

[Paul said]: 'from this man [David's] descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised.'
Acts 13.23.

Why is there so much yukkiness in the world? so much cruelty, injustice, pain? Why are children killed? Why is there cancer? How can there be a good God with a world like this? Surely this opposes everything a good God stands for?

If you've ever asked questions like these, then you've hit on the main theme of the Bible. God never intended us to live in a world like that. The first book of the Bible, *Genesis*, begins with paradise, the Garden of Eden, and the last book of the Bible, *Revelation*, ends with paradise, the 'new heaven and the new earth'. Turn to p1249, to Rev 21.1-4 ...

The great mass of stuff in the middle of the Bible between those two paradises is the yukky bits - the wars, the killings and cruelty, the pain and injustice. And that's all due to that little serpent you first met in the Garden of Eden. He opposes God, and what does 'Satan' mean in Aramaic? 'Opponent'. So, although there are 66 different books, the Bible has a story-line and it is this: God means us to live in paradise, but Satan is working flat-out to oppose that. For a time, now I'm afraid, Satan seems to be succeeding, but one day, God will bring us back to the paradise he always meant for us. The Book of *Revelation* is just that, a *revelation* of something way off in the future. Let's read Rev 21.1-4 again ...

The Bible's story-line is the working out of God's plan to frustrate the destructive efforts of that serpent in order to bring about that new heaven and new earth. A good sermon should have a text. And the text of the *Bible* is a promise God

made to Abraham at *Gen 12.2-3* on p13... God is going to bless us through descendants of Abraham ... This is the key to the Bible.

You see, God did not intend us to *hate* life, to find it a chore. He meant *paradise* for us. He means to *bless* us, *all* of us, 'all the peoples of the earth'. At the present moment in your life, you may not actually *feel* that God is blessing you, but that's because that wretched serpent keeps getting in the way. The Bible calls that *sin*, and God has a plan to destroy that sin which is trying so hard to wreck our lives.

In *Gen 12.3b* God promises Abraham that 'through you will all peoples on earth be blessed'. The rest of the Bible shews how from Abraham will come a nation, Israel, who will be the means of blessing the peoples of the world. Unfortunately, that awful serpent succeeded in nobbling most of Israel. Only a faithful remnant remained, until eventually, the only *true* Israelite descended from Abraham was Jesus. This Jesus would be the one who saved us from sin and finally destroyed the sin which wrecks our lives and turns our paradise into hell.

Sorry about all that. It's a bit heavy going, isn't it? But let's return to our *Acts 13* passage on p1107. Paul continues on his 1st missionary journey into Asia Minor, modern Turkey to Pisidian Antioch where he preaches in the Jewish synagogue, vv13-15... It's interesting, isn't it, that they call a sermon a 'word of *encouragement*'? A lot of sermons are far from encouraging. After some sermons you lose the will to live! But the explaining of God's word should *encourage* us.

Well, how does Paul encourage his fellow Jews (and Gentiles)? Just as I have done, he gives a summary of the OT,

(vv17-22). Why the history lesson? It is to shew them that, yes, the world as we know it is rotten, unfair and cruel, but God is at work. He is at work to get us all back to the paradise he always meant life to be for us. Way back in Gen 12.2-3 he *promised* that he would bless us, everyone, all the 'peoples of the earth', Jew and Gentile alike. He means to bless *you*. You may not *think* that as you look at the world or your personal life, but he does. God wants you in paradise, but he first has to destroy Satan, the one who *opposes* him. Cancer opposes God's will. So does war, cheating. Deaths on the road, terrorism, child abuse, cruelty to animals are all against God's will. They are the work of Satan, who opposes God. That serpent has to be dealt with. We need a Saviour.

Can you see now how I have been building up to Acts 13.23? ... It is Paul's contention that when God promised Abraham that through *him* all the people of the earth would be blessed, he meant Jesus. He was descended from David who was descended from Abraham. He would bless the people of the earth, Jew and Gentile, by saving them from the sin, death, fear, oppression which turn our paradise into hell, v23... Look also at v26... and v38... All Jews looked for a Saviour. Unfortunately most of them refused to accept it was Jesus, v27... and v45... So Paul turned to the Gentiles, v46... But the OT intended this, v47... So '*all* people on earth would be blessed'.

Last Thursday was the due date of our baby. Instead, I *buried* my baby boy, my only son on New Year's Eve. In an ideal world I shouldn't have had to do that. But that's exactly my point. We are *not* living in an ideal world. This is very much

a fallen world. At the moment, it's very hard to see how God might be blessing Laura and me. So what does the Bible say?

Jesus spoke in *John* of 'the prince of this world'. *Hebrews* 2.14 speaks of the 'devil who holds the power of death'. It's that serpent again, Satan who opposes God. Satan is working very hard at the moment to crush me and my wife; to destroy our faith in the goodness and love of God. But scripture tells us that God is working even harder to save us.

God came in Jesus, descended from Abraham, and took the devil on. The prince of this world did his worst to Jesus, the best perfect person who ever lived. Evil got him on to that Cross on Good Friday, but God the Father raised his Son from the dead. So Jesus could say, 'I have overcome the world'. And we can say with 1 *John* 4.4: 'Greater is he that is in me, than he that is in the world'. Never underestimate Satan; but don't overestimate him either. Jesus took him on and smote him.

We need saving. We need Jesus our Saviour, to defeat the sin and evil which make our paradise hell. You may not think so, but God *is* in fact at work in the world. Creation, life, as you see it now is not finished yet. Life as we know it is a work in progress. Life is not just endless repetition, going nowhere. God is moving us all on so that one day we shall be back in paradise where he first meant us to be until that serpent nobbled us. The Bible *begins* in the paradise of Eden, and *ends* in the paradise of a new earth and a new heaven. Through Christ our Saviour, God is working to bless you, to make your life paradise again. That's what he promised to Abraham way back in *Gen* 12, and God never breaks his promise.