

Redemptive History

Explanation

Once you have a basic idea of the flow of redemptive history, you should find that you have an easier time making sense out of what people might have been thinking. The notes have chapter and verse references for many of the major events in Biblical history, as well as some dates. You can use these as a reference as you try to place whatever book you are studying within redemptive history.

Make sure you allow the scale of redemptive history to affect you. In the Bible God is telling a really big story. Keeping in mind everything that is going on should help you interpret the Bible; you will begin to see what you're studying as a smaller part of a much bigger picture. This will make individual events seem both more and less important. They will seem less important because they're just a small part of a really big story, but they will seem more important because they take place within the greatest story ever told.

Historical Overview

Creation

Let's dig right in and go to the first book in the Bible, **Genesis**. Moses starts off by telling us that God created everything in six days; six times, upon completing a work, God declared what He had made to be good (1:4,10,12,18,21,25). On the sixth day, we are told that God made man in His own image (1:27). God, the King, blesses them and commands them to bless and rule over His creation (1:28). God's plan was to have an entire planet of people made in His image: enjoying and then praising God for His creation and for Him. After making man in His own image, God looked at everything He had made and declared it to be very good (1:31).

For clarity, we should try to define goodness. We know that God is good, and God said that man was created good. For our purposes we'll do what many theologians like to do and divide goodness up into two categories; this will make things easier to deal with later. The first category is called "natural good." Natural good is a quality that is good to have, but is morally neutral. Happiness, strength, knowledge, power, and wisdom are all examples of natural good; they are good to have, but it's not evil to lack them. Man was created naturally good. The second category is moral good; examples of moral good would include love, honesty, mercy, faithfulness, and justice. Man was created naturally and morally good; he was wise and he would use that wisdom to love God and his neighbor. This is why we are told that man and woman were naked and not ashamed (2:25); they had nothing to hide, they had no sin.

The only rule God gave man was that they not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16-17). This was not intended as a kill-joy. God was not holding any good thing back; He was a loving Father protecting His children. He warned that they would die in the day they ate of it. He was being kind to them even in that rule.

The Fall

Genesis 3

Everything was going great until the serpent entered the picture. We know him better as Satan; his name in Hebrew is *Ha-Satan*: “the accuser.” Satan shows up in the garden and begins tempting Eve (though her husband is close by). The accuser starts by accusing God of being unloving and unreasonable; he asks her if God had really forbidden them from eating from any tree in the garden (3:1, note that virtually every time the serpent uses the word “you,” it is a plural pronoun).

Eve starts off rather poorly; she seeks to defend God, but adds something onto the rule that He had given her, putting a fence around the protection God had already given. She says that God had given them permission to eat from any tree in the garden but forbidden them from eating or touching fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden (the bit about touching was added, not a part of God’s command as it was revealed to us) lest they die (3:2–3). Satan then accuses God of lying, telling Eve that they would not die but would in fact become like God (3:4–5). Eve takes the bait and also gives some of the fruit to her husband, whom Genesis records as being with her (3:6).

For the first time they understand good and evil; the first thing that they see is their own sinfulness. Now they have to be covered, so their solution is to sew fig leaves together (3:7). Now the sound of God moving in the garden, instead of bringing joy, brings fear. Adam and Eve run and hide themselves (3:8). God goes looking for and calling after the man, though he was the last to rebel chronologically (3:9). Adam admits to having been afraid and says that, even though he had sewn his own covering (3:7), he still felt naked (3:10). God knows what’s going on and asks Adam if he had eaten from the tree (3:11). Adam responds by effectively blaming God for giving him a defective woman (3:12). The woman blames the serpent (3:13), and God responds by cursing all parties involved starting with the serpent. The serpent was doomed to crawl on his belly (3:14), which really doesn’t sound too bad. God was just getting started, though.

Genesis 3:15 contains the first direct proclamation of the gospel; theologians call it the protoevangelium because they think Greek sounds cooler than English (and in this case, I must agree). God promises that a seed (a Son, ultimately Jesus) would come from the woman. This seed would be injured by the serpent, but in return would deal the serpent a killing blow to the head. Next God moves onto cursing woman; she is told that her pain in childbirth would increase and that she would desire to control her husband but would instead be ruled over by him (3:16). Adam is told that the ground is cursed because of him; he would henceforth have great difficulty providing for his own needs and the needs of his family; the death penalty is also restated (3:17–19).

God then makes proper coverings for the man and the woman (3:21). He kills an animal and uses its skin to cover Adam and Eve’s skin, thus setting the precedent that sin can only be covered by shed blood. Within a single generation (and just a chapter later), Cain will get this wrong and murder his brother out of anger (4:3–5,8). Although man is still smart and strong, he is no longer loving or just.

Noah

I don't want to take too much time covering this, but it's an excellent illustration of what has now happened to mankind. Several generations after Adam and Eve, humanity is described as utterly wicked, everything man thought and wanted was always wicked, 24/7 (6:5). God even goes so far as to say that He was sorry that He had made man (6:6). We don't have time to explain specifically what that means; for right now we will just say that God is using very strong language to prove His point: man is wicked. Man is so wicked that God decides to wipe out everyone except for one man and his family (6:7).

Noah is said to be the only righteous person on earth (6:9), this righteousness, though, cannot be taken to mean sinless. In Genesis 8:21, God repeats the notion that every thought that man has is wicked even from his youth. This is after God had wiped out everyone but Noah and his family! Noah then proceeds to plant a vineyard, get drunk, and lay naked in his tent; it's almost as though he is trying to prove God's point (9:21). It should be noted that we cannot say that man has completely lost the image of God. After the flood, God essentially institutes the death penalty for anyone who murders (9:6); He says that the reason for it is that man is made in the image of God. We would say that while man still has many of the natural good aspects of being made in the image of God, he has lost any moral good attributes; his thoughts and intentions are "only evil continually" (6:5).

Noah's son Ham does not respond properly to Noah's vineyard incident like his brothers Shem and Japheth do (9:22–23). Noah curses Ham's son, Canaan, and blesses Ham's brothers, blessing Shem the most (Gen 9:25–27). From Shem will eventually (after an incident with a tower and a very different kind of tongues experience – chapter 11) come Abraham, who is the main character in our next main point.

The Abrahamic Covenant

In Genesis 12, God calls a nomadic Chaldean named Abraham from an area that would later be called Babylon (about 55 miles south of modern Baghdad). We get the impression from Scripture and historical records that Abraham was just as idolatrous as any other person in his area (*Josh 24:2*); he probably worshiped the moon or a god associated with it. God tells Abraham to go to the land of Canaan (later called Israel), a significant journey; He promises to make Abraham a great nation and to bless him (12:1–2). God also promises to give Abraham offspring and to give the land of Canaan (Israel) to his offspring. Most importantly to us gentiles, God promises to bless all the nations (families) of the earth through Abraham (12:3). This covenant with Abraham was unconditional, there was nothing expected of man for God to follow through with His promise.

The ultimate fulfillment of these promises is truly found in Jesus (*Gal 3:16*). The more immediate realizations of the fulfillment of this promise, however, are going to be found in the nation of Israel. Abraham and his wife are very old, Hebrews even says that Abraham was as good as dead (*Heb 11:2*); even in spite of the difficulties, though, God gives Abraham a son named Isaac. Isaac doesn't get too much attention in the Bible (Genesis 22 is perhaps the most notable bit), so we'll not say much about him.

Isaac (21:1–7) marries a woman named Rebekah; she gives birth to twins: Jacob and Esau. Jacob (whose name could be translated “circumventer”) is the younger brother and does not deserve his brother’s blessing or birthright, but through some sneaky actions manages to acquire both (*ch. 25, 27*). God later changes Jacob’s name to Israel (32:28), which means “he fights (or fought) with God,” a fitting description for both Jacob and the nation of Israel throughout the Bible.

From Jacob (Israel) come the 12 tribes of Israel (*ch 29, 30*). His most important sons in terms of the flow of the story are Joseph and Judah. Judah is important because through his line would eventually come David and later Jesus (both of whom we will eventually address). Joseph is more important to our story for the time being because of what happens to him. He is thrown in a pit, sold as a slave (*ch 37*), promoted to head of a prominent house in Egypt, falsely accused of rape, and thrown in prison (*ch 39*). In prison, Joseph still does well, mostly because of his God-given ability to interpret dreams, and eventually is promoted to second in command of Egypt (*ch 40-41*). A famine prompts Joseph’s entire family to move into the land of Egypt; Joseph is gracious to his brothers and gets Pharaoh to let them live in the fertile land of Goshen (in Egypt), see chapters 42-45.

At the end of Genesis we find God working in in spite of the Fall; He is fulfilling His promise to Abraham. Abraham has children (seed/offspring), they are living comfortably (blessing), but they are not living in the land promised to Abraham. That’s okay, though, because God said it would take 400 years for Israel to move into the Promised Land (15:13). Everything is going according to God’s plan.

Mosaic Covenant

Many people believe that Joseph was a type of Christ; this is partially because, unlike all the other patriarchs, he is not recorded as having any major screw-ups (though we assume that he sinned because he is human). He also interceded before a king (Pharaoh) on behalf of God’s chosen people (*Gen 47*), like Jesus does for us. Perhaps Joseph’s biggest flaw was that he died (*Gen 50:22–26*).

Joseph’s death brings us to the rest of the Torah, Exodus through Deuteronomy. We’ll skim through these looking for key parts that will profoundly affect the rest of history.

Exodus explains that a new king arose that did not know Joseph (*Exo 1:8*). The people of Israel had been following God’s first command in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply (*Exo 1:7*); their numbers were so great that Pharaoh feared the Israelites and thus began treating them harshly and enslaving them (1:10–14). The people of Israel cried out to God and He heard them (2:20–25).

God responded by sending Moses (3:7–10) and through a series of great acts of judgment, God delivered Israel from Egypt (6:6, 12:41). It is worth noting that in this story we have the first revealing of God’s name (YAHWEH) to the people of Israel (3:14); we also have the institution of a Passover which continues the concept of people needing to be covered by blood for salvation (12:43–49).

He promised to Israel them His people and to be their God (6:7–8) and that is exactly what He did; He treated them as his son (4:22) by guiding them (13:17–22), feeding them (*ch 16*), and giving them water (17:1–7) despite Israel’s acting like stubborn children (17:7). He took His people to Sinai where He gave

them the Law, we call this the Mosaic covenant because it was a covenant made with Israel through Moses (19:4–6). The people told God that they fully intended to follow through with all of God’s rules (19:8).

The covenant made with Israel at Sinai was conditional; if Israel obeyed they would get to stay in the land and be God’s people, and if they did not obey they would not get to stay in the land and be God’s people (19:5–6). However, the promise that God made with Abraham regarding the land, seed, and blessing remained unconditional. This means that while God fully intends to give Israel the land, each generation’s continuation in that land is conditional based on whether or not they obey God.

In the Mosaic covenant, God explicitly spells out how sin is to be dealt with. The message before, though not always communicated very clearly, had been that blood had to be shed to cover sin. God’s covenant with Moses is no different. The Law, Leviticus especially, spells out exactly how sin is to be dealt with. Animals had to be slaughtered just like at Passover. One particularly clear expression of this is the Day of Atonement. On the tenth day of the seventh month, everyone would be restricted from working. The procedure is described in detail in Leviticus 16. The high priest would offer this sacrifice once a year and it would atone for the people of Israel for that one year; it had to be re-offered every year.

We don’t have time to cover exactly how Israel got into the land, but after some disobedience and a 40 year waiting period, eventually Israel ended up in the land; though it was Joshua who actually took them in. Before Moses’ death, Moses promised a few key things. He described in great detail what would happen if Israel obeyed God (*Deut 28:1–14*) and if they disobeyed God (*Deut 28:16–68*). Essentially, the people would be blessed beyond measure if they obeyed, but ultimately scattered among the nations for disobedience (*Deut 28:64*). God knew that the people would fail, though, so He told them how they could get back on track; it would involve repenting, turning from their sin back to God (*Deut 30:1–10*). When Israel repented, God would bring them back (*Deut 30:4–5*).

Moses also promised that another prophet would come, one who would be like him and would speak to God face to face (*Deut 18:15,18, cf. 34:10*). This prophet would ultimately be Jesus, but Israel would spend something like 1400 years waiting for Him. After Moses died, Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land (*see Joshua*). They did not do very well, however, until God gave them a King (*see Judges, Ruth, and the 1 Sam ch. 1–9*). Saul was Israel’s first King, but he did not work out very well and God rejected Him (*1 Sam 15:23*). Israel needed a king that God would choose, one who would love the Law of the LORD and encourage the people to follow it (*Deut 17:14–20, cf. Gen 49:10*).

The Davidic Covenant

After Saul died (which honestly seemed to take forever – see 1 Samuel ch. 10–31) David became king, first of Judah (*2 Sam 2:1–7*) and then of all Israel (*2 Sam 5:1–5*). Israel prospered greatly under David, and God prospered David greatly (*2 Sam 5:10*). God loved David and called him a man after His own heart (*1 Sam 13:14*). David loved God (as evidenced especially by his Psalms) and wanted to build a temple (or house) in which He could dwell with His people and be worshiped by them (*2 Sam 7:1–2*). God, however, had other plans.

In 2 Samuel 7, God uses Nathan to tell David that He would instead build David a house. He then makes a promise, or a covenant, with David. God promises to make David's name great (7:9), build him a house (7:11), give him offspring (7:12), allow his offspring to build Him a house (7:13), establish the kingdom of his offspring forever (7:13), have a father-son relationship with his offspring (7:14), never allow His steadfast love to depart from his offspring (7:15), and again to establish the house, kingdom, and throne of his offspring forever (7:16). This covenant is unconditional; David nor his sons are required to do anything to inherit this promise.

The fulfillment of this promise, in its immediate meaning, comes through Solomon. Solomon does build a house for God (1 Kgs 6:28) and expands Israel's size and fame to be larger than it ever had been before (1 Kgs 4:20–34). The ultimate fulfillment, though, would be in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's true Son (Mrk 1:1, Rom 1:4), and an everlasting King from the line of David (Luk 1:32–33).

Pre-Exilic Period

David's son Solomon was far from a perfect king; he put a heavy yoke on the people of Israel through overtaxing them, enslaving them, and other things (1 Kgs 5:13, 12:4). Eventually, Solomon turned completely from God (1 Kgs 11:3–8). His sons were no better and Israel, because of his and their sinfulness, was split into two kingdoms (1 Kgs 12). Judah, the southern kingdom, was ruled by a Solomon's son Rehoboam (in keeping with God's promise to David about having a Davidic king always on the throne). Israel, the northern kingdom, was ruled by a series of dynasties, none of whom were ever called righteous.

Israel and Judah became more and more wicked and sinful. They had the Law of Moses, but essentially ignored it. The temple in Jerusalem ended up being in Judah; this meant that the northern Kingdom of Israel had to build its own temple for worship; wicked King Jereboam I built two temples for golden calf worship, one in Dan and one in Bethel (1 Kgs 12:31). This was extremely wicked because God had specified that there would be only one place where He was to be worshipped and that His people were not to worship images (Deut 12:11, Exo 20:4–6). Israel and Judah both were involved with idol worship, injustice, adultery, mis-treating of the poor, and other sins.

Through His prophets (see *Isa, Jer, Ezk, Hos, Joel, Amo, Obad, Jon, Mic, Nah, Hab, and Zeph*) God repeatedly warned both Israel and Judah, but they would not listen (*Amo 2:12 among other places*). God also sent all of the warnings that he had promised in Deuteronomy 28 (*compare Deut 28:16–68 to passages like Amo 4:6–14*). In 720 B.C. God sent Assyria into Israel to destroy it and take everyone into captivity (2 Kgs 15:29). In 586 B.C. God sent Babylon to take all of Judah into captivity and to destroy the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25). God, however, promised through Jeremiah that this captivity would only last 70 years. (*Jer 25:11–12*). Jeremiah's prophecy lines up with what we already discussed in Deuteronomy 30:1–10.

Post-Exilic Period

In Daniel 9, Daniel prays for his people. He confesses their sins (*Dan 9:3–15*) and begs for mercy and restoration (*Dan 9:16–19*). God moves the heart of Cryus King of Persia (Babylon had been taken over by Persia by this time) and the exiles (captives) from Judah are allowed back into their land in 538 B.C. (*Ezra*

1:1). Very few exiles actually return, though (see *Ezra 2*). Once in the land, Judah rebuilt the temple (*Ezra 6:13–18*), though it was much smaller than Solomon's. They also rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem (*Neh 6:15–17*), and made promises to God after hearing the Law and confessing their sin (*Neh 8–10*). The people were still wicked, though, so sin continued to abound (see *Neh 13*). God still sent Israel prophets (see *Hag, Zech, and Mal*) and worked among His people (see *Ezr, Neh, Est*).

The Time Between the Testaments

From the last prophet, Malachi to the coming of Christ, about 400 years passed. The Bible does not have any details about this time period, so we'll not cover it in any kind of detail. After Persia conquered Babylon Greece conquered Persia (thanks to Alexander the Great). When Greece saw that Rome was coming, they began trying to unite the Middle East to fight against Rome. This process was called Hellenization; Greece tried to "Greekify" all the nations they had conquered by spreading their culture (arts, entertainment, religion, etc.). This led to Greek becoming the language that virtually everyone could speak; it also had huge impacts on the culture of the entire known world.

Rome still came, though, and conquered Greece. For a short period of time, while Greece and Rome were preoccupied, Israel actually had independence under a group of Jewish rulers called the Hasmoneans. You can learn more about this time period in 1st and 2nd Maccabees; the history provided there is not authoritative like the Bible (and not always 100% accurate, either) but is helpful.

Rome provided many things for the world by building roads and securing them. This meant that parts of the world that were once inaccessible became accessible. Trade and communications took off like never before. Rome did for the ancient world what the internet had done for the modern world (on a much smaller scale). When Rome took over the Middle East, Herod the Great, an Edomite/Idumean, was installed as King over Judah. That brings us to the Star of the show, Jesus Christ.

Enter Jesus

The time between the testaments is often referred to as "the silent period." They call it that because during that period of time, there was no Word from God; He stopped speaking as He had before. If you imagine the story of redemption as a musical piece, though, this makes sense. God makes everything get really quiet before the biggest and most amazing part of the composition comes. Jesus enters the world! God stops speaking to us through prophets and starts speaking to us directly through His Son (*Heb 1:1–2*). He's not holding back anything anymore; Jesus is all of God's glory and the exact image of God's nature (*Heb 1:3*).

God starts off by telling a priest named Zechariah that his wife would give birth to a prophet (*Luk 1:5–23*). God is finally decided to start speaking again; God chose Gabriel to talk to both Zechariah (*Luk 1:19*) and Mary (*Luk 1:26*). Gabriel's name means "Warrior of God." Just like God's first announcement of the gospel back in Genesis 3:15, God is in a way declaring that He is going to win; He will crush the serpent's head.

Jesus is born and then grows up. Throughout His ministry He heals many people, and declares “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (*Matt 4:17,23*). At the right time He allowed Himself to be arrested and crucified. His death meant that we don’t have to be punished and that we by faith can be counted as dead to slavery to sin. Three days later He rose again; this was the declaration that Jesus was the Son of God (*Rom 1:3*). When we identify in His death we also identify in His life, receiving His Holy Spirit. Through His resurrection we are enabled to seek heavenly things instead of earthly things (*Col 3:1–3*) and we are declared by His Spirit to be children of God, Jesus brothers and sisters (*Rom 8:14, 16–17*).

Jesus is the most full declaration of God possible because Jesus is God (*Col 1:15–16,19*). Jesus is also the only way that we can know God (*Mat 1:27, Luk 10:20, Joh 1:18 14:6*). When we see Jesus, we see all of God (*Joh 14:7,9*). He is also the only way to be saved (*Act 4:12*). Jesus is He for whom all things exist (*Col 1:16*), and that which sustains their existence (*Col 1:17, Heb 1:3*). Jesus is the ultimate and last High Priest who didn’t need to sacrifice anything for his own sin, but instead offers up his own blood to remove (not just cover) our sins (*Heb 9:25–26*), not every year but once and for all (*Heb 9:27–28*). Jesus is really all that matters (*Col 3:11*).

The Church

Jesus appointed apostles (*Mark 3:14*), people who would declare His name authoritatively. Their other job was to help start the church, which Jesus also started and controls (*Col 1:18*). These men provided the teachings to which the church is to be devoted (*Acts 2:42*). The apostles all died and now the church is left with the same message that Paul and the rest of the apostles had: Christ and Him crucified (*1 Cor 2:2, Col 1:28*). The church finds itself standing in opposition to the world, not because it is better than the world but because it proclaims Christ; the world hates Jesus and thus it will hate the church (*Luk 21:17, Joh 15:18–19*). The church is how God is presently working on earth; it is Jesus’ body (*1 Cor 12:27*) but it is to be controlled and nourished by Jesus, the Head (*Col 1:18, 2:19*).

The End

Jesus will one day return (*Rev 22:7,20*). One day, the dead will all stand before Him and be judged (*Rev 20:12–13*). God will throw anyone whose name is not written in the book of life into the lake of fire; He will also throw death itself and hades into the lake of fire (*Rev 20:14–15*). A new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem are coming (*Rev 21:1–2*). God will dwell with men just like he did in Genesis 2, but it will be even better (*21:3*). There will be no death, no mourning, no tears, and no pain (*21:4*); He will make all things new (*21:5*). The entire city will be like the Holy of Holies because man will be in the presence of God (*21:17*). There will be no temple because God and the Lamb will be the temple (*21:22*); we will abide in Jesus and in God (*see Joh 15*). There will also be no more need for a sun; Jesus is the lamp and the glory of God is the light (*21:23*). It will be amazing, all because of Jesus.