

*The Whole Counsel of God*  
**Study 24**

**FROM CREATION TO CHRIST**

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men,  
the man Christ Jesus . . . .*

*(1Timothy 2.5)*

In our previous study, we moved directly from creation to Christ, passing over the history of the OT. In the present study, we will step into the stream of this history and see how it moves from creation to Christ.

The central concern of the history of the OT is the relationship between God and mankind. This history begins with God being in a relationship with the entire human race and moves to the prophetic vision of one man through whom God's purposes for the world will be realized. The gospel takes up this prophetic vision and announces the one man.

The fact that Jesus Christ is the one and only man has its eternal basis in his divine person. From all eternity, he was the Son of God. God is eternally related in him, and all of God's other relationships are through him. From this it follows that as soon as the one and only Son became human, he became the one and only man. The Son of God became the Son of Man. But, his eternally unique role was not simply imposed on mankind by some divine right. His unique position was also established in human history. All history from creation to Christ moved toward him to give him the place of being the only one in whom God's purposes and mankind's destiny are realized. In this study we will look at how the Bible presents this view of history.

**A. CREATION AND HISTORY**

Creation and history are to be clearly distinguished. Creation is God's work alone, which he completed on the sixth day when he made man. The seventh day of rest seals off the work of creation from the rest of time. After creation, mankind must act and make history.

**1. Setting up history**

While creation and history must be distinguished, they are not to be divorced. In fact, within the creation accounts, the two are integrated. God, in his work of creating the world, both set the stage for mankind to act and defined the key issues to be worked out in history.

**a. Genesis 1: the destiny of history**

When we think of history, we think of events that bring about significant changes and mark off eras. Genesis 1 does not give any vision of this kind of history. However, the account of the creation of mankind in Gen 1.26-27 gives three important facts which form the creational basis of biblical history. They are: 1) the agent of history is man made in the image of God to represent God within the world, 2) the destiny of history is mankind's reign over the whole earth and 3) the created process by which mankind's rule was to be extended is procreation.

The process of multiplying family units and progressively colonizing the earth involves time, but in itself this does not make significant history. For the making of history, we must turn to the second creation account.

## **b. Genesis 2 and 3: the process of history**

In the second creation account, we have no vision of the world as a whole and no divine decree setting mankind's goal in creation. Rather, a close up view is given of the creation of Adam and the way God built his immediate environment around him. In this account we are shown how the process of history was set up and activated.

### *i. Adam's role and impact*

God placed Adam in the Garden and gave him the charge to guard it, and this indicated that Adam's created world was vulnerable and dependent on him. Then God gave Adam the first law that defined sin, which made sin a possibility in the world. By the two trees in the middle of the Garden, God set before Adam life and death. It was not just that the Garden had to be guarded; man's own created state was in the balance. All of this put before Adam the possibility that his action could change things. His role was not simply to perpetuate the blessed state of creation, multiply and extend the borders of the Garden to fill the whole earth. His action was to be more determining than that.

Genesis 3 gives the account of how mankind's historical role was activated. The threat suggested by the charge to guard the Garden was introduced by the serpent. Through the entrance of Satan, the earth became the arena for the conflict between God and his archenemy, and this war was waged over mankind. The law was broken, sin entered the world, and through sin death. God stepped in as judge and dedicated the rest of history to deal with the great issues introduced by sin.

### *ii. The change brought about by sin*

A comparison between the decrees of Gen 1.28 and 3.15 shows how things changed. The creator's decree to procreate and fill the earth set up mankind to fulfil its mandate through time. After the fall, God began here again, but with a significant difference. Procreation now had to serve the creator's defeat of his archenemy. The seed of the woman no longer functioned primarily to fill and subdue the earth but to engage in the life and death struggle with the serpent and to be used by God to deal the mortal blow to the source of evil. The mandate to rule the world was absorbed with the task of defeating Satan and bringing about salvation from sin. Before there can be kingdom, i.e., the reign, there must be combat and conquest.

