

Overview Grand Story of the Bible

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. The King chooses Israel
 - a. A people for the king
 - b. A land for his people

Interlude: between OT & NT

4. The coming of the king (Jesus)
5. The mission of the Church
 - a. From Jerusalem to Rome
 - b. And into all the World
6. Return of the king

Part I: God establishes his kingdom – Creation

In Gen. 2:4 God is referred to as Lord God (Yahweh Elohim). This tells us that the same God who rescues Israel from slavery is the God who made all things (creator). He is our creator & redeemer.

The creation story in Genesis tells us about a Creator God who has made a good creation where humankind may live and enjoy the intimate presence of the Creator himself. This is very different from the creation stories of neighbouring countries.

Purpose of Genesis-story: it gives us a true understanding of the world in which we live, of its divine author, and of our own place in it. It tells us this:

1. God is the divine source of all that is.
2. He stands apart from all other things in the special relationship of Creator to creation.
3. The creation of humankind by God is the high point of all his work.
4. God had in mind a very special relationship between himself and men.

Creation by the word of God means the most radical distinction between Creator and creature. Creation is not somehow an overflow of his being. Instead, it is a product of his personal will.

God is the Sovereign one, he is king over all creation. At the same time there is a personal relationship between the divine king and humankind (Gen. 1:28).

We are made for God. We are also made for one another. And we are made for creation, as God's stewards, to care for it and to be at work within it. As stewards of God's good creation we reflect his image. He is the supreme ruler over all.

This world is God's Kingdom. It is God's good creation. We as his stewards are called to develop it and care for it.

What have we learned so far?

1. The Creator = the Redeemer.
2. Creation story in Genesis is unique.

3. God wants special relationship with humankind.
4. Sharp distinction between creation and Creator.
5. God is sovereign King.
6. We reflect God's image and are stewards in his creation.

Part 2: Rebellion in the Kingdom – the Fall

Evil came into the world because of sin (Genesis 3). Sin is a decision to choose your own way instead of the way of God. It is rebellion against our Creator, it is idolatry (serving someone or something else than God) and it is wanting to be autonomous (to decide yourself what is right and wrong). Sin does not (usually) destroy creation but it gets twisted, corrupted and distorted by sin. In Jesus and by the Spirit God is going to restore creation to what it was meant to be.

Part 3: The King choose Israel – Redemption initiated

A. A people for the King

Also after the fall humankind remains in the image of God (Gen 5:1, 9:6). In the story of Cain & Abel we see the results of sin: jealousy and murder (Gen 4). Cain's sons are developing culture (cities, music, poetry) but they do not use it to honour God. Cultural activity is developing the hidden potentials of God's good creation. It should glorify God.

Genesis 6-9 tells us how evil reaches a climax and God destroys the world with a great flood. Only Noah and his family are saved. Also animals are spared; God is concerned for the whole creation. This story reveals God as a holy Judge and gracious Redeemer.

After the flood God makes a covenant with Noah which extends to the whole of creation (Gen. 9). A covenant relationship is a 'bond in blood sovereignly administered'. Noah is the 2nd Adam: God's purposes for creation remain what they always were.

Genesis 11 tells us of the building of the Tower of Babel. Mankind wants to build his own kingdom, apart from God.

The Abrahamic covenant: blessed to be a blessing. Through Abraham and his descendants (people of Israel) God will bless all nations. God does not forget his purpose for all the nations of the world. Abraham is chosen to be a channel of blessing to others. The covenant between God and Abraham has 3 elements:

1. Personal relationship;
2. A nation (Israel);
3. A land for this nation (Canaan).

Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are the patriarchs of God's people. Three themes are important in the stories about them:

1. God's promises to Abraham are reaffirmed (relationship, people, land);
2. There is the repeated breakdown in family relationships. God still uses them for his purpose.;
3. God overcomes many obstacles to work out his plan for them.

