

# Progress of Redemption #04

by David Shirley

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*God's plan of redemption is a story of restoration, preservation, and sovereignty, as He works to bring His people back to the land and prepare for the coming of the Messiah.*

**Duration:** 1:14:52

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 6:17, 2 Chronicles 9:17, 2 Chronicles 11:6, Ezra 3:2, Ezra 6:10, Isaiah 45:1-7, Jeremiah 29:10-14

**Topics:** "Redemption"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of the word of God and how it can change people's lives. The sermon takes place in Judea, a Persian province, around 430 BC. The people have returned to their land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. They renew their covenant with God and dedicate the city, with only a tenth of the population allowed to live inside the city walls. The preacher also mentions the book of Esther, which showcases God's providential control over events to fulfill his purposes. The sermon emphasizes the power and wisdom of God in preserving his people and thwarting Satan's plans.

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## Transcript

Now in Act 3, we see that God restores Israel to the land for the coming of the Messiah. The temple and the city of Jerusalem is rebuilt, and only a remnant or minority return. They're now under Gentile rule.

And also during this time, we read in the Book of Esther how that God providentially preserves His people in Persia, and then the Messiah comes to provide salvation for the world. The grounds for all God has done or will do. Now when we look at the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we see that both of them begin in Persia.

They begin with the Persian king's decree, but they end in Jerusalem, because God is working. And God told Cyrus, king of Persia, that he would rebuild the temple. In Ezra chapter 1, verses 1 through 4, which is interesting, the last two verses of 2 Chronicles 36 are the same as the first two verses of the Book of Ezra.

In 2 Chronicles 36, verse 22, it says, In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has appointed me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with them, and let him go up. The reason that the last two verses of 2 Chronicles and the first

two of Ezra are the same, no doubt, is because they were originally the same book, and if you'll read what Jeremiah prophesied in Jeremiah 29, verses 10 through 14, or turn to Isaiah chapter 45 and read verses 1 through 7 and verse 13, we see God calling Cyrus by name almost 200 years before he was born.

Actually, beginning in chapter 44 of Isaiah in verse 27, we see how specific his prophecy was as compared to Daniel chapter 5, when Belshazzar was throwing the feast, and the handwriting came out upon the plaster of the wall, saying, Mene, mene, tekele, etharsen. Then it says in Isaiah 44, 27, It is I who says to the depths of sea, dry up, and I will make your rivers dry. It is I, he says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd, and he will perform all my desire.

And he declares of Jerusalem, she will be built, and of the temple your foundation will be laid. Thus says the Lord to Cyrus, his anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand to subdue nations before him, and to loose the loins of kings, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut. I will go before you and make the rough places smooth.

I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars, and I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wells of secret places, in order that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. For the sake of Jacob, my servant, and Israel, my chosen one, I have also called you by your name. I have given you a title of honor, though you have not known me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other. Besides me, there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known me, that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun, that there is no one besides me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other, the one forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity. I, the Lord, do all these things." So, God is calling Cyrus by name before he is born, so that he will know that there is a God, and that he is the true God, and ultimately, as he finishes chapter 45, in verse 22, he says, "...turn to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other.

I have sworn by myself, the word has gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, and I will not turn back, that to me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. They will say of me, only in the Lord, a righteousness and strength." God does desire that all would come to know him, and God is working in history. He is working to bring the Messiah, so that everyone can be saved, and I think it is just really neat to see in Isaiah 45, in the same chapter, the fact that God prophesies the man who will give the decree to bring the Jews back to their land, and it is for the purpose of the coming Messiah.

Now, after Cyrus gave the decree, many of the people did not care to face the dangers and start all over again. They had settled in Persia, and so only a remnant of the people went back, undesirable, about 50,000 returned. There were three returns actually, the one under Zerubbabel, and then later the one under Ezra, that we read in Ezra chapters 7 through 11, but in the first six chapters of Ezra we read about Zerubbabel, and then finally the third return under Nehemiah, when he went back and rebuilt the wall, but only a remnant left Babylon to travel over those 700 miles of trackless desert to Jerusalem to start over again, and yet throughout Ezra, we hear the term all Israel, in Ezra 2.70, it is all Israel, he says, returns.

