

Key People & the Story of Redemption

The Scriptures were written to give us *enduring hope* (Romans 15:4). One of the barriers to developing a deep and passionate love for the Bible is a lack of understanding. The Bible is a large, multi-layered, and fairly complicated collection of ancient manuscripts (see *About the Bible*). However, there is a clear and simple story at the heart of the Bible. While the Bible holds a very large and diverse collection of mini-stories, there is one over-arching theme that weaves all of these mini-stories *together* into one cohesive whole—*i.e. the Story of Redemption*. While this story can be traced in a variety of ways, here is one example with seven distinct stages:

Stage 1: Creation, Fall, and Re-Creation

Stage 2: Covenant

Stage 3: Deliverance, Law, Rebellion, and Wandering

Stage 4: The Promised Land and the Judges

Stage 5: The Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah

Stage 6: The Exile and Return of the Jews

Stage 7: The Messiah, the Church, and the New Jerusalem

These stages provide a big-picture context (framework) for the whole of Scripture (the whole Bible). A solid framework can keep us from getting lost in the vast number of minute-yet-very-profound details in Scripture. To put it another way: We don't want to lose the forest while we're exploring the trees. In addition to the stories we find in the Bible, we also find a lot of content that is *not* in story-form—e.g. genealogies, laws, poems, proverbs, etc. As we grasp the over-arching story—from Genesis to Revelation—then we can begin to see these other genres into their natural, biblical landscape. That can be called *gaining adequate context*. The book of Genesis—which is the first book of the Bible—is given almost entirely in story-form. The one author behind the many authors of Scripture (God the Holy Spirit) knew that we would need an adequate context (framework) to begin grasping the depth and richness of God's revealed wisdom.

So then, we start by grasping the over-arching Story of Redemption. Then, we zoom-in to learn all the fascinating mini-stories that make up this one larger story of redemption. Certainly, the other genres should not be ignored. But the other genres of Scripture find their natural home within this series of stories. Without the story-framework, these other genres are difficult to understand and appreciate. But with the story-framework *adequately in place*, the other genres become richer and more meaningful. One objection to this story-framework is that it's overly simplistic—that Sunday School classes have been doing this with small children for a long time (so, where's the meat?!). But all we need to do is talk to Christians in our culture about the contents of the Bible... and those conversations will likely provide evidence that the story-framework was never *adequately grasped* by a large majority of church-going Christians. I am advocating that we go *much deeper* with this approach. By-and-large, the theology of the Bible is communicated *through stories*. And the Epistles (Letters) of the New Testament are essentially sermons instructing us on how we ought to apply the stories of the Old Testament—now that we have this new knowledge of the crucified and risen Christ as our ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King.

In my experience, the best way to begin embedding these stories in our minds is by concentrating on the Key People. As we become more and more familiar with each of these Key People—by learning their stories—then our ability to appreciate the wisdom of the Bible is magnified. In addition to expanding our own appreciation of the Bible, we will also grow in our ability to share these stories *with other people*. And both of those outcomes are exciting! The better we know these stories, the more we will appreciate

their wisdom and share this wisdom with others. It's important that we go *beyond* simply reading and listening to these stories--we need to learn to *tell them* to others. Telling these stories to others will help to embed the stories within our conscious, everyday experience more and more. This is in fact how the stories of the Bible become *the light that guides our feet through the many paths of life* (Psalm 119:105). Remember, the Scriptures were given to us so that *we might have hope* in all of life's circumstances (Rom. 15:4).

Let's look at my Chart with 47 Key People. It's not about getting every single person in the Bible—it's about connecting one Key Person's story to another Key Person's story to trace the unfolding of God's *one story* of redemption. That's what makes a Key Person a Key Person. The person and their mini-story are like important *mile-markers along the highway of redemption*.