Exodus: formation of a people

God has not forgotten his promise to Abraham: God delivers his people out of Egypt. He revealed himself to Moses as Yahweh, the God who can be trusted and who redeems. At mount Sinai God establishes a covenant relationship with his people and they receive God's law. They are to be a holy people and an example to the nations. Israel is instructed to build the tabernacle, a place of worship where God is present. God journeys with his people. The people of Israel have now a covenant with God with a law (ethics) and a tabernacle (worship).

Leviticus, Numbers & Deuteronomy

The book of **Leviticus** is about Israel living with a holy God. It gives instructions for priests and tells Israel how to do the sacrifices. It also gives detailed instructions about what is holy and what is common (e.g. animals, food and medical conditions). Israel is God's chosen people in every detail of personal and public life.

In the book **Numbers** Israel travels from mount Sinai to the plains of Moab (just outside promised land). A census is taken: there are 600,000 men, which is approx. 2 million people in total. Because of the hardships in the desert, the people start to complain to Moses and to God. After spies have inspected the promised land, Israel fears the giants in the land and again they complain. God's patience is tested and the punishment is that the current generation will not enter the promised land (Num. 13-14). At the end of Numbers Israel has reached the plains of Moab (ch. 22) and the area west of Jordan is occupied (32).vFulfilment of God's promise to Abraham is close!

The book of **Deuteronomy** contains sermons of Moses to equip Israel for their task in the new land. They must be a people bound to God by covenant, a display people for sake of the nations. Moses wants them to learn from the experiences of their parents and he again explains the law of the covenant to them. To love God by obeying these laws is central (6:4-8). The command to drive out the nations in Canaan (7:1-6) is because of the sin of these peoples (Gen 15:16). Israel also needs to destroy all other gods (1st commandment). Moses gives Israel 2 options:

1. Faith & obedience to God means blessing;
2. Unbelief & disobedience results in his curse (30:11-20).

In chapter 31 Joshua is appointed. Moses can only see the land from a distance (32:48-52). Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses.

B: A land for his people

In the book of **Joshua** the people of Israel receive the gift of the land Canaan and the promise of God to Abraham and others is fulfilled.

The book of **Judges** shows us the failure of Israel to be a light to the nations. Joshua is not replaced but Israel is to live directly under the Lord's reign. They do what is evil in eyes of the Lord. They have not driven out all the Canaanites and destroyed their idols. The ever returning cycle in the book of Judges is:

1. Israel worships Baal;
2. This violates covenant and angers the Lord;

3. Lord hands over Israel to enemies;
4. Israel cries out for deliverance;
5. Lord raises up a military leader, a judge.

The first judge is Othniel, the last one Samson. At the end of the book, the situation has become worse. The perfect standard of God's law has been all but forgotten in Israel.

I & II Samuel: After the period of the judges, Israel wants a king. The Lord is their king but they want a king like their neighbours. Kingship in Israel must remain compatible with covenant. Saul is the first king but he is not obedient to God. Then David becomes king. God promises him a dynasty and rest from the enemies (2Sam. 7). Solomon becomes king after David.

I & II Kings: Solomon was known for his wisdom. Wisdom in the Bible is about knowing how to live effectively. It starts with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7). Solomon also built the temple. Symbol of God's presence among his people. Jerusalem is the city for his Name to dwell there. During Solomon's reign Israel was a strong nation and enjoyed peace.

Problems start when:

1. Solomon allows worship at high places,
2. He uses forced labour and
3. He takes many foreign wives.

After his death, the kingdom splits in two: a northern kingdom (Israel, capital Samaria) under Jeroboam and a southern kingdom (Judah, capital Jerusalem) under Rehoboam. Jeroboam makes 2 places of worship in Israel with 2 golden calves: in Dan and in Bethel.

From now on the **prophets** become more important. Prophetic office is a counterbalance to the powerful office of kingship. Elijah (king Ahab, 1Kings 18) and Elisha confront the disobedient kings in Israel. In 722BC Israel is taken by Assyria and deported. End of northern kingdom because of they have been disobedient to the covenant. In 586 BC also Judah is invaded by Babylon and deported. Jerusalem is left in ruins. Have God's purposes to redeem creation through Israel failed?

