

GENESIS TO REVELATION

WHY THE WHOLE STORY
OF THE BIBLE MATTERS



Jed Ostoich



introduction

Genesis to Revelation

Why the Whole Story of
the Bible Matters

S **tory's a big deal.** We live in a culture and an era where the cold, scientific minds of the enlightenment and modernity have softened to the mystical, magical, and immaterial. Though the abstract concept of science still reigns supreme in spheres where it makes sense, our cultures jettison it regularly when it becomes inconvenient. And it's in that world that the concept of story really begins to shine.

Before we talked about balls of rock hurtling around other balls of combusting gas in the inky

blackness of space, before we studied bones and muscles and blood, before we articulated acceleration due to gravity, the human race told stories. Everything had a reason, and every reason had a story. As our society picks up speed rolling down the hill toward pre-modern tribalism that thrive on stories that border on myth, being able to tell the story of the Bible becomes an ever-more potent tool.

So. What *is* the story of the Bible?

Jed Ostoich

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one

Before We Read

Before diving into the narrative that unfurls through the pages of Scripture, we have to understand three things about how stories work. First, they need characters. While that might seem obvious—after all, we’re familiar with the Bible’s massive cast—a story isn’t a story without the *right* characters.

Throughout the Old Testament in particular, we’re fond of pointing out the characters we relate to the most. Abraham, Sarah, Rachel, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth, David, Solomon, Elijah—the list is as long as the Bible itself. However, no one on that list is the character that the Bible’s actually about. They’re bit-part players in a drama centered on one person—God himself.

Before we get any further into the story of the Bible, we have to understand that it's *God's story*. He's both the main character and the (ultimate) teller of the tale. He's chosen to reveal himself to his people not in a list of attributes or complex theology books, but in story. So we have to avoid at all costs either making the Bible about someone (or *someones*) else, and we cannot allow ourselves to reduce the Bible to a textbook. It's a narrative, so we have to approach it that way.

The second thing we need to understand about how stories work is the simple fact that every story has conflict. In fact, it's not story at all without some problem the hero (in the Bible's case, God) has to solve. That conflict drives the whole plot, and it's the process by which the hero eventually wins that makes a story actually *say* something.

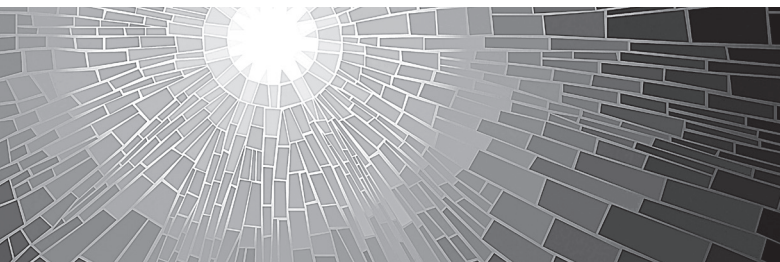
Nearly every commercial you've ever seen on TV or has interrupted the YouTube video you were watching makes use of conflict: "Use our competitor's shoes and you'll end up with sore feet and bad style. But use *our* shoes, and you'll be both fleet and fly!" Conflict. There's a hero. And that hero has a problem to solve.

The next thing we need to understand about story is that it has an author. That author controls the story. But the Bible is special when it comes to authorship. It does have one author, but that author tells his story using the pens of many other writers over the long course of the story. And here we should mention something about the writing of the story. The ultimate author, God, knows the story. Knows all the twists and turns, the successes and failures. The people he used to write the story down, and the readers, don't know any of those things. So, what

those in the story and we as readers experience as surprises, were all already known in the mind of the author. It's his story after all. He's telling it in a way that helps the reader see the depth of the conflict (more on that later) and who the enemies truly are. Despite God knowing what is coming at every turn of the page, he tells his story so that readers (and characters) are surprised by the way God wins and the measures he takes to accomplish his victory.

Finally, there's one more thing I should mention. The Bible is a huge book. Trying to condense it to a few dozen pages in a summary will inevitably leave something out, rush through some details in favor of others, or fail to highlight every important theological point. The point of this telling of the Bible's story is simply to highlight how the whole thing is *God's* story arc.

