

The Storyline of the Bible

In the Beginning

Genesis 1:1

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

These are the first words of the Bible. God has always been without beginning or end. God is three persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all working together in perfect harmony. This is often referred to as the Trinity. Notice from this first verse that God first creates the heavens and then he creates the earth.

God creates others to rule with him

On the creation of the heavens, God decides to create a divine council of spirit beings called 'gods' (with a little 'g'), or 'sons of God' who have free will and who will rule with him. This concept of spirit beings, all of whom are infinitely inferior to Almighty God, runs throughout the Bible.

Exodus 15:11

'...who is like you among the gods?'

Deuteronomy 3:24

'...what god is there in the heaven and earth who can do according to your works?'

Psalm 86:8

'Among the gods there is none like you O Lord.'

Ps 97:9

'You are exalted far above all gods.'

Job 38:7

'And all the sons of God shouted for joy.'

These 'gods' or 'sons of God' are created as spirit beings and are wholly dependent on Almighty God for their existence. God could do everything by himself yet he chose to create these lesser gods to hold responsibility over certain parts of his creation.

Having created the heavens, God then creates the earth and human beings to live on it (**Genesis 2**). Just as God creates a divine council of gods or sons of god who have defined areas of responsibility under him in the heavens; so God creates humankind to share the government of the earth with him.

Genesis 1:26

'Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

The above verse tells us that mankind is made in God's image. Being made in God's image and being given dominion over the earth are directly connected. God created mankind with a free will, a mind and emotions. The animal kingdom have these same attributes although

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they are not so developed; yet animals are not described as being made in God's image, so what does '*being made in God's image*' mean? To be made in God's image means to be a representative of God to bring his will or dominion upon the earth. It refers to our **status** before God and to the divine commission he gives to mankind. This commission is sometimes called '*the dominion mandate*'.

The creation of the spiritual and earthly realm with spiritual and human beings who are in relationship with God and to whom God delegates authority is the foundation and big picture upon which the rest of history is founded. Spirit beings and human beings are both given free will and it is this free will that leaves open the possibility that God will be rejected and that the will of 'others' will shape the heavens and the earth.

Trouble in the Divine Council

Isaiah 14 and **Ezekiel 28** seem to describe a rebellion within the heavenly divine council. A free will spirit being wanted to become the supreme being and he wanted to replace God. In **Genesis 3** he is called a 'serpent'. In the New Testament, he is referred to as the devil. (We will use this name throughout this study.) The devil thinks that even though he is created, he can act as though he is self-existent. His plan backfires quickly and he is cast out of God's presence. We are not given any information about when this rebellion actually took place. **Ezekiel 28:15** refers to his rebellion as a time when '*wickedness was found in you*'. It is possible that the devil's rebellious moment is outlined in the events of **Genesis 3** when he enticed Adam and Eve to also rebel in the Garden of Eden.

Trouble on Earth

This rebellious member of the divine council wanted to destroy mankind because he knew that they had received delegated authority from God for the earthly realm and this further challenged his desire to gain control. He knew Adam and Eve would be judged if they rebelled so, in Genesis, he entices them to do so. In response to their rebellion, God is true to his word and expels mankind from the Garden of Eden - a place of perfection and of God's presence. Eden did not cover the whole earth but was a clearly defined geographical area. The rest of the earth was not like Eden and part of Adam and Eve's mandate was to expand Eden until it covered the whole world. It is into this undeveloped territory that Adam and Eve are sent (**Genesis 3**).

Mankind has now fallen into the hands of this rebellious former divine council member – the devil. Although Adam and Eve are made in God's image, their unbelief created a separation from God. Due to the choice made in Eden, God's initial plan to bring dominion over the earth was thwarted. Yet their status as representatives of God remains. The devil succeeded in causing a rebellion by enticing Adam and Eve to adopt a self-centred mind-set in the same way he had. He esteemed himself to be independent of God and sowed the seeds of self-esteem and independence into mankind.

Humanity Grows and the devil increases his grip

The children of Adam and Eve multiply and humanity grows in number. Two other major events happen that strengthen the devil's hold on mankind. The first event occurred when

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rebellious angelic beings from heaven come to earth and co-habit with women which results in the birthing of giants on the earth; which consequently pollutes and changes God's original genetic design for mankind. Their infiltration of humanity results in increasing evil and God's heart is grieved (**Genesis 6**).

