



THE BIG STORY: 6 ACTS OF SCRIPTURE

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OBJECTIVE

We will go through an overview of the grand narrative of scripture from Genesis to Revelation, by considering the bible as six acts of a play: creation, crisis, calling, Christ, church and consummation and drawing out recurring themes (e.g. exile, covenant, kingdom)

As a result, as individuals and churches we will be able to locate our lives as participants in this story and yield to its transformative power.

WHY STORY

THE BIBLE IS ESSENTIALLY GOD'S STORY

- He is the chief character in the drama that unfolds through the bible.
- The bible is a whole in which the drama unfolds, building as it goes. It is not a set of isolated texts giving us facts about God.
- In this story we touch God's feelings, plans and interactions with people.
- Stories communicate so much

WE ARE CALLED INTO THIS STORY

- God calls us into His unfolding story, in which we have a part to play.
- We need to see ourselves as part of this unfolding story, with its God-given plot etc.
- We drain the bible of its colour if we simply dissect it in a way that loses the rich narrative

MORE TECHNICALLY

- The literary form that dominates Scripture is narrative.
- 40% OT texts are narrative
- In the NT the gospels and Acts are clearly narrative.
- Much of the rest of the scripture is set in this narrative context, i.e. retelling the story, even if it is not narrative itself.

The bible tells stories about God, his plan and purposes for the world, his interaction with his people, and the unfolding of salvation history. God chose to become revealed in history and historical forms, i.e. the

READING THE STORY

- It must be read so that the stories, and The Story, which it tells can be heard as stories, not as rambling ways of declaring unstoried ideas.
- Stories provide a vital framework for experiencing the world...[and] a means by which views of the world may be challenged.
- Instead of translating narrative into something else, such as propositional truth, we should read it and understand it in its own terms.
- It is from within this story that we, personally and corporately, find our God-given history, identity and destiny with God for the whole of life.

APPROACHES TO THE STORY

- NT Wright & Shakespeare play
- Drama of scripture
- This approach: six acts: creation, crisis, calling, Christ, church, consummation

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF STORY

- Narratives do not set out to teach doctrine
- Not all the actions of the 'good' people should be copied (Gideon's fleece, Samson ...)
- Stories are not complete – be careful not to fill in the gaps with what you want there!

LIVING IN THE STORY

- Israel remembered their story. Often over the meal!
- Contrarily if you read through scripture it isn't too long before you come across phrases like 'and they remembered God no more.'
- Living in the story is essential for understanding who we are as a people, and for living faithfully as that people. When the pressure comes, in a land full of idols, we need to remember who we are.
- Eucharist...worship...scripture...eating...

ACT ONE CREATION

INTRODUCTION

Gen 1:1-3 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said...

What does story tell us?

- Who we are
- Where we live
- Where we are going & how to get there
- How to live

THE STORY IS GOD'S! (GEN 1:1-3)

- Who not how!
 - God exists (Elohim)
 - God's creation, story, world, plan, purpose
- What was it like?
 - Formless, empty, dark
- What does it tell us about God?
 - Presence in darkness
 - Irresistible word & Spirit bringing order
- Why? Mustn't lose His centrality
- Foundation for Israel: memory

Deut 6:4 *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* (Shema) (cf Ps 96:4-7; 1 Cor 8)

THE CREATION IS GOOD. (GEN 1:3-25)

- God's blessed pronouncement
 - Says something about matter & physical
 - Kingly function
 - Refrain affirming the work

- Bounded and ordered
 - Creation
 - Evil
 - God's people. Leviticus 20:24, 26: *'But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations. You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.'*
- Climaxed in people
 - Image bearers & stewards
 - God's continued involvement through people
- Creation tied up in God's plans
 - Whole of creation to be redeemed (Rom 8)
 - Resurrection bodies, new heaven and new earth (Rev 22?)

GOD IS INVOLVED

- Intimacy and Involvement
 - Distinct
 - Yet involved & committed
 - Spirit presence prior to creation
- God's dwelling place

Ps 104: 2-5 *'He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved'*

- King's home, cosmic temple
- Spirit as architect
- Now it's us!
- Our dwelling place
 - Task to fill it
- Creation has a destiny It's destiny is assured despite the fall.

- Its destiny is glorious: and for eternity

CONCLUSION

We have a God, the only God, who has created a good earth on which we dwell. He has plans and purposes for the whole of this creation and has given us a key place in it. We are to steward the rest of creation on God's behalf, bringing His order and reign into reality and bringing creation to a place where it brings God glory and honour.

This is our story-but only the beginning!

HUMANITY MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (GEN 1:26-28)

WHAT IMAGE: THREE IN ONE GOD

Father, Son and Spirit...paint a picture of the triune God

Implications for personhood if made in this image

- Individualism vs. personhood defined by relationship
- Being human thus implies being in relationship, not made to be alone

Image to do with whole being, not just spiritual bit! So don't denigrate the body.

