

more topics that could have been included, or how those included could have been expanded upon.

Our approach has been to start from the beginning, looking at Jesus as the one foreordained before the foundation of the world, and then at the Old Testament prophetic witness to the two themes of the suffering servant and the anointed king. Then his birth and nature, and his roles as Son of man and Son of God, provide the basis for considering his sacrifice and high-priesthood. His exaltation for faithful obedience is demonstrated by his resurrection and the bestowal of Spirit gifts in the first century. One of the prophecies about Jesus describes him as the prophet like Moses; it seemed helpful, therefore, to consider Jesus's role as a prophet.

Jesus's final instructions to the apostles involved preaching the gospel and the baptism of believers, so we look at the aspects of baptism, grace, following Jesus's steps and remembering his sacrifice as he instructed. His coming again is what we eagerly look for, but even so it is wise to refresh our minds about the signs he gave to encourage us and the warnings that should increase our readiness. Being recipients of such momentous privileges and a glorious hope through Jesus means that we are to be actively witnessing, both by our lives and by our speech,

to him and to God's purpose in him. This revealed secret needs to be brought in love to the people of the world who, as yet, are in darkness, "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Our studies conclude with consideration of the hope of eternal life. Other aspects of the subject are covered in shorter articles, but within the scope of this Special Issue it is impossible to be exhaustive in our coverage.

The challenge of discipleship

Without question Jesus challenges us. He calls on all to be like him; indeed, it is the Father's intention that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. Like him, we are expected to take up the cross daily and actively endorse the principles of self-denial and God-centredness that he displayed. Those who bear the Name of Christ must depart from iniquity, despite the pressures around them to be conformed to this transient age. Our considerations in this Special Issue are commended to readers in the hope that they will, by considering our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith, also look to the joy set before us that has been made possible in him, and so ultimately be partakers of his holiness.

"Foreordained before the foundation of the world"

Did God's original purpose fail?

John Watts

THE BIBLE TEACHES that God has a purpose that will be fulfilled: "as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num. 14:21). Just as clearly it teaches that, as part of His method for achieving His purpose, God overrules the affairs of men (Dan. 4:17). Taken together with the omniscience and omnipotence of God, philosophers and theologians often conclude, as Calvin did, that everything is therefore predestinated and foreordained.

The plain Bible teaching is that men do have a choice: death or life. When we deal with Divine

matters it is always unwise to assume that human reasoning and logic are infallible, not least because we are never in possession of all the facts concerning God's ways and thoughts. In our examination of Bible teaching about the place of Jesus in God's purpose, we must therefore move carefully and rely on what Scripture says, using great caution in drawing 'logical' conclusions. The teaching is in fact straightforward so far as the Bible presents it; it is our subsequent deductions that sometimes conflict with reality.

A first reading of the early books of the Bible may suggest that God laid out His plan of Crea-

tion as in Genesis 1, but because of man's sin in Eden everything went wrong, and all that follows then becomes an account of God trying to repair the damage. The episode of the Flood seems to confirm this impression. But a moment's thought shows that this is deficient because it is not in harmony with a God Who is omniscient and omnipotent. God knows the end from the beginning. His foreknowledge is complete. Are we to suppose that Adam's sin was not foreknown, that God's purpose did not include this in the scheme of things?

Without Jesus we perish

Most of us at some time are asked, or ask, Why are things as they are? If God knew that things were going to go wrong in creation, why did He start? The misery, oppression, injustice and suffering, the apparent futility and purposelessness of the world, even the indifference of men to God, are endlessly presented by sceptics as evidence that there is no God. The final answer, as in most things, is that things are as they are because God so decrees it; but the subject of this study, Jesus Christ, provides a much closer and more comprehensible reason. It is a consistent teaching throughout Scripture that all things find their meaning and purpose in Jesus, Son of God and Son of man, the seed of the woman (Col. 1:15-19).

When God, in Genesis 1:26, spoke of making man in His image it is apparent that even from the beginning He had in view something far beyond Adam. The first man Adam would fail, and God knew he would fail; but God's purpose was never based on the assumption of failure, but of success—the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. His whole purpose in Christ and his followers is set out in the parable enacted in the creation of Eve. The detailed creation of man in Genesis 2 carefully distinguishes Adam's creation from that of Eve, both in time, because Adam was made first, and in fashion, because he was made from the dust of the earth whereas Eve was made out of Adam (1 Cor. 11:8,9). Here is a parable, a prophecy of the work of Jesus: Eve was made from Adam's rib as he lay in a deep sleep—a prophecy of the death of Jesus as essential for the creation of his bride, the ecclesia. All this was enacted before any suggestion of sin had entered the world.

