

PERSPECTIVE

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WHAT IS THE BIBLE'S
BIG PICTURE?

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WHAT IS THE BIBLE'S BIG PICTURE?



If you had to summarize the Bible in one sentence, what would you say? What would you include, and what would you leave out? Summarizing a book so big and so diverse takes careful thought—and it is worth the effort, because the way we tell the story shapes the way we read it and share it with others.

The Bible is comprised of 66 books, written over 1,500 years by numerous authors. And yet the Bible itself testifies that there is a single divine Author behind it all — it is God-breathed revelation (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is not a loose collection of books; it is one unified story that spans from creation to new creation. The story of the Bible is the true story of history.

If you haven't yet read Aaron's article in the January Perspective, you should. He challenges us to consider what the Bible is and why a year devoted to thinking more deeply about Scripture is worth our effort. As he put it, "We should be a church that is well-equipped both to understand the Bible and to communicate what it is to those around us."

My aim in what follows is not ultimately to summarize the Bible in one sentence—though I will attempt that. If we can grasp the Bible's big story simply and with confidence, we will be a church better equipped to understand the Bible and to communicate its truth to those around us.

D. A. Carson writes, "The Bible as a whole document tells a story, and, properly used, that story can serve as a metanarrative that shapes our grasp of the entire Christian faith."¹ Scripture is God's word written through human authors, unfolding God's eternal plan in conjunction with his creating and redeeming activity in history. His covenantal self-disclosure grounds all his works and promises, and it finds ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Let me offer five motivations for getting hold of this story. First, the better we know it, the better we can behold the Lord Jesus Christ—and so love him more deeply and follow him more faithfully. Second, the better we can live life in a fallen world. Third, the better we can guard the gospel. Fourth, the better we can hope in what is ours in Christ, both now and in the life to come. And fifth, the better we can share the gospel with people who desperately need to hear it.

Here, then, is a single-sentence attempt to summarize the Bible's big story: *The Creator-covenant God planned in eternity and worked in history to glorify himself by the redemption of his people, the judgment of sin, and the making of all things new in Jesus Christ.*²

To see that this is in fact the Bible's big story, we will follow a four-part outline commonly used to

summarize the storyline of Scripture: Creation, Rebellion, Redemption, and New Creation.

CREATION: GOD IS CREATOR

Every worldview must answer the question of origins. Where did everything come from? Why are we here? Every story has a beginning, and the Bible provides the most coherent answer. It is where we begin.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The beginning here is creation—the self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal God is the Creator of everything that exists. In six days, he speaks all things into being by the word of his power.

But on the sixth day, God pauses his creative activity to express design and purpose. When he comes to humanity, the account turns personal and intimate. Humanity uniquely displays a likeness to God and images him (Gen. 1:26–27). As image-bearers, humanity represents God’s rule by exercising dominion over all the earth. And these first image-bearers are to fill the earth with more imagers to represent and spread that rule (Gen. 1:28). Already, by the end of day six, we see not only the origin of the world and of humanity, but the beginnings of an answer to why we exist.

Once the sixth day is finished, God steps back and revels in his glorious work (Gen. 1:31). And yet, that is not the end of the creation account. There is one more day. God blesses the seventh day and makes it holy, because on it he rested from all his work of creating (Gen. 2:1–3).

The seventh day is the climax of the creation account. Its culmination is the blessing of God’s resting rule. Most commentators observe that the creation account is presented as the construction of a cosmic temple, resulting in God’s enthronement. Upon the completion of temples in the ancient world, the people would host a seven-day celebration that culminated in the placing of an idol—an image of the god—inside the temple as an enthronement ceremony. What is unique about the Bible’s presentation is that instead of placing a lifeless idol in the temple to represent the god’s dominion, the Creator God places humanity in the garden—living, breathing image-bearers who will exercise dominion and dwell in his presence.