All humans, without differentiation bear God's image

- All people everywhere are *essentially* the same
- No room for racism, status seeking
- Given the role of images in the ANE image stood for the presence of the king...or deity
- Any act of abuse against another human being is an act of high treason

THE FALL & THE IMAGE

- Although all in the image of God, not all are living up to that image
- Christians are called to:
 - Do good to all: since all in God's image
 - Invite all to respond to the gospel

PEOPLE OF GOD & THE IMAGE

The image being restored in those born of the Spirit

Society should be able to look at the church and see there what it means to live “in the image of God”

Characteristics that ought to describe Christian life together:

- Glory: the presence of the Spirit
- Ethical: the fruit of the Spirit
- Power of the Spirit - gifts
- Judicial governmental: justice, mercy

STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

GOD AS KING

- In creation narratives, God depicted as King – orders and fills, and then rules in rest
- Creation as his kingdom; very good but yet to reach its full potential
- Distinct from creation, but personally involved and committed to it

PEOPLE AS PART OF CREATION

- Made from the same dust
- Image but not identical
- Pinnacle of creation

ROLE AS VICE REGENTS

- God takes us into his work to steward the whole created order:
 - The work of ordering, ‘differentiating’, naming (control over)
 - Clearly seen in sciences, discovery imitating God
 - To bring blessing, goodness, and shalom
- All of our actions ought to be representative of and portray the character of God
 - Glory (cf. John 1:14, filled with the Spirit)

- Ethical (cf. Heb 1:9)
- Judicial authority (cf. John 5:19, 30)
- We need a Christ centred approach to creation. Are we lording creation or stewarding it?
- Our vice regent role is outworked in the whole of our life including especially:
 - In our place of work (Spirit anointed)
 - In our family
 - In our body
 - In our community
 - As the people of God and with the people of God

PRIESTS ON BEHALF OF CREATION

- Redemption includes the whole of creation – see the great commission (Matt 28) as including to enable once again the first commission (Gen 1:26-28)
- Romans 8 and revealing of sons of God - crying out on behalf of creation
- Eternal aspects of creation: new heavens and new earth

GOAL OF CREATION: THE GLORY OF GOD, STILL THE AIM

- Fulfilment of creation
- Supremacy of Christ (Col 1:15-20)
- Harmony, shalom (Gen 3:8, Micah 4:3-4)
- Glory of God filling the earth (Hab 2:14)
- Mature sons

Eph 1:3-10

- Who - *He*
- What – *Chose us*
- How – *In Him*
- When – *Before the creation of the world*
- Why – *For Himself*
- Where – *That we should be before Him*

ACT TWO: THE FALL (GENESIS 3)

INTRODUCTION

- The Wisdom Debate (Gen 3)?
 - Whom should we trust?
 - Could say “who is the wise one?”
 - Belief here affects how to live?

THE DIALOGUE!

- What was the command? (2:16-17)
- What did the serpent ask first? (v1)
 - What did it do?
 - Subvert God’s order, calling god’s trustworthiness into question
 - Change view/image of God?
- How did the women answer?
 - Minimises God’s goodness; adds to command
 - What could she have said?
- What did the serpent ask second? (v4)
 - What did it do?
 - Suggests independent actions will attain image of God; contrast God’s initiative in ch 2
 - We don’t need God

THE CLIMAX V6-8

- The women saw, took and ate
 - Judgement tree seen as tree of life by women, becomes tree of death for humanity
 - Demonstrates trust in the serpent not God
 - Believing the lie about God
- Adam & Eve fails to exercise judgement
 - Don’t deal with serpent

- Adam doesn't protect his wife

CONSEQUENCES V9-19

- Destroys relationship between Adam & Eve
 - He blames, she blames
 - In whose character are they now made?
- Damages relationship with God
 - Intimacy to fear...why?
 - Wrong image of God, disobedience...

HOW DOES GOD RESPOND?

- Sanction:
 - the snake: belly and eating dust as the ultimate defeat (cf. Rom 16:20)
 - the woman:
 - Pain in motherhood
 - Control not freedom in relationship
 - Power struggle
 - The man: because you have obeyed your wife (rather than God) and have eaten
 - 'To eat' five times in three verses: you will eat with painful effort
 - Not work but the hardship and frustration
- Death:
 - Instead of finding plentiful provision from the land ... Adam will now ultimately feed the dust.
 - Instead of his head being crowned, he will trampled underfoot as dust, the lowest order of creation.
 - BUT the final judgment is delayed

CONCLUSION

The Exile (3:22-24)

- Driven out: loss of home and close relationship (3:25; cf. 2:15)
 - Those called to tend the garden are turned out of the special sanctuary
 - Tree of life: eternal life under the curse of rootless autonomy would have been disastrous.

- Sword also prevents further self-salvation attempts
- ... to the East

PROMISE OF REDEMPTION!

INTRODUCTION

- Who do you trust (wisdom debate)
- Despite the fall there are seeds of hope and promise
- God's story is not to be thwarted

Read Gen 3:14-15, 20-24

GOD'S ACT OF MERCY

- His response in coming looking...
- He clothes his rebel "sons" - God makes garments
- What they couldn't do for themselves God does.
- Hint of covenant sacrifice: sacrifice to make provision
- Hint of salvation garments (Is 61:3, 10; Rev 3:18, 7:14)
- Flashing swords and cherubim

FUTURE FORETOLD

- Battle of the champions
- Head wound and the heel wound:
- Seed of the woman both collective and individual

THE TALE OF TWO SEEDS

- Seed of the women (Abel)
- Seed of the serpent (Cain)
- Becomes tale of two cities!

