

Story of the New Testament

A Biblical Theology of the New Testament

Jesus

Central to the Grand Story presented in Scripture, the Grand Story that our individual stories are caught up in, is one person ... Jesus. Every Old Testament theme, character, conflict, institution, and plot line is looking forward to Jesus. Every story from Genesis to Malachi is aching for One to come and to redeem the people of God.

In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the long-awaited Messiah. This Promised One is who God's people have yearned for centuries, even millennia. And as the story progresses, everything that happens as the Church explodes and the glory of God begins to flood the earth points back to Jesus. The Church growing in Asia and Paul's missionary journeys all have an antecedent event that shapes and forms their stories.

The person and work of Jesus is the focal point of the whole Bible.

Jesus' Life, Death, and Resurrection

In order to study the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we first turn our attention to the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are the historical narratives that give us a direct examination into who He was and what He did.

OUTLINE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY, MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, JOHN

The province of Judea, the homeland of the Jews, came under Roman rule in 63 BC. During the reign of Caesar Augustus, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, probably about the year 4 B.C. John, known as the Baptist, prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus. This ministry of preaching, teaching and healing began with Jesus' baptism and lasted about three years. Growing conflict with the Jews and their religious leaders led eventually to Jesus being sentenced to death by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Jesus was executed by the Romans just outside of Jerusalem, but he rose from death two days later and appeared to his follower on a number of occasions. After a period with them, Jesus was taken up to heaven.¹

Our study will not necessarily dive into each of the gospel narratives, but will scan the story of Jesus through parallel accounts, but especially leaning on Matthew. In a course of this length, we need to be decisive and hang our hat on a few things instead of everything we could say.

Jesus' Birth

The Story: Incarnation (Biblical Event)

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

*Matt. 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"*

(which means, God with us). (Matt 1:21-23)

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 201.

High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:30-33)

The miracle of the Incarnation. Jesus’ birth was by all accounts the miraculous work of God. An unwed, but engaged virgin named Mary was met by an angel in a dream. Mary’s husband, Joseph, also met an angel in a dream. Jesus’ mother, Mary,

“was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:18).

The role of the Holy Spirit. Though not a frequent character in the Old Testament, in both Matthew’s and Luke’s account, the third person of the Trinity is *instrumental* in the conception of the God-man, Christ Jesus. When Mary questions how a virgin could have a child, the angel responds,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Where was Jesus born and who was there? These are important questions to ask of any story in the Bible. A story’s setting is always part of the plot line. Jesus was born in a backwater town with little to no notoriety. Bethlehem was the oft-forgotten, bathroom break before you get to Jerusalem, the Holy city. Instead of being born in the palace in the heavenly city, Jerusalem, Jesus was born in a small town, almost unnoticed in Bethlehem.

What’s more is that the characters in Jesus’ birth story are stock animals, local shepherds, and strangers from the east. No excited family members are present to celebrate. No midwives are there to aid the delivery. At the beginning, just Mary and Joseph are resting with the animals. Eventually social outcasts like shepherds show up on the scene to behold the baby boy. What we’ll come to see next week is that Jesus came to seek and save all who are lost, not just the high and mighty.

Why doesn’t Mark have a birth narrative? The gospel of Mark doesn’t include a birth narrative. Which should lead us to ask the question *Why?* Does Mark not think Jesus’ birth is important? Does Mark not believe that Jesus’ birth happened or happened in the ways the other gospel writers portray? While those positions are possible, they are far less from probable. Mark’s authorial focus is much less on Jesus’ teaching and much more on Jesus’ life. Mark goes to great lengths to show the humanity of Jesus on full display. For example, Mark 1:35 says,

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”

If Mark didn’t believe in the true humanness of Jesus, why would he detail an event that seemingly has no relevance to the story itself. Therefore, it is hard to understand that Mark didn’t believe those things. While we can’t be totally sure as to why Mark withholds a birth narrative, we do know that all authors choose to emphasize certain things over others. We hold that this is the case with Mark.

John’s perspective. John’s perspective is a little different. His gospel account of Jesus’ birth is less narrational or story-driven, and more like a commentary. All he says is,

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The pre-incarnate Word took on flesh, embodied humanity and lived as a person amongst us.

The Story Lines (Biblical-Theological Themes)

Many of the biblical-theological threads that make up the tapestry of the Bible run straight through Jesus' birth. We will examine one of them here.

Genesis. In Genesis 1-2, God created Adam and Eve. He created them and then gave them the mandate to take what He had created and to guard it and keep it, to tend it and cultivate it (Gen 2:15). He created them for relationship. Relationship with each other as well as relationship with Him.

In Genesis 3, that relationship was severed. Sin created shame and guilt and blame among Adam and Eve and even among Adam and God Himself. Because of their rebellion against their Creator, Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden.

...therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:23-24)

But throughout Genesis, and the Bible in general, God has showed His intention to be with His people (e.g. Gen 39:2, 21).

