



Chapter 8: The Tapestry of the Stories

A. How the stories are interwoven

1. All the stories begin in Genesis.

God created the universe and gave special effort to prepare the earth for human habitation. His desire was to live among his people, created in his image, on our planet. When God looked at the world he had made, he declared that everything was very good—even the character of the human heart, since it was created innocent and destined for holiness.

In the opening chapters of Genesis, God reveals not only creation but also of the kingdom of God on earth through human dominion. Evidence is given of God's gracious gift and man's freedom. God claimed Adam and Eve (and their future descendants) as his people and prepared a special garden as their true home.

But then Adam and Eve disobeyed his one command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That rebellious act brought sin into the human race, to be passed down through the generations. It changed the nature of the human heart, corrupting its faculties and potential. The positive relationship between God and people, as well as among people, was damaged. Instead of freedom, we were enslaved to sin. Instead of receiving God's grace, we set out try to be good enough through our own efforts. Those efforts will never be good enough, and we forfeited our claim to be God's people or to rule over his creation.

God imposed additional limitations on humanity through the "curse" placed on the earth. This was both a punishment for sin and a discipline to allow God's plan of salvation to unfold. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, leaving a sense of lostness and alienation in human beings ever since. By one act of disobedience, our condition changed from perfect to hopeless.

2. All the stories are about God restoring the results of human sin.

The major story lines of Atonement, Home, Creation, Freedom, Kingdom, Grace, and People are told over a history of thousands of years. God's solution for human sin was not a simple solution. This encourages us to take sin as a very serious matter, both before we come to Christ and after. The solution is offered to us totally without charge or obligation, but it was extremely costly to God himself.

The marred and cursed creation must be created anew. People's hearts must be transformed. Slave-masters must be destroyed. A new kind of king must be found. The Lamb must die to satisfy the wrath of God. Legalism must be fully discredited. God would demonstrate that nothing would work to reverse sin except his own grace and forgiveness.

Humans in their impatience typically expect an instant answer. But God's plan would unfold over time, with many new beginnings. In that history God would show that sin can't be corrected by education, reformation, religion, trying harder, environmental change, political processes, or by treating sin lightly.

3. All the stories end in Revelation

The book of Revelation is not only the last book of the Bible, it is the conclusion and recap of the entire Bible. Fittingly, we discover that all the major story lines of the Bible are brought to their conclusions at the end of Revelation. We will consider here just the final four chapters.

The happy ending of the **Atonement Story** is seen in Revelation 19:6-10, describing the wedding of the Lamb. Jesus Christ, as the victorious Lamb of God, is worthy because he was slain in the act of redemption. In the wedding feast, he receives the outcome of his atoning sacrifice. (The "bride" of the Lamb is also a reference to the new humanity as the people of God.)

The **Kingdom Story** has its happy ending in the King who triumphantly returns to earth on a white horse in Revelation 19:11-16, bearing the title: King of kings and Lord of lords. He will rule with an iron scepter over the cursed earth (described in Revelation 20:1-6). He will rule forever in the new creation (described in Revelation 22:3). The saints will take their places under the King and reign with him.

The happy ending of the **Freedom Story** is told in Revelation 19:17-21, where all the human and angelic enemies of the saints will be vanquished and all servitude and oppression will end. Revelation 20:7-15 give the final destiny of these enemies in the lake of fire and sulfur, while we will enter into an eternity of freedom to serve God.

The **Creation Story** finds its consummation in the New Heaven and New Earth, mentioned in Revelation 21:1-5. Believers will be resurrected as part of that new creation. All effects of sin will be forever removed from God's creation: no more death, crying, pain, or curse. The transitional aspects of creation will also be fulfilled, leaving no night or sea.

The **People of God Story** will be fulfilled, according to Revelation 21:2-27. God will claim his people, drawn from every tribe and language and ethnic group. This is symbolized in "the Holy City, new Jerusalem." Some people imagine that this is a literal city in which the saints will live forever, but verse 9 clearly tells us it is the bride of the Lamb, the people of God. The gold, precious stones, foundations, gates, and street are symbols to portray the purity, beauty, and holiness of the people God has saved.

The happy ending for the **Story of our True Home** is a return to Paradise, as mentioned in Revelation 22:1-5. The river of life and the tree of life will be available to God's people. And, according to Revelation 21:3-4, God himself will live among them and be their God. We who have been longing for home and have found our home in Christ will be forever in his presence.

The **Story of Grace** will continue throughout eternity as well, since all the benefits will be God's gifts to us. Revelation 22:10-17 underline the free offer of grace that

is still available in our time. The invitation is "whoever wishes , let him take the free gift of the water of life."

4. All the stories intersect at the Cross

The events surrounding the cross provide the one irreplaceable scene that must be included in all dramas and stories of the human race. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are part of all God's story lines. We often reserve the idea of "salvation" and "Savior" for the story of atonement; but that concept applies equally to all of the Bible's story lines.

a. Jesus' substitutionary death (2 Corinthians 5:21) satisfied the wrath of God in the Atonement Story.

b. Jesus said he was "going to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1-4) through his death and resurrection in the True Home Story.

c. The killing of the author of life (Acts 3:13-21) enabled Jesus to restore everything at the proper time in the Creation Story.

d. Our union with Jesus in his physical death (Romans 7:4-6) allows us to die to the Law and to sinful passions releasing us from bondage in the Freedom Story.

e. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for us (John 10:14-18) so that we can be his people in the People of God Story.

f. Jesus' taste of death for everyone (Hebrews 2:6-9) restored human kingship in the Kingdom Story.

g. Jesus' death provides forgiveness through God's grace lavished on us (Ephesians 1:7-8) apart from works in the Grace Story.

