

Gospel Triumph: Acts in the Story – Various Scriptures

It's common that people will struggle to read and understand the Bible. There are several reasons for this, but a contributing factor is that we tend to treat the Bible like a collection of pithy and encouraging spiritual maxims. Sort of like bumper sticker statements. This makes us really like the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels and the epistles, but we often don't know what to do with the law, prophets, and narrative portions of Scripture.

For the Bible to make sense we need to learn to read it as a single, unified story where all the parts matter and contribute to the whole. This is a passion of mine and something I love to try to help people with when I teach the Bible. You need to see that the whole thing connects and flows into a single stream. Now, this morning I'm going to read you the introduction to *The Jesus Storybook Bible* to help make this point about the Bible being a single story. I read this a few years ago and I begin my basic hermeneutics class by reading this. Listen closely.

"Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn't do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn't mainly about you and what you should be doing. It's about God and what he has done.

Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you'll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren't heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose), they get afraid and run away. At times, they're downright mean.

No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne—everything—to rescue the ones he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

You see, the best thing about this Story is—it's true.

There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.

It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle—the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture."

This morning, I want to briefly help you to try to fit the book of Acts into the biblical story. To do this let's turn to Acts 1:1-3. After His resurrection Jesus spent over a month with His disciples speaking about the kingdom of God. This topic is on the disciples' minds. Look down to verses 6-8. Jesus's answer here comes in two parts. Verse 7 indicates that the full arrival of the kingdom will be in the future, but then verse 8 gives us the outline of the book of Acts and I think is Jesus' way of saying, "But you will be involved in the expansion of the kingdom through the spread of the Gospel."

This is how Acts begins, with a focus on the kingdom, and now let's see how Acts ends in Acts 28:28-31. The kingdom brackets the book and everything in the middle is about the expansion of the proclamation of God's kingdom. But what does that mean and how does "the kingdom" fit Acts into the larger story of the Bible? That's what I want to help you with this morning with the goal that we can fit ourselves into God's continuing story. **4 Movements in God's Story that Help Us to Fit Into His Purposes.**

1. The Mission (Genesis 1-2)

Why did God create the world and human beings? It's easy to sort of answer that with a vague, "For God's glory". But God has a specific mission in mind that would honor and glorify His name. On the 6th day of creation God makes human beings, who are made in His image. They are made to represent Him. Listen to God's instructions to them. Genesis 1:26-28. Notice the language of image bearers and kingly authority and rulership.

With this mission in mind, God places the first two humans in a garden and gives them commands to obey as they seek to fulfill this worldwide dominion as God's

representatives. So, here's the goal God has for creation. Yes, it's for His glory but in a specific way. God brings Himself glory by ruling and reigning through His people in His place. Adam and Eve were to start in the garden and fill the earth with image bearers of God and bring the created world into subjection as they dwelt with God in relationship with Him and in obedience to His Word. They were to start in the garden and expand outward until the entire earth was a suitable dwelling place for God and man with God's image filling the earth and God's kingdom set up. But His vice-regents failed in this.

2. The Mutiny (Genesis 3)

Rather than obeying God's Words and ruling over creation, Adam and Eve obey the voice of the serpent and abdicate their God-given authority. Because of their mutiny, God expels them from His place and corruption and death take hold in the world through sin. But God graciously promises that a "seed" will come who will undo the work of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). The implication is that this individual will win the victory over the serpent and re-establish God's rule and reign over God's place. The rest of the OT tells the story of how God seeks to re-establish His rule and reign through His people over His place. And this story leads toward the arrival of the seed, the promised one.

3. The Method (Genesis 12; Exodus 19; 2 Samuel 7; The Gospels & Acts)

So, God promises to re-establish His rule over creation through a Promised Seed. His goal is still to have His rule over His people in His place. He restarts this project in Genesis 12:1-3, 7. Listen to these verses. God tells Abraham that He will create a people through Him, a nation. These people will live in a place that God will give them, and their mission will be to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth. There's a worldwide goal for this mission.

As you continue in the OT God begins to fulfill these promises to Abraham's descendants as they become the nation of Israel. God formally establishes the nation as His special people in Exodus with these words. Exodus 19:4-6. They are to be God's special people, living in God's place, the land of Israel, and representing God to the nations. God then gives them His law so that they can live

under God's rule in the land that God has promised to them. Listen to Deuteronomy 6:1.

