

God's Plan: People and Timing

The Bible is a historical record of God's interaction with human beings - in particular His promises to Abraham and how He will fulfill them. Through this account, we see many examples of how people live, which help us understand God and His plan for each one of us regardless of whether one has faith in His Son Jesus or not. Take for example the following account when the apostle Peter healed a crippled man at the Beautiful Gate entrance of the Temple:

But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (Acts 3:12-18, LSB)

1. Observe what Peter is saying to these non-Believers. How do you know he is addressing Jews? With careful reading, you can usually discover the context of a passage, which in this case is recorded in three previous locations: Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:5-15; and Luke 23:13-25.

But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate marveled. Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. And the man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. And Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he was aware that the chief priests had delivered Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. And answering again, Pilate was saying to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" And they shouted again, "Crucify Him!" But Pilate was saying to them, "Why? What evil did He do?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" And wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he delivered Him over to be crucified. (Mark 15:5-15, LSB; Matt 27:15-26; Luke 23:13-25)

What role did this crowd play in God's plan? What does the data show?

2. As Peter confronts the Jews at the Temple, what do we know about Peter's faith around the same time? What do you observe about his behavior?

At the time of Jesus' arrest: And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew out his sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Therefore, how will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?" At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. But all this has taken place in order that the Scriptures of the prophets would be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left Him and fled. (Matt 26:50-56, LSB; also Mark 14:45-50)

At the start of Jesus' trial by Jewish religious authorities: And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the entryway. And when the servant-girl saw him, she began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" But again he was denying it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are also a Galilean." But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" And immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said the statement to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And throwing himself down, he began to cry. (Mark 14:66-72, LSB; also Matt 26:69-75; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:25-27)

What was Peter's faith like before and after Jesus' resurrection? What role did Peter play in God's plan?

3. Did Jesus have a role in His death and crucifixion? Asking questions of the text causes you to be more attentive to details.

Way before Jesus' arrest, in response to Peter identifying Jesus as the Christ, Jesus warns not to share that detail and **prepares Peter for what is coming.**

saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." (Luke 9:22, LSB)

When leaving for Gethsemane, why bring swords?

And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword should sell his garment and buy one. For I tell you that this which is written must be completed in Me, 'And He was numbered with transgressors'; for that which refers to Me has its completion." And they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." (Luke 22:36-38, LSB)

Jesus never identified Himself as the Son of God or the Christ. Jesus prevented demons from identifying Him as the Christ (Luke 4:41) and warned the disciples not to tell anyone He was the Christ (Matt 16:16-20; Mark 8:29-30; Luke 9:20-21). **But not so during the trial by Jewish religious authorities – why?**

And the high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What are these men testifying against You?" But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You yourself said it; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his garments and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?" They answered and said, "He deserves death!" (Matt 26:62-66, LSB)

"If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "You yourselves say that I am." (Luke 22:67-70, LSB)

What was Jesus' role in God's plan for the crucifixion?

4. What exactly is God's plan for each of us? Carefully consider John 6:28-29 in light of the above questions. To expand on your thoughts of God, consider Acts 4:27-28. Share what you have seen and learned. How does this apply to your life?

Therefore they said to Him, "What should we do, so that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:28-29, LSB)

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. (Acts 4:27-28, LSB)

God's Plan: People and Timing Teacher Notes

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What role did this crowd play in God's plan? What does the data show?

Encourage the student to share his observations:

The people had a choice of who would be granted a pardon, and Barabbas was chosen over Jesus.

Inform the student that this day was significant for Jews – it was the day of Preparation for the Passover (John 19:14). The apostle John would identify Jesus as the sacrificial lamb of God that would atone for the sins of mankind (John 1:29, 36).

The crowd's role in God's plan insured that Jesus would be crucified on the day when His death would be associated with the blood of the Passover lamb. Just as the last plague of Egypt passed over those Israelites whose door lintels had the blood of the unblemished lamb, so has God passed over the sins of those who place their faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Teacher Note: the timing of Jesus' crucifixion is confusing and the source of many debates. Within the context of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion of Christ, two festivals were occurring: Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.

Passover was an annual festival that started with the sacrifice of the unblemished lamb in the late Thursday afternoon and followed by a Passover meal that evening. By Jewish reckoning of time, where the next day starts at 6 pm, the Passover meal would be seen as a Friday meal.

Passover commemorated the last meal in Egypt while the last plague upon Egypt took place and passed over all those whose home had the blood of an unblemished lamb on its lintel and doorposts; it was a memorial of redemption from the angel of death (Ex 12:1-13, 23-27).

