

The Six Key Verses in the Old Testament that Tell the Bible Story

by Mark Roberts

Many fledgling Bible readers start strong but soon begin to fade because the Bible seems to be going nowhere. It starts with Creation but soon there's a guy named Abraham and then his children (who aren't always stellar characters) take over the story line and then suddenly we're in Egypt with slaves and plagues. "Wait a minute," they think, "what is going on here?" It is hard to read a random story that is completely disconnected. However, the Bible isn't random and it is not disconnected. **It is one story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end.** Knowing the plot makes all the difference as you read. There are six verses in the Old Testament that illuminate that storyline and help us understand where we are, and where we are going as we read. These passages are the major markers or milestones along the way that change the course and flow of the Bible's story in a significant and important way. Let's go find them!

Genesis 3:1-24

This is easily the most important passage in the Bible and it's not even close. Why? Because if Genesis 3 doesn't happen then everything remains perfectly wonderful in the Garden. Men and women have still have perfect fellowship with God like Adam and Eve did. Nature and all creation would still be in harmony. All would be great. A quick look around reveals everything isn't great. We have turmoil, racism, violence, crime and drought. What happened? Genesis 3 tells us what happened: sin entered the world and nothing was ever the same again. We live in a fallen world now.

The rest of the Bible (all of it!) is about God's plan to restore men and women to His fellowship. The whole Bible is about how God will fix the sin problem that Genesis 3 details. Notice 3:15 where God promises the Messiah will come some day (there's something to watch for as you read the Bible). You might also cheat a little and flip to the end. In Revelation 22:1-2 there is the Tree of Life that Adam and Eve lost access to in Genesis 3 due to their sin, only now it's in heaven and we do have access to it through Christ Jesus. The Bible's story is complete!

Genesis 12:1-3

After Genesis 3 the Bible shows the worldly steadily going downhill. Sin increases until God finally floods the world to give it a new start (the Noah story, Genesis 6-9). Yet almost as soon as Noah and his family leave the ark sin rears its ugly head again. By Genesis 12 the Bible reader is realizing how hopeless mankind is to solve the sin problem. It is in this chapter that God enters the picture, announcing He will do what we cannot. In Genesis 12 God chooses Abraham to be the head of the family through which God will work to bring salvation to everyone. That starts with God making three promises to Abraham. He will have a family that will become a nation (verse 2), that nation is promised a land (verse 1, this is Canaan or now modern-day Palestine) and through that family will come the Messiah, who will bless all people (verse 3) with salvation from sin.

The rest of the Old Testament simply follows these three promises. That's why the Bible is about the Israelites and not some other nation, like the Hittites or Philistines. The Israelites are the descendants of Abraham's son, Jacob who's name was changed by God to Israel. They are the family that God works through and with to bring salvation. As you read the Old Testament always keep these promises in front of you. They are driving the story from Genesis to Malachi!

Exodus 24:9-11

This is a very under-looked passage but it is huge in the Bible story. Here Moses, Aaron and Aaron's two sons, and seventy elders of the Israelites (the nation that descended from Abraham as God promised) journey up Mount Sinai and eat with God! What an amazing meal that must have been. What the Bible is showing us is that some of the fellowship lost in the Garden of Eden, destroyed by sin, is now being restored by the Law of Moses. God's covenant with Israel, set forth in the laws and regulations contained in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, would allow God's people to once again be in fellowship with Him. It wasn't perfect fellowship, like Adam and Eve had, but it was a step in the right direction. The Law of Moses becomes an important tool to help men and women understand about God's nature, His holiness, the seriousness of sin and more. Paul will later say it led us to Christ (Galatians 3:24) so don't downplay its importance. It is a step toward solving the sin problem of Genesis 3!

Deuteronomy 28-32

These chapters "forecast" much of the Israelite history we will read in the Old Testament because they describe what God will do when Israel is faithful to Him and what will happen when they aren't. Unfortunately, much of Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles is dominated by idol worship and God's judgment for it. When you read these stories just keep reminding yourself that we are seeing the Word of God come to pass exactly as God promised. When Israel is not faithful we should be looking for the judgements we see (like drought, see 28:23-24 and foreign invasion, see 28:49ff).

2 Samuel 7:1-16

So we are watching the Abrahamic promises come to pass. Is there anything else we should watch for? Yes, meet King David. David isn't perfect by any means but he is an amazing king who loves God. He decides to build the Lord a house, since God's worship center is simply a tent (known as the Tabernacle). God declines this offer but is so moved by David's devotion He announces that He will build David a house. By "house" however God doesn't mean a physical building or palace. God says He will build David a ruling house, a dynasty. His son will always sit upon His throne. This is a prophecy of the Messiah, that He will be of the family of David. Ultimately Jesus comes as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and He is the ruling King that God promised David! Once again we see the promises of God coming to pass, and here they are being refined. The Messiah promised to Abraham (an Israelite) now must also be a Jew, because David was from the tribe of Judah.

Jeremiah 31:33-34

This is the last of the key verses shaping the Old Testament story. Here we have the promise of a new covenant, something new that God is doing through the Messiah. Remember, the Bible is about fixing the sin problem that began in Genesis 3. Now God announces, through His prophet Jeremiah, that forgiveness of sin will be available, and He will "be their God and they shall be My people." This is a prophecy of what Jesus, the Savior, will do and accomplish. It sets our hope once again on the Christ!

Conclusions

These six verses guide the reader through the Old Testament. There are a lot of stories, incredible poetry, prophets preaching and more but in all of it we must keep our eye on the main story line: God reconciling sinful people to Himself. How can a just and holy God do that? The Old Testament is the record of how God planned and brought about salvation in Jesus. It's all about the sin problem, the promises to Abraham and David and the prophecy of a new covenant. That's why Matthew's gospel begins with "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). He is the fulfillment of the Bible's story!