The creation of man as God planned it had both a physical and a spiritual aspect. The physical creation of man was God's work without

man's aid; and, like all God's unaided work, the result was good. In the nature of things a spiritual nature is developed by spiritual forces. Because man was a living, sentient creature, his moral nature was to be developed by a cooperative work in which both God and man would be involved.

That process was based on the same principles as that of physical creation—God would speak and it would come to pass—but with a difference: the Word would convey spiritual, not physical, creative force. Just as the inanimate clay responded to the power of the Word to make and reshape it, so man's mind and spirit would hear and respond to the teaching of the Word. Man would be shaped and developed spiritually by his personal response to the Word, as it formed in him the mind of the spirit, conforming him fully to the image of God. It is another facet of the figure of the potter and the clay. God foreknew that Adam would fail to respond correctly to this second stage of his creation, and in consequence the perfection of his physical form would be reduced to mortality.

Adam, however, was only a type of Christ; the first man, of the earth, earthy, only a type of the second man, the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:45,47), who would truly be in the image and likeness of God. This man would respond so completely to the Word of God that in him the Word would become flesh (Jno. 1:14). From the time of Creation itself, then, Jesus stands at the centre of God's plan. All things truly exist in anticipation of him, and in him all things hold together.

The status of the Lord Jesus

As the New Testament writers explore the details of God's plan of salvation, we begin to realise something of the greatness of the work of Jesus (Phil. 2:5-11), the pivotal role he plays in the whole of creation (Col. 1:15-18). It is set out in clear terms that without Jesus there is no salvation, and therefore without him there can be no purpose to creation. Our lives would be meaningless. There is indeed no other name given whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12), simply because no other man has come near God: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). All other forms of belief are human delusion and deception, lies that lead nowhere but to the grave.

So high is Christ's status in these things that it is usual for men, perhaps seeking excuse for our

ungodliness, to project Christ out of humanity into Divinity, taking the Son of man and making him God the Son. That approach, however, diminishes the work both of Jesus and of God, implying that the Word of God was unable to do the work it had been sent out for: to make man in the image of God.

Foreknowledge

The theme we explore here, then, is the centre of our hope, the reason we have hope. It has its difficulties as we try to understand foreknowledge, since we are looking at the way God has thought and planned. Peter wrote of Jesus as “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20). A lexicon or concordance indicates that “foreordained” has overtones not strictly present in the original message. ‘Foreknowledge’ is what the word means. Jesus was foreknown but was under no compulsion from God; he could choose freely, but God Himself knew from the outset what choice His only begotten Son would make. The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness make this point very obvious.

So clearly was Christ’s role established before the first acts of Creation that Jesus could speak of the glory that he had with his Father “before the world was” (Jno. 17:5). Speaking of his death and resurrection in Luke 24:46,47, Jesus made the related assertions that the Christ must suffer and then rise from the dead, not under external compulsion but because “Thus it is written”, and that the Christ would endure these things because he had chosen to do God’s will. Peter spoke of Jesus’s sufferings as being according to “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

We have, then, God’s will, but also His foreknowledge of how Jesus would behave: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will” (Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7). Hence the pattern of type and prophecy of Jesus that abounds in the Old Testament, so that Jesus could say to his disciples, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”, and show to them in all the scriptures of the Old Testament the things concerning himself (Lk. 24:25,27). The central purpose of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 19:10).

When God said, “Let us make man . . .”, we appreciate that God’s plan would be a long time in developing. Four thousand years would pass before Jesus, the seed of the woman, would be

born, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death (Heb. 2:9), the one who would be the image of the invisible God (1:3), the pioneer of our salvation (2:10). If, then, we now turn to the Old Testament with this knowledge in mind, we begin to appreciate why so much that is written is prophetic of Jesus and his work. There is so much evidence bearing on this theme that it is impossible to examine more than a fragment of it, and we must focus on particular aspects.

“The glory that I had with Thee”

Jesus himself spoke of the glory that he had with the Father before the world was (Jno. 17:5,24). John refers to this glory as something about which Isaiah had written 750 years earlier (12:37-41). The vision in Isaiah 6 was of a temple, with the Lord (Adonai) high and lifted up, and seraphim who announced that the glory of the Lord (Yahweh) filled the earth. Here in symbol was a representation of Christ and the redeemed in the Kingdom of God, with God’s purpose at last fulfilled, for the seraphim declare that the glory of the Lord fills the earth.