Genesis 6:6

'And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and he was grieved in his heart'.

God responds to this. He warns a righteous man called Noah to build a boat to survive a flood that God is going to send upon the earth. It takes 120 years for Noah to build this boat giving plenty of time for the people to be warned through Noah of the coming judgment, but only 8 righteous ones are protected. With these 8 God begins again. At this point God re-establishes the '*dominion mandate*' that he first gave to Adam and Eve (**Genesis 9**). From these 8 people the earth's population increases.

However, once again pride and the desire for self-determination lead the people to build a community without reference to God. This led to the second event when mankind attempted to make a direct connection to the spirit realm by building a tower to reach heaven and worship rebellious spirit beings. Once again God responds and this time scatters mankind across the earth in order to break up their unrighteous unity and to restrain the devil's ability to corporately infuse them with his rebellious presence (**Genesis 11**).

The Government of other gods over the nations

God sees that the people he has created do not want his Lordship. They have rejected his direct rule so he appoints those from his divine council to administer these scattered people groups. His expectation is for these free-will divine council members to govern as he himself would govern.

Deuteronomy 32:7-9

'Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.' (English Standard Version)

History repeats itself and these 'sons of God' or spirit-beings who are allocated to rule over the scattered peoples in their new locations fail to govern humanity as God envisaged. They were supposed to rule with righteousness and justice but **Psalm 82** shows they did not. God therefore pronounces a judgment to come upon them. God tells them that they will lose everything and they will '*die like men*'.

Psalm 82

'God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked... I said, "You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any

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prince." Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations.' (English Standard Version)

Psalm 82 tells us of God's commitment to reverse this situation and hold these rebellious 'gods' accountable. God could have decided to eradicate them in an instant but this would not be consistent with his vision for creation. He made a plan to work out his will through mankind, rather than change it through direct divine force.

From the scattered peoples mentioned in **Genesis 11**, different nationalities and cultures and religions emerged. These false religions are inspired by rebellious 'sons of God' masquerading as the supreme God. Paul makes reference to them in book of Ephesians as '*principalities and powers*'.

Ephesians 6:12

'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'

A Question

We might ask, why did God carry on with this human project when it seemed to be going wrong? All we can know for certain is that he did and because of his love for his humanity his plan continues. His intent is to fulfil his original vision through mankind and not by going over our heads. (We will see later that this is why Jesus became a human being).

Isaiah 46:9-10

'Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'

Humanity retains the power of choice as to whether they will welcome God or not. This aspect of free will is extremely important to understand. Love is a choice which means that free will has to be present in our choice to love God. He set in motion a plan to both deal with the devil and to redeem, (to buy back), the love of mankind.

God's Plan to restore humanity and deal with the Devil

Now we will look at how God sets his plan to restore humanity in motion. It begins with God choosing one righteous man called Abram (**Genesis 12, Josh. 24:2-3**).

God tells Abram that through him and his wife Sarai, even though Sarai is barren, he will make a great nation. God changes Abram's name to Abraham (meaning exalted Father) and Sarai's name to Sarah, (Princess). God gives the descendants of Abraham a land and blesses them. Then, God promises Abraham that through his descendants he will extend that blessing to all the nations of the world (**Gen. 12:1-3; 18:18**). The descendants of Abraham are called the people of God. God is sometimes referred to as the God of Israel. Israel is the name of this new ethnic people group as well as the name of the land that God gives them.

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As the people of God, Israel becomes unique in the rest of history and they become a people that the devil targets for annihilation.

Abraham is sent from his birthplace in Ur (on territory within modern day Iraq, Iran and Syria) to another land that is known today as modern day Israel. The offspring of Abraham grew in number and God reveals himself to them so that they would know how to seek and follow him.

The family of Abraham eventually go to live in Egypt due to a widespread famine. They increase in number and become slaves to the rulers of Egypt who worship other gods (**Exodus 1**). God chooses Moses to be a saviour of his people (often called the Hebrews) from the cruel treatment of the Egyptians. God judges the people and gods of Egypt (i.e. the rebellious spiritual beings governing over Egypt- **Exodus 12:12**). Israel is saved from the Egyptian army as they cross the Red Sea. They keep travelling and arrive at Mount Sinai where God gives them the 10 commandments (**Exodus 20**).

Salvation in the Old Testament

The first 4 commandments are about our relationship with God and the next 6 commandments are about our relationship to one another. So a question arises! Were Old Testament believers saved by grace or did they receive eternal life through obeying these laws?