CONCLUSION

- Place of promise
- Place of redemption
- God wins! Rev 19 & wedding banquet

ACT 3 – CALLING (ISRAEL)

INTRODUCTION

The story of Israel, told through the rest of the Old Testament

Books in the narrative: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus ,Numbers ,Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, (Ruth), 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, (Esther)

POSSIBLE TIMELINE

(All dates BC)

2081	God's covenant with Abraham
1991	Death of Abraham
1875	Jacob and Family to Egypt
1446	Exodus from Egypt
1406	Death of Moses, entry into the promised land
1375	Joshua's death
1375-1055	Period of the Judges
1050-1010	Saul's reign
1010-971	David's reign
971-931	Solomon's reign
931-722	20 kings of Israel – divided kingdom
722	Destruction of Samaria – Israel scattered
931-586	20 kings of Judah – divided kingdom
586	Jerusalem destroyed by Babylonians. Judah taken into exile
586-538	Exile in Babylon
539	Cyrus of Persia captures Babylon
538	First return of Jews from exile under Jeshua and Zerrubabel
516	Temple rebuilding completed
458	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem

NOAH

World in decline, God sends judgement but doesn't give up on His world. Ends with 1st covenant

WHAT IS A COVENANT?

Key theme of scripture, common in Ancient Near East.

2 main types we see:

- Royal Grant (unconditional)
- Suzerain-vassal (conditional)

Typical elements in a covenant:

- Promises
- Conditions
- Meal and/or sacrifice
- Sign

So in covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1-17):

- What type?
- Who with? (9:9-10)
- Sacrifice (8:20)
- Promise (9:11)
- Conditions (9:4)
- Sign (9:14-16)

ABRAHAM (AND ISAAC AND JACOB)

Another significant covenant, that comes in 3 sections – Genesis 12:1-3, 15:9-21 and 17:1-27

Type – both! 12 & 15 are unconditional, with the condition in 17

Elements of Covenant

- Promises: God steps in to restore the original plan from Gen 1 & 2: 3 promises:
 - Human Flourishing - Gen 12:2, 15:5 (cf Gen 1:28) - PEOPLE

- Relationship with God – Gen 17:7 (cf Gen 2:9) - PRESENCE
- A place/land – Gen 15:18 (cf Gen 2:8) - PLACE
- Condition & Sign – Circumcision (Gen 17)
- Meal and/or sacrifice – Gen 15:9-11

Restated to Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5) and Jacob (Gen 28:14-15)

For the rest of the Pentateuch (Torah), the promises are developed and start to be fulfilled

HUMAN FLOURISHING (GENESIS 12-50)

Abraham and Sarah – 1 child – Isaac.

Isaac – 2 sons – Esau and Jacob

Jacob – many sons!

Joseph to Egypt, family follows and settles

The promise is tested:

- Sacrifice of Isaac
- Repeated barrenness (Gen 11:30, 25:21, 29:31)
- Chronic strife (Gen 21:10, 27:19, 27:41, 29:23, 37:20)
- 19 famines in the land (Gen 12 to 50)

But **the promise wins** – Gen 47:27

Also, blessing to the nations along the way (fulfilment of Gen 12:3, 22:18)

- Prosperity to Potiphar's house (Gen 39:5)
- Food for Egypt and surrounding nations (Gen 41:56-57)

MOSES: RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (EXODUS AND LEVITICUS) AND 'A PLACE' (NUMBERS AND DEUTERONOMY)

EXODUS: 1-18: GOD BRINGS HIS FIRSTBORN SON OUT OF EGYPT

The Israelites are oppressed and cry out; Moses is called to lead

Conflict with Pharaoh – plagues, finishing with Passover. They are let go but then chased by the Egyptian army.

Miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, then into the desert.

- Key verse: Ex 4:22 – special relationship
- Ex 12 – Israel’s firstborn preserved in the Passover
- Ex 14-15 – Pharaoh’s army drowns but Israel is on dry ground (Gen 1)

EXODUS 19-31 - COVENANT

Covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai

- Promises: God to be their God – the whole nation (e.g. Ex 19:4-6)
- Conditions: To be distinct, holy, consecrated – live by God’s rules (e.g. Ex 20)
- Meal and/or sacrifice – both (Ex 24)
- Sign: Sabbath rest (Ex 31:13-17)

Ex 25:8 – The promise fulfilled *‘Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them’*

EXODUS 32-40

The relationship promise is tested:

- The Golden calf and consequences
- New tablets
- Setting up of the tabernacle
- God glory fills the tent – the power of the promise (Ex 40:34-38)

