that they only teach that which the prophets have spoken. Acts 2:30, 3:21, 4:25f, 13:37f, 15:15f, 24:14, 26:22-23, 27.

Had they spoken of anything but what the prophets had predicted, then their teaching would have been flatly (and rightly) rejected. It is true that they had to argue the case, showing that the events of Christ were in conformity with the prophets, but since the facts were clear enough, people should have agreed with them and believed in Christ. The point is made, however, that prophecy was the basis for coming events, and when a prophecy was fulfilled it had to be so recognised.

4. PROPHECY AND THE FULFILMENT OF THE PLAN

So far we have seen that God does nothing but what He tells the prophets. This means that the outworking of His plan can be followed. Christ claims himself to be the fulfilment of the prophecies. He does nothing but what is predicted he will do. Finally he shows his followers how closely he has done this (Luke 24:26-27, 44f).

This is all very revealing. It leads us to a very powerful and a very demanding conclusion:- God has always communicated His intention, short-range and long-range, and whilst the prophetic utterance has not been heard in every age (cf. I Sam 3:1, 3:19 - 4:1), yet the prophetic deposit was always available, i.e. the content of what the prophets had spoken.

This is borne out by Acts 3:21, “Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old”. “From of old” is “from eternity” (cf. Luke 1:70, i.e. *ap’ aionos*), The prophets have been from the beginning of man’s time. What they say will be, fulfilled by the end of time. This is seen even more powerfully in Revelation 10:1-7. Here the fulfilment involves the Creator of land and sea, and: all mankind.

This important fact means we must search the prophets to discover what they say. I Peter 1:10-12 shows that they had a strong sense of what they were about. II Peter 1:20-21 shows that they said what they were moved by God to say. Whilst Christ is the fulfilment of the prophets we will not know *how* he is, i.e. what he has done, *until we read the prophets!*

One of the problems for man, in regard to prophecy, is that the prophets were not interested merely in communication of information regarding the future, as, say, diviners and astrologers seek to do. They always confront man with the present and the future (and, indeed, the past) as the action of God and demand a response. They polarise

humanity so that it either conforms to the prophetic exhortation or rejects it. Man who has his own plans will scarcely be interested in the plan of God.

On the other hand, the man who responds to prophecy has a rich power for living. He understands what God is about. He is in the will of God. The future has meaning, purpose and goal for him. He can then live and work in the present as a person with true purpose. What is more, he can participate in the plan. Since then the plan is formulated in holy love, he can live in holy love.

We need to note that God conceals things in history until the right time for them to be known. Paul claims this in Ephes. 3:1-11. It is to him, as a prophet, that a special revelation comes. It is the Revelation of the church, and the full participation in it of both Jew and Gentile. In Romans 16:25-27 he indicates that something of God's plan was "hidden for ages", yet now it is revealed. In fact in Isaiah 48:3-8 God speaks to those who actually presume upon prophetic revelation. They know it all! He says, "Well, I Will *do things I have never told you about*". This means then that God is not bound, mechanistically, by His own prophecy. He has no need, Himself, to move out beyond it, but He will do other things when prophetic prediction is presumed upon. Prophecy, then, has its own dangers! For this reason we can expect anything from God.

5. CONCLUSION

We may conclude that God has planned history, and will see His will fulfilled. This plan He has opened to man, insofar as he needs to know it. That God's will, will be fulfilled is angering to the opponent of God but full of wisdom and encouragement to the one who loves and obeys God. The knowledge of the plan through the prophets also assures the prophetic reader that all history works out according to the promise and will of God. Hence, the wise man aligns himself with God and His plan.

STUDY FOUR

COVENANT, ISRAEL, AND THE PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PRINCIPLE AND FACT OF COVENANT

A great deal of research has been put into discovering the meaning of covenant contemporary with O.T. Biblical times and customs. In fact little has been discovered apart from Scripture which can be set forth with any great certainty. This does not greatly matter since the idea of covenant comes through very clearly in the Scriptures themselves.

Briefly speaking, the term *berith* in the O.T. covers the ideas of ‘contract’, ‘pact’, ‘arrangement’, ‘agreement’ and the like. Covenants are made from many angles. Marriage is a covenant, i.e. an agreement of two people for a certain situation which will then obtain henceforth. Laban and Jacob made a covenant, though mainly from distrust of one another. David and Jonathan made a covenant, mainly from trust. Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:25-32) and Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:26-31) also made self-protecting pacts. In each case there was a ritual of some kind which sealed the covenant. The ritual was called “cutting the covenant” and this can easily be seen in Genesis 15 where Abraham cuts the animals. In Exodus 24 God seals the covenant by the slaughter of beasts and the sprinkling of their blood upon the altar, the book of the covenant, and the people. In the N.T. the Greek word *diatheke* really means a testament, and refers primarily to a will, but it also does the work of *berith* in the O.T. and is so translated in the LXX.

There are a number of covenants in the Scriptures. Briefly speaking they are the pre-flood Noahic Covenant, the post-flood Noahic

Covenant, the Covenant with Abraham, with Moses, with David, and the New Covenant mediated by Christ. All of these related very much to the plan of God.

2. THE NATURE OF THE COVENANTS

Covenants in the Bible are made from various points of view. In Ezekiel 17: 13 the king of Babylon sets up one with the seed of Zedekiah. His is the covenant of a superior to an inferior and he sets his own conditions. Covenants of parity such as those of Abraham and Abimelech register equality of contribution. God, however, always effects a covenant of grace, and in fact research cannot really find such a parallel in history, which is not surprising. The gods are harsh and demanding in their covenants with devotees.

Biblical history must be seen properly in order to truly understand covenant. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are pre-history to the Abrahamic covenant, and without them this covenant is not understood. We have to see that the Abrahamic covenant which was to have universal connotation and effect had to be seen in right perspective, i.e. man sinful and needy, Abraham selected as the great covenant-father, and the human race receiving its blessings or cursings as it relates to Abraham and his progeny. Most of all it is a covenant of grace.

