

The “big story” of the Bible

OR “WHY THE OLD TESTAMENT IS NOT JUST FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS”

Introduction

How I heard the gospel:

- Separated from God by sin
- Nothing I could do to get back to him
- Jesus’ death took my sin
- Now I get to go to heaven

Me at the centre

The bible then is all about helping me find out more about God, a guidebook on my search for God.

Consumerist; ‘verse of the day’ to help me with life.

The Old Testament:

- Nice stories for sunday school.
- A rulebook for Jews.
- Story of God’s failure compared to NT story of success.
- God appears to be a bit different.
- OT law vs. NT freedom
- OT judgement vs. NT grace

The reality, or ‘what was I missing’?

The salvation story doesn’t have me in the middle of it, it has God in the middle of it.

It’s not about me, it’s about him. It’s not about me getting into heaven, it’s about God populating his kingdom. It’s not about how I can escape, it’s about how he restores.

The bible is not about my search for God, it’s about God’s search for me.

This morning - the OT and the NT tell the same story. The same God, the same plan, the same purpose, the same message.

Take a step back and ask the question - what is the story of the bible?

Part one – Creation

The bible starts with the creation of the universe.

At the start we see God, the source of all, the cause of all, the focus of all. The only way to understand the world is by looking at him who made it. Everything in creation points to God.

And then God made man, in his image.

- Created to see him.
- Created for relationship with him.
- Created for dependence on him.

The story of the Bible begins with a creative creator who creates a perfect world, and creates beings in his own likeness to dwell in this perfect world. Creation is the story of the beginning of an amazing relationship, of creator and creation.

A beautiful world without conflict, fear, pain, a place of love, peace and wholeness. This was the world that God wanted, created to perfectly house his beloved creation, us.

Part two – the fall

Man had everything he could possibly need, a perfect world, perfect love, relationship and dependence on a God who provided everything he could ever need.

But man somehow wanted more, he decided that he knew better than God and decided to do things on his own.

Man ruined perfection.

After this he (we) had (have) to take the consequences of rebellion.

“Instead of the world we want, we get the world we deserve”

Tim Chester

No longer able to see God as he really was man started to misrepresent God and project his brokenness, his guilt, his pain and hostility onto God.

He blamed God - “Why did you make me like this?”

“Why are you so cruel?”

“Why don’t you intervene?”

We became idolators, creating ‘idols’ or gods that we would worship, serve and give ourselves to. These gods reflected our fallen nature.

We were no longer able to think the way we were meant to, no longer able to relate as were supposed to, we created gods that looked distorted the truth of who God really is by making god in our own image. These were gods of destruction, gods of lust and inappropriate sexual activity, gods of selfish ambition, gods of money and power.

For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:21-25 ESV)

We became unable to see God for who he really was.

The fall also corrupted God's image in us.

No longer were we able to be God's representatives, reflecting a patient, loving, forgiving, generous, merciful God we became the opposite.

The fall prevented our relationship with God.

We were created for dependance on him, we chose independence from him and it stank.

Part three – redemption

As God expelled rebellious man from his perfection and presence he made a promise to his enemy - that one day a man would come along and defeat him.

Despite our rebellion, despite the fact that these people had seen perfection and rejected it, God still loved them.

From this point on God has a plan - to restore this perfection. To recreate this perfect place of love, peace, freedom and dependance.

It's hopeless for mankind, but God intervenes.

He makes a promise and gives some instructions.

He chooses a nobody to become a somebody.

At the start we have Abram and Sarai. A nobody from Haran (modern day Turkey).

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. And 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. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
(Genesis 12:1-3 ESV)

God begins the plan of restoring people to their ideal place by choosing Abram and Sarai to begin his dynasty, a lineage that would again bear his image - be like him, see him as he really is, have relationship with him and be dependent on him.

God's people, Abraham and Sarah's descendants became slaves in Egypt. But God sent the first of his prophets (= someone who reveals the identity and activity of God), Moses.

God intervenes.

He chooses a nobody (Moses) to become a somebody.

He makes a promise and he gives instructions:

*God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'" Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery. So the LORD said to Moses, "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land."
(Exodus 6:2-11 ESV)*

And so God gave them a gift - the law. The law wasn't given to control their freedom but to teach them what he was like, and to help them relate to him and one another properly. It was about freedom and protection, about how to live lives of devotion and live in harmony.

God gave the law so that the people would be able to see what he was like. He allowed his presence to travel with them so they could live in relationship with him, and he provided food and water for them so that they would understand their dependence on him. He began to restore the world he had created at creation. He had a land for his people where they could live as an expression of this perfect world that we crave.

But we read that the people continued to rebel, to believe that they knew better. They stopped trusting God and gave into their selfish desires. They stole, they worshipped the agricultural fertility Gods of their neighbours. They disliked the law because it appeared to take away their freedom.

They stopped being able to see God for who he was. They stopped having a relationship with him. They stopped their dependence on him and became independent.

So we see a pattern of being conquered, defeated, realising their mistake with the help of 'Judges' and turning back to God, only for him to rescue them.

Then God sends another prophet, Samuel. And Samuel appointed for them a great King.

They were utterly lost, and God intervened.

He made a promise, gave some instructions.

He made a nobody into a somebody.

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you

from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

*I 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, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.
(2 Samuel 7:14-17 ESV)*

God promises that one day someone will come who will rule over his people for ever. There will be a land where God will be known, where people can live in relationship with him, where they will be dependant upon him.

But, it all goes wrong again. God sends prophets, singers and wise men but his people demonstrate that people are unable to live as God intends us to.

So God judges his people.

*If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”
(Deuteronomy 30:16-20 ESV)*

But he never abandons them. The promise to Abraham still stands. As does the promise to Moses. And the promise to David.

The prophets speak of a new King to come, a new re-creation of perfection, a perfect revealing of the perfect world.

It's hopeless for us - nothing we do seems to work, we can't do it on our own.

But God intervenes.

He made a promise, he gave some instructions.

He turns a nobody into a somebody.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
(Luke 1:26-33 ESV)

So at the end of this part of the story we see the pieces coming together. The answer to who this great King who would lead us into perfection is none other than God himself!

He gives up his glory and splendour, conceals his identity so that it can be revealed. He arrives as the son of a peasant to an oppressed people. He lived and taught about God and died the most horrendous death. Then in his glorious resurrection he showed how the results of our rebellion, the false gods we had created for ourselves had been defeated completely and utterly, their power broken, the guilt gone.

Our God enabled us to see him, to understand what he was truly like. He enabled us to be restored into the image of who he is, to become like him, to reflect and represent him. He enabled us, through the presence of the Holy Spirit to have an ongoing relationship with him.

The central story of the Bible is the story of God's search for you - that he would sacrifice himself to death for those who hated him, that he would rather take the death that we deserved than be apart from us.

Part four – the end

The final part of this God story is still being written. It started with Pentecost when God, aware that we were unable to make this glorious perfection work on our own, intervened. He made a promise, gave some instructions and made 12 nobodies into somebodies.

The NT is full of the same story; James, Paul, Timothy, Barnabus, John. We know how the story ultimately ends - the restoration of perfection for all those who choose it.

The bible tells one story - God's story. The amazing part is that we can be a part of it too. The OT is not a story of God's failure, it's the story of man's failure and God's plan. When Jesus said

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."
(Matthew 5:17 ESV)*

...he was talking about the law that we don't quite get - the law demonstrated God to people, it brought them freedom and liberty and showed them how to relate to one another and the world. That's what Jesus was here for too.

And God is still doing the same thing today - his intervention stands. He's here with a promise, with instruction, to make nobodies into somebodies.