

Living Out God's Story Today

I. INTRODUCTION

Making the Bible's Story Your Own

This class began with the fairly obvious assertion that the Bible plays a crucial role in the faith and practice of all Christians. But *how* the Bible plays that role is as crucial as *that* it does. Since the Bible as a presents itself as God's true story of the world, then believers are not only behooved to know this story thoroughly, but also to make it their own. The more that Christians grasp their place within the biblical narrative, the more they are prepared to move the story along toward its intended resolution.

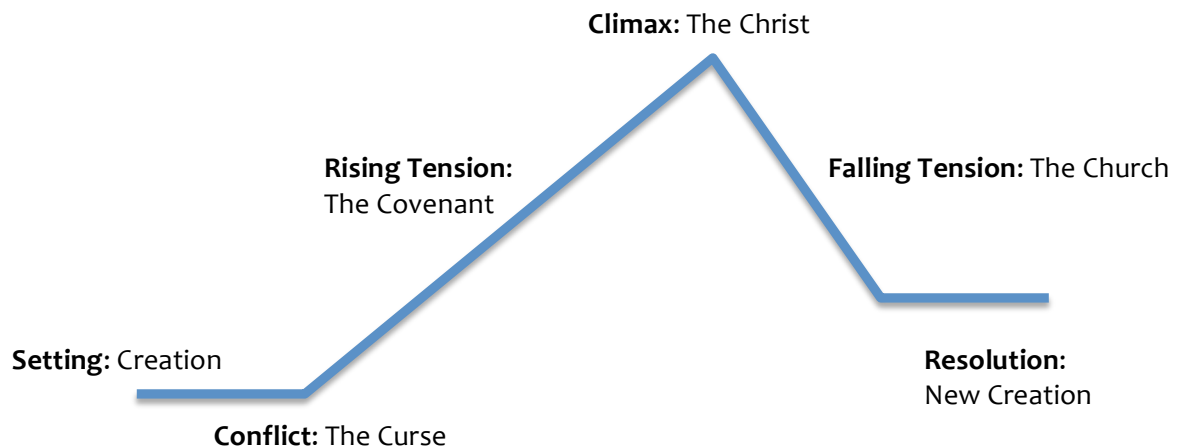
"The Bible isn't simply a repository of true information about God, Jesus, and the hope of the world. It is, rather, part of the means by which, in the power of the Spirit, the living God rescues his people and his world, and takes them forward on the journey toward his new creation, and makes us agents of that new creation even as we travel."

N. T. Wright
Simply Christian

II. A REVIEW OF GOD'S STORY

The Story of the Bible

Though the Bible consists of sixty-six individual books, it forms one overarching story, God's true story of the world. The primary theme of the Bible is the kingdom of God and its ultimate reestablishment over all creation. This biblical narrative operates like any other story in that its plot can be diagrammed according to its key literary features.



- **Creation.** Through the act of creation, God establishes his kingdom over all things and appoints human beings to rule on his behalf as his image bearers, to fill the earth and develop his creation into a glorious civilization.
- **The Curse.** Tragically, human beings rebel against God as they seek to rule God's creation their own way, resulting in the curse of evil and death upon the world, which infects every aspect of God's good creation.
- **The Covenant.** God remains committed to his creation by initiating a covenant with Israel to undo the world's curse by being a blessing to all nations thereby reestablishing his kingdom, but Israel is continually unfaithful to the covenant.
- **The Christ.** In faithfulness to his covenant with Israel, God sends his Son as their Messiah to inaugurate and make possible the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven through Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension.
- **The Church.** The work of Jesus results in the renewal of God's covenant and the creation of a transformed community called the church whose mission is to extend God's kingdom to every part of the world in the power of the Spirit.
- **New Creation.** With the return of Jesus to earth, God ultimately deals with evil and death, and glorifies human beings so that they reign with Christ over a renewed and flourishing creation—God's kingdom is finally restored.

A Biblical Worldview

Remember from lesson one that the world itself only makes sense in the context of a story, a grand narrative called a worldview. A worldview is the lens through which someone sees and makes sense of the world, providing the answers for some of the most basic questions about life and existence. The biblical story becomes one's worldview the more it is able to answer these basic questions.

Where Are We? We live in God's world, which is inherently good but diseased by evil. God created all things to be an expression of his kingdom, which is marked by order, meaningful work, abundance, joy, harmony, and love.

