

Chapter 2

The Scriptures Reveal God's Plan

Objectives: By the conclusion of this chapter, we will recognize the focus of God's activity and we will understand the reason we have the Bible.

An Important, Often Unrecognized, Theme in Scripture

Who is the central figure to whom all Scripture points?

"Ah," you say, "this is a foolish question. The obvious answer is, of course, Jesus Christ."

Yes, I understand why this would be your answer. After all, didn't we discuss in chapter one the fact that "the mystery of His (the Father's) will" is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ"? And didn't we discover that there is information in all parts of the Old Testament about Christ? Yes, Christ is the central figure to whom all Scripture points. Yes, I agree with you, but not completely, because....

There is another focus in the study of Scripture which is more basic and essential to our theological understanding — God's concern for mankind. It was this concern which caused the Father to send the Son into the world to be its Redeemer. It was the Son who laid aside His heavenly glories to become a man in order to be mankind's Saviour. It was the Spirit who was sent into the lives of believers in order that God's life could be resident in mankind. In all of the actions of the members of the Godhead we recognize that the *end or focus* of all God's purposes and plans is — mankind!

Christ Accomplished the Purposes of God on Behalf of Humanity

Christ was the *means or facilitator* who made our relationship with the Godhead possible. He was the One who created mankind ("For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by Him and for Him," Colossians 1:16). He was the One who left the glories of heaven in order to identify with our humanity. He "made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man," (Philippians 2:7-8). He was the One who suffered and died on the cross to atone for our sins and to establish the way of a restored relationship with God. "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior, but now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation," (Colossians 1:19-22).

Christ “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” He was the One who facilitated our spiritual reconnection with God. He was the mediator who stood between God and mankind. “For there is ... one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men,” (I Timothy 2:5-6).

Another Important, Often Unrecognized, Theme in Scripture

Let’s move on to a second important question. How much of Scripture has a missionary focus? Would you be surprised if I stated that there are only four chapters in Scripture which do not have either an explicit or implicit missionary emphasis?

The Climax of Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 is the Creation of Mankind

Two of those chapters are at the beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapters 1 & 2. In these chapters we read that God created the universe and then concentrated His attention on one small planet of that universe. He systemically and carefully prepared the earth for human habitation. The high point of the creative process is described in Genesis 1:26-27 when God said “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Everything that God made was very good.

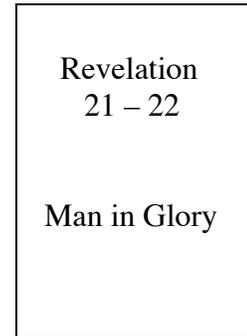
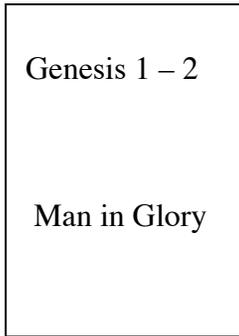
The Magnificence of Mankind in Genesis 1 and 2

Chapter two of Genesis provides some additional details about the living conditions of Adam and Eve. They were in a perfect environment. Everything was exactly like God wanted it to be. Adam and Eve had a close personal relationship with their Creator and LORD. There was no shame or guilt because they were holy and pure. We can say that mankind was dwelling in the glory that God intended for mankind.

The Magnificence of Mankind at the End of the Age

There are two more chapters in Scripture which do not have a missionary focus. These chapters are at the end of the Bible, Revelation 21-22. These chapters describe “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” The characteristics of the new heaven and earth are remarkable. There are no more tears in the eyes of the people, there is “no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” In other words, all the consequences of sin and separation from God are ended. Members of the human race are once again in close personal fellowship with the LORD God. Nothing impure and contaminated by sin exists in the presence of the holy God. Mankind is fully restored to the glory and relationship which existed in the Garden in Eden.

We can diagram these four chapters in this way:



The emphasis of all the other chapters of Scripture.

In Genesis chapter 3 the circumstances, unfortunately, changed dramatically and tragically. The disobedience of Adam and Eve caused their fall from their position of perfection and glory. They were no longer qualified to be in the presence of their holy Creator God. They were afraid and filled with shame. Their perfect world became filled with pain and hard labor. They were no longer the innocent and perfect spiritual beings that God created. They had lost the glory that God had originally given to them.

From that point in time people were spiritually helpless creatures. They maintained physical life only because of the mercy of God. He covered their nakedness with animal skins. He banished them from the Garden of Eden so that they could not eat of the tree of life and live forever in their desperate condition. He made a promise that the offspring of the woman would some day crush the head of the tempter.

Immediately after the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the LORD God implemented a plan whereby His fallen human creation could be brought back into fellowship with Himself. This plan is described in a systematic and sequential way throughout the Scriptures. All the chapters from Genesis 3 until the end of Revelation 20 is a history record of what God has done for fallen humanity.