The Noahic covenant as we have mentioned has two aspects, i.e. pre-flood and post-flood. The pre-flood one was with Noah and his family, the post-flood one was with all mankind. The judgement of the flood will not be repeated as such, and the rhythm of the seasons will henceforth remain undisturbed. This is pure grace since man continues to sin and so to deserve judgement. The Abrahamic covenant has another note. It is not simply grace *where* man's sin still abounds, but, in the ultimate, i.e. in the Seed (Christ) it is grace *for* man's sin.

The Abrahamic covenant promises the land of Palestine (as it was later called) to Abraham and his descendants. They would not enter the land for some hundreds of years for the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet completed, hence righteous judgement awaited that completion. The covenant had ethnic and geographical principles. It also had moral and salvific principles. Abraham was justified because of his faith. Doubtless temporal blessings were to come to the progeny of Abraham, but the N.T. reveals it was to be blessing of the deepest kind, i.e. redemption and an eternal inheritance.

The Mosaic covenant can only be understood within the Abrahamic covenant. It was exclusive of other racial elements (i.e. a 'one-race' covenant) but inclusive of all God had promised Abraham. Israel's covenant at Sinai was based upon redemption from Egypt. Israel was to obey God - yes, but so had Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel was to keep the law, but on the basis that God had delivered it from Egypt (see Exodus 20:1f). Whilst it was a covenant of law this did not mean it was not at the same time a covenant of grace. God's grace had delivered them, and within the law had provided the sacrificial cultus by which the members of Israel could keep at 'covenant-level' when they sinned. Personal as well as corporate sacrifices (the sin-offering, the atonement offering, etc.) ensured they were kept at the level of forgiveness, freedom from guilt, and so retained their place within the covenant.

The Davidic covenant is prophesied strongly in the Old Testament. Some of the prophecies are linked with 'great David's greater son', and some with 'the person of the Messiah-King'. In this regard the passages of Psalms 89:3-4, 26-37, 132:11-18 should be read. In these passages we learn that God establishes a covenant with David to make his dynasty continue in perpetuity. Also He will make David to be His special son. He will be "...the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth". This covenant should be studied in the light of the Messianic prophecies.

The New Covenant in one sense would have been seen by thinking people in Israel to be indispensable. The idea of an *entirely* new covenant would not necessarily have been seen this way, but the idea of *renewing* the Mosaic covenant would have been seen to be needed. In Deuteronomy Moses tells the people that to subvert the covenant would mean punishment by God of His people, even to the point of invasion and forced exile. This had eventuated as the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom (later) had happened. So in exile the Jews looked to a new life on return, God having punished them. However, much of Israel's history after return was of invaders and oppressors who ruled the land. Hence when the prophets spoke of a new day, and explicitly talked of a covenant God would make with them which was 'new' and 'everlasting', and then in the latter chapters of Isaiah of the Suffering Servant who would *himself be the covenant* of God (doubtless the covenant head and mediator), then Israel began to look to a new, i.e. a fresh covenant.

Jeremiah in his prophecy (31:31-34, 32:40 and 50:4-5) speaks of this covenant as being an entirely new kind of covenant in that (a) The law will not be written on stones, but in the heart. (b) Knowledge of God will not be taught, but personally and directly known, and (c) Forgiveness will be apart from the sacrificial cultus. These ideas were quite radical. Ezekiel links such concepts of the New Covenant with the Spirit (Ezekiel 36:16-30, 37:1-14, 39:17-29).

When, then, John the Baptist appears he is able to point to the coming Messiah and link the ideas of Kingdom, forgiveness, and the Spirit with him. The Kingdom in the O.T. is also linked with covenant and Messiah so that when Zechariah his father had prophesied over him he had linked Messiah, redemption, forgiveness and covenant together (Luke 1:68-79). Jesus was in fact to fulfil these things according to the *Abrahamic Covenant* and gradually it emerges that the New Covenant is really the Abrahamic Covenant come to fulness (or, coming to fulness). Peter refers to it (Acts 3:23-25), and Paul uses the idea of a new covenant in II Corinthians 3, whilst in Galatians 3 and Romans 4

he points back to the promises given to Abraham and their fulfilment in Christ, and in a way he seems to by-pass the Mosaic covenant, although he does not denigrate it. The writer of Hebrews enlarges the concept of the better covenant (the New) and its better Mediator (Christ) and its better effects (forgiveness of sins and cleansing from impurity), and quotes Jer. 31:31-34 liberally. He calls it a new covenant and an everlasting covenant.

So we see the succession of covenants but are driven to see that in fact the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants are really of one piece, or at least that the latter three are subsumed under the Abrahamic head. Nevertheless what Abraham knew, and Israel experienced in the Mosaic covenant is not to be compared with what emerges in the New Covenant. It is unique, it is incomparable, it is wholly grace.

3. THE PLAN, ISRAEL, AND THE COVENANTS

The plan is not simply for Israel, but for all the world. It is for the people of God. Old Israel of Exodus 19:5-6 is linked with new Israel of I Peter 2:9-10. Since man is a fallen creature God cannot have that relationship He had with man in his unfallen state. In His grace He relates to him by covenant.. Even a conquering king could do this with his vanquished enemy. However, man has no way of relating to God unless He grant him what we may call ‘covenant access’. Israel was loved by God and such love expressed is called ‘covenant love’.

What, then, of the Gentiles? The Abrahamic Covenant was with a view to all the peoples of the earth. Likewise so is the Gospel. The Gospel is in fact, covenant-gospel. The blood of Christ which was shed is covenant blood. Just as the lamb slain at the passover represented covering for the family within their homes, so the blood of Christ protects from the holy wrath of God upon sin. It effects the forgiveness of sins. This offer is to all mankind. Peter is told not to

call unclean what God has called clean, i.e. the Gentiles (cf. Acts 15: 9-10). The Gentiles then are called into the Covenant.

What, then, of rebellious Israel? The promises of the New Covenant (as given in the O.T.) seemed entirely to them. Nevertheless James points to Amos 9:11-12 as including the Gentiles in the renewal of “the dwelling (tent) of David”. Joel 2:28 had spoken of God pouring out His Spirit on all flesh. ‘All flesh’ had seemed to most Israelites to mean all in Israel, and not only special ones within Israel as had been the case in the O.T. times. However, in the Acts the Spirit fell on Samaritans and Gentiles and so the Kingdom and the covenant became the possession also of Gentiles.