Now, as I read through this Chart, I'm going to do five things for each stage:

1. I'll begin by reciting the stage that we're covering.
2. I will list (in chronological order) the Key People in the stage.
3. I will list the chapters in the Bible where the Key People (along with their stories) are each located.
4. I will talk very briefly about the dating of the stage.
5. I will provide a short synopsis of the overarching storyline.

In this survey, we're looking at the over-arching storyline, so we won't be delving deeply into the mini-stories. That endeavor is for you to do in your own Bible reading (and hopefully you can find others to read the Bible with as well). I'm outlining a story-framework. And my hope is that this story-framework will help us to gain a better grasp of the *whole Bible*. Not just for our own personal benefit, but for the benefit of *all our relationships*.

Stage 1: (Refer to Chart.) Since the modern era, the Creation Story and the Flood Story have tended to spark controversial arguments. Here's some helpful advice: *Keep the main thing the main thing*. The biblical author (Moses in this case) is clearly *not* intending to provide a scientific account of origins. That's not his intent. And so, we shouldn't spend endless hours speculating about the scientific implications of these stories. As interesting and valid as those questions might be, Moses did not intend to answer them. And so, we need to use discernment here: *Keep the main thing the main thing*. Who determines what the main thing is? The author.

Here's a note about the dating system for the Old Testament. Basically, the dates get more precise during the kings of Israel (see 1 Kings 6:1, 2). Based on these more precise dates, scholars work backwards to calculate the dates of prior events. Generally speaking, by the time the narrative gets to the kings of Israel, the dating among biblical scholars is almost unanimous. But prior to the kings of Israel, there is a *traditional* dating system and a *critical* dating system. The critical timeline has events occurring about 200 years later than the traditional timeline (and this is largely to harmonize the Exodus account with Egyptian historical records). But by the time we reach the kings of Israel, this 200-year gap between the two dating systems is gradually reconciled. In this Chart, we're following the *traditional* dating system.

Many Bible scholars will readily acknowledge that we don't know the dates of Stage 1 (from Adam & Eve to Noah). We don't have enough information to know those dates. But some do claim to have knowledge of these dates based on the genealogies occurring in Genesis 1-11. That claim, however, involves a high degree of speculation.

Again, in this survey, we are not delving deeply into the mini-stories... and since the movements of Creation, Fall, and Re-creation are fairly straight-forward, there is not much left to cover. To summarize: God created the world and placed mankind over His creation to rule and to govern it. God's adversary (the serpent), however, enticed mankind to *throw-off God's authority* and to rule Creation *on their own terms*. And that rebellion against God's created order precipitated the Fall. The episodes which follow immediately after the Fall reflect the chaos and depravity that man's choice brought upon the earth. And so, God determined to *Re-Create* a new world order through a baptismal (cleansing) Flood. In modern language, God hit the "reset button" on His Creation. While the Re-Creation was *of a different order* than the Original Creation, we still see very clearly that mankind remains in a fallen state of being (see Genesis 9-11).

Now, one thing we need to see in Genesis 3:15 is the *foreshadowing of a Savior*. Here is the passage: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This begs the question: *Who is going to crush the serpent's head?* So then, Genesis 3:15 is the earliest hint at a coming Messiah. And this *Messianic Hope* gets more and more elaborate as the story progresses throughout the Old Testament.

Stage 2: (Refer to chart.) This stage covers about 230 years (from 2100 BC to 1870 BC). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are commonly referred to in the Bible as "our fathers" or "the patriarchs." The story begins with Abraham in Mesopotamia and ends with Joseph in the land of Egypt. This stage is called "Covenant" because within this stage God establishes a covenant (which is a promise or pledge) with Abraham and his descendants. One of the key ideas associated with *covenant* is this: the covenant establishes a *mutual relationship* between God and man. *Relationship* is the key word. If the covenant is kept, then the relationship remains intact. If the covenant is broken, then the relationship is severed.