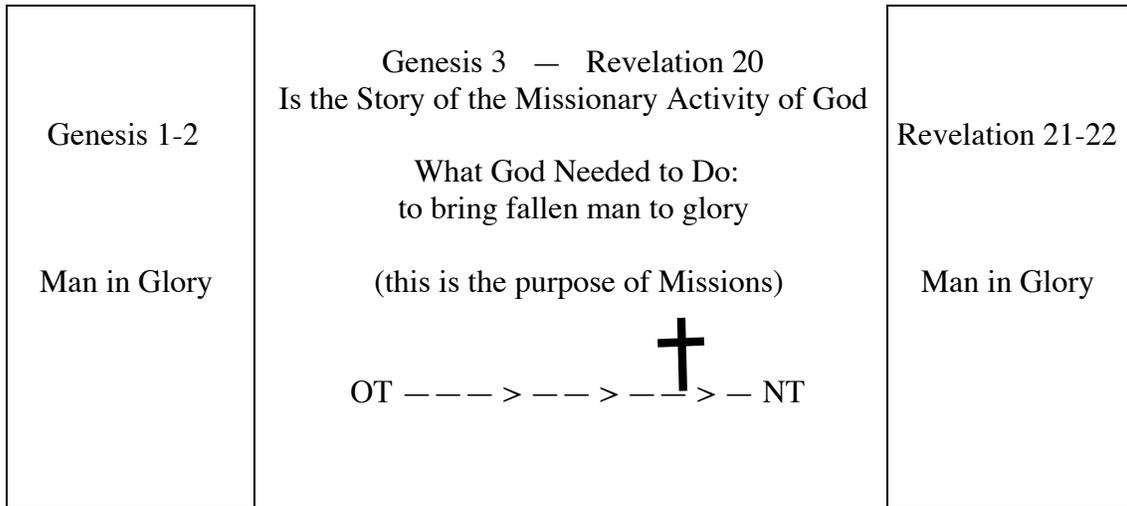
Throughout Human History God Has Been Reaching Out to Fallen Humans

In Genesis chapter 3 God searched for Adam and Eve who were hiding among the trees in the Garden. Throughout history God has been searching for and appealing to individuals who are spiritually lost. If God had not taken the initiative, and had not persistently and patiently appealed to individuals throughout human history, people would have been without hope in the world. Fortunately, God is a God of mercy and grace. The Father loved the world so much that He sent His Son into the world to be its Redeemer. Jesus said of Himself, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost.”

We can describe God as a “missionary God.” A missionary goes to people who are separated from God and lost. The missionary presents the Good News about Jesus Christ to these people in order that they may be reconciled to God. This is what God Himself has been doing since Genesis 3. The missionary follows the example of God Himself.

We can illustrate the missionary activity of God this way:

The Scriptures from Genesis 3 — Revelation 20
Is a Record of God's Activity in Restoring
People to Their Intended Glory



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Christ Revealed in Law, Prophets, Psalms, and New Testament:
He was the Facilitator of God’s Missionary Activity

Missions Outreach is the Most Essential Part of the Character and Purposes of God

What we have been explaining is not just “missions” but an important part of the mystery of God’s eternal purposes. There are numerous other verses which reinforce this description:

John 3:16 “God so loved the world that He gave.....”

I John 2:2 Jesus “is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world — not only ours.”

I Tim. 2:3-6 God “wants all men to be saved “.....”, “there is one ... mediator between God and all mankind” (a “mediator” is a “facilitator”), ----- “Christ Jesus ... gave Himself as a ransom for all men.” (Note the three references to “all” in these verses!)

Matt. 24:14 “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.”

Rev. 5:9 “You are worthy ... because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

God’s Purpose is to Restore Sinful People to Their Pre-Fall Position

From these and other verses we can see that God’s purpose was to restore people to the position originally intended at the time of creation. Mankind will be returned to this position in Revelation 21-22. Christ is the means by which restoration is accomplished. The point about Christ as means is brought out in I Peter 1:18-20 “Christ ... was chosen before the foundation of the world” to be the sacrificial Lamb to redeem people. In other words, while Christ is the central figure of Scripture, and even though God’s purposes are worked out through Christ, God’s plan itself focuses on mankind, and the spiritual needs of all people.

The Bible is a History Book of God’s Missionary Activity

The story of God accomplishing His plan is the story of the entire Bible. The entire Bible from beginning to end is concerned with the salvation of mankind. This is what missions is all about. Remember Luke 24: “repentance and forgiveness will be preached to all nations”.

The Bible is a record of God’s activity on behalf of mankind. Between Genesis 3 and Revelation 21, everything God did was missionary outreach activity. God acted, and a record was made of what happened. God's redemptive mission is the basis for the entire Biblical revelation! If God had not purposed to redeem mankind, there would have been no need for Him to reveal Himself through the Biblical record. We have a Bible because God wanted us to have a record of His outreach efforts to mankind. Hence, we can make the statement that missions is the basis of the Bible.

The Bible is a Unique Book Because God is a Unique God

The Scriptures of other religions describe man’s search for God. The Bible describes God’s search for man. This is one of the significant differences between the Bible and other religious writings.

In the next chapter we will examine a passage of Scripture which will reinforce this theme of God’s activity.