In Romans chapters 9 to 11 Paul speaks of the people of Israel being cut off as the domestic branch of the olive tree. He then spoke of the Gentiles being reconciled to God as a result of this, Christ being the Redeemer. He points out that the broken-off olive branch will again be grafted into the tree. This accords with the truth that the “gifts and calling of God are without recall”, i.e. there is a day ahead for Israel, and it will mean “life from the dead”, i.e. will restore Israel, and have the impact of life upon the world.

It seems clear then that the O.T. prophecies concerning Israel are prophecies which are always linked with covenant and the Kingdom of God. In the N.T. the “true Israel of God” is constituted of (a) the believing Jews, (b) the believing Gentiles and (c) proleptically the Jews who will be saved at the endtime according to Romans 9 - 11.

It is clear from these points that the plan of God which we are discussing in our series, and as seen in passages such as Ephesians 1:3-14 and Isaiah 43:6-7, will come to fulfilment. In Ephesians 2:11-21 Paul shows that the new humanity, i.e. ‘the new man’ has been minted in the Cross, hence the statement often used of “neither Jew nor Gentile”. The ‘all one’ (cf. Gal. 3:28) is the true people of God. This is the people God has planned and Paul in Ephesians 3:1-11

says that this is the true mystery of God, hidden for ages in God who created all things, and now revealed to the apostles and prophets of the apostolic period in a manner not revealed hitherto. Paul is given a special commission to reveal this great truth. It is in fact a stunning truth - that Jews and Gentiles should be o-partakers, and co-heirs of, and within, the same body.

4. CONCLUSION: COVENANT IS GRACE

All that God does is from grace. Creation is an act of grace. Man has rejected the essential creational position, hence he merits no further consideration, and certainly not redemption from his sin and rebellion, yet God does just this. He does it through His covenant, especially as outlined to Abraham. It is grace for the father-Abraham, his descendants and the Gentiles. Without this grace man cannot be redeemed and brought into the community of God, His true, time-wide, and universal, household.

As to the nature of grace, i.e. covenant-grace, this cannot be understood unless personally experienced. This requires true conviction of sin, repentance and faith. It requires men and women to receive the gift of salvation, and to continue in the grace of God, the grace which teaches (Titus 2:11f) and constrains to true obedience.

STUDY FIVE

MESSIAH AND THE PLAN

1. THE CLIMAX AND FULFILMENT OF THE PLAN

The plan as we have seen it in Ephesians 1 and related passages speak of the fulfilment of the plan as being “in Christ”. Thus, “in Messiah” means, “by means of, or through, Messiah”. According to verses 3-5 God chose us *in Christ*, that we should be holy and blameless, and He predestined us to be His sons *through* Messiah Jesus. In verses 9-10 the climax to history’s plan is stated definitively, “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, *according to his purpose* which he set forth *2n Christ* as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things *in him*, things in heaven, and things on earth”. We see then that there is no fulfilment of that plan without Messiah.

2. MESSIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament there are intimations of One who is to come. These intimations commence with Genesis 3:15 - the Proto-Evangel. This one will defeat the serpent. With the outlining of the covenant (see last Study) Abraham is promised his large family, and that he will inherit the earth. The closest to a covenant-head is indicated in Genesis 49:10 where “the sceptre shall not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs, and to him shall be the obedience of the people”. This *obedience of the people* is what Christ requires when he tells his disciples to make disciples of all nations and bring them to obedience (Matt. 28:18-20). Likewise in Romans 1:5, 15:18, and 16:25-26 Paul speaks of the “obedience of faith of the nations”. Phil. 2:11 shows every knee bowing to Messiah.

However, it is in Psalm 2 that the full drama is represented. Here the peoples, and their rulers gather together “against the Lord and His anointed (i.e. His Messiah)”. In this Psalm the anointed is the Son, and is anointed as King. He is to ask his Father, and he will receive all the nations. Again the ‘peoples’ theme is present.

Other intimations in the O.T. such as ‘Son of man’, ‘Son of God’, ‘Son of David’, ‘Davidic King’, ‘Suffering Servant’ all are brought together in the N.T. in the one person of Jesus. To put it another way, the Christian cannot understand the intimations in the O.T. except in the person of Christ. Then he can understand them.

3. MESSIAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(i) The Ministry of the Anointed One

John speaks of being a messenger to prepare the way for the Coming One. This One has to do with forgiveness of sins, the Kingdom of God, and the pouring out of the Spirit of God. Whilst John does not refer to him specifically as Messiah, the inference is clear. In any case, Israel has great Messianic expectancy. Nathaniel cries out, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! (John 1:49)”. Later Peter confesses, “You are the Messiah (i.e. Christ), the Son of the living God”. (Matt. 16:16). The High Priest wants Jesus’ answer to this question, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?”

In practice this Messiah is the one anointed by God. This anointing took place at his baptism, hence he was Messiah (i.e. ‘the anointed one’). Technically speaking he was anointed King at the baptism. However, Messiah has a programme to fulfil, and this he cannot do apart from the Spirit. He completes all his ministry by the Spirit - i.e. baptism, temptation, ‘doing good and healing all oppressed of the devil’ (Acts 10:38). His statement, “If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you”, is most

significant. Finally he effects the work of the Cross by the Spirit (Heb. 9:14) and rises and ascends by the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11, 1:5, cf. Ephes. 1:19-21) so that he is truly the anointed one, and the one working by the power of the Spirit.

(ii) The Work of the Anointed One

Messiah in the O.T. was to be of the Davidic line, and to accomplish liberty for his people, and establish the everlasting Kingdom. Jesus was certainly on the work of the Kingdom, but he had to defeat evil definitively. He promises this (Luke 11:21ff, John 12:31, 14:30-31, 16:11) and has to seal the defeat of all evil by his death and resurrection. This he does very clearly (Heb. 2:14-15, Col. 2:14-15, I John 3:8, Gal. 1:4, 6:14, etc.).