In chapter 6 verse 17, all Israel, chapter 8, 35, all Israel, chapter 10, verse 25, he speaks of the tribe Israel, and so it is interesting to see how the phrase all Israel is used, even though there is only a remnant that returns, and when they arrive in Jerusalem, the first thing they do in chapter 3 verse 2, is they build the altar first. The center of Judaism was the altar, where the sacrifice took place, as the center of Christianity

is the cross, where the ultimate and true sacrifice of Jesus Christ took place, and then after they built the altar, beginning in verse 8, it says, now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jazadak, and the rest of their brothers, the priest, and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work, and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. Now when they had finished laying the foundation of the temple, in verse 10, it says, when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, sons of Asa, were assembled to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel, and they sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, for he is good, for his loving kindness is upon Israel forever, and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

Yet many of the priests, and Levites, and heads of fathers, households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of the house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people. So the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away. So there's mixed emotions here, because I guess some of the older ones had seen the first temple, and the second temple was not quite to the standard as the first temple, but nevertheless, they're back in the place where man could meet God again, because the temple is being rebuilt, and only a small minority have returned a remnant, have returned to Jerusalem, and the Jews who remained in the other countries established synagogues, where they did their teaching, and they did their worship, and the synagogue became a foundational structure, actually also helped the churches to come, and whenever Paul went out to spread the gospel, he would go to a city, he would always go to the synagogue first, and so the temple was finally completed in Ezra chapter 6, and verse 15, it says, and this temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, and it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius, and God was behind the whole thing, and verse 14, it said the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Edo, and they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel, and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia, and so beginning about 537 all the way to 517, and in 516, actually, they finished the temple, and God worked through history to help them finish this temple.

As a matter of fact, in 1835, Henry Rawlinson, a British army officer, noticed on a mountain northeast of Babylon, a great isolated rock. It was rising 1700 feet out on the plain, and there was a cliff 400 feet above the road. It had carvings on the smooth surface of the cliff, so he investigated, and he found an inscription engraved from 516 BC by the order of Darius, king of Persia, from 521 to 485 BC, the same Darius under whom the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt, as told in Ezra, the same year the temple was completed, and Rawlinson spent four years standing on a ledge getting squeezes of the inscriptions there, and in about 14 more years, translations were completed of them, and he'd found the key to the ancient Babylonian language, and unlocked to the world the treasures of ancient Babylonian literature, and once again, archaeology catches up with the Bible.

Now, between chapters 6 and 7 in the book of Ezra, you probably ought to place the book of Esther, where you see the good hand of God providentially preserving his people scattered throughout Persia, and even though the name of God is not mentioned specifically in the book of Esther, because partly, I think it was believed that God could only be met in Jerusalem, and these people are scattered throughout Persia, but you do have the tetragrammaton, the YHWH, where God's name was so holy that they took the

vowels out of God's name and only left the consonants, and there were four consonants, YHWH, and they called them the tetragrammaton, and you do find that in acrostic form four different times in the book of Esther, in chapter 1 verse 20, chapter 5 verse 4, chapter 5 verse 13, and chapter 7 verse 7, but you definitely see God's hand providentially controlling the circumstances and the events to fulfill his purposes, and God'll do that, and the Jews in the dispersion would have been destroyed except for Esther, and so this book's a documentation of God's power and his wisdom manifested in his control of the events that placed Esther into the palace at the precise moment she was needed to overthrow Satan's plans to thwart the redemptive purposes of God. In chapter 1 of Esther, we read of Ahasuerus, who was, well, another name for him was Xerxes, and he was throwing this great feast, a 180-day banquet for the king, and he called in his queen Vashti in order to show her off, and she refused, and so because of that embarrassing moment, he deposed Vashti, which is thought to have been in around 482 BC, and he found another queen, but he had to leave and go on an expedition against Greece, and whether he married Esther before that or after that, we're not totally sure, but we know that he found no one with which he was as pleased as with Esther, and so he married her. She was a young Jewish girl, and Ahasuerus died about 13 years later, and Esther lived on, on through the reign of her stepson Artaxerxes, and no doubt had some influence there in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah because Artaxerxes was giving commandment to help them, and you know the story how that Haman had a decree made to kill all the Jews in all the provinces, and so Esther, warned by Mordecai, had to go in, and she had to intercede with the king on behalf of her people, and she went in and touched the top of the scepter, and he no doubt still adored her, and the outcome was that the gallows that Haman had made for Mordecai, Haman was hanged on, and in his place of honor was given to Mordecai, who was Esther's cousin, and so because God is providentially taking care of his people, the Jews were not massacred at this time, and instead when Esther persuaded the king to make another decree authorizing the Jews to resist, and then to slay anyone who would attack them, it was exactly what they did, and so Esther saved the whole race from annihilation.

So she was not only beautiful, but she was wise, and she was used by God because of her willingness to step out and to trust that God would work in this situation, so the Jews began what we know today as the Feast of Purim, and they still observe it in memory of what Esther did, and what God did through her preserving the people, and so we see that Zerubbabel has gone back with a remnant of people, and it began building the temple, and in the meantime too, God is preserving his people in Persia, but now in chapter 7 of Ezra, it's time for Ezra to make his journey to Jerusalem. It's about 457 BC in the reign of Artaxerxes, who was Esther's stepson, and probably around 60 years since the temple's been completed, maybe 80 years since the Jews initially came back under Zerubbabel. Ezra was a priest, and he wanted to go teach the law of God to Judah.