God's Promise (His Covenant) is a central concept in the Story of Redemption. The word "covenant" and the word "blessing" go hand-in-hand. And the ultimate blessing that accompanies God's Covenant is the *blessing of His Presence*. "I will be yours, and you will be mine"—this is the essence of God's Covenant. God was *with* Adam and Eve in the Garden, and when they broke His covenant, their relationship with Him was *severed*. However, in God's mercy, their relationship with him was not *totally* severed. And we see that even as they are sent away from His Presence, God is still providing for them (Genesis 3:21). And in Genesis 9, we see that God also makes a covenant with Noah—establishing a *new set of expectations* for a *new generation* of mankind.

Now, when God establishes His covenant with Abraham, it's important to recognize that God's promise to Abraham ultimately includes "all nations" (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). It's crucial to understand that this was the goal of God's covenant with Abraham *right from the very outset*—which is perfectly in keeping with the universal scope of God's previous covenants with Adam & Eve and Noah (read Gen. 1: 28-29; 9:7-17). Abraham's descendants were chosen to be a *vehicle* through which God would pour out His blessing on *all nations*. In Genesis 15, we see that God's covenant with Abraham did *not* involve a set of stipulations. God actually grounds this covenant with Abraham *in His own faithfulness*. That is, God swears to keep this promise *no matter what*.

On a related note, the deeply dysfunctional relationships within the family of Abraham are meant to show us the frailty and depravity of even the most faithful of God's human servants. It's ridiculous to talk about any of God's saints as if they were *nearly perfect*. No saint is sugar-coated in the Bible. The family drama in Abraham's household is an incredible reminder that God works in and through our

brokenness—even using our sin! Abraham and his descendants—despite their obvious failures—would be the *vehicle* through which God’s ultimate blessing would be poured out upon *all nations*.

1. The descendants of Abraham produced the Bible.
2. Jesus, the Messiah, was a physical descendant of Abraham.
3. The global spreading of the gospel has been well documented and continues to this day.

So then, it’s safe to say that God’s promise to Abraham *has been fulfilled!*

Finally, don’t miss the elaboration of the *Messianic Hope* in Genesis 49 (Jacob’s blessing of Judah). And here it is: “The Scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.” The *Covenant Blessing* and the *Messianic Hope* are mutually dependent. God’s Covenant Blessing—the blessing of His Presence—would not be realized until the Messiah *comes to rule the nations*. The phrase “already-not-yet” is helpful here. Jesus *did* come, and Jesus *is* reigning at the right hand of God (reference). So then, the Messiah’s rule has been *inaugurated*. However, until all the saints have been gathered-in to his kingdom (reference), we await his Second Coming—when he will establish a *final world order* without the presence of evil (reference). Hence, the kingdom of is already inaugurated but not yet consummated (*already-not-yet*).

Stage 3: (Refer to chart.) This stage covers roughly 120 years (from 1525 BC to 1405 BC). And don’t miss the fact that there is about a 350-year gap-of-silence at this point in the narrative. In the Bible, we find no stories about Israel’s enslavement in Egypt until we get to Moses. In this stage, there are only two key people and Moses is the dominant person. In fact, the time periods of this entire narrative can be divided this way: Moses’ first 40 years (in Egypt)... Moses’ second 40 years (in Midian)... and Moses’ last 40 years (which began with Israel’s Exodus, and then ended on the plains of Moab with the nation of Israel poised to cross the Jordan into the promised land). These themes—deliverance, law, rebellion, and wandering—saturate the whole of Scripture. *The events of this stage are essentially an object lesson for the people of faith for all generations to come.* The Gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus *as a second Moses*. The central role of Moses was to *intercede* for the people of Israel. Israel was a rebellious people—even in spite of God’s gracious and merciful actions toward them. And Moses *stands between* the people and God to protect the people from God’s righteous wrath. The mediating work of Moses, however, was ultimately imperfect. But it was meant to *point us forward* to the perfect mediation of Jesus Christ—the *Messianic Hope* that was yet to come.