God’s enthronement is signified by his rest (Ps. 132:5–8). Creation is finished. Notice that there is no beginning and end of the seventh day. The author is signaling that though God’s creative acts are finished, the goal of creation is his unceasing rest—ruling in fellowship with image-bearing humanity.

This is why God created: to display his glory and to share his dominion with humanity. Adam and Eve had good work to do. In God’s resting presence, they were to fill the earth and bring it under his rule.

What does the creation account teach us about the Bible’s big story? It reveals a God who was, is, and always has been. Creation itself has a beginning; God does not. It reveals God as the Creator who rules over all, provides for everything he made, and enjoys his handiwork. It defines his relationship with humanity — he created us in his image and likeness, which means every human being has value, worth, and purpose according to his design. God made humanity to rule with him. And the goal of creation is his unceasing rest, ruling in fellowship with his people. History has a definite starting point and is moving toward a goal not yet fully achieved.

By the end of Genesis 1–2, we already have the essential elements of the Bible’s big story. The main character: God. The supporting cast: humanity. The setting: the heavens and the earth—the theatre to display God’s glorious works of creation, redemption, and new creation. And the plot: God’s unceasing rest, ruling in fellowship with his people, expanding across the entire world for his glory. When we turn to the second movement of the story, two more elements appear—an enemy and a plot twist.

REBELLION: WHAT WENT WRONG

Why is redemption necessary? Everything was very good in creation—until it wasn’t.

Every worldview must answer the question: What is wrong with the world? What caused the problems we experience in creation and in humanity? If the world was created good, what happened? The Bible tells us.

The word “Fall” is often used at this point in the four-part outline. It is a fine word, and it gets the point across. But it is a slightly more passive term, as though something happened to humanity—we *fell* into sin. “Rebellion” better captures the willful

act of rejecting God's rule. Human rebellion is what plunged creation under the curse of God's righteous judgment, and it gave rise to the need for redemption.

The first command in the Bible appears in Genesis 2:16–17. Notice first that God's generosity is on display in a positive command—eat freely of the abundance of the garden. Only then is a prohibition given, along with a consequence that contrasts sharply with the story to this point—a story teeming with *life*. Adam, representing all of humanity, receives a command from God.

Two important conclusions about reality are presented here. First, the Creator God is the source of all life, and enjoying the abundance of his provision in his rest is where life is found. Second, to disobey and rebel against God is death. And where there is death, there is no rest.

In Genesis 3, an enemy appears in the form of a serpent. He lies and deceives, tempting Adam and Eve to reject God's righteous rule. They believe him, grasp for equality with God, and willfully rebel — eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Consider the fallout in what unfolds next. In Genesis 3:8–10 and 14–19, we see the fourfold result of human sin: (1) Alienation and condemnation from God—fear, hiding, and eventual exile from his presence. God must judge sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). (2) Alienation from the blessing of procreation—the rejection of God's rule has consequences for his mandate to fill the earth with imagers. (3) Alienation from one another—the conflict between men and women, our confusion over who we are, and the broader relational discord we see everywhere find their origin here. And (4) alienation from the world we were created to rule—what began as good is now under a curse and groans for restoration. Humanity's unique relationship to the earth explains why our sin has subjected creation to futility and bondage to corruption (Rom. 8).

The fallout from humanity's rebellion is far-reaching, and it is the origin of what is wrong with the world. This rebellion ripples throughout the rest of Scripture. The next few chapters of Genesis show how. Murder and polygamy come onto the scene (Gen. 4). In Genesis 6:5, we see how deeply the human heart is poisoned by sin: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and

that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Sin comes from the heart—the center of the human will so thoroughly embraces rebellion that, unless God steps in, there is no hope, only judgment.

Genesis 6:5 is the preamble to a worldwide judgment in the flood (Gen. 7–8), which serves as a preview of God's righteous judgment on a world filled with evil and death. The Bible's big story shows us why humanity inherently expects justice in a world so devoid of it. And Genesis 11 is the capstone—humanity's pride at the tower of Babel results in God's judgment to confuse languages and disperse the nations, an alienation that persists to this day.