The morning after Passover was seen as the "day of preparation" for the Sabbath when the Feast of the Unleavened Bread took place that evening (by Jewish reckoning Saturday) and lasted seven days.

The Feast of the Unleavened Bread commemorated the day that God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt. In their preparation of their hasty departure, God instructed the Israelites not to leaven their bread (Ex 2:14-20; 13:1-16).

These two festivals were celebrated over eight days and Passover overlapped "the day of preparation" for the Sabbath that starts off the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. By the first century, the proximity of Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread caused many Jews to consider the two memorials as a single festival. In the Gospels, there are instances in which the reference to Passover includes the seven day Feast of the Unleavened Bread or visa versa (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:1, 7-8; 2:41-43).

The Synoptics understand the Passover to include the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and record the Passover meal on Thursday evening, which by Jewish reckoning was the start of Friday.

John considers Passover as taking place on Friday evening, which by Jewish reckoning was the start of Saturday and the beginning of the Sabbath. John saw the Passover meal coinciding with the first evening meal of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.

Jesus Christ was crucified on Friday 9 a.m. (3rd hour) and died by 3 p.m. (9th hour). Both the Synoptics and John call this Friday Preparation Day - the day before the weekly Sabbath. Jesus' body was placed in the tomb late Friday afternoon before 6 p.m. and before the next day by Jewish reckoning.

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At the start of Jesus' trial by Jewish religious authorities: And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the entryway. And when the servant-girl saw him, she began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" But again he was denying it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are also a Galilean." But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" And immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said the statement to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And throwing himself down, he began to cry. (Mark 14:66-72, LSB; also Matt 26:69-75; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:25-27)

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To encourage the student's observation, ask: how bold is Peter before and after he sees the resurrected Jesus Christ? What did he fear? Why is Peter weeping bitterly?

At the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter ran away when Jesus was arrested.

During Jesus' trial, Peter denied being associated with Jesus three times. Despite Peter's bravado (Matt 26:33-34; Mark 14:29-30), the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of how Peter would behave (Matt 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61) produced in Peter a bitter disappointment in himself (that he wasn't as steadfast as thought) and for letting Jesus down (which Jesus fully knew).

After the Ascension, Peter is emboldened by the power of the Holy Spirit and no longer fears death for Jesus Christ. In God's plan, Peter experienced disappointment in himself and for failing Jesus so that he would serve boldly and no longer be disappointed in himself nor let Jesus Christ down. Peter's experience caused him to appreciate the love of God and His Son all the more.

3. Did Jesus have a role in His death and crucifixion? Asking questions of the text causes you to be more attentive to details.

Way before Jesus' arrest, in response to Peter identifying Jesus as the Christ, Jesus warns not to share that detail and **prepares Peter for what is coming**, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." (Luke 9:22, LSB)

Although they do not understand what Jesus is saying, Jesus displays a foreknowledge of the future to the disciples. Jesus knows of His Father's plan.

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And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword should sell his garment and buy one. For I tell you that this which is written must be completed in Me, 'And He was numbered with transgressors'; for that which refers to Me has its completion." And they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." (Luke 22:36-38, LSB)

Jesus made sure that the Roman cohort had a reason to arrest Jesus that night (John 18:3).

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Help the student become aware of the essence of time.

Jesus’ role was to atone for mankind’s sins on a certain day at a certain time to meet God’s prescribed method of atonement and to fulfill Messianic prophecies that would confirm that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

Jesus made the claim as Messiah to insure the death penalty from Jewish religious authorities and meet the prescribed time of death.

4. What exactly is God’s plan for each of us? Carefully consider John 6:28-29 in light of the above questions. To expand on your thoughts of God, consider Acts 4:27-28. Share what you have seen and learned. How does this apply to your life?

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Ask the student a rhetorical question: what do you think God’s plan is for you? Is it something like a job, prosperity, or relationship? As the above biblical passages show, God’s plan involves all of us, consciously or not, in the work of causing others to believe in He who God has sent.

Ask the student: if God’s plan is predestined, are our actions programmed? Did you observe any person acting as a robot or with free will?

Consider Jesus’ foreknowledge of Peter denying Him three times and when he would do it (Luke 22:61). Did Peter act freely?

Allow some time for discussion.

God somehow foreknows how people will respond to various circumstances and takes this into account in the unfolding of His plan. Jesus’ actions just before and during His trial indicate His foreknowledge of how people will freely behave and utilized their actions to make certain of God’s plan at the right moment and circumstance in time. Predestine describes this process yet retains the freedom of human action.