

The Epic Story:

Does the Bible Answer Mankind's Questions and Needs?



Image: Codex Sassoon – dated around 1000AD is the oldest complete Bible in the world

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After all these years we still have the Bible and it's still the bestselling book in history. Why? Some of you were raised religiously but now you may feel a haunting tension between what you were taught in the past and what you know now. Some of you were not raised religiously at all. Either way, what do we do with the Bible today? Is it completely true, completely myth or some kind of uncertain mix of the two? Is it still relevant for us modern Americans living in the 21st century or has it become more and more antiquated and out of touch with reality? In this booklet, I hope to present to you a way to view the Bible that should be compelling and might lead you to eventually believe it as true. I'd like to present this booklet as an "exploration" we go on together – a journey of personal consideration and discovery.

As the writer, I am committing myself to assist you in considering a way to view the Bible that we all can connect with; whether we live in the 1st or 21st century. I will do so in an informative, humble and respectful way. As the reader, I ask that you commit yourself to come with an open mind and heart in considering the view of the Bible I will present. I ask that you do so in a respectful, fair way between you and I. So, here we go.

Exploration Introduction:

Most of us love stories. I am particularly thinking of stories that are epic. Think of one of your favorite epic movies for instance. We love epic stories because of the drama, the struggle, the character development, the battle of evil and good, the victory of good over evil and the mark the story may have made in history.

I want to put forth a case that we should think about the Bible as an **EPIC STORY**¹. Why do I propose that the Bible is like an epic story? I believe it's truly epic because it answers the ultimate questions every human seeks – where did I come from? Why am I here? What went wrong in the world? How is the wrong fixed? Where am I and all of history going? Any religion or philosophy that's worth following has to answer these questions and give us reasonable answers². Referencing the epic story *Lord of the Rings*, Ralph Wood, in his book *The*

¹ This image fails in that movies and stories are made up by man. I am not claiming that the Bible is simply a human construct. It is different. Christians believe its source is the eternal, personal God who lives outside of time and culture.

² In other words, it furnishes us with a "worldview" – A worldview can be described as *the way a person interprets himself and the world which, in turn, affects how he lives with himself and lives in the world.*

Gospel According to Tolkien, says, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ is more than a fairy-story because it is not a human discovery or invention: it is an actuality that occurred in space and time. Christ was actually born, and He actually lived and died and was resurrected. Here is God’s own story wherein the Teller of the tale becomes its chief Actor. Rather than cancelling all other stories, however, this is the one that they all have been stumbling on and pointing to. The Gospel is the completion and fulfillment of all other stories.”³ Do not all humans hunger for some ultimate, epic story and find our place in it? If the Bible gives us a reasonably reliable answers to these ultimate questions, then we are on our way to saying that the Bible is still relevant for us today. Sounds interesting? Keep reading.

Exploration Snapshot: The Overarching Plotline of the Bible

All epic stories have some overarching plotline. In brief, here is the overarching plotline of the Bible (graphic below). In the rest of this booklet, we will examine each stage of this essential, basic plotline of the Bible. I hope that you will see that each stage of the plotline helps answer the ultimate questions all humans ask, including you. If so, then I really believe the Bible offers a message that you will connect with even though it was written 2000 years ago. Still interested? Let’s dig deeper.



³ Ralph Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien*, Philadelphia, PA: WJK Press, 25.

Exploration Stage 1: Creation (“all is good”)

When you think of the words “order” and “peace” what positive images come to mind? I bet the words or images that come to your mind are accurate descriptions of how the Bible describes how the world was originally meant to be. In the world creation account of Genesis chapters one and two, we see the words “good” and “very good” used many times. The world was designed to work well – God with humans, humans with God, humans with other humans, and humans with the earth. These first two chapters of this epic story tell us some very good and fundamental things. The Bible says a good God created us and created us with dignity. We were designed to have personhood like God does. We are to relate with him and with one another in a loving, purposeful and fulfilling way. God also gave humans purpose and a basic job description to live our lives by. Here are a couple, sample verses from Genesis chapter one.

