

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“THY KINGDOM COME: THE WITNESS OF CHURCH HISTORY”

“Beginnings”

I. Why Church History?

A. GOD is a GOD of History – someone rightly said that history is really **“HIS” or GOD’S STORY**. God created time and space, and history is the result of God’s creative work through human beings in the time/space continuum we call the present age. From observation and study, we know that every aspect of creation has a purpose. This includes individuals, families, communities, and nations. Likewise, there is a purpose to the overall plan of human history. The Biblical witness is clear – not only did God create the context for human history, but history has an overarching purpose – *the redemption of mankind*. What was lost by man in the Garden of Eve (Gen. 3) – “paradise” - will be restored by God through the present time/space reality.

The promise of God’s redemptive plan is first found in **Gen. 3:15**: *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”* In the Hebrew, it is literally ***“the seed of the woman”*** and is a reference to the future Virgin Birth of the Messiah. Note that the Hebrew word we translate as “seed” is always used in context of the father’s progeny. However, here, there is no father, only a mother. Thus, we can see the first glimpse of a birth without a human father! Moreover, later in **Gen. 3:21**, God makes animal skins (an animal had to be killed for there to be skins!) to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness. This also points toward the future coming of the Messiah/Christ and His death as a covering of our sin and means for the spiritual and eventual physical restoration of fallen humanity. The theological terms for this include *atonement* and *justification*.

As already noted, this promised intervention and redemptive work is through the long-awaited promised Messiah, who we now know to be **the Lord Jesus Christ**. Human history hinges on Christ’s first coming and culminates with His Return or second coming. Our Old Testament provides the foundation for both comings. **“Old Testament” is another way of saying Old Covenant**. Covenant is the term used to denote holy agreements that God makes with mankind. Every covenant God makes with mankind usually has four main components: a promise, a ratification or sign, an obligation, and a fulfillment. While there is an obligation on man’s part, God will fulfill the covenant regardless of whether man fulfills his end of the covenant.

God’s covenants are made with mankind and in time and space. Therefore, they are both historical and eternal realities. The three main covenants of the Old Testament are the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant. We cannot fully understand the significance of Christ’s coming and the purpose of history until we understand these three covenants.

1. Abrahamic Covenant – the precursor of the covenant God made with Abraham is found in **Gen. 12:1-4**: *“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told*

him...” NOTE that Abram believed and showed his faith by obeying. Later we read in **Gen. 15:6** that **“he believed the LORD, and He (God) counted it to him (Abram) as righteousness.”**

God’s covenant with Abraham is clearly stated in **Gen. 17:1-8**: *“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; a walk before me, and be blameless, 2that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” 3Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”*

Note the promises: a son would be born and through that son he would have many descendants and land, and through his progeny the whole world would be blessed. The blessing of the covenant would be received by faith (covenant’s obligation). God’s blessing through Abraham is realized in the Lord Jesus Christ as Christ will be a descendant of Abraham. Note Abram’s name was changed to Abraham (“exalted father of many”) to highlight this covenant. God would finally show him where to go but this required faith/trust on Abraham’s part. The implication of this covenant is not only will all families of the world be blessed but this blessing would involve land as the covenant includes “promised land” to Abraham and his descendants. It points us to the reality that God’s Kingdom is not only about changed lives and peoples but about a changed domains or regions of the earth. History is the story of people groups and nations, their interactions, and migrations from one area to another, which ultimately means the control of geography.

2. Mosaic Covenant – to be God’s people expressed through obedience to the law – a kingdom of priests.

Ex. 19:1-6: *“On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, 3while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel,”*

Dt. 5:1-3: *“And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. 2The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 3Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.”*

3. Davidic Covenant – a descendant of David would reign forever. **2 Sam. 7:12-16**: *“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16And your house and*

*your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. **Your throne shall be established forever.**” 17In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.”*

Towards the end of his life King David says in **2 Sam. 23:5**: “For does not my house stand so with God? For **he has made with me an everlasting covenant**, ordered in all things and secure.”

