

## **Introduction to the Bible**

### **Week 1**

#### **Class goals, syllabus & requirements**

SYLLABUS: Note no class next week; note course requirements

HOMEWORK: This is a crucial part of the class!

Rochford's paper provides you with a summary for evidences for why biblical Christianity is true/God's revelation to humanity.

The Bible readings are geared to the *next* week's class, including specific passages we will look at more closely. The readings will also speak to and nourish your soul, because the Bible is God's love-letter to you! Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you (1 Sam. 3:9) and to enlighten you (Ps. 119:18).

#### **The big picture**

The Bible is 66 books, written by 40 different human authors over 1500 years, employing several different types of literature (BOOKCASE) – yet it has one ultimate Author (God) who tells one Story centering around one key Figure (Jesus).

In the next four weeks, we will introduce you to its major time periods and types of literature. But tonight we want to get the big picture (and keep coming back to it in coming weeks).

If you watched an Impressionist artist starting a painting, it would be very confusing – just seemingly random dabs of color on a canvas. But if before starting to paint, he explained to what he was going to paint, the dabs of color would make sense much more quickly. So with us and the Bible. Individual passages seem random, confusing, even chaotic. But if we learn first what the big picture is, then the individual passages will begin to make more sense. This is why we won't be reading many individual passages tonight . . .

Think of the Bible as an epic novel with three main parts (CHART):

Introduction: the beginning situation (CREATION) and what went wrong (FALL)  
(Gen. 1-11)

Main body: the plot that resolves the problems – REDEMPTION (Gen. 12 – Jude; 2 main parts – most of Old Testament & most of New Testament)

Epilogue: the new situation after the problems are solved – CONSUMMATION  
(Revelation)

Let's walk through this "novel" at high altitude over the next hour. Don't worry about dates or places – we'll fill in some of these in coming weeks. Don't worry about the different types of literature involved – we'll look at them in coming weeks. Let's just focus on how the story unfolds, using the chart to visualize it.

## Creation & fall (Gen. 1-11)

Narrate the CREATION account (Gen. 1,2) – God creates the universe, focusing on the earth, the plants and animals that inhabit it, and especially the first humans (Adam & Eve). This account is historical (vs. myth or fable), but it is theological (“Who?” & “Why”) in focus rather than scientific (“When?” & “How?”).

“Who created?” The infinite-personal God created the earth and its inhabitants (including the first humans), which were originally good.

“Why did God create?” This passage says implicitly (“It was good”) what Rev. 4:11 says explicitly – because He wanted to and for His pleasure, not because He needed to. “Why did God create humans?” God created humans in His image – to have a love-trust relationship with Him, and to exercise His benevolent rulership over the earth.

Narrate the FALL (Gen. 3-11).

Satan (already fallen) slanders God as repressing Adam and Eve, and urges them to become their own gods by disobeying God. They decide to follow Satan by mistrusting and rebelling against God. But what Satan promised would be a step upward to enlightenment and freedom became a tragic fall into alienation and bondage. Humanity now has two key problems (among others):

PROBLEM #1: Separation from God – instead of enjoying personal access to God, they hide from God (3:8), and God bars them from His presence (3:24).

PROBLEM #2: Loss of rulership – instead of ruling the earth as God’s agents, humanity is now under Satan’s authority and the earth is now antagonistic to humans and will ultimately kill them (3:17-19).

Gen. 4-11 narrates the downward rebellious spiral of early humanity, and the (redemptive) judgments that God enacts to prevent humanity’s total corruption (FLOOD & BABEL). It ends with humanity fragmented into “nations” separated by different languages, etc.

But there is also a word of hope. Gen. 3:15 anticipates God’s redemptive plan (read). One of Eve’s male descendants (“her seed”) will ultimately defeat Satan, but Satan will also injure this descendant. The rest of the Bible details this Person, and teaches that He comes twice – the first time to be injured by Satan (but solving PROBLEM #1), and the second time to crush Satan (and solving PROBLEM #2). Why this order? Because otherwise, there would be no humans eligible to enter His kingdom.

## Redemption (Gen. 12 – Jude)

Most of the Bible tells the story of how God solves these two problems through this “seed.” The Old Testament focuses on the nation of *Israel* and tells how God prepared His Coming. The New Testament focuses on His first Coming, the new people He works through (the *Church*), and how He fulfills His mission through His Second Coming. All of this material is the fulfillment of a covenant God makes to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 (read). Note three key promises:

God will make a great **nation** (12:2) from Abraham's descendants.

God will give Abraham (or his descendants) a **land** (12:1).

God will extend a **blessing** to all people-groups through Abraham's descendants (12:3).

The rest of the Old Testament narrates the initial fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. God enacts three other covenants (agreement between two parties) as He does this:

First God forms the **nation** of Israel. Abraham's grandson has 12 sons, who become the 12 tribes of Israel. These tribes grow into a nation while enslaved in Egypt. God raises up Moses to deliver them from Egypt. (2100 – 1400 BC)

Next, God gives Israel His Law (the *Mosaic Covenant* or the Law of Moses). This Law explains the conditions for Israel's possession of the **land** He will give them. It also institutes the sacrificial system, which foreshadows how God will solve PROBLEM #1 (explain substitutionary atonement). (1400 BC)

Next God brings Israel into their **land**. At first, He rescues them from their enemies through deliverers ("judges"). Then He gives them kings. Some of these kings follow God, but most of them don't. Before long, the **nation** divides into two different nations (Israel in the north & Judah in the south) with two different kings. Both nations are disobedient to the Law of Moses – so both are eventually exiled from their lands (Israel first, then Judah). God restores Judah to their land as the Old Testament closes. (1400 – 400 BC)

During this same time, God raises up prophets to speak to His people. Among other things, these prophets provide growing detail about the coming "**seed**" and the blessing He will bring to all people-groups. They provide two different pictures of this Person: (900 – 400 BC)

He will be a King ("Messiah") who descends from king David's line (the *Davidic Covenant*; 1 Chron. 17; Isa. 9,11). He will defeat His enemies, and exercise God's rulership over the earth through His people Israel (Dan. 2,7). In other words, He will solve PROBLEM #2.