Whether we like it or not, God chose to progressively reveal his nature, his plan, and his purpose for humanity through the slow burn of a story. Through that story, we discover his compassion for rebellious humanity but also his commitment to restoration. The conflict is as much ours as it is his, after all, his story is intertwined with our story, or maybe it's better said the other way around. But that's getting a bit ahead of ourselves. It's best to start at the beginning.



two

Begin at the Beginning

The first chapters of **Genesis** waste no time in introducing us to the hero of the story (“In the beginning God...”) and in setting the scene. Creation takes place across two chapters and settles into the idyllic wonder of a brand-spanking-new world. So new, in fact, that the dew hasn’t even dried.

In that world, God sets up a crucial kind of order. The planet itself is full of life, if a bit untamed. It’s in the chaos of infant creation that God creates a bit of structure—a garden we call Eden. Into that garden God puts both of his new humans—creatures he’s

made in his image. Part of the image in Genesis is simply that humans were to be God's representatives to the earth. He was God over the universe and humans were the physical representation of the invisible God on the planet.

So long as that order—God-humans-earth—stayed put, the idyllic world of early Genesis would also stay put. God in his grace would give humanity everything it needs not only to survive but to thrive. Humanity, in turn, would live in trusting obedience to him, exercising dominion and care for the world around them.

But in the third chapter of Genesis, a trickster waltzes into the garden and drops the thought into the humans' minds that maybe—just maybe—God's holding out. If they disobey his command and eat of the forbidden tree, they could be their own gods. Rulers of their own destinies.

At the heart of the Bible's story is that problem: God created humanity to rule the earth as his representatives. With great love he gave them his authority and power and life. But humanity chose (and would continue to choose ever after) autonomy over trusting submission. The first humans wanted to be masters of their own lives, and so chose rebellion. That rebellion brought death as God had promised. But it also corrupted the order of rulership. Earth and reproduction would no longer submit compliantly to humanity. Humanity would suffer in hard work on both fronts. And their relationship to God broke too.

That's the conflict that sets off the story. The balance of the Bible then shows the hero—God himself—on a

quest to fix what humanity broke. To restore the order of rule, to bring human hearts back into loving submission to him, and to find a replacement Adam—someone who could rule the earth in perfect obedience to the Father and be the living, breathing, physical representation of the invisible God. Reading the Bible, we follow in that journey in which God goes to incredible, even shocking, lengths to reclaim humanity. We sit with bated breath and watch as he moves through the events of human history on his quest. And we wait with anticipation for the climax and resolution of his journey.

If that sounds like Jesus is the inevitable answer to you, great. You've been through this story before. But we have a long way to go before we get to Jesus, and every bit of ink in the Old Testament is crucial for understanding how the story gets us there. We can't skip ahead; we can't just "sum up" and say everything in the pages of Genesis through Malachi points to Jesus and ignore the rest; we have to do the work of reading the story. Because every story has an author and that author puts everything in the story for a reason.

When God Embarked on a Quest

In the Bible, God isn't a scared hobbit afraid to leave the Shire, nor is he unable to bring himself to do what must be done—and that will prove surprising. But the course of the Bible's narrative still invites us into his journey to undo the sinful rebellion of Adam, undo Adam's curse, and restore creation and the order of rule to the earth, ultimately bringing humans back into his own presence like it was in the

garden before their deceived and rebellious hearts believed a liar.

The first step on the journey is a total reset. Through the flood in Genesis 6–9, God hits a giant “start over” button on the process of creation. He wipes away every vestige of sin and corruption, literally washing the planet clean. He keeps a few righteous humans to start over with, as well as one pair of each kind of animal. In chapter 9, we find a near-perfect reproduction of the original creation story. Dry land arises from the water, birds then animals venture out into the world, and finally God reinstates humanity with a commission to rule the earth and fill it as God’s representatives.