The process of history must deal with the great issues introduced in Genesis 2 and activated in Genesis 3. The goal of history, as set in Genesis 1, continues to be mankind's reign over creation. However, since this must be achieved by God's defeat of Satan through mankind, the reign of mankind must become the reign of God.

## **2. The gospel and the historical themes set in creation**

The gospel takes up the agenda for history set in creation. We see the fulfillment of this agenda in the two overarching themes of the gospel. First, mankind's destiny to reign is taken up in the theme of the kingdom of God. Second, the concerns brought about by Adam's action, namely sin, life and death, and the defeat of Satan are addressed in the theme of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This second theme, in turn, opens up a view of the kingdom which is eternal.

**a. The good news of the kingdom**

Jesus preached the gospel as the good news of the kingdom of God. In Acts, the kingdom of God is the overall subject of the gospel preached by the apostles. That this is the case is seen in the way the theme of the kingdom encloses the entire book of Acts. The narrative begins with the risen Lord speaking to the apostles about the kingdom of God (1.2) and closes with the ongoing proclamation of the kingdom of God (28.31). This theme of kingdom rings throughout the apostles' messages. In his first message, Peter proclaimed the risen Jesus as the son of David whom God exalted to his right hand where he is seated, i.e., enthroned, as the Lord (2.32-36). Paul proclaimed Jesus to the Jews of the Diaspora as the son of David in whom the Davidic covenant is fulfilled (13.21-36). To the Gentiles, the risen Lord was proclaimed as the judge of the whole world (10.42; 17.31), and in the OT the king was the chief judge in the nation.

**b. An eternal kingdom through triumph and deliverance**

The gospel picks up the theme of kingdom in the OT and takes it beyond the reign of mankind on the earth to the reign of God in resurrection life. Jesus set forth this view of the coming kingdom in Lk 19.11-27. The Jewish people who had a this-worldly view of the kingdom expected the rule of God to appear when Jesus entered Jerusalem. In contrast to this, Jesus pointed out that he would leave this world to receive his kingdom and then bring this kingdom back to earth. The point the parable makes for those who know the gospel is clear: Jesus entered his kingdom through his death, resurrection and ascension. This is not some geo-political kingdom on earth. It is the reign of God in victory over death. It is the eternal kingdom. Paul confirmed this view when he said that "...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable," (1Cor 15.50). In 1Cor 15.23-28 the apostle pointed out that the risen Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet, and the last enemy is death. Earlier we noticed that the destiny to reign over the earth had to be realized through the defeat of God's enemy, Satan. The view of the kingdom in the gospel is true to this.

**c. The subject and substance of the gospel**

The two themes we are tracing give us the subject and substance of the gospel: the subject being the kingdom of God and the substance being the death and resurrection of Jesus through which people are delivered from the power of Satan and receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

**B. SALVATION HISTORY**

The close connection between creation and history, which we are observing, deepens our view of creation. Creation is commonly understood in terms of the universe of space: the heavens and the earth and all that fills them (Gen 2.1). But, in creating the world of space, God created time. Genesis 1 presents two types of time. On the fourth day, God created the cyclical time of days, years and seasons, and this kind of time is simply part of the physical world (1.14-19). But, there is another kind of time in Genesis 1. This is not the cycles built into creation but the time that is the product of God's activity in creating. God acted in stages that moved toward completion, and this brought about the measure of time in the creational process. The time caused by God's work was not cyclical. It moved from beginning to end. It was linear time. When we think of history, we think of this kind of linear time brought about by significant actions and events that mark off periods. The second account introduces this kind of time issuing out of creation, that is, historical time.

The second creation narrative begins with these words, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven" (Gen 2.4). The opening phrase, "These are the generations," is a standard formula in Genesis to introduce the history that issued forth from the head of a family. By using this formula to introduce the second account, the author of Genesis is signalling that he is now narrating the beginning of the history that came out of creation.

The first human act to make history was the fall, and the rest of history took place in the fallen world. However, history is not the story of mankind in the treadmill of defeat. God stepped in after Adam and Eve had fallen and set history on its course toward salvation.