The Cross seals the doom of evil, and the liberation of man. The resurrection shows Jesus' victory over death (I Cor. 15:55-56, II Tim. 1:10). The ascension is in conformity with Psalm 2. Now Jesus is to have the nations (or, peoples) of the world in fulfilment of Psalm 2:7f, and Genesis 49:30 (amongst many other prophecies). In pursuance of this Jesus commands the disciples to win the nations (Matt. 28:18-20), to evangelise all persons (Mark 16:15f), and to declare to all the truths of repentance and remission of sins. Messiah himself, having ascended and being seated at the right hand of God, pours out his Spirit upon the people in fulfilment of the prophecies (Acts 2:14ff = Joel 2:28ff). They are to be his anointed ones (Messiah-ites), and they are to witness to Christ "in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth". "Uttermost parts of the earth" are what God has promised His Messiah-Son in Psalm 2:8-9. Hence, in Acts 1:8 *the disciples have indicated to them the entire programme of Messiah.*

On the day of Pentecost Peter proves - with the coming of the Spirit - the Lordship of Jesus, and the Messiahship he has obtained: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him

both *Lord and Messiah*, this Jesus whom you crucified”. Jesus’ acceptance as such is his verification as Messiah. The question is, “What does Messiah now do?”

(iii) The Present Work of the Anointed One

In Acts 3:19-21 Peter exhorts the people to repent that they may receive the forgiveness of sins, “that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ,(Messiah) appointed for you, Jesus, *whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke* by the mouth of his ‘ holy prophets from of old (i.e. from eternity)”. This means that wherever Jesus is he is linked with things moving towards their consummation, as pointed out in Ephes. 1:9-10.

In Matt. 28:18-20 Jesus has said he will be with the disciples as they complete the work up until the end of the age, i.e. the work will go on to the end of the age with the consummation of the age in view. This accords with Mark 16:15ff where Jesus is said to attend the work of the disciples, confirming their preaching with signs and wonders. However, most plainly of all his present messianic programme is seen in I Cor. 15:24-28, which should be studied thoroughly, This says in effect that in this age Messiah is putting down all the enemies of God and His people. He will continue to do this until the last enemy, death, is destroyed, after which he will give the Kingdom to the Father ‘that God maybe all in all’.

Rightly speaking, Messiah must be seen in action in the Book of Acts. It is he who is seen by Stephen to be (standing) at the right hand of God. It is he who meets Saul of Tarsus and prevents him further persecuting him (Jesus), for to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus. This same Lord appears at other times to Saul. He is the one who verifies the work of his servants. The Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ and as such directs the work (cf. Acts 16:6-7).

In the epistle to the Ephesians the church is the body of Christ, ‘the fulness of him who is filling all in all’ (cf. 4:10 - ‘fill all things’). That is Christ shares his fulness with his body so that they may work along with him in the fulfilment of God’s plan. Hence in Revelation chs. 2 and 3 the churches are directed by Christ, and are taught what they should and should not do. In Revelation 14:1-5 a picture of the wholly faithful of God’s people is given. It is said of them, “...these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes”. This means that Messiah is leading his people. He leads them in their work of preaching the Gospel to the uttermost part of the earth, and in breaking down strongholds of Satan, and in bringing the nations to the obedience of faith.

(iv) The Consummation of the Plan: Messiah Victorious

In Phil. 2:9-11 it is shown that because of the victory of the Cross every knee shall ultimately bow to Christ. In Revelation 5 the ‘Lamb-that-had-been–slain’ takes the book with its seven scrolls - he being worthy to open it - and under his authority history proceeds to unfold. The remainder of the Book of the Revelation presents the picture that Messiah (the Lamb) unfolds history, controlling it to its triumphant conclusion. Passages such as Revelation 12:10, “...now the salvation and the power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ have come...” Rev. 11:15, “The Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ”. In Revelation 19:11-21 the utter decimation of evil forces by him who is called “King of kings and Lord of lords” is shown. Revelation 10:1-7 is another picture of the same triumph, “...there should be no more delay, but that in the day of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God as announced by his servants the prophets should be fulfilled”.

What then is that consummation? From one point of view it is the defeat of all evil, but from another the “gathering together of the

children of God, scattered abroad, into one family". These are the grand scenes of the Revelation where the multitude that cannot be numbered is before God. The Bride, the church is joined to her husband, Messiah, clothed in fine linen which are the righteous deeds of the saints. In Revelation 21:1-5 it is the City of God descending from heaven, the City which is the Bride. This City is the new and final sanctuary of God, and now He dwells with them.

In Ephesians 1:9-10 it is the summation, the heading up and unifying of all things in Christ. In Ephesians 4:10 it is the filling up of all things from the fullness of Christ, i.e. making them complete, true, authentic. In Col. 1:20 it is the reconciliation of all things, both to God, and to one another. In Col. 3:14 it is the "binding together in harmony of all things" through love.

God has achieved His aim. He has created a holy people, willing in love to obey, serve and worship. He has created sons in the image of His own Son. He has renewed His creation until only that which is pure and righteous dwells in it. He has sealed off evil forever.

4. CONCLUSION: MESSIAH OF THE HEART

In looking at the larger, more panoramic view we may be in danger of forgetting or minimizing the intimate and personal matter of the human heart. Here it is, of all places, that Messiah has made his conquest, "The Son of God who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me!*" is the cry of the believer and child of God. He has "made the rebel a priest and a king". This is God's goal for His elect. This is Christ's finest achievement for this is the very heart of the plan of God.

STUDY SIX

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before we look at the work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the plan of God we should understand the fact that the Holy Spirit is person. Many of the figures used of him seem to indicate elements such as fire, water, breath, wind, power and so on, which are generally regarded as impersonal. However, since he talks, feels (is grieved, vexed) and is the source of certain emotions or affection (love, joy, peace) he cannot be impersonal. He has the three elements required for personal being, that is cognition (knowing), affection (feeling) and volition (will). For this reason he has personal being. The uses of 'it' for the Holy Spirit should not delude us into thinking of him in the neuter gender, for that is simply the use of the gender for breath or wind. Spirit in the O.T. is *ruach* and *pneuma* in the N.T., which means breath or wind. Life of course comes from such, or is the indication of such, and the Spirit is the Spirit of life in that he initiates and sustains life (Psalm 104:29-30).

2. THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AND THE PLAN OF GOD

If we regard the plan of God as being prepared for creation, but involving creation, redemption, sanctification and glorification of the elect, and the restoration of God's universe, then we will see how present and effective the Spirit was, is, and will be in these various categories.

(i) The Spirit of Creation

The Spirit is present at Creation - “the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). Psalm 104:29-30 shows him to be the Spirit of life. This is also evident in Isaiah 32:14ff, where the Spirit renews creation. In Ezekiel 37:1-14 he gives life to the dead. In Romans 8:2 and II Cor. 3:6 he is the Spirit of life. In John 3:3ff he is the Spirit of new life. The Father initiates creation; the Son mediates creation, and the Spirit is the Agent of creation.

However, it is what creation is for which determines the manner in which the Spirit works. Just as the Son sustains creation with his powerful word (Heb. 1: 2-3, cf. Col. 1:16-17), so the Spirit is the one who sustains life. In Gen. 2:7 God breathes into man the breath of life, and in Psalm 104:29 the withdrawal of this life means death.

(ii) The Spirit of the Patriarchs

For the Spirit to aid in effecting the plan of God he must be the Spirit of history. He was certainly with man before the Flood. Because of their deliberate corruption, violence and wickedness God says, “My Spirit will not always dwell (strive, work in) man because he has become flesh”. This means God worked but is about to visit the earth with judgement (the Flood). The pattern in which His Spirit worked will be changed because of men’s evil.

Following the Flood we deduce that man soon became corrupt, and sought independence of God, especially at Babel. Abraham is called from Ur and Haran and obeys God, being given the great Covenant. Whilst the Spirit is not mentioned in regard to Abraham, Galatians 3 and 4 indicate he was a man of the Spirit, and Isaac is said to have been born of the Spirit, Sarah being designated as “the free woman”. Abraham was a prophet (Gem. 20:7). So was Isaac in giving the blessing, and Jacob also. Joseph is attested to by Pharaoh as being a man of the Spirit (Gem. 41:38). The Spirit then led the patriarchs.

(iii) The Spirit and Israel

Moses was a man of the Spirit (Numbers 11:16-29). So were the 70 elders. So was Joshua (Num. 27:18, Deut. 34:9). Isaiah 63:10-14 shows that the Spirit led Israel in the wilderness. At the time of the Judges the Spirit came upon leaders to save Israel from apostasy and destruction (3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 19, and 15:14). So he moved on men like Gideon, Jephthah and Samson.

Israel may have felt, during the exile, that it was abandoned and that the Spirit would not now be with them. God encouraged Israel by saying, “My Spirit abides among you; fear not.” (Haggai 2:5). Ezekiel had seen the glory of God depart from Israel which was equal to the Spirit having departed, but then he also saw the Lord return in the new temple.

The Spirit was on people such as priests, kings, artisans and prophets. The Spirit on Bezalel caused him to do the work of the Tabernacle fully and significantly. David is in despair lest the Spirit be taken from him (Psalm 51), for he has seen what happened to Saul. However, it is the prophets who know the work of the Spirit. In Nehemiah we read of Israel, “Many years Thou didst bear with them and didst warn them by Thy Spirit, *through the prophets*, yet they would not hear...”

The story of the prophets and the Spirit is a large one. The nation needed the dreams and visions through which God gave His message to the prophets, but it was the Spirit who worked in them to proclaim, and gave them the truth (I Peter 1:10-12, II Peter 1:21). Without the prophets the people would not have known what lay ahead. God does nothing but what He first tells the prophets, who can then tell it to the people. Without predictive elements Israel would have missed God’s plan for it. Without hortatory elements Israel would have known no exhortation to live consistently with the calling God had given them.

(v) The Spirit and Redemption

Prophetic ministry by the Spirit continues into the N.T. John the Baptist is filled with the Spirit from the womb. Zechariah, John's father, is filled with the Spirit and makes prophetic utterance. So do others, in regard to the birth and person of Jesus.

However, it is the baptising or anointing of Jesus with the Spirit which enables him to fulfil his work. He is born of the Spirit in Mary's womb, he is anointed with the Spirit to minister (Matt. 12:28, Acts 10:38), and offers himself at the Cross through the Spirit (Heb. 9:14). He is raised from the dead by the Spirit (Rom. 1:4, 8:9-11), and ascends by the same power (Ephes. 1:19f). This compact paragraph indicates that Jesus was 'the man of the Spirit'. Certainly he was always led and enabled by him.

The redemption that Jesus effected on the Cross is made available and powerful to believing man through the Spirit. In Luke 24:49 Jesus forbids his disciples to fulfil the Gospel commission until they are clothed **with** the Spirit and his power. In Acts 1:8 he promises that power. At Pentecost the Spirit comes in power and endues the believers with power to proclaim.

The plan, then, is being fulfilled. Romans 8:1-3 and II Cor. 3:6 show that man is released from sin by the Spirit as he applies the work of the Cross and Resurrection. II Cor. 3:17 shows that where the Spirit of the Lord is liberation has been effected.

(vi) The Spirit and Sanctification

II Thess. 2:13, I Peter 1:2, Titus 3:5, I Cor. 6:11, amongst other Scriptures, indicate that the sanctification of the redeemed is effected by the Holy Spirit. Sanctification pertains to (a) The washing away of sins and cleansing of the heart (cf. Acts 15:8-9), (b) The consecration of the believers to God (I Cor. 6:9-11, I Peter 2:9-10), and (c) The

experimental holiness which is aided by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 18, 22-26). Since sanctification is glorification begun, and glorification is sanctification completed, then the plan of God as set out in Ephesians 1:4ff, “chosen...to be blameless and holy” requires this important work of the Spirit.

(vii) The Spirit and Sonship

Romans 8:14-17, Matt. 10:20, and Gal. 4:4-6 (amongst other references) indicate that it is only by the Spirit that man comes to sonship of God. This sonship is most important because it also is part of the plan of God (Ephes. 1:5ff, I John 3:1-3, Romans 8:3, etc.). The Spirit (*a*) Brings to new birth (John 3:3f, 1:1131, II Cor. 5:5, etc.), and (*b*) To sonship (Gal. 4:4-6) of the Father. Man then moves to fulfilment with the new relationship aiding him in obedience. His obedience is also calculated (Ephes. 2:10) to be part of the fulfilling operation of God’s plan.