The prophets have tried to warn Israel for the coming exile but without result. But God's purposes for the redemption of his creation remain. Jeremiah talks about a new covenant and all nations worshipping God.

Ezra & Nehemiah: Israel returns to the land - In 539 BC the Persian king Cyrus defeats Babylon and allows the Israelites to return to their land. The book of Esther is set during the reign of the Persian king Xerxes. Even though God's name is not mentioned in the book, the story tells us that God is protecting his people.

In the book of Ezra we read about the rebuilding of the temple (516 BC) and in the book of Nehemiah about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (445 BC).

The future of Israel remains uncertain but the prophets speak of a future Messiah and salvation for the nations.

Interlude: waiting for an ending – the intertestamental period

Jewish community in Palestine & the diaspora - Minority returned from exile. Diaspora Jews establishing synagogues for worship & study. Five fundamental beliefs in Israel's faith:

1. **Monotheism:** one God, Creator & Ruler of history.
2. **Election:** God had chosen Israel for special purpose.
3. **Torah:** law to direct Israel's way of life as a holy people.
4. **Land:** holy, especially Temple. Exile because of their own unfaithfulness.
5. **Future redemptive act** of God: restore Israel.

Growing tension: from Persia to Rome

- **Life within the Persian empire:** Israel remained a nation in exile! Shame of exile is still there.
- **Greek empire under Alexander the Great:** in 331 BC Alexander conquered the Persians. Now Greek domination. Threat was especially in cultural area. Septuagint (LXX): OT in Greek language. Pressure to conform to pagan patterns would only intensify. Alexander died in 323 BC. Struggle among his generals. Two dynasties: the Ptolemies (Egypt) & the Seleucids (Syria). Israel in between. First ruled by one, then by other.
- **Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes:** he needs to pay tributes to Rome and struggles with ethnic diversity of Greek empire. His 'solutions': looting (for tribute) and forcing people to adopt Hellenistic (Greek) culture (Hellenizing). For Jews: circumcision, Sabbath observance, sacrifice etc. forbidden. On 25 Dec. 167 BC Antiochus IV deliberately desecrated the temple > altar to Zeus, pig sacrifice.
- **Maccabean revolt:** Priest Mattathias ben Johanan organized band of rebels with 5 sons. His son Judah Maccabee (= the hammer) formed Maccabeans. On 25 Dec. 164 BC he cleaned out the temple > Hanukkah feast. Twenty years later Seleucid rule removed (142 BC) and self-rule of Jewish rulers (Judah's older brother Simon) for 80 years. God had acted to deliver his people! Yet Jewish rulers were deeply compromised by pagan, Hellenistic culture.
- **Israel within fist of Rome:** 63 BC Roman army takes Jerusalem and brings Israel within Roman empire (for 500 years). Rome rules Israel indirectly through puppet kings & governors. Romans brutal and demanding: force, fear & intimidation. Those who collaborated with Rome: priests & tax collectors, Herod, etc. Longing for God's rule. Hope for God's kingdom was intense! Different ideas about Messiah but idea of suffering Messiah was absent.

Different expressions of Israel's hope

- **Pharisees** wanted: 1. separation from pagan corruption & 2. radical obedience to Torah. Pharisees were teachers of the law in synagogues. Popular, they voiced desire of people.
- **Essenes** wanted to reverse assimilation to Hellenistic culture by withdrawal. Formed an alternative community outside Jerusalem. Their faithfulness to Torah would bring God back to restore Israel.
- **Sadducees & priests** were official teachers of the law & recognized reps of mainline Jewish religion. Together with Pharisees: ruling council, Sanhedrin. Collaborated with Romans. Maintain status quo.

- **Zealots:** loosely organized, different levels of society, also Pharisees. Inspired by old priest Mattathias. Loyal to Torah, resisted compromise, use of violence, willing to be martyred.
- **Common people:** not members of any party. Do their duties and wait in hope.