Genesis 1:1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:26-28: Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Let me explain these sample verses a little more for you. This will put muscle on the bones of these basic statements, or add color to the painting:

First, the author’s (Moses) purpose for writing the creation account was not just to give us a sufficient, scientific explanation of the creation of the world, though it does that.⁴ It was also to give a truthful account of the one true God and *how and why* He created the world in comparison to all the other ancient, Middle Eastern myth stories at the time of Moses (1500 B.C). Many of these myth stories were very complex and contradictory, with a mixture of many gods fighting for control, no regard for human life as valuable and with very little information about why we are here – a reason to give humans and human history meaning.

⁴ See further creation.com for many great articles on the topic. Of course Moses wasn’t there and we have no video camera footage. We believe God revealed this “first part of the epic story” to Moses supernaturally.

Second, in Hebrew the term “God” often means Yahweh – He is a God who is holy but also loving and is committed to the well-being of His creation, in particular mankind. He is also understood as self-existing (I AM), only one God, not one of many gods, He’s eternal, all good and is all sovereign.

Third, In Hebrew the term “created” means what was created comes from a singular cause, and this cause is a being (God) who is creative, powerful and creates the world with a design or overall purpose built into it. It actually goes as far to say that God created the world “ex nihilo” - spoke it into existence out of nothing. It also incorporates the idea that God’s creating of the world, and humans, is done with a fatherly love.

Fourth, in Hebrew the term “dominion” means rule, order, or stewardship. Mankind was given responsibility to care for the future of the world and the human race. We are to do so as servants or representatives of God on earth.

Fifth, you see the introduction of a very important term that reappears multiple times throughout the whole “epic story” of the Bible. It is the term “Image of God.” A good, short definition of this important term is “The image of God refers to the immaterial part of humanity made after God’s likeness. It sets human beings apart from the animal world, fits them for the dominion-stewardship God intended them to have over the earth, gives mankind meaning, value and enables them to commune with their Maker. It is a likeness mentally, morally, and socially.⁵”

Sixth, connected to the important term “Image of God” is the command from God to Adam and Eve to “Be fruitful and multiple and subdue the earth.” In seminal form, this is mankind’s job description. Besides worshipping and submitting to God, God gave us a role to play in establishing His kingdom on earth through “culture making”. Mankind is meant to get

⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/image-of-God.html>. Note: Though we are made in God’s image (having personhood), there are some attributes of God we do not have. These are called “incommunicable attributes” and includes that God is all knowing, all present, all eternal and all powerful.

married, have families, labor, govern, play, influence others for God, establish orderly societies, build homes and churches, gardens, hospitals, etc. all under the right and good rule of God.

ORDER and PEACE. These words are excellent, one word summaries of the purpose of the Genesis account. God created things to have order and to function under His Sovereign, good rule since He alone is God. Also, when people live according to this order, they will have peace with God and one another from generation to generation.

Let me close this first stage of our exploration by asking a question. Does this part of the Bible give a reasonably sufficient answer the first two of our ultimate questions “where did I come from?” and “why am I here?” Honestly, I believe it does.

Exploration Stage 2: Fall (“things go bad”)

But, as well we all know, the world is not working very well today. What happened? I believe the Bible gives us a very plausible answer to the next of our ultimate questions – what’s wrong with the world? Keep exploring with me.

Here are two sample passages from the Bible, one written by Moses right after chapters one and two of Genesis and one written many years later by the Apostle Paul. The Bible assumes both accounts to be both humanly reasonable and actually true history. Read through these accounts and see what you think. As in exploration stage one, I will fill in some commentary to help us further understand these passages the best we can.

