

Formation School – Track 1; term 1; Session 5

Chronological Bible overview – session four

The Mission Accomplished (Jesus, the Spirit & the New Creation) (Matt – Revelation)

I wonder if you've ever stood on a bridge and looked down at a river flowing through a tight gorge after a period of heavy rain.

All the swollen streams and tributaries from higher up the river keep pushing the water down in huge volumes until all of it converges at the narrow point of the gorge.

You look down and it's enormously impressive.

All of the power of the river is concentrated into that one, deafening, white rush of the water beneath you in the gorge.

Well, as we come to the opening of the NT in our Bible Overview we've reached something rather like that river gorge.

As C.S. Lewis reflects: "The whole thing narrows and narrows, until it comes down to a little point, small as the point of a spear – a Jewish girl and her prayers."

The whole flow of the Bible's great story line and plan converges on just one person – Jesus, the Christ, the King of the Kingdom, the true Servant of the Lord, the offspring of Abraham through whom blessing will come to the nations, the long promised Serpent-crusher. And all of the power and significance and potential of the story is brought together and concentrated in him.

See Bible at a glance handout. Can see three final stages there.

And those three stages in the story of the kingdom of God are initiated through three key events.

Coming (1st) of Christ – the Present Kingdom

Coming of the Spirit (Pentecost) – the Proclaimed Kingdom

Coming (2nd) of Christ – The Perfected Kingdom

The OT seemed almost to fizzle out. But it finished with Malachi promising a messenger and a visitation from God.

The NT opens with the messenger arriving: John the Baptist calling for repentance, because the Kingdom of heaven has come near (Matt 3:2). The tense of the verb stresses a concrete definitive action that has brought the Kingdom near – ie the coming of Christ!

Jesus begins his public message with the same call (Matt 4:17).

And in his ministry of wonders and words Jesus announces that the Kingdom has indeed come.

“If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come to you!” (Luke 11:20).

Why? Because the King has come.

...Present Kingdom – the King has come

Let's use our grid reference system to see what the kingdom is like.

God's people – Jesus, the true Israel

Matt 1:1-17 (Interact)

Which part of the OT does each section of the genealogy relate to?

In the Bible '7' is often a number of fulfilment or completion so what is the point of v17?

Abraham, David and Jesus dominate, but whereas A & D stand out in the first two by being first, Jesus stands out in the third by being the last – ie the fulfilment of it (and therefore of the whole story)

Double 7 generations: Jesus brings to complete fulfilment all the stages of the OT story.

The promise of blessing given to Abraham in Genesis 12 is to be fulfilled in him.

The promise of the everlasting King and Kingdom given to David is to be fulfilled in him.

The promise of an end to the exile given to the people in Babylon is to be fulfilled in him.

But then look on in Matthew – point fleshed out in chaps 1-4

Repetition 'And so was fulfilled...' (or variant)

Virgin Birth - 1:22&3 – fulfilling Isa 7

Birth in Bethlehem - 2:4-6 – fulfilling Micah 5

Escape to Egypt - 2:14&15 – fulfilling Hos 11

Slaughter of innocents - 2:16-18 – fulfilling Jeremiah 31

Childhood in Nazareth - 2:23. – fulfilling something (not sure what!)

Then at his baptism Jesus is identified as the Son of God who fulfils the OT promises (3:17 cf Ps 2:7; Gen 22:2; Isa 42:1).

Temptation in the Desert (all his passages quoted from Deut when Israel in the desert)

Stand back and think for a moment:

His birth is promised

His life is protected through a desperate journey to Egypt

His time in Egypt is associated with the brutal killing of children

He is called out of Egypt by God himself

He passes through water

And out to a time of testing in the desert.

Are we talking about Jesus or about Israel? Jesus' story is matching the story of Israel at each point.

But in the desert, Israel *gave in* to temptation.

While Jesus in the desert *resists* temptation and obeys the Father.

Do you see Matthew's point?

Jesus fulfils all that Israel was called to be, but failed to be.

He is the true Israel! The true offspring of Abraham. The true Son of David! Cf John 15:1 the true vine.

And he gathers to himself a new community of disciples – 12 – who redefine what it means to belong to the people of God.

No longer about tracing ancestry to the 12 tribes, but finding fellowship with Jesus and joining in his mission.

Why do they gather to him? Because he is...

The place of God's presence – Jesus, the new temple

Why? Because he is God come to live among us.

John 1:14 “The word became flesh and built his tabernacle among us and we have seen his glory...”

John 2:21 destroy and rebuild the temple 'the temple he had spoken of was his body'

John 4:24 Jesus gathers a worshipping community to himself, because he is the truth and he gives the Spirit, so that we become the worshippers the Father is looking for (see next section)

Blessed to be a blessing – Jesus, the obedient son

Jesus is the truly blessed one (Luke 1:42, 19:38, Matt 21:9) and he blesses the poor, the mourning, the persecuted (Luke 6:20-22) and the children (Mark 10:16).

