

The Story of Jesus

This book is all about the Lord Jesus. His story is found in the sacred book called the Bible. You may not have had the opportunity to read the Bible. So before I go on to the main chapters of the book I want to give you a short summary of the story of the Bible. Then you will understand better the following chapters and how they fit in. You may need to refer back to it as you read on.

The story of the Bible begins at the very dawn of creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).¹ We are given a summary description of God’s creation with the climax of the creation being the formation of man. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the seas and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Genesis 1:26).

God created a man and a woman whom he named Adam and Eve and set them in a garden to care for it. In that garden were two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.² The creator God then told the man and woman that they were free to eat of any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

Adam and Eve rebel against the Lord

The Lord had good plans for Adam and Eve. But instead of trusting their creator the first man and woman listened instead to the smooth talk of the Evil One.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

¹ The Bible was written by various authors from around 1450 BC to 100 AD.

² See Genesis 2:9.

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

To the woman he said,
“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.”

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.
It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:1-24)

At once they came to realise that they were naked. For the first time in their lives they felt shame. They knew that they had done wrong. They had offended their creator by deliberately disobeying his command. The response from God was to pronounce judgement on Adam and Eve, to banish them from the garden and prevent them from eating of the tree of life. The ground was cursed and from then on it would only yield its fruit as Adam and Eve worked it by the sweat of their brow.

Nevertheless, in spite of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, God was gracious to them. Along with his discipline the Lord God gave them two wonderful things. Firstly, he made a covering for their nakedness from animal skins. Secondly, he gave them a merciful promise. Speaking to the devil the Lord said, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel”. That is a wonderful promise. It is not clear at this point what the Lord is referring to. But we can see already that a descendent of the woman will oppose the devil and crush him, though he himself will also be wounded. As the story of the Bible, the story of God’s dealing with his creation, moves on this promise is clarified. Flesh is put

on the bones. More details emerge and the promise is finally made crystal clear, as you will see.

Cain and Abel

So Adam and Eve went to live outside the garden. This is what happens next:

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

But the LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 16 So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. (Genesis 4:1-16)

We read then that the Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering but not on Cain and his offering. It is not clear from the text why this was so. Perhaps it was because

Cain was offering something that he had brought about by his own hands whereas Abel was offering something that clearly he had not brought into being. Or perhaps it was because the Lord wanted a sacrifice of blood. We are also not told whether the Lord had told the two young men that he would favour a particular kind of offering. We are just told that he favoured Abel's offering. Cain now had a choice. He could humbly accept the Lord's rejection of his offering, trade some grain for some fat portions of Abel's flock, and offer that in its place. Or he could resent the Lord's choice and become bitter and angry. Sadly, Cain chose the latter and killed his brother in a fit of jealous rage. The Lord spoke to Cain proclaiming that he was now under a curse. The soil would no longer yield its fruit to him. He would be a restless wanderer on the earth.

The wicked earth

Cain lay with his wife. She became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Adam lay with his wife again and she gave birth to another son whom she named Seth.³ Over the ensuing centuries of the Bible the story of mankind became increasingly evil. "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5).

So God said he would destroy the inhabitants of the earth in a mighty flood. Only Noah and his family found favour in the eyes of the Lord. And because he found favour he was counted as good. Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. These four men, with their wives and under the instruction of the Lord built a huge boat. The Lord instructed Noah to bring some of every kind of animal into the boat. Noah and his family also entered the boat and the Lord shut the door. The wicked people of the earth were destroyed in the flood but Noah's family were rescued.

From Noah's sons come every family and people on the planet. At that time, we are told, "the whole world had one language and a common speech" (Genesis 11:1). As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar (modern day Iraq) and settled there. In the plains there was no stone for building, so they made bricks and baked them. Then they

³ See Genesis 4:25.

said, “Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4). They named their city Babel, later to be called Babylon. God was not pleased with this development so he confused the speech of the people making it impossible for them to communicate. “From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:9).

The covenant with Israel

At this point the Bible narrative changes. Instead of describing the events of the whole world and of all the various peoples that God has created and that make up the earth, the story focuses on one person and the people who descend from him. That person is Abram. We are told that the Lord called Abram to leave his country there in Mesopotamia and go to another land.⁴ The Lord made a covenant with Abram and promised to bless him and make him a blessing:

“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;
I will make you name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2-3)

Abraham (as he is later called) left his country and settled for a while in the land of Canaan. He and his wife had to wait a long time for a son. God wanted to show Abraham that he had a great plan and that, even though there would be many challenges to the working out of that plan, he would ensure that nothing stopped it. Abraham’s son Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old. Isaac was the heir to the covenant with its laws and promises. Isaac’s son Jacob, later called Israel was his heir. The covenant that the Lord made with Abraham was for all Israel’s descendants.

⁴ See Genesis 12:1.

The rescue

The Lord's plan for the people of Israel then led them to live for 400 years in the land of Egypt, where they became subject to the Egyptian king and his people.⁵ It was God's plan to rescue the people of Israel from their oppression and to bring them back to Canaan, the Promised Land, where they would live as the people of God.

The Lord then raised up a great leader by the name of Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt wanted to keep the Israelites as slaves so God sent a series of plagues on the Egyptians until they let them go. That great event, the Exodus, is the defining moment of the people of Israel. It is at that point that they began to identify themselves as a nation.