As the readers of the story, we might assume it should work. But as Noah and his sons run smack into more corruption, the story introduces a facet of the overarching problem: Humanity’s sin isn’t a product of environment, and changing that environment won’t make sin disappear. In fact, all of humanity gathers together at Babel in high-handed rejection of God’s sovereignty. God takes the failure of Noah and his sons, as he took Adam’s before, in stride. Though readers may understandably be tempted to believe that the promise God made to Adam and Eve about a coming deliverer could be fulfilled with each new character who steps into the story, God’s prepared for the long-game, as it were. For the quest to stretch on through the years.

And that’s why in Genesis 12 when God calls a single person—Abraham—we buckle in for the long haul. God promises to bless Abraham in much the same way he intended to take care of the first

humans. His promise comes without gimmicks or fine print. God shows love and blessing to Abraham without any further requirement than he simply follow. His promise to Abraham sounds like both the blessing at creation (and re-creation after the flood) and hints at the fulfillment of the promise to undo all that had been broken.

The story of God's relationship with Abraham plays out over several chapters in Genesis. And at each juncture, God offers Abraham opportunities to respond to his loving protection by trusting him and carrying out blessing to the world around him. As each successive generation inherits the promised blessings (first Isaac and then Jacob), God's relationship with them continues to grow. The promise remains the same: Abraham's family will inherit the land (like a reboot of Eden) and will be a blessing to the world as God's representatives.

God's still looking for a new Adam—still searching for that one who will do what Adam couldn't. But the balance of Genesis shows that he's working with flawed people. Abraham has doubts, Isaac plays favorites, and Jacob gets what he wants by hook or by crook. And then Jacob's sons doubt, play favorites, and get what they want—ultimately selling one of their own brothers into slavery. But despite all of their flaws and failures, God is showing people who he is. His ongoing commitment to his creation expressed in his forgiveness and grace as subsequent characters in God's story continue in Adam's failure.

Throughout the lives of the patriarchs, the problem that became evident after the flood surfaces again: No matter how faithful God is to his promises, no matter

how far out of his way he goes to show compassionate care and provision, no matter how many times he proves the depths of the well of his forgiveness and patience, the human heart will always wander into rebellion. But in the midst of the repeated failures in Genesis, we do get glimpses of humanity functioning the way God wants it to.

Abraham demonstrates incredible faith in trusting the life of his son to the God he serves when he goes to offer Isaac on the altar at Moriah. Later, Joseph trusts God implicitly even when it means constant suffering. And, when given the chance to leverage power and position against the brothers who wronged him, Joseph chooses to trust God and forgive instead.

Slowly, a picture begins to take shape. The true heir of Adam, the descendant promised by God himself who would crush the deceiver who planted rebellion in the heart of humanity, is going to have to be an extraordinary human being—someone who trusts God to a degree no one else has. Someone who will give of himself until there's nothing left to give. Someone who will obediently submit to God's direction and care. Until he comes, God's people wait in anticipation and expectation. And God waits, not in anxious anticipation, but in patient deliberation, showing his people his care, and how much they need him; gently (and sometimes not so) correcting them when their rebellious hearts run wild. But always moving toward the revelation of the new Adam.

The opening book of the Bible not only sets the scene, paints the problem, and introduces us to the

hero on his quest, but it also starts giving us clues to how the story will eventually play out. These bits of foreshadowing don't point directly to Jesus—they draw a line around a silhouette.

The Many Allies, Enemies, and Obstacles in God's Quest

God's initial charge to the first humans (and then again to Noah and his family) finds a mirror in his promise to Abraham: a land to rule and lots of children to fill it. God wants his human representatives to spread across the earth—to show his glory through their lives to the ends of civilization and beyond. And, as the story progresses, we get glimpses of that happening, if only imperfectly.

The family of Israel enters Egypt at the end of Genesis and there they multiply—filling, as it were, not the whole earth but certainly a large portion of Egypt. So great did their numbers become that it threatened the king of Egypt, who resorted to making them slaves in order to check their numbers.

