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A Thumbnail Sketch of Biblical History

by Dan Trygg

“Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’”
Isaiah 46:9,10

It is important to understand that **human history was preceded by rebellion in heaven**. We have no idea how long before the creation of humankind this occurred, but it seems to have been a backdrop for human and redemptive history. It seems that **God has chosen to allow free will to be expressed**, both for good or evil, within certain boundaries or limitations, **so that all sentient beings could observe and learn from the results**. Instead of crushing the Satanic rebellion with force, God is allowing things to play out so that His Kingdom will be populated by those who recognize His wisdom and goodness, ...people and angels who *want to* serve Him because His ways are *best*.

In the early chapters of Genesis, we learn that God created humankind in His image and likeness, and set them over the earth as guardians and stewards. **Our first parents were innocent**, having no experiential knowledge of sin or evil, nor even any predisposition toward rebellion. **Satan convinced them to eat the forbidden fruit by suggesting that God was evil**, trying to cheat and dominate them by keeping them from the one thing that would liberate them. **The effects of sin were immediate. They felt guilty, naked and ashamed.** They tried to hide themselves from each other and from God. When God approached them, they passed the blame off on one another, ...even blaming God Himself..., rather than take responsibility for their own actions. **God, in His compassion, covered their nakedness, and declared to them a promise that the “seed” of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent**, though the Serpent would get his venomous bite in, too. *This was the first hint of God’s plan of redemption* (Gen. 3:15).

Although God intended to redeem them, **the effects of their choices were *not* erased**. They were driven out of the paradise God had prepared for them, and the way to the tree of life was barred to them. The woman would bear children in great pain, and the man would struggle to make the earth produce crops. Unlike the garden, the earth brought forth weeds, thorns and thistles. Death and decay entered the world as a result of their sin, and its **corruption and futility spread throughout the entire creation** (Rom. 5:12; 8:19-21). People also became more corrupt, as murder and violence spread throughout. Finally, “all flesh” became evil and violent, and God determined to destroy them with a flood. Only Noah and his family, along with a sampling of all the animal types were spared the worldwide deluge.

Some ten generations later (if there are no gaps in the genealogical record), **God began working out His redemptive plan**. From a universal knowledge of the one true Creator, people had developed all sorts of strange superstitions and beliefs. Many had all but forgotten the knowledge of the Maker, and had begun to worship images and false gods of their own making. Others had been deceived and intimidated into worshipping and serving demonic powers. Out of a background of such idol worshippers, **God called a man named Abram** to leave his country in order to serve Him. God promised to bless him and make his name great, saying that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed. **As Abram walked with God and honored Him, God revealed more. It would be through his “seed” that all the families of the earth would be blessed. As childless Abram trusted in God, the Lord counted him righteous** on the basis of his faith in Him. God changed his name from “exalted father” (Abram) to “father of a multitude” (Abraham) as a confirmation of His promise, and caused his barren, elderly wife to miraculously give birth to a son.

From Abraham (ca. 2000 B.C.), God chose to extend this covenant promise to Isaac, and then to Jacob, otherwise known as Israel. Israel had 12 sons, who became the heads of twelve tribes, the forefathers of the nation of Israel that continues to this day. **The nation of Israel really was born as God powerfully delivered them from Egyptian enslavement in 1450 B.C.** by ten devastating plagues. God had uniquely prepared and personally called Moses to be His prophetic spokesman before Pharaoh. Each plague was directed against an Egyptian god, so that God could show that He was greater than all the gods of Egypt. The final plague was directed against the house of Pharaoh himself, who fancied himself to be a god. **God warned the Israelites to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their houses, so that the destroying angel would see this sign of faith and pass over their houses.** They were to be dressed in readiness to leave, because the angel would kill the firstborn son in every house that had no sign of faith. The Egyptians discovered the death of their sons, and quickly sent away the Israelites. When Pharaoh later reconsidered, and attempted to pursue and recapture the people, God opened the sea so that His people

could escape through the water. When the Egyptians pursued, they perished in the sea. **The yearly Passover celebration, observed by Jews to this day, commemorates these events surrounding the birth of this nation.**

In the wilderness, **God led them to Mt Sinai, where He made a covenant with them as a King with His people** (Ex. 19-24). **He was calling them to be a people set apart for Him.** Part of this would come through the delineation of covenant terms, or the giving of the law, to His people, ...instructions meant *for their benefit*. Chief among them was **the expectation of absolute loyalty**, ...of having no other gods before Him. The second was to have no idols or images of any kind to worship, for **God wanted their full allegiance and obedience.**