LEVITICUS

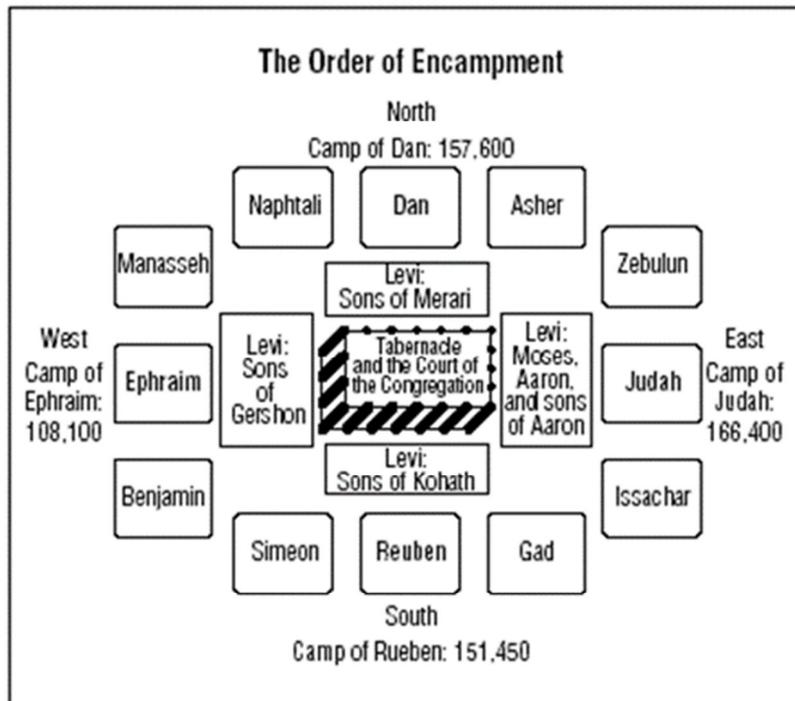
Maintaining Israel’s relationship with God – why? Israel is prone to sin!

- Sacrificial system (Lev 1-7)
- Priestly system (Lev 8-10)
- Ceremonial cleanness, social & civil justice and the Day of Atonement (Lev 11-27)

PREPARING TO TRAVEL (NUM 1-10)

First Census (Num 2:32) – Impressive numbers (how many?) confirm Human Flourishing promise

Layout of camp (Num 2:1) – God’s tent at centre – God in their midst – confirms the relationship with God promise. Everything should revolve around God



SINAI TO MOAB (NUM 10-25)

Journey – the ark leads the way!

The promise is tested:

- Internal rebellion and unbelief – 10 times! (Num 13-14, 16-17, 20:1-13, 21:4-9, 25:1-18) – leads to 40 year wait!
- External opposition – nations deny passage (Num 20:14-22, 21:23-25, 22:2-25:18)
- Balak/Balaam & the Baal of Peor – curse attempt, apostasy and immorality (Num 22:2-25:18)

But – a turning point – Phineas' zeal – no further rebellion Num 25:13 – atonement brings cleansing and a new beginning

Unconditional **Covenant** with Phineas (Num 25:10-13) – just a promises: lasting priesthood for his family

PREPARING TO ENTER THE LAND (NUM 26-36)

Looking wholly to the future, with a mood of hope.

New census (Num 26) – marginal drop in numbers – a testimony to God's faithfulness

Despite rebellion, opposition and 40 years time having passed, Israel is now poised to enter the land.

The promise has been tested, but still stands

MOSES' 3 SERMONS (DEUTERONOMY)

What God has done for Israel (Deut 1:1 – 4:43)

What God expects of Israel (Deut 4:44 – 26:19) - restatement of the law from Sinai

- Repeated emphasis on living by the law in the land (Deut 5-7)
- Radical loyalty to God – no treaties with other nations, break down their altars (Deut 7:2-6)
- Lush description of the land – new Eden (Deut 11:8-15)
- Regulations for kingship (Deut 17:14-20) – Why?

What God will do for Israel (Deut 27:1-24:12)

- Obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings curse (Deut 28) – KEY
- The promise will be tested again
- Moses' prophecies (Not the most positive):
 - Future covenant breaking and exile (Deut 31:19-29)
 - Circumcision of their hearts (Deut 30:6) - Anticipation of NT: Rom 2:29, Col 2:11 – Heart circumcision through Christ and the Spirit
- Concluding songs (Deut 31:30-33:29)

The promise will stand!

JOSHUA AND JUDGES

New season in the life of the nation:

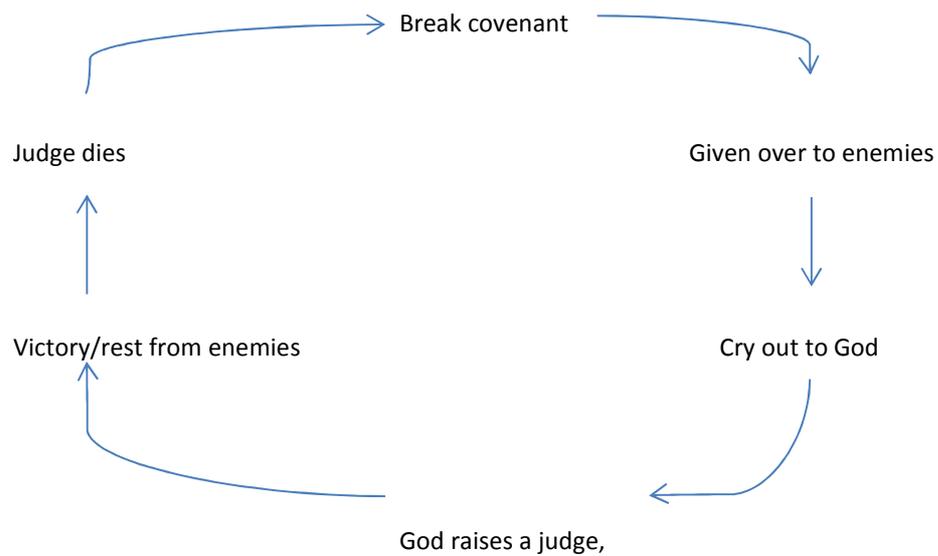
- New Leader - Joshua
- New Spirit. Not Numbers 14 (spies) but Josh 2:22-24: *"Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us."*
- New Task

Deuteronomical principal (Deut 28) seen in action: Obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings curses

Faithfulness of God to His covenant promises

No succession planning, so after Joshua, 350 years of history in Judges with no leader

Repeated cycle of Judges– 7 times:



Judges were Spirit anointed military leaders to lead a tribe/tribes in a time of need.