The glory of Jesus includes his triumph over sin and death, as well as his consequent triumph as ruler over God’s Kingdom on earth; and John 12:38 links Isaiah 6 with Isaiah 53, in which the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus was prophesied in great detail. We have already noted that his work was outlined in parable before the fall of man, and that the rulership of Christ was implicit in the decision of God at Creation to give man dominion over the earth. These twin aspects of Christ’s glory are evident throughout the Old Testament, beginning, as was noted earlier, with the creation of Eve, the Bride.

Failure in Eden and the seed of the woman

The fall of man in Eden is too well known to need detailed exposition. What we can appreciate, particularly in the light of the study of the awfulness of sin given in Romans 1–3, is that the failure was total. Far from being in the image and likeness of God, conformed to God’s Word, man had chosen to listen to the creature, the serpent, rather than to the Creator. God had spoken and it had not come to pass. Life had been given to man for a purpose, to allow him to hear and respond. It was taken from him because he refused his destiny and chose rebellion.

It is difficult to understand why, confronted with the enormity of man’s rebellion, anyone

can suppose death is anything other than the complete termination of all life and consciousness. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:22,23). Part of God’s creation, man, had rebelled against God’s Word and was therefore to be removed from existence. God’s purpose had, however, anticipated this setback, and Eve was given the promise of a ‘seed’ (Gen. 3:15), a descendant, uniquely described as the seed of the woman, who would crush the serpent’s head. The problem, sin, was personified in powerful imagery using the figure of the serpent who had helped Eve to justify her actions. The seed of the woman would be bitten in the heel but would triumph in crushing sin’s head—a fatal blow.

Retrospect shows us that here is Jesus, his life, death and resurrection all portrayed in a thumbnail sketch as a message of hope from the very outset. There is no suggestion that God, like some general whose campaign has gone awry, is hurriedly cobbling together a new approach. This is all part of His original purpose centred in Christ, the man who would truly be in the image and likeness of God. We must be careful, however, to appreciate that, although Christ is the centre, the pivot, he was not the sole end of God’s purpose. God created male and female, and the details of Eve’s creation in Eden teach us that the bride of man was made because it was not good for the man to be alone.

The Bride of Christ, the *ecclesia*, consisting of all those men and women of faith down the ages who have struggled to hear God’s Word and to respond, is thus as much a part of God’s plan as is Jesus (Jno. 17:22). In a very important sense they are his ‘seed’, the travail of his soul, his house, his brethren, chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). The figures and personification of the faithful abound in Scripture. The destiny of man was to “replenish the earth”, to have dominion; his final destiny is to be in God’s image, having complete fellowship with the Father, when Jesus will have handed over the Kingdom to God (1 Cor. 15:28; Rev. 21:2-4).

The seed of Abraham

The opening words of the New Testament describe Jesus Christ as the son of David and the son of Abraham, drawing attention to God’s dealings with these two men. We are being reminded

that the work of Jesus was foreknown in the purpose of God, and that Abraham and David were also focal points in that purpose. Jesus was not the end but the means by which others would come to God.

The book of Genesis is full of figures and types prophesying the work of the seed of the woman. It shows us very clearly the way in which God has pruned and selected humanity in His design to bring into the world the Son of God, the second Adam. The rejection of Cain is one example. Eve herself recognised that the seed would come through her next son Seth (4:25). The Flood is a striking demonstration that God does not value individual lives as we do. Noah alone found favour, and together with his family was saved in the ark. The rest of humanity perished. It is not that God is ruthless, without pity and compassion, but rather that those who judge themselves unworthy of eternal life, and who prefer sin, have no enduring place in His creation; in effect they are already dead, being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1,5).

After the Flood, as man once more corrupted God’s way, the selection process focused on Abram the Hebrew from Ur of the Chaldees. Galatians 3:8 tells us that the gospel was preached to Abraham: “In thee shall all nations be blessed”. Paul develops the idea of the ‘seed of Abraham’—who is singular and who is Christ (v. 16). The chapter ends with the assertion that those who have believed and have been baptized into Christ become one with him and hence part of that singular seed of Abraham (vv. 26-29). Now turn back to Genesis and consider the way in which Abraham’s son Isaac was a prophecy of Jesus—an enacted parable demonstrating again that the work of Jesus was a settled part of God’s plan.

