

Destino Leadership Institute

Introduction: What is the Bible About?

What's the Bible about?

“Well, there are lots of Bible stories—little episodes about miracles, kings, giants, animals on a big boat, and a bunch of people living in the desert... Jesus is an important character... And there are lots of rules.” This sums up how I once would have answered the question, “What’s the Bible about?” It is some of those things: the Bible is a collection of many different books, written over a couple thousand years, with many stories of every genre imaginable. *However, it is actually one great Story that God is telling us.* The purpose of this article is to understand the basic structure of this story; think of it as a skeleton on which the flesh, muscles, and fibers of our understanding of the Bible are built.

This story, or perhaps drama is a better word, starts with God making everything and setting up the world in perfect harmony. Like all great stories, there’s a major conflict, a loss of all hope, escalation to an intense climax, and resolution beyond our wildest expectations! This way of understanding the story of God’s Word is called redemptive history. Another way to put it is that God’s word is all about how he is “redeeming” the world—rescuing it, saving it, restoring to its former glory. If the Bible were a play, there would be six acts: Creation, Rebellion, Promise, Redemption, Proclamation, and Restoration.

Act I: Creation

This is the first act in God’s drama of redemption! In Genesis 1-2 we read that God created

everything. And he made it good—excellent even! The world was perfect, with people, plants, and animals all living in harmony. He created human beings to be stewards of the Earth, “parental guardians” of creation. We are his image: God’s representatives for good, productivity, and order. Human beings had a job to do: care for and cultivate the earth, bring out the best in it. God’s people, living in a fruitful garden, had a physical, visible, and tangible relationship with God.

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Act II: Rebellion

But the perfect harmony didn’t last long. In Genesis 3, still on the first page of most printed Bibles, the human race rebelled against God. There was only one rule: “Do not eat from the tree of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 3:3-5) Adam and Eve, the first humans, were tempted by God’s enemy, Satan: “God knows that your eyes will be opened and you’ll be like him!” The first sin wasn’t disobeying an arbitrary rule about a tree; they were trying to be God! And frankly, if you look at the world around you, you can see that we haven’t stopped trying to do that ever since. As a result of this rebellion, Adam and Eve had to leave the garden. A curse fell upon them. Since they were

representatives of the whole world, a curse fell upon all of creation.

Act III: Promise

But God didn't give up! He did not intend to leave image-bearing humans separated from him and accursed. The remainder of the Old Testament, Genesis 4 through Malachi, consist of God's promise to make everything right again, to undo the curse that came into them world through our rebellion. This is a very long section of scripture, so we'll give a brief explanation of a few parts:

Scene 1: The Patriarchs. God promised to restore humanity and creation, and does it through a family. After Noah and the flood, God chooses Abraham and Sarah to bless the whole world. The book of Genesis recounts how Abraham and Sarah grow into a family, which grows into a people. God promises Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3)

Scene 2: The Kingdom of Israel. This tribe becomes a nation of twelve tribes. God sets the nation up with priests, laws, judges, and eventually kings. These are patterns and promises of how God intends to redeem creation. Blood sacrifices to pay the penalty for sin, a mediator between God and people, and a ruler who cares for and brings out the best of the people before God—these all point beyond Israel to God's ultimate plan. God installs David as the ideal king of Israel,

and promises him, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:16)

Scene 3: The Prophets. When Israel chose not to worship God or keep his laws, God allowed them to be taken captive by wave after wave of conquering empires. They were removed from the land and could not fulfill God's requirements for worshiping at the Temple. God raised up prophets to explain to the people what was happening and to deliver God's promise to rescue. But the promise started to take on new dimensions. The promise was now worldwide, cosmic, and beyond the mere physical realm: "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all

nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." (Micah 4:1-2) And similarly, "This is the covenant I will make with the people of

Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the Lord. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'" (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Act IV: Redemption

The Old Testament prophets wrote with great and increasing expectation about someone who would be sent to make things right: a King greater

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than David, a Prophet greater than Moses, a Man who was more righteous than Adam, and God himself clothed as a servant. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, recount the life of Jesus Christ and how he fulfilled these expected roles. Jesus quoted the prophets as he proclaimed, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19) However, the triumphant announcement of God’s rule on earth resulted in Jesus being put to death as a criminal. It would seem that yet another conquering empire was controlling the destiny of God’s people. But it was precisely Jesus’ death that redeemed people! He took the punishment for our sin, and exchanged it with us for the life with God we were destined for! “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Act V: Proclamation

The story doesn’t end with Jesus’ death. God’s drama of redemption wasn’t done!! On the third day after he was killed, Jesus Christ rose from the dead with a new physical body, demonstrating God’s power over death and his promise to make all of creation new. Jesus returned to heaven, leaving us with a promise and a command: “I will be with you forever,” and “Go make disciples of all nations!” (Matthew 28:16-20)

Today we find ourselves in this act of God’s drama! The task of proclaiming, or taking the news of Jesus’ death and resurrection to all people, is ours. Jesus’ promise to be with us is ours. Through baptism and through the Eucharist or Holy Communion we identify with Jesus in his death, resurrection and kingdom along with all Christ-followers throughout history. However, a

momentary look at our families, neighborhoods, the news headlines, or even our own hearts will tell us that God’s Kingdom is not quite here yet. Some have called the present moment “the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of God’s Kingdom.” (Footnote) Christians already have God’s Holy Spirit empowering them to live out the values of Heaven here on earth, yet we are not yet fully freed from a world broken and cursed by sin. This is why Destino exists, even why this training module exists: to equip God’s people to proclaim the reign of Jesus, and to invite others by faith into that Kingdom. We exist so that every family, every city, every college campus, every block and neighborhood—every corner of creation—may be saturated with the knowledge of God and the redemption he offers!

Act VI: Restoration

One day it will all be over: “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4)

What we see now only partially will one day be crystal clear reality. God will be physically present once again in a perfectly harmonious world, just as it was in the beginning, just as it was intended to be. Until then, we fix our eyes on Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, and run with endurance the race God has set for us. (Footnote Hebrews 12:1-2)

What does this mean for us?

We have arrived at two natural questions: How do we read the Bible? And how do we read our own lives? Any time we open the Scriptures we should be aware that what we’re reading is part of this

drama. A good question to ask is, “Where in God’s drama of redemption is this passage located?” Consider how the passage echoes back to the perfection of creation, the consequences of our rebellion, and the promise of God’s redemption. How does the passage relate to Christ and his ministry, and our proclamation of that ministry?

The second question is, *How do we read our own lives?* It is a remarkable thing that we are players in this drama! Just as we read Scripture with God’s redemption on our minds, we should read and interpret our own lives according to his redemption as well. Consider the following questions for reflection:

1. *Where do I see God’s Kingdom already? How is it not yet fully present in my current position?*
2. *At this time and place, what does it mean for me to proclaim God’s Kingdom?*

3. *How does the drama of God’s redemption make sense of the Bible?*

4. *How does the drama of God’s redemption give you hope?*

Further Reading

González, Justo, *Mañana: Christian theology from a hispanic perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990). See especially chapter 5.

Roberts, Vaughan, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

Williams, Michael, *Far as the Curse is Found* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005).