

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

2 Timothy 3.15-17: ...from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF THE SCRIPTURES?

To make us wise about matters regarding salvation.

The meaning of the Greek word for salvation in the New Testament is to make whole and well.

Salvation is God's plan for making persons who are spiritually ill whole and well. And it is the purpose of the Bible to make this plan known to us.

WHAT THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE IS NOT

1. The purpose of the Bible is not scientific.

John R. W. Stott: This is not to say that the teaching of Scripture and of science are in conflict with one another for, when we keep each to its proper sphere, they are not. ... Nor is it to say that the two spheres never overlap ... for the Bible does contain statements of fact which can be ... scientifically verified.

But the primary purpose of the Bible is to reveal spiritual truths that cannot be discovered by the empirical method of science, and it has little interest in discussing matters that can be.

2. The purpose of the Bible is not literary.

The Bible contains many of the great themes that literature has always addressed. But the purpose of the Bible is not to be great literature. The power of the Bible is in its message not in its literary sophistication or style.

3. The purpose of the Bible is not philosophical.

There is great wisdom in the Bible; in fact, in the Scriptures we find God's wisdom. But it's not meant to be a book of philosophical insights and erudition.

The purpose of the Bible is to reveal matters of salvation.

And that includes the whole sweep of God's purpose to make well and whole humankind and, for that matter, all of creation.

Making known what God has done in the world and what he will he do – that is the primary purpose of the Bible.

WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE CONCERNING SALVATION HISTORY?

Genesis 1-3: God creates the heavens and the earth and the creatures that inhabit these realms, including the pinnacle of his creation – man and woman.

The plan was for Adam and Eve

- (1) to live in a love relationship with God, characterized by faithful service and obedience,
- (2) to live in a love relationship with each other, and
- (3) to rule over and care for the earth as God's representatives (to be his image on earth).

Adam and Eve sinned and broke their relationship with God.

This is dramatized in the book of Genesis with their removal from God's presence as they are put outside of the Garden.

Crosby, Stills, and Nash: We've got to get ourselves back to the garden.

The major story line of the Bible after Genesis 3 (oversimplification): How can humankind become right with God and re-enter the love relationship we were meant to enjoy with him?

Important: The Bible teaches that the human problem is a sin problem: self-centeredness and selfishness beneath which is our rebellion against God's rightful rule in our lives.

"The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart."

After Genesis 3, the story line of the Bible is:

- (1) how can we be forgiven for our sins and
- (2) how can our hearts be changed from sinful to holy.

The struggle between good and evil, and the battle to win the human heart that continues throughout the Bible is hinted at in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3.15: (God to the serpent) And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

Between Genesis 3 and 12, humanity's condition worsens: murder, sexual perversion and blasphemy.

In Genesis 12, God acts to begin salvation history by calling Abraham.

God makes a covenant with Abraham.

The story line of the Bible revolves around a series of covenants that God makes with individuals who represent a people-group.

And God's dealings with these individuals and with the people-groups they represent is how he brings humankind the possibility of entering into a right relationship with himself.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Genesis 12.1-3: The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your

father's household and go to the land I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

LATER, OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COVENANT WERE REVEALED TO ABRAHAM.

Genesis 15.18: On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates ..."

Genesis 15.3-7: Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

THE PROMISES OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

- (1) God will bless Abraham and be his God and the God of his descendants
- (2) God will multiply the descendants of Abraham
- (3) God will give Abraham's descendants a homeland
- (4) God will bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham

The blessing of the peoples of the earth will be done in two ways.

- (1) The descendants of Abraham will take their knowledge of God to others.
- (2) The messiah will come from the lineage of Abraham.

THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The Mosaic covenant did not replace or supplant the Abrahamic covenant. It was supplementary to and more explicit in what God expected out of the Israelites than the Abrahamic covenant.

One difference is that the Mosaic Covenant spelled out in great detail how the Israelites were expected to live.

Exodus 19.3-6: This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Later, Israel is told what the results of obedience to the covenant and disobedience to the covenant will be (see Deuteronomy 28).

