

CHAPTER 2

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GOD'S STORY OF REDEMPTION

Everyone likes a good story. This may be due to the fact that we as human beings are created in the image of God – the Great Storyteller – who has revealed himself to us through the Bible, through his Son, Jesus Christ, and through the beauty of his creation. God's story of creation, the fall of humankind, redemption, and consummation is the most compelling story of all time. Yet, there are many competing stories surrounding us today in the world that falsely claim to offer a better tale. It's only in reading and listening to God's story of redemption that we will finally be able to get the real scoop on such questions as "where do I come from?" "where am I going?" and "what is the meaning of life?" We hope that as you contemplate the beautiful story of God's redemption of humankind, you will come to see it as the greatest story ever told.

CHAPTER 2 – GOD’S STORY OF REDEMPTION

The Bible is a large and complex book—sixty-six books written over a thousand years. You can get lost trying to make sense of it. However, it is possible to divide the Bible simply into thirds and see its essential theme:

- Genesis 1–2 comprises the first third of the Bible in which we read about God’s good world.
- Revelation 21–22 comprises the last third of the Bible in which God’s good world is restored.
- The middle third, and the bulk of the material, is about what God is doing to bring the world back to his original intention.

CREATION	FALL AND REDEMPTION	CONSUMMATION
Genesis 1–2	Most of the Bible	Revelation 21–22

Once we understand the way the world was supposed to be, the way it is now, and the way it will one day be again, we have tools to make sense of our life experiences and our longings. Without such a broad biblical perspective, our pains may seem depressively terminal and our longings and joys frustratingly empty.

CREATION

I hate to walk into a movie after it has started. If I stay, I stick around until the next showing to see the beginning. Sure enough, even though I was able to make sense of most of the action, I find pieces of the plot that I didn’t get. Since the book of Genesis is about the beginning of the world, until you are familiar with it, you too will be missing pieces of life. What does it tell us about our origins?

1. God exists before and beyond the world he creates.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (1:1)¹

We might be tempted to think that Genesis 1–2 is just about creation. But it is primarily about God. Skim Genesis 1 and note the references to God: “And God said” (v. 3); “God saw” (v. 4); “God called” (v. 5); “And God said” (v. 6); “So God made” (v. 7); “God called” (v. 8), and so on through the rest of the chapter. Deism, which arose in the seventeenth century, and naturalism and evolution, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, offer ways of conceiving of the world in which God is distantly removed or absent all together.

The depiction of God in Genesis is also in contrast to pantheism of the East, in which everything is God, and pan-in-theism, in which God is in everything. From Genesis we can see that God is never synonymous with his world. He is before it, will be after it, and, while involved in it, stands above and outside it.

The Genesis account teaches us that we are never to think about the world without thinking about it as God's world. John Calvin said that the world is "the theater of God's glory" and observed that it is not possible to conceive of the world as God's creation without experiencing a desire to honor him. Beyond that, we should believe that our greatest good is in knowing him.

Moreover although our mind cannot apprehend God without rendering some honor to him, it will not suffice simply to hold that he is the One whom all ought to honor and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him.²

2. God orders his world.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep. (1:2)

This sentence provides the structure to all that follows. In the initial stage of creation, the earth was "formless" and "empty." In the rest of Genesis 1 God forms and fills his world. A simple chart shows the structure of the creation days.

GENESIS 1

FORMED	FILLED
1. Light, vv. 3–5	4. Luminaries, vv. 14–19
2. Sky and water, vv. 6–8	5. Birds and fish, vv. 20–23
3. Land, vv. 9–13	6. Land animals, vv. 24–28

God unfolds and develops his creation in an orderly way through the course of his work week. This description of creation as a literary structure provides true information about the Creator and the process by which he forms and fills his world.

CHAPTER 2 – GOD’S STORY OF REDEMPTION

3. God makes the world good.

The word *good* is used seven times in Genesis 1, in verses 3, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. As created, the world is not fractured or corrupted. God likes and takes pleasure in it. In God’s world, as originally created, it was good to be alive.