## **1. The conditions of salvation history**

### **a. Salvation history: God takes over**

Fallen mankind cannot steer the course of history toward salvation. This is sealed in the gospel which rules out any role for mankind in saving itself and shows that salvation is God's work according to his own purpose. We already see this fact being established at the outset of salvation history. Through the knowledge they attained, Adam and Eve did not find their way back to their point of departure from God and their created state. Rather than recalling God's word, they only looked at themselves and focused on their shame. When God stepped into the scene, they did not run to God for help. They ran away to hide, and when confronted by God they evaded the issue. The history of mankind in sin is the story of inventions to cover up, of flight from God and of evasions. Left to fallen mankind, history would be the story of a continuous falling. But, God did not leave matters in the hands of mankind. He stepped in as judge and ordained the course of history. His first decree touching mankind began with these words, "I will put..." (Gen 3.15). With these words God declared that he would work in mankind to carry out his hostility against Satan and bring about the defeat of the archenemy. This commitment of God to carry out his work in mankind turned the story of mankind in the fallen world into salvation history.

### **b. The first condition: God's prior decrees are unalterable**

The conditions that control this history are rooted in the ways and character of God, and these are set in the divine work of creation. The first great revelation of God in creation is summed up in Ps 33.9: "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." In Genesis 1 God is revealed as the one whose word is a decree that comes to pass. This points us to the great crisis that Satan introduced into the world. God decreed that mankind be fruitful and rule the earth. He also decreed death for sin. By drawing mankind into sin, Satan seemed to win a sure victory over God. If God carried out the sentence of death, the decrees of Gen 1.26-28 would be defeated. But, if he cancelled the sentence of the law in order to keep his creational decree, his law would fail. In either case, God's word would have failed. Through this dilemma God moved to fulfil every word he uttered.

### **c. The second condition: God's commitment to being represented in creation by man**

The second condition for God's ways in history is fixed in the relationship that God established with mankind. In Genesis 1 God created man in his image and through this committed himself to being represented within creation by man. In Genesis 2 and 3 God is seen acting within his creation, but he does so only in relation to Adam. The account opens with God creating Adam in a personal and intimate relationship with himself, and then from within this relationship he created Adam's world around him. For our study on God's role in history, the point we are making is important. God only stepped into time through his personal relationship with Adam, and this fact marks the entire revelation of God. God reveals nothing of himself in scripture but what he does in relation to people and realizes through them.

God's word and work are irrevocable, and this means that through all human failures history must proceed forward under the direction of God. God must carry out his own purposes, but he must do so through mankind.

## **2. The great funnel of salvation history**

The OT presents a great human funnel that moves from the entire human race to one man.

**a. God in relation to the human race as a whole**

In Genesis 1 to 11 the whole race is related to God under the creator's decrees to rule and multiply. In this period of biblical history, we see a significant shift in the way God judged human sin.

In the period from Adam to Noah, the focus was on mankind's relationship with the ground. When Adam sinned, God judged him by cursing the ground because of him. God judged Cain by decreeing that the ground would no longer yield its strength to him (Gen 4.12). The same principle of judgment is seen in the flood, but on a grander scale. When the sin of the whole race reached a climax (and spread over the whole earth due the growth of the race, 6.1), God judged mankind by flooding the whole earth, which, in effect, rolled back the creation of the earth to Day 2 when all was under water. When Noah came out of the Ark, God renewed the creational decrees in a covenant. The flood showed that sin threatened the stability of creation. By the covenant, God secured the stability of the created order, and this set the stage for continuous historical development.

We see the effect of the Noachic covenant in the way sin was judged after the flood. When Cain committed murder and feared that another would take his life, God protected his life and only cursed him from the ground. But, in the Noachic covenant, God ordained that the judgment for murder be carried out against the person who committed the murder (Gen 9.5-6). Noah's curse in response to the sin of Ham did not fall on the earth but was to be worked out in the history of Ham's descendents through Canaan (Gen 9.25-27). We see this same principle in the judgment on the building of the Tower of Babel. God judged the people by confusing their tongues and dispersing them to become the nations of the world. With creation stabilized, sin is **now** judged in the lives and history of the people.