And yet humanity's rebellion did not alter God's purpose and goal for creation. In fact, as the story continues, we discover that rebellion is the very means by which God's great work of redemption would come about—his greater glory revealed through the person and work of God the Son. What man meant for evil, God intended for good.

REDEMPTION: IS THERE HOPE?

Every worldview must answer the question: Is there hope? Is there a solution to the problem of sin? The Bible's big story reveals a truth so glorious that the triune Creator God will rightly be worshiped and praised forever for his redeeming work. The gospel really is good news for the world.

Embedded within God's judgment on Adam and Eve is a promise. Just as sin and judgment came through a human act, redemption would come through a future offspring of this human family (Gen. 3:15). This promise is the origin of the messianic hope for humanity.

There is much to say about redemption, but I will focus on two key themes: the promised seed and the atonement. In other words, what is needed now that sin has entered the world, and through whom will that need be met?

First, the seed. God promises Abraham offspring that will bring blessing to the families of the earth—a reversal of the curse (Gen. 12). Israel, the offspring of Abraham, is then referred to as God's son (Ex. 4:22–23). God redeems Abraham's seed through the exodus to be a kingdom of priests, representing his rule on earth and bringing his blessing to the nations by mediating his presence in the tabernacle

and temple (Ex. 19). God will once again dwell with his people on earth, and where he dwells and rules, there is rest. We see this in two distinct ways under the Old Covenant—the land and the Sabbath.

Once Israel is settled in the land, God gives them rest on every side through King David. He also promises David an offspring who will reign on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7). David recognizes that this promise extends to all humanity (2 Sam. 7:19).

When God the Son comes to earth, he is presented as the seed of the woman, the son of Abraham, and the son of David. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman” (Gal. 4:4). “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1). God the Son incarnate is the promised seed from Genesis 3, Genesis 12, and 2 Samuel 7—a new Adam to begin the work of a new creation.

Next, the atonement. The Bible hints at the need for sin’s atonement in the garden, where God covers the shame of Adam and Eve’s sin with animal skins—the first recorded physical deaths in God’s good world. Two conclusions follow: First, rebellion results in death. And second, God is the one who can cover sin.

Judgment must fall on the guilty. Yet God is abounding in steadfast love—a gracious God who delights to forgive. But this holy and just God cannot simply sweep human sin under the cosmic rug. A blood sacrifice must be made as a substitute for sinners. Why blood? God tells us: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev. 17:11).

God graciously provides the sacrificial system to make a way for sinful people to be forgiven through an atoning, substitutionary death. But the blood of bulls and goats could not truly cleanse sinners (Heb. 10:4). Year after year, those sacrifices anticipated a better one to come. Just as sin came through a man, atonement must come through a man.

Paul draws the threads of the Bible’s big story together in Romans 5:12–21. Sin and death came through Adam’s rebellion. Forgiveness and life have now come through the second Adam—the God-man, through whom the new creation comes. This new creation first renews sinful people spiritually

and will one day renew them physically, along with all creation. In Christ, we have atonement for sin and reconciliation with God (Eph. 1:7–10).

And the forgiveness of sins is just the beginning. God redeems so that he might dwell once again with his people (Eph. 2:22). That access is spiritual in nature now but will one day be physical, and in a fullness that far outstrips Eden. The Church is now the dwelling place of God on earth—better than the temple, but not yet what it will be. And this good news is to be displayed and proclaimed by the church, announcing to rebellious humanity that God has opened the way of access to him by faith through the Son (Eph. 3:7–12).