In the opening chapters of Exodus, God finds allies (such as the Hebrew midwives and Moses and Aaron) and enemies (Pharaoh and the people of Egypt) who will either join him on the quest or stand in the way. With ten plagues, God shows that he's both committed to protecting his people and far more powerful than the many gods of Egypt. So fantastic is his victory over Pharaoh, that years later the inhabitants of Canaan will still be quaking in their sandals out of fear of Israel's God.

But long before the story arrives at Canaan, God takes his people into the desert to bring them as

a whole into a different kind of relationship with him. Thus far, he's made a promise to one person at a time: First to Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob. But now the one man has become an entire nation's worth of people, and God chooses to relate to them all. He has saved them, brought them out of slavery, and now they are his special people.

The promise he makes at the mountain of Sinai takes the relationship he formed with Abraham and spreads it across all of Abraham's descendants. Now each of them has a relationship with him. Through the laws, sacrifices, and worship systems that God lays out for the people, God reveals who he is and who humanity was meant to be, at least what they could be until the rebellion started by the deceiver and now existing in the human heart is finally defeated. To prove his point that he desires to be close to his people, God designs the tabernacle—his mobile home—to be reminiscent of Eden, the place where he walked among his creation. From the materials to the decorations to its orientation on the compass, the tabernacle shouted to the people, "God is rebuilding what was lost in Adam's failure."

However, like the reset of Noah's flood, this new democratized relationship with God has a fatal flaw: the human heart. Despite years of working the relationship and developing practical applications of God's laws (the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), the people end up spending forty years in a sort of pre-exile from the land they still haven't settled because of their sheer lack of trust in God's provision. The food and drink, the leading through the desert, the giving of God's laws, and his

many demonstrations of power had not convinced them that he was bigger than the giants of the land. And, once the new generation enters the land, the books of Joshua and Judges paint a gut-wrenching picture of rebellion against God.

The human heart ultimately ends up serving only itself. No matter the environment, no matter the laws, no matter how explicitly God speaks to his people, humanity will always go its own way. The author leaves us feeling disheartened. No matter what God does to set his people up for success in establishing his rule and giving them the place of their father Adam, they will always fail. We begin to wonder how Adam's heir, even if he can be all the things his ancestor wasn't, will address the problem of the human heart. Even if he can be what Adam wasn't, what about the rest of us?

Despite the constant failure of God's people, he sets up one more opportunity for success. If he's looking for someone to claim Adam's place, where better to look than among the kings themselves?

The Boy Who Was the Almost-Perfect King

One of the best-known players on the stage of the Old Testament is King David. David faces off against a giant named Goliath and wins despite the odds. David runs from Saul, wins the hearts of women and men, and becomes the true king of Israel. But David's Achilles' heel—his desire for rewards for doing God's will—nearly brings his kingdom to its knees. We know the stories well, but it's not always easy to understand how or why they fit into *God's* story in the course of the Bible.

In order to grasp a bit better what David is to the story, we need to rewind a bit. The conclusion of the book of Judges leaves us wondering if God's people will ever turn to him in whole-hearted obedience. In fact, it seems like the longer time goes, the worse they get. The book of Samuel picks up in that turbulent time by introducing us to the last of the great judges: Samuel himself.

Samuel's success comes early in his life—he's clearly a man of God, he leads the tribes in obedience to God, and, for a time, peace seems to settle into the land. But as he ages and his sons prove unfit to lead in his stead, the people come to Samuel with a request: Give us a king.

What might seem innocuous to modern readers accustomed to the idea of castles and crowns and monarchies, the author of the text highlights just how stunning the request was to Samuel. He feels like Israel doesn't want him anymore, but the people weren't really rejecting Samuel. They were rejecting God.

Throughout the book of Judges, God allowed Israel's enemies to come in and subjugate them any time they wandered from faithfulness. Like a father disciplining his child, God wanted Israel to see their error and correct course. When they did—when they returned to him in repentance—God would send a military deliverer to rescue them. They'd have peace for a while, and then the process would repeat. Despite serving (at least in name) the same God, each generation repeated the mistakes of everyone who had come before, all the way back to Adam. And God, with infinite patience, would correct and restore them, showing himself to be compassionate and gracious, patient and slow to anger.