He wanted to beautify the temple, and he hoped to restore the temple worship. Well, when he got there in Ezra chapters 9 and 10, the first thing he found was that people were back in the mixed marriages, and he was just sick over this, and the rulers of the people had intermarried freely with all the idolatrous neighbors. God had told them again and again, and they'd just gotten out of Babylon with the same kind of thing, and so Esther made all the people and the leaders come together, and they had to make the commitment to put away their wives, their false and foreign wives, which they did, and though it might seem a little bit severe, it was necessary, and God used it.

It was effective to begin to purify the people, and so Ezra was bringing in these reforms. Well, soon Nehemiah is going to make his journey to Jerusalem. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king, and he spent about four months in prayer before he made his request to the king in order to go back because he

had it on his heart to go back and rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and fortify the city, and this king Artaxerxes, as we said, was Esther's stepson, so no doubt she had some influence there, and he sitting there gave permission for Nehemiah to go, and so Nehemiah went back, and we read that he repaired like the stairs that go down, you know, from the city of David in chapter 3 and verse 15.

He repaired the bend in the wall that's been found, verse 25, the tower that stands out in verse 26, and all of these have been found and are clearly detected today, and so Ezra went back, and he rebuilt the wall and fortified the city by assigning families to it, and the families came together and took portions of the wall, and they all worked together, and they rebuilt it, and then he instituted the public reading of the book of the law, and for seven days every day from early morning till midday, they would open the book of the law, and they'd read the law of God, and it says Ezra would give the sense so that people could understand the reading the book of the law, and they could keep the covenant of the law, and that's really neat because so many times all we really need is to turn the word of God loose, and God will do the work, and today just simple expository preaching of the word of God will change people's lives, and so after they finished reading the law, they re-entered and renewed the covenant with God, and the city was complete, dedicated. There's a temple, and they cast lots to find out who could live in the city because only one-tenth of the population of people was able to live inside the city, and the rest had to live outside of the city, and they cast lots to see who would live inside of the city, and Nehemiah was the governor there in Judah for at least 12 years, and Josephus says that he lived to be a great age, and he governed Judah for the rest of his life, and so we see that God has once again preserved his people, and brought them back to their land after the 70 years of captivity in Babylon. They were in Egypt, if you remember, around 1500 BC, and it's amazing what they suffered, and yet God led them out, and then Assyria destroyed the northern tribes, and now Babylon has taken the southern tribe of Judah into captivity for 70 years, and yet they're led out and brought back into their land, and again during the Roman times, they were scattered, and since AD 70 when Jerusalem was burned, and they said his blood come upon us and upon our children in Matthew 27 25, then Jerusalem has been trodden down until the times of the Gentiles shall be completed, but once again we see in our day since 1948, they're being regathered back into the land, and so the continuance of the Jewish people is a riddle of history, and in spite of numerous judgments and dispersions and persecutions, they still exist, and so there's that development of the people and the nation Israel that mocks pretty much all explanation apart from God.

God is working. Well, now that the people are back in their land before the Lord comes, before the Messiah is sent, it's about 430 BC, and Judea is a Persian province. Persia has been a world power for about 100 years, and it remains so for another 100 years, and there's not too much going on.

For the most part, the Persian rule was very tolerant of the Jews, and as we look at this development of history when we read in Galatians about the Messiah coming and the fullness of time God sent in his son, then it involves the all-embracing history of mankind for whose salvation Christ appeared, and during this time when Persia was in control, the Jewish people had a sacerdotal government under the rule of the high priest who were responsible to the satraps, and so the high priestly office was pretty much political and became an ambition for power. So much so that we read in history that John, the son of Judas, the son of Elisha, because of his love for power killed his brother Jesus, not the Jesus you're thinking of, who was a favorite of one of the generals of Artaxerxes who was in command of the district, and so because of this crime, and it was committed right in the temple itself before the very altar, then the wrath of the Persian ruler swept over Judea, and so the Persians occupied Jerusalem, the temple was defiled, the city was laid in waste, and heavy fines were imposed on the people, and a general persecution followed which

lasted for many years. Then as later on and many other persecutions followed, the Samaritans were always willing to obey whatever tyrant was in charge that day, and they usually went free of any persecution, and that began to develop more animosity between the Samaritans and the Jews, but up to this time the greatest powers of the world had always been in Asia and in Africa, but now you look toward the west and there's this rising power of Greece, and you have the Greek period or the Alexandrian period which was from 334 to 323 BC.