There are many themes that could be highlighted in this stage, but *the giving of the law* is very near the top of the list. Israel was *called out* of Egypt and *set apart* to be *God’s chosen people*. Those three phrases are all important—called, set apart, God’s chosen people. In being *chosen*, there was an explicit *calling* for the nation of Israel. Israel was called to be *a light to the nations*. Israel had been in Egypt for roughly 400 years! And the cultural influence of the Egyptians had completely permeated the Israelite population. So then, in calling Israel *out* of Egypt, God also provided Israel with an entirely new set of customs—which eventually became known as *the Law of Moses* or *the Torah of Moses* (Torah meaning law or instruction). If Israel would follow these instructions, then they would fulfil their calling to be *a light to the nations*. In essence, Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). And their presence among the nations would be a witness to the glory, majesty, and dominion of the LORD—the maker of heaven and earth.

And that is only a tiny snippet of what is contained in this stage of redemptive history. It’s helpful to recognize that this stage represents the *end of the Torah* (the first five books of the Bible). As mentioned, *torah* means law or instruction. And these five books (the Torah) were a *literary whole* (i.e. they formed one complete scroll)—and this fact can easily be missed in our contemporary Bibles. The

Torah is foundational to the whole Bible. The themes of the Torah *saturate the whole of Scripture*. These themes are constantly echoed by the Prophets and the Apostles, and we also see these themes repeated in new and different ways as the Story of Redemption unfolds. And we can't miss this: The themes begun in the Torah are *ultimately fulfilled* in the person and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Stage 4: (Refer to chart.) This stage covers about 350 years (from 1405 BC to 1050 BC). It begins with Joshua—the successor of Moses—who took on Moses' role of leading the nation of Israel. Under Joshua's leadership, the Israelites crossed the Jordan to begin the conquest of the promised land (the land of Canaan). The Canaanites were descendants of Canaan, who was the son of Ham, who was the son of Noah. Canaan was cursed by Noah in Genesis 9, because of his father's wickedness. It may seem unfair to the modern reader—that Canaan would be cursed by his grandfather for his father's wickedness—but this was actually the status-quo in the ancient Near East. In their eyes, you *lived-on* through your descendants. So then, it was a damning circumstance to have your posterity cursed. In Noah's eyes, Ham's actions were so reprehensible that this curse was a fitting response. And so in this stage, we see the fulfilment of Noah's curse.

Now, don't fall into the trap of thinking that this stage marks the genocide of an *innocent* people. The Canaanites (and their neighbors) were despicably evil—e.g. sacrificing their own children as burnt offerings to their gods. It is not a stretch to recall images of Nazi Germany. Should the perpetrators of such crimes against humanity remain free from retribution? No. Not in God's eyes. In Genesis 9, God commands capital punishment for murder. The Bible speaks very clearly about God's demand for justice: God is not willing to let wickedness go unpunished. And people were often punished *as a people*—and not merely *as individuals*. That might seem strange and even unfair to us today because we think in terms of people *individually* and not *collectively*. But that over-emphasis on *individual* persons is foreign to ancient and pre-modern cultures. Ironically, however, the conquerors proved to be no better than the conquered. Throughout this period, God raised up judges for Israel. And yet, we see that these judges can only right-the-ship temporarily. The narrative ends with the judge and prophet Samuel. And under his wise leadership, a rebellious Israel will demand a human king (1 Samuel 8).

Stage 5: (Refer to chart.) This stage covers roughly 400 years (from 1020 BC to 639 BC). And here is one of the puzzling questions that we're confronted with at this stage: Why does the Bible seem ambivalent or unclear about whether kings are good or bad? When Samuel installs Israel's first king (King Saul), Samuel clearly denounces Israel's request as wicked and rebellious. Samuel viewed it this way because Israel wanted to become "like the other nations" (1 Sam. 8:5), and that is exactly the *opposite* of what God had called them to be. God called them to be a distinct-separate-holy nation—i.e. *not* like the other nations. They were to be a *light* for the other nations which were living in darkness.

