



By Dr. Richard Youngblood

Question: What is the main or primary message of the Bible?

The message of the Bible is that God wants to share full fellowship with each one of us in his presence for eternity. The storyline of the Bible reveals what he has done and is doing to redeem us from the tragic effects of sin and restore all creation to the way it was in the beginning when God “walked in the garden in the cool of the day” with those whom he had created (Gen. 3:8). By skipping from place to place in our reading and study of the Bible, we often fail to see how the various parts fit together to provide the big picture: God’s story and plan for humanity. While any attempt to fully summarize the story and message of the Bible in a few paragraphs is virtually impossible, I do believe it is possible to provide at least a brief, although sketchy overview.

The foundational lines of the big picture are drawn in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Here we are told that God, the only transcendent and everlasting being, created all things (1:1). The height of his work was to create humanity in his own image (1:26-27). God placed them in a beautiful and perfect garden where they could enjoy all things in life forever, especially the full fellowship and presence of God himself (Gen. 2; cf. 3:8), and gave them the freedom to make choices for themselves. Unfortunately, they failed to trust God and, instead, chose to believe the serpent and act in rebellion to what God told them (Gen. 3:2-8). As a result of that choice to sin, humanity became separated from God and brought upon the whole of creation the devastating effects that we continue to witness (Gen. 3:8-24).

But even before creation, God had a plan to bring us back by redeeming both humankind and the whole creation from sin and its effects throughout the ages (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:19-22). Although still allowing us the privilege of choice, God’s plan would eventually cleanse, transform and restore all that he created to the original perfect world he intended. This plan began with the choice of the man Abraham and his descendants. After reading in Genesis how sin and its effects grew worse in spite of God’s efforts to curtail it by the flood (Gen. 6-8), we are told how God chose Abraham to become the father of all who would believe (Rom. 4:11). The Lord promised Abraham that he would make his descendants into a great nation, that he would give them the land of Canaan and that through them all nations would be blessed (Gen. 12: ; 17:3-8). Abraham’s

descendants became slaves in Egypt; but after four hundred years, God brought them out of slavery just as he told Abraham he would (Gen. 15:13-14). Abraham's descendants became the ancient nation of the Israelites.

Moses, God's chosen leader and prophet, was sent to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and down to Mt. Sinai where God revealed himself to them, made a covenant with them and gave them his laws to bless and guide them in life (Exo. 1-20). The history of this nation that follows shows that they were not chosen because they were a greater or more righteous people than other nations but that God chose them to demonstrate his faithfulness to his promise to Abraham (Deut. 7:6-9 & 9:6). It was an act of God's grace. The Lord wanted them to be "a light to the nations" so that the nations might see the glory of God in them (Isa. 49:6; Acts 13:48).

But Israel became God's kingdom-people only in a partial sense. Their history further demonstrated the sinfulness of humanity and their inability to obey and serve God faithfully by their own power (Judges through 2 Chronicles). While there were some good times, the Israelites became divided into two nations and gradually became so wicked and idolatrous that God disciplined them, allowing them to be carried into captivity by Assyria and Babylon. After seventy years of captivity, a faithful remnant was allowed to return to their land and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem; but they continued to struggle with sinful ways (Ezra-Nehemiah).

Throughout the history of the Old Testament, God sent his prophets to call his people to repentance (Isaiah through Malachi). The prophets warned the people of the severe consequences of their sinfulness, but they also held out hope for them in the glorious kingdom to be revealed in the last days (Isa. 2:2ff; Micah 4:1ff). It would be a kingdom that would crush all other kingdoms and that would stand forever (Daniel 2). This hope would ultimately be realized only in the coming of the Messiah (Christ).

With this the Old Testament ends, and the New Testament begins the final part of God's story. Look for the continuation of this main storyline of the Bible in next week's column.

[Send questions or comments or request for a copy to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071, phone 270-753-1881 or email richardy@murray-ky.net] 2011/10/14