

# THE NATURE OF GOD'S REVELATION IN HISTORY

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All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. II Timothy 3:16-17

To be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" the child of God does not turn to the vain philosophies of men, but he looks instead to the infallible Word of God. This must be true of the child of God in his study of history (defined by Prof. H. Hanko on page 2 of *Principles of Education* as "the temporal revelation of the counsel of God with respect to all things beginning with creation and ending with the realization of God's purpose in the new heavens and earth.")). Repeatedly the child of God must ask himself, "How must I understand this event in the light of God's word?" The key to the understanding of history, then, is God's Word.

On this basis we will examine the promise which God announced to Adam and Eve after their fall and the implications of this promise upon all subsequent history. Also, this paper will demonstrate the progression in the revelation of that promise during the antediluvian period. And finally, in this connection I will show how the wicked in their very rebellion against God serve the promise and its revelation.

## I. THE PROMISE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

Adam and Eve, who were made by God perfectly righteous, fell into sin. The fall, however, was not something outside of God's plan for the human race; but rather, it was the means by which God's love, grace, and mercy could be revealed through the gift of His Son. That this is the case is seen immediately after

the fall when God proclaims in Genesis 3:15 this beautiful prophecy:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

In the highest sense the conquering seed of the woman spoken of in this prophecy is Christ. It is the revelation of Christ, who is the focal point of history. Although Christ is the fulfillment, we must not fail to see that every child of God is represented in the seed of the woman; Christ and His people are one. Thus, the prophecy in Genesis 3:15 has tremendous implications for all subsequent history. On page 260 in *Reformed Dogmatics* Rev. Herman Hoeksema writes:

All the rest of the history of God's people in the world is plainly the realization of this prophecy. This prophecy is called the protevangel. It is called this because it is the beginning of the gospel of salvation; and all the rest of the revelation of the gospel in Christ may be conceived as only a further unfolding and expansion of this promise.

This means that Genesis 3:15 reveals in a nutshell what *all* history is--the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

The protevangel, therefore, certainly has something to say to the history teacher about his presentation of historical facts to the class. These facts must be, and can only be, understood correctly if they are interpreted in the light of the protevangel. From this perspective, for example, the history of Israel in Egypt can be understood. We see Israel as the seed of the woman whose heel is bruised while Israel is in bondage, and we observe the bruising of the head of the serpent when Israel is delivered and the Egyptians are drowned in the Red Sea. The history teacher must also make clear that the outcome of this "Battle of the Ages" between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is never in question. Although many times it appears that the serpent's seed is victorious, especially, when God's people endure persecution at the hands of wicked men, yet the victory is always theirs. Persecution, too, is used by God as a means to that glorious victory. This is a victory which we must credit to the

conquering Christ, who crushed the head of the serpent, when He overcame sin and death for His people by His perfect sacrifice on the cross.

We, who live about six thousand years after the pronouncement of the protevangel and acknowledge the finished work of Christ on the cross, have little difficulty seeing Christ as the fulfillment of the protevangel; but could the people of that period in history see what we now see? Could they know and understand the implications of the protevangel as we do? The obvious answer is no. They didn't have all the Old Testament prophecies, the words of Christ, nor the testimony of the Apostles. Throughout Old Testament history God chose to reveal to His people in a progressive manner the meaning of the protevangel. In this connection Prof. H. Hanko on page three of *Principles of Education* writes that the dispensations before Christ "were all periods of time in which God progressively shed more light on the promise which He had made to our first parents in paradise." Rev. G. M. Ophoff in Volume one of his *Old Testament History*, p. 66, informs us that, "the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is a progressive revelation of what the triune Jehovah in His sovereign good pleasure purposed to accomplish in His Christ, namely, the salvation of the elect to His everlasting credit and glory." About this the Heidelberg Catechism has something to say. Lord's Day VI points out our need for a Mediator that is in one person both God and man. It goes on to say that *Christ* is that mediator, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30). Then, question and answer number 19 illustrates the progression of which we are writing:

Q. 19. Whence knowest thou this?

A. From the holy gospel, which God himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son.

## II. PROGRESSION OF THE PROMISE DURING THE ANTEDILUVIAN PERIOD

Evidence for this progressive revelation can be seen throughout the various periods of Old Testament history, but for our purposes let us concentrate our efforts on the time before the

flood.