Abraham is the father of what was to be called the nation of Israel. He was chosen by God before the law was given; he was chosen not because he obeyed the law and was righteous but by grace alone (this can be defined as God's unmerited favour). Grace came first, and then came the law.

When Israel obeyed the 10 commandments they received further blessings from God for their obedience (**Deuteronomy 28**). This means that God's choice, or his grace, preceded man's obedience and man's choice. Man's obedience to God simply releases further measures of God's blessing and grace. The opposite is also true - when Israel disobeyed the law they experienced trouble. So we can see that in the Old Testament, salvation was given by grace and not by obedience to the law. Obedience to the law just increased or decreased God's blessing to them as the 'chosen by grace' people of God. A simple formula expresses this - Faith in God by Grace Alone = Salvation.

God releases his grace to the Hebrew people so that they may be a nation to attract all the peoples of the world to Him.

God chose the people of Israel to act as his messengers on earth and describes them as a kingdom of priests (**Exodus 19:6**). A priest in the Old Testament had the role of mediation or of bringing God's presence into a place. As a kingdom of priests they were to mediate; to bring God's presence into the world.

The first commandment is '*you shall have no other gods before me*' (**Exodus 20:3**). Only through faith in the one true Supreme God of Israel could anyone be saved. Israel was to

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teach that the gods (rebellious former members of his divine council) of the surrounding nations were just masquerading as the supreme God.

Israel's Journey Continues

God delivered Israel from Egypt so that they can make their way back to their homeland (**Exodus 2-15**). On their journey back they enter into unbelief and rebel against God (**Deuteronomy 1-2**). God then sends them into the wilderness for 40 years until all the rebellious ones have died and a new generation (their offspring) can enter the Promised Land.

Moses instructs Israel on how they should live when they arrive in the Promised Land (**Deuteronomy**). Moses dies and leadership is passed to his assistant Joshua (**Joshua 1**). They enter the land ready to obey their God and enjoy his blessings.

Living in the Promised Land

A long history develops around their time in the Promised Land. When Joshua dies, God leads his people through various judges (**Judges 1**) and prophets that he anoints. The Book of Judges outlines a sad story of how Israel turns from God to the gods of other peoples who oppress them and lead them further into false worship. God responds in mercy and anoints military leaders through whom he then delivers Israel. Yet Israel rejects God as their King and wants instead to have a human king to be like the unbelieving nations around them (**1 Samuel 8**). God warns them of the trouble a human king will bring, but gives them what they want. God uses Samuel, the last of the judges, to appoint Saul as the first king - who is unfaithful to God (**1 Samuel 9**). Saul is succeeded by David, the second king who makes grave mistakes but repents of his sins and turns back to God (**1 Samuel 16, 2 Samuel 5**).

Many kings come and go. Most were bad kings who chose to worship the gods of peoples in the surrounding nations; a few were faithful to God. God sends prophets to set the nation of Israel right when they go wrong. The most well-known of these prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Not only do these prophets speak for God and tell Israel where it has gone wrong; they also explain how the people can return to God. They foretell of future events when God will bring a Saviour for his people and for the peoples of all nations. They also prophesy of a final eternal age called the New Heavens and Earth.

Isaiah 9:6-7

'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this'

Isaiah 65:17-18

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, And her people a joy.'

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Whilst the people are in the Promised Land God provides for them and defeats all their enemies when they are obedient to him. However, they continue to rebel and quarrel with one another and the kingdom is divided into two groups. The northern kingdom is called Israel and is made up of the 10 tribes. The southern kingdom is made up of 2 tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and is called Judah with Jerusalem as its capital (**1 Kings 12**).

From this time on, the two halves of the divided nation have their own kings. The books of **1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles** give account of this history and tell their stories. The story is of a downhill slide into rebellion as a result of their unfaithful kings. Far from being an example to the nations, God's people deepen their worship of false gods to the point where God expels them from their land. The Bible calls this period of their history '*The Exile*.' This echoes the rebellion of Adam and Eve and their expulsion or exile from the Garden of Eden. As God's people replaced their worship of the true God with the worship of the lesser gods of foreign lands; God eventually gives them over to the rulers of these foreign lands who then invade Israel and Judah and take the people captive as slaves.

2 Kings 18:11-12

'Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and put them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant and all that Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded; and they would neither hear nor do them.'