We've already seen how Jesus fulfilled all that Israel was called to be yet failed to be. God's verdict was announced at his baptism.

Matt 3:17 “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am *well* pleased.” And his perfect obedience led him to the cross.

Remember in Gethsemane Matt 26:42 “My Father, if it is possible...”

At the very start of the story, a man stood in a garden and faced a choice to obey or disobey God – Adam chose disobedience and dragged the whole human race into guilt and sin.

Jesus now stands in a garden, faced with a choice to obey or disobey the Father – *he* chose obedience, fulfilling the purpose of the Father

as he went to the cross, before being gloriously vindicated in his resurrection and ascension.

In his obedience he is blessed by the Father and through his obedience the nations are blessed.

What has he achieved? What are the blessings he brings?

The blessing of sins forgiven: the cross

2 Cor 5:21 “God made him who had (lit knew) no sin [i.e. Jesus], to be sin for us [i.e. to take our sin onto himself so that he could bear its punishment as our rep and subs], so that in him we might be the righteousness of God [i.e. in him the perfect righteousness displayed in Jesus’ sinless life is credited to us – cf Rom 4 – justified – counted righteous]...”

ie The blessing of righteousness given: justification

Notice the *double-exchange*. He carries our sin and pays its penalty, we are clothed in his righteousness and crowned with his blessing.

But, having walked through the whole Bible as we have done, we now look at the cross through eyes prepared by the OT revelation.

Gen 3:15 – the Serpent Crusher would be *struck* by the serpent

Gen 15 – God himself would bear the curse of the covenant when we broke that covenant

Ex 12 – the blood of the Passover lamb, who died in place of the Israelites, would keep them from the judgement they deserved.

Lev – the sacrifices were looking to the ultimate sacrifice.

Isa 53 – the Servant of the LORD would be wounded for our transgressions.

All of it is fulfilled in the cross of Jesus.

The blessing of victory over our enemies: i.e. sin, death and Satan

And on the cross Jesus walked into the grip of all three

Yet none of them could hold him and in his resurrection he broke their power and rose to new and everlasting life.

But in doing so he has broken open a way to life for all who are ‘in him’ – he has defeated our enemies and secured our freedom!

And so we are freed to enter the Kingdom, come under the righteous reign of God again and find our place in his great mission and plan.

Blessing for all the nations - Gal 3:13-14 – read.

Eph 1:3-14 – *every* Spiritual blessing in Christ!

On 6th June 1944 (D Day) 156000 allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy in Northern France.

The bloody battle that followed is widely seen as the moment when WW2 turned decisively in favour of the Allies.

It was not until nearly a year later on May 8th 1945 that Victory in Europe was finally proclaimed, and in those intervening months many battles were fought and many casualties suffered. But the outcome was not seriously in doubt. The decisive battle was had already won.

We’ve now reached that kind of point in the story.

Jesus, the King of the Kingdom has come and in his coming the Kingdom has come – the reign of God has broken into history in the middle of time, bringing promised blessing to the nations.

But remember the remaining three stages of NT fulfilment... PPT

And, so we still await the full victory of that Kingdom, when all his enemies are finally crushed beneath his feet, but nonetheless the decisive battle has been won through his death and resurrection so that from now on the final outcome is not in doubt.

The Proclaimed Kingdom – the Spirit has come

John 14-16, Jesus promised his disciples that after he had returned to his Father he would send the Holy Spirit to them.

Bible Reading Acts 1:4-11 – ie the promise is about to be fulfilled. And when he comes they will experience his presence and be sent out in his power to gather an international people of God to himself. 9-11 – the next big day is the return of Christ. Until then the agenda is set – the church proclaiming the kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Groups: Look at the following passages to see how our major themes are impacted by the coming of the Spirit. Just do the first 2.

God's people – Acts 11:4-18; Gal 4:4-7

In the place of his presence (temple) – Eph 2:17-22 – 'far away' = gentiles and 'near' = Jews.

Blessed with his covenant blessing to be a blessing – Gal 3:6-14, Rom 7:1-6 (esp 6); Gal 5:16-26; Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8

God's people – alive in the Holy Spirit

So Acts 11:4-18 – what defines us as the people of God is that we have received the Spirit – and he is given to Jew and gentile.

He is the Spirit of adoption who confirms that we are not just slaves but children of God (Gal 4).

In the place of God's presence – the temple of the Spirit Eph :2-17-22; 1 Cor 3:16-17

5 NT reference to the temple of the Spirit. Only 1 is individual, others are to do with the community of God's people.

And that community includes people from all the nations.