(viii) The Spirit and Glorification

Romans 8:18-25 indicates that the Spirit is linked with the fulfilment of sonship, the redemption of the body, the glorification. of elect man. The changes from one stage of glory to another are effected by the Spirit of the Lord (II Cor. 3:17-18). The glorification of sons indicated in I John 3:1-3, Romans 8: 18ff, I Cor. 2:6-10 is dependent upon the work of the Spirit.

(ix) Judgement and Renewal of Creation

History climaxes when Christ has defeated all the enemies. A study of I Cor. 15:24-28, Ephes. 1:21-23 shows that Christ will effect the plan of God by his church. The church must be under the Lordship of the Spirit (II Cor. 3:18). He has created the new people of God. From Pentecost onwards they are enlivened and enabled by him. They proclaim through his power. They use the effectual gifts and the

spiritual weapons which he provides. In this way they defeat powers of darkness and are aides to Christ in his subduing of all things.

In II Thess. 2:8 Christ slays the son of perdition by “the breath of his mouth”, a term taken in regard to Messiah from Isaiah 11:4. In Revelation this is a sword going out of Messiah’s mouth (19:15). This is the sword of the Spirit (Ephes. 6:17), for the breath of the mouth is a name for the Spirit. Thus Christ destroys all evil. The renewal of all things is by the renewing Spirit (Ezek. , 37:1-14, Isaiah 32:14ff).

3. CONCLUSION: THE SPIRIT WHO EFFECTS ALL THINGS

We have seen that the Father initiates creation, redemption, sanctification, glorification, and the renewal of His creation. The Son mediates such, and the Spirit is the Agent. The three Persons work together in loving unity and purpose, and so effect the full end. It is then interesting to see that the Spirit is never, so to speak, ‘doing his own thing’. Rather ‘his thing’ is to do the will of the Father and the Son. He is thus the Spirit of the Father, and of the Son (cf. Matt. 10:20, Gal. 4:5-6). He is the Spirit of God, of the Lord, of the Father, of Jesus, of the Son, and so on.

The work then is Trinitarian, and three working in congruence and unity. God is patient, and spends much time bringing things to the true and right goals. His plan is a beautiful one, distinguishing Him as the ‘God and Father of us all’. At the same time, the Son does the Father’s will, and the Spirit is currently the ‘Spirit of the Man’. The plan is the Father’s, but is in the hand of the Son who shares a blueprint, so to speak, with the Spirit. He seeks to glorify both Father and Son (John 16:12-15), and bring to them, at the end of the age, that family of holy and blameless ones, fashioned in the image of the Son, and, by the Spirit all enabled to cry, “Abba!”, that is, “Father!”

STUDY SEVEN

THE CHURCH AND THE PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PLAN CONCERNS THE CHURCH

Our study of Ephesians 1:3-14 has shown us that God has planned for His elect people -

- (i) That they be holy and blameless before Him: He has chosen them for this.
- (ii) That they be His sons.
- (iii) That they be to the praise of the glory of His grace.
- (iv) That they be to His glory, whether Jew or Gentile.

The sum total of this plan is that both His grace and His glory be fully manifested in the ages to come (cf. Ephes. 1:7, 2:7, 1:11-14), but that in the context of His Fatherhood. That is His plan is, by His family, to denote His Fatherhood. This will be the ultimate meaning of His Creator-Redeemerhood.

For this reason the people of God signifies deeply.

2 THE PLAN OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In Studies 3, 4, and 5 we saw God and His purposes for Israel. We are aware from Romans 9-11 (and other Scriptures) that God's plan obtains for Israel. 'All Israel will be saved'. However,, whilst there is discontinuity (in a sense) between the people of Israel and the new

people of God commencing at Pentecost, there is also continuity. The continuity is shown at various points:-

- (i) The Kingdom is not simply to be restored to Israel, but now concerns Samaria and the 'uttermost part', i.e. the Gentiles-(Acts 1:8). This is the story of the Book of the Acts.
- (ii) In Acts 15:12-19 James makes it clear that the rebuilding of David's tabernacle, i.e. the Messianic-Davidic Kingdom, includes the Gentiles.
- (iii) Ephesians 3:1-6 shows that the Jews and Gentiles are members of the one body on the one level. Their parity excludes the inferiority of one or the superiority of the other. The Gentiles do not tag behind the Jews. Ephes. 2:11-21 shows that through the Cross, through Christ, through the Spirit and the Father, they have become one family.
- (iv) Galatians, chapters 3 and 4 shows that all men of faith - whether Jews or Gentiles - are the children of Abraham. Gentiles then join the saga of God's elect people by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26 -4:6). Thus in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave or free man, for 'all are one', i.e. have the same identity group-wise. This is substantiated by I Cor. 12:13.
- (v) Not only are we children, joining the family saga, but we are, importantly, the very household of God. We have seen that in ~. N.T. the new people of God, the church, has continuity with the old people of God, Israel. A close study of Numbers 12:6-7, Hebrews 3:1-6, Ephes. 2:18-22, I Tim. 3:15, Gal. 6:10 and related Scriptures (e.g. John 8:35, 14:2) shows that the household of God has ever been the plan of God. I John 3.:10ff indicates that all who are persons of faith, love and righteousness have been members of this household.

It remains then only to see that at the end the 144,000 of the Book of Revelation (7 :4-8, 14:1-5) are the first-fruits ‘redeemed from all mankind’ (14: 4), and the ‘great multitude such as no man can number’ is the fulness of the family and not just, as in the case of the 144,000, the first-fruits. Revelation 21:1-5 in particular shows the people of God as the dwelling place of God Himself, in conformity with Ezekiel 37:24-28 and Ephesians 2:18-22.

