

Learning, Loving, and Living The Story of God: Finding Your Place In the Battle of the Ages

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).



I am a narrative theologian.

I tell and interpret the stories of Scripture to understand the Story of God.

In my judgment, many of our churches today are
making two critical mistakes when it comes :

- 1) We have abandoned the Scripture's fundamental mode and language of communicating God's saving acts in history: *God's story!*
- 2) We have misread culture which is desperately looking for a story big enough and true enough to shape its course, and lacking our story, feeds on shallow, hollow, and paltry little narratives which

The only answer is to rediscover the Story of God in Christ, to love it with all our hearts, and live it out with honor and joy in the presence of our neighbors, inviting them to see things, as it were, from the vantage point of the Storytelling God.

*Once Upon A Time: Welcome to Bible's Unfolding Cosmic Drama
of the Battle of the Ages*

Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible*. 4th ed.
Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006, pp. 12-13.

Many people, however, lack any awareness of the Bible as a whole. They know a few snatches of Scripture here and there, like the twenty-third Psalm or the Sermon on the Mount, but are very hazy—if not completely ignorant—about the larger dramatic context within which these favorite passages have meaning. We all need to stand back from the trees so that we may see the woods. . . .

[Presenting the Bible as a historical drama] to be sure, this figure of speech is not found anywhere in the Bible itself, but it is a convenient and appropriate way to view the Bible as a whole.

. . . For one thing, *a drama has a beginning and an end—it starts somewhere and goes somewhere*. Also, it has *a cast of persons*, and the story deals with *the whole range of human experience*, from triumph to tragedy. Furthermore, a drama has a plot that moves forward through several acts toward a denouement (or climax) in which the episodes that took place at the beginning are understood in their larger meaning. In a drama there is a great deal of diversity: different personalities, different attitudes toward life, different episodes that take place at different times and in various settings. But underlying all this variety is *the movement of the plot toward its resolution*.

The Bible, too, has a unity like that of a great drama. *It moves from beginning to end, from creation to new creation*. The story deals with people's hopes and fears, their joy and anguish, their ambitions and failures. There is a great deal of diversity in the Bible: different authors, different historical situations, different kinds of theological expression. But underlying all this great variety is the dynamic movement, similar to the plot of a drama, that binds the whole together.

The biblical drama, however, is unique in that *God appears in the cast*. Not only is God the Author who stands behind the scenes prompting and directing the drama, but God also enters onto the stage of history as the Chief Actor—the protagonist. *The biblical plot is the working out of God's purpose for the creation in spite of all efforts to oppose it*. The denouement is reached, according to the conviction of the Christian community, when *the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are proclaimed as the sign of God's decisive victory*. In the light of this climactic event, the earlier stages of the story are understood with a deeper and larger meaning [italics mine].



I. Learning, Loving, and Living The Story of God: Find Your Place In the Battle of the Ages

A. Learn the Story of God

1 John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— [2] the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— [3] that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. [4] And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1. *The universe is at war:* since the creation of the universe, a battle has been raging in the heavenlies which has effected the earth and all beings and creatures in it. *It is a battle for preeminence in the universe!*

a. A battle for supremacy: *who will ultimately receive honor, worship, and glory as supreme and final Lord in all things?*, Matthew 4:8-10 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. [9] And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." [10] Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, " 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'

b. A battle for authority: *who will finally rule in the universe?*,

Rev. 4:11 Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

- c. A battle for restoration: *what will be the fate of creation and humankind, destruction or redemption?*, Habakkuk 2:14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

- 2. The Scriptures contain the script of God's cosmic drama, a beautiful, true, and good story told beginning, middle, and end, climaxing in the work of Jesus Christ. Let me tell you the entire story of Scripture (in two minutes or less!)

Once Upon A Time: The Cosmic Drama Through A Biblical Narration of the World

From Everlasting to Everlasting, Our Lord Is God

From everlasting, in that matchless mystery of existence before time began, our Triune God dwelt in perfect splendor in eternal community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the I Am, displaying his perfect attributes in eternal relationship, needing nothing, in boundless holiness, joy, and beauty. According to his sovereign will, our God purposed out of love to create a universe where his splendor would be revealed, and a world where his glory would be displayed and where a people made in his own image would dwell, sharing in fellowship with him and enjoying union with himself in relationship, all for his glory.

Who, As the Sovereign God,

Created A World That Would Ultimately Rebel Against His Rule

Inflamed by lust, greed, and pride, the first human pair rebelled against his will, deceived by the great prince, Satan, whose diabolical plot to supplant God as

ruler of all, resulted in countless angelic beings resisting God's divine will in the heavenlies. Through Adam and Eve's disobedience, they exposed themselves and their heirs to misery and death, and through their rebellion ushered creation into chaos, suffering, and evil. Through sin and rebellion, the union between God and creation was lost, and now all things are subject to the effects of this great fall—alienation, separation, and condemnation become the underlying reality for all things. No angel, human being, or creature can solve this dilemma, and without God's direct intervention, all the universe, the world, and all its creatures would be lost.