When Israel asks Samuel for a king, however, they really want a full-time deliverer. They want a professional whose job it is to keep Israel's enemies at bay. It may seem harmless, but what they're asking for is simply to cut out the "repent and return" part of the cycle. If they have a full-time military leader "like the nations," then what need would there be to ask God to help them?

The first king is an abject failure. Saul's job was indeed to protect Israel, but to do so as a steward and not really as an unmitigated monarch. Saul was to be God's tool for shepherding the people who, collectively, had wandered far too many times. But Saul himself fears his fellow Israelites *and* their enemies far more than he trusts the God who gave him the crown. His fear is his failure and ultimately God removes him from kingship, replacing him with David—someone who would fulfill the role of king more effectively than Saul.

God selects David because he's someone who will execute his role faithfully. God calls the young warrior to protect his people and lead them in pursuit of God's agenda—not their own. And David does so with flying colors. As a man of war, he consistently seeks out God's direction in each battle. He acts within the vocation he's given in keeping with God's requests. Instead of weighing the entire nation's faithfulness, God works through the king. And as the king goes, so go the people.

But David, like his ancestors, is not without flaws. The first words out of his mouth in the text are asking what he'll get if he defeats Goliath. Throughout his life, David has a penchant for picking up trophies, and

they're often women. First, he wins Saul's daughter by defeating a giant. Later, he takes that giant's sword as his own. Later, he thinks he wins Abigail by defeating an angry slob named Nabal—despite God doing all the work. Then, when he finally gets out from under Saul's thumb, he steals back his first wife in a fit of jealousy. As his fame and influence grows, David adds wives and concubines.

We all know where the story lands the king. One day, when his armies are at war, David's so convinced of the victory that we find him at home walking a balcony instead of where a king belongs—leading his army. His pride converges with his lust, and he seemingly is already picking out his trophy. That's when he sins against Bathsheba, her husband, and God himself. Even the greatest king to sit on Israel's throne—one God himself had chosen and set up to represent him to the people—had fallen short.

David was the closest we get in the story to seeing a true heir to Adam's rule. All the pieces were there—representation, rulership, multiplication of God's people—but still something was wrong in the human heart of Israel's king. Regardless, God keeps his promise to David and sets up king after king over Israel and then, after the nation splits in two, Judah. Each king has a chance to succeed where his ancestors failed. And though there were some kings who were better than others, none was the one promised to defeat the enemy. Each time the hopes of the people were frustrated as each king fails.

Along with her failed rulers, Israel falls into even worse rebellion against her God. The era of the prophets cries out like a siren full of God's warnings

that his people and their leaders are full of pride, consumed with their own interests, and hardened against God. In the voices of the prophets, we can hear the sadness and frustration of God. After everything he's done through the course of the Old Testament to show his unfailing love and compassion, his people consistently rebel. Each follows in the footsteps of Adam in high-handed rebellion against God. The condition of the human heart seems to be getting worse, not better.

In the midst of that failure, though, the story gives us a glimmer of hope. Over and over, God promises that he *will* one day find a new Adam. He *will* have someone who sits on David's throne but does so in perfect obedience to God. And, perhaps most importantly, he *will* fix the heart problem ingrained in every human being. Such a problem requires a grand solution, and we begin to expect something is coming, an unexpected twist that will hurdle all of these obstacles in one bold leap. Adam's heir cannot come from humanity. Instead, God has to go back to the original model.



three

Adam's Heir and the True Human

The pages of the New Testament open with a genealogy for a reason. As we've seen, the story of God throughout the Old Testament is the story of failed Adam-replacements. Every time God offered a new person the chance to succeed where Adam had failed, that person also failed. The genealogy in Matthew's first chapter, then, offers us a look back across the whole field of people who, despite inheriting God's promise, didn't succeed in fixing humanity. But the genealogy carries with it a note of hope.

The list of names makes the statement: Each person had the chance to be the one we've been waiting for—Adam's true heir and the redeemer of the human race. And now that list has connected

Adam to the son of a virgin in Nazareth, proving that he is yet another heir to the place of Adam. Maybe *he* will succeed where everyone else fell short.