It is worth pausing here to ask: How does seeing God’s work of redemption within the Bible’s big story help the Church guard the gospel and display it more faithfully? Knowing the whole story keeps us from collapsing the gospel into something smaller than it is—a private inner experience, a moral self-improvement project, a vague promise of heaven for nice people. The gospel is the announcement that the Creator-covenant God is reconciling sinners to himself through the death and resurrection of Christ, making them part of a renewed humanity in a renewed creation. That story is too important to get wrong and is what the world needs to see displayed and hear proclaimed.

NEW CREATION: WHERE THE STORY IS GOING

Every worldview must address life after death. Or, more positively, is there hope for the future? Where is history heading? The Bible’s big story answers the entire arc of human history, from creation to new creation.

With the coming of Christ, God’s eternal kingdom has broken into the present, inaugurating the fulfillment of every promise bound up in Christ’s redemptive work. “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20). The Bible’s big story presents an already/not yet reality—a reality that gives true hope for the present and ultimate hope for the future, when Christ bodily returns to be enthroned physically and eternally. Until he returns, the old creation and the new creation exist simultaneously.

Tom Schreiner puts it this way: “The new and old ages coexist simultaneously now that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The new has come, but the old

persists...the resurrection of Jesus...is the emblem of the new age, the signature of God's promises.³"

This already/not yet reality is true for God's people because of their union with Christ. Every blessed hope we have, we have because of him—because we are found in him by faith. Christians are made new in Christ: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). This is true the moment when we repent and believe the gospel.

Many passages teach about our union with Christ. Three are worth highlighting. First, union with Christ is pictured as sharing in his death and resurrection life (Rom. 6:3–8). One "already" reality is that sin no longer dominates our wills—we are no longer enslaved to it. But we are not yet totally free from sin. In the new creation we will be. Second, because we are "in Christ Jesus," God's just wrath against our sin will not fall on us. The righteous requirement of the law has been fulfilled in us—an imputed righteousness that is ours only because we are in him (Rom. 8:1–4). We stand justified already, and in the future, we will be forever declared righteous through him. Third, with Christ we are truly alive, right now. Even now, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly throne room — and yet the fullness of that experience is still "not yet" (Eph. 2:4–7).

Each of these passages speaks of new-creation realities that have broken into the present with Christ. And yet the fullest experience of them is yet to come in the new creation.

What about creation itself? It also awaits renewal because of Christ's work. Creation groans and awaits restoration, and we who have the Spirit have been given the first fruits of what is to come—a foretaste of the new-creation life that awaits God's people and creation (Rom. 8:18–25).

The Bible's story ends similarly to how it begins—a new heaven and a new earth where God dwells with his people (Rev. 21:1–8). And yet a more grand and glorious future awaits God's people than even Eden could anticipate, while a more frightening and final judgment awaits those who remain in their rebellion (Rev. 20:11–15).

God's goal for creation will be accomplished. Redeemed humanity will share in God's rule over the new creation, united with Christ, the perfect

image of the Creator-God—a rule comprehensive and complete, unspoiled by sin and death. That is humanity's ultimate hope. The Bible's big story has a climax beyond all we could ask or imagine. For those who persist in their rebellion, this fallen creation is the best they will ever know.

CONCLUSION

The Bible's big story in one word: Jesus. In five: Creation, Rebellion, Redemption, New Creation. In one sentence: The Creator-covenant God planned in eternity and worked in history to glorify himself by the redemption of his people, the judgment of sin, and the making of all things new in Jesus Christ.

The story of the Bible is not ultimately our story. It is God's story—eternally planned, worked in history through Christ, all to the praise of his glory. The better we know it, the more clearly we will see him, the more deeply we will love him, the more faithfully we will follow him, and the more confidently we will commend him to others. May we be a church that knows it, lives it, and tells it well.

— Chad Ireland

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 194.