**Yet, in Mercy and Loving-kindness,
the Lord God Promised to Send a Savior to Redeem His Creation**

In sovereign covenantal love, God determined to remedy the effects of the universe's rebellion by sending a Champion, his only Son, who would take on the form of the fallen pair, embrace and overthrow their separation from God, and suffer in the place of all humankind for its sin and disobedience. So, through his covenant faithfulness, God became directly involved in human history for the sake of their salvation. The Lord God stoops to engage his creation for the sake of restoring it, to put down evil once and for all, and to establish a people out of which his Champion would come to establish his reign in this world once more.

So, He Raised Up A People From Which the Governor Would Come

And so, through Noah, he saves the world from its own evil, through Abraham, he selects the clan through which the seed would come. Through Isaac, he continues the promise to Abraham, and through Jacob (Israel) he establishes his nation, identifying the tribe out of which he will come (Judah). Through Moses, he delivers his own from oppression and gives them his covenantal law, and through Joshua, he brings his people into the land of promise. Through judges and leaders he superintends his people, and through David, he covenants to bring a King from his clan who will reign forever. Despite his promise, though, his people fall short of his covenant time after time. Their stubborn and persistent rejection of the Lord finally leads to the nation's judgment, invasion, overthrow, and captivity. Mercifully, he remembers his covenant and

allows a remnant to return—for the promise and the story were not done.

**Who, As Champion, Came Down From Heaven,
In The Fullness of Time, and Won through the Cross**

Some four hundred years of silence occurred. Yet, in the fullness of time, God fulfilled his covenant promise by entering into this realm of evil, suffering, and alienation through the incarnation. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, God came down from heaven and lived among us, displaying the Father's glory, fulfilling the requirements of God's moral law, and demonstrating the power of the Kingdom of God in his words, works, and exorcisms. On the Cross he took on our rebellion, destroyed death, overcame the devil, and rose on the third day to restore creation from the Fall, to make an end of sin, disease, and war, and to grant never-ending life to all people who embrace his salvation.

**And, Soon and Very Soon, He will Return to This World
and Make All Things New**

Ascended to the Father's right hand, the Lord Jesus Christ has sent the Holy Spirit into the world, forming a new people made up of both Jew and Gentile, the Church. Commissioned under his headship, they testify in word and deed the gospel of reconciliation to the whole creation, and when they have completed their task, he will return in glory and complete his work for creation and all creatures. Soon, he will put down sin, evil, death, and the effects of the Curse forever, and restore all creation under its true rule, refreshing all things in a new heavens and the new earth, where all beings and all creation will enjoy the shalom of the triune God forever, to his glory and honor alone.

“And we will live happily ever after. The End.”

3. *Christ Jesus is the Victor (Christus Victor)*: through the covenant promise of God, he determined in ages past that he would send to the world a seed who would put down all evil, sin, death, and the devil forever. That seed was *Jesus of Nazareth!*

Col. 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Psalms 68:18 You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

Hebrews 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil

1 John 4:4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

- a. In fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12.1-3), God revealed his covenant plan through the patriarchs and the history of Israel, promising to send a Messiah who would redeeming the world from its futility, and humankind from its sin, opening the door for full restoration: freedom, wholeness, and justice
- b. In the fullness of time, Christ came inaugurating the Kingdom of God, displaying God's glory and demonstrating his victory over our mortal enemies (sin, death, the grave, the devil), and made the whole creation new, Mark 1.14-15

- c. As Victor over Hades and death, Christ was crucified, died, and has been raised and ascended to heaven to God's right hand, has sent his Holy Spirit into the world, and formed his people to be the continuation of the story in the world today
- (1) He overcame the godless world system that traps so many millions in its wake, John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
 - (2) He overcame our inherited sin nature and its bondage, Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
 - (3) He overcame our ancient foe and resister of the will of God, the devil, 1 John 3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.
 - (4) He has overcome death and Hades, Rev. 1:17-18 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, [18] and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.
4. We are the Church of the living God, the veritable Army and Agent of the *Already/Not Yet Kingdom*: now through the Holy Spirit, God has entrusted the message of deliverance and life to the

Church, which is both the proof and power of Christ's victory in the world today, Matthew 16:18-19 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

B. Love the Story of God

Phil. 2:3-11 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1. *Repent from sin, small dreams, and petty alternative storylines*, and believe in the Good News of Christ and his Kingdom, Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, [15] and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
2. Welcome to your new identity: union with the Conqueror, *Jesus Christ the Lord*, and member of his army, the *Church Militant*

- a. We are the continuing *sign and foretaste of the Kingdom*, Eph.5.25-32
 - b. We are *his messengers who bear witness to his Kingdom promise* to the ends of the earth, Acts. 1.8
 - c. We are appointed *ambassadors of Christ* and His Kingdom, 2 Cor. 5.18-21
 - d. We are *God's trophy and showcase* of God's calling and grace, 1 Pet.2.9-10
 - e. We are *soldiers and warriors*, the deputies of Christ's authority, Matt. 28.18-20; 16.18-19
3. *Let us fully, wholeheartedly, and enthusiastically adopt God's Story as our very own story*, become involved and participate in the Story that God is telling and fulfilling through all time!, 1 John 3:1-3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. [2] Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.
- a. In *theology*, we affirm God as the Author of the Story, Jesus of Nazareth as its Champion, and the Holy Spirit as the interpreter of the Story
 - b. *The Scriptures* are the living testimony and record of the Story

