

## 225 The history of God and the world

As I said last time,<sup>[224]</sup> I was struck by Jesus' statement<sup>Lk 16:16</sup> that:

*The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached.*

It set me thinking about what exactly changed when Jesus and John started preaching? Why do we measure time by those events, that preaching? Why do we see it as the centrepiece of human history or, better, the centrepiece God's history? And here are the column headings I scribbled:

Totally ideal	Good but flawed	4 BC – AD 30	Good but flawed	Totally ideal
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At the time of creation, it was totally ideal, but (what? why?) the wonderful goodness of creation was marred. God's creation is still good (God doesn't make rubbish!), but flawed. What changed at the centrepiece? Next scribble: *Old covenant → New covenant Jer 31*

Totally ideal	Good but flawed	4 BC – AD 30	Good but flawed	Totally ideal
<i>Gen 1</i>	Old covenant (OT)	<i>Jer 31:31ff</i>	New covenant (NT)	<i>Rev 21/22</i>

Right throughout history, God has made covenants with humans – relationship agreements. At creation, God came to dwell with humans – heaven came to earth – and it was ideal. Ultimately, heaven will come back to earth, and it will again be ideal.

Totally ideal	Good but flawed	4 BC – AD 30	Good but flawed	Totally ideal
<i>God comes</i>	God helps	<i>God comes</i>	God helps	<i>God comes</i>

See how God is there the whole time, helping to gradually improve things! OK, in the OT we see how God helps sometimes by withdrawing his protective hand and allowing things to get worse. But this is always to make us see that when we trust God, have faith in God, things go well, but as soon as we say we can 'manage without your help, thanks', it all goes horribly wrong.

So the whole of human history is about God trying to get humans to improve, to learn, to work together, to stop beating each other up. Gradually we improve, but it's a very long, slow business, and there's a repeated pattern of 'wilderness/exile' times and 'promised land' times.

Can you just imagine the sense of excitement in the early church – especially Paul, with his intimate knowledge of the OT – as they saw this pattern, there in the scriptures, and realised that they were actually at the centrepiece of God's human history – God's kingdom has come! (Well, I'm not sure how much they realised, but they knew it was cataclysmic.)

My thinking is that for hundreds of years, the church has managed without God's help, thanks. We've turned the Good News of the Kingdom of Hope into 'You're a miserable human being, steeped in sin from birth, but if you do what we say – sorry, what the Bible teaches – you can escape this evil world and get to the loveliness of heaven'.<sup>Rev 21/2</sup> (OK, a slight overstatement.)

There is hope! There is God with us, Emmanuel!