But not only does God permit this installment of a king, He also promises to bless the king and his subjects *if* the king would obey and promote the law of the LORD (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). So, here is how we should see this development. These human kings were a *foreshadowing* of the need for a perfect king. When we see that, then we can make sense of this seeming ambiguity. A sinful people require civil governance. But history and experience show just how easily human governance becomes corrupt and oppressive. Israel was given the law of LORD at Mount Sinai through the prophet Moses. The original governance of Israel was *submission to the law of Yahweh*. And here is a side comment: In the Old Testament, 'LORD' is often used in place of the name 'Yahweh' (and this is in keeping with Rabbinic scribal tradition). The law of Yahweh was enforced by the elders of the community. Enforcing the law did not require a full-time civil office. It was the responsibility of the elders of each community. These elders were working-class men with strong family ties to the community. But this arrangement did not suit the Israelites, and indeed the book of Judges shows how ineffective this arrangement was

for the nation of Israel. But that was not a fault *of the arrangement*—it was a fault *in the people*. At any rate, the Israelites got themselves a king.

As Israel had been warned, the kingship was filled with corruption. And into this scene—one of systemic national corruption—the prophets were raised up by Yahweh. The prophets were God’s chosen men to expose and denounce Israel’s wickedness, to call the whole nation to repentance, and to exhort the rulers and the people to *turn back to Yahweh*. That was the basic function of every prophet. The prophets would also at times speak of future events that would come to pass. Some of these prophecies were to happen in the *near future*, and some of these prophecies were to happen in the *distant future*.

But don’t miss this central point: The prophets were constantly criticizing Israel for *one main thing*—false worship (idolatry). And the prophets also catalogued the various examples of Israel’s idolatry. And here is a recurring indictment: The nation was neglecting and abusing the poor and the needy of the land—the orphans, the widows, the foreigners residing among them. It is astounding that many Christians today *miss the mercy and grace of God in the Old Testament*. Many see the Old Testament portrayal of God as a war-mongering tyrant, and prefer the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels because Jesus seems much more compassionate and merciful. That perspective is deeply flawed on many levels. But back to the main point: The prophets connect true worship with justice for *all* people. *True worship fosters true justice*. False worship fosters injustice and depravity. And get the order right! True worship *leads* to true justice. The two cannot be separated (worship and justice). But if we place justice *ahead* of worship, then we are no better than the idolatrous kings of the Old Testament. They had their own views of justice, but it was Yahweh—“the compassionate and gracious God” (Exodus 34:6)—who told them what true justice really was.

And one final note: With King David, God’s Messianic Promise (the Messianic Hope) is elaborated. Yahweh promises David that from his descendants would come a king that would reign over all the nations for all time. This became known as the *Davidic Messiah*—the one who would sit on David’s throne and reign over *all* the nations... establishing an eternal reign of righteousness and peace on earth. First, the Messianic Hope was seen in Genesis 3 (when God’s cursed the Serpent)... and the Messianic Hope reemerges in Genesis 49 (when Jacob blesses Judah)... and now, we see the Messianic Hope in 2 Samuel 7 (with God’s promise to King David). As the history of Israel amply demonstrates, this Messianic Promise was Israel’s *only hope for redemption*.

Stage 6: (Refer to chart.) This stage covers roughly 200 years (from 626 BC to 445 BC). Despite the prophets’ constant confrontation and exhortation to *turn back to Yahweh*, the nation of Israel remained steeped in idolatry and injustice. There were significant reforms under King Hezekiah and King Josiah, but these reforms did not change Israel’s *march toward Exile* (banishment from the land). The Exile of Israel happened in successive stages. We didn’t mention this in the previous stage, but Israel actually splits into two kingdoms after the reign of King Solomon—into Israel and Judah. Israel (the northern kingdom) was conquered and exiled by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Then, the Babylonians conquered and partially exiled Judah (the southern kingdom) in 597 BC. And when the remaining subjects rebelled under King Zedekiah, the Babylonians returned in 586 BC and completely destroyed Jerusalem and deported a majority of its remaining citizens. And note that the northern kingdom of Israel was extinct from this stage forward. Ultimately, those who remained or returned to the northern region became known as Samaritans. But the southern kingdom of Judah—exiled to Babylonia—retained a very strong Israelite ethnicity.