**b. God in relation to one nation**

Noah did not only curse Canaan but also pronounced a blessing on Shem and Japheth, which blessing pointed to a shift in the way God would relate to the world. Up to this point, God related directly to the whole world. But, in Noah's blessing he was called the God of Shem, and Japheth was given the blessing of dwelling in the tents of Shem (Gen 9.26-27). The fact that God would be identified with the head of a family and bless through the history of that family comes into full light with the call of Abraham, a descendent of Shem.

At the building of Babel, the race was broken up and scattered as tribal-linguistic groups. God did not identify with any of the families that came out of Babel but took his place in the world of nations by calling Abraham to make him a great nation through which he would relate to all the families of the earth (Gen 12.1-3). Abraham's seed became a tribe, and at Mt Sinai God offered this tribal family the status of a kingdom of priests and holy a nation (Ex 19.5-6). God's purpose for mankind was thus to be realized through this one nation which would reign (as a kingdom) by virtue of their position (as priests) between God and the nations.

**c. God in relation to one house**

At Mt Sinai God came down to dwell in the midst of his people and lead them into the Promised Land, and thus the creator of the universe took his place fully among the nations. In the Promised Land, God related to Israel as a whole, and when they were in need of deliverance he raised up judges for them. But, when the people insisted on having a king set over them, God took this as their rejection of him (1Sam 8.7). God had provided a judge in Samuel who met their needs for leadership, but the people rejected this provision of God and demanded a king.

The difference between a judge and king was significant. A judge was directly raised up by God's Spirit, and when he died the people were once again left as a nation under God and dependent on him for their stability and deliverance. A king changed all of this. With a king came a dynasty that provided for the continuous succession of kings, and with the setting up of the dynasty the direct relationship between God and his people was transferred over to the king. Under the Mosaic covenant, Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, but by demanding a king the nation gave up the role of ruling to the royal house. The change that took place is reflected in the way the story of Israel is told. In the Book of Judges, the story is about God and the people, but under the kings it is the story of kings. All that mattered for the history of Israel was the king's relationship with God.

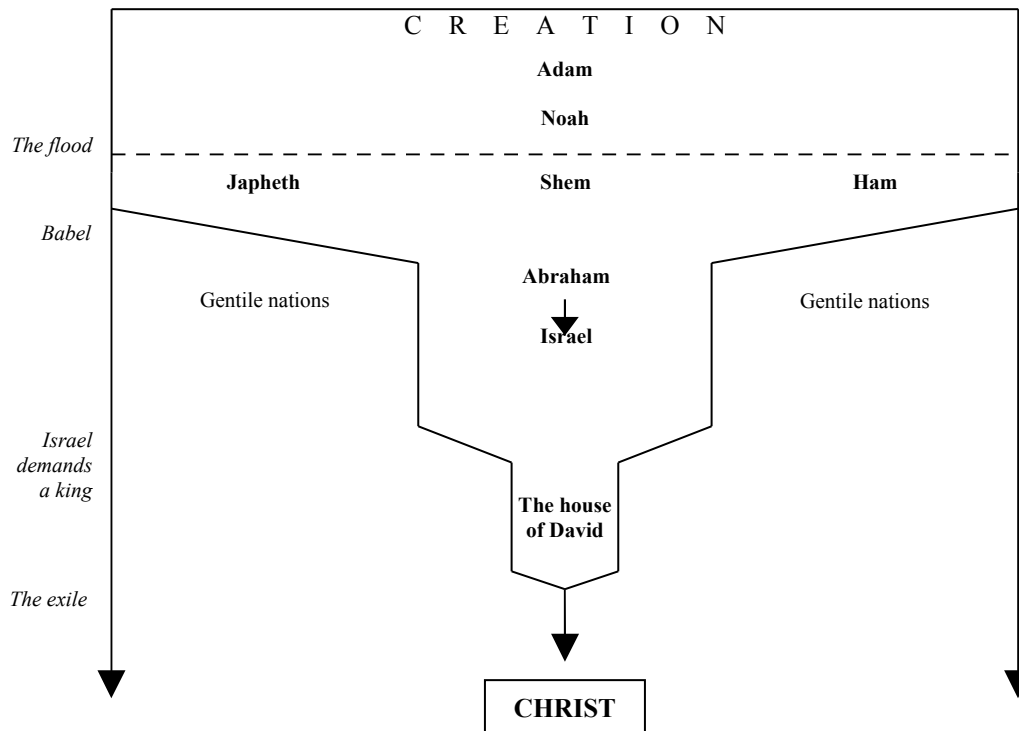
God chose David and made a covenant that established his house. The royal Psalms work out the cosmic significance of the Davidic king. He represented the rule of God on earth, and this made him the representative of God to the whole world. This vision of the universal reign of the son of David is the basis for the messianic Psalms that present the LORD's Anointed, the Messiah, in his worldwide reign (Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89 and 110).

