

317 The good news announced – God's great plan

What I've written here – right or wrong – is how I see God's overall picture/plan/timeline, for bringing God's kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

Prehistory to Abraham et al. – God inspires people, through story and oral tradition, to abandon the idea of gods living up mountains hurling thunderbolts willy-nilly and see the One God seeking to come and live with us in the place God created for that very purpose.

Up to 400BC – God inspired writers to know and communicate a God of love wanting to live with us; God seeded words, phrases, ideas in their texts which people would later recognise as predictions of the gospel story.

BC/AD God came – It happened, here on earth, real events: incarnation, birth, growth, living, teaching, healing, announcing the kingdom, terrible death, resurrection, ascension.

Early years – The good news is announced, God's kingdom has come, passed orally, enacted in real lives, suffering comes, the gospel (the story of what actually happened) spreads like wildfire, they follow Jesus' method of using parables, metaphors to help people understand and appreciate: lost/found, redemption, healing, rescue from slavery (exodus), atoning sacrifice, etc., thus Jesus' oral tradition continues.

Early decades – Problems begin, as individuals and groups develop ideas contrary to Jesus' teachings, so God inspires letters to be written to point people back to Jesus' way, eventually accounts of what happened are written down (the Gospels) by a few people.

Early centuries – Some people try to move ideas away from Jesus' teaching, so church leaders decide which letters and which written accounts should be trusted, and they also write careful statements of belief (the creeds).

Centuries roll by – People like me begin to say, 'Yes, but exactly *how* does Jesus' death and resurrection *work*?' and so theologians develop atonement theories: C2 Irenaeus (recapitulation), C3 Origen (ransom), C11 Anselm (satisfaction), C12 Abelard (moral influence), C16 Calvin (penal substitution).

Jump to C21 – We need a new vicar so, for people interested, we on the PCC write that the person must be someone who 'keeps the penal substitutionary death of Christ and his resurrection at the centre of his/her theology and ministry.' (I agreed to these words, drafted by a theologically trained lay member, but I had no clue then what they meant.)

'The gospel' has become: 'You're a sinner, you deserve God's punishment, Jesus took the punishment instead of you, you can now be free', i.e. penal substitution.

In C1, an evangelist was someone good at communicating the gospel, i.e. telling the story of what actually happened. In C21, an evangelist is someone who is good at persuading people to believe in one particular atonement theory.

An over-simplification, yes, but I hope it might help.

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