- A. Already only moments after the pronouncement of the protevangel, God made for Adam and Eve coats of skins (Genesis 3:21). God shed innocent blood to cover their physical shame. This certainly typified the shed blood of Christ for their sins. God had determined for His people the way of sin and grace, and already here He begins to reveal it. Of course, Adam and Eve could not see the complete meaning of this covering by God, but certainly the shed blood and covering with skins did not come without instruction which pointed to Christ (I would speculate that they were at this time instructed as to the nature of the sacrifices they were to offer.)
- B. The sacrifices of Cain and Abel reveal the antithetical relationship of the seed of the woman to the seed of the serpent which was spoken of in the protevangel.
- C. The murder of Abel by Cain demonstrates the "Battle of the Ages" pointed to in the protevangel. Furthermore, Cain exposes himself as being the seed of the serpent. It is evident therefore that the seed of the protevangel is not a physical seed but a spiritual seed.
- D. Enoch's walking with God demonstrated the covenant relationship which God had established with His people, and it pointed ahead to the perfect realization of that covenant relationship in Christ.
- E. The translation of Enoch by God revealed that the protevangel's promise of deliverance meant more than mere physical deliverance. In addition it pointed to a "better country." This translation, which resulted because of the persecution the "sons of God" were experiencing at that time (Hebrews 11:5, Jude 14-15), reaffirmed to an even stronger degree the bruising of the woman's seed.
- F. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 speaks of the victory of the seed of the woman, but as time passed it must have become more and more obvious that that victory could never be accomplished by man. The seed of the woman grew smaller as the "sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Genesis 6:2). From a physical point of view the seed of the woman was no match for the seed of the serpent. Was it possible for the seed of the woman to

be victorious when they numbered just a few souls in contrast to the millions which constituted the seed of the serpent? It is this state of helplessness and hopelessness that God uses to shed more light on the promise made to Adam and Eve. Their deliverance must come from outside of themselves. God must deliver them. Although the Flood itself provided a temporal deliverance, this temporal bruising of the serpent's head was at this time the clearest revelation of the Spiritual Deliverer to which the protevangel pointed. That the flood was only a temporary deliverance became clear to Noah shortly after the flood when he saw a duplication of the wickedness which was prevalent before the flood. Certainly Noah could see that this life held no hope for the seed of the woman. The flood must open the eyes of God's people a little bit more with respect to the protevangel. The victory of which Genesis 3:15 speaks is a *complete* victory, but a victory which in the complete sense this earth cannot afford. The flood and all of the temporal bruising of the serpent's head point to a final *spiritual* victory.

### III. THE WICKED SERVE THE PROMISE AND ITS REVELATION

These temporal bruising, both of the seed of the serpent and of the woman, must be made clear in our history instruction. In addition, we must be able to demonstrate in this instruction that the seed of the serpent *serves* the seed of the woman. The serpent in rebellion against God attempts to destroy the church throughout history, yet this very rebellion is God's means to accomplish the temporal victories which the church experiences and also the final victory at the return of Christ. Think of the events of the antediluvian period used to demonstrate a progressive revelation of the protevangel's promise. It isn't difficult to see in these events that even the works of the wicked contributed to the revelation of that promise and the salvation of the church. Cain, for instance, when he murdered the righteous Abel participated in the "Battle of the Ages" which is prophesied in the protevangel. By this act he was the very means whereby Abel was delivered from this bondage of corruption. Although Cain meant it for evil, God used it for good. Thus, wicked Cain was a tool in God's hand to reveal to God's people the meaning of

the promise of Genesis 3:15. Think, too, of the rapid development of sin during the time before the flood. It was unquestionably direct rebellion against God and a result of the attempt of the serpent to overthrow the seed of the woman, but this rebellion against God merely serves the protevangel's promise of victory and is another step in its revelation. The result of this rebellion is the flood which consumes all mankind except for God's people. Not only did this destruction of the world constitute a temporal victory for the woman's seed, but it also served to provide the most beautiful typical revelation of the Final Deliverer that God's people had yet received.

This subjection of the serpent's seed does not stop at the flood. Throughout history the seed of the serpent must bow before the seed of the woman. Although the subservience of the serpent's seed to that of the woman's is sometimes difficult to see, especially for the child of God in the midst of the "battle"; yet the Word of God in Isaiah 45:4 sounds forth comfort to the child of God throughout the ages.

For Jacob my servant's sake and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee (Cyrus) by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

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## **The School's Calling to Teach the Children to Keep the Way of the Lord**

Rev. David Engelsma

It was my privilege to receive my grade school education from the third grade on in a Protestant Reformed School. The memories of this training are overwhelmingly favorable, but I also have certain bad memories concerning this training. All of these bad memories have to do with what I consider to have been a shortcoming in the school, a shortcoming as regards teaching