The prophet Jeremiah affirms this covenant again in **Jer. 33:14-22**: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will fulfill the promise** I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15In those days and at that time I will cause **a righteous Branch to spring up for David**, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: **‘The LORD is our righteousness.’** 17“For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, 18and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.” 19The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 20“Thus says the LORD: If you can break **my covenant** with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, 21then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. 22As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so **I will multiply the offspring** of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.”

4. The New Covenant

These three covenants are fulfilled in the New Covenant that Christ established on the eve of His crucifixion. The context of the New Covenant was the celebration of the old – the Passover – as it was a Passover meal that Jesus had with the Apostles. It also was predicted by the prophet Jeremiah in **Jer. 31:31-34**: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32**not like the covenant** that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, **my covenant that they broke**, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them**, and **I will write it on their hearts**. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**”

B. The Creation and Purpose of the Church

In establishing the New Covenant (**Luke 22:20**), Jesus established a “New People” to be of all races – both Jew and Gentile. This new creation is the Church – the Body and Bride of Christ. It is through the Church that God will manifest His Kingdom – His glory, His power, His wisdom, and His love to the world. The Church’s purpose to bring glory to God and to reveal Christ to the world – the Kingdom of God.

1. We find this in the giving of the Great Commission in Mt. 28:18-20; “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”

2. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:

a. Acts 1:6-8: *“So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

b. Acts 2:1-4: *“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

3. The revelation giving to the Apostle Paul who declares in Ephesians 2:9-11: *“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Notice that the witness of God’s work is not only for mankind but for the heavenly host! God will use human history to reveal His plan and purposes and in so doing will manifest his wisdom and glory to all creation through the witness and work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

4. Christ’s prophetic witness declared in Mt. 24:14, *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

5. The revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John when we read of the four living creatures and twenty-four elders at the end of the present age, *“And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you (Christ) to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:9-10)*

Thus, it is Church History that gives us both the witness and the means of how God is accomplishing His will in our world. This will is ultimately fulfilled in the New Covenant which in turn is revealed and fulfilled in the first and second comings of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Why Church History Matters

1. It confirms the historical character of the Christian faith. Our faith is rooted in history and the events and people involved are not fanciful creations of the imagination. We can see the consistency and results of the truth claims of God’s Word and people manifested throughout Church history when we study it.

2. It gives us perspective on the interpretation and fulfillment of Holy Scripture. By looking at how the Church has understood God’s Word over the centuries and has put the Christian faith into action helps us further understand the message of the Bible and avoid the pitfalls of previous generations misinterpretation of Scripture as well as previous generations insights that we may have failed to appreciate or see if we had simply

ignored them. We have a wealth of the wisdom of 2000 years of Christian experience when we study Church history! We can also see how the prophecies of God's Word are being fulfilled especially in relation to Israel.

3. It helps us to see how the Gospel has truly spread and impacted our world for good. Church history is a testimony of how God's saving grace, work of the Holy Spirit, and His Word have transformed the various cultures and peoples of the world.

4. It enables us to see how the Church has engaged with the surrounding culture and faced the unique as well as similar challenges that comes with each generation. This would include how to live within various political contexts, deal with certain moral issues, and whether to adopt or reject cultural norms. Church history is replete with examples of how the faithful addressed such matters and their response enlightens us.

5. It shows how God has continued to grow and bless His Church despite the unfaithfulness of His people. To study Church history is to see both the hypocrisy and evil within the Church as well as the transformational grace and power of love of those who remain faithful. We see both the bad and the good, and ultimately their respective fruits.

6. It is a reminder that the Church is God's creation and as such God will sustain it and grow it! The promise of Jesus to Peter after his confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, *"that upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it"* (Mt. 16:18) still stands. As believers, we stand in this tradition, and it is for that reason that Church history can inspire, convict, and encourage us in our own day and in our own walks with the Lord. Therefore, we should approach Church history with humility and gratitude for we are the spiritual progeny of those who have gone before us and the recipients of God's prevenient grace and blessing.

D. Bibliography of Our Study

1. *Church History in Plain Language* – by Bruce Shelby – solid overview of 2000 years of Christian history with an emphasis on the personalities that shaped the Church of today.