Genesis 3:1-7: Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” **2** And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, **3** but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” **4** But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. **5** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” **6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Romans 1:18-25: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. **19** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. **20** For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. **21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. **24** Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, **25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Wow, some good things are said, some weird things are said and yes, some hard things are said. Here's some explanation of Genesis 3:1-7 to consider:

First, Satan questions God and tries to get humans to doubt God. This produced the original form of confusion over truth. It's an authority issue. It begs the question, who is in charge of my life – me or God? Who should Adam and Eve listen to? Second, Satan tried to tempt humans to be able to have the same authority as God, and thus, eventually, being able to be their own god – dismissing the real God, their Maker. Third, after disobeying their Maker, their conscience was struck causing guilt and shame, knowing they not only disobeyed and distrusted God, but that they were dismantling the ORDER God gave to the world. They sensed this would have consequences both vertically and horizontally now, thus affecting PEACE⁶.

⁶ Common questions many people ask about “the fall” is: why did God allow this to happen? Why did He not fix it right away? And why does He still allow the effects of the fall to go on today?” Biblical answers to these questions are far beyond the reach of this short booklet. However, a short answer, in the context of this booklet, could be this: (1) Real life happens within the context of relationships, within the framework of a basic plotline of history God designed and happens over a period of time. Relationships, horizontally, as well as vertically, have to have good, bad, blessing, suffering, etc. to be real. So does a good plotline of history if it's going to be authentic. And all of this has to happen over a period of time. That is true life. Messiness is a mark of reality. (b) God ordained/allowed the fall in His sovereign rule over history – that it will all go the direction He plans and purposes. However, under that sovereignty, God also allows humans free will to choose to rebel and do evil. Adam and Eve chose to believe the lies of Satan and go their own way apart from God. They are responsible for their choice and its consequences. However, this does not surprise God, and He redeems it by sending a Rescuer to fix the problem. God did not fix it right away because He, being the designer of the whole epic story, knew the fall (stage 2) had to happen in order for stage 3 (redemption) to come. Stage 3 is great news because stage 2 is terrible. God is still allowing the effects of the fall to plague us, in part, because it should cause us to look for the hero, the rescuer God sent – who the Bible tells us is Jesus. And of course, all of this makes us hope for the story ending well, where everything is made right again one day (stage 4). [Note: why do we think God should make life not include suffering? Do we think, in order for Him to exist and to be a good God, he should not allow any suffering to exist?]

Here's some explanation of Romans 1:18-25 to consider:

First, God's righteous judgement has to fairly fall on disobedience and rebellion, just like a good quality justice system should. It's an authority, order and righteousness issue. Second, what are the characteristics of Adam and Eve's disobedience which affects all humans since⁷? The text says humans

- a. "Suppress the truth": like trying to hold a beach ball under the water. Sinful, selfish humans now want to push down God's definition of truth and how life is supposed to be. In the words of Frank Sinatra, humans now want to "do it my way."
- b. "Exchange the truth": humans have traded God's way for their own way. They feel that their way is "worth more" or is more valuable to them than God's way.
- c. Because humans choose to suppress and exchange God's truth for their own opinions on truth, the text says that "their minds become futile." In Greek, this literally means "wandering off." The text also says their "hearts become darkened." In Greek, this literally means "cold and resistant to God".
- d. This causes an interesting juxtaposition – "claiming to be wise, they become fools".
- e. They begin to value, and give glory, to themselves and other man-centered things, instead of the Being that has the highest value and worthy of the most glory in the world – God.
- f. They exchange the truth about God for a lie – created humanity tries to become god-like and self-sufficient.
- g. They not only exchanged truth for a lie, but that exchange caused them to go all the way down the road to turning human-centered things into objects of worship. Today this can include ourselves, our jobs, sex, cars, politics, etc. These are things we value and put our hope in. The Bible calls this "idols of the heart".

⁷ We call this original sin. Sadly, because of it, by nature now, everyone is a sinner. See Romans 5:12-14. Each person sins because original sin has so corrupted our will to choose good or bad, that we now are naturally bent toward sin and selfishness.

- h. God then “gave them over” – God let them go down the self-destructive path and see where it leads. I will have to say that the “social experiment” going on in the city of Portland Oregon today is a clear example of this. It isn’t going well at all.