Isaac—a figure of Christ

Isaac was the promised child of Abraham and Sarah, born in their old age with a miraculous conception when both parents were past the age of having children. In many ways Isaac’s life prefigures Christ’s work and forms a study in its own right. Isaac is actually called Abraham’s “only begotten son” (Heb. 11:17), despite the existence of Abraham’s son by the bondmaid Hagar. Again, the details of Genesis 22 are well known: the command from God that Abraham should offer Isaac as a sacrifice; the cooperation of Abraham and his son; the three days’ journey under sentence of death to the very mountains

where Jesus would be crucified; and the intervention of the angel at the last moment, with a sacrifice that God Himself provided.

It represents the ultimate test of Abraham's faith; James says that it was the work that perfected Abraham's faith (Jas. 2:21,22). The New Testament itself draws our attention to it, presenting Isaac's deliverance from death as a figure of resurrection (Heb. 11:19). Isaac was the child, the immediate seed promised to Abraham and his wife Sarah. Abraham had another son, Ishmael, but Isaac is in God's assessment "thine only son". It was in Isaac that Abraham's seed, the seed of the woman, would be called.

Abraham had his own foreknowledge—we would call it faith in God's promises—which enabled him to look ahead with confidence to a redeemer in whom all nations would be blessed, one who would possess the gate of his enemies. Even Isaac's name, 'laughter' or 'rejoicing', seems to echo this foreknowledge: "Abraham rejoiced to see my day" (Jno. 8:56). On the mountains of Moriah, where the temple would be built a thousand years later, and where Christ himself would be crucified another thousand years on, Abraham clearly saw it and was glad; the Lord would provide the sacrifice.

Taken in isolation, the command to sacrifice Isaac has no meaning other than as a test of faith. God abominates human sacrifice. It is the prophecy in the actions that gives it its ultimate significance; a figure of the 'seed' who would cooperate with his Father, even to death, to ensure that the promises to Eve and to Abraham would be fulfilled. Here is foreknowledge.

The promises in Genesis 22 introduce us to another aspect of God's plan in the seed; verse 17 concludes: "thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (cf. 24:60). The ultimate enemy is sin and its consequence, death, but God's purpose to achieve the victory has two stages. The first, through the seed of the woman and of Abraham, brought hope of resurrection, but the second is the Kingdom of God in its first stage, the thousand-year reign of Christ and the resurrected saints (Rev. 20:6), when mortal men and women still inhabit an earth ruled by the seed.

This promise in Genesis 22:17 is part of the plan that was developed in Jacob's blessing on his sons (49:10,11), which speaks of the sceptre of kingship belonging to the tribe of Judah until Shiloh (Christ) comes. It was, however, in the

promises to King David that the role of the seed as king of Israel and of a worldwide empire was clearly stated, some thousand years before Christ was born.

The seed of David

The New Testament has many references to David, to the seed of David and to the promises to David; for example, Acts 13:22,23. When God calls Jesus His beloved Son (Mt. 3:17) He does no less than call him 'My Son David', for David means 'the beloved'. The promises in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 were given one thousand years before Jesus was born. They speak of a seed, a son of David who would rule forever on David's throne, under whom God's people would at last find rest in the Kingdom of God. The promises had a very limited fulfilment in the reign of Solomon, and the New Testament shows us that the fulfilment would be found in Jesus (Heb. 1:5). The promise of Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1 is a plain statement that Jesus would be that seed of David. The preaching of the gospel in the book of Acts, particularly to Jews, is very much concerned with demonstrating that Jesus is the son of David (for example, 2:22-36).

Even the title that Jesus is given, 'the Christ', is a reminder that he is the anointed King of Israel. The terms of 2 Samuel 7:10 are still future; they require a worldwide Kingdom based on righteousness, with the power to impose absolute justice and equity. It is a description of the seed possessing the gates of his enemies until sin is finally eliminated. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:25,26: "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death".

Conclusion

Confronted with all this evidence, we begin to understand something of what Paul meant when he wrote of Christ: "in him all things consist" (Col. 1:17, RV). Scripture teaches that Jesus was the centre of God's purpose from the very beginning. Only Jesus has achieved the moral and spiritual and, finally, the physical stature that God intended when He and His angels set out to make man in God's image. It is a humbling thought that we who respond to the Word of God have this power, through him and in him, to become the sons and daughters of God (Jno. 1:12).