2. *The Story of Christianity* – 2 Volumes – by Justo L. Gonzalez – a more detailed 1000-page study of the Christian faith.

3. *Turning Points* – by Mark Noll – highlights 14 decisive moments in Church history that impacted both the church and our world in life-changing ways.

4. *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* – by Tom Holland, an agnostic, recognizes the valuable contributions made by the Christian faith to the modern world through Western culture and civilization.

5. *The Church through the Ages* – by Kenneth Latourette – a shorter version of his classic 1500+ page work, *The History of the Church*.

6. *How Jesus Changed the World: An Illustrated Guide to the Undeniable Influence of Christ* by Christopher D. Hudson - shows how Christ and His message has transformed the world for good.

7. *Why You Think the Way You Do?* – by Glen S. Sunshine – highlights how the western worldview developed out of the growth of the Christian faith and its positive impact on the world.

8. *Trial by Fire: The Story of Christianity's First Thousand Years* – by William J. Bennet – a short history of the first 1000 years of the Christian faith with a particular biographical emphasis on the lives of those who remained faithful despite the persecution and setbacks they faced.

9. *The Ecclesiastical History* – by Eusebius of Caesarea – church historian and writer of the 4th century. His work gives solid overview of Church history from the time of the Apostles through 330 AD.

10. *The Works of Josephus* – by Josephus - ancient Jewish/Roman historian whose first century works have been preserved and give us a detailed look at Jewish history and first century Judaism.

E. What every historian/believer needs when studying Church History

1. your Bible
2. a map
3. a timeline
4. familiarity with key people and events
5. learn the issues, trends, and ideas of each age in light of the witness of God's Word understanding that all history finds its ultimate purpose and fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ and the growth of His Body (the Church) in wisdom, righteousness, and love.

II. The Coming of Christ (5 BC–33 AD)

A. **The Fullness of Time** – Why did Jesus come when He did? **Galatians 4:4-5**: “*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*” **Heb. 1:1-2a**: “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also created all things.*”

B. The Jewish Context

1. **period of relative prophetic silence** – the intertestamental period (335 BC – birth of Christ (2-6 BC) consisted of the rise and fall of Alexander the Great, the Seleucid dynasty, the Maccabean revolt, the rise of the Roman Empire, and the Herod dynasty. During this time, the prophetic voice of God as it had been known was for the most part silent. The prophetic word had ceased with the last prophetic book of Malachi (c. 450 BC)

2. **the burden of Roman oppressors** – while Rome did make some concessions for Jewish “self-rule” and did not require Jews to have to offer sacrifice to the Roman Emperor or gods, many still resented their Roman masters. Tension revolved around not only from being ruled by Gentiles, but the accommodation to Hellenism (Greek culture and philosophy) by many in Jewish faith and leadership. Though an avid builder and administrator through most of his career (he rebuilt Solomon's temple), King Herod (“the Great”) was a ruthless despot who imposed heavy taxes and mercilessly oppressed his subjects. Reigning from 40 BC by Roman Senate appointment, he crushed all opposition. He had ten wives and numerous children. Suffering from mental derangement (possibly from the effects of late-stage syphilis) towards the end of his life, he murdered two of his own sons, and his wife. From Matthew's Gospel (**2:1-12**) we know that he infamously gave the order to kill all the male babies in Bethlehem when he heard the Magi from the East were looking for the baby Messiah.

3. **messianic anticipation** – Josephus writes that there was great expectation throughout the Holy Land that the Messiah would come.

4. **four main groups** – Josephus mentions these groups during the high priesthood of Jonathan (152-142 BC) in his *Jewish Antiquities*. Both the Sadducees and Pharisees vied for control of the Temple and the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council).

a) **the Sadducees** – wealthy priestly families in Jerusalem who were responsible for providing priests for the Temple and overseeing its functions. The High Priest Caiaphas was a Sadducee. They cooperated with Herod and Rome as much as possible. They were conservative and institutionalists. They only accepted the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) as primary and did not believe in a general resurrection of the dead or in angels.

