

What is the Bible about?

Last month we looked at why we should investigate the claims of the Bible. This week we are looking more at its content. If God has indeed revealed Himself, and for the sake of discussion we entertain the notion that the Bible is God’s self-disclosure, is there any central theme to that overall message? What is the bottom line? If God is making Himself known, what is the primary thing about Himself that He is seeking to reveal? If He is the one who made us and is revealing not only Himself, but also who we are, what is the essence of that reality?

The good news is that the Bible in all its complexity and diversity does have a golden thread that runs throughout it. There is a central theme. That message is the **story of redemption**. It is indeed the greatest story ever told, the story to which all other good stories point.

For redemption to make sense you have to have the preface. If the Bible is the story of redemption—who/what is being redeemed? Why do they need redemption? From what are they being redeemed?

The Bible in this view explains the why’s and then traces God’s acts of redemption through history. It shows God’s purpose to redeem a people to Himself out of sin and death. It documents His promises to do so and then reveals His faithful fulfillment of those promises. The flow of the story traverses paradise lost, promised redemption, the futility of any other means, the means of redemption, the anticipation of fulfillment, and then looking forward, the actual attainment of complete redemption in paradise regained.

Paradise Lost

Like all good stories, the Bible is a love story. It reveals both who God is and who we are, and the odyssey that God goes through to woo us to Himself as his bride. Unlike other suitors however, God had to first create His beloved. The Bible begins in the creation of paradise where God sets His people to enjoy unmitigated intimacy with Him.

This perfect communion between God and humanity was shattered by the sin of disobedience. Instead of eternal life and joy, death and despair now stain everything. Mankind is driven out of the place of special relationship, but not without a promise. Just a whisper at first, this promise will swell into a symphony.

Redemption Promised

God will send a deliverer. He will provide a way back. He will conquer the death and destruction that has been set loose in sin. But how? When will this promised Redeemer come? How will we know?

What follows in Scripture is the unfolding drama of God’s people clinging ever so poorly to that hope and God’s faithful provision. He provides both increasing revelation of His purposes and signs of His work in fulfilling them. Throughout the story He shows in manifold ways the futility of trying to restore relationship with Him through any other means than by His promised way.

The Means of Redemption

The holy God of the universe and a filthy bride; how can this be? Despite all the promises, the longing, and hopes, how can this love affair ever truly amount to anything? God becomes man. Infinity becomes finite. The King becomes a servant. The Eternal One dies as a substitute for His betrothed. Even though she has played the whore. Regardless of all her disloyalty, He paid the price for her deliverance.

You see, Jesus stepped onto the scene, not out of the blue, but in the fullness of time just as God had promised. He came for a very specific reason. His life, death, and resurrection were all carefully orchestrated for the sole purpose of redeeming His people from the death and despair in which we are all trapped. The whole of the Hebrew Scriptures looked forward to His arrival and the deliverance so long promised and expected.

The Anticipation of Fulfillment

But, you say, Jesus came and went and people still die. Where is this promised redemption? How can this be what all of the ages looked forward to? What we see in the work of Jesus is the inauguration of His Kingdom, the beginning of His fulfillment of His promises. We live now in the continuation of that Kingdom. There remains the consummation, the final act when we will see fully the ramifications of what He has done.

We still live by faith rather than by sight. That is to say, while God has done everything that we need and has faithfully fulfilled all His promises, it is still not evident in the world around us. We are still pilgrims. From our vantage point the love story is still threatened by all forms of imposing obstacles. The Bible on the other hand shows us the true reality.

Complete Redemption

The rest of the story is yet to come, but its conclusion is no less certain. God is ever the estranged lover chasing after His runaway bride, but He has already done everything necessary to not only win her, but to completely restore her. Jesus is coming back. This is the expectation of every page of the Scripture.

When He comes back the love story will be consummated. All the shadows and imagery, types and symbols will be realized in fullness. His Kingdom will not only have come, but it will reign over all that exists. The hope that there will be no more tears or sorrow is much more than pie in the sky hopefulness. It will be the reality of Redemption. The King and His bride will reign over a new heavens and new earth where justice flows like the rivers and mercy covers the seas. This is the central theme of the Bible and what the entire universe is ultimately about.