It covers the Asiatic rule of Alexander the Great. The great he go to Daniel chapter 8, and he's now on the scene, and in the 12 years of his reign he completely revolutionized the world, and as described he was swift as an eagle, and when Alexander was on his Syrian campaign, and being his policy he wouldn't leave any strongholds at his back. He reduced tire after a siege of about, you know, a couple of months and started demanding the surrender of Jerusalem, but the Jews wanted to remain loyal to Persia, and so as Alexander was approaching the city, Judua the high priest with a train of priests in their official dresses and all went out to meet him and to ask for mercy.

Well, Alexander had a dream of this thing happening, and so because of that dream Alexander spared the city, and he gave a sacrifice to Yahweh and had the prophecies of Daniel concerning him read in his hearing, and he showed the Jews many favors from that day forward. They became sort of his favorites, and he employed them in his army, and he gave them equal rights with the Greeks as first citizens of Alexandria, and so you can see where the strong Hellenistic spirit of the Jews was created because of their relationship there with Alexander, but Alexander died, and when he's 33 years old he was struck down at Babylon and pretty much turned everything into chaos, and he divided his empire under his generals Ptolemy and Lysimachus, Cassander, and Salinas, and Egypt fell to the share of Ptolemy's Soter, and Judea was part of it. Well, Soter was succeeded by Ptolemy Philadelphus, who was an enlightened ruler famous through the erection of the lighthouse of Pharos and known for founding the Alexandrian library, and he was very friendly to the Jews.

Well, in his reign the Greek translation of the Old Testament scriptures we know as the LXX or the Septuagint was made, and Palestine though increasingly became the battleground between the Ptolemies, and during this time there was a very decisive battle between Ptolemy, Philopator, and Antiochus the Great at Rathia near Gaza. The Antiochus was crushed, and during Philopator's reign in Judea they remained an Egyptian province, and yet at the same time this battle was a turning point of the history of the Jews in their relationship to Egypt, because Ptolemy came in drunk because of the victory, and when he got to Jerusalem he tried to go and enter the Holy of Holies in the temple, and they wouldn't let him do it, and so he retreated, and when he came back he just took his vengeance out on the Jews for opposing his plan and began a cruel persecution of them, and he was succeeded later by his son Ptolemy Epiphanes, who was just a kid five years old, and so the vengeance of Antiochus began to take on the form of an invasion of Egypt, and then Judea became occupied by the Syrians, and you have a Syrian period from 204 to 165 BC, which was like the valley of the shadow of death for Israel, and it was almost an uninterrupted time of martyrdom. Antiochus was succeeded by Seleucus Philippator, who was very cruel, and everything changed when Antiochus Epiphanes came to the throne and reigned from 175 to 164, and he's been called the Nero of Jewish history.

He totally defiled the temple and brought in the terrible persecution. Thousands were slain. Women and children were sold into captivity.

The city wall was torn down. All the sacrifices ceased, and in the temple on the altar burnt off, and he erected a statue to Jupiter Olympus. Circumcision was forbidden.

All the people of Israel were forced into paganism, and once again during this time the Samaritans went right along with the Syrians, but there was a priestly family dwelling at Madin, which is west of Jerusalem, named Hasmonean after one of their ancestors, and it was a family. The head was Mattathias and his five sons. They raised up a revolt, and so we have the beginning of the Maccabean period from 165 to 163 BC.

It began with the slaying of an idolatrous Jew at the very altar, and that was the signal of the revolt. Judas Maccabeus was used to guerrilla tactics, and he was the leader of the Jewish patriots, and Antiochus launched three Syrian campaigns against him to stop the rebellion, but they just couldn't do it because he was so swift in using the guerrilla tactics that he knew they weren't able to do it, and the king finally died of the disease, and a peace was reached there with the Jews, but they're still under Syrian control, and Judas became governor of Palestine, and his first act was the purification and rededication of the temple from which the Jews date their festival of purification. Well, when the Syrians renewed the war against him, then Judas applied for help from the Romans, which turned out later to sort of be a mistake in many ways, but the Roman general Pompey took the city, and after a siege of three months, he entered the holy of holies and estranged himself from every loyal Jewish heart, and so we see the beginning of the Roman period, which was from 63 BC down to about 4 BC, and Judea became now a Roman province, and Rome exacted annual tributes from the Jewish people, and in the war between Pompey and Caesar, Judea was temporarily forgotten, but after Caesar's death, then Antony, who favored Herod the Great, secured for him the crown of Judea and enabled him to completely extinguish the old Maccabean line of Judean princes, and so Herod the Great began to be in charge of the area of Judea and was so at the time of the birth of Christ, and he's the one that was so cruel and had the children two years old and under, the boys, the males, killed, and so before we look at the gospels, let's look also at the internal developments that took place within Israel at this time.