But as Israel takes possession of the place God has promised them, they fail to submit to His rule and properly represent Him. This leads God to set apart a King for the people as the representative of the nation who can obey God and lead them to obey Him and help them showcase God to the nations. God promises this to David. 2 Samuel 7:12-13. But eventually, the kings in David's line fail to obey God and so the prophets promise a greater Davidic King who will come to bring about God's mission.

The point in this is that as you read the OT, with all its laws and stories of war and violence and idolatry, and the priests and prophets and kings, that God's overall mission hasn't changed. God wants a people living under His rule in His place for His glory. He wants the entire earth to be this place where He can dwell with human beings. But humans have failed at this all along the way. And even though humans have failed to bring about this mission, humans must be the one's to rule and reign as God's representatives.

And this brings us to the NT. It's clear from the early chapters of the Gospels that Jesus Christ is the Promised one. He's the Promised One of Genesis 3:15, but He's also the human being who will succeed in obedience where every other OT person has failed. He is the fulfillment of the law, the sacrificial system, the nation of Israel, and the prophetic promises. All that God has done in the OT has longed for and looked for this one to come and accomplish God's mission.

This is why when you open to the NT you find Jesus proclaiming that the kingdom of God is at hand. Mark 1:14-15. God's rule and reign, through human beings, over God's place, which is ultimately the entire earth, is arriving through the King, Jesus. But it arrives in a most unexpected way.

This King ends up dying on a cross to win His kingly victory over the serpent's work. He conquers death by rising from the dead and He ascends to the Father and takes up His Kingly throne.

But here's an interesting part in the story. While Jesus is the anticipated King who has inaugurated His kingdom, His kingdom hasn't fully arrived. And this is where the book of Acts comes in and leads us to the rest of the NT. The message of the King and His Kingdom is announced in Acts and people enter the kingdom through faith in the work of the King. This is why Acts begins and ends with kingdom language. This is why Acts proclaims the resurrection of Jesus and arrival of the Spirit. This is why Acts constantly shows Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT. Because the message of the kingdom is the message that God's original plan is coming about through Jesus.

And we find ourselves in the same spot in many ways. We are still announcing the message of the kingdom and seeing people united to the King. The rest of the NT helps us to organize ourselves into churches and live under the authority of the King as members of His kingdom now while we anticipate the full manifestation of the kingdom in the future.

4. The Manifestation (Revelation 21-22)

God's original mission, to have a people in His place, the entire earth, dwelling with Him under His rule, finally comes about because of the work of the King. Listen to Revelation 21:1-5.

So, these are the major pieces of the story, and I hope you can see how Acts fits into it. It's a key moment where the message of the King spreads to the nations and then continues to spread up to our day. And here's why it's so important for you to understand this story and be able to locate yourself in this story.

"Even in adults, stories groom instincts, and instincts control loyalties, and loyalties shape choices." – N.D. Wilson

The story you believe you inhabit or the story you tell yourself about your life, is the primary shaping reality in your life. Why do you make the choices you do? Because of the story you believe about the world, yourself, and God. Which story defines you? What story do you inhabit?

Listen, preaching the Bible is not just a matter of me giving you a couple of principles to hang your hat on this week and a couple of words of encouragement

to get you through the tough times. The Bible is about reframing the story you believe about everything. The true story of the world is one where we are continuing the mission of Acts to proclaim the kingdom and living our lives under the rule of the King in anticipation of His return. Know that story and live in that story. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 3/30/25

- What is the hardest part of the Bible for you to understand?
- What is the most difficult part of the Bible to fit within the story and see as part of a single, unified story?
- How would you summarize the overall message of Acts?
- How would you summarize God's mission for creation as given in Genesis 1-2? Support your answer from the text of Scripture.
- What are some lessons we learn about sin from the temptation story in Genesis 3? (Hint: these weren't necessarily covered in the sermon)
- What promises does God make to Abraham in Genesis 12? How do these promises fit with God's original mission in creation?
- Do you think the land of Israel is a temporary "place" where God establishes his rule over His people or a permanent fixture of His original mission in Genesis?
- What does Jesus mean in Mark 1:14-15 when He says that the kingdom of God is at hand?
- How does the King's rule and reign arrive and why is it unexpected?

- What are some implications of this quote: *“Even in adults, stories groom instincts, and instincts control loyalties, and loyalties shape choices.”* – N.D. Wilson
- What other stories are we tempted to believe we inhabit?