3. GOD’S PLAN FOR HIS PEOPLE IS ALSO THROUGH HIS PEOPLE

Paul says in Ephesians 3:8-11, ‘To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord’. He is saying, ‘(i) I have to show the riches of Christ in creation, redemption, and the election. (ii) I have to teach them the plan of God’s mystery, hitherto hidden, but *innate in creation*. (iii) This plan and its fulfilment arise from and constitute the wisdom of God. *It is to be known through the Church*. Angelic powers and authorities are seeking to know the wisdom by looking at the Church. (iv) What has happened is not fortuitous. It is God’s plan as planned and now realised in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

What this means is that the plan relates primarily to the church, the people of God. God has formulated His plan *for* the church. This plan is being fulfilled. What is happening in history is happening for, to, by, and through the Church. Of course it has been realised in and through Christ. He has worked out and effected the will of God. Now, through the Church, the good news of this accomplishment must be made known.

The angelic powers are looking at the church for at least two reasons:-

- (i) They can see what God has planned and accomplished by seeing what He has effected, i.e. He has created the church through Christ's work, and so has drawn sinners into His household, redeeming them from sin's doom, and making them His children.
- (ii) He is now using the church to bring the whole plan to completion. It is not by looking at secular powers and the universal workings of nations that the powers come to understand the will of God, but *by looking at the church*. In fact Paul is saying that the church and its actions are the true wisdom of God manifested.

In practical fact what does all this mean? It means (i) That the most significant operation of history is the making and using of the church by God. (ii) That currently the church is committed to outworking that portion of the plan which as yet has not been fulfilled. How then is this done? It is accomplished in the following manner:-

- (a) *The church has been called upon to proclaim the saving work of Christ*, i.e. the Gospel. This is seen in the commission Christ gave to his disciples and the church to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts, i.e. to Jew, Samaritan and Gentile. The Book of Acts, and the history of the church show that it has been about this matter for 2,000 years.
- (b) *Christ is outworking the victory of his death and resurrection by defeating*, in history, the enemies of God and the church. Passages such as I Cor. 15:24-28, Ephes. 2:9-11, and the Book of the Revelation (e.g. chs. 19 and 20) show this. However, Christ has given his fulness to the church (Ephes. 1: 19-23) and is filling all things (Ephes. 4:10) by means of his body, so that the church is involved in his defeat of the enemies. This is seen by the fact that,

- (c) *The church is-involved in spiritual warfare.* Ephes. 6:10-18, II Cor. 10:1ff, Phil. 1:27-29, Rev. 19:15ff, and other passages show that the church is equipped with powerful spiritual weapons to defeat the enemy, tear down evil strongholds, and effect the triumph of Christ.
- (d) *The church itself has its own intrinsic life of love, care, concern, fellowship.* Thus the members of the family are being built up in love and drawn to maturation as preparation for the glorification of the children of God. The things which will appear at the end time (holiness, fruitfulness, love, etc.) are being experienced in the present time. It is this intrinsic life which assists it to its extrinsic life of proclamation, defeat of the enemy, etc. It is also true that the extrinsic further promotes the intrinsic, and so on. The building up of the church from within, through love, is well set out in Ephesians 4:7-16 (cf. I Cor. 3).
- (e) *As the true household of God* (I Tim. 3:15, Hebrews 3:1-6, Ephea. 1:18ff etc.), the children witness to the glory of the Father (Matt. 5:16, cf. John 14: 12-13). This is why love of the brethren is so important (I John 3:14, 4:7-8, 19-20. I Thess. 4:9, etc.).

4. THE PLAN FULFILLED

Because this is the substance of our next (and final) study we will not fill it out here. It is sufficient to say that all things must be fulfilled (Acts 3:2 Rev. 10:7), and so they will be fulfilled. The family will be completed. The Father will be denoted, and so on. What concerns us practically is that we must participate in the plan. Genesis 1:28ff has shown us the creational elements of God's plan. Ephesians 1:3-14 has shown us the redemptional elements of the same. Both, i.e. creational and redemptional, are incumbent upon us. We are committed to, and involved in, this plan, for we are His church.

STUDY EIGHT

THE PLAN FULFILLED

1. INTRODUCTION: THE FACT OF THE PLAN

In our first study we noted that ‘God is a faithful Creator’, and concluded from that statement (I Peter 4:19) that He is this because what He creates He brings to its intended goal, its purposed fulfilment. We saw in Ephesians that He ‘accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will’, and that what has happened in Christ is ‘according to the eternal purpose which He has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord’. This is all in accordance with the prophetic word, ‘I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient time things not yet done, saying, “My counsel will stand, and I will accomplish all My purposes.” I have spoken and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed and I will do it’ (Isaiah 46:9-11).

We have seen the goal of this plan, the relationship of prophecy to it, as also its nature as declared in covenant generally and the Abrahamic Covenant in particular. The history of the world is related to it, and specifically Israel’s history. In accordance with the prophets Messiah has come to fulfil that plan, and as intended has drawn his church to share in its fulfilment. Now we need to see for whom this plan is intended, and for what, as also the fact of its fulfilment, and the modes of its fulfilment as the Scriptures disclose them. Finally we need to see the very nature of the fulfilment itself.

2. FOR WHOM THE PLAN IS FULFILLED

It is always said that the fulfilment of history and the plan of God is for His glory. This is patent. Ephesians 1 shows us that it is for the praise of the glory of His grace, for the praise of His glory, and all of this is true. To make holy, redeem from sin, and to make sinful man the object of His grace is indeed His glory. This is 'in the coming ages to show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.' Even so, when He redeems, purifies and infiliates sinful man He is not simply showing the glory of Himself as though it were ever unchanging and is finally manifested (though that is true), but His glory as 2t essentially 2s. It is not just transcendence as such, or the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence as they are philosophically conceived, but the glory of Himself as Creator, King, and Father, these being worked out in His glory of Redeemerhood. It is His glory in these offices, functions and associated actions which is His essential glory. These pertain to His creation which He causes to arrive at its predestined end. Then He is fully seen as God.

The glory then relates to those for whom He has planned it. These constitute -

- (i) All creation, including celestial and terrestrial beings, and all the orders which are ultimately to be renewed, i.e. the new heavens and the new earth.
- (ii) The Church in particular as the People of God in general. His plan is for His Household into which ultimately come all the redeemed.

- (iii) Persons. We mean that salvation and sonship, whilst corporately effected are also personal. God gives personal identity to each member of humanity, and fulfils this identity in conforming each to the image of His Son, as also giving a name (Rev. 2:17) and a place (John 14:2) to each person.

