

THE BIBLE'S BIG PICTURE



A Bible Class Study

The Diversity in the Bible

The Bible is a book of tremendous diversity. It contains 66 books written over a period of more than 1500 years by more than 40 human authors from every walk of life, including kings, military leaders, peasants, poets, philosophers, prophets, fishermen, tax collectors, musicians, statesmen, scholars and shepherds, some well-educated and some ordinary, uneducated men. The words of Scripture were written in different places at different times, during different moods and in different styles, on three continents and in three languages. The books of the Bible were written for different purposes and covered different topics. No single book in history contains such diversity in a single work.

The Unity of the Bible

However, the Bible is indeed a single work with a central unifying message. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is a logically ordered whole, and each diverse part contributes perfectly to the whole. Although there are many different historical contexts and human authors in the Bible, God is the unifying author behind it all.

The Bible's Unifying Principle

The unity of the Bible revolves around what God wants, and how He deals with the created universe and His people. In a word, "redemption" may be used to describe the Bible's main theme, and Jesus Christ is the ultimate central figure of God's Word and Will. However, the broadest unifying concept of Scripture is the **Kingdom of God**.

We can recognize three aspects of the Kingdom that occur throughout the Bible from *Genesis 1* through *Revelation 22*:

1. **A Place** where God's people reside.
2. **A People** chosen and called by God to be *His* people.
3. **God's Presence** among His people according to His grace.

***"I will walk among you and be your God,
and you will be my people."
- Leviticus 26:12***

(also see *Ex. 6:7; Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3-4*)

Throughout Scripture we see the rule of God's Kingdom over a people experiencing God's presence (either intimately or tenuously) in a specific place. For example, in *Genesis 1*, we find created man and woman in the Garden of Eden experiencing intimacy with God. In *Exodus 40*, we find the nation of Israel experiencing the presence of God in the tabernacle. In *Acts 2*, we find a regenerated people experiencing the Holy Spirit's inner work in the Jerusalem church.

The Progression of the Kingdom

The content of the Bible from *Genesis* through *Revelation* records the progression of the Kingdom of God.

Genesis 1:31 God declared His Creation, including mankind, "*very good*." Man and woman experienced His intimate presence in the Garden of Eden, a perfect place of purity and provision.

Genesis 3 Temptation by the serpent resulted in the sin and Fall of man. Such distrust in God and His goodness resulted in separation from God through physical and spiritual death. Mankind's relationship with God is forever changed, and God's *very good* Creation is ruined by the Curse and no longer as intended. Yet, even in the midst of sin, we find God's first words of grace – "*the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'*" (*Gen. 3:9*). Though sin and separation from God changes mankind's earthly life and eternal destiny, God will continue to pursue us.

Genesis 3:15 After the Fall, God promises a path of restoration. The serpent has a victory, but he will ultimately be defeated by an offspring of Eve who will "*crush*" his head. These words are the first declaration of the one who ultimately redeems mankind and all Creation – Jesus Christ.

Genesis 3:15–Revelation 22 The majority of Scripture records the dealings of our faithful and longsuffering God with unfaithful people. It was distrust and lack of faith that brought sin and separation; from beginning to end it will be faith and belief that restores and brings reconciliation (*Rom. 1:16-17*). Through the Old and New Testaments, God works through the Covenants (see below) until the day of redemption when Creation will once again be free from curse, death and decay (*Rom. 8:21*).

Revelation 22:3-4 The New Testament prophecy tells us we can live in hope of the day when "*there will be no more curse*." God's people will once again worship in God's very presence before His face, and find complete restoration before His throne.