Second, all of what the Apostle Paul is describing here can be summed up in one commonly used over 400 times in the Bible - SIN. Sin, in the Bible, is defined as “anything we think, say, feel or do that disobeys God and His right and good rule over us.” Sin causes the discord we see now among all people in history and separates us from our relationship with God, our Maker. It deeply and historically corrupts ORDER and PEACE, both horizontally and vertically.

Third, the text tells us some sad news. As in any fair and good legal system, rightly but sadly, sin against God deserves and requires just punishment.

This begs the question I hope you are all asking - can this problem ever be fixed? If so, who will fix this major problem and how? Fortunately, the Bible gives us an answer this question in exploration stage three.

Like stage one of our exploration, let me end this stage with another question for you: Does this part of the Bible give a reasonably sufficient answer the question “what went wrong in the world?” In all honestly, I believe it does.

Exploration Stage 3: Redemption (“a hero comes on a rescue mission”)⁸

When you think of the word “rescue” what comes to mind? By now I hope that you might wonder, or even doubt, whether mankind is able to save ourselves. The Bible argues that,

⁸ You will notice that we have skipped over most of the Old Testament. This is due to two reasons: (1) time – this is a booklet, and (2) Though everything in the Old Testament has historical value for that time-God’s dealings with Israel, the New Testament tells us that most of the important lessons learned in the Old Testament are a “pointing forward to fulfillment in Christ” (Rom. 15:4, 2 Cor. 1:20). For instance, Jesus is called the true and final Passover Lamb. This is Jesus fulfilling everything the Passover lamb signified and could not ultimately fulfill for people (Ex. 12, 1 Cor. 5:7).

sadly, we cannot. So, what is the answer to our next ultimate question – how will the wrong be fixed?

Fortunately, because God is a loving and powerful God as well as a just God, the Bible says that God himself, the one offended by our sin and rebellion toward him, mercifully came up with a rescue plan that would both save mankind from ourselves and from God’s judgement on our sin and rebellion⁹. If this is true, then I hope you would agree it sounds like “good news.”

Here are a couple sample passages from the Bible that talk about this rescue plan; which is good news if it’s really true. These samples come from the pen of the Apostle Paul who experienced these things first hand¹⁰. Give Paul the benefit of the doubt when reading these sentences.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4: For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

1 Corinthians 15:12-20: Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? **13** But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. **14** And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. **15** We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. **16** For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. **17** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19** If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. **20** *But, in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Ephesians 2:1-10: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with

⁹ God came up with this plan to save us from judgement and transform us to be more like His Jesus before stage 1 even happened (Eph. 1:3-5). He implemented this plan in stage 3. Note: Remember this idea of the “image of God” in stage one? This rescue plan not only grants us reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sin by faith in Jesus dying in our place, it also is the beginning of God, slowly but surely, restoring the original “image of God” in Christians. The image of God will not be fully restored until the new heaven and new earth time (see stage 4).

¹⁰ After many years of studying the Bible personally, academically and professionally, I believe there are many reasons why we can trust that Paul is being truthful with us in these passages.

which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Let me add some explanation here as well:

First, 1 Cor. 15:3-4 is the earliest, fundamental creed of Christianity. It is what all of Christianity was built on and continues to stand on today. The Old Testament predicted it, and these things came true historically and were witnessed by many people as described in 1 Cor. 15:5-8. Paul says that this is of first importance. Also, it actually says that Jesus gave this truth to him, he did not make it up himself. This is the “rescue plan” in a nutshell.

Second, 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 is a rhetorical argument that actually is true. Paul understands that the resurrection sounds mythical and he once persecuted Christians for their beliefs. But now he cannot deny that the resurrection actually happened and had a purpose behind it. If it’s not true or didn’t happen, then we are still “in our sins” (not saved from God’s judgement) and our faith is really just a useless belief. The resurrection of Christ is not only the centerpiece of Christianity, it’s the centerpiece or “pivot” of world history and the epic story God wrote and is currently playing out.