- c. In our worship we historically recite the Story, prophetically proclaim the Story, and dramatically reenact the Story
- d. In *initiation and incorporation* into our fellowship, we *baptize the converted*, helping them to identify with and embrace the Story
- e. In *our discipleship* we learn the Story, memorize and meditate on the Story, and are trained in the meaning of the Story
- f. In *spiritual formation* we embody the Story (Church Year)
- g. In *counseling and soul care*, we enable others to understand their own life stories in juxtaposition to God's Story
- h. In our *service and outreach*, we express the Story's meaning through acts of hospitality and generosity
- i. In our *witness* we *proclaim and announce* the Good News of the Story to all who have never heard of God's great Drama
- j. In our *hope* we await the consummation and fulfillment of the Story

C. Live the Story of God

2 Cor. 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. [17] For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

True Pretense: Playing Your Role in the Mighty Drama of God
(C.S. Lewis on the Lord's Prayer)

Why? What is the good of pretending to be what you are not? Well, even on the human level, you know, there are two kinds of pretending. There is a bad kind, where the pretense is there instead of the real thing; as when a man pretends he is going to help you instead of really helping you. But there is also a good kind, where the pretense leads up to the real thing [*italics mine*].

When you are not feeling particularly friendly but know you ought to be, the best thing you can do, very often, is to put on a friendly manner and behave as if you were a nicer person than you actually are. And in a few minutes, as we have all noticed, you will be really feeling friendlier than you were. Very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already. *That is why children's games are so important. They are always pretending to be grown-ups—playing soldiers, playing shop. But all the time, they are hardening their muscles and sharpening their wits, so that the pretense of being grown-up helps them to grow up in earnest.*

— C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1943, copyright renewed © 1980, pp. 162-63.

1. Don't be ashamed of God's drama; commit to the battle, for you can't claim neutrality. *You in this thing, whether you realize it or not!*, 2 Cor. 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. [4] For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments [5] and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,
2. No other scripts fully tell the tale of life; get ready for a fight, cause

it's on and you're in it. 1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

3. *Stand and fight, or get out of the way.* There is no middle ground, but the love and grace of God ensures that in the end, we win. We cannot be defeated, and we can be powerful in battle for the Lord!, Joshua 24:15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

— 1 John 3:8



*Welcome to the High Drama and the Deep Mystery,
to the Story of God in Christ!*

As Tolkien and C.S. Lewis both argue, the Christian Story is True Myth, Art Verified, Where the truth of history and the stuff of legend fuse together in cosmic drama and power. We are living in the greatest story ever told.

We are characters in God's high drama where the high magic and deep mystery of God's working in Christ touches us here in east Wichita, in our homes, in our families, in our lives. We are believers in Christ, heirs to the Kingdom of

God, to hold to Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord is to believe what I take to be one of the fundamental principles of all hero stories and fairy tales. Nothing in this world truly is, as it on the surface appears to be.

To read comic books and fairy stories in the right way, you must believe that WHAT YOU LOOKING AT AIN'T ALL THERE IS OUT THERE, BECAUSE NOTHING IS AS IT APPEAR TO BE.

Jim Ware in his fascinating book, God of the Fairy Tale: Finding Truth in the Land of Make Believe, talks of a discussion one night, between Tolkien and Lewis. Tolkien, the author of the Lord of the Rings, and C.S. Lewis, the molder of Narnia tales, met on the grounds of Magdalen College, Oxford, discussing the stories of the world and the Story of God.

The account goes that Lewis said: I've loved stories since I was a boy. You know that Tollers (Lewis' nickname for Tolkien). Especially stories about heroism and sacrifice, death and resurrection. . . But when it comes to Christianity . . . Well, that's another matter. I simply don't understand how the life and death of someone else (whoever he was) 2000 years ago can help me here and now.

Tolkien replied, "But don't you see, Jack (Tolkien's nickname for Lewis), "the Christian story is the greatest story of them all. Because it's the real story. The historical event that fulfills the tales and shows us what they mean."

Lewis: Are you tryng to tell me that in the story of Christ . . . all the other stories have somehow come true?"

A week and a half later Jack, C. S. Lewis, teacher, author, defender of the Christian faith and creator of the beloved Chronicles of Narnia writes to his friend Authur Greeves: "I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ—in Christianity. My long night talk with Tolkien had a great deal to do with it."



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The only answer is to rediscover the Story of God in Christ, to love it with all our hearts, and live it out with honor and joy in the presence of our neighbors, inviting them to see things, as it were, from the vantage point of the Storytelling God.

May we learn, love, and Live the Story of God in such a way that we find our Place In the Battle of the Ages, the story of God's love in Christ.

The Bottom Line: _____