BUT – downward spiral leading to total moral and religious breakdown (Judges 19:22-30)

BUT – God was faithful

Low point at the end 21:25: *'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.'*

Was a king the answer?

[Beacon of hope at the time of the Judges – Ruth – who becomes part of Jesus' story and genealogy]

THE RISE OF THE MONARCHY – SAUL, DAVID AND SOLOMON

Books: 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles

The question that will be answered is *'Will a king make Israel more faithful to the covenant, and help her become the people God created them to be?'*

Samuel is the prophet, and he is the one pressurised to produce a king. What is his role?

Deut 17 should have been the basis for the monarchy but. *'Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations'* (1 Sam 8:4-9)

SAUL

- The best God could find (1 Sam 9:1-2)
- Started well (1 Sam 9:21, 10:22-3, 11)

- But then failed the tests (1 Sam 13 & 15)
- Rejected by God (1 Sam 15:26-9).

DAVID

- A man after God's own heart.
- Anointed King (1 Sam 16), then on the rise and the run for years (1 Sam 17-31) until Saul dies
- David starts well as King too and receives an amazing promise - **Davidic covenant** (2 Sam 7:5-16): An unconditional promise that David's line will be established for ever – from which the Messiah would come
- Big failures follow though (2 Sam 11-14)
- Key difference between Saul and David?

SOLOMON

- Solomon started well (1 Kings: 3-11)
- Wisdom, wealth and women.
- Solomon fulfilled all that Samuel warned about a King (1 Sam 8:10-18)
- At the end of Solomon's reign, the Kingdom divides (1 Kings 12)

DIVIDED KINGDOM

North – Israel (10 tribes) – 20 bad kings in 210 years

Key phrase: Israel – 'did evil in the eyes of the Lord'

God sends **judgement** through Assyria

South – Judah (and Benjamin and some Levites) – 20 kings in 345 years all from David's dynasty.

Mixed – good and bad kings:

Judah also '*did evil in the eyes of the Lord*' but look for whether the king '*removed the high places*'

Eventual fall to Babylon (586BC) which has conquered Assyria. Judah taken into exile.

Strong theme of Deuteronomic principle

High points

Solomon's wisdom

Dedication of the temple

Elijah and Elisha

EXILE

Assyria – invaded Israel, scattered them (722BC)

Babylon took over from Assyria, conquered Jerusalem and took Jews into exile (586BC)

Persia overthrew Babylon in 539BC ruled by Cyrus. Return?

THE RETURN – EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

First return under Sheshbazzar (537)

Second return under Joshua and Zerubbabel (525)

Temple rebuilding finished (516)

Ezra and exiles return (458). Repentance

Nehemiah returns to build the walls (444)

- Renewal of the covenant
- Dedication of the walls
- Reinforcement of community purity

Both act with support of Persian kings but are opposed by locals

Books of **Restoration** and **hope**

Focus on the restoration of covenant, city, nation, temple and holiness and hope for the future

BOOKS OUTSIDE THE STORY

2 main types of writings – Prophets and Wisdom

Prophets – Covenant Enforcement Agents – calling the people back to obedience, but often with a promise of something else to come...

ISRAEL (NORTHERN KINGDOM)

Elijah (875-848)

Elisha (848-797)

Jonah (785-775)

Amos (760-750)

Hosea (750-715)

JUDAH (SOUTHERN KING)

Obadiah (855-840?)

Isaiah (740-681)

Micah (750-686)

Nahum (663-612)

Zephaniah (640-627)

Habbakuk (c605)

Jeremiah (626-585)

EXILE

Daniel (605-530)

Ezekiel (593-571)

RETURN

Zechariah (520-480)

Haggai (520)

Malachi (440-430)

UNSURE

Joel

Obadiah

COVENANT IN JEREMIAH – THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE COMING

A final unconditional covenant promised in Jer 31:31-34: *‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to[d] them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’*

ACT4: CHRIST

CONTEXT – THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

After Nehemiah, when the Persians were still in power, a new Empire rises from the west – the Greeks. They invaded Judea in 332 BC, and sought to establish Greek culture across the empire as a way of bringing unity, using their language and lifestyle (Hellenisation). There's was a very secular life, and this brought about a significant clash with Jewish culture.

After the death of Alexander the great in 323BC, there was no clear successor, and the Empire divided into two:

Ptolemaic kingdom (Egypt and Macedonia)

Seleucid (Syria and Mesopotamia)

Judea was in the middle of these two and was contested by them. Initially it came under Ptolemaic control – and they were quite tolerant of Jewish culture & practice.