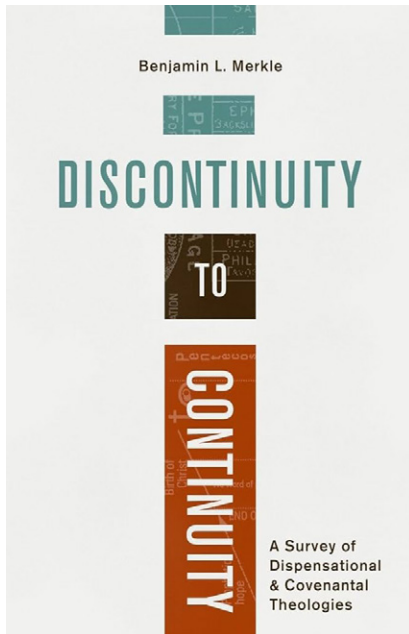
² This summary statement is modified from Stephen Wellum's *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept*, 393.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 105.

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

DISCONTINUITY TO CONTINUITY

Written by Benjamin L. Merkle | Recommended by Parker Bentley



Benjamin Merkle's *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* provides a balanced and structured overview of major theological systems that address the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The central thesis of the book is not to convince readers of one particular system, but to “inform rather than persuade.” Merkle organizes six major systems—ranging from classic dispensationalism to covenant theology—along a spectrum of discontinuity to continuity. He presents each view fairly and objectively. For each system that he evaluates, Merkle asks four questions: (1) What is the basic hermeneutic? (2) What is the relationship between the covenants? (3) What is the relationship between Israel and the church? (4) What is the kingdom of God? Through this framework, the book emphasizes the importance of careful biblical interpretation and encourages readers to appreciate differing theological perspectives held by Bible-believing Christians.

One of the main takeaways from this book is how theological systems are definitively shaped by their underlying hermeneutics, or methods of interpreting Scripture. The presuppositions one takes to a passage or theme in Scripture (possibly derived from a system) dictate where one may

land. Another important insight is the spectrum itself. Rather than a simple binary between dispensational and covenant theology, there are multiple nuanced positions between the two. I was encouraged by the reminder to approach Scripture with humility and to be charitable and gracious with those who may not share the same convictions. Thankfully, Merkle demonstrates a respectful tone and encourages readers to engage with opposing viewpoints.

This book is valuable for Christians who want a clearer understanding of how different traditions interpret the Bible. The structure is accessible, and the tone is neutral, so it serves as an excellent introduction for those new to the topic, while still offering enough depth. Anyone seeking to better understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and to engage thoughtfully in theological discussions, will benefit from this work. *Discontinuity to Continuity* is especially timely for us at Mount Vernon as we've been going through Revelation and have heard about many of these systems and their implications in recent sermons.

BOOK EXCERPTS

We must all be continual students of scripture. But it is not just a matter of seeking to master the content and doctrine of the Bible. We don't want to be guilty of knowing about God without knowing God. The fact that we don't have all the answers and never will have all the answers should always keep us close to the source of truth—God's revealed word.

– "Prelude," p. 3

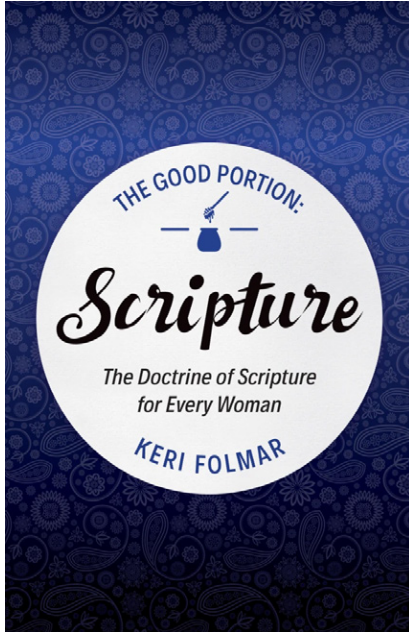
Theological systems are constructed in an attempt to understand the overall message of the Bible. Ideally, they result from a faithful interpretation of the Bible. Once formed, however, they also influence how we interpret the bible. This makes understanding theological systems a hermeneutical endeavor.