In this context Jesus announces that the Kingdom had come to Israel and was present in Him.

Part 4: The coming of the King - Redemption accomplished

Central theme in Jesus' mission: Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15).

Jesus prepares for his kingdom mission: His **birth** = incarnation, miraculous, by the power of the H. Spirit. Jesus wants to be **baptized** (Mark 1:9-11) & confirmation of his calling: the anointed king to inaugurate the kingdom of God. **Temptation** by Satan (Matt. 4:1-11). Three paths:

1. Stones > bread, populist Messiah, give the people what they want.
2. Temple > angels, messianic wonder-worker;
3. Political Messiah, military shortcut to the throne but bow for Satan.

He chooses the hard road into the kingdom: humble service, self-giving love & sacrificial suffering.

Jesus launches his kingdom mission in Galilee: Good news has arrived. Demands a response: repent & believe and follow him (Mark 1:15-17). Jesus' claim as Messiah validated by amazing acts that reveal saving power of God.

- (1) Healing of blind (Luke 18:35-43), lame (Mark 2:1-12) & deaf (Mark 7:31-6) & leper (Luke 17:11-19) > to end the reign of sickness and pain.
- (2) Calms the sea (Mk 4:35-41), feeds hungry (Mk 8:1-10) > demonstrates power of God to restore a cursed creation.
- (3) Raises Lazarus (John 11), Jairus's daughter (Mk 5:21-43) > power of God conquering even death.

The sources of Jesus' power are the H. Spirit and prayer.

Jesus arouses opposition to his kingdom mission: Jewish leaders, Pharisees & teachers of law disturbed by Jesus' teaching & actions (Mk 2:1-12). Jesus challenges the status quo, announcing a radically different view of the kingdom. Jewish leaders expect that Israel will be suddenly and forcibly delivered. Jesus preaches: love for neighbours & Israel to be channel of blessing for nations.

Jesus gathers a community: Jesus gathers a community around him (Mk 1:16-20; 2:13-14). Primarily within Israel. Prophetic: the end-time gathering of Israel has begun (Ezek. 37; 39:23-9). But not limited to Israel. Nations will share in its salvation. He appoints 12 disciples, apostles (Mk 3:13-19). 12 = 12 tribes of Israel, the nucleus of the renewed nation (Luke 22:30). Purpose for the 12: A. that they might be with Jesus. B. send out, preach & heal. Disciple = to live like Jesus, obey his teaching & take active part in his mission.

Jesus welcomes sinners & outcasts: Within his kingdom community, Jesus includes the poor, sick and lost – all those who are marginalized within Israel. He has come to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19.10).

Jesus explains the kingdom with his parables:

- (1) The kingdom **does not come all at once**. It is present, but also future.... Seems contradiction! Parable of sower and of the weeds (Matt 13:24-30): has begun (sowing) but not yet here in fullness.
- (2) In the present, the kingdom **does not come with irresistible power**. Farmer sowed his seed (Mk 4:1-20 & Matt 13:1-23). Messiah does not come as a military conqueror but as a humble farmer.
- (3) The final **judgment is reserved for the future**. Parable of weeds and others. Also: Matt. 25:1-46.
- (4) The **full** revelation of the kingdom is **postponed** to allow many to enter it during the present age. Luke 14:15-24 > lost must also be brought in to share at the banquet table.

Jesus journeys outside Galilee: Jesus goes into Gentile territory. As opposition grows, he turns to the instruction of his disciples, preparing them to carry on the work.

Who is Jesus?