Some of the most famous stories of the Bible are situated in Babylonia—e.g. the story of Esther; the story of Daniel in the Lions’ Den; the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And it was during this period of Exile, that the residents from Judah became known as “the Jews”. And the Jewish people held fast to their traditions while in exile. It is very likely that it was during the Exile that the Hebrew Canon (the Old Testament) began to be compiled. Also during this time, the Jewish synagogue emerged as a

center for Jewish worship and Jewish culture. These key developments were the result of a *dispersed people* trying desperately to retain a sense of national (ethnic) identity. And, by the providence of God, their efforts were incredibly successful.

The Exile had long been foretold by the prophets (beginning with Moses all the way back in Deuteronomy 4!)—and this Exile was seemingly long overdue. However, after 70 years in exile—shortly after the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylonia—the Jews were commissioned to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of the LORD (the Temple of Yahweh). Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah are key people in the effort to return and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Their effort is detailed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. And these books are filled with political intrigue, drama, and suspense. In the end, the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the Temple of Yahweh was restored.

Stage 7: (Refer to chart.) This stage covers just under a century (from 1 AD to 95 AD). For the sake of consistency, I have the birth of John the Baptist at 1 AD (when a critical timeline might suggest a date as early as 5 BC). The reason I like to stick with 1 AD is because AD stands for *anno domini* (year of the Lord), and this is the traditional date for the birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. We should recognize that there is about a 400-year gap-of-silence between Nehemiah’s story and the story of John the Baptist—similar to the gap between Joseph and Moses. Now, we have a lot more historical documentation for this later gap than we do for the earlier one between Joseph and Moses—but we won’t cover that information here because it’s not part of the biblical witness.

And we should recognize that summaries of this kind can’t possibly do justice to contents of the Bible. These stories simply need to be read (or heard) *in their entirety* over and over again. But the first four books of this stage are commonly called the Gospels, and they are essentially *portraits of the life and ministry of Jesus, the Messiah*. When Jesus entered the world, it was dominated by the Roman Empire—and Judea (which was formerly known as Judah) was also under the rulership of Rome. Another feature worth mentioning is the Jewish religious establishment. The Romans were allowing to Sanhedrin (the religious rulers) to govern the Jewish capital of Jerusalem (which had a deep influence on Jews throughout the entire Mediterranean)—the Romans allowed this so long as the Sanhedrin recognized Roman supremacy and upheld Roman taxation. By-and-large, the Jewish religious authorities were deeply hypocritical, and the people of the land (the commoners) were oppressed by the heavy taxation coming from *both* the Romans *and* the Jewish authorities. And it’s important to recognize that, in Judea, the religious authorities governed virtually all aspects of Jewish social life.

Also worth noting are some of the various religious sects which were present in Judea. There was a Zealot party actively fomenting revolt against the Romans and also anyone who *sympathized* with Roman rule. There were also separatist communities which had withdrawn due to the apostasy of the priesthood to form their own monastic communities (e.g. the Essenes). And within the Jewish Sanhedrin, there were two parties: the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees controlled the high priesthood. They were a small but wealthy and powerful group of families. They were *culturally* Jewish, but they rejected fundamental Jewish beliefs—such as angels and demons and the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees embraced an intellectually sophisticated stream of Greek culture, and they wanted to dispense with what (they perceived to be) the superstitious and mythological elements of the Old Testament. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were orthodox in their beliefs—even if their attitude and conduct was lacking. And the Pharisees enjoyed the common goodwill of the people—whereas the Sadducees did not. Despite that fact, Jesus excoriated the Pharisees to such an extent that the word ‘Pharisee’ is now synonymous with the word ‘hypocrite’.