So no longer special buildings; but special communities which are the place of his presence, where heaven and earth meet and people are brought home to God.

Blessed with his covenant blessing to be a blessing – blessed, transformed and empowered to be a blessing by the Holy Spirit.

In Gal 3:1-14 Paul is recalling the original promise to Abram that through him (and his offspring) all the nations would be blessed.

The Galatians have been sold the line that a recovery of the OT law would bring about that blessing. Paul says no:

The law didn't give them the **Spirit** (1-6)

The law didn't give them the blessing of **justification** – ie being counted acceptable to God (7-9)

The law had left them under the **curse**/judgement of God (10-12).

But by contrast faith in **Christ** had lifted the **curse**, given the **blessing** of justification and imparted the promised Holy **Spirit** to them v13-14 (NB reverse order)! The blessing of justification is sealed in them by the presence of the Spirit.

He is the transforming Spirit who changes us not by giving us laws (the old way of Moses from which we are now freed – Rom 7:6) but by changing us from the inside (Gal 5:16-26) giving us new desires, new direction and new fruitfulness just as Jer 31:31ff had foreseen.

And, blessed and transformed by the Holy Spirit, we are sent in the power of the same Spirit to make disciples of all nations by being witnesses of Christ (Matt 29:18-20, Acts 1:6-8).

Here at last, is a people blessed by God who are truly a blessing to the nations, so fulfilling the mission and plan of God himself.

So Jesus has come so the Kingdom has come; the Spirit as come so the Kingdom is proclaimed in his power.

But does that mean everything is back to how it should be?

Clearly not – sin, death, suffering etc.

The Kingdom has come, but it has still to come in its fullness and perfection – Christ's enemies are defeated but they are not yet fully put under his fee (Eph 1). The now and the not yet.

The Perfected Kingdom – the King is coming!

I wonder if you're looking forward to going to heaven when you die. I am – but I'll be honest with you, it isn't what I'm really living for. I want to tell you about something even more exciting than going to heaven when you die (though that is wonderful – Phil 1:23).

The Bible finishes not with us all going off to heaven, but with heaven coming down to earth! And when heaven comes to earth everything is made new! And the Bible clearly teaches that our dead bodies will rise to share in the glories of that new creation.

Phil 3:20&21; 2 Pet 3:11-13 for new creation – don't read.

I should just mention one controversy here (? Time).

In Rev 20 we read about 'the millenium' – an 1000 year reign of Christ, during which Satan's activities are limited – he is bound, prior to a final onslaught of attack on God's people.

And opinions differ among Bible-believing Christians as to how this should fit in to our thinking about the future.

Premillennialists believe that Jesus' second coming will occur *before (pre) the millennium* and that after 1000 years Satan will be defeated in a final climactic battle before the coming of the New Creation.

Postmillenilaists believe that Jesus' second coming will occur *after (post) the millennium* and that the millenium itself will be a time of peace, revival and the growth of the church, preparing the world for the return of the King and the New Creation.

Amillennialists believe that the millennium isn't a literal period of 1000 years at all but a description of the age of the church / age of the Spirit, during which Satan's activities are limited because he is

defeated at the cross and Christ's reign is extended as the gospel is preached. The period then comes to an end with the second coming which heralds the dawn of the New Creation.

But one way or another, the return of the King will lead to the final perfection of the Kingdom – the New Creation.

Read Romans 8:18-20.

Perspective with a kind of parable – take a look at this aeroplane.

Boeing 767 twin jet passenger plane – cf cross the Atlantic.

Impressive machine but to function properly and safely it needs a good pilot.

But *without* such a pilot it can be positively dangerous:

Here is a Boeing 767 being flown by poorly trained maniacs into the twin towers of the WTC on Sept 11 2001.

Sim the creation was made to be piloted by us – people who would rule over it with justice and wisdom on God's behalf. (Gen 1)

But rather than doing it, we've gone our own way and as a result the creation has been spoilt as an environment for us.

It is frustrated – longing to be properly piloted again – ie the true Sons of God to be revealed. (19)

Jesus was the 'true son' – eg wind and waves obeyed him.

But when we returns we will be like him and will join in his reign, ruling creation with wisdom and justice. (20-21)

So let's get to the end of our great story.

Rev 21:1-8 follows on from the final resurrection of the dead, the judgement and the consigning of all that is evil to eternal punishment.

But, though we find thoughts of final judgement troubling, there is a sense in which it is, in the end, even less than a sideshow.

The climax is not in God's strange work of judgement, but in his joyful work of salvation and restoration.

So after the resurrection, after the judgement... *then* v1 – read 1-5.

Bible Reading Rev 21:1-5 – the New Creation – when Heaven comes to earth. (Note heaven coming to earth in v2).