- (1) Mark 8:27-30: **Christ** > Messiah, anointed one. During intertestamental period: this term had political & military overtones. That's why Jesus tells them to not tell anyone. People's expectations must be adjusted. Jesus is God's chosen one, to usher in God's kingdom, but he is also the crucified victim.
- (2) Matt. 16:16 adds '**Son of the living God**'. Son of God = title given to Israel's kings. Special relationship to God. True for Jesus in unique way: intimacy with Father & messianic task.
- (3) Mark 8:38 > **Son of Man**. See Daniel 7:13-14. Son of man = Israel's messiah. (4) Mark 9:2-8 > Jesus' identity confirmed. For a moment the disciples see the unveiled glory and majesty of the Son of Man, the son of God

Jesus journeys to Jerusalem: After short period in Gentile area, Jesus sets out toward Jerusalem (Lk 9:51) for the final confrontation.

The way of the cross & discipleship: Jesus instructs his disciples that he must suffer and will be rejected and killed but they don't understand (Lk 9:44-45). Jesus describes discipleship as a way to be followed, a journey to be taken. To follow Jesus means to walk the way of the cross (Luke 9:23-24). Discipleship is costly (Lk 9:57-62). To follow Jesus is also to participate in his mission (Lk 10:1-24). His disciples must love God and their neighbours (10:25-37).

Jesus concludes his kingdom mission in Jerusalem: When Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, there is growing hostility and his teaching is about judgment. Jesus performs 3 striking, prophetic actions:

- (1) **Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey**. Like a king to enter the city > Jesus is laying claim on David's throne. Prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-13. But crowd/disciples do not understand what kind of king Jesus is (John 12:16). Humble and gentle king on a donkey, not on a war horse (Matt 21).
- (2) **Jesus enacts judgment on the temple**. Mark 11:12-17. Temple is most important symbol of Judaism and centre of Jewish hope. Jesus weeps because Israel misunderstood judgment. It will not come on gentiles but on unfruitful Israel (Lk 19:41-44). Now Jesus

enacts this judgment on the temple. He shuts down operations in the temple. Temple should be a place to which all people will come to acknowledge God of Israel. But it has become a place where violence & vengeance is encouraged: a den of revolutionaries (Mk 11:17). Jesus will be the new temple (John 2:21). The resurrection of Jesus will bring new life for God's people and they will be a light for the nations.

(3) **Jesus symbolizes his death.** Passover meal (Mk 14:12-26) > climax. Not only remembering but also looking forward to new exodus, deliverance of Israel. Jesus gives meal a new meaning: bread = his body > death will mean life for his people. Cup = blood of the covenant > in his death, Jesus will bring the new covenant, the forgiveness of sins, the kingdom of God for which Israel longs.

Jesus is arrested & tried

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry his enemies have been plotting against him. While in Jerusalem for Passover, Judas Iskariot helps the Jewish leaders to arrest Jesus. Jesus submits to the will of his Father. His trial took place in 2 stages. First a Jewish part: a. before Annas (John 18); b. before Caiaphas (Mk 14) and c. before the Sanhedrin (Mk 15). Then a Roman part: a. before Pilate (Mk 15); before Herod (Lk 23) and again before Pilate (Mk 15). Pilate sentences Jesus to death.

In his death Jesus secures the victory of God's kingdom

Crucifixion was a terrible and humiliating death penalty. The NT sees it as God's judgment against sin and his power to renew the creation. Looking back to the cross thru the lens of the resurrection, the NT-writers see the crucifixion as God's **victory** on Satan, as the ultimate **sacrifice** of the Lamb of God and as the moment that Jesus died **on behalf of** all people, bearing God's judgment.

In his resurrection, Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God

The resurrection stand at the centre of the Christian faith. The Jews were only expecting the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. NT: Resurrection is the beginning of God's renewal of creation. Jesus is the first to rise from the death. Three images: firstborn, first fruits & pioneer. All God's people and all of creation will share in his resurrection life. Jesus commands his disciples to carry on with his kingdom mission in this world.

Part 5: Spreading the news of the King - The mission of the church

5a: From Jerusalem to Rome

Luke carries on the story of the coming of God's kingdom in the book of **Acts**. Jesus is taken up into heaven (ch. 1). Jesus Christ is Lord over all the earth. This confession brings conflict & suffering to the believers. The real enemies of God's kingdom are the spiritual powers of evil that oppose God's rule. Final defeat of evil comes by loving power of the gospel.