But, as we said, it doesn't seem God will find a new Adam by picking humans from the available pool. Instead, the Old Testament—especially the prophets—makes it clear that something's broken in humanity: whenever humans are given the choice to trust God or go their own way, they always end up choosing autonomy over submission. Humanity, it seems, needs to be remade. In the Gospels, the author of the text introduces us to the final new Adam, but he's different than all the ones who went before him. This is the surprise, the unexpected twist to God's story that reveals—more than any other event or action before it—exactly who God is and how he is going to keep the promise made so long ago.

In his book *On the Incarnation*, early church father Athanasius offered an illustration of the problem that the Old Testament presents, as well as how Jesus is the solution:

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. Even so was it with the All-holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father, came and dwelt in our midst, in order that He might renew mankind made after Himself, and seek out His lost sheep, even as He says in the Gospel: "I came to seek and to save that which was lost" (ON THE INCARNATION, 3.13).

So when Jesus enters the story, we already anticipate great things from him. The whole of the Old Testament looked for the arrival of Adam's rightful heir, and, with Jesus, we now have him. Throughout his mission on earth, Jesus regularly faces the same issues that plagued the human race: temptation to go his own way, to mistrust God, to establish his own name. But over and over Jesus succeeds where Adam and Adam's children failed.

For the first time since the fall of creation, true humanity walked the earth again in Jesus. And the earth recognized her rightful king. Everything we see in the Gospels—from Jesus casting out demons (invaders into his sovereign territory) to calming the storm—flows not simply from Jesus's divinity but also from his position as the true, human ruler of creation. In perfect submission to the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus lived as humanity was meant to.

The hero had finally arrived and he is everything we hoped he would be. But in the story, he's not given the hero's welcome that we would have expected. Despite his miracles, despite his powerful words and wisdom, despite winning over large crowds and individuals alike, he didn't do exactly what many thought the hero was going to do. Instead of saying things like, "Down with Rome," he was telling people that their sins were forgiven. Rather than setting up his own kingdom and taking his rightful place on David's throne, he was eating with tax collectors and "sinners."

For some, his actions were proof that he was the promised one. For others, it was just the opposite. But none of them knew exactly what was happening.

He was rewriting the story they thought they knew. They were looking for God's promised deliverer. What they got instead was God himself, and the God they got wasn't the God they thought they knew. Everything Jesus did wasn't just to be a better Adam; it was to show people who God truly was. Jesus revealed God's mercy when he reached out to the unclean and the unwanted. He showed the heart of God's love when he wept with the grieving. And he exposed God's desire for hearts committed to him when he challenged the strict devotion to laws by people whose hearts were dead.

Jesus was a better Adam and able to reveal God because he was God in the flesh. God knew that the only way to really deal with the problem that humanity faced was to enter the story himself. To become one of the characters on the stage. Jesus stripped bare the misconceptions about God and the deliverer and showed the great lengths to which God would go to reclaim his own. He would become one of them.

But his victory isn't complete only in living the way he should. Death itself had to be unmade. The core of the curse of that came because of the deceiver, the consequence for humanity's witting and unwitting rebellion, still had to be addressed. In a garden much like the one in the beginning of the story, Adam's heir wrestled with the same temptation his forebears had—to step out on his own and do things his own way. Three times he went to God and asked if the task set before him could be changed. Three times he bent his will to submit. Three times he claimed victory where Adam failed. From there, the cross was a foregone conclusion.

In the end, Jesus—the perfect human over whom death had no claim—went willingly to his death. In doing so, he satisfied the justice of God and proved that perfect obedience was worth it. God vindicated his Son in the resurrection, demonstrating to everything in heaven and on earth that, through Jesus, death no longer had a claim on humanity. Adam's curse was broken.

In Jesus we have the fulfilled promise of God to reclaim what he had made. In the life of Jesus, we have not simply a single true human, but, in his words and deeds, a model for a life given over to God. Jesus was both the ultimate expression of God's love and his model for humans to live in love for God and for each other. The diseased human heart that chooses rebellion can only be undone by the love of God, and that love then becomes the defining characteristic for those who follow Jesus.