b) **the Pharisees** – were more the party of the people who opposed the intermingling of Roman and Greek customs upon the people. They were concerned with the right interpretation of the Law and God's Word and how it applied to everyday life. They had a large following among the masses. There were three

main schools – Shammai (more conservative), Hillel (liberal) and Gamaliel (grandson of Hillel under whom the Apostle Paul studied). They oversaw and taught in the synagogues. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Pharisees became the dominant group in Judaism.

c) the Essenes - the Essenes dropped out of public view by the time of Christ. They lived in isolated communities throughout the holy land, separating themselves from the rest of society they deemed corrupted. They wore white and practiced baptism. Many did not marry. They shared what they had in common and gave to the poor. While they strictly observed the Sabbath, they did not bring sacrifices to the Temple as they believed the corrupted priests defiled the Temple! Their writings and those that they preserved showed an anticipation of the end of the age culminating in the coming of the Messiah and the defeat of evil. The Dead Sea Scrolls are thought to be from one of the Essene communities in Qumran near the Dead Sea. Some believe John the Baptist may have been associated with this group.

d) the Zealots - while not as prevalent during the time of Christ, this sect grew in numbers and influence. Opposing Roman rule and seeking the overthrow of the Herodian dynasty, the Zealots were instrumental in sparking riots and rebellion culminating in the final rebellion in 66 AD and the eventual destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD. One of Jesus' disciples was called Simon the Zealot indicating his association with this group. Some believe Judas Iscariot may have been from this group, too.

5. geo-political regions

- a) Judea and Jerusalem – heart of Judaism – the place of the Temple – the holiest site.
- b) Galilee – land of the north with Jews and mixed people
- c) Samaria – mixed people – descendants of the northern tribes of Israel
- d) Gentile border regions – Decapolis, Perea, Idumea
- e) The Diaspora – Hellenized Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire in every major urban center – Alexandria, Carthage, Rome, Antioch, Corinth and beyond into Persia.

C. The Roman Context

1. Greco-Roman culture – developed from the time of Alexander the Great. Hellenism is the term to describe the Greek influence that pervaded the Mediterranean world during that time. It influenced art, literature, architecture, education, religion, science, and philosophy. Roman law produced a clear legal code administered through local officials. This legal code still serves as a basis for modern law today.

2. The good, the bad, and the ugly

a. the good

1) the Pax Romana – relative peace and stability which was a direct result from how the Romans ruled and accommodated the various people groups. The consistency of Roman law and the enforcement of Roman rule by a professional army all were contributing factors, too.

2) unity of peoples and religions under Caesar's lordship and the Roman Senate - Rome's genius was to allow for local customs and religious traditions, even including the people's deities in the Roman pantheon, with the provision that they be subject to the authority of Caesar. Rome also sought to improve the infrastructure of the cities and places they conquered. Roman citizenship did not depend on ethnicity. This all contributed to a "unifying glue" for the Empire.

3) common language – Greek. In fact, the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) had been translated into the Greek language 200 years earlier and was used by Jews throughout the Empire. It was this Bible that was quoted from by the Apostles and writers of the New Testament most frequently and was increasingly used by Christians as they spread the faith throughout the Roman world.

4) "all roads lead to Rome" - Wherever Roman soldiers went, the construction of cities and highways would follow. Rome was all about building civilization. In fact, the Latin word from which we get civilization, literally means citification. It is Roman in origin. This along with the Pax Romana mentioned above all meant the ease of commerce, trade, and travel. Note that Paul's greatest worry by sea was not pirates but storms.

5) Greek Philosophy – some of the ideas of Plato and Stoicism also reflected in biblical Christianity would be helpful in making the gospel more understandable to Gentiles.

b. the bad

1) polytheistic religion – the acceptance and propagation of many religions led to an immoral universalism where everything was accepted. It would prove challenging to explain the Christian faith to those who believed in a universe inhabited by many deities and many ways of "salvation." Add to that, the gnostic sects, the mystery cults, and Greek philosophies, the gospel had incredible competition. In fact, many would charge Christians with being "atheists" since they did not hold to the belief in the Roman pantheon of gods.