Third, Ephesians 2:1-10 is a good, brief explanation of this rescue plan. In this passage, the Bible says our sin produced and produces both physical death spiritual death (separation from God). Because of it, we can no longer live in loving ORDER and PEACE with God and others that we were originally designed to do. But, God, the offended party and righteous Judge, took the *initiative* to reconcile us to himself and rescue us from His judgement on us! Our condition was so bad, there was nothing we could invent or do good enough to fix it or reconcile us to God. God did this by sending Jesus to live and die in our place, as our *substitute*. To God, it was the only way to fix the situation.¹¹ But, the greatest news of all is that there is nothing we have to do to contribute to this rescue plan! The text says it is a “gift of God.” What is the nature of a gift? It is something of value lovingly given from someone to someone else with no expectation of

¹¹ See also Romans 5:1.

payment back for it. *In other words, in order for us to be rescued, all we have to do is two things: (a) admit that we need rescuing (this can be the hardest part) and (b) believe (trust in) that Jesus lived a perfect life in my place and died on the cross in my place in order that I might receive forgiveness for my sin and rebellion toward God.* Note: verse ten does tell us that “good works” are a part of our salvation – but they flow from, and are a result of, our salvation. They are not something that will earn our salvation.

In other words, Christians believe that this rescue (salvation) happens by FAITH alone, In CHRIST alone, by the GRACE of God alone. That’s good news!

- a. Faith alone is understanding, assent and trust in an object worthy enough to fully rescue you.
- b. Christ alone is the object of our faith. He alone could live a perfect, holy life in our place and he alone could take on the rightful punishment for our sins in our place. It’s very judicial in nature.
- c. Grace Alone is that all of this rescue plan is based solely on the unmerited favor of God alone. Nothing we can add to or subtract from His goodness toward us to rescue us.

C.S. Lewis, the famous British novelist and writer, who once was an atheist and then became a Christian, has famously said of Jesus’ claims, “*“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [that is, Christ]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”*¹²

¹² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 55-56.

I love that quote. I think Lewis is right. Let me close this stage of our exploration going back to our ultimate questions. Does this part of the Bible give a reasonably sufficient answer the question “how is the wrong fixed?” Yes, I think it does.

Exploration Stage 4: Restoration (“things are good, even better, again”)

When you think of the words “restoration” and “victory” what comes to mind? I believe these words are great pictures of how the Bible says the epic story ends. Our final ultimate question is “where am I and all of history going?” Here are a couple of passages from the Bible that describe how the Bible says the epic story of human history will end. One is from the Apostle Paul again and the other from the famous book titled Revelation, written by the Apostle John around 90ad¹³.

Romans 8:22-25 and 30: For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Revelation 21:1-5: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place^[a] of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,^[b] and God himself will be with them as their God.^[c] ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

¹³ Though it might seem crazy, as Christians we believe that God is ultimately the author of the Bible and communicated what He wanted us to know through the lives and hands of a few men specially called to such a task. Examples of such men are the Apostles Paul and John. Read for instance 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. Of course, there are other ways in which we can argue for this belief other than quoting scripture.

Wow, as you can see, one day, God will restore everything to be good, maybe even better, than things were originally meant to be back at the beginning of the epic story, Genesis chapters 1-2. That is something that gives us hope as we go through this tough world now.

Here is what Romans 8:22-25 is telling us:

First, both we, and the created world, yearn for all things to get better again.

Second, the word “hope” in the Bible this does not mean, “Well, I just hope it comes true”. In Greek, hope means “confident assurance of a future occurrence”. Thus, biblical hope is that if Jesus and God promises us eternal life and full restoration of how things are meant to be, rest upon that in faith for now, looking forward to it coming true one day soon. Hope keeps us going. Who doesn’t need hope today – especially a hope that pertains to life after death?

Here is what Romans 8:30 is telling us:

First, God is in control of all things and will cause all things to lead to a Christian’s growth, well-being and eternal life. Jesus affirms our value and God’s intimate work in our lives in Matthew 10:29-31.