The laws to which God had asked obedience were specific and particular ways that love might be shown. It was not obedience in itself that God was searching for, but a heart devoted to him in love that spilled over into love for others and found ways of showing that love.

When we talk about Jesus today, it's easy to fall into a pattern of thinking about him only as the divine condescending to our "level" in order to transact some kind of bargain on our behalf. But the whole story of the Bible paints a much more profound picture. In Jesus, humanity was reformed into the glorious thing it was in the beginning. In Jesus, we see the fulfillment of the commission God gave Adam: to rule the earth and subdue it; to care for

creation and keep it; and, in obedience to God, to live untouched by death.

Death died, the curse crumbled, and humanity awoke to the light of renewal in the image of Jesus—the image God intended for it from the beginning. In Jesus humanity not only sees itself but it also sees God. Jesus is the perfect representation of the invisible God. In him we know both ourselves and our creator. In him we see restored relationship with God, and the lengths to which God would go to demonstrate his love for us. In him we see life eternal. In him we see hope.



four

The Rest of the Story

It's easy when we talk about the story of the Bible to end with Jesus. “He won!” we say, and then we get on with our lives. The balance of the New Testament—the letters, the stories of Acts, the craziness that is Revelation—is just there to inspire us to live correctly, right?

But the Bible's story doesn't end with Jesus returning to heaven, and the stories and letters of the apostles have just as big a part to play in God's quest as Jesus's success on the cross. The rest of the New Testament contains the part of the story that believers today still participate in. The story's not over and we have a role in it.

With Jesus's success where Adam failed, he also stepped into the role that King David had tried and ultimately failed to execute: the head of a new people. Just as the promise of God had moved from Abraham

to all Israel at Sinai and then back to a single person in David, so now again, the promises extend to all those who are loyal to the True King. Jesus represents believers to God, and his success and righteousness is ours as a result.

But further still, Jesus opened the door to the healing of the human heart. Throughout the Old Testament, it was increasingly obvious that the humanity that had fallen in Eden was broken. Through Jesus, however, humanity has begun to be remade. Jesus walked into the darkness and shined the light of hope. God's quest saw its highest point of success in Jesus's victory, but it's not over.

Humanity as a whole has begun to be remade as people choose to follow Jesus. As their king, he reconnects them to God through the Holy Spirit, enlivening what had been dead for so long. But humans who follow Jesus are still stuck with fallen flesh. The material part of humanity hasn't been remade yet—only the immaterial. And so, like an outdated computer trying to run the most recent version of Windows, believers struggle.

Yet faithfulness to Jesus comes with the promise that, one day, we will be remade in our entirety. Our hardware will get updated to match our software. And it's with that promised hope that God has invited the followers of Jesus to join him in finishing this quest he started. The world is full of humans who still remain separated from God and suffer under Adam's curse. And followers of Jesus have the opportunity to bring them all into Jesus's kingdom.

Our role in the story is crucial. God has entrusted the final leg of the quest to us imperfect humans.

We're being remade into the image of Jesus—he is, after all, the true human. But we also have the task of inviting others into a trusting relationship with God. That invitation comes with the promise of a return to true humanity for all who will follow Jesus.

So the task of believers in this penultimate leg of the quest is both internal and external. Internally, we work with the Spirit to follow Jesus's example in submitting to God and dying the death-of-self every day and allowing his life and love to be born and grow in us. Externally, we work with the Spirit to invite others into the kingdom of Jesus with the promise of full restoration. This is where our transformation toward true humanity finds its expression. Just as Jesus lived and loved, we now live and love, our lives given for the sake of others to know God.

The story of God in the New Testament is the story of his people living out that quest. The book of Acts outlines the growth of this new kind of humanity throughout the known world. The Epistles wrestle with the tension of dying-to-self and submission to God. And it's all part of the quest that will not end until we've seen our race finished.

