

Session Two

God Speaks to Us

The Purpose and Story of the Bible

The Purpose of the Bible

The purpose of the Bible is **to reveal God's love** and His perfect **plan** for our salvation from sin and death to all people and to teach us how to live as Christ-followers. In other words, God's purpose is **to make clear to all people** the fact that they are sinners in need of salvation and that God Himself has provided the means for them to be saved from sin and reconciled to Him. God did this through a series of covenants with spiritually minded people who were able to understand.

The Process by which we have received God's revelation of himself, the Bible

Since the Bible is the revelation of God, from God, it will be good to follow that process from the beginning of time to the present. The Bible tells us that God, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1) out of nothing. The universe came into existence by the power of the Word of God. *"God said . . ."* To speak a word is to give expression to thought. In the New Testament Jesus is described as "the Word," the expression of the thought of God.

Scientists speak of the "Big Bang," the moment all the elements of the universe exploded from one point of origin. Of course, no one was present when that happened, but the scientific evidence points to a specific moment in time. Scientists insist that there must have been a tight wad of material substance which scattered at the moment of the Big Bang, but they cannot specify where the material came from. The Bible tells us that God Himself created it by the power of His mind and total personality including the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus, the Word, the expression of the mind of God, the Father. This process involves a series of covenants/agreements between God and His people by which He made promises and then executed circumstances to bring those promises to reality. These promises and their fulfillment are told in a series of stories which are recorded in the Bible as follows:

The Story of the Bible – A series of covenants

God is a moral Being. He created the world for moral people with consciences capable of discerning right from wrong. He provided everything they needed. God placed them in the Garden of Eden and invited them to enjoy it all “except for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (the morality tree). After being deceived by Satan, both Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s direct prohibition concerning eating the fruit of the morality tree. As a result, they began slowly to die physically but they died spiritually the moment they sinned by disobeying God’s direct command. Just as physical death means the separation of the spirit from the body, so also spiritual death means the separation of our spirits from God’s Spirit.

People became worse and worse because of their immoral sin nature. Cain murdered his brother, Abel. Violence and wickedness became common, so the Lord God decided to destroy all those on the earth with the exception of Noah and his family. He instructed them to build a big boat in which to take refuge when the floods came and destroyed the world. Only Noah and his family and the animals with them in the boat were saved.

People began to multiply again in the world, but their immoral hearts were not changed. Sin and violence and moral degradation continued. Then God chose another man through whom to create a race of people devoted to Him. That man was Abraham.

(Note: In the following series of covenants each is conditioned on **faith and obedience.**)

- A. **God’s covenant with Abraham** (Gen. 12:1-3, 15:1-21, 17:1-21) (A chosen family)
1. Gen. 12:1-3 gives the four basic elements of the covenant:
 - a. “I will make you a great nation.”
 - b. “I will bless you and make your name great.”
 - c. “You will be a blessing.”
 - d. “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”
 2. This covenant was confirmed (Gen. 15) with a solemn ceremony. Gen. 15:6 is a key verse: Abraham *believed in the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness*. Abraham’s faith made a right relationship with God possible. (See also Rom. 4:1-3 and Gal. 3:6-29.)
 3. The covenant here seems to be unconditional; but see Gen. 17:1-2, 9; 18:19; 22:15-18; and 26:1-6. In each of these verses the condition of obedience to God’s will is either directly stated or implied. I am printing them here for clarity on this key point (please also see James 2:21-23 on the need for both faith AND obedience):

Genesis 17:1-2 (ESV)

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly . . . ⁹ And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

Genesis 18:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

Genesis 22:15-18 (ESV)

¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

Genesis 26:1-5 (ESV) (The covenant is re-confirmed to Isaac.)

¹ Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ² And the LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

4. So, the covenant was again confirmed (Gen. 17) and the sign of circumcision was given. God promised to give a son to Abraham and Sarah when they were 89 and 99 years old! God’s covenant promises were to be passed on through Isaac, the son of promise. All this happened just as God said it would.

B. God's Covenant with Moses and the people of God (Ex.19:1-6; 20:1-17; 34:10-28)

(A chosen people with a plan for worship and right living)

1. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the Patriarchs) became very numerous. They endured about 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Then God sent the ten plagues on the Egyptians and delivered (saved) His people from slavery and brought them to the promised land (Canaan). Soon after they left Egypt they came to Mt. Sinai (Horeb) where God had first spoken to Moses about delivering His people from Egypt (Ex. 3:1-12). It was there that God gave them the ten commandments and other instructions about living as His holy people (set apart for God; moral; different).
2. God's purpose was for them to be "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Ex.19:6). The work of a priest is to speak to God (intercede) for the people. As a kingdom of priests, they were to intercede for all the other peoples of the earth and teach them the way of the Lord. A "holy nation" means a nation set apart for God and therefore different. They were to be different both in their way of living and in their worship. They were chosen by God for service, not for privileges, but they failed to keep the covenant and therefore suffered the consequences (Deut. 28-29) just as God had predicted.

C. God's covenant with David (II Sam. 7:1-17) (A chosen dynasty in a chosen kingdom)

1. God's people conquered the land of Canaan and settled there. Eventually they asked for a king to rule over them instead of depending on God's guidance through judges and prophets. When David became king he wanted to build a temple which would be the center for worship for all the tribes of Israel. God did not allow him to do that but promised instead that He would build "a house" (a line of kings, all descended from David) which would rule over God's people forever. However, this covenant, like those with Abraham and Moses, was conditioned on the obedience of the descendants of David. When they failed to worship God and worshiped idols, they lost God's blessing and the kingdom came to an end in 586 B.C. Moses had predicted this (Deut. 29:18-28).
 - a. This promise appears to be unconditional in this passage
 - b. But the following scriptures, in which David quotes God's promise, include conditions: I Kings 2:4; 6:11-13; 8:25, 61; 11:29-39; II Kings 17:7-23, especially v. 20)
2. The only way God's covenant with David could be fulfilled was in a spiritual sense. Isaiah predicted the coming of a "*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace*" who would reign on the throne of His father,

David forever (Is. 9:6-7). This prophecy, of course, was fulfilled in Jesus, our Savior, our Lord, and our spiritual King. (See Luke 2:30-33)

D. God's covenant with us! (The New Covenant, or New Testament) (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:28; Luke 1:72-75) (A new chosen people in a new kingdom)

1. This is the fulfillment of all of God's previous covenants. The others failed because the people involved failed to obey God's condition - faith and obedience.
2. The covenant with Abraham is fulfilled in us who are people of faith as Abraham was (Rom. 4:1-3; Gal. 3:16, 23-29).
3. The covenant with Moses is fulfilled in us because we are the new people of God, not saved by keeping the Law but keeping the spiritual and moral law **because we *are* saved** (Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:17-26)! Our old sinful nature is not capable of living according to God's high standards (Matt. chapters 5-7). Only by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us are we able to live a life pleasing to God, loving Him above all and loving our neighbors as ourselves. (Matt. 22:37-40)
4. God's covenant with David is fulfilled in us because we are citizens of the Kingdom of God and Jesus is our King! Physically He was descended from David (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; Rom. 1:1-3) but spiritually He was (and is) the eternal Son of God (Rom. 1:4), the second person of the Trinity, the agent of creation (John 1:1-5, 14-18; Col. 1:15-17). He is the King of kings and Lord of lords! Hallelujah (1Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14, 19:16)! Some day He will return with power and rule with righteousness forever and ever (Matt. 25:31; Ps. 9:8, 72:2, 96:13, 98:9; Is. 11:4)!