They continued their literary activity, even though the voice of prophecy was hushed during this period. They had many writings which they produced, though they lacked the authority of the canon. The Apocrypha was produced, the 14 books of the Apocrypha, and they're very important for an understanding of the Jewish problem during these times.

There was the Pseudepigrapha, which contained things like the Psalter of Solomon, a collection of songs for worship. There was the book of Enoch that's referred to in Jude chapter 1 and verse 14, the Septuagint version. The Septuagint was of great missionary value and contributed perhaps more than anything else to prepare the world for the fullness of time because everyone would be able to read the Old Testament scriptures in the Greek language.

The spiritual conditions at that time, having returned from Babylon, that was a turning point in their spiritual history because the lust of idolatry had pretty much disappeared. In the place of it came an intolerable spirit of exclusiveness and a striving for legal holiness, which was the heart of Phariseism, which in some ways is just another form of idolatry. The law became an object of almost idolatrous reverence, but the spirit was utterly lost in the form, and so Hebrew gradually gave way to the common language of Aramaic.

The rabbis and their schools strove ever more earnestly to keep the ancient tongue pure, so worship and life had to have separate languages. And so the Jews became bilingual. The Hebrew language was used

in their synagogues, but the Aramaic was used in their daily life until later also the Greek was used because it was the lingua franca of the period.

And the simple laws of God were being replaced by cumbersome human inventions that crushed down all the liberty that we would have in Christ. And we need to remember that for every Jew that came back to the old national home, there were a thousand that never came back that remained in other lands, but they were just preparation for worldwide missions and helped promote the knowledge of the true God. And their synagogues helped to spread Christianity when it finally appeared.

Well, there were also political parties developing within the Jews themselves. There was the true Hellenistic party, which hated all the true-blooded Jews. And then there was the Jewish Patriots, the party of the Pharisees, and they were opposed to the more secular-minded party of the Sadducees, who were wealthy and had fine social standing, and they were wholly free from the restraints of traditions, oblivious to the future life, and sort of akin to the Greek Epicureans.

And so these parties bitterly opposed each other till the very end of the national existence of the Jews in Palestine, and they continued to fight for the mastery through means of the high priestly office. It was only for a short time that they found unity, and that was centered around their hatred for Christ while he was walking among them. And so throughout this period, you can see God was working.

The scriptures were translated into Greek after the conquest of Alexander the Great, became the common language in the East. The world was being prepared for the Word of God. The Septuagint was a great movement forward and a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise as well.

In Genesis chapter 12, they were meeting in synagogues all over, and they became military, you know, or missionary, we'd say, institutions. And though when the Messiah came, Israel didn't recognize him as such, they had helped prepare the way for others to come to know Christ. And so we have world centralization because Rome ruled what was there, and we have a cultural oneness now because the Roman Empire combined the best of the cultures into one.

We have a world trade and communication system with the Greek language there and with the roads that could be easily traveled. We had the Pax Romana, the world peace, and an army that helped to ensure peace. And the world was degenerating during this time as well.

There were 2,000 lords in Rome, and those 2,000 had 1,300,000 slaves. And there were a total of 6,000,000 slaves throughout the Roman Empire. Marriage and family life and chastity was falling apart.

There was also a mingling of world religions together. And so this is some of the background that fits into the picture of Galatians 4, 4 and 5 when it says, but when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that they might receive adoption as sons. And now we hear the voice of a forerunner, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

It's one like Elijah, one that Isaiah 40, verse 3 speaks of. And Mark 1, 2 introduces us to John the Baptist making ready and preparing as a forerunner the coming of the Messiah. And I'm sure John's message was as startling as his appearance as he asked the people to repent and to prepare the way of the Lord.

For it was a baptism of repentance that he was preaching. I think if I would have picked one to herald my son, who was the very son of God coming into the world, I would have chosen someone maybe with a

more noble birth or a university trained man with an eloquent vocabulary. And yet God often picks those who we would not select.

He picks the foolish to confound the wise, the weak to confound the mighty. And so here's John crying, prepare the way of the Lord. As we look at Matthew chapter 1 and verse 1, it is called the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And so right over the front door, God's hung the key to the entrance of this gospel that it is the royal position of the son of David, the one who had been determined from the time of Abraham, because the king is not chosen by popular ballot, but by birth. And then when you turn to Mark, you immediately notice as Mark starts off, there is no genealogy at all because Mark is going to portray Christ as a servant. No one's interested in the pedigree of a servant.