**d. God in relation to one man**

The house of David fell into deep sin and was cut off under God's judgment. This brought about a spiritual crisis of the greatest proportions. All was lost from the human point of view. The succession of kings was terminated, but the whole relationship between God and the world hung on this throne. Psalm 89 presents the anguish and the deep dilemma involved in this fall.

The fall of the dynasty removed the last possibility of realizing the kingdom goal of mankind through normal procreation. The Davidic covenant did not allow for any new family to be raised up to carry on the realization of God's authority on earth. There was only one way left open, which was pointed out by the prophets. The Messiah, the son of David yet to be born would establish his eternal reign, and thus the succession of kings in the house of David would be replaced by the everlasting kingdom of the Messiah.

The historical development we have traced is one in which God progressively narrowed down his relationship with mankind. God began with the whole race in Adam and then again in Noah. After Noah, a process of elimination began in which God's relation to the world went from the whole race to Israel, and from Israel to the house David until at last the hope of the world rested in one man, yet to be born. This is the great funnel that moves from all to one.



**The great funnel of salvation history**

### 3. Covenantal history

At the key transitional points in the history we have been reviewing, God made covenants which played an important role in salvation history.

#### a. The covenants: binding relationships

Through the covenant, God bound himself and the people together in a relationship and defined the obligations of the relationship. The human party had no role in determining what the relationship and its terms were to be. God alone defined the relationship and its obligations, and the people had to accept the covenant as given by God. The covenant could not be revoked, and this gave covenantal history its stability and forward direction.

There are two kinds of covenants: legal and promissory. In Romans and Galatians, Paul sets these two types of covenant in contrast. The law as a covenant (i.e., defining the human relationship with God) imposes the duty of the relationship on mankind. In a covenant of promise God who makes the promise takes on the duty in the relationship, and this puts people in the position of faith.

#### b. The covenant made in creation: the first law as a covenant

The word covenant first appears in scripture in God's promise to Noah in Gen 6.18. However, Hosea 6.7 points to an earlier covenant. In this prophetic scripture, God says, "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant." Israel broke the covenant of the law like Adam. Paul in Rom 5.14 confirms this link between transgression of the law and Adam's sin. The first covenant was made in the Garden when God gave Adam the first law. This covenant of law is rooted in creation, and its principle is built into human existence. Paul pointed to this reality in Rom 2.15 when he wrote that the Gentiles who do not have the Law of Moses nonetheless "show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them." The first covenant made in creation sets all human behaviour under the principle that sin is forbidden and must be judged, and this forms the background of biblical history.

#### c. The promissory covenants

With the covenant made with Noah, God introduced the second type of covenant: the promissory covenant.

##### i. *The Noachic covenant*

The covenant with Noah renewed the decrees of creation, and the connection made between this promissory covenant and creation is significant. In creation God acted of himself, and in his promises he acts with this same self-determination. The Noachic covenant shows the need for this. God proceeded to make this covenant on the basis of the observation (demonstrated through the prevalence of sin that led to the flood) that the intention of the human heart is evil from youth (Gen 8.21). If God always judged human sin by striking creation, creation would ever have to be undone. Through the Noachic covenant, God committed himself to maintaining the created order so that he could pursue his purposes through history.

