

S.S. Biblical Theology

Lesson 1: The Storyline of the Bible

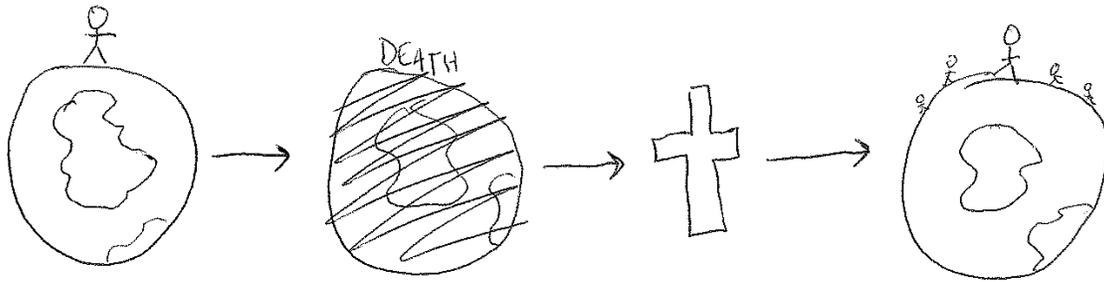
Read: Luke 24:13-27

Intro

We love stories, don't we? They easily captivate our imaginations. They help us make sense of the world, and our place in it. We tell and read stories to our kids to teach morals. We try and capture the history, values, and identity of cultures and nations by telling their "story." We can even think of each individual person has having a life story. Stories have a beginning, a middle, and end. They have an overarching purpose and goal. They contain conflict, but also resolution. And (despite what some may say) the best stories have a good, satisfying ending.

The Bible is not just a book of laws, commands, or truth claims: it is, at its heart, a story. It contains laws, commands, truth claims, even poems, prayers, and songs. But it also tells a cohesive story, painting a picture of the True Story of the world and life itself. The Bible tells the story of the true God who created all things, and about us, humanity, whom he created. In order to understand God, the World, and our place in it, we must become incredibly familiar with the true story of the Bible and let this shape our understanding of everything else in our lives.

As we saw in our last "semester" of Sunday School, the Bible is God's holy, inspired, and inerrant - even infallible - Word; it is necessary and sufficient for us to know God and having a saving knowledge of and faith in the gospel of Christ Jesus in order to be saved. This is because, in the Bible, God reveals Himself and His plan of redemption (or salvation). But God's Word of redemption doesn't come to us right at one moment in history, as a complete, finished package. Instead, it's comes to us over the whole course of the Bible. God revealed Himself, His truth, and His plan of redemption progressively, as the Bible was written over thousands of years, as the Holy Spirit inspired numerous human authors to write God's Word. Amazingly, though, despite having many different authors and spanning thousands of years, the Bible tells one, cohesive story. It's the story of **creation, the fall, redemption, and new creation.**



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This is the story that progressively unfolds throughout the Bible. It's the story of how God created us all, how humanity fell into sin, and how God has progressively revealed, accomplished, and applied his plan of redemption, ending in the coming restoration, or New Creation, of all things..And at the center of this story is the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the center of the story. This is why, as we read earlier from Luke 24, that the entirety of the scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, point us to and tell us about Jesus Christ. Christ is the key to understanding and interpreting the Bible. And understanding the storyline of the Bible is essential for us rightly understanding how it all fits together.

We're going to slowly walk through the storyline of the Bible together over the next few months in this "Biblical Theology" Sunday School class. As we talked about last semester in one of our classes, there are two main types of theology: *systematic theology* and *biblical theology*. Systematic Theology is where we take a topic and ask, "What all does the Bible say about this topic?" and then try to fit it all neatly together. We did before the Christmas break with the doctrine of Scripture and Revelation. The second type is Biblical Theology. This is where we try to trace out the progressive flow and storyline of the Bible itself, seeing how it all fits together. We're doing Biblical Theology when we ask questions like, "How does the New Testament relate to the Old Testament?" or "How does the book of Genesis, or Ezra, or Revelation, fit in with the

¹ This illustration was originally drawn by Lee Tankersley.

rest of the Bible?" That's what we're going to be doing for this Sunday School series: *Biblical Theology*. We're going to be looking at how the entire Bible fits together, by looking at the cohesive story that it tells throughout. We'll walk slowly through key passages of the Bible to trace out this storyline. But today, let's just outline the basic structure of this storyline some more, so we can get an idea of the "big picture" first.

I. Creation

God created the world. We see this in *Gen. 1-2*.

When God created the world, all was good. Mankind imaged God, perfectly reflecting, resembling, and representing him as we reign over creation. This was paradise. Mankind was with God, delighting in God, and obeying God.

God created mankind to be His *people*, living in His *place* (the Garden of Eden, expanding it throughout the world), and He created a relationship between God and man. The word covenant isn't used, but as we'll see next week, we can describe what happens as a covenantal relationship: GOD promises that if they obey Him and live in right relationship with God and Creation, mankind will remain God's People and live in God's Place, Paradise, living forever and eating from the Tree of Life. But the flip side is: if they disobey and break the covenant, by disobeying God, then mankind's relationship with God will be broken, they'll no longer be God's people, and they'll have to leave God's place.

And, unfortunately, we know that's exactly what happened: *paradise was lost*.