2 Chronicles 36:16-17

'But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand.'

Both Israel and Judah are now in exile; living in the territory of other peoples and the spiritual territory of other gods. Those of the northern kingdom were taken captive by the Assyrian empire around 722 BC who were then themselves conquered by the Babylonian empire (**2 Kings 17**). Later in 586 BC, the citizens of the southern kingdom were also taken captive by the Babylonian empire (**2 Kings 25**). The journey of God's people into the Promised Land starts with their exodus from Egypt and out of slavery with Moses and ends with their exile from the Promised Land and back into slavery. They fought hard to gain the Promised Land and it was painful for them to lose it (read **Lamentations**), especially since the places they were sent into exile were the very places where Abraham their father had originally come out from.

During their period of exile, God continues to speak to the northern and southern kingdoms through the prophets. Jeremiah speaks God's word to the people saying, *'I know the plans I have for you'*, declares the Lord ... *'plans to give you hope and a future'*! (**Jeremiah 29:11**). God offers his people hope beyond their exile and gives a wonderful promise of a new season to come in which he will change his people from the inside out; creating a faithful community of believers who will accomplish his plan to restore the land to the Eden that

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once was (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). Isaiah prophesied that after 70 years God will make a way for those exiled to Babylon to return to Jerusalem. It is through the faithful prayer of Daniel that this prophecy is fulfilled. Some return but some choose to stay. The returning people rebuild the temple and city of Jerusalem, the capital of Israel (**Ezra 1**).

The books of the Old Testament were compiled over many years. Some researchers believe a lot of this work was done during the time of exile in Babylon. The Old Testament ends with the people of Israel back in their land.

The period between the Old and New Testaments

This period is called the intertestamental period.

Over the next four hundred years the nation of Israel is surrounded and often controlled by superpower nations: the Persians, the Greeks, the Syrians and later the Romans. Yet the promises of God through the words of the prophets still stand. Israel waits for a day when God will send a Saviour called the Messiah to deliver his people and their land from foreign occupiers. However there were groups within Israel who held different views as to how this would happen. In the New Testament these groups are called the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots and the Essenes. Despite these different views, all agreed that the story for Israel and its people has not ended and they wait in hope for their Saviour, the Messiah.

A New Era begins

God's plan for creation was to bring his spiritual and human family together to rule with him. First through Adam and Eve, which failed; then through Noah and his immediate family, which failed; and thirdly through the people of Israel, which also failed. Although he was not going to bypass mankind as his free will imagers - his representatives through whom he would accomplish his original goal; God could not depend on them. Only God himself could achieve God's will. One Person within the Trinity would need to become fully human yet also remain fully divine and come to earth and accomplish the task. Then, and only then, would the plan succeed!

The promised Saviour comes

His name is Jesus. He leaves heaven and is born on earth. This is often referred to as the '*incarnation*'. He is born a Jew of the family line of King David in the Old Testament (**Matthew 1**). He is born of his human mother called Mary and he is conceived by the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 1:18-20**). Jesus is therefore both fully human and fully divine. He grows into a man and begins to preach throughout all Israel that he is the Messiah, the Saviour they have been expecting. He teaches about the Kingdom of God and does many miracles.

Matthew 8:16

'When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.'

Jesus knows that in order to be the Saviour of his people, he has to sacrifice himself and take upon himself the punishment for their sins. Jesus lived a sinless life and on him your

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sins and the sins of all peoples were assigned; they were placed upon him by God. This also was prophesied many years before in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 53:5-6

'But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

The death that he died on the cross satisfied the justice of God against sin so that all who believe in Jesus will be pronounced just; just as if they had never sinned. This was the greatest way that God could express his love for you and for all mankind.

Matthew 16:21

'From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief princes and scribes and be killed, and be raised the third day.'

Through this greatest demonstration of his love, a way was opened for all peoples to repent of sin and be forgiven. By grace; the law of God revealed what sin was. By grace; a way was made available through the death of Jesus for sin, (the breaking of the law), to be forgiven. Jesus never broke the law and never sinned so he could be a sinless and fully righteous sacrifice. Only a sinless sacrifice would satisfy the justice of God.