On Pentecost the Spirit is poured out (ch. 2). Three signs: wind (new life), fire (God's presence) and different languages: the gospel is no longer confined to the Jewish nation. The exalted Christ will now work thru his Spirit to bring good news to the ends of the earth.

The Spirit forms a community (ch. 2). The church in Acts has **3 qualities**:

- (1) committed to teaching, fellowship, holy communion & prayer;
- (2) Life of Christ is manifested thru wonders/signs, justice & mercy;
- (3) they grow in number, are attractive to outsiders.

The Church witnesses in Jerusalem, in Samaria & Judea and to the ends of the earth

In the book of Acts we see that the expansion of the Gospel happens in 3 stages:

- Jerusalem (3.1-6.7),
- Judea & Samaria (6.8-11.18) &
- Roman empire & Rome (11.19-28.31).

The Gospel is spread through

1. The work of the exalted Christ;
2. The Spirit;
3. The church and
4. the word of God (Acts 6.7).

The life of the community of believers authenticates the truth of the good news. The Gospel is spread outside Jerusalem because of persecution. The church in Antioch is planted and we read about the conversion of Saul (Paul). He plays the most important role in taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul & Barnabas are sent out from the church in Antioch and Paul made 3 missionary journeys, planting churches and building them up to be witnessing kingdom communities. After his last trip Paul is arrested and finally taken to Rome where he most probably has been executed.

Paul unfolds the gospel in his letters. Paul is a missionary pastor: establishing churches and applying the good news in their situation. **Paul's teaching:** the kingdom of God has arrived in the death & resurrection of Christ. Crucifixion is end of the old age (Christ took God's curse) and resurrection is start of new age & kingdom (new life). But the kingdom has not arrived yet in fullness. Darkness of sin & rebellion is still around us. In this time: church's work of mission can be accomplished before the final revelation of the kingdom.

Paul's concern to bring the new communities of believers to mature in their faith & witness.

2 images:

- (1) church as new temple of God (Eph. 2:21-22) and
- (2) growth of a human body (Eph. 4:15) or a field crop (1Cor 3:5-9).

Also: We are given new life in the kingdom and we are to live as **obedient** citizens of that kingdom, empowered by the Spirit. This is a life of love and the results are the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5).

Why do we do this? Paul: **for the sake of the world.** So that others also will be drawn to Christ. The witness of church is to spill over into public life. We need to be visible in the life of the surrounding culture while avoiding the pollution of that culture (Phil. 2:15).

Part 5B: And into all the world.

How do we continue the story of Acts?

- A. **Being a light to the world** (continuing the mission of Israel) [1Peter 2:9-12].

- B. **Introducing the kingdom** (continuing the mission of Jesus) [John 20:21]. Words & actions.
- C. **Bearing faithful witness** (continuing the mission of the early Church). The church is to be a preview of what the future in God's kingdom will be. We are living in *hope*: straining toward what is ahead!

Part 6: The return of the King – Redemption completed

God's ultimate purpose is the restoration & renewal of God's good creation: healed, redeemed & restored (Rev. 21:1-5). Restored peace between Creator & creation and also healed relationship between people. The book of Revelation gives us a glimpse into the heavenly throne room. We see the spiritual battle that is going on and that is shaping the world's history. Original context: Christians facing persecution. Message: God will triumph, Jesus is in control of world's events.

Events preceding the end:

- a. Jesus returns;
- b. the dead are raised bodily (some sharing in new creation, others to endure final wrath) and
- c. the world comes before Christ to be judged. Don't focus on the labour pains but focus on the baby!

Salvation is restoration and implies continuity & discontinuity. It will be comprehensive. Both cosmic & personal. Also human cultural development and work will continue (Rev. 21:24-26).

Finally, 3 times a promise: Behold, I am coming soon! (22:7,12,20)