Revelation 22 Upon Christ's return, we will for all eternity dwell in God's presence free from the presence of sin. Those found in Christ will find themselves in eternal glory and blessing. "*The dwelling of God [will be] with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*" (*Rev. 21:3-4*)

There are two principles of the restoration and redemption of God's people from sin:

Divine Initiative: All things begin with God. It was the initiative of the one eternal and sovereign God that created the universe and humanity. In His grace, God reached out to man and woman in the Garden following the Fall (*Gen. 3:9, 15*). We find further examples of Divine Initiative in *Exodus 2:24* when God hears the groaning of His people and redeems them from bondage in Egypt through Moses, and throughout Israel's history as God calls them to return to Him through the words of the prophets. Ultimately, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (*Rom. 5:8*). God's Divine Initiative is shown as He establishes His Covenants with humanity (see below).

Human Responsibility Yet God, while reaching out to mankind in grace, expects us to respond to His initiative. It is our responsibility to recognize the existence and goodness of God through faith, and to accept the mercy, grace and salvation offered. Throughout God's dealings with man, we are to recognize God's Covenant offer and respond accordingly to receive the physical and/or spiritual blessings offered by God.

God Chooses to Work through Covenants

The restorative principles of Divine Initiative and Human Responsibility are made concrete through covenants. God chose to work through covenant rather than law because He desires relationship with man. Law is impersonal and is obeyed simply to avoid punishment. Covenant is personal in nature, whereby those ruled offer their allegiance to the faithful sovereign. Covenant requires personal commitment to a relationship on both sides. A progression of five covenants govern God's dealings with humanity:

The Noachic Covenant (*Gen. 9:1-17*) is God's unconditional, promise never to destroy all earthly life again by natural catastrophe. In this Covenant, we see God's nature as longsuffering and patient, for God does not judge sin immediately when committed, but gives mankind time to turn before final judgment.

The Abrahamic Covenant (*Gen. 12; 15:1-21*) is God's unconditional promise that frames everything that happens throughout Scripture. The redeemer first described in *Genesis 3:15* is narrowed to the line of Abraham. God is creating for Himself a people – the descendants of Abraham – who will always dwell in a "land" and experience His presence. The Old Testament details the physical people of Israel, who obtain the Promised Land and experienced God's presence in the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle, and the temple until their unfaithfulness led to their removal of physical blessing (according to the conditional aspects of the covenant). The New Testament makes it clear that the church of Christian believers are spiritual descendants of Abraham through the same faith (*Rom. 4*), that we experience the internal presence of God through the Holy Spirit, and we look forward to dwelling for all eternity in God's presence

The Mosaic Covenant (*Exodus 19-24*) is God's conditional pledge to be Israel's God and grant physical blessings of the land, wealth and health if Israel will remain obedient and totally consecrated to God's rule and purpose. Their failure to obey and remain faithful will result in temporary removal from the land and curses rather than blessing. In the Mosaic Covenant, we see the full scope of Divine Initiative and Human Responsibility. It further developed the promises and demands God had originally given to Abraham. In the Mosaic Covenant and subsequent giving of the Law, God defines the right and just living required of God's Holy people. In His grace, God provides guidance for how His people must live.

The Davidic Covenant (*2 Samuel 7:1-19*) is God's promise to David that one from his family line would sit on the throne of God's people for all time. This is not an earthly son, but God's own Son, the Messiah who will come in the person of Jesus Christ. The line of Eve's seed was further narrowed to David's line. Indeed, Jesus was born from the family line of David (*Matt. 1:1-6*), and he will rule forever in glory. The king was always a mediator for God's people, and through Christ, we find the ultimate mediator bringing sonship to all his followers (*2 Cor. 6:18*).

The New Covenant (*Jeremiah 31; Ezekial 36; Hebrews 8-10*) is the ultimate Covenant of God with His people. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the world and to rule for all eternity. In his death and resurrection, we see Christ's sufferings and the glory to follow. Christ inaugurated the New Covenant with his death and resurrection, but he has not fully consummated its promises. We await hopefully for the physical promises that will come when Jesus comes again in glory, but we presently experience the spiritual blessings through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Indeed, we can claim today in Christ, "*we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*" (*2 Cor. 6:16*).