

Lesson #8

The First 4000 Years

Don't be alarmed. This look at the first 4000 years will be brief. We simply need to establish a few key reference points that bring us up to the point where the strategic plan of Jesus Christ began to unfold. Though this chapter may contain facts that are familiar to you, it is very important to place the strategic plan in its proper historical context. **What is important about history is not just the facts, but how they fit together into a strategic plan that ultimately connects us to our destiny.** Many people have heard the old stories, but don't see them as part of the big picture or the current plan.

Creation, Sin, and Atonement by Blood

In the beginning the Triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) created heaven, earth, the sun, moon, stars, planets, plants, animals ... He created it all. But then He created something very special - man. What is so special about man? It is the fact that God created man in His own image! God said, *"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."* No other creature was created in God's image.

Man was created to have wonderful companionship with God and man's physical body was created to live forever and never die! God put His crown of creation, Adam and Eve, in a garden He had made for them and told them to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over all the earth.

However, in spite of all the infinite glory that God had made available, man was tempted and rebelled against God. Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the rest is history. Sin and death entered the human race and, according to God's law, the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). As a result, all of mankind fell from the position of close personal companionship with God and has sought ways of regaining dominion over the earth ever since. The result has been greed, jealousy, murder, theft, pain, suffering, rebellion, wars, and injustice of every kind.

Because of sin, God placed a barrier of separation between Himself and man, not because He was angry or punishing man, but for the sake of His law. Without law and order, all of creation would self-destruct. Doing so would compromise His character, and we would be without hope because there would be no trustworthy standard in heaven or in earth. God will not break this rule or any of His eternal laws.

Because of their sin, God banished Adam and Eve from the garden and they were not allowed to go in, lest having sinned, they would eat of the tree of life and live forever. We can only imagine how bad it would be if sinful man was allowed to live forever! So we see that death is actually a sort of check and balance system against evil.

However, because of His love for man, God did not abandon him but devised a plan to defeat death and redeem mankind. He made a way to maintain a level of contact with man through legal covenants utilizing a process called atonement. In atonement, innocent animals were killed and their blood was received by God to atone for, or in other words, satisfy the requirement of the law of God which says, *The Wages of Sin Is Death* (see Rom 6:23).

The Flood

Though atonement for sin was available, mankind became more and more evil. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). As a result, God sent a great flood to destroy all life on the earth. Only Noah and his family were found to have grace in God’s eyes. So God gave Noah warning and instructed him to build an ark by which he, his family and breeding stock for the other land-based life would be preserved. Noah, his three sons, and their wives, eight people in all, were saved.

Decentralization at Babel

After the flood, God blessed Noah and his family multiplied. As the people multiplied, they journeyed eastward. They settled in the land of Shinar and began to build a tower which was displeasing to God. It is not perfectly clear why this tower displeased God, but it appears their sin was self-exaltation, because according to Genesis 11:4, their purpose was to make a name for themselves and their goal was to have a tower that reached into the heavens.

The goal of reaching into the heaven suggests that they were seeking to exalt themselves above God and usurp His authority. Though they could not have literally invaded heaven, the tower represented a high place from which they would commit idolatry and exalt their own achievements, a place of worship revering the ability of man, not God.

God saw that they were very capable and, working together, they would accomplish whatever they put their minds to. So God decided to hinder their ability to work together and frustrate their work. He did so by confusing their language, for until then, everyone spoke the same language and were able to communicate with each other. The result of this was that the work on the tower ceased, and the people were divided and scattered over all the earth.

The confusion of the languages is the biblical basis for the decentralization of government, the separation of powers, and the sovereignty of nations. Because man tends toward evil, God divided the peoples into different nations as a way to protect the whole of the people from the error of the one or the few. Before Babel, the whole world became so evil that God had to destroy it in the great Flood, saving only Noah and his family. With the people divided into nations, evil can be more contained. This way, if a nation became too evil, it could be destroyed without the need to destroy rest of the world. Nations and other groupings of people always need leaders and leaders always arise. But mechanisms must be put in place to guard against the sin nature.