Having brought them out of Egypt the Lord then met with them at Mount Sinai in the desert where he renewed his covenant with the people:

‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ (Exodus 19:4-6)

The Lord then gave the people a set of Ten Commandments that sum up the requirements that the Lord would make of his covenant people.⁶ There are laws governing their relations with God, which include the commands to worship only the Lord and forbidding them from making idols. There are also laws governing their relations with their fellow men and women. Along this with summary of God's moral law, the Lord also gave the people the plans of a sacrificial system with a holy tent and priesthood. The sacrifices were to be a regular reminder that the people are sinful and that to approach God blood must be shed.

The Lord guided the people of Israel through the desert. He protected them from enemies and provided them with food and water. The Israelites, however, were not

⁵ See the book of Exodus.

⁶ See Exodus 20.

faithful to their Lord. They broke the covenant again and again. But God was gracious and reminded them that the sacrificial system was set up for that very reason—to bring forgiveness for sin, for covenant breaking. So the Lord brought the people to the land of Canaan, where they took possession of the Promised Land.⁷ But before he died Moses had a special prophecy to give to the people (Deuteronomy 18:15):

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

Judges and kings

The next 300 years of Israel's history were marked by recurring cycles of disobedience, repentance and rescue.⁸ Time and again, the people rebelled against the covenant that the Lord made with them. Time and again the Lord handed them over to their enemies to be disciplined. Time and again the people cried out to God for salvation and he responded by raising up a leader to rescue the people from their enemies. But the people were not content with these leaders whom God had raised up. They looked at the nations around them and wanted a king like they had. God took particular offence at this demand. After all, the Lord himself was their King. Why did they need a human king as well? But the people persisted and God gave them what they desired.

The kings brought a centralised authority to the nation. After the first king, Saul, failed to keep the Lord's command, however, the prophet Samuel anointed the boy David to take his place. Samuel told Saul that "the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). David endeavoured to honour his Lord but even he fell into sin and broke the covenant. Nevertheless, David was reconciled to the Lord. David made the city of Jerusalem his capital and built for himself a palace. He wanted to build a house for the Lord as well, a temple that would show the Lord's greatness. But God sent a prophet to David. He told him that the Lord would build a house for David instead. "Your house and your kingdom," said the prophet, "shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

⁷ See the book of Joshua.

⁸ See the book of Judges.

Solomon and David's greater Son

David's son Solomon was a majestic ruler but he too failed to live up to God's standard. Nevertheless, the Lord's promise to David would not fail. One after another the kings showed how corrupt they were. A longing for a better ruler slowly developed. This ruler, anointed by God, would be a godly king, a son of David who would keep the covenant. He would be like the people but would not be corrupted by sin.

Because the people and their rulers rebelled against their Lord, however, he handed them over to foreign nations to oppress them and eventually to take them into exile in Babylon. After 70 years in exile they were allowed to return to their land where they tried to rebuild their shattered lives. In all this their hope for a future 'Messiah' (Anointed One) increased and developed further through centuries of foreign domination.

The coming of the Messiah

The Bible tells us that, "...when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman..." (Galatians 4:4). The hope of the people for a righteous and just ruler finally came to reality in the birth of a baby in a stable in the village of Bethlehem, just to the south of Jerusalem.⁹ His mother was Mary, a descendant of King David, who was made pregnant by the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus could not have a human father because he had to be perfect to fulfil the demands of the covenant. At his birth God displayed a series of amazing signs. Angels announced Jesus' coming to both Mary and Joseph, the man to whom Mary was pledged to be married. Angels declared Jesus' birth to a group of shepherds watching their sheep on the nearby hills. A bright star appeared in the sky at Jesus' birth and was traced by a group of astrologers from the East until they came to Jesus himself and worshipped him with offerings fit only for a god and a king.

The boy Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth in the northern district of Galilee. There he learned the trade of a carpenter from Joseph. When he reached adulthood, however, he began his ministry by teaching the people in their meeting houses, healing

⁹ See the accounts of Matthew and Luke in the Bible.

the sick, and casting out demons. Everyone spoke well of him. Some wanted to make him king but he refused saying that his Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. After some time, Jesus' teaching and actions put him into opposition against the religious leaders of his day. They arrested him, beat him, put him through a mockery of a trial, and handed him over to be killed. So the Jewish people, the Israelites, with the help of the Roman occupying soldiers put Jesus to death. But death could not hold him. On the third day, just as he had prophesied, he rose from the dead. Many people saw him. He commissioned his disciples to go into the entire world to preach the good news and then left them to return to heaven.

The disciples of Jesus went out and told the people the message they had been given. The message was this: Jesus was the Messiah, God's anointed Son, who had come to earth to die as a sacrifice for the sins of many people.¹⁰ He has risen from the dead to demonstrate the success of his mission, and is now in heaven waiting a time when he will come again. At that time, he will come to judge the world and to finally rid it of evil. As corrupt people, we must now turn away from our sin and trust in the Lord Jesus to save us from God's just judgement.

That is the story of the Bible. In a sense that story has not ended. Whenever someone hears that story and turns to give devotion to the Lord Jesus then the story continues in their life. Until Jesus returns to earth that story is incomplete. My prayer is that in reading this book you will become part of the story too.

¹⁰ Both 'Messiah' (Hebrew) and 'Christ' (Greek) mean 'Anointed One'.