– "Chapter 1," p. 5

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

THE GOOD PORTION: SCRIPTURE

Written by Keri Folmar | Recommended by Jaynie Timmons



The Good Portion: Scripture highlights the treasure trove available to us when we open our Bibles. Keri Folmar explains the doctrine of Scripture without deterring readers with complicated vocabulary or explanations. The overall message of the book is that God revealed Himself to us through His Word, and we have access to taste and see his goodness if we would just take it up and read. There is great joy and love for God to be discovered through regularly reading His Word. Walking through the doctrines of inspiration, authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency of Scripture, this book unpacks big theological truths while beautifully inviting to see that God's Word is true food for hungry readers.

Having known Keri during her time as a member here made reading this all the more enjoyable. She is living out what she wrote about—treasuring God's Word as her delight, and relying on it as her daily bread. I was particularly struck by the offer she makes in the book: "Oh Christian sister, pick up your Bible! You will remain weak without it." What a fitting encouragement for us after carefully unpacking the theological truths of God's Word. Open it and enjoy God!

Keri writes about complex theological truths in a way that's easy to understand. I would recommend this book to any woman, particularly because members of Mount Vernon will remember and love Keri from her time as a member here. This would be a great discipling resource to read with your youth-aged daughter or another woman you meet with in the church. In addition, is there a woman in your life with whom you are currently sharing the gospel? This would be a valuable book to read with a woman who is questioning the reliability and authority of God's Word. In *The Good Portion: Scripture*, she will find satisfying answers about the depths and riches of the wisdom of God!

BOOK EXCERPTS

Knowing God gives the world, and our place in it, significance. It's unplugging the ears and taking off the blinders. Knowing God helps us make sense out of life, and even better, brings us to the source of joy.

– "Chapter 1," p. 31

Because human beings are finite, we can never know God fully or exhaustively; however, we can know Him truly and substantially through His word. Salvation, growth and knowledge of God's will are on offer in the Bible. Christians and their churches must fill themselves with the Scriptures. Starving ourselves makes us weak. The Bible sustains us and makes us healthy.

– "Chapter 7," p. 145

BIBLE READING PLAN

JUNE

TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message.
Take Up & Read!

June 1	Psalm 10	June 17	Psalm 138
June 2	Psalm 73	June 18	Romans 5:1-5
June 3	Job 23:1-17	June 19	1 Peter 1:1-9
June 4	James 1:2-8	June 20	1 Thessalonians 3
June 5	Romans 3:9-26	June 21	Psalm 66
June 6	1 Thessalonians 1	June 22	1 Samuel 13:1-14:23
June 7	Psalm 10	June 23	Psalm 27
June 8	Revelation 14:1-20	June 24	Genesis 16:1-16
June 9	Psalm 96	June 25	Isaiah 40
June 10	Romans 2:1-11	June 26	Acts 13:13-25
June 11	Matthew 13:24-43	June 27	1 Thessalonians 4
June 12	Joel 3:9-16	June 28	1 Samuel 13:1-14:23
June 13	1 Thessalonians 2	June 29	Revelation 15:1-16:21
June 14	Revelation 14:1-20	June 30	Psalm 97
June 15	Psalm 66		
June 16	Psalm 46		

*Sermons in Bold

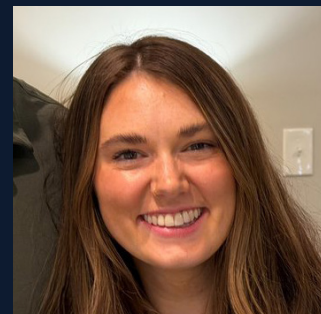
NEW MEMBERS



DAVID LEMAN



JACOB LOGAN



TAYLOR LOGAN



JAY RAYNOR



GARY REID



DONNA REID

"We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come a man's way in this world."

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES



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