The Covenant With Abraham and The Nation of Israel

Through atonement by blood, God established a means of making covenants or agreements with men. However, God found very few people through history with whom He could make a covenant. Eventually God found a man named Abram and made a special covenant with him. God made a covenant with Abram and changed his name to Abraham. One of the reasons God choose Abraham was because He saw that Abraham would pass the commandments of God to his children and household. God promised Abraham that through his family line He would fulfill the things spoken over him and eventually bring the blessing of salvation from sin and death to all nations.

...since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

— Genesis 18:18-19 (NASB)

Abraham had a son named Isaac and Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob had an experience with God and God gave Jacob the name Israel. Israel had twelve sons and they became twelve clans (or tribes) which became the nation known as Israel.

During a severe famine, God sent Israel to the land of Egypt where He gave them favor with the king and food to survive. However, an evil king arose later who made slaves out of the whole nation. After 400 years, God raised up a leader named Moses and used him to deliver Israel out of Egypt with many mighty miracles and displays of power. God gave Moses the law known as the Ten Commandments. He told His people to follow these commandments and they would prosper and be blessed.

Through hundreds of years of Israel's history, God blessed them and gave them victory over their enemies when they offered the required blood sacrifices and walked in the ways of God. Yet, when they walked in wickedness by disobeying God and worshiping false gods, God handed them over to be defeated before their enemies until they learned to trust and obey Him again.

All the while, through many good times and bad times, times of obedience and disobedience, victory and defeat, God was still working on His plan to bring salvation to all nations. It was part of God's plan and His agreement with Abraham, that through his bloodline (the nation of Israel), a special man come who would offer the perfect blood sacrifice once and for all.

The Perfect Sacrifice and a New Covenant

The blood of animals was only a temporary atonement that could not completely deal with the sin problem. Even the most perfect and innocent animal, such as an innocent little lamb, could not fully atone for the sin of man because animals were not created in the image of God as was man. Something lesser cannot purchase something greater.

Since sin had entered all men, there was none totally righteous. No one could be found who could atone for the sins of the world. Yet all the while, God surely knew what he would do. He would come to earth Himself in the form of a man and live life on the same level as man. He would defeat the power of sin by never yielding to it and then He would offer His own life (blood) as the atonement for man's sin.

In all ways, Jesus Christ endured the tests and temptations of this world as a man. Even His entrance to this world was like ours, through the womb of a woman. God the Holy Spirit planted the seed of God in the womb of a virgin named Mary who gave birth to Jesus in the most humble and lowly circumstances. This man was Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the earth-born Son of God. He and He alone is God's Sacrifice Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Though He is fully God yet He fully became a man and overcame the world as a man facing all the same temptations that we face, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He learned obedience by the things He suffered and became the author of salvation to those who obey Him (Heb 5:8). This qualifies Him and Him alone to be the sacrifice for man's sin.

This man Jesus demonstrated true humility and love in the midst of a perverse world. He healed the sick, raised the dead, deliver people from evil spirits and did many wonderful miracles. He gave this world a taste of the powers of the age to come and a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God will be like when Jesus returns as King of kings and Lord of lords (see Matt 12:28 and Luke 10:9). He also trained a group of followers to carry on God's plan to bring salvation to all nations, not just Israel.

Then, those descendants of Abraham (who were supposed to be expecting Christ's coming) refused to believe in Him and had Him killed. Though Jesus was killed by those who hated Him, yet they did not take His life against His will. **He gave His life willingly because He knew that He was the sacrifice for man's sin and He was fixed on the joy of what He saw in the future (see Hebrews 12:2).** Jesus was crucified, nailed to a wooden cross and hung there until he died. This was the greatest act of love the world has ever known. Jesus' death satisfied the requirement of the law that says, *The Wages of Sin Is Death.*

The atonement through the blood of Jesus happened almost 2000 years ago. Since that time, blood sacrifices have no longer been required by God. The sacrifice of Jesus' blood is good once and for all to those who believe and trust in Him. This is the New Covenant made by the blood of Jesus Christ. The requirement now is to believe on the Name of Jesus Christ, that God has raised Him from the dead, and to follow Him. **There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we can be saved because Jesus Christ is the only One who qualified to pay for our sins and provide forgiveness.**

Death Defeated, the Holy Spirit and the Church

After being crucified, Jesus was then buried in a tomb. But on the third day after His death, He rose from the dead and was seen alive by many people over a period of forty days. One time He was seen by five hundred people at once! The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an indisputable fact. The resurrection proves Him to be exactly who He says He is. He alone has the keys of death and can give life to others. He is the way, the truth and the life, no one can be saved apart from Him!