Neither Socrates nor the Buddha, nor the systems of thought attributed to them, considered the world good. Both taught that final pleasure involved escaping this world, into a spiritual, nonphysical state.

4. God makes humanity in his image.

So God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them. (v. 27)

Made in God’s image on the sixth day, humans share, in common, the nature of the other land animals.

God. | Humans. Animals.

Made in the image of God, humans are unique; different from the rest of creation.

God. Humans. | Animals.

THE FALL

The world described in Genesis 1–2 does not continue. Our daily experience confirms this. It is worth noting that the first explicitly Christian book that C.S. Lewis wrote was titled *The Problem of Pain*. We live in a world that is a swirl of both pleasure and pain. Where did this pain come from?

In Genesis 3 we read that the world was corrupted by the invasion of evil, through the choice of God’s king and queen. Goodness is now polluted by that which is bad, and the image of God, gloriously radiating in his world, is now fractured. Let’s look more closely at the text of Genesis 3.

1. God sets limits.

God set limits, and Eve knew it. She exaggerated the limits but nevertheless stated the prohibition: “God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die’” (v. 3).

Just as a game makes no sense without rules and referees, God makes the rules and is the referee. He had said, in effect, “Enjoy the garden but don’t eat the fruit from one tree; if you do, you will die.”

2. A hostile being is present in the world and raises suspicion about God’s character.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals that the LORD God had made. (v. 1)

Satan is a liar in a twofold sense; first, he calls into question the character of God.

Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden”? (v. 1)

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (v. 4)

The implication of the serpent is that God has good things available that he is withholding. God is, Satan implies, mean and stingy.

Second, Satan is a liar in the sense that he blatantly, directly contradicts God, “You will not surely die” (v. 4).

John Milton, in *Paradise Lost* (Book 9), explores the infernal dynamics that defiled Satan in eternity.

Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluk’d, she eat:
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost. Back to the Thicket slunk
The guilty Serpent.

What we read in Genesis 3 about the insulations of Satan continues to the present; quietly, subtly, constantly, Satan continues to lie about the character of God and the truth of God’s Word.

3. Adam and Eve break faith with God and overstep their limits.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (vv. 6–7)

CHAPTER 2 – GOD’S STORY OF REDEMPTION

Augustine and many since him attribute the invasion of evil into the world to the pride of our first royal parents—reaching for more than they were given. In *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis agrees that pride was the chief sin. Martin Luther, who rediscovered the role of faith in salvation, was convinced that lack of faith was the chief sin. Adam and Eve didn’t believe God when warned of death. They chose to believe Satan. Instead of enjoying the goodness in which they were immersed, they believed that God was holding out on them.

Since that day, God has been on trial. The problem of pain and evil is a reason many people give for denying or renouncing faith in God. But if you renounce God, you need to deal with the problem of goodness. How do we explain all that is good in the world and all the good that we desire to do if we were not created by a good God?

4. The intimate relationship between humans and God is fractured.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ (vv. 8–9)

Adam and Eve enjoyed an evening walk with God. The picture is one of close friendship. Having broken faith, our first parents felt shame and hid among the bushes. As a race we have been hiding in the bushes ever since, loudly protesting that we can’t find God.

What a chimera then is man! What a novelty!
What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy!
Judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth;
Depository of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error;
The pride and refuse of the universe ...

Know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself.
Humble yourself, weak reason; be silent, foolish nature;
Learn that man infinitely transcends man
and learn from your Master your true condition,
of which you are ignorant.
Hear God.⁴

5. God curses his previously blessed world.

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you” ... To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing” ... To Adam he said ... “Cursed is the ground because of you”. (vv. 14–19)

God doesn't shout and show up with thunder and lightning; he patiently questions and pronounces judgment. Neither the wrath of God nor the curse is a popular subject. Yet God is angry about his polluted and corrupted world.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Rom. 1:18–20)

Imagine the pain God must have experienced cursing his good world! Who wants to admit we live in a cursed world? Yet it is the consistent theme of Scripture. How else can we explain that the good and sovereign God allows the pain and grief we now experience?