Why did Jesus clash so intensely with the Jewish authorities? This topic deserves more time than we have here—but the bottom line is this: Jesus exposed their sinfulness, threatened their positions of power, and claimed to be the Promised Messiah and Son of God. This was *way too much* for the Jewish authorities. Despite Jesus’ displays of miraculous healing power, despite his humble demeanor, and

despite the *evident authority* of his teaching... the Jewish leaders conspired to kill him. And they succeeded (for three days) with the help of the Roman government. But the Prophets—especially Isaiah—foretold of the *Suffering Servant*—the one who would be oppressed and afflicted, pierced for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. Isaiah prophesied that *through his suffering*... this Servant would ultimately bring us peace, bind up our wounds, and ransom our souls (see Isaiah 53). Now, we know that the Suffering Servant and the Davidic Messiah are *one and the same person* (they are identical). But that was a radically new interpretation for Jesus' contemporaries—and they rejected it. Most of the Jews saw of the Davidic Messiah as a conquering king and *not* a suffering servant. And so, when it became clear that Jesus was apparently *not* going to restore the fortunes of the nation, they had no problem in joining the Jewish leaders who conspired together to *snuff out* this imposter... this pesky menace... this threat to the established order.

It was extremely vexing and disturbing to the Jewish authorities when a mere three days after his execution, news of his resurrection began to spread like wildfire. And fifty days after his resurrection, a seemingly unstoppable movement was sparked in the very city where he had been executed. This was the day of Pentecost—when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples *in power*—just as Jesus had told them. Pentecost—fifty days after Jesus' resurrection—this was the event where the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples of Jesus (those who had been with him throughout his earthy ministry)—the Spirit enabled these disciples to proclaim the message of salvation *through Jesus Christ* with unrelenting boldness and miraculous power. The lowly Suffering Servant was now the *Risen & Exulted King*. And all who would place their faith *in him* would receive peace-with-God *now*, and a rich *future* inheritance in God's eternal kingdom.

In the biblical history of the early church (which is primarily found in the book of Acts), Peter and Paul feature prominently. But there were certainly many other faithful witnesses to the power and glory of the risen Christ. (As a side comment: 'Christ' is the Greek word for 'Messiah'. And 'Messiah' is a Jewish word. It means 'Anointed One') One of the most appalling aspects of this new teaching—in the eyes of traditionalist Jews—was the *inclusion of Gentiles* (non-Jews) into the membership of God's people *without their submission* to the Law of Moses. This was simply unthinkable! Surely this was blasphemy! Never-the-less, despite intense Jewish efforts to stop the spread of Christianity, by 57 AD (the time of Paul's letter to the Romans) there were well-established churches in the Middle East, in Africa, Asia Minor, and eastern Europe. By the time the Apostle John writes the book of Revelation (in 95 AD), the church of Jesus Christ had spread across at least three continents... and had experienced multiple generations of successive leadership.

Now, the book of Revelation was clearly intended to be a bookend to the history of redemption. But this intentional bookend is actually quite open-ended. This final chapter of the Bible invites us not only to ponder and cherish the future coming of Christ (and the consummation of his Kingdom) but the book of Revelation also exhorts us to be faithful *here and now*—as we recognize the *certainty* of God's future promises and the *urgency* of His command to *love one another with the same love* that has been "lavished on us" (1 John 3:1).

In Conclusion...

Knowing the Story of Redemption—which means *knowing the Bible*—enables us to *see more clearly* the continuing work of the Spirit in our own day. Our knowledge of Scripture enables us to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). And my hope is that this story-framework will enable you to *delve more deeply* into the richness of God's revealed wisdom. I hope this framework will aid you in *weaving together* the many powerful themes which have all been given ultimately by *one shepherd*—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. If we want to grow in the grace and knowledge of *him*, then we need a *comprehensive* (not a *minimal*) grasp of *his entire story*—from Genesis to Revelation (the Story of Redemption).