Jesus's life on earth

The gospels of **Matthew, Mark, Luke** and **John** tell the story of this God-man, Jesus. However, Jesus does not do what the Jews expect. He does not start a rebellion to overturn the occupation of the Romans in the land of Israel and establish a new earthly kingdom. He forms a small band of disciples and trains them for when he dies. He challenges the customs and traditions and the unbelief of the Jewish people. He preaches love, repentance for the forgiveness of sins and righteousness and performs many miracles. He challenges the Jewish religious institutions and the corrupt Jewish Pharisees who want to get rid of him...

Matthew 16:15-16

'Who am I' Jesus asks his disciples and Peter answers 'You are the Christ, anointed King the Son of the Living God.'

But the majority of the Jews and their leaders do not believe or follow him. The religious Jews concoct a plan to put him to death which is put into motion. Eventually Jesus is handed over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. It is through his death on the cross that God accomplishes his plan to recover a lost and broken world. His disciples are astonished when they see Jesus alive and risen from the dead and only then do they begin to realise why his death was necessary (**Luke 24**).

Before Jesus went to the cross he gathered his disciples to himself to explain to them that they will be doing the very things they have seen him do during his life.

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John 14:12

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.”

After his resurrection from the dead Jesus gives them a command to spread the blessings of repentance and forgiveness to all peoples across the earth. This is a further stage of the fulfilment of the promise that God made to Abraham; that through Abraham all the nations would be blessed.

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Jesus then rises up from earth to return to heaven. As the disciples watch this happen, two angels inform them that he will return in the same way.

Acts 1:10-11

“And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up behold two men stood by them in white apparel who also said ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up onto heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven’.

The devil thought he had won a great victory in killing Jesus. It was in fact the moment of his greatest defeat. The death of Jesus on the cross is the defining moment of our age. It is the greatest demonstration of God's love for mankind and his commitment to the human project. Jesus is raised from the dead and all authority in heaven and earth is given to him (**Matthew 28:18**). God accepted the death of Jesus as the punishment for the sins of the mankind so now people can come back to God from every nation. Although the devil is defeated at the cross, he is not destroyed. The task of implementing the victory of Jesus to all the peoples of the world is delegated to those who believe in him.

Salvation in the New Testament

The New Testament presents a similar teaching of salvation to the Old. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were saved by faith through grace and were expected to respond to God by accepting his Lordship and by obeying his commands. In the New Testament, we also are saved by faith through grace and are expected to respond to him by accepting his Lordship and by following his teaching (**Ephesians 2:8**).

In the Old Testament, the law came through Moses but now Jesus's teaching is the final authority for men. Jesus has fulfilled all the requirements of the Old Testament law; for example, it is the death of Jesus, not the death of the sacrificial lambs as prescribed in the Old Testament, through which we receive forgiveness of sins. Jesus will come again, (the 'Second Coming'), and he is the Judge who will pronounce reward and condemnation on the last day at the end of this age.

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2 Corinthians 5:10

'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.'

Revelation 22:12

'And behold I am coming quickly and My reward is with me to give to every one according to his work'

Through faith in Jesus, salvation is now universally available to all who will believe in him, both Jew and Gentile (all non- Jews). All the earth can now receive the blessing of grace that was first given to Abraham.

John 3:16

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten (unique) Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'

Making disciples of all nations

Now that salvation is made available to all, Jesus ascended back into heaven and then sent the Holy Spirit to fill his disciples, (his followers), with power to do his will on earth (**Acts 2**). A new community of believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds is formed and to them God gives the command to make disciples of all nations, thus spreading the blessing of God to the whole world.

The Church

This new community is called the Church. It is made up of those who believe in Jesus for their salvation. It is not a building or an institution; it is a people who love and serve God. God has sealed them with his Holy Spirit as a sign of his ownership and of their membership into his family (**Ephesians 1:13-14**). The core elements of their activity are understanding the word of God; prayer; fellowship with God and one another; and evangelism - telling people about faith in Jesus to the rest of the world (**Acts 2:42-47**). The Church began in Jerusalem and grew and spread. The Apostle Paul plays the largest initial pioneering role in spreading the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Many letters are written to the growing community of believers throughout the Middle East and Europe by the apostles. These letters eventually are collected into the New Testament. Each of these letters continues today to give us valuable instruction on what to believe about the good news and how to live faithfully under God's rule in our daily lives.

2 Timothy 3:16

'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.'

The early days of the Church can be read in the book of Acts. It is a book that ends without a conclusion because there is still much to do. From that time forward, disciples have made disciples and gone into the whole world to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to make

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more disciples. You are the fruit of that. The story is not yet completed - it continues and will continue until the time of Christ's return, the Second Coming.

