

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

Part 2

THE STORY

The Old Testament (Part 1)

BEFORE WE BEGIN

What are some of the major events in the Old Testament? What order do these appear in?

Do you think it is important for Christians today to know the storyline of the Old Testament? If so, why? If not, why not

**When you read the Old Testament stories, what do you expect to get out of them?
What purpose do they serve?**



Original Design (Genesis 1-3)

A. The way the Bible presents the story of creation describes the world as specifically tailored for

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1. The terrestrial perspective in the creation story does not mean that humanity is the focus of the scriptural storyline. God is the focus. However, the terrestrial perspective does tell us the kind of story we are about to encounter, one about God and humanity.
 2. We have to ask what the creation story, as Genesis 1–2 presents it, is meant to accomplish. While scholars debate whether the lines of Genesis 1 particularly should be viewed as strictly narrative or more a poetry, we can all agree that God was building a good world for His glory. Further, we can all agree that God wanted to have a special relationship with humanity, who represent the pinnacle of creation.

B. Humans take on the role of God's _____ to creation.

1. Among all creation, humanity alone bears the "image of God." What the image of God comprises has been a rich debate in the history of theology. Some theologians have pointed to human creativity, dominion, and rationality. In fact, the text of Genesis 1–2 does not specifically define the image. Those passages do give humanity a blessing and a task, though: be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.
2. What seems clear about the place of humans in the created order is that we are supposed to be kings and queens (we are to rule and subdue), and we are supposed to do everything we do on God's behalf (we bear His image in the created order). These foundational aspects of humanity, and especially how we fail at them, will play an enormous role in the story that follows.

C. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil presents a challenge about

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1. Given the task to rule on God's behalf in creation, humans have a choice about what kinds of rulers we will be. Will we rule under God's authority and by His wisdom, or will we rule by our own authority and our own wisdom?
 2. The ways in which Satan tempts Eve, and the description of the fruit as she considers taking it, show that it is not just a desire to disobey God that drives her. It is the desire to take on God's role and to gain wisdom apart from a relationship with God.



3. A good comparison story appears in the Gospels when Jesus is also tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Each of the temptations that Satan presents to Jesus (providing for Himself by His own power, proving His Messiahship, and gaining His kingdom) would be the same kind of act, taking control for Himself rather than relying on His relationship with His Father. Jesus succeeds where we failed in the Garden and continue to fail even today.

D. Humanity falls, but God demonstrates _____ and gives _____.

1. Despite our rebellion in the Garden, God does not snuff out humanity all at once. We do die the day we eat the fruit, both spiritually and physically. Our spiritual death is demonstrated by our being cast out of the Garden where God's presence dwells. Our physical death is represented by our exile from the Garden and being kept from the Tree of Life.
2. Still, God cares for us by providing the coverings we need to survive outside of the Garden in a land that will fight against us. He shows the consequences of sin by taking the life of animals in order to clothe Adam and Eve (and in doing so, previews the sacrificial system).
3. Most importantly, God promises that evil has not won the day. Though there will be two lines of humanity always at war—the "seed of the serpent" and the "seed of the woman"—a human is coming who will end the effects of sin by killing the serpent (see Genesis 3:15).

The Perpetual Spiral (Genesis 4-11)

A. Cain sets a precedent for being in the line of the _____.

1. In the story of Cain and Abel, Cain is given a choice in much the same way that Adam and Eve were given a choice. God says that he must decide whether he will master sin or let it master him. Cain chooses the latter.
2. The genealogy that follows Cain's choice shows the generational effects that sin can have. He plants a city named after his son, and this leads down the family tree to a man named Lamech. Lamech has two wives (a first in the story and prominent in the narrative), and he claims more divine protection than Cain for a murder that is even more frivolous.

B. Humanity chooses evil to the point that God _____ the world.

1. The flood narrative has distinct connections back to Genesis 1, essentially running back the creative process from a finished, good world back to a world that is formless and void with waters covering the entire surface. Just compare the creative process in Genesis 1 to the destruction of Genesis 7:



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Creation: separation of waters → dry land → birds → creeping things and cattle → man

De-creation: man → cattle and creeping things → birds → dry land → separation of the waters
(see Gen 7:11)

2. When Noah and his family exit the ark, the world is back in a pristine state. They are given the blessing once again to “be fruitful and multiply” and “fill the earth.” However, not everything is as it was in Eden. God says that animals will fear humanity (undermining our ability to “subdue” and “rule” properly), and God also lays down a penalty for murder, immediately letting us know that sin has not been swept away in the flood waters.
3. The first thing Noah does after exiting the ark is to build an altar and worship God. The second thing he does is plant a vineyard, make wine, and get drunk. In this instance, we see sin once again rearing its head as the behavior of Noah’s son, Ham, causes a rift in the family. Ham’s act shames Noah for his nakedness, echoing Adam and Eve’s shame in the Garden and repeating the fall narrative for the reader. The genealogy of Genesis 10 tells us how the nations develop, and specifically how most of Israel’s future enemies come from Ham’s line, including Canaan and even more importantly Nimrod.