And you look at the front door of Luke and there is a genealogy in Luke 3, 23, but it traces Christ's line all the way back, not to Abraham or to David, but to Adam, because he has been presented as the ideal man, the one from the line of Adam. And then in John, you see, there's no genealogy either, because it begins within the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. And so Christ is portrayed as God in John.

And so when you go through the gospels, you get to the end of them and you can see how they close. You see a key at the back door as well. In Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20, this royal king who was born of royal birth, the son of David, is commissioning his disciples that they are to go out with all power that's been given unto the son of David, all power in heaven and in earth, and they're to go teach all nations to observe the things that he's commanded and he'll be with them to the end.

And then as Mark closes out, that great servant, we see that in Mark 16, 20, they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them. And so Christ is pictured as a servant who's still laboring among his disciples. And so he is today, we are workers together with him.

First Corinthians 3, 9 says, and he is still working with us. And therefore we're steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. And then we look at the back door of Luke, who was presented in his genealogy at the beginning as one traced back to Adam, the ideal man.

And Luke has this man, Jesus Christ, the perfect man, ascending up into heaven unto the father so that he was parted from them and carried out of their sight into heaven. And we're left with that thought of a perfect man in heaven. And then when we get to the back door of John, who is portraying Jesus Christ as the word, the living word that was made flesh, that he was very God and the signs that were chosen were chosen to show that he was God, but for a purpose, because over and over, John uses the word believe.

And it's John's intention to bring men to faith in the son of God so that they might inherit eternal life. And so John closes with. There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they should be written, everyone, then I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

The tremendous testimonies about this very son of God to increase our faith, truly, as John said in chapter 7:46, never man spake like this man. For he was the very son of God. When you read the four gospels, you begin to see the purpose as it manifest Jesus Christ and shows the reason for making this nation Israel.

Well, so that to this nation, God would send his Messiah and that he would provide salvation for the whole world. John 4:22 makes that very clear. And the four gospels give us a faithful record of the work of God and the words of God through Jesus Christ, the son of God.

And it's good to have the four accounts. If four people came and told you the exact same words verbatim and they were given your description of something that had taken place, you'd almost wonder about it because hardly ever do people say exactly the same thing. It's more credible if they don't say exactly the same thing.

I know dealing with kids in school at Federal Christian School, we always kids would come in and if two or three kids came in and they had the exact same story, you might go, these guys got together, decided exactly what they were going to say, and they came in and told us. But if you got three different accounts and they were pretty close, had the main ideas right, but the slant was a little different, you felt comfortable they were probably telling you the truth. And it's interesting that in the National Gallery in London, there are three representative paintings of Charles I. They were painted by Van Dyck, and the purpose of painting the three was to give a left view and a right view and to give a full view of Charles I. And they sent these down to the Roman sculptor Bernini.

Bernini took these and from these was able to compose a bust and sculpt of Charles I. And it makes me think of how we have these, well we have a left view, a right view, and a full view, but we also have a heavenly view looking down to get that depth perception and height as well. So God has given us a tremendous resource in portraying his son through the four gospels. And when you think about the testimony of a publican tax collector, a physician, well-educated, a fisherman like John, and who knows what Mark was, maybe just a servant.

We have a very credible testimony and perfect picture of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And when Jesus arrived upon the scene, you can turn to Matthew 1:17 and see that the first three acts of our progress of redemption are found there because it says so all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations. That covers from Genesis 12 to 1 Kings 10, Act 1. Then from David until the captivity in Babylon are 14 generations.

That covers from 1 Kings 11 to 2 Chronicles 36, Act 2. And from Babylon's deportation to Christ are 14 generations. And that covers from Ezra, Nehemiah, and Ezra to the gospels. That's Act 3. All of this preparation has gone towards bringing the Messiah that he might provide salvation for the world.

And I like the way Jesus put it himself when he was talking to the woman there in John 4:22. He said, you worship that which you do not know. We worship that which we know for salvation is from the Jews. And so Jesus himself laid it out very clearly that the Messiah would be brought through the Jews.

And they knew that the Messiah would come through them. And they should have known that he was coming to provide salvation for the whole world. And so as Galatians 4:5 says, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

So notice what Christ did. What were his actions when he entered into the world? And there are three things that stand out. The first thing that Christ did was miracles.

He proved that he was God and that he was God over all. And as John 5.36 tells us, these miracles proved that his origin was divine and his commission was divine. And John 7.31 tells us that the Jews understood that the Messiah would actually do these miracles.

And so Jesus came and performed miracles of physical healing, the sick man at Bethesda. And sometimes he would heal only one man out of a multitude. And while he was doing that, the Jewish leaders would be more concerned over the Sabbath than the sickness.