Exodus. In Exodus, God sets out on a rescue plan to redeem His people from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt. He tells Moses to confront the King of Egypt telling him that he,

"shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'" (Ex 4:22-23)

He roots his relationship with His people in his tender, fatherly love. He calls His people His firstborn son.

After God judges all of Egypt through the death of every firstborn son in the land, He leads them through the desert as a pillar of fire in the night and a pillar of cloud by day.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Ex. 13:21-22)

God meets with His people through Moses on a mountain in the Sinai peninsula. In one sense, He is dwelling among them. He leads them by day and night. In another sense, their relationship is still distant. Moses is commanded to tell the people they aren't to come too close to the mountain, were they to touch it, they would die.

And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. 13 No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.'" (Ex. 19:12-13)

Eventually God gives order to create a wooden box called an ark. This ark will be the place where God's glory presides. It will go with His people and along with a tent, called a tabernacle, will be the meeting place of God and His people.

And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. 22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between

the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Ex 25:21-22)

Leviticus. Littered throughout the Law is God's desire for restored relationship. As He explains what keeping the covenant looks like, he declares that part of His work in the Exodus is to make them His people.

I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. 10 You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. 11 I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. 12 And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. 13 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. (Lev 26:9-13)

God will make His dwelling amongst His people. He will walk among His people and be their God and they His people. This echoes language of Genesis 1-2. God walking amongst His image-bearers. God living with those He loves.

Joshua. After God's people traipse around the desert for 40 years, God finally and mercifully let's them enter the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. The Promised Land was meant to be the place, the land where God's people and God meet and dwell together.

Temple. Eventually the Temple in Jerusalem was the upgraded tabernacle (or tent of meeting) where the Ark of God resided. The Temple was to be the place where God and His people met. God's people offered sacrifices to restore relationships broken by sin.

David gets the idea that he is to build God a "house to dwell in."

... the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent."

"Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. (2 Sam 7:2, 5-6)

Though David doesn't build a Temple for God, Solomon, David's son does.

Exile. After Solomon's rule, the kingdom divides under two of his sons. The sin and rebellion of the people eventually leads to God's sending His people into exile yet again. The Northern Kingdom known as Israel falls in 722 and the Southern Kingdom known as Judah falls in 596. God's people live in exile until 538 when Israel is allowed to start sending people back to Jerusalem. As they return, they recognize that it's not the same and their longing to be restored to their God increases over centuries of silence.

Old Testament Summary. Adam and Eve are exiled from God's presence, but God's desire for intimacy immediately sends Him on a mission to reconcile. God comes to dwell with His people from a distance in the wilderness, through the Ark of the Covenant, in the Promised Land, and in the Temple.

This is where we find Jesus. In the midst of this waiting. A voice crying out in the silence that God has not forgotten His promise to dwell amongst His people and be their God.

Our Story (Gospel Implications)

Jesus is the Presence of God Amongst His People. Here in the story of Jesus' birth, we get a formative glimpse into the necessity of the incarnation as it pertains to the greater storyline of the Bible. One of the primary themes that runs throughout the entire Bible is the theme of God's presence. God created mankind to live with Him. He created His image-bearers to have relationship with Him.

Jesus is God with us. Jesus' name in Matthew 1:23, foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 7:14), means "God with us."

*Matt. 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"
(which means, God with us).*

This is part of the purpose of God's redemptive plan, to restore God with us. One of the drumbeats of the Old Testament is the longing for, the aching for a renewal of God with us. And here in this baby, is a picture of God with us.

Jesus is the meeting place between God and man. The Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle was the place where God and man met. These were the designated places where it was okay for God and man to interact. But Jesus is the place where God and man meet.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Tim 2:5)

Because He is both fully God and fully man, He is ontologically the place where God and man meet as well as relationally the place where God and man meet. Inherent to His nature is both God and man. Inherent to his purpose in life and death is to reconcile man to God.

Friends, you and I were made to live in the presence of our God and King. We were made for deep and abiding relationship with him that isn't distant or far off, but is near, is intimate, is close.

One purpose of the gospel narratives is to show that Jesus is fully God and fully man, but that He lived amongst fools and sinners like you and me.

John 1 uses unique language to describe what is happening in the Incarnation.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

The word John uses to say that Jesus "dwelt" among us, means "to tent, or tabernacle." John makes a semantic connection between Jesus' becoming man and His *tabernacling* amongst us.

God with us happens through atonement. Atonement is defined by John Stott as "satisfaction through substitution." Atonement is God's satisfying His own need for justice, assuagement of His own anger and wrath through the substitution of His Son for our sin.

Sin is inherently opposed to relationship. It devours intimacy and creates estrangement. It reorients our hearts to think that relational distance is what is actually healthy and desirable and "good for us."

Without the cross and resurrection of Jesus, God with us doesn't happen fully. The incarnation is but a foretaste of the coming relational reality we will experience in a renewed Heaven and Earth.

God has given all of Himself to be with us. There is nothing truer or better to understand than the fact that God has literally sacrificed Himself in order to restore us to Himself.