

TEACHING NOTES: The Drama of Revelation and Redemption

Last week, we dealt with the most fundamental question we could ever ask: What is God doing and how is he doing it? Though this sounds like an arbitrary question, in reality it is necessary for us to ask and answer as believers. Answering this question allows us to understand the nature of how things really are, and how we fit into the larger schemes of life. Knowing what God has been doing from eternity past and how that affects his creative purposes helps us know the deeper meaning of life. Last week, we discovered that God has been living in perfect relationship with himself within the Godhead, ie. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This perfect relationship of mutual love, joy, and submission displaying his perfect glory is the reason God created the world and us. We were created to live for his glory and to display it through worship, obedience, and mission. This "Glory" Drama is written in 4 acts (creation, fall, redemption and restoration) where God intends to build his kingdom and redeem the people who will inhabit it. This is the primary hermeneutic (interpretive tool) we use to understand God's unfolding plan through the biblical witness.

Israel, the Church and the Kingdom of God~

One of the key passages we can turn to in Scripture in order to understand the larger picture of God's unfolding revelation of himself is Genesis 12:1-3 where he promises Abraham land, seed, and blessing. Many believe this to be the key text to understanding the larger work of God's redemptive plan as it moves toward the future Kingdom. Here we are forced to ask questions like: What was/is Israel's purpose? What is the relationship between Israel and the Church? How do they relate to the coming Kingdom?

Land~ An Eternal Place of Restored Fellowship with God

The land that was promised is best understood as an eternal land that the people of God will inhabit when they experience a restored relationship with him. This is the New Heavens and New Earth. As Abraham sojourned through the land, he had numerous personal encounters with God and built altars to call upon the name of the Lord. Conversely, when he journeyed outside the promise land, he never did this indicating that the land was linked to his personal encounters (theophanies) with God. Abraham viewed the promise of Canaan not as physical land for ethnic Israel, but a future reality. Canaan serves as a picture of the future dwelling place of God's redeemed people, the church, where fellowship will be eternal.

Seed~ An Eternal People Enjoying a Restored Fellowship with God

From the outset of his covenant with Abram, God states, "Fear not Abram, for I am your exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15:1) At the heart of the covenant is the idea that God is the intended fulfillment of the covenant promises, particularly the seed. In Genesis 17:4-8, God makes it clear that this seed is a people whose God is Jehovah and would be made up many nations. Therefore, we must not view the seed as a physical/ethnic people, but a spiritual and ethnically diverse people. Viewing the seed as a physical/ethnic people produces two problems. First, genealogically, all peoples of the earth did not proceed from Abraham's personal physical seed, yet the promise endured. Second, Ishmael was a physical heir of Abraham, but was never viewed as the fulfillment of God's promise. Why? Because the covenant concerns a spiritual seed not merely a physical seed. God's promise encompasses believing spiritual Israel as well as the NT church. Believers of the OT and the NT are the one people of God, the Church. The believers of the OT were "spiritual" Israel, or the invisible church, who set the stage for the present visible church in the New Covenant of Christ.

Blessing~ A Universal Blessing of Fellowship with God

Genesis 3:15 states that there would be an offspring (seed) that would "crush" the serpent's head. Understanding the promise of blessing is intended for the whole world, this offspring must be Jesus. Abraham longed for the fulfillment of these promises. So much so, that he took matters into his own hands and had a child with his wife's maid to push along the process. God reveals to Abraham that this will not do, "He that shall come from your bowels shall be your heir" (Genesis 15:4). In the context of this explanation, Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness. What was it that he believed in? It was not that he would have a child of his own. That had already happened. It was that this seed was to be the blessing to all nations who would redeem, reconcile, and restore people to a renewed fellowship with God and then, inhabit the eternal dwelling place of God.

Concluding Principles:

One People of God, the Church: Believing Israel of the OT (Invisible Church) foreshadows the Revealed and Empowered Church of the NT.

Physical Israel and Canaan are types/pictures of Eternal Promises: Physical Land/Seed promise fulfilled in Jesus and Joshua 21:43-35

New Testament Teaching:

Land: Hebrews 11:10; 13, Galatians 4, Revelation 21:2-3

Seed: Romans 4, Galatians 3:7-9

Blessing: Galatians 3:7-18