198BC – Seleucid Empire took control of Judea. They were much less tolerant of the Jews, especially under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (means 'God made manifest' – 175-164BC) – increased Hellenisation of Judea

168BC – The temple was looted. Sabbath keeping, circumcision, reading the Law, festivals all forbidden & a pig was sacrificed on the altar (Daniel's 'abomination of desolation'). An attempt to destroy Judaism by taking away all the things that were important to them

166-142 BC – Maccabean revolt. Nationalistic Jews rose up and fought against the Empire. They recaptured Jerusalem & gained independence. The Temple was rededicated (164BC) and the festival of Hanukah inaugurated which remembered one event from this time, when God made one day's oil last 7 days in the 7 branch candlestick in the temple.

63BC – Jewish independence was lost again as they were invaded by Rome, who were still in charge when Jesus was born.

During that time, there was a significant Messianic hope in the nation. Lots of Jewish writings from around the time of Jesus' birth speak of expectations of the Messiah coming. Many of them expected that the Messiah would lead a revolt and kick out the Romans and set up God's Kingdom. The Jews still felt in exile because there was an occupying power, and they wanted to go back to the glory days of King David.

KEY GROUPS OF PEOPLE IN JESUS' DAY

Sadducees. A small but influential group, who were descended from wealthy priestly families. They only accepted the Torah as their scripture, they were religious and politically conservative and didn't believe in the resurrection. Their main concern was the temple and keeping the status quo

Pharisees. Being a Pharisee was not a job but a lifestyle, and they were typically middle class tradesmen (about 6000 of them in Jesus' time). They were anti-Rome –and waiting for Messiah. They were afraid of exile again, which they believed happened because of Law (Torah) breaking, so they wanted to make sure the nation kept the Law. To achieve this they put hedges (extra rules) around the Law – hundreds of them. Many of the Pharisees were trying to do the right things

Zealots. They were political activists, but theologically similar to Pharisees. The Maccabees were their heroes and they wanted to get rid of Rome through armed revolution.

Essenes. They withdrew from life to be religious purists around Qumran, and were waiting for Messiah. They prayed and read all Hebrew scriptures. Some think that John the Baptist was an Essene. They aren't mentioned in the NT, but they were around at that time

Scribes. They were professional guardians and students of the scriptures. Copied the texts and taught them – with Rabbinic interpretation. They would have disciples – people would go and ask to be a disciple. There was an overlap with the Pharisees

WHY 4 GOSPELS?

They are 4 different pictures or portraits of Jesus and His life

Each writer has key theological themes

Mixture of narrative and teaching

3 gospels are quite similar Matthew, Mark and Luke – called synoptic

'Kingdom of God'

EXERCISE

In groups decide which descriptions fit with each gospel

Jewish (to fulfil...)	Longest (word count)
No parables	Earliest written
Fast moving (Immediately)	Detailed (green grass)
'Spiritual'	Anti-Roman
5 teaching blocks	I AM sayings
Medical details	Latest written
Focus on prayer	Story of Wise men

MATTHEW – JESUS IS THE PROMISED JEWISH MESSIAH

Author - Matthew - Tax collector, called by Jesus to be one of the 12.

Date – between late 50s and late 60s,

Written for Jews to explain Jesus is the climax and fulfilment of the OT story.

- **Jesus as Messiah** – Matthew wants to persuade a Jewish audience that Jesus was the Messiah:
- **Jesus as the saviour of the nations** – fulfilment of Abrahamic promise in Genesis:
- **Gospel as a manual for Christian living** :There are 5 main teaching passages – focus on the Kingdom
 - The lifestyle of the Kingdom (5-7)
 - The servants of the Kingdom (10)
 - The growth of the Kingdom (13)
 - The fellowship of the Kingdom (18)
 - The triumph of the Kingdom – the end of the age (24-25)

MARK – JESUS IS THE SERVING AND SUFFERING KING

Author - John Mark, working with Peter(?)

First gospel (& NT text) written – probably late 50s

Fast paced, with some extra details e.g. ‘green grass’ (6:39), asleep on a cushion (4:38)

Who is Jesus for Mark? Key is Mark 1:11 ‘*You are my son whom I love, in you I am well pleased*’.

- **Anointed King.**
- **Suffering Servant.**

LUKE – JESUS IS THE ASCENDED PRIEST AND KING

Author Luke - companion of Paul (mentioned in Col 4:11, 2Tim4:11 and Philemon 24). Gentile Doctor – also wrote Acts.

Date – around 60AD. Also seems to use Mark as a source

- **Saviour of all**
- **Man of the Spirit.** 3:22, 4:14, 4:18, 10:21, 24:49
- **Man of prayer.** 11 references to Jesus praying. e.g. 6:12, 9:18, 10:21, 22:31-2, 22:41
- **Priest.** (Start and end)
- **King.** Gospel starts with King Herod (1:5) and ends with a new, ascended King in heaven

JOHN – JESUS IS THE ETERNAL, INCARNATE, LIFE GIVING SON

‘I like the comparison of John’s Gospel to a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. It is both simple and profound’

Author – the ‘Beloved’ apostle, towards the end of his life – about AD85

Purpose ‘call next generation to faith’ – written for those who had not seen Jesus (20:29) that they may ‘*that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*’ (20:31)

Centred in Jerusalem, around the feasts (Passover, Tabernacles, Dedication and Passover again)

Where does John start? Cosmic Christ (John 1:1-18)

- External **Revelation** – the 7 signs (semaia)
- Internal **Response** - strengthened by the 7 ‘I AMs’
- External **Result** – Everlasting Life.