New heavens and new earth (1)

But in what sense is it 'new'? Is it new in *time* (*neos*) – i.e. in the sense that it hasn't existed before, or is it new in *quality* (*kainos*) – i.e. in the sense that it is gloriously renewed and pristine?

It is the second sense – e.g. playdough – new but same *stuff*. (*God not given up on creation – still plans, so we should care*).

So exciting. Our hope is not just of an everlasting church service for rather less-than-human worshippers who have seen better days.

We're looking forward to *life*, - *real* resurrection *life*, in real bodies, in a real world which has all the beauty, richness and fulfilment of this world (and more) but with none of the frustration, none of the pain, none of the impermanence, none of the loss.

In this new world we will live and love and explore and sing and create and work and eat and drink and walk and laugh and discover and play and think and learn and worship and delight – wonderful!

That's what we're to give up everything for!

The New Jerusalem (2)

This is not something different to the new creation; rather it is this that makes the new creation *new as* the whole community of God and his people now come to make their home in the renewed creation.

Explanation: I am making everything new (3-5)

Heart of it is in v5. 5a – God is renewing his broken creation.

What is the nature of this renewal?

God has made his home among his people (3) – all that the OT tabernacle/temple anticipated and that the church as the temple of the Spirit has begun to experience of God's presence is now realised completely. The divorce is over. Heaven and earth are reconciled!

God is in an eternal covenant with his people (3a – read). This language occurs throughout the OT to describe God's commitment to Isarel (e.g. Ex 6:7) and in the NT it is used of the church (2 Cor 6:16).

Now 1 vast people of God from *every* nation is united and embraced. *God comforts his people* (4a – read) – Have you ever wiped tears from a person's eye? It doesn't say he will pass them a tissue, no *he himself* will wipe *every* tear. It's an image of startling intimacy, care and healing isn't it?

The end of suffering (4b - read) – suffering in all its forms is gone forever – wow don't you long for such a time?

And look on to v22ff – the blessing of the nations has come! And, far from obliterating human achievement and diversity, its best glories are all gathered into the new creation, but now purified and gleaming.

And a new Garden City - 22:1-5, leave unless time and flip to +++++
Garden or a city – both echoes of Gen 3 but now grown to city.

And there is life *everywhere* in these verses – the new creation isn't a place of shadows and spirits, those who live here are more truly alive than the inhabitants of any other city – this is *real resurrection life* truly human life of which our life now is but a shadowy anticipation.

There is a *river of life* from which we are invited to drink. It is the very life-giving presence of God and to drink long draughts of it is to be utterly satisfied, to experience unspeakable joy, *to be alive*.

And a *tree of life* – the tree from which we have been barred since Genesis 3, but now in the heart of the city for all to eat. Its fruit sustains us in eternal life and its leaves bring healing.

What is the healing? It is the removal of the curse of God (3a) – the judgement of God on human sin – but the curse is lifted, because the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus, became a curse for us on the cross.

And so, with the curse lifted, the vision of the Holy City finishes with a glorious picture of our life with God:

3b – no estrangement

4a – intimate fellowship with God.

4b – God’s image which we were created to bear now fully and finally restored.

And so (5a) no darkness or night, no shadows and suffering, but perfect fulfilment as at last the Children of God take up their God-given role to rule creation on his behalf in justice, liberty and joy (5a) as was there work from the beginning.

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God's people – new community drawn from every nation of those who he has saved.

In the place of his presence – new creation – the new city which is a temple because God is there, the new garden which is teeming with life because the curse has lifted (ie chap 22).

Eternally blessed – new security – they are God's people forever, their wounds are healed and their suffering gone.

Conclusion

A young Canadian lad Tommy had a grandfather who was a great storyteller.

He would jump up onto his knee whenever he could and plead, “Grandpa, please tell me a story.” And Grandpa would oblige, Tommy hanging on his every word.

But one day Tommy had a special request, “Grandpa, tell me a story and *put me in it!*”

And isn't that exactly what God has done? (written in to story)

He is writing a great story – the story of creation, the story of human beings. It is a story of great possibility, of terrible rebellion and disaster and of forgiveness and restoration.

And you and I, who have trusted ourselves to Jesus, are written into that story, partners in the one great mission of God to bring the blessing of God in good news of Jesus to all the nations of the world. *So the question for us is whether we are going to choose lives, which are perhaps comfortable, but ultimately meaningless, because they are out of step with God's story.*

Or a life of sacrifice, following God to the ends of the earth as his servant having found our place in the mission of God.

Passing it on (groups of 3):

Referring to the 'Bible at a glance' hand out, use what you have learned to explain the three stages in which the NT describes the three dimensions of our '3D Grid reference system' reaching their goal:

The coming of Jesus

The coming of the Spirit

The (second) coming of Jesus.