##### ii. *The Abrahamic covenant*

God made two other important promissory covenants that controlled the course of history. The first was the covenant with Abraham and his descendents. This promissory covenant with a family must be understood against the backdrop of the Tower of Babel. At Babel all the people departed from God and all families were banished from him and given over to idolatry. In the Abrahamic covenant, God committed himself not to treat the family that descended from Abraham in the way he treated all other families of the earth. Thus God secured a seed and a nation in the world of nations through which he would work out his purposes for the world.

*iii. The Davidic covenant*

The other great promissory covenant was made with David. This covenant dealt with the need for the people of God to have a king. Israel's history in the time of the judges and the people's demand for a king showed that the people needed a human representative of God to exercise the authority of God over them and provide deliverance and justice. God took this need up, committed to providing for it, and this provided the link to the person of Christ, the LORD's Anointed.

As was the case with the covenants made with Noah and Abraham, the Davidic covenant was set against the background of God's unsparing judgment on sin. God said to David concerning his son, "When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. "Your throne shall be established forever" (1Sam 7.14-16). God showed his unsparing judgment against a disobedient king by cutting off the house of Saul. If God treated the son of David this way, the house of David would be cut off. By making the covenant with David, God ensured that his purposes would continue through David's line.

*iv. Securing the continuation of salvation history*

The three great promissory covenants that we have reviewed show that God established his relationship with people in the context of human sin and divine judgment, and by means of covenants he secured the continuation of salvation history. The Noachic covenant stabilized creation for history to run its course. The Abrahamic covenant secured a people for God through which God could carry out his purpose in the world of nations. The Davidic covenant was God's commitment to provide the one man, the king, to rule and deliver his people.

**d. The Law of Moses**

Besides the promissory covenants, there is the important covenant of law which God made with Israel at Mt Sinai. This covenant brought forward the principle of law established in the Garden of Eden and gave it a role in salvation history. It pressed the point that mankind cannot enter the fulfilment of the promise without sin being exposed and judged. The apostle Paul pointed out the law's function in giving the knowledge of sin (Rom 3.19-20) and bringing in the curse (Gal 3.10) and causing wrath (Rom 4.15). The law was designed to bring the world under the curse of the law and so lock up all for faith in Christ that God might fulfill the promise as a pure promise (Gal 3.22-24). But, the law's function is not confined to this negative role of imprisoning people. It also put down the demand that for God to fulfil his purpose for mankind, he must deal with sin and create a holy people.

**e. The new covenant**

At the end of Israel's history in the land under the kings, the failure of the Mosaic covenant was declared and a new covenant promised (Jer 31.31-34). In this covenant, God would meet the two needs pressed by the Mosaic covenant. He would write the law on people's hearts, and he would forgive all their sins. Both of these needs were fulfilled by Jesus Christ who died that we might be forgiven (Hebrews 8 to 10) and gave the Spirit so that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us (Rom 8.4).

The new covenant is a promissory covenant in that God committed himself to carrying out its terms. But, this promise is different from other promissory covenants in that it fulfills the demands of the law. That means that in carrying out his obligation in this covenant God had to take up the human side of the relationship and secure the fulfilment of the human obligation. God thus took up both sides of the relationship, and he did this through Jesus Christ who as the Son of God holds God's relationship to mankind and as the Son of Man holds mankind's relationship with God.

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The covenantal history of the OT provides the backbone of salvation history. God ever was true to his word. Just as he created order out of chaos by his word in Genesis 1, he fixed the order of his relationship with mankind by his covenantal word. Once a covenant was made, God could not reverse his ways and return to the past. The covenants only allowed for history to move forward. This meant that the human race could not be left on a treadmill of sin and judgment with repeated promises that would fail because of sin and judgment. Salvation history is not cyclical but linear.

The covenantal history also meets the condition set in creation that God would carry out his work within the world through mankind. God by means of covenant yoked himself to people to work out the deep issues in his relationship with mankind, and at last he secured his relationship through the one man, Jesus Christ.