C. Humanity still refuses to obey God, leading to _____ founding.

1. Despite God’s admonition to “fill the earth” after Noah got off the ark, humanity decides once again that our wisdom is better than God’s. Genesis 11:1–4 presents humanity actively trying *not* to be scattered over the face of the earth by grouping together to build a city. The stated purpose of this building project is to “make for ourselves a name.”
2. There are several connective features in this story that help readers to understand the ways in which it develops the issue of sin in the human heart and the purposes of God in redemptive history.
 - (1) The human counsel (“let us make bricks”...“let us build a city”...“let us make a name”) mimics the divine internal counsel of Genesis 1 and 11 (“let Us make man”...“let Us go down”) to show the autonomy humanity tries to assert.
 - (2) The human desire to make a name for themselves will be immediately countered by God’s promise to make a name for Abram in Genesis 12.
 - (3) The materials that humanity will use to build their city are the exact materials that Pharaoh forces Israel to use in order to build cities after his name in Exodus 1.



3. In response to human rebellion, God once again acts in judgement. This time, rather than destroying the people in rebellion, God forces His blessing on them by scattering them abroad—the very thing they had desired to avoid by building Babylon! The pattern of God turning human sin for His good purposes will show up over and over in Scripture, eventually resulting in the final act of redemption in Jesus' death.

A New (Old) Kind of People (Gen 12-Deut)

A. God chooses one man out of Babylon through whom He will bring

_____ to the nations.

1. God's choice of Abram differs from His choice of Noah in that we know nothing of Abram's righteousness at the time God calls him. All we know is that Abram is a product of Babylon, and God calls Him out of Babylon and away from his family to create a new kind of people through him.
2. Abram's blessing, which is given and restated several times (see Genesis 12:1–3,7; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–8; and 22:15–18), begins with his family but always has an extension to the rest of the nations. Part of the mystery in God's redemptive plan is how a blessing for all people can be accomplished through a single couple, but the rest of the Old Testament will show how God develops this plan.

B. Abraham's family grows, but it never looks like the kind of people God _____.

1. Abraham lies twice about his wife's identity, bringing harm instead of blessing to the nations around him, and then he and his wife conspire to use a slave woman for their own benefit.
2. Isaac repeats his father's mistake and lies about Rebekah's identity, and then the two of them choose favorites between their sons.
3. Esau never considers righteous behavior, but he follows his appetite wherever it takes him.
4. Jacob perpetually deceives people to get what he wants, and then his preference for one of his sons leads the others to sell Joseph into slavery.
5. The sons of Jacob also slaughter an entire town in response to one man raping their sister.
6. What each generation gets right, at least some of the time, is that they believe God's promises and have faith.

C. The Exodus story becomes a foundational picture of God bringing an

_____ people out of slavery.

1. Egypt becomes the next Babylon, the paradigmatic “kingdom of man” trying to make a name for itself and looking after its own self-interest at the expense of other people. Pharaoh enslaves Israel because he is afraid of them and their hypothetical threat to his own power and people.
2. The people of Israel are fruitful and multiply, and they fill the best area of the land (Ex 1:7). Immediately, we see God creating a new humanity through them. However, the line of the serpent, represented in Pharaoh, tries to overcome the line of the woman, represented in Israel.
3. God must intervene and deliver His people through His own mighty acts of salvation, just as He will do over and over until the final act of deliverance through Christ

D. Israel immediately and constantly fails to be the kind of _____ it seems God would choose.

1. Only three days after being delivered through the Red Sea, Israel grumbles about a lack of water, then a little later about a lack of food, then later about a lack of meat (they have magic bread flakes that appear every day!).
2. When God meets them on the mountain of Sinai (a.k.a. Horeb), they promise to obey every word He speaks and then promptly disobey the first two commandments He gives them within 40 days. They assume Moses is dead on the mountain, so they have Aaron make a golden calf to worship.
3. When God brings Israel to the edge of the Promised Land and promises to go before them and deliver the land to them, they rebel and spend 40 years in the wilderness grumbling and disobeying.

E. The Torah ends with a desire to have a new _____ like Moses who speaks to God face to face.

1. This sort of cliffhanger ending becomes a pattern in the Old Testament. The Torah desires a new Moses, the Prophets desire a new Elijah, and the Writings desire a new kingdom; however, none of these things materializes by the end of the Old Testament narrative.
2. What the narrative creates in the mind of the reader is one category of true human that we need to come and help us escape our cycle of failure. Even Moses failed, so he could not be the true deliverer. We need someone else who is a better Moses.