II. Fall

Mankind sinned and creation fell. In Genesis 3, we are told that Adam and Eve sinned. And when they sinned, they and everything else in all of creation was cursed. The ground starting bearing thorns and thistles. Death reigned over the earth. And humanity's nature was corrupted with sin. I mean, in the very next chapter after the

fall, Cain kills his brother Abel, and in the chapter thereafter we have a record of everyone living a while and then dying. Now, that is common to us, but before the fall death wasn't even in the picture.

The relationship is broken. God's People are no longer His people. They have to leave God's place. Mankind and creation itself are cursed. Satan reigns. Sin abounds. Death enters the world. Creation is broken; the image of God in man is distorted. And every person become a sinner, doomed to stand condemned under the wrath of the holy, just God that we have rebelled against.

But, thankfully, the story doesn't end there. This second stage of the story sets the scene for the rest of the story to unfold. Because of the Fall - because humanity has sinned, because we're all cursed, because death reigns, Satan has dominion over the world, and creation itself is broken - because of this, all of humanity desperately needs salvation and deliverance; we need *redemption*.

Thankfully, this is what we see unfold throughout the rest of the Bible's storyline: *God's unfolding plan of redemption*.

III. Redemption

Immediately after the Fall and Curse of humanity and creation, God began promising coming redemption. Some of these promises were explicit. In Genesis 3:15, for example, God promised that there would be a son who would be born from the woman's line, and he would crush the head of the serpent, that which we recognize as Jesus being born and conquering Satan by his life, death, and resurrection from the dead.

But there are other less direct promises as well. In fact, most of the Old Testament predicts this promise of coming redemption in *indirect* ways, just by giving us pictures, types, shadows, and symbols of what is coming. You have pictures of who

Jesus is and what he will do in persons, institutions, and practices in the Old Testament that seem great in themselves but always point you toward more. So, for example, you see the sacrifices of bulls, goats, and lambs for sin. That's great. But you realize that these are just types and shadows because we have to keep repeating them. But they're helpful types and shadows because they're giving us a picture of what God must do for us. His own Son must come and make atonement for us through the sacrifice of himself. And then he comes, fulfilling God's promises of redemption.

So while part one, Creation, sets the stage for us, and part two, The Fall, introduces the conflict that has to be resolved, setting the plot in motion, part 3, redemption, gives us the content of our plot, or story arch: it gives us the *rising action, climax, and falling action*. It should be no surprise, then, that part 3, Redemption, covers the vast majority of the Bible.

The plot of the Bible's storyline is driven by the problem introduced in Genesis 1-3: the problem of sin and our need for redemption. And this story centers around God's promises of redemption and His means of accomplishing them. So this is very important for us to understand, right from the beginning: *God is the main character of the story of the Bible*; he is the hero, not us. We're the ones that need saving.

So, we can outline the major turning points of the story of redemption by seeing God's main promises, or covenants, given. These covenant promises of God drive the story along, and even frame it.

- 1. Adamic Covenant/Promise of Redemption**
- 2. Noahic Covenant**
- 3. Abrahamic Covenant**
- 4. Mosaic Covenant**
- 5. Davidic Covenant**
- 6. Exile: Promises Broken? Promise of a New Covenant**
- 7. New Covenant of Christ**

Jesus is the center of the story. Jesus fulfills God's promises and covenants. Jesus is the center of God's plan of Redemption. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes, lives, dies, and is raised to redeem us from sin and judgment.

Jesus is the answer to how a sinful people can be reconciled to a holy God again and dwell with him in paradise. He comes and obeys God at every point, living a perfectly holy life, dies on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of anyone who would repent of their sins and believe in him, and then he is raised from the dead on the third day, conquering death forever. Therefore, if anyone believes in him, we are united with him by faith so that the blessings that Christ receives come to us as well. And because he's coming back to make the earth new again and reign over a new creation, we will get to reign with him with no more sickness, sin, pain, disease, or death.

This leads us to our last point in the Bible's storyline.

IV. Restoration/ New Creation

Jesus will come back to raise the dead and make a new perfect creation where we reign with him forever.

The Bible doesn't scrap God's good creation but redeems it. One day God's children will be raised from the dead and the earth made perfectly new so that we can reign with the Lord forever.

Conclusion/Application

We're going to go over this storyline in more detail over the next few months. But today, it's important for us to note a few important themes that tie the entire storyline of the Bible together:

1. God is the main character, not Us
 - Story Center's on GOD's Glory Revealed Through Plan of Redemption, Revolving Around the Person and Work of Jesus Christ
2. God's People
3. God's Place
4. God's Covenants

The Story is outlined, as we've seen, into 4 parts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, New Creation. It begins with God creating His People (Mankind made in His image) and putting them in God's place (Garden of Eden). The story of the Bible is all about God, His people, and His relationship with them, symbolized by whether or not they get to live with God in GOD's place. Humanity's relationship with God is broken by the Fall, and needs to be restored through God's work of Redemption, which is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God's plan of redemption

comes to us through covenants, in which God forms His people, gives promises of grace, and brings redemption. Finally, at the end of the story, God wins. God is the hero. He slays the Dragon (Satan). He gets the girl - the Church, the bride of Christ. He saves the world.

The Bible is an epic storyline, telling the true story of God's redemption of his people and the world, the entire cosmos - all of Creation. And right at the center is the person, work, and gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. So this will be the basic outline we'll use to trace out the Bible's storyline and see how it all fits together.