But Jesus was proven that he was equal with God. He was doing miracles over nature. He was turning water into wine in John 2.11. He was feeding 5,000 in John 6. He was doing miracles over the supernatural powers that they knew in that day, which were mainly demonic or demonized.

And you can see in Matthew 8.28-34. He was even doing miracles over death in raising Lazarus from the dead. And all of these miracles were for the purpose of demonstrating his divine origin and commission and that the Jews understood clearly the Messiah would do these miracles. But besides doing miracles, there was something else Jesus was doing.

He was making disciples. He was training men who would later take the message of Jesus Christ to the world and thus establish the church. So he selected 12 in Luke 6 to follow him and he trained them to be with him.

And then he would send them out to preach. And then he would commission them and challenge them at the end of his earthly ministry and say, go and make disciples of all nations. But the greatest work of all that Jesus did was redemption, securing eternal redemption for all who would accept him personally.

He did so by his voluntary substitutionary sacrifice on the cross for the sin of the human race. And this is confirmed as the epistles explain it, and particularly in 2nd Corinthians 5.21. But here is the eternal word of God who died for us and we must receive him or reject him. And Jesus tells forth and makes known God.

He is the Lamb of God. And if you believe in him, you have eternal life. And whoever believes in him, he says, has eternal life in his name.

And so Jesus was doing miracles, proving he was God. Jesus was calling and making and training disciples who would carry on his message. And Jesus was providing eternal redemption.

And he gave us a message to take out, which is called good news. And now we're ready to go to the nations. We have something to tell that can reconcile man to God.

It's the gospel. The gospel that's explained succinctly in 1st Corinthians chapter 15 verses one through four. The gospel is not only a message of salvation, but it's also the instrument through which the Holy Spirit works.

And that's explained in Romans chapter one, verse 16, tells us that the gospel is the power of God. There is perhaps no better definition than Melancthon's when he said, The gospel is the gratuitous promise of the remission of sins for Christ's sake. But for those of you that are thinkers and the gospel might be too simple, too easy for you.

You might want to think about Jesus as a thinker, the ethics of Jesus. He was an ideal man in himself and certainly in his relationship to other people. The ethical teaching of Jesus transcends all that we know in

any book throughout the antiquities.

He had a unique personality and Jesus was a thinker. He stands alone in his thinking. He speaks with authority.

He doesn't quote others. Yes, he might have quoted Moses or drawn reference to something Moses said perhaps, but he spoke with authority and he demanded that those who understood should obey what he said. And that's very unique.

There's nothing like this in literature. Not even in the Bible is there anything to compare with the way Jesus spoke. Even in the other books of the New Testament, we don't find anything like the attitude of Jesus to the very common things of life.

You can read all the world's literature and there won't be a parallel to the parables that are found in the gospel. They've got an individual stamp upon them that accredits them as the product of one great mind. And Jesus is the only thinker who goes straight from the common things of daily life and daily experiences right into the deepest mysteries of life.

He's able to just take things around the house, things that were common things of life and things from occupations of life. And because he discerns the Father's presence in everything in life. And today, when you see a little bit more so than used to in the past, poetic sympathy with nature and it's considered comparatively modern, yet you find it in the gospels.

You find wind and weather there. You find mountains and valleys, seed time and harvest, summer and winter, sowing and reaping, buying and selling. All of these things are transfigured into higher meanings made part of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

And if you notice, most other thinkers, they tend to graduate by steps from common experience. They'll have to describe it on a little higher thought level and they'll make wider general relations about it. And then they'll begin to try to relate it somehow to interpret the mystery of life in the universe.

But when you look at Jesus, he doesn't need any middle man. He doesn't need middle terms. He just sees a woman preparing bread for use of the family.

And in this same process, he perceives the mystery of the kingdom of heaven and explains it. And so he just touches on common everyday things and immediately transfigures them into the kingdom of God. And the way Jesus thought and taught was just luminous with the presence of the living God.

And so he transforms earth and makes it full of heaven. And as one poet said, every bush is aflame with God. And so when we look at the gospels, we see that they bear a unique stamp, that there's a creative personality.

And if you find a problem with there being four gospels, there's only one way you can solve that problem. And that's to recognize that this creative personality by his words and by his work was unlike any other man the world has ever seen, because he was the Theanthropos, the God-man, the Messiah, even Jesus Christ, who came for you. And so it certainly takes at least a minimum of four men to do a portrait of Jesus Christ.

And you see in Matthew, the prophesied king, whose prominent word is fulfilled because he fulfilled the prophecies of the Jews. He fulfilled the two great covenants, the one to Abraham in Genesis 12 and the one to David in 2 Samuel 7. He was the fulfillment of law. And he completed the law.

He didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill the law. And so no wonder Matthew 2 says, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we've seen a star in the east and have come to worship him. It's only in Matthew that you would read something like what's in chapter 15, verse 24.

I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And 55 times he speaks of the kingdom of heaven. And his parables are called the mysteries of the kingdom.

And then you see Mark portraying the obedient servant who said, here I am, a body thou hast prepared for me. And the prominent word is straightway immediately. Forty times it's used, a word for servants.

And there's so much action he would have appealed easily to the Romans. And the power with which he worked and did his miracles also would have appealed. And he was obedient unto death.

He gave himself in service. And when you read Mark and see how much he did and how quickly Mark moves, it's a short gospel, it moves so fast and he's doing one work after another work. And it's where you just find him sleeping in the midst of a storm, probably because he was dog tired.

And the accomplishments that he made would have impressed any Roman or even any businessman today. Mark 10, 45 says, for even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. And then you look at Luke showing Christ as the perfect man, the son of man, and going back to Adam, a man's man, the Greeks would have related so easily to the son of Adam and the grace with which he spoke and the grace with which he moved.

How he could make common life seem beautiful. And there was such an art to the things he did in a poetry in the way he spoke and in the way he even worked in his relationships with people, the compassion that's found there in Luke for human beings, the story of the good Samaritan would have went right into their humanitarian hearts. The story of the prodigal son.

And there's so many things there that you see how Jesus was touched as a man, the weeping over Jerusalem. And so with that concern and broken heart, Luke 19, 10 says, for the son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. And that includes all mankind.

And then John portrays him as the word made flesh, the divine son of God. And 98 times John uses the word believe. It's so prominent because that's his purpose to cause us through these signs to believe and that the glory of Christ could be seen.

The seven I am's that he can say, I am the bread of life, the light of the world before Abraham was I am and the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life, the true vine and these witnesses to his deity. John witnessed it and Nathaniel and Peter and Martha and Thomas, my Lord and my God and Jesus himself claiming. And so there's deity in almost every chapter of the book of John and John closes in chapter 20 and verse 30 and 31 saying.

Jesus did many other signs not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. And that belief in you may have life in his name. Oh, how wonderful are the four gospels and their portrayal of Jesus Christ, but you couldn't really say the four gospels are true

biographies in the way that we think of a biography because they don't tell too much about his family or about his childhood, his youth.

They don't say much about his physical appearance or, you know, what his activities were that he enjoyed his recreations. You know, did he play sports? You know what? You just don't find a lot of things there. They're all about mostly the last three years of his life, the time of his public ministry.

And each of the four gospels has at least a fourth and some a third of even those three years are spent on just the last week of his life, the week of his passion, where he went to die for us on the cross. So does this tell you anything? Yes, it so fully agrees with what Galatians 4 explains that when the time had fully come, God sent his son to redeem those who are under the law. So we might receive adoption of sons and the focus is on the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

I like the way Hebrews chapter nine portrays it in verse 26. He has appeared. That is, he's made the atonement.

He's put away sin. He's the slain goat of Leviticus 16. And chapter 9, 24 says he is now appearing that he's in heaven to be our advocate there to be bearing the sins, plural of many.

As he said, he prayed for us that our faith wouldn't fail and that we wouldn't be given totally over to the enemy. And if we confess our sin, we have an advocate there now in heaven with the Father Jesus Christ, the righteous, and he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And then chapter 9, verse 28 says, and he shall appear.

That is, he will come again at his second advent. He will appear a second time, but it won't be like the first time when he wore a crown of thorns. He won't be wearing a crown of thorns, but a kingly crown.

And he won't be wearing a mock scepter, but he'll come to rule with a rod of iron. And it won't be just the wooden sign tacked up over the cross saying who he is, but it will be written boldly on his crown and on his thigh. And as surely as he hung on the cross, he shall appear in glory.

And I like the way Luke 12, 35 puts it. When he comes, he's going to come for those faithful ones who are serving him and watching for him. And then the Lord will gird himself and make them sit down and he will come forth and serve them.

That's so great because it shows the same love that started it all. The same love that he demonstrated to his disciples when he was here in John 13. It's the same love that's going on now as he intercedes for us in heaven.

And it's the same love that will be coming again to receive us unto himself so that where he is, there we also may be. I would encourage you to read the gospels and see Jesus and grow in your love for him who loved you first. And as you read them, you'll learn to appreciate the unique portrait of the Christ who died for you.

And if you've never heard the voice of the Son of God speak before, may you hear him say in John 1, 12, as many as receive him, to them he gives the power to become sons of God. May you receive him and then devote yourself to him, that he might fill you with all his fullness and give you life abundant. In Jesus name, amen.

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