Thus all the redeemed creation participates in the benefits of His plan. The finally impenitent elements will be destroyed as viable entities, but not necessarily annihilated as such.

3. THE FACT OF FULFILMENT

Prophecy, based on the purpose, nature and oath of God is the true basis for hope, and is the assurance that the end will come as predicted. A study of eschatology shows the various elements which will ultimately obtain, such as life after death, the destruction of all evil, the eternal life which will be enjoyed, the new heavens and the new earth, and so on. Prophetic discourses discuss the modes (see below), and certain parts of Scripture discuss or state the facts. Three passages are relevant (among others) for our purposes.

- (i) **Philippians 2:9-11**. This states that all knees shall bow to Christ in the ultimate, acknowledging him as Lord to the glory of the Father.
- (ii) **I Corinthians 15:24-28**. This states that at the end every power will have been made subject to Christ, and that all enemies will be destroyed (death being the last enemy) and the kingdoms of this world having been won the Son will turn and give the Kingdom to the Father who will be 'all in all' (cf. Revelation 11:15 for the same thought).
- (iii) **Revelation 10:1-7**. This is the announcement that all predicted by the prophets, i.e.. the plan, the mystery, the plan of the mystery - all are about to be fulfilled in accordance with what was told to the prophets. There is then to be no doubt about the fulfilment. Some thinkers

see the plan as fulfilled by human efforts and strategies. Others see it only by God's sovereignty.

4. THE GOALS OF FULFILMENT

These, of course, relate to those for whom the goals are planned. In accordance with Isaiah 65:17ff and 66:22ff, we see the new heavens and the new earth. Many other passages point to this total renewal of creation. Romans 8: 18-30 speaks of it as the liberation of creation from bondage to corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Revelation chapters 21 and 22 describes the fruits of the new creation in the descent to earth of the City of God, and its greatness as it envelops mankind.

These chapters introduce the capturing of the nations to the obedience of Christ, spoken of in Genesis 49:10 and reiterated by Paul in Romans (1 :5, 15: 18f, 16:25-26). In Revelation 21:1-5 the people of God are nominated as having reached fulfilment, and having become the dwelling place of God. In verses 22-, 27 the nations walk in the light of the City of God, that is of the Father and the Lamb. The kings of the earth bring in the glory and honour of the peoples. In 22:1-5 the river that flows from the throne of God has the tree of life on either side of the river, whose leaves are 'for the healing of the nations'. Other passages such as Romans 8:28-30, I John 3:1-3, Phil. 3:21, I Cor. 15:51-56 all show that each person is ultimately in the image and glory of God.

In this sense the goals (or goal) of God are fulfilled. These goals being fulfilled God shines forth in His pristine glory. He has not so much won glory by what He has done in time as what He has done in time is the true expression and actuation of His. glory which ever was.

5. THE WAYS OF FULFILMENT

If we take I Cor. 15:24-28 as our model, then we see that whilst the work of the Cross was complete ('It is finished', i.e. 'complete') yet it was complete with a view to an outworking of it in history. We mean that the moral victory at the Cross gives the Son of Man authority over his enemies. Whatever he has as Creator-Word (Col. 1:15-17, John 1:1-4, Hebrew_^. 1 :2), he has complete authority over all evil powers at the Cross. He has also devised the means whereby man may be freed, and live free from his enemies. Hence history from Christ's Resurrection to His parousia is an outworking of his basic victory. Revelation 5:5ff shows (a) His right to break the seals of the scroll of history, and (b) His actual breaking of those seals with resultant plagues, judgements, trumpets, vials, etc. until history climaxes in the overt victory of God. Thus 'The Lion of the Tribe of Judah' is the victorious 'Lamb That Was Slain'.

The Book of the Revelation from chapters 5 to 20 is the outworking of the model of I Corinthians 15:24-28. We see the enemies of God even given authority to do their evil work, by which mankind is polarised in its loyalty to either the Beast or God. The principle of Babel and Babylon in the O.T. is reproduced, and the rebellion of evil powers manifested in its (seeming) grip upon God's creation, seeking to turn it to their own ends. However, the great city of Babylon is defeated, sacked and destroyed. The nations cannot do without it, so dependent are they upon it. Then one by one the Beast, the false prophet, and finally the serpent, Satan himself, the great red dragon are each defeated and thrown into the Lake of Fire. Judgement is made upon the nations. Those who escape judgement are those whose names have been written in the Lamb's book of life from before time. Death and Hades are themselves cast into the lake. All things unclean are destroyed. The new heavens and the new earth are for the glorified only.

The new age begins with the glorification of the redeemed, the rewards given to the overcomers, and the new identity given to God's people as a people, as to each as persons. Then the glorified shall look upon the glory of God and the Lamb.

6. THE PRESENT POWER FOR US FROM THE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

God's people are the people of hope. Hope for them is the assurance of the things that are coming. God's people released from their sins of the past, strain forward, peering into the future. They are not men and women of this world. They hang loose to it (I Cor. 7:31), looking for a city to come, and to the Author of their faith who shall complete that faith by sealing it with ultimate love. Meanwhile in looking to him (Hebrews 12:2, II Corinthians 3:18) they are being changed from one stage of glory to another.

The dynamic of the plan is the rest God's people have in His sovereignty. They know that what He has begun He will complete because He is a faithful Creator, a faithful Father, and 4 faithful Redeemer and King. In fact He must do these things in order to express His glory. Only in this way can His creation know Who He is. And their life is dependent upon this knowledge (John 17: 3) .

Whilst man-in-rebellion hates the thought of election and predestination, and God's insistence of the ultimate unification of all things in His Son (Ephes. 1:9-10), the harmonising of all things through love (Col. 3:14), and the reconciliation of all things through the Cross (Col. 1:20), yet all mankind may rest assured that in the doing of that God never violates the created dignity of man, the given image and honour. He works in His own wise and wonderful way to effect ultimately the best for His people. The mystery of reaction and response is not given to us to know, but to those who trust Him nothing He does need ever be questioned.

His plan is to us the assurance of His greatness, and the assurance of glorification and eternalisation.