

Lesson 1—Background Terms and Info

For the next couple of weeks here at camp, we are going to trace the Progress of Redemption through the entirety of the Scriptures; this does not mean that we are going to explain everything about every book of the Bible, but rather, we are going to show how the single story of the Bible, what God is doing on this earth to glorify Himself by redeeming His fallen creation, is expressed through the many complex stories presented throughout the many books of the Bible. In order to do this, we need to first lay some ground work and define some terms to make sure we are all at least starting on the same page: those terms are unity, progress, and goal.

Unity: To help understand what it means to be unified, let us look at two different items that both express unity, but in different ways. First, a piece of chalk; a piece of chalk is unified in the sense that it is comprised entirely of the same substance (chalk). It is a single stick of chalk, and therefore, it is unified. Secondly, an ink pen; an ink pen is unified in the sense that it is made up of multiple different components that all work together to make a unified whole. This distinction is significant, especially when approaching the Scriptures. Which, of these two examples, do you all think best represents the unity expressed throughout the Scriptures? An ink pen, for the Bible is made up of many different books that tell a bunch of different stories, but all of the stories work together to tell one grand or overarching story, thus making the Bible a unified whole.

To show you what I mean, let's look at a list of references that span most of the Bible, and as we read them, look for a pattern to emerge: **Genesis 1:1; Exodus 3:6-9; Joshua 1:2, 5-6; Judges 2:16, 18; 2 Chronicles 36:15-17; Ezra 1:1; John 1:1, 14; 10:14-16; 14:1-3**. Hopefully you all were able to notice that all of these verses have God as the central focal point. He is the

source of movement throughout this story, for he is the main actor, and it is this fact that serves as the foundation for the unity of the Scriptures. God is at work throughout history, and the Bible is the record of what God is doing on this earth; even though God is still acting (doing things), the Bible gives us the base of what He has done, is still doing, and will do in the future. It is also significant to note that God only does what he says he is going to do: **Numbers 23:19; Amos 3:7; Matthew 11:2-4**. God has always told us what he was going to do before he did it, apart from creation, and he has told us what he is going to do in the future before he does it. I believe God did things this way so that when he acted, no one could reasonably doubt that it was God who was acting; if God never told us what he was going to do, people would have reason to doubt whether or not God was the one acting throughout history.

For example, let's say that when I walked in tonight, I found a \$20 bill. I could then ask you all who dropped a \$20 bill, and you all could tell me that you did and I have no way to prove that any of you are telling me the truth, and so I don't trust any of you. However, let's say that Mr. Alex or Mr. Joel called me this afternoon before I came over to this building and told me that Abby, one of my youth, accidentally dropped a \$20 bill somewhere out in front of this building while she was moving her luggage to her cabin. I then tell Mr. Alex and Mr. Joel that I will be on the lookout for the \$20 bill and as I come to this building, I find one. Then, when you all get here, I ask if anyone lost any money, and Abby can tell me that she lost exactly \$20 and that she lost it outside of this building while moving her luggage to her cabin. I was told before I found the \$20 that I would likely find it, then I found it, and then Abby told me afterward that she lost it exactly the way I was told that she lost it. Therefore, I have no reason to doubt that the \$20 I found rightfully belongs to Abby. In the Bible, we see this often: God will speak, things will happen the way God said they would, and then God tells us that he did it exactly the way he

said he would. For instance, as you read about the birth and early years of Jesus, the Gospel writers tell us over and over again how his birth very specifically fulfilled prophecy that God had spoken hundreds of years before: the fact that Jesus would be born of a virgin, that he would be born in Bethlehem, that he would come out of Egypt, and that he would be raised in a place called Nazareth were all spoken of by God hundreds of years before they happened, then they happened the way God said, and then God tells us that they happened the way God said they would. Therefore, we have no good reason to doubt that God is the one acting throughout history and that the Bible gives us the record of those actions. This is the foundation of the unity of the Bible: God acts, and he always tells us what he is going to do before he does it.

Now, we are going to explore two other terms, besides unity, that are essential to understand before we move forward and actually dig into what the Bible says God is doing here on this earth: we are going to explore the concepts of progress and goal, and we need to explore them together because they depend on one another; to make progress implies that you have a goal, and in order to reach a goal, you must make progress. Simply stated, progress is forward or onward movement towards a goal, and a goal is a set achievement yet to be reached or attained. These definitions are important because you can have movement without progress (i.e. wandering or being lost), which is why you need a goal (so you know where you are going), and you can have goals without ever reaching them, which is why you need to make progress.