JESUS’ LIFE – SHOWING AND TEACHING THE NEW KINGDOM

WHAT IS THIS KINGDOM?

Expectations of different groups

BIRTH

Incarnation ‘*making in flesh*’

Miraculous events

Announcement to the Shepherds

Little known of early life

BAPTISM AS LAUNCH

Cousin John ‘*The Kingdom is coming. Repent and be baptised*’

Jesus is baptised in the Jordan (echo) – Why?

Voice from heaven ‘*You are my Son whom I love, with you I am well pleased*’ (Mark 1:11)

Straight to temptation – Satan knows the danger of Jesus accomplishing His mission

KINGDOM ACTS – DEEDS AND WORDS

Jesus announces the ‘good news’ (Mark 1:14-15):

- Repent

- Believe
- Follow

Not just words but acts of power

- Healings
 - Blind (Luke 18:35-43)
 - Deaf and Mute (Mark 7:31-36)
 - Lame (Mark 2:1-12)
 - Leper (Luke 17:11-19)
- Miracles
 - Calms the sea (Mark 4:35-41)
 - Feeds the hungry (Mark 8:1-10)
 - Raises the dead (John 11)

Jesus was a man filled with the Holy Spirit and a man who prayed – the sources of His power.

He brings a foretaste of the Kingdom – the restoration of the creation plan

HALLMARKS OF KINGDOM –

Inclusion of all, not just Jews. Jesus gathers a community of all kinds around him – welcoming sinners and outcasts and Gentiles

- Genealogy (Luke 3)
- Shepherds worshipped Jesus first
- Simeon's prophecy (Luke 2:29-32) – '*saviour of the nations.*'
- Commission in Luke 24:47 '*to all nations*'
- Poor and disadvantaged (Luke 1:53, 2:7, 2:24, 4:18)
- Women e.g. first resurrection witnesses – Luke 24:1-12
- Invitations to the banquet (Luke 14:13)
- The lost parables (Luke 15)

Parables explain the kingdom:

- The Kingdom is not about power (Mark 4:1-20, Matt 13:1-23)
- The final judgement is yet to come (Luke 14:15-24)
- The Kingdom is 'Now and not yet' (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50)
-

JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION

THE CROSS – THE VICTORY OF THE NEW KINGDOM

In Jerusalem, Jesus is arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. The End of the Kingdom?

Crucifixion in the Roman Empire was horrendous and humiliating. But when Jesus was crucified:

- The accusation is the truth – *'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'*
- The thief speaks the truth *'Remember me when you come into your Kingdom'* (Luke 23:40-42)
- The centurion declares the truth *'Surely this man was God's son'* (Mark 15:39)

The cross accomplishes salvation:

- Liberation from slavery
- Cleansing from sin
- Relationship restored
- One man for all men

The cross overcomes and destroys all opposition to God's rule – human rebellion (Rom 8:3-4)

THE RESURRECTION – THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW KINGDOM

The disciples weren't expecting it – the women go to anoint His body, not meet Him!

What did resurrection mean to the Jews?

- Bound up in what they believed about the 'end of the age' and the coming of the Kingdom
- So - 'The end of the age' is now!

Foolishness of the cross is made sense of by the resurrection (1 Cor 1:18-20)

Without the resurrection, we have no faith (1 Cor 15:12-14)

Jesus is:

- The firstborn from the dead – we will follow Him (Col 1:18, Rev 1:5)

- The first-fruits of a harvest (1 Cor 15:20,23)
- The pioneer of our salvation (Heb 2:10)

ACT 5: THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Acts 1:1-5 Resurrection & ascension of Jesus – his vindication, inauguration of kingdom of God, disciples told to wait for the promise of the Father first

ASCENSION OF JESUS – JESUS TAKES HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE

- Acts begins with the risen Jesus present on earth with the apostles
- Ascension sets the scene for all that follows in Acts
- Jesus ascends to the throne of heaven to reign over all the earth
- Luke is about...(Acts 1:1)
- Acts is about...

PENTECOST – AN ACT OF THE EXALTED LORD JESUS

- Ascended Jesus now pours out the Holy Spirit, fulfilling OT prophecy (Joel 2:28-32; Ezek 36:26-27; cf. Luke 3:16) – this means, along with resurrection, the “last days” are now here
- Pentecost: People from everywhere heard the disciples speaking in all their languages
- Believers and new converts (resurrected people) are now filled with the divine presence (Ezek 37)... image of God (cf. Gen 2:7; 1:26)... now empowered to be God’s people in the world

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH – THE SPIRIT FORMS A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

- Nature: Holy Spirit produces not just Spirit-filled individuals but a new community (Acts 2:42-47) – who are to live out the new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34), which includes, as did the earlier ones, the inclusion of the Gentiles/nations
- Mission – deriving from its nature (Acts 2:47) ‘*The Lord added daily to their number...*’
- Structure of Acts is in 1:8
- Unstoppable gospel

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH – THE NEW HUMANITY

Acts tells the story of the birth of the church – but what is it?