The King returns

There will be dramatic days prior to Jesus's Second Coming. The implementation of Jesus's victory on the cross over the devil in this age has now been given to his Church. We are to take up the authority he has delegated to us as his representatives. Then, at the end of this age, Jesus will return to finally deal with the devil. Jesus's first coming was as a baby. His Second Coming will be as a conquering King in all his majesty, breaking into earth's atmosphere for all to see.

Revelation 19:11

'Now I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True and in righteousness he judges and makes war...'

The devil, knowing his days are numbered, will strongly resist the spread of the gospel (the good news about Jesus). But Jesus said that the '*gates of hell*' (or the devil's kingdom) will not prevail in keeping people from every tribe, tongue and nation from receiving the gospel. The Church will be victorious in its mission (**Matthew 16:18, Revelation 5:9**). The Apostle Paul makes also makes a similar statement.

Romans 16:20

'And the God of peace will crush Satan (the devil) under your feet shortly.'

When King Jesus returns, all who have died will arise again. There are different views as to the timing of when believers and non-believers will be resurrected, but all believe that it will happen. There will be a time of judgment with condemnation for those who choose not to believe in God, and of reward for those who do believe. The devil and all the spiritual rebellious gods will be punished and they will never again be able to influence mankind. All humans who choose to be separated from God in this life will receive what they want; eternal separation from God in a place called Hell. (**Revelation 18-21**). Jesus starts a new age. '*I am making everything new*' (**Revelation 21:3**)

All is perfect, God dwells with mankind forever

In Genesis, before Adam and Eve entered into sin, God walked with them in pure union and they enjoyed the amazing delights of his fellowship in an environment that was called Eden (**Genesis 1:31**). God described it as 'very good.'

There are differing views as to what will happen when Jesus comes again. One view suggests that after Jesus comes again, there will first of all be a period of 1000 years (referred to as the Millennium) when Jesus will rule on this earth from Jerusalem. Then after the 1000 years will come the final age called 'the eternal age of the New Earth and Heaven'. Another view suggests that after Jesus returns, we will go immediately to the eternal age of the New Earth and Heaven. All viewpoints agree that this whole story will end with all those who believe in Jesus being eternally together with the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit living in our midst for ever and ever in a new global Eden - a new earth

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and heaven. There we will rule with God as God originally intended for Adam and Eve when he gave them dominion over old earth and old heaven (**Genesis 1:28, Revelation 3:21**). The Bible ends with these words.

Revelation 22:20-21

'He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly" Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.'

A Quick Summary of the Above

God formed a plan for the creation of a spiritual realm and an earthly realm. In these two realms, God creates spirit and human beings with whom he will share responsibilities. In his foreknowledge; he knows that spirit and human beings out of their free will rebel against him; yet, because of his love for his creation, he continues his plan. Things do go wrong in both realms; the spirit beings as well as human beings separate themselves from God, through their disobedience to his commands. He could end it all and annihilate what he has created but out of his grace and love he sets in motion a plan to both deal with the spiritual rebellious spirits and draw mankind back to himself. He reveals himself to a man called Abraham. The descendants of Abraham are called the people of God. God's plan is to reveal himself to mankind through his people (Israel). To satisfy his justice, he promises a Saviour who will take the punishment for mankind's disobedience against him. This Saviour is Jesus who is a member of the Godhead, called the Trinity. Jesus comes down from heaven and is born as a human baby through Mary his mother but is conceived by the Holy Spirit; he is therefore fully God and fully man. He teaches people about returning to faith in God and about eternal life. He is put to death by those who did not accept him. Yet his death is in the plan of God. In his death he takes the place of all mankind as the required punishment for sin in order to satisfy the justice of God regarding all the sins of mankind. Jesus rises from the dead and gives a commission to those who believe in him, his disciples, to do what he has done and teach others about faith in God and eternal life through repentance. He then returns to heaven. All of mankind can now receive forgiveness of sins and receive eternal life if they believe in what Jesus has done for them through his death and resurrection. At a time of God's choosing, Jesus will return and those who choose to reject him will receive what they want for eternity. They will remain separated from him and will be sent to a place called Hell; a place that is totally devoid of the love and grace of God. Those who choose to believe in him will go into eternity and live eternally in a perfect new earth with new heavens. God's original plan succeeds, Eden is restored.