Who Are We? We are the pinnacle of God's creation, made in the image of God, inherently good but diseased by sin. We are created to represent God's rule, developing his creation into a glorious civilization.

What's Wrong with the World? The world is infected by evil because we rejected God and attempted to rule his world in our own way. Our rebellion has unleashed—and continues to unleash—pain and dysfunction into every part of God's good creation.

What's the Remedy? God is reclaiming his world through the person and work of Jesus Christ, which includes the sending of the Spirit upon his church to continue the work of Jesus of extending the reign of God into every part of the world.

Where Is History Going? God's kingdom will ultimately be restored on this earth as Jesus returns to do away with evil once and for all and to glorify his people to rule with him over creation as God intended from the very beginning.

III. HOW TO LIVE OUT GOD'S STORY

Treating the Bible as a Story

Realizing that the Bible as a whole presents itself as God's true story of the world should dramatically influence how we read and treat the Bible today. As mentioned in lesson one, many people treat the Bible in ways that are inconsistent with the Bible's very nature.

As a Rulebook. Some treat the Bible as if it's a massive collection of laws used to prescribe right and wrong behavior. While there are plenty of commandments scattered throughout Scripture, converting the biblical story into a list of rules distorts the true nature of the Bible.

As a Theology Book. Others treat the Bible like a puzzle that needs to be put together into a tidy theology system. While the Bible is indeed theological in nature, it is not a theology book, nor should it be read as such. To treat the Bible this way diminishes how God chose to reveal himself through story.

As a Devotional Guide. Some treat the Bible as a devotional guide that offers morsels of blessings and promises to help one get through each day. While there are lots of promises scattered throughout Scripture, using the biblical story as a book of promises fails to do justice to how God gave us the Bible.

*"We must resist the temptation to read the Scriptures
as if they were a religious flea market,
with a basket of history and old doctrines here, a shelf full of pious stories there,
promises and commands scattered from one end to the other.
Some readers of the Bible turn it into little more than an anthology
of proof texts assembled to support a system of theology.
Others seek only ethical guidance,
ransacking the Old Testament for stories of moral instruction.
Still others look just for inspirational or devotional messages,
for comforting promises and lessons for daily living."*

Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen
The Drama of Scripture

If the Bible presents itself as God's true story of the world, then it requires that we read it as such. And since the biblical story continues today, Christians are to read the Bible not only to be reminded of the story's earlier scenes, but also to be energized for living out the story in its present and "unwritten" scenes. To read the Bible as God's true story of the world prepares the reader to participate in moving the story toward its intended conclusion.

Living the Bible Out as a Story

Because the Bible is a story that we find ourselves in, it is sometimes compared to an actor's unfinished script. While the reader holds the script's earlier acts as well as the final one, he also finds himself in a place to "live out" the next to last act. The actor's challenge, then, is to move the story along by "living out" the present scene in a way that is compatible with what comes before and yet anticipates what is to come. This requires both a commitment to the story's trajectory as well as a willingness to improvise.

Trajectory. In order to faithfully live out the biblical story today, Christians are not called to reenact past scenes of the biblical narrative, but to embrace the trajectory set by the script's previous acts. The themes that emerge help guide the church in moving the story toward its final act. Some of these themes include the following:

- Developing God's creation into a glorious civilization
- Following the way of Jesus Christ above all
- Making disciples of all nations
- Working toward racial reconciliation
- Protecting the vulnerable and promoting justice
- Advocating international peace over war
- Caring for those who hurt and are in need

Improvisation. Moving God's story forward in today's world also requires imagination and creativity. The exact situations of earlier scenes will never be duplicated, nor should they be, since the biblical plot moves on. God's people instead are called to bring about God's purposes in the present in fresh ways and in their own unique contexts. This requires a degree of improvisation as God's people listen to the Spirit and discern how to demonstrate and proclaim the gospel most effectively in different cultural settings.

*"The Bible is a book designed to be read
by those who are living in the present
in the light of God's future – the future which
has arrived in Jesus and now demands to be implemented."*

N. T. Wright
Simply Christian

All of creation longs for the sons and daughter of God to be revealed. Creation waits for God's children, the actors in the present act of God's story, to move the story along toward the stunning resolution of God's kingdom on earth. With the previous acts setting the stage, and the final act revealing how the story ends, God's people are called to faithfully live out God's story today.