He will also be a sacrificial Servant whose death pays for humanity's sin and re-establishes a relationship with God for those who receive Him (Isa. 53). In other words, He will solve PROBLEM #1. Through Him, God will inaugurate a better covenant with Israel which replace the *Mosaic Covenant* (Jer. 31 & Ezek. 37; explain 3 elements of the *New Covenant*).

The prophets neither understand nor explain how these two pictures fit together (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

There are 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament (400 – 4 BC; DOTTED LINE). During this time, no prophets speak for God, the "seed" does not come, sin is not atoned for, and Israel's kingdom promises are unfulfilled.

The New Testament records the arrival of the promised "seed" – Jesus. It goes on to describe how His two Comings fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant.

It narrates Jesus' First Coming – His birth, brief public ministry, and (with special emphasis) His rejection, death and resurrection. (4 BC – 33 AD; 4 GOSPELS).

Jesus descends physically from Abraham and David. This is why Matt. 1:1 calls Jesus “the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

Jesus claims to be the King who will one day rule (Matt. 25:31ff.), but insists that He has come this time as the Servant to die for humanity's sins (Jn. 1:29; Mk. 10:45). His betrayal and death (engineered by Satan; see Gen. 3:15 – “you shall bruise him on the heel”) thus resolves PROBLEM #1. Now all humans can be reunited with God through faith in Jesus' sacrifice (explain TEMPLE VEIL TORN).

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that He is the Messiah, and He begins His rule in an unexpected way – by working through His followers to spread the message of His atoning death (the “gospel”) to all people-groups (quote Matt. 28:18-20 as Jesus' “Great Commission” and connect it to Gen. 12:3).

It narrates the (temporary) switch from Israel (ethnic nation in a land) to the Church (multi-ethnic believers in Jesus) as God's redemptive agent, and the expansion of the early Church by spreading the gospel. (33 – 60 AD; ACTS)

It records Jesus' apostles' teaching to local churches, groups of churches, and individuals. They expound the content of the gospel (DEFINE) and describe the transformed lifestyle it makes possible. (48-90 AD; LETTERS)

We are still in this stage of God's plan (DOTTED LINE). It gone on for over 1900 years so far, and will continue until the Great Commission is fulfilled (give brief update of its progress thus far).

## **Consummation (Revelation)**

The last book of the New Testament (Revelation) predicts the future culmination of the battle between the “Seed” and Satan, ending in Satan's defeat (Gen. 3:15 – “He shall bruise you on the head”).

The gospel reaches people from every people-group (7:9,10).

Jesus returns as King (19:11-16), fulfills Israel's kingdom promises (20:1-9), and permanently ends Satan's reign (20:10).

God creates a new heavens and earth, in which all of His people (resurrected from Old Testament and New Testament periods) “see His face” (22:4) and “reign forever and ever” (22:5) – PROBLEM #2 is solved. Notice the symmetry with Gen. 1-2 (tree of life). This is not merely the restoration of Gen. 1,2; it is the consummation of God's plan!

## **Reasons why the Bible is God's unique revelation**

All of the major world religions have sacred books, yet they differ widely in how they describe God, humanity's root problem, and the solution to that problem (GIVE 2 EXAMPLES). Why should we believe that the Bible is giving us the right answers to these questions? We cannot “prove” that the Bible is inspired by God, but several lines

of evidence lead compelling to this conclusion. Your reading assignment (Rochford's paper) over the next four weeks will give you many answers to this question. Here is a summation:

The Bible claims to be inspired ("God-breathed") – quote 2 Tim. 3:16a. By contrast, most other "scriptures" do not even make this claim.

The unity of the Bible's plot (see above) argues for a *single* ultimate Author. By contrast, most other "scriptures" are collections of sayings without any historical narrative within a unified plot.

The unexpected way this plot unfolds (e.g., REJECTION & DEATH OF MESSIAH; SWITCH FROM ISRAEL TO CHURCH; etc.) and its unique way of salvation (BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH) argues for a *unique* Author.

The phenomenon of fulfilled prophecy (i.e., detailed predictions recorded in advance & fulfilled) is unique and argues for an *all-knowing and sovereign* Author. By contrast, other "scriptures" do not have this feature.

The historical accuracy of its account is unique and argues for a *reliable* Author. By contrast, most other "scriptures" either do not interface with history at all, or have demonstrable historical errors.

## Application

God has a good plan for human history, and His plan centers around His Messiah (quote Eph. 1:9-11).

Atheistic world-views either have no plan for human history (Nagel: "Human history is an episode between two oblivions"), or borrow an overarching plan from the biblical world-view (e.g., Marxism).

Pantheistic world-views have no personal plan for human history. Just as each person's soul is a like drop of water being merged into the infinite Unconscious, so is human history.

God's plan gives true purpose to your life.

If you receive His Messiah, God forgives you and makes you a member of His forever family (quote Jn. 1:12). There is a big difference between believing in God (even the God of the Bible) and receiving Christ. Have you ever done this? If not, this would be a good time!

If you follow Jesus after receiving Jesus, He will work through you to fulfill His plan. Don't try to use Jesus as Genie; let Jesus use you to liberate others. Don't try to get God to write your story; let Him write you into His story! Have you ever given your life to Jesus in this sense? If not, this would be a good time!