

The Story of God's Mighty Acts IN SCRIPTURE

The overriding purpose of the Scripture is to guide men to a proper relationship with God. God's gracious salvation is the only way guilty sinners can experience that relationship, and God's gracious salvation is in and through and by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself declared that He was "the way, the truth, and the life," the only way for men to come to God (John 14:6). It follows that if the purpose of Scripture is to guide men to the Lord and if the only way to the Lord is through the redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ, then the revelation of Christ should be the grand and predominant theme of Scripture.

Indeed, it is. All revealed truth in one way or another relates to and is ultimately defined by the central truth of Christ. The Pentateuch, the first five books with all their religious rituals, prepares the way for the Perfect Priest to stand between God and men as the perfect sacrifice for sin. The Historical Books draw attention to the Perfect King, who would come to rule His people and subdue His enemies. The Prophetic Books anticipate the Perfect Prophet, who represents and reveals to man the only true and living God. The Poetical Books put it all together with Christ as the great theme for worship and praise.

Obviously, the New Testament develops this same saving theme. The Gospels, with the narratives concerning the Lord's earthly ministry, introduce the performance of His saving work, the historic foundation of the gospel. Acts records the initial proclamation and dissemination of the message of His saving work. The Epistles explain and expound the nature of His person and work and the implications for personal and church life. The Revelation assures the consummation of all the glorious truths of His person and work. Cert-

ainly seeing Christ is the key to understanding the message of the Bible.

The Scripture both reveals God's gracious plan of salvation in Christ and also records the unfolding of that plan from its first prophetic declaration to its actual achievement in the fullness of time. Because the nature of redemptive truth is complex, God progressively revealed His truth in ways that man could understand. He first gave the foundation and then continued to build upon it as men's capacity to understand increased. Progressive revelation expands, clarifies, and details the truth. Progressive revelation is never from wrong to right or from partial to complete. It is from general to specific, from macroscopic view to microscopic view, from overview to thorough view. The closer the fulfillment of the promise of Christ, the clearer the details about the promise became.

One of the significant ways that God progressively revealed His redemptive plan and unilaterally governed history for the fulfillment of His redemptive purpose was through the covenant. In many ways God's covenant promise of Christ the Redeemer is the unifying theme of the Bible and the central thrust of biblical history. The Edenic, Noachic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants are not different covenants; they are the same covenant that God renewed and enlarged, each time revealing more and more of the essential details until finally the Redeemer came and accomplished the work of redemption.

The covenant promise is a good place to see the development of redemption both in the Bible and in history from the beginning of time. Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised that the Seed of the woman would destroy the serpent. The first sinners received the direct, quite general, but most encouraging

promise that a Saviour for humanity would arise from the human race. Humanity had just been cursed by sin, but Adam and Eve were told that one coming into the human race through the woman would reverse that curse. The sin of Adam spread. When man's sin grew worse and reached the point where it required judgment, God sent the flood to destroy mankind. With the exception of Noah and his family, God eradicated the entire human race. The promise to Adam appeared to be in jeopardy, but God made a covenant with Noah by which He secured and renewed the first promise and revealed more about the coming Redeemer. The Lord declared that He would never again destroy the world by flood, thus guaranteeing the continuation of the human race into which the promised Seed, the Saviour, was to come.

In this progression of gospel revelation, the Lord singled out Noah's son Shem as the progenitor of the specific race into which the Saviour would be born. But once again, sin intensified and earned God's direct intervention. After man rebelled against God at Babel, God scattered and confused the nations. Then He called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, a Semite (a descendant of Shem), and again promised the Seed, adding that the Seed would come into Abraham's line and that He would bless all the people on earth. By repeating that promise to Isaac and Jacob, God identified the specific Abrahamic line through which the worldwide blessing would come. When Jacob blessed his children before he died, he gave a prophecy that narrowed the lineage of Messiah to the specific tribe of the specific Semitic nation of Israel. The prediction revealed not only that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, but that He would be a king. About a thousand years later, God made a

covenant with David that the ideal King would be from his family and that He would rule forever. A long time had passed since the promise of a redeemer was first given, but God had not forgotten His promise and His plan to redeem sinners.

The redemptive history of the Old Testament progressed slowly but always steadily. By the time we reach the end of the Old Testament, we know that the only Redeemer will be a Semitic Man from the family of David from the tribe of Judah from the line of Jacob from the line of Isaac from the line of Abraham. It is not surprising that the message of the Old Testament closes with the prophecy that the “messenger of the covenant” would be coming suddenly (Malachi 3:1).

It is not surprising either that the New Testament begins as it does: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). When Gabriel announced to Mary that she had been chosen as the mother of Messiah, he identified Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to David: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever: and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32-33; see 2 Samuel 7:12-16). When Zacharias opened his mouth in praise to God after the birth of his son, John, he recognized the dawning of the messianic era. Not only did he identify his son as Messiah’s forerunner, but he saw in Christ’s coming a link between the promised salvation associated with David’s throne (Luke 1:69) and God’s holy covenant oath to Abraham (Luke 1:72-73). As the writer of Hebrews enumerates and expounds the many excellencies of Christ, he identifies Jesus as “the mediator of a better covenant” (8:6) and ends his discourse with a reference to the resurrected Christ and the “blood of the everlasting covenant” (13:20).

From the first coming of Christ as the Seed of the woman to the second coming of Christ as the Deliverer of Sion, God has revealed His plan of salvation in covenant terms. By covenant He issued the unconditional and unbreakable promise that Christ would come, and He has entered into a binding agreement with all who will trust and obey that covenant promise. Salvation is sure for all who emulate the faith of Abraham and become the heirs of the promise. ■

Adapted from *Beginning at Moses: A Guide to Finding Christ in the Old Testament* (Greenville, S.C., and Belfast, Northern Ireland: Ambassador-Emerald, 1999).



The Brazen Serpent by Benjamin West
from the Bob Jones University Collection

Dr. Michael Barrett is the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs of the Whitefield College of the Bible, Greenville, South Carolina.