REDEMPTION

The God who patiently called Adam and Eve out of the bushes began his great work of salvation. God selects the family of Noah (Genesis 6–9). When the descendants of Noah seek to construct a civilization while ignoring God, he frustrates their efforts and confuses human language (Genesis 11). Then God selects Abraham (Genesis 12). Through the family of Abraham, God creates a line, the Hebrew nation, that over two thousand years will lead to the birth of a new Adam, Jesus Christ.

Step by step God saves us in Christ.

1. Through the act of becoming human, God himself assumes the image of God.
The Son is the "image of the invisible God." (Col. 1:15)
2. Where Adam failed the temptation, Jesus succeeded. (Luke 4:1–13)
Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Luke 4:12)
3. Then Jesus took the consequences of Adam's curse and died.
When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom. 5:6)
4. When God raises Jesus from the dead, it's the beginning of the new creation; no more curse; no more death.
For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. (1 Cor. 15:21)

CHAPTER 2 – GOD’S STORY OF REDEMPTION

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17)

Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 4:17) is an announcement that through faith in him it is possible to enter the renewed creation.

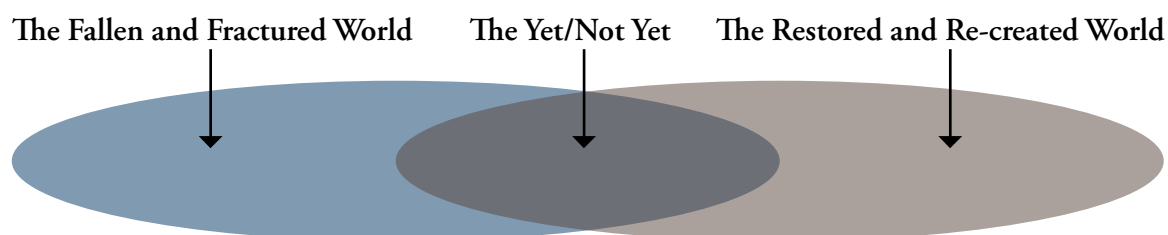
The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18–19)

The miracles that Jesus did—the healing of the sick, the opening of blinded eyes, the forgiving of sins, and the casting out of demons—all demonstrate the presence of the new creation.

5. Redemption is both complete and yet still in process.

Why then, do we still struggle with pain, sickness, and disappointment? Some of us are healed but not all of us. And healed or not, Christians still die. We experience growth in holiness, but we still struggle with the three classic enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In The Presence of the Kingdom, G.E. Ladd notes that we live in the intersection of two ages. The new age has come, but the old one has not yet been abolished. The new creation has been initiated but not yet completed. This means we live in the “yet/not yet,” and the “here and coming.” The kingdom of God, the new creation, has been initiated by Jesus, and we taste its fruits, but we are awaiting its consummation.



CONSUMMATION

The book of Revelation records the final battles in which the war for God’s good creation is finally completed (chaps. 1–20). After the final victory over Satan, the old age is completely abolished. Revelation 21 describes a new order.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,

coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is 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.”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (vv. 1–5)

In that new world God will again be present among us; pain and death will be eradicated. Again, the tree of life will bear its fruit (22:2), and the curse will be no more (22:3). The renewed world will be completely safe, completely good and enjoyable.

The thrill of this new world beckons us: we can’t wait to be refreshed, renewed, re-created, and restored. It is what every boy or girl really wants when gazing longingly at some desired toy or doll. It is what every adult wants when thinking of a new car, a new house, or a new job. G.K. Chesterton, in his pithy style, wrote, “Every knock on a brothel door is a knock on the door of heaven.”

We are all waiting for that consummation. In the words of C.S. Lewis:

At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in.⁵

NOTES

¹Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, 1984.

²John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.i.II.

³If the work of *Paradise Lost* is daunting, consider, C.S. Lewis, Preface to *Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), which makes accessible Milton’s great thoughts on the Creation and Fall.

⁴Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin Books, 1996) sec 434.

⁵C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, quoted in C.S. Lewis, *A Year with C.S. Lewis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 397.