During the 40 day period following His resurrection, Jesus spoke to his followers and continued to give them instructions to carry out God's plan. This plan makes salvation from sin and death available to all the nations and prepares the earth for Jesus' return and the appearing of the Kingdom of God on earth. Jesus told His followers to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high and then take the message of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth (Jesus had told them earlier that He must leave in order to send the Holy Spirit). Then He ascended into heaven and disappeared into the clouds as His disciples watched. At that time, they received the promise from angels that Jesus would return again in the same manner that he ascended. (See mark 16:17:20; Acts 1:1-11)

About 10 days later, Jesus' followers were gathered together in Jerusalem for an annual feast called Pentecost. People from every nation were gathered for this feast. It was at this time that Jesus' promise of power from on high was fulfilled. There were 120 people who had gathered to wait for this promise when the Holy Spirit came upon them with such great power that it sounded like a mighty rushing wind!

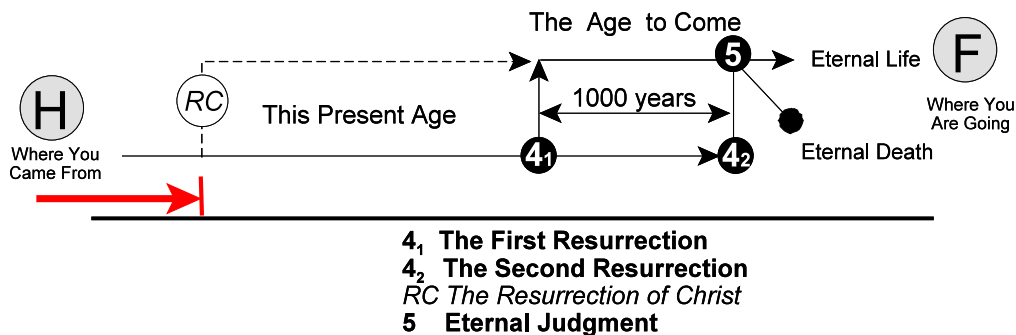
The Holy Spirit appeared to them as flames of fire and lit upon each one of them. The noise of it was such that it was heard by people all around the city and they gathered to see what was going on. One of the men named Peter stood up and explained to the crowd what had happened. He told them that Jesus who had been crucified was the Christ. He explained that death could not hold Him and that He was risen from the dead and had sent the Holy Spirit. This was the plan of God coming to pass that had been spoken of by the prophets centuries before. Peter exhorted them to be saved from this perverse world by believing on the name of Jesus. He told them that if they would turn from their sins and be baptized, they too would receive the Holy Spirit.

This Present Age (of Grace) Begins

About 3000 people believed and were baptized that day! The Church was born. The followers of Jesus received the power of the Holy Spirit and began to spread the gospel of the Kingdom and spread the message of salvation, doing the same kinds of miracles and works that Jesus had done. The solution to the problem of sin and death had been provided and the time period that we refer to in this study as “this present age” had begun.

Once again, let’s look at our Destiny Diagram. Our brief overview of the first 4000 years of history is represented by the arrow extending from “H” and ending at “RC” the Resurrection of Christ. This brings us beginning of “This Present Age,” which we referred to earlier as the age of amazing grace.

Destiny Diagram #8



Jesus had trained His disciples and commissioned them to carry on with God’s plan. Satan’s worst nightmare was now upon him. Instead of one man filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, there were many and they were multiplying! The strategy of Jesus Christ to prepare the way for His Kingdom was activated!