5. Jesus is the hero of all the stories

The hero of each story is Jesus Christ. He was there at the beginning, when the stories began. The turning point of each story is his coming to earth as a servant. The focus of his ministry was to die on the cross and rise again. None of the stories could be told without him being at the center.

Jesus is the Creator, the High Priest (as well as the Lamb), the King of kings, the Gift of God, the Liberator, the Shepherd, and the Host. All glory to Jesus!

All human stories are tragedies with very sad endings, unless they include Jesus as their hero. Salvation is what turns our drama into a believable and glorious tale. The Author decided to enter his own story and provide the only possible redemption for people gone bad. No one else in heaven or on earth or under the earth could be found who was worthy to intervene in our predicament (Revelation 5). To save us required him to lay aside his equality with God and take on the form of a servant, becoming obedient unto death on the cross (Philippians 2).

B. Scriptures for further study:

1. The Festivals of Israel

Leviticus 23 outlines the times when Israelites stopped their regular work and met to celebrate God's provision. Each of the festivals focuses on one of the story lines of the Bible:

The Sabbath – Creation Story (God rested on the seventh day)

Passover – Freedom Story (deliverance from Egyptian bondage)

Firstfruits – Grace Story (seen in the harvest)

Pentecost – People of God Story (God accepts Jews and Gentiles; explained in Acts)

Trumpets – (later kings counted the years of their reigns from this festival)

Day of Atonement – Atonement Story (blood of the substitute)

Tabernacles – Home Story (live in booths to remember wilderness time with God)

2. Groups of Psalms

The worship of Israel used the Psalms, some of which are arranged to show the story lines of the Bible. One group is Psalms 21-27. [Check for other groups.]

Psalms 21 – prayer for the king

Psalms 22 – description of Jesus' atoning death

Psalms 23 – the Lord shepherds his people

Psalms 24 – creation belongs to the Lord

Psalms 25 – celebration of God's love and grace

Psalms 26 – the place where God's glory dwells

Psalms 27 – the deliverer sets his people free

3. Jesus' Words from the Cross

The seven statements Jesus spoke while on the cross center on his atoning work, but also refer to the other story lines as well.

"Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34) – Atonement, with emphasis on Grace

"You will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43) – Story of Home

"Behold your Son. Behold your mother." (John 19:26) – People of God Story

"I am thirsty" (John 19:28) – not clearly referring to a story line

"Why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:66) – Atonement Story

"It is finished" (John 19:30) – Atonement, with emphasis on Freedom

"Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46) – not referring to a story line

4. The Book of Ephesians

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians gives the gospel and its implications for us, mentioning most of the story lines.

chapter 1:1-14 – Atonement Story

chapter 1:15-23 – Kingdom Story

chapter 2:1-10 – Grace Story

chapters 2-4 – People of God Story

chapter 4:17-24 – Creation Story

chapter 6:10-18 – Freedom Story

5. Names, Titles, and Descriptions of Christ

Some passages in the Bible combine a number of names and titles of the Lord. These lists tend to bring several of the major story lines together, showing that they are not totally separate concepts. It is another way that the Bible weaves the story lines into a tapestry.

Isaiah 9:6-7

Romans 1:1-6

1 Timothy 6:13-16

Hebrews 1:1-4

Revelation 1:12-17

6. Biblical Summary Statements

Sprinkled through the New Testament are chapters or shorter sections of Scripture that give summaries of the work of Christ. These summary statements often combine three or more of the story lines into one account. This shows us the connectedness of the individual stories.

a. Titus 2:11-14 connects the Grace that teaches us, the Savior who redeems us, and the God who claims us as his own people.

b. Hebrews 2 combines the Grace Story (v. 1-4), the Kingdom Story (v. 5-9), the People Story (v. 10-13), the Freedom Story (v. 14-17), and the Atonement Story (v. 17-18).

c. 2 Corinthians 5 starts with the Creation Story (v. 1-5), moves through the Home Story (v. 6-9), continues to the Grace Story (v. 10-15), the People Story (v. 16-17), and ending with the Atonement Story (v. 18-21).

C. Discussion Questions:

1. Do a quick review of the Story Lines, individually. Which story speaks most strongly to you right now in your situation? How can our worship of Christ be enhanced by considering his work from seven different viewpoints? Does this study give a new meaning to the hymn, "Tell Me the Stories of Jesus"?

2. Which story line is most often told in the sermons recorded in the book of Acts (by Stephen, Philip, Peter, and Paul)? Or, is there a balance of various stories used? Would some of these stories be more appropriate for Jews, in contrast to Gentiles?

3. Memorize Philemon 1:6. Reflect on the "every good thing we have in Christ" in terms of the major stories. How is our understanding made more full by considering the variety of story lines? Which story was most helpful to you in coming to faith in Christ? Can you see ways to approach nonchristian friends through a story you haven't yet shared with them?

4. Be alert in your Bible reading and mentally identify which story is being told in each section of Scripture.