Second, God has a purpose in developing and implementing this rescue plan both globally and for each individually who places their faith in Jesus as their savior and Lord. Who doesn’t need a sense of peace in life? And this purpose comes from God not our own dreams or imaginations.

Third, God is the active party in this rescue plan from beginning to end. We are involved – we are required to *believe*¹⁴ in order to receive the benefits; but we play a recipient role. God initiated the plan, God fixed the problem through Christ and the cross, God draws us to believe this and to convict us of our need for Him and God will stay with us and carry us to the end.

Here is what Revelation 21:1-5 is telling us:

¹⁴ See page 15 for how the Bible defines this key word – used over 200x in the New Testament (96 in the gospel of John alone).

First, one day heaven and earth will be totally restored, made new again. This is a sort of “return to Eden” and the way things were supposed to be.

Second, the text says “I will be their God and they will be my people.” We will dwell with (make home) one another and with our Maker, perfectly for all eternity. ORDER and PEACE perfectly restored again for those who place their faith in Christ as their savior and Lord.

Third, the effects of sin in this life will no longer be experienced vertically and horizontally. All things will be truly new.

I will return to our ultimate questions one final time. Does this part of the Bible give a reasonably sufficient answer the questions “where am I and history going?” Yes, I believe it does. You might say that this is an amazing “The End” to this most epic of all epic stories.

Well, there’s the key message or plotline of the Bible. We’ve ended our short exploration¹⁵. Of course, a lot more can be said and I know you have many questions. But for now, can you see why I call it an epic story? Does this epic story feel compelling to you? It sure did to me back when I placed my faith in Jesus in 1991 and it still does to me today. I’m not here to try to make you believe it or try to prove it to you. I’m here to hopefully help you see that because the Bible is an epic story and because it answers all those fundamental questions about life reasonably well, it is a worldview worth considering to be true as it claims to be.

So, now what? My short answer to you is either (a) keep considering these things. Stay in touch with me if you want. Or (b) trust in and follow Jesus, the hero of this “rescue plan” *today* to find both meaning life now and to secure your eternal salvation when you die¹⁶.

¹⁵ For further study, see Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Donners Grove: IVP Press, 2002), C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1943) and John Stott, *Why I Am A Christian* (Donners Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Consider this mind-blowing fact: Whether you believe the Bible or not, 99.9% of your existence will happen after you die.

In Acts 16:31, people heard this rescue plan from the Apostles, and cut right to the chase – asking “sirs, what must we do to be saved?”¹⁷ And the Apostles answered him, “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”¹⁸

The Gospel (The Good News of a Rescue Plan):

1. God made everything to work perfectly under His rule:
 - Romans 1:20
2. Sin ruined a perfectly working world:
 - Romans 1:25
 - Sin is anything we think, feel or do that disobeys God and His right and good rule over us. It's self-centered rebellion toward our Maker.
3. Sin toward God comes naturally to us all now:
 - Romans 3:23
4. Sin deserve God's just punishment:
 - Romans 6:23
5. Jesus came to save us from God's punishment and to restore our relationship with God:
 - Romans 3:20-22
6. We can receive forgiveness of sin through confessing our sin to God and believing in Jesus alone for our salvation:
 - Romans 5:1
 - Jesus saves us by: (a) Living his life perfectly in our place and (b) Taking God's punishment for our sin in our place.
7. God will now be working in you to restore how you were created to be:
 - Romans 6:22
8. God will continue this work in you, and other Christians, until it comes to completion and the world is perfectly restored once again:
 - Romans 8:28-30.

¹⁷ “saved” in Greek (sozo) literally means to rescue one from peril, danger or suffering, to protect from loss or destruction. The danger or peril is God's judgement on our sin. It will result in loss of eternal life and final destruction out of the presence of God in hell.

¹⁸ “believe” in Greek (pisteo) literally means rest upon or entrust oneself to. In this case, the object you are placing your faith in, or entrusting yourself to, is Jesus Christ alone – nothing else.