The remainder of the Old Testament history revolves around Israel's repeated failure to abide by the terms of this covenant and to honor God as He required. God promised blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience (Lev. 26; Deut. 27,28). In spite of this, the people continued wandering from God's ways. They did not keep themselves set apart for Him. **They were always looking for fulfillment in ways that were outside of God's ways.** It may be hard for us to relate to the worship of idols or images, but these stood for false deities who promised wealth, health and prosperity. **The promise of money, sex and power were the three main attractions** at the shrines of these other gods. The religious practices often included temple prostitutes as part of the ritual. Infants and young children were also commonly offered up as burnt offerings to these false gods. [Our culture, too, wants autonomy (power to do our own thing), with the freedom of sexual expression, without the inconvenience or expense of children. Our practices (abortion and abandonment through non-marriage or divorce) are a bit more subtle, but motivated by the same concerns, ...prosperity, sex and self-determination. **Sensual comforts, desires for things we see, and the temptation to disregard God's ways in favor of a seeming "shortcut" to what we want, continue to be the avenues of entrapment** the tempter uses to destroy not only our own souls but the lives of our children, as well.]

As time went on, **God repeatedly sent His prophets and deliverers to call His people back to Him**, and to set them free from the bondages which came upon them as *consequences* of their disobedience. **The people demanded a king, so that they could "be like other people".** God warned them that this would introduce further burdens, but acceded to their request. After the handsome, physically impressive first king, Saul, ended in disaster, **God raised up a most unlikely person, a humble shepherd boy, David, to be king (1000 B.C.).** He was a man of faith, and started well. **God promised to raise up one of his "seed" to be king after him. This "seed" would build a house for God, and the Lord promised to establish the throne of his kingdom forever** (II Sam 7:12-16). Eventually, however, David himself was corrupted by sensuality and lusts of the eye, and chose to disregard God. Although he was forgiven when he confessed his sin, the *consequences* of his choices continued to plague him and his family. **Initially, his son, Solomon, appeared to be the promised "seed", but he too was corrupted by wealth, sexual lust and power.** Instead of his throne being established forever, it was all but lost in the next generation. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel broke away from the Davidic line, never to return. They also departed from following God's covenant, even creating a rival religious system to keep their people under their influence. This proved to be their undoing. Again, **God sent His spokespeople to call them back to Himself, but they were not willing. Idolatry and hypocrisy persisted. God used hard economic times and war to discipline them, but they would not listen.** The southern, Davidic kingdom that remained did little better. They, too, departed from God's ways. Eventually both groups were defeated by their enemies and removed from the land, ...the northern 10 tribes in 721 B.C., and the southern, Davidic two tribes in 586 B.C. **Freedom of choice, and the harsh reality of consequences, were shockingly real. Everyone suffered, children along with parents.**

Amazingly, after 70 years, God brought back a remnant of His people to the land of Palestine. Again, the prophetic voices of God's spokespeople refocused the people on their original purpose, to be a nation dedicated to God. They finally put behind them the worship of idols and images, but **the temptation to intermarry with outsiders remained an ongoing problem** that had to be addressed. Again, the nation fell into empty religious forms and rituals.

In about 5-4 B.C., the prophesied "seed of the woman", the "seed" of Abraham and David, was born in Bethlehem, as God's spokespeople foretold. In 26 A.D. He began going through the land, doing miracles, healing the sick and casting out those oppressed by the devil. He preached the "good news of the Kingdom". He called out a people to follow Him as their heaven-sent King, the Christ or Messiah. **It was upon the confession of allegiance to Him as their King that He would build a called-out people who would assault the gates of hell for the souls of people bound up in sin.** He called and trained apostles to carry on the mission after He left. He was not here to stay. His atoning death broke the power of sin and the devil, but His departure allowed the Holy Spirit to come to empower *all* of His people with gifts and abilities to *work as a team* to liberate and build up a spiritual household, a dwelling place and family for God (Eph. 2). [Again, **the battle is on, Satan attempting to distract and divert, and the Spirit calling God's people to rise up to their destiny.** In the early church days there were 360 non-believers for every Christian. In 1960, there were 24 for every Christian. Today, there are only six. Jesus continues to build His church.] **In the end, He will return and vanquish all opposition.**