CHURCH – EKKLESIA

- Greek culture: An assembly or political assembly (Acts 19:32, 39, 41) – often the assembling of the citizens of a city to make decisions
- OT: Used of Israel (e.g. “the assembly in the desert” Acts 7:38, and e.g. in Deut 31:30 (LXX) as “the congregation of Israel”)
- NT: understanding is borrowed from both Greek and OT, though mainly OT, so that *ekklesia* means ‘called together ones’

THE NEW/TRUE HUMANITY – A PEOPLE BEARING GOD’S IMAGE

- A people constituted through Christ and by the Spirit (Gen 1:26; 12:3)
- An endtime (eschatological) community who are the new humanity:
 - Being transformed into the image of God
 - The truly human people, who together display God’s multi-coloured wisdom (Eph 3:10; Phil 2:16)
 - Called to incarnate in our life together what God is like to a broken world (cf. John 1:14; 20:21) by being a “good news” community (Phil 1:27-2:18; 3:20)

NT IMAGES OF THE CHURCH – CORPORATE BEING, NOT A COLLECTION OF INDIVIDUALS

- God’s family (2 Cor 6:18; Gal 6:10; Eph 1:5; 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17)
- Israel (Rom 4:16-17; 9-11; Eph 2:17-19; 3:6; Gal 3:29; 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9-10)
- Body of Christ (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 10:17; 11:29; 12:12-27; Eph 4:12-16)
- Temple (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22)

WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

A people devoted to God and only God in every sphere of life (1 Cor 8:6)

THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH – LIVING OUT OUR IDENTITY IN PRACTICE

THE ALREADY/NOT YET FRAMEWORK OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

- We have been transferred from this age to the age to come

- Already we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) but this is not yet complete (1 John 3:2)
- We experience the clash of two ages

THE SPIRIT NOT THE LAW IS THE POWER FOR OUR LIVING

- The Holy Spirit is given to us as a deposit – firstfruits, divine infection
- He is the power to live out our new life in Christ (Rom 8, Gal 5:16)

WORKED OUT IN COMMUNITY

- NT approach to ethics:
 - Purpose – the glory of God (= conformed to his image);
 - Pattern – Christ (Phil 1:27; 2:5; 1 Cor 11:1; Eph 4:20-22);
 - Principle – love (= seeking others' good; love fulfils the law, Col 3:14);
 - Power – the Spirit
- Ethical commands are addressed to community
- Community to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22)
- Church is a forgiven and forgiving community
- Community builds up community

LIVING THE STORY

- A people who allow His story to shape us
- We are characters in the story
- The church as community

ACT 6 - CONSUMMATION

Can we be sure about what is to come?

Which book reveals the future?

REVELATION

Most confusing book? 2 extremes to avoid

Need to approach with our mind and our heart and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit

Purpose – for the church under pressure. What's it NOT for?

WHAT TYPE OF BOOK?

Chapter 1 shows 3 genres

Apocalyptic: Popular from 200BC to 200AD. Rooted in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and some of Isaiah

Features of apocalyptic literature

Generally born in a time of persecution or oppression

Literary style – meant to be written (1:9) – *'write what you have seen'*

Told in visions and dreams.

Images are more of fantasy rather than reality.

Prophetic:

John himself identifies the book as prophecy (1:3)

It was God's word **for the churches he was writing to**

Epistle:

Both the apocalyptic and prophetic streams are cast in the form of a letter – and it has many of the features of the other NT letters, which were written in a standard form of the time

Letters are written **to people** (7 churches) **by people** (in this case, John). Knowing something about them is important for our understanding, just as for any other epistle.

The primary meaning of Revelation, is what John intended it to mean.

The most important book for understanding Revelation is ???

CONTENT

JESUS IS LORD OF THE CHURCH (1-3 – PROLOGUE AND THE LETTERS)

General greeting to the churches, and explanation of the start of the visions

Encouragement to keep going

These short letters are a reminder for the churches that Jesus is their Lord – he is the one they are accountable to above all others – for their behaviour and doctrine, but also He is their source of life, truth and future, not Caesar.

JESUS IS LORD OF HEAVEN (4-5)

In these chapters are the first 5 of many moments of worship throughout the book:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is and is to come' (4:8)

'To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and light forever and ever' (5:13)

God is seated on the throne, and the Lamb (Jesus) is standing in the midst of the throne, and there is always worship in Heaven.

The Christians this was written to needed to know that when they were under persecution

We see reminders of Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6 in Chapter 4 and Genesis 49, Isaiah 11 and 53 and John 1 (the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world) in Rev 5

JESUS IS LORD OF HISTORY (6-20)

It is chapters 6-20 where most of the different views of Revelation are. These are the main ones:

Historicism

Futurism

Preterism

Idealsim

However we read these chapters, we should focus on the key issues:

- 1) Through all the times of woe and horror on the earth, God and Christ are still on the throne in heaven
- 2) Christ is the one who can open the seals on the scroll of history – it is Christ who controls history
- 3) There comes a day when Christ returns to the earth (2nd coming)
- 4) Satan will finally be defeated
- 5) There will be a day of judgement and vindication for the saints
- 6) There will be resurrection for those who follow Jesus

JESUS IS LORD OF THE NEW CREATION (21-22)

The Lamb wins, and there is new/re-creation. Great end to book and whole Bible.

This is the hope of the world, and this is why the church under persecution holds on, for what we see is not the end, but in the end The Lamb wins!

New Creation – heavens and earth

New situation – *'They shall see His face'* (22:4)