Blessings for obedience will include prosperity, protection, and prominence among the

nations of the earth.

Punishment for disobedience will include pestilence, disease, defeat at the hands of their enemies and, if there is no repentance, the ultimate punishment will be removal from the promised land.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

Its primary intent is to establish David's lineage as the rulers of Israel, including the Messiah.

Psalm 89.3-4: You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ⁴"I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.' "

Psalm 132.11-12: The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne – ¹²if your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne forever and ever."

God promises to have a descendant of David rule over Israel forever – if David's descendants will be faithful.

Most are not.

During this Kingdom era the sins of Israel that we find most often are sexual sin, the oppression of the poor, and idolatry and the worship of false gods.

For the most part, Israel fails to keep the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, and finally God brings about the ultimate punishment – the Israelites are taken from their land into exile.

Under the Persian King Cyrus the Israelites were allowed to return to Palestine.

The temple is rebuilt, the law is read, and the people vow to follow it.

Then we have a long period of silence until the coming of Christ.

THE NEW COVENANT

Mark 14.22-24: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." ²³Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant:

Luke 1.31-33: (Gabriel to Mary) You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him **the throne of his father David**, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant

Luke 1.67-68, 72-75: Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: ⁶⁸"Praise be to the Lord ... because he has come and has redeemed his people ... ⁷²to show

mercy to our fathers and **to remember his holy covenant,** ⁷³**the oath he swore to our father Abraham:** ⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

What we see in this covenant as we read through the New Testament is an emphasis on the spiritual aspects of the covenant: God giving us forgiveness of sins, new hearts that love him, and the spiritual blessings of his grace and his peace, and his presence in our lives – and our responding with holiness of heart and life.

Jeremiah 31.31-34: "The time is coming ... when I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ... This is the covenant I will make: I will

put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The Mosaic Covenant with all of its laws was given for two primary reasons.

1. To tell the Israelites how to live lives that pleased God and conformed to his will.
2. To show the Israelites that they could not live lives that pleased God and conformed to his will – in other words, to show the Israelites that they needed a Savior.

Galatians 3.7-14: The real children of Abraham, then, are all those who put their faith in God. ... God promised this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹And so it is: All who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith. ¹⁰But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all these commands that are written in God's Book of the Law." ¹¹Consequently, it is clear that no one can ever be right with God by trying to keep the law. ... ¹²How different from this way of faith is the way of law, which says, "If you wish to find life by obeying the law, you must obey all of its commands." ¹³But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. ... ¹⁴Through the work of Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, and we Christians receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.

Here's the point of this passage.

The law was given to us to remove any illusion that we could make ourselves right with God by good works.

It was given to lead us to understand that we could not save ourselves and to realize that we needed a Savior who would pay the penalty for our sins.

And who now are the children of Abraham who may receive the promises of the covenant?

Not those who keep the law – because no one can.

Not those who are physical descendants of Abraham.

No, the children of Abraham are those who put faith in what God has done for all people in the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

The bottom line of the New Covenant:

Either we can try to save ourselves, or we can trust in God for our salvation.

If we insist on trying to save ourselves by following the law or by any human effort, including good works, we are lost.

But if we put faith in the Savior, he will bear the punishment of our sins, and we can be forgiven and receive a relationship with God.

Good works are important: but they are the results of a redeemed and grateful people, not the means of becoming right with God.

BIG PICTURE SUMMARY

1. Humankind was made to be in fellowship with God.
2. We broke that fellowship through sin.
3. God began salvation history by establishing a covenant people through Abraham.
4. He sent Moses with the Law to show what is required to please him and to show us that we cannot live that way on our own.
5. He promised that the Messiah will come through the lineage of David.
6. He sent Jesus to be the Messiah who did for us what we cannot do – be obedient to the law and pay the penalty for us who are not.
7. The payment for our sins allowed us to be in a right relationship with God and receive his Spirit.
8. And we are instructed how to respond to God's grace and live in keeping with God's will.

The Woodlands United Methodist Church

www.thewoodlandsumc.org