The author of Hebrews picks up on that theme, describing the journey of faith like a race. Those who've gone before us have lived their part of the story, and now it's our turn. We too have to lay aside our focus on ourselves, look solidly to Jesus who is our model for renewal, and run with faithfulness in pursuit of true humanity.

God still has the full restoration of humanity, the earth, and the order of all things to accomplish. But we play a part in that goal even now before we're

completely renewed. It's important to understand that the story didn't end with Jesus returning to the Father. The story won't end until God makes all things new.

The End of the Story Is Much Like the Beginning

Eventually, every story must end. And God's quest throughout the Bible is no different. The pages of the Bible are filled with hints and pictures of what the world will look like when the hero returns, having successfully solved the problem and restored life to its original state. The peace of the garden that was disrupted and distorted by deception-induced rebellion led to a cross on which hung Adam's heir and God's provision. That cross points to the future in which all things are made new.

God walked with humanity in Eden before our rebellion; he walked with us in Jesus to confront and heal our rebellious hearts, and he'll walk with us again when the kingdom arrives in full. The New Testament, in the book of Revelation, gives us the most poignant vision of the future.

As the fullness of those who willingly follow Jesus is gathered in, the kingdom of darkness—those humans who, like Pharaoh, refuse to bend in submission to God along with the host of angelic beings who also refused to submit—will grow increasingly strong. Unrepentant humanity's hardness throughout the Bible and history will ultimately lead to a confrontation unlike any other.

In heroic stories after the hero succeeds in fixing the problem, there's always a journey back home. At some point on that journey, the hero faces one last stand by the enemy—a final confrontation that

puts everything to the test. And in the prophecies of Revelation, we find that confrontation.

As the final chapters of the Bible's story unfold, God's people must trust increasingly in the hope that God will raise to life all those who die trusting in his promises. The weapon of the kingdom of darkness is death, and it wields it well. But those who embrace a martyr's end will find the same renewal Jesus demonstrated in the tomb. For death cannot truly kill what cannot truly die. The most ironic twist being that it was by death, the enemy's own weapon, that Jesus claimed victory. In these final chapters the victory is irrevocably complete. Jesus the victor lays full claim to what he died for. But the victorious warrior is again an unexpected picture.

His life and death to reveal God and reclaim what was lost were not what was expected of the promised one, and the one who finally ushers in the finished work, a warrior lion who appears as a lamb. Throughout Revelation the victor is the slain lamb of God. In the climax and resolution of the story, it is the slain who claims the victory.

Though the end of all things remains a hotly debated topic within Christianity, there are some parts of the story that are clear. The kingdom of darkness won't be able to withstand God's final press to restore what was lost in Eden. And when he achieves the victory, he *will* remake not only humanity in its original glory, but all the earth with it. Everything will be as it was intended to be: In trusting submission to a loving God, humanity will reign over the earth, sharing the throne of Jesus himself. It will be a very happy ending indeed.



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What Do We Do with the Story?

That, in a nutshell, is the story of the Bible. It's God's story as he pursues the quest of redeeming what humanity broke in Eden. It chronicles the consistent failure of human after human to live up to the expectations God has for us. And it shows the brilliant solution of humanity remade in the God-Man, Jesus.

We live in a world that prizes an imagination-capturing story, much like the pre-modern era in which the texts that make up the Bible were written. The Bible is unchanged, but how we tell the story matters. Knowing the whole story equips us to tell those around us about the work that God has done

and is doing in the world. It makes sense of our roles today, and it gives us a clear picture of why it matters that we live in obedient submission to God.

As our societies move further and further from rational dialogue and reasoned argument, the old models of sharing the gospel become less and less effective. But if we can tell the world God's story—of a paradise lost in rebellion, of many failed successors, of one who remade humanity, and of hope for final restoration—we can capture imaginations.

After all, when Jesus left his disciples to return to the Father, he gave them one instruction: "Be my witnesses." And what are witnesses if not storytellers? People who, having seen the whole course of what happened—from Genesis to Revelation—tell the truth of the story. God has invited us into his quest of redemption, and he's given us everything we need in the pages of the Bible. So let's tell the story well.



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