2) Emperor Worship and obedience to the state – while such acts were considered essential to maintain the unity and authority of the Roman Empire and most citizens simply did so out of duty, for the Christian such "worship" amounted to idolatry. Jews had been given an exemption to worship the Emperor dating back to the days of the Republic. Since all early believers were Jews, the early church benefited from this exemption. However, as the Church became more Gentile in nature and after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, Rome's view of Christians as a Jewish sect slowly changed. By the time of the Emperor Domitian, his decree that all subjects call Him Lord, led to a great persecution of Christians who refused.

c. the ugly

1) slavery – slavery played an integral role in Roman society. Slaves came from conquered peoples, lower classes, and those who ended up becoming slaves to pay debts. Regardless of the reason, slaves had no rights. They were considered property and expendable. A master could have his slave put to death for any reason. Slaves were used for sexual perversion and pleasure. This included children. Slaves could earn their freedom through military service, special edict, Rome, the way it was constituted, could not survive without the practice of slavery. It should be added that free women were considered for the most part second class citizens. While some were wealthy and had autonomy, this was the exception and not the rule.

2) sexual perversion – temple and regular prostitution, pedophilia, homosexuality, and adultery were common. The theatres where live plays took place, would include such behavior with even boys "playing women" and engaging in sexual acts. Chastity was not the norm. Many Romans viewed sexual acts as mere physical gratification without any true spiritual or emotional value to it. Thus, to have relations with a prostitute, slave, or child would eliminate the relational problems that come with sex in marriage or with another person's spouse.

3) abortion and infanticide – due to the low value placed on human life and sexual perversion, unwanted children were often aborted or if born killed. Abortions led to the death of many women and for those who survived, sterilization. Fathers had ultimate authority in the Roman household and could require his wife to abort or abandon their child. Girls were more often abandoned than boys. By the third century the infertility rates and male female ratio severely threatened the stability of the empire. Jewish and

Christian communities grew faster as a result of their greater respect for family and children.

4) violent death – gladiator games, slave cruelty, and torturous means of execution (e.g. the crucifixion) were all commonplace in the Empire. Again, if you were a slave you absolutely had no rights.

One of the most important passages in all of God's Word addressing the evil of the above and laying the foundation for the rights of all human beings is the truth found in **Galatians 3:26-30**: *For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*

Verse 28 shatters the entire Roman worldview and sets the stage for establishing human rights for all people. This is not only affirmed by our being made in the image of God, but that in Christ, there is no distinction of value of a person (lesser or greater) regarding race, class, or gender.

Summary/Conclusion of First Study:

Jesus came in fulfillment of His Father's will which was foreshadowed in the covenants God made with Abraham, Moses, and David. He also came in the fullness of time; in other words, perfect timing. The Jewish people were looking for their Messiah while Roman civilization was at its height in power. Both would provide the best context for the quick spread of the Gospel and the bringing together of both Jews and Gentiles. Notice it was not in the Father's plan for His Son to have gone to China, Persia, India, sub-Saharan Africa or what we presently call the Americas. All of these peoples and lands eventually would hear the gospel. However, Jesus first came to the House of Israel and He did so when the greatest Gentile ancient civilization was at its zenith. Simply put, the Mediterranean area was most primed for the message and spread of the Gospel.

And yet, it was not an easy time. Much of Jewish religion was a far cry from the demands of the true righteousness of the Law. The prophetic word had ceased centuries ago. Religious corruption and division ruled the day. While many would be open to the Lord's message of the Kingdom, many more would oppose it. The same was true in the Roman world. The idolatry of the Roman state and pantheon of gods stood in the way of the gospel's call to renounce the world as well as the flesh. Rome was built and maintained by viewing and treating many of its subjects as slaves who had no rights. The sins of the flesh not only came naturally for the Roman populace, but they were given hearty approval. In addition, the exclusivity of the Christian message made no sense to the Gentile world. Finally, to both Jews and Gentiles a crucified Savior seemed to be foolhardy at best, and weak and disgraceful at worst. Yet, God would still use this living reality to transform the world!

History would end up proving right the Apostle Paul's famous words from **Romans 1:16-17**: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*