

Testimony

Jesus said: “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” (John 18:37)

Herein lies perhaps the most significant reason why the Gospel and the Scriptures are to be accepted and believed – they are true.

Hymn, *by H Kinsbury (c.1850)*

1. In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time;
all the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.
2. When the woes of life o'ertake me, hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
never shall the cross forsake me. Lo! it glows with peace and joy.
3. When the sun of bliss is beaming light and love upon my way,
from the cross the radiance streaming adds more lustre to the day.
4. Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, by the cross are sanctified;
peace is there that knows no measure, joys that through all time abide.

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Scripture

- Genesis 49:8-12
- 2 Samuel 7:11b-14a
- Hebrews 1:1-4

Prayer:

Dear Father God,

Throughout time, despite the machinations of mankind and the violent opposition of your enemies, you have continued to fulfill your purpose to increase your Kingdom through the work of your Holy Spirit, the proclamation of your Word and the witness of the redeemed. Be pleased, dear Father, to continue your work of transformation in the lives of individuals and the communities where they live.

I ask for your protection over and provision for your servants who work in difficult and dangerous places. In particular, I pray for Kent and Ruth Hodge, working in Jos, Nigeria, as they minister to those severely impacted by violence and terrorism, to children, widows, teenagers and young men and women. May your Word effect change for good and righteousness in individuals, communities and indeed the whole nation of Nigeria.

Thank you, Father, for the privilege of being a citizen of your Kingdom and a member of your family, experiencing your everlasting kindness, mercy, care and encouragement. Bless this time together, in Jesus' Name,

Amen

Message: A Short History

Today, something a bit different! Much of Scripture is narrative, describing the events and stories experienced by God's people, but we don't spend much time reviewing them, except perhaps to look at specific incidents relevant to whatever topic is being discussed. So today we will take a brief overview of part of the history of God's people as recorded for us by Scripture. These are recorded so that we can appreciate how the Lord was able to fulfil his purpose as stated through the prophets, sometimes making it, as we might say, by the skin of his teeth.

We'll start at the time of Samuel, who was responsible for selecting the first king of Israel, Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, which to those following the prophecies of Jacob (Gen 49:8) might have presented a puzzle. But God's way prevailed and David of the tribe of Judah became king around 1000 BC. Solomon his son by Bathsheba, followed as king. The temple in Jerusalem was built and after Solomon's death, a rebel by the name of Jeroboam was made king of Israel. This also looked like a threat to the fulfilment of prophecy, but the tribes of Judah and Benjamin refused to accept Jeroboam and instead separated themselves into a separate kingdom with Solomon's son Rehoboam as their king. The two nations never re-joined.

Over time, the two nations sometimes co-operated, sometimes fought each other. The nation of Israel was the larger and more prosperous, but was never ruled by a Godly king. God's prophets, however, spoke into the lives of both nations, prophets like Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani, Jehu, Eliezer, Jehoiada, Zechariah, Isaiah, Micah, Huldah, Jeremiah, Uriah into Judah and Ahijah, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Oded into Israel, just like the writer to the Hebrews says (Hebrews 1:1). Sometimes they were listened to, but mostly the attitude was similar to that of Ahab, king of Israel who said, concerning the prophet Michaiah "I hate him" (1 Kings 22:8).

Ahab's wife was Jezebel and both were confronted by Elijah (870 BC). Their daughter Athaliah married the king of Judah, Jehoram. After Jehoram, his son Jehoahaz (aka Ahaziah) became king, but only for one year because he was killed. Athaliah was still around, and in the spirit of Jezebel plotted to kill all of Jehoahaz's children, her grandchildren and the descendants of David through whom God had made promises about the Messiah, so that she could become queen. And so she did. She killed them all. Except the youngest, Joash, who happened to be elsewhere when the massacre took place. So the line through David was preserved. Just!

Meanwhile the rebellion of the northern kingdom of Israel was only getting worse. False gods and idols were established and despite the prophets and the faithful few (1 Kings 19:18) the nation continued on its way. To the east the Assyrian empire was flexing its muscles and eventually turned its attention on Israel, and conquered the nation, finally in 722BC taking over the capital Samaria. The best of the Jewish people were removed from the land and exiled elsewhere, never to return (the ten lost tribes of Israel). The Assyrians replaced them with their own and others, and so the whole of that region of what was Israel became a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, later to be designated as the despised Samaritans of Jesus' time – despised because they were not pure Jews.

A Short History

But things were not going well in the nation of Judah either. Unlike Israel, there were six or seven Godly kings during its history, kings like Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, but the trend was toward evil, heading in the same direction as Israel.

Meanwhile the Assyrian empire was diminishing and the Babylonian empire was establishing itself as the dominant force in the region. Eventually Nebuchadnezzar was in charge and invaded Judah, first turning it into a vassal state during the reign of king Jehoiakim (aka Eliakim). Eventually Zedekiah became king, and despite the exhortation of the prophet Jeremiah, he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and formed an alliance with Egypt. This proved disastrous, incurring the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar. Despite these circumstances, Jeremiah prophetically bought a field indicating to those watching that despite circumstances there was hope for the future – God's promises were sure. Nebuchadnezzar then attacked Judah and in 586BC was victorious and removed many of its people to Baylon (including Daniel, and his three friends). Despite Jeremiah's real estate purchase, things looked grim. Again.

Then Babylon was overtaken by the Persians. It was the Persian kings Cyrus and later Darius, influenced by Daniel, who over several years allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem – Zerubbabel, Jeshua/Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah. The people were re-established. The temple was rebuilt. The walls repaired. The cult of Jewish worship restored. The inevitable coming of the Messiah was getting closer to realisation. Despite set backs, discouragements, persecutions, failures, despair, trials and open disobedience, the great prophesies were always going to be fulfilled. And so the Messiah came.

So we too can be encouraged. The Christian church has had, and has, its issues. Local churches have come and gone. Opposition is ever-present. But we press on in trust that God is working his purpose out. The Lord's return. The New Jerusalem. The destruction of all that is evil. It is all coming. Maranatha!

Prayer with suffering Christians (*Barnabas Prayer 30/8/26*)

Lord Jesus,

We intercede for brothers and sisters encountering apparent hopelessness through war, persecution, natural disasters or extreme poverty. We ask for mobilisation of resources to support our Christian family facing such suffering and that You will use Your people to help them renew their hope in You.

We thank You that through Your glorious resurrection we are born again to a living hope in You that does not disappoint us. We pray in Your mighty Name.

(1 Peter 1:3; Romans 5:5).

Hymn *by AC Ainger*

1. God is working this purpose out, as year succeeds to year;
God is working this purpose out, and the time is drawing near;
nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be:
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.
2. From utmost east to utmost west, where human feet have trod,
by the mouth of many messengers goes forth the voice of God:
"Give ear to me, ye continents, ye isles, give ear to me,
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea."
3. Let us go forth in the strength of God, with the banner of Christ unfurled,
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth may shine throughout the world.
Let us all fight with sorrow and sin to set the captives free,
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.
4. All we can do is nothing worth unless God blesses the deed.
Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide till God gives life to the seed.
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Benediction:

In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham has come to you, so that you might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:14)

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom 8:11)

Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA