

How the Bible Fits Together: Introduction

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[0 : 00] We can turn back for a moment to Revelation chapter 21 and we'll read the first three verses again.

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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Now one of our main priorities when we come together at church each week is to listen to what the Bible teaches. That is one of our core priorities and desires as we come together.

The life of the church involves many, many different things. It involves worship and prayer and fellowship, giving, helping, encouraging, supporting. All these things are vital in a church, but at the very centre of what we do is the Word of God.

[1 : 17] And that's why preaching is the main part of our service. We devote the most time to opening up God's Word. And in the Acts of the Apostles we read that the 12 apostles said that we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.

And when you read Paul's instructions to Timothy, he emphasised again and again, preach the Word. The Bible is at the centre of what we do.

Just like the apostles, our two great priorities are prayer and the ministry of the Word. We're here together to speak to God in our prayers and in our praise, and we're here to listen as God speaks to us through His Word.

That's our great goal in church each week. And as you know, each week we focus on a part of scripture. We'll maybe look at a verse or a chapter or a section, or maybe even just one or two parts.

And we'll dig into these words and examine what they say and see what each part of scripture is teaching us. And that may be from any part of the Bible.

[2 : 28] And we try to make sure that we always look at the whole counsel of God. We never want to neglect parts of the Bible. We always try to spend time looking at all the different chapters and verses and passages contained in this great book.

But our usual routine is to focus on maybe one small part of the Bible. For the next few weeks, I want us to start a study where we're going to do something a wee, wee bit different.

Rather than focus on a particular book of the Bible or a particular section, I want us to look at the Bible as a whole.

I want us to stand back and to look at the whole of this book. And I hope that as we do this, that we discover something amazing.

I hope that we will see the amazing way in which the whole Bible fits together. The Bible has many books, 66, and they're written by many different people over hundreds and hundreds of years, but from the very beginning to the very end, there is one glorious story and one perfect plan.

[3 : 47] I want us to see that as we examine God's word together. Now, as we begin, I want to emphasize an important preliminary point.

As Christians, we are utterly committed to the truth of the Bible. We are committed to the fact that this is God's word. It is inherent, it is inspired, it is absolutely authoritative.

And I would urge you, urge you never to listen to somebody if they're saying that one part of the Bible is true and one part isn't. You'll hear lots of people saying that, lots of people say, well, I accept that part, but I don't accept that part.

That part's relevant, that part's not. Please do not have that attitude towards the Bible. This is God's word, and we view it all as authoritative.

If you cannot accept that, then I would of course ask to say that this is not the church for you, because this church holds to the authority and truth of the Bible.

[4 : 53] It is utterly true. It is God's word. It is authoritative. And that is the core of what we believe. It's at the heart of our faith.

But if that's the case, there's a vital question for us. How do we know?

How do we know that the Bible is God's word? How do we know that it's authoritative? How do we know that we can rely on every word that this book contains?

That's a really, really important question. And there's many different ways that that can be answered. But one place which gives us a fantastic answer is in the Westminster Confession of Faith, paragraph 5, chapter 1, paragraph 5.

I'm going to put it up here. Now, never, ever, ever be scared of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It can seem quite a full document, and some people think, oh, well, I'll never understand that. Not at all. It's quite straightforward, and it's a wonderful, wonderful document in terms of summarising the content of the Bible.

[5 : 56] Chapter 1 in the Westminster Confession is all about the Bible. And chapter 5 is answering the question that we're asking. How do we know the Bible is God's word? Well, let's see what it says.

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. That's basically what I just said, that we believe that the Bible is the word of God.

We hold it very high. And it says, the reason that we may do that is high, reverent, esteem of the Scripture, the heaviness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, which is to give glory to God, the full discovery of it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments, but by it does abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God. Yet, notwithstanding, a full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

Now, what does that say? Well, it's the last sentence that's making a key point in terms of the paragraph. It's saying that first and foremost, it's the work of the Holy Spirit within us that evidences the Bible to be the word of God.

[7 : 17] And some of you may have experienced that in your lives. Maybe you found you opened God's word and it just jumps out at you and it answers the questions that you have in your mind and it speaks to your situation and it all fits together perfectly.

We don't always experience like that. It's not like that every time we read the Bible, but I'm sure that many of you have had that experience where the Holy Spirit works within you and shows you.

So that's the main point, that last wee bit, but all the first two thirds of the paragraph here is like preliminary information. And that preliminary information is saying that the Bible evidences itself to be the word of God.

In other words, if you look at the Bible, you will see evidence of its divine origin. Now, this is really important because today a lot of people say that faith is belief in spite of the evidence that if somebody has faith, if somebody is religious, it's because they're ignoring the evidence.

They're just believing and that's their beliefs. That's their thing. That is absolutely not true. We do not believe in spite of evidence.

[8 : 32] Our beliefs are backed up by very, very strong and clear evidence. And the confession is saying that the Bible evidences itself as the word of God in various ways.

It says, first of all, the heavenliness of the matter. This book is different from every other book. What other book can you read that will give you comfort and hope in the face of death?

What other book can do that? No other book can do that. The heavenliness of the matter. Then it also identifies the efficacy or the effectiveness of the doctrine.

In other words, the Bible's teaching works. Or the Bible says works in real life. And that is so true because the Bible tells us that human beings are precious.

The Bible tells us that right and wrong matter. The Bible tells us that death is an enemy. Now, I am sure that you hold to these three things.

[9 : 38] I'm sure you all believe that humans are precious. I'm sure that you all believe that right and wrong matter. I'm sure that all of you believe that death is an enemy. Well, if you are an atheist, then you have no reason to believe any of those things.

You have no basis to place any value on humans above anything, any other part of creation. You have no basis for right and wrong. And death is just part of the big machine ticking over. We know that that is not true. And the Bible meets us and agrees with us. The Bible works in real life. So it's effective, the efficacy of the doctrine.

Then we have the majesty of the style. And that is a really important point because the Bible is magnificent. Have you ever, ever read anything that compares to passages like 1 Corinthians 13 or to John chapter 1 or Psalm 23 there?

Some of the most glorious and wonderful pieces of literature ever written. So all these different evidences are there and you can read the Bible to see it. But what I want us to focus on is what the Westminster Confession of Faith calls the consent of all the parts.

[10 : 58] In other words, the fact that the whole Bible fits together perfectly. And this is one of the ways in which the Bible evidences itself to be the word of God.

And that's really important because you and I should never, ever, ever be afraid about defending the Bible. We should never be afraid to defend the Bible because the Bible has strong legs on which to stand.

In fact, it's Spurgeon spoke of this when he basically said that he would never defend a lion. He would simply open the cage and let a lion defend itself. And he said exactly the same thing that applies to the Bible. We don't need to defend it. It can defend itself because it contains so much strength, so much power, so much evidence.

The Bible fits together perfectly. And it reminds us of how perfectly God has worked everything out for our salvation.

[12 : 03] So this is where we're going to be going and where we're going to be thinking over the next few weeks. Tonight we have to do a supposed wee bit of preliminary work and I hope that please do be patient as we try to cover over these things.

I hope that we can lay some foundations that will help us to see just how beautifully the Bible fits together.

We read from Genesis chapter 2 and from Revelation 21. In other words, we read at the very beginning and we read at the very end.

And in between these two passages you have got 66 books, 2,000 years, 40 writers, you've got passages of poetry, sections of prose, you've got big historical narratives, you've got words of prophecy, you've got letters to various different individuals and churches across the Mediterranean, you've got gospels, you've got visions and it all fits together beautifully.

And we can see how it fits together by looking a little bit more closely at Genesis chapter 2 and Revelation chapter 21. Remember I said at the beginning and at the end.

[13 : 19] And I have to say that although we're going to spend a wee bit of time looking at this, we will only barely scratch the surface and I'm almost ashamed at how little we're going to be able to look at because it's just quite remarkable how much it all fits together.

But we'll do our best. So to start with, we'll roll up our sleeves and we'll go to Genesis and we'll see what we can find.

In Genesis chapter 1 and 2 we have God's work of creation and it's probably a familiar narrative to us how God created the world. And I want us just to ask, when you look at Genesis 1 and 2 what do you see?

What do we see when we look at these passages? And I suppose we could say many things and there's all the details of the plants and the animals and even the stones and the rivers and all of these things.

But what I want us to try and see are the big themes that are being set before us in Genesis 1 and especially in Genesis chapter 2.

[14 : 25] And as we look at these big themes we can find six things that I'm just going to go through very quickly and very briefly together. We look in Genesis 2 we see six things.

First of all, we read, if we go to the next slide, sorry Tixie, we read that the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he put the man whom he had formed. God placed Adam in the garden of Eden and it was a beautiful, beautiful place and we had that marvellous description that we read in Genesis 2 of the stones and the rivers and everything. It sounds absolutely amazing. It was a beautiful place but the key point for us right now is that it was a place.

God created a place, a land for humanity to live in. It's not a mythical or a figurative image. It was a real physical geographical location.

[15 : 35] God has made a place for humanity to live. God has placed man in his land.

And so that's the first big key theme that we have here. A land. Garden of Eden was a place, a land for humanity to dwell. That's the first big thing that we see, a place, a land.

When we look at creation, everything was good apart from one thing and we read about that in Genesis 2. The Lord God said it's not good that the man should be alone and then we read about how God created Eve and how they were joined together in marriage.

For a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. From the very beginning man was never ever intended to be alone.

Instead God placed man in a family. He made him a wife. They became one and the creation ordinance of marriage was established and then their commander to enlarge their family to multiply.

[16 : 49] And so we see the second big key theme that we have in Genesis at the very beginning is family. We've got marriage between a man and a woman and we've got a parent-child relationship being established.

God from the very beginning establishes family. So a place to live, land, a family. These are our first two big things.

Eden was a place where they could dwell and it was a place where the first human family was established. But it was also a place where God and humanity were together.

We read in Genesis chapter 3 of how God came to walk in the garden in the cool of the day and it's showing us there that it was normal for God and humanity to be together in Eden.

God and humanity were together. Humanity dwelt there, God dwelt there. And the fact that they dwelt together in Eden tells us something really, really important about Eden.

[17 : 54] It tells us that Eden was the first temple. Now that's really, really important. That's when we think of temple, we often think of sacrifices and animals and rituals and stuff like that.

What is a temple? A temple is a place where God and humanity meet. It's a place where God is worshiped.

And Eden was the first temple because it was where God dwelt and it was where humanity met God and worshiped him.

Eden was the first temple. And we'll look at this a little bit more in coming weeks because it's very, very interesting. I want us just to note, first things chapter six describes Solomon's temple.

And let's read what it says. This is the temple being built in Jerusalem. Around the walls of the house he carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers in the inner and outer rooms.

[18 : 54] The floor of the house he overlaid with gold in the inner and outer rooms for the infants. To the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood. The lintel and the doorpost were five sides. And he covered the door, two doors of olive wood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers.

He'll overlaid them with gold and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees. Okay, now that's describing it. What was it that he had to put in the temple?

What did God want him to put? He wants, God wants, flower. And he wants trees and he wants leaves. And what, where do you find flowers and trees and leaves?

In a garden. And the temple is being made as a sort of reminder of Eden. It's made to look like Eden.

The temple is like that because Eden was the first temple. And as I said, we'll look at that in more detail. But the key point is that all that has been described in Second Kings is all very garden-like.

[20 : 03] In Eden, God created a place where he and humanity could dwell together. So that's our next big theme, temple. Okay? Eden was a temple.

Next we see that in Genesis chapter two, God gave Adam a commandment. The Lord God commanded the man saying, you may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.

For the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. This is a very clear statement from God that he has certain expectations of Adam in terms of his conduct.

In other words, Adam is given God's law. And indeed the whole of the creation narrative tells us that Adam had certain duties and responsibilities.

They were to have dominion over the earth. They were to be fruitful and to fill it. And they were to work the garden and to keep it. God has given them this amazing privilege of being in the garden, but along with that privilege comes responsibility.

[21 : 06] God tells them what he wants and what he doesn't want. He gives them his law. And that's the fourth big theme that we have here.

God gives them a commandment, God speaks and God reveals what he wants and what he expects. Now, this whole concept of expectations and of blessing, of privilege, of responsibility is pointing us in the direction of covenant.

In that when God created humanity, he entered into a covenant with Adam. Now, a covenant is just a committed relationship, a bit like a marriage. It is a life and death commitment where two parties entered into a bond with one another.

And in terms of God, the covenant is the relationship between a superior and an inferior where there are blessings and there are responsibilities. And the whole idea of covenant is summed up in scripture by this great phrase that we have in Exodus, I will take you to be my people and I will be your God.

That was what we have in Eden. God was Adam's God and Adam and Eve were God's people. God and Adam are in a relationship. God is committed to Adam and that relationship brings blessings, but that relationship also brings responsibilities.

[22 : 30] And if these stipulations, if these requirements of the covenant are broken, then instead of blessing you have curse.

And one of the reasons we know that God and Adam were in a covenant together is not simply that we have clear evidence of it in Genesis, but Jose also comments where he says that like Adam, they transgressed the covenant.

When Adam sinned, he broke this covenant. But at the very beginning, there was this covenant relationship. That's the fifth thing. Now, you've been very, very patient because there's a lot to cover here, but we're nearly there for this.

When you step back from all of this and you look at Eden and you look at creation, you see that this is all God's work and you see that God reigns over it all.

And that is emphasizing that God is King over all that he's made and God is establishing his kingdom. Sam 95 speaks about that.

[23 : 32] The Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth, the heights of the mountains are also his. The sea is his, but he made it and the hands for his hands formed the dry land.

Oh, come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker. These verses are saying that God made us and that God is there for King.

Creation belongs to him. He rules over it. The land is his land. The laws are his laws. The patterns are set by him. God is the great covenant King.

And as part of that kingdom, God delegates authority to humanity because we are in God's image and therefore God said, let us make man and our image after our likeness, let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock.

God is doing there. God is the one who is King and as King, he has the authority to delegate authority to humanity. The key point of it all is that God is King and from the very beginning he's establishing his kingdom.

[24 : 42] So that leaves us with our six big things that we have in Genesis chapter two. Now, there was a lot of information and we went through it very, very quickly, but I hope that you can see that. You look at Genesis two, you see these things.

You see land, a place where humanity can live. You see family, Adam and Eve joined together and told to have children. You see a temple where God and humanity dwell together.

You see a law where God sets out his perfect standards. You see a covenant relationship which God has entered into with Adam and you see God's kingdom being established.

These six things are there for us to see. Now if we turn to Revelation 21, what do we see?

Well, let's go back and see. In this passage, John is describing the end of history. He is describing the new creation where Christ returns and all things are made new and this is the destination to which the Bible is pointing.

[25 : 55] This is the end point of the great narrative of scripture. This is what it's all aiming towards. This is what God wants to bring.

And look at what we find. It says that John saw the holy city.

What's the city? A place for God's people. A land for them to dwell. Eden was a place and here we see a new place, a new land where they can dwell.

We see land, a land, a place where we can dwell. And then John says, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven for God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

In other words, a marriage, the establishment of a family. And then it says, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

[27 : 03] Now literally, and if you've got the authorized version in front of you, you'll see this, it says the tabernacle of God is with men. Now the tabernacle was the sort of temporary version of the temple.

Exactly the same thing. Temple, tabernacle, they did exactly the same thing. They were the place where God dwells. So this city is a temple where God and humanity dwell together.

And that's what Revelation 22 emphasizes because it says, I saw no temple in this city, for its temple is the Lord God and the Almighty and the Lamb. The whole place is a temple just like Eden was a temple.

And then we remember that this is a holy city. It is a place which is pure and perfect where God's law is perfectly upheld. There is no place for lawlessness and sinfulness here as verse 8 of Revelation 21 says, as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, murdered or sexually immoral, socialist, I don't know, all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

In other words, this is a place where God's law is upheld. This is a place where things are done God's way.

[28 : 26] It's a holy city. And then we look a bit more closely and we see that it says in verse 3, they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

Now what's that the language of? That's the language of covenant, a covenant relationship.

And so we've got five of our themes. We've got land, we've got family, we've got temple, we've got law, we've got covenant.

What about kingdom? Is it there? Well, where did this voice come from? What came from the throne, which is where the king sits.

There God rules. And I really hope that you can see how perfectly it all fits together.

[29 : 23] How what God has set out at the very beginning is what God has planned for the very end. And please, please remember the fact that in between Genesis 2 and Revelation 21 comes 2,000 years and the books are written by over 40 different authors and there's numerous different scenarios, places, people, events, so many different things have gone into the making up of this book and yet it fits together perfectly.

And over the coming weeks, we are going to look at each one of these themes together in more detail to see how they spread through scripture.

The Bible takes us on an amazing journey from the beauty of creation into the trauma of sin and broken covenant and then it reveals to us God's amazing work of restoration.

And in the end, it is pointing us towards the perfect completion of God's great work and it all fits together.

And two key points arise from this. These themes run through the Bible. The land runs through the Bible. What does it talk about all through the Old Testament?

[30 : 41] When the people left Egypt, where were they going? To the promised land. And all of these themes build up and point through. What did God say to Abraham? In you all the families of the earth will be blessed and that was worked out through the ages of history.

You read through the Old Testament and you see God coming to dwell with his people in the tabernacle and then in the temple. You go to Exodus and you go to Mount Sinai and you have the law being set out and being worked out in the lives of God's people.

And again and again and again in the Old Testament references made to God's covenant relationship and his kingdom being established. An earthly kingdom which is pointing towards his eternal kingdom and these things run right through the Bible and they are all revealing to us what God has done.

But that diagram is not actually accurate because these things do not run through straight like that. They do not run flat through the Bible.

But as you go through the Bible there is a progression. In the Old Testament these things are revealed as a shadow. In the New Testament they are all fulfilled perfectly.

[32 : 02] And that's the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. It's not that the New Testament cancels the Old Testament. It's that the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament. So we can make our diagram a bit more accurate if we do that.

And you see these threads run through Scripture from prefigurement to fulfilment. In the Old Testament they are shadows.

In the New Testament we see the reality. And the key question is what makes the difference? What is it that takes us from shadow to reality?

What is it that takes us from anticipation to consummation? The answer is Jesus Christ.

And there when Jesus came and when he died on the cross and rose again everything fits together.

[33 : 01] Jesus is the centre point around whom the whole Bible revolves. And Genesis sets out the themes that are coming and Revelation describes how perfectly will all end but all of that is accomplished by the coming of Jesus Christ and by his person and work.

And I hope that we will see that as we go through these themes one by one in the coming weeks. It all fits together perfectly and right at the centre is Jesus Christ.

And I want to say that you have been very, very patient and that was a lot of information and in many ways we are just laying the foundations of what I hope will be a helpful study.

But just to close let's just make three points of application because this is not just theory although that was a lot of information. We are not just saying this to grow in knowledge.

This is vital importance to our lives. And we can see three things very, very quickly. First of all all of this shows us how glorious the Bible is.

[34 : 19] And we see that in a Psalm like Psalm 119. The Psalm of your word is truth and every one of your righteous rules and Jewish forevermore. This persecutes me without cause but my heart stands in all of your words.

And I can guarantee to you that the more you study this amazing book the more you will see how utterly wonderful and glorious it is.

It fits together so perfectly and it is just an amazing thing for us to study. And may God give us all a real hunger to study his word and if you've never really studied his word before then now is a great, great time to start.

If you're on holiday just extend it and we can stay and look at this together as we study God's word. It is such an amazing thing for us to look at.

We see how glorious the Bible is. But secondly we see how worthy God is of our praise.

[35 : 25] Because in all of these things we are seeing God's work. We are seeing God doing amazing, amazing things.

And we can just echo Paul's words in Ephesians 3.20. It says, Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

When we study the Bible we are seeing God's work and we are seeing the amazing plan that he has worked out. How he has pieced everything together and how he has paid the ultimate price of giving his son in order to accomplish it all.

And we should praise him and worship him and serve him and thank him for all that is revealed to us in his word.

We see in the Bible how worthy God is of our praise, our worship and our service.

[36 : 35] And last of all we see how perfect our salvation is.

Ephesians 2.4, God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Jesus Christ.

In Christ we have immeasurable riches of kindness. We were looking at that in the prayer meeting on Thursday night. The word immeasurable basically means to throw something as far away as you can, to throw something beyond.

And that is how great God's kindness towards us is. Imagine throwing something out of sight. It's beyond measure. It is beyond reach.

God's salvation is utterly amazing and it all fits together perfectly. God has done a perfect work from beginning to end in order to bring salvation.

[37 : 57] And this is probably the most important point of all because as we look at this diagram together and as we work through these themes we will see that God's plan has been pieced together perfectly.

But the key point is that it has been pieced together perfectly for you.

All of this is because God wants to save you. All of this is for your benefit.

All of this is because God wants to make you his. Now you can study God's word and you could maybe write volumes of books about all the astonishing theology that it contains and we could spend years looking at all the different ways that the Bible fits together and that would be a great thing to do.

But the most important thing is that you realise and know that all of this is for you.

[39 : 22] All of this is so that we can be saved through Jesus Christ. That's what God wants.

I hope it's what you want to. Amen. Thank you.