So, first, let us examine progress a bit more and better understand how it will play a part in our examination of the unity of the Scriptures. Initially, let us answer the question of why we would even expect to see progress in the Bible: well, **Hebrews 4:12** says that the word of God (the Bible) is living and active, and all of life experiences growth, or progress; therefore, we can reasonably expect to see progress in the Bible since it, too, is living and active. Let me illustrate

what I mean by this: imagine with me an acorn; what is an acorn? It's a seed, and what does it grow into? A mighty oak tree. Do you have to coach an acorn and tell it to grow and how to grow? No; because it is living (it's organic), it grows naturally. Let's take another example to really help drive this home: a zygote is another seed, but does anyone know what kind of seed? A zygote is a human seed—it is the single cell from which all human life originates within the womb of a mother. Now, when my wife Hannah was pregnant with either of our daughters, did I have to lean down and talk to Abigail or Elena through Hannah's belly to give her instructions on how to grow and develop? No; because our daughters were alive from the moment they were conceived, they began to grow and develop on their own—that is progress, and since the Word of God is alive and active, we should expect to see progress throughout it as we examine what God is doing on this earth, and I believe we see it in seed-like statements and actions that God grows into fullness and maturity over time. For example: in **Genesis 12:1-3**, God tells Abraham that he will bless him and through him, bless all the nations of the world. This is the seed, and the coming of Jesus—his life, death, resurrection, and ascension—was the fulfillment, or oak tree, of that seed, and everything in between shows us the growth, or progress.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, progress requires a goal, and if we expect to see progress throughout the Bible, then there must be a goal towards which God is progressing. Understanding this goal, therefore, is crucial to making sense of any progress we find in the Bible. Without understanding God's goal, we might actually get confused as we see progress being made. For example, imagine with me that when we all arrived at camp, we saw the big playing field all taped off with some major equipment sitting in the middle of the field: if you didn't know that the camp had the goal of adding a new barracks building so that they could house more campers, then you might be really confused about why you can't play in the field or

why on earth they have a giant excavator sitting in the middle of their property; however, when Mr. Joel explains their plans to build a new barracks building, it all starts to make sense now. Of course, they have to tear up the field and make sure everything is perfectly level for a new building—they are progressing towards a new barracks building. Similarly, knowing the goal of God helps to make sense of the progress being made throughout Scripture. So, what is God's goal here on this earth?

Let me suggest for you what I believe to be God's ultimate goal here on this earth:

Numbers 14: 21 reads, "But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD...." I believe God's end goal here on this earth is to fill the earth with his glory, and this is why from the beginning in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been commanded by God to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it as his image-bearers (**Genesis 1:26-28**). Having been made in God's image, we accurately reflected the glory of God, and so for us to fill the earth and subdue it would have been to fill the earth with the glory of God. Unfortunately, when we sinned, we marred, or distorted, the image of God within us, hindering our ability to accurately reflect his glory. This is why **Romans 8:29** and **Colossians 3:10** tells us that the purpose of our salvation is for God to renew his image within us and therefore to progress towards fulfilling his goal of filling this earth with his glory by filling it with people who accurately reflect his glory.

So, now we see that the Bible is unified by the single thread of what God is doing on this earth to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation. We also see that God does have an end goal in mind—filling the whole earth with his glory—and that we expect to see progress towards this goal through a series of seed-like statements and actions that God grows into fullness and maturity throughout history and over time. At this point, there is just one more section of background information that we need to make sure we understand before we actually begin

digging into the Scriptures and examining what God is doing. We need to know and make sure we understand that the Bible is one of the most, if not the most, selective book ever written. You don't have to read the Bible for long before you start asking yourself questions that the Bible doesn't answer: for instance, **Genesis 1:1** reads, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We were just told in a single sentence that God created all that existed. You would think that for a topic so important that God would spend more time telling us about it, but he doesn't, and he never apologizes for it. This is an important lesson, and you will see this all throughout the Bible—God only tells us what we need to know in order for us to understand what he is doing here on this earth in order to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation, and apparently, knowing exactly how he created the universe does not fall within that category; apparently, all we need to know about creation is that God is the one behind it. He existed before all things were made, he brought all things into being, and he will continue to exist outside of his creation, totally independent from it forever.

Then, after a single sentence telling us that God created the entire universe, including this tiny planet called earth, God then spends the next 24-25 verses explaining the filling and forming of earth. So, one sentence telling us that he created everything followed by 24-25 verses detailing how he filled and formed this single planet. Are you starting to see how God is focusing our attention? Then, in verse 26 of chapter 1 of Genesis, God begins detailing how he made us, mankind. Then, for the rest of chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Genesis, God details the creation of mankind and the Garden in which he placed us. Again, can you see the focus? A broad, sweeping statement that covers the creation of the entire universe, then a shift to a more detailed focus on a single planet, earth, within that entire universe, and then a shift in focus to a single creature, man, within a single Garden on this single planet within the entire universe.

With the selective fashion in which the Scriptures are written, God is working to focus our attention on the important details. Not that we can't ask questions and explore ideas that are not explicitly mentioned in the Scriptures (i.e. Did Adam and Eve have belly buttons? Could the animals in the Garden of Eden talk? What type of fruit, in particular, was the fruit of the tree of life; was it an apple? Orange? What?), but we must recognize and come to terms with the fact that, while those topics may be fun to consider, they have little to no bearing on the story of how God is working in this world to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation. Again, exploring those questions is not wrong, but we must remember that those types of questions and their answers are entirely speculative (meaning that we are just guessing and we can't know for sure) and God does not seem to think that we need to know them; pursue them all you want, but, first, make sure you know what God has deemed the important details that we actually have recorded in Scripture.

It is with this understanding that next time we meet, we will examine the first 11 chapters of Genesis in some detail to see what appears to be the prologue to what God is doing on this earth to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation: the first 11 chapters of Genesis, like a prologue, will give us the necessary background information so that we will understand the story of what God is doing as we read through it.