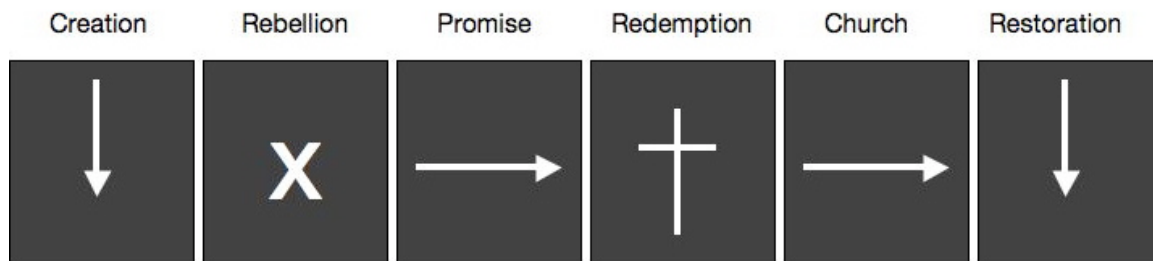


Introduction

One Way to approach the Bible is to see it as a Divine Drama. It is a dramatic six-act play. But it is not just a fairy tale. It is a True Story. Much of what follows is influenced heavily by the work of Chris Wright, Michael Goheen, Craig Bartholomew, and Caesar Kalinowski. Following are 6 symbols we have used to identify the 6 acts. We have found this a useful tool in getting the overarching story to stick. After the symbols you will find the True Story.

Symbols of the Story



Act 1: Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and earth. God, the main character of this story, is the personal, all-powerful being who existed outside of time, space, and matter. He existed before all that we see today. In this story we will see that He is the true ruler of the universe, the one who created His kingdom by His own volition, and lovingly cares and provides for all that is under His good reign.

God first created angels. Angels were beings whose existence was centered around praising, worshipping, and enjoying this good God. However, not all angels were satisfied with this role of declaring the worth and majesty of the good and true God. One angel named Lucifer, the most beautiful of all the angels, grew jealous of the glory that belonged to God and chose to set himself up as an alternate god. He was able to convince 1/3 of the angels to rebel against the good, true, and just God. Those rebellious angels chose to worship Lucifer, a created being instead of God. Knowing Lucifer's rebellion, God, who will never permit rebellion or sin to remain in His presence forever, had to deal with this rebellion and banished Lucifer, now called Satan or Deceiver, and his rebellious angels from enjoying His blessing and His kingdom.

The kingdom or sphere of authority that God set up was not restricted to the heavens or heavenly beings, but God powerfully, intentionally, and creatively spoke all of creation into existence. He precisely laid the foundations of the earth. He intentionally separated the waters from the land and filled the land with beautiful

flowers, unique animals, and splashed His creative canvas with many colors and fragrances that all declared His worth. In five days He masterfully and brilliantly set up a physical kingdom that was separate from Him, but uniquely cared for by him. After each day He reflected and said that his creation was good.

On the sixth day God created the first humans. God said let us make man in our own image and He proceeded to form the dust of the ground together and breathed into it the breath of life, and the first man was created and placed in a perfect garden where he could enjoy the good reign of this God. Man was decidedly different than the rest of creation and had a unique relationship with the creator, the king of this kingdom. God spoke to this first man, Adam, and told him that he was to enjoy all that He had created, the animals, the scents, the flavors, the sights, and the work he was to do. Humans were created with the ability to enjoy this wonderful place God had made. God also made it clear to Adam that in the center of the garden were two trees. One was the tree of life, and that one could be enjoyed and eaten from just like the rest of the fruit trees- the other tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the only tree was the only one they were not to eat from. If Adam was to eat of this tree God clearly stated that death would be experienced by humanity. This conversation between Adam and God went on as God described what it was going to look like for Adam to live in this garden, he had responsibilities and was to cultivate the garden and name the animals operating under God's authority to cultivate and populate this world.

So Adam went about the work that God had given him to do. As he worked God said that it was not good for man to be alone, he needed a helper. So God caused a deep sleep to come over Adam and took a rib from his side and created a woman, Eve, for Adam to enjoy, love, protect, and care for in relationship. When Adam woke up he broke into poetry and declared how amazed and blown away he was by what God had created! This first marriage was enjoyed without shame and guilt, but they were naked in every sense and not the least bit afraid of rejection. After the sixth day and the creation of man in His own image God declared that what He had made was very good.

Then on the seventh day God rested and reflected on the goodness of His creation. This was not the end of God's relationship with His creation, but rather was only the beginning. Each day God would come down in the cool of the day and talk with Adam and Eve, teaching them the best possible way to live life, and showing them how to live a life under His good reign. Adam and Eve were able to enjoy both the goodness and greatness of their Creator and His creation. They worked faithfully in the garden cultivating it and developing it's potential to bring glory to God. They lived in perfect harmony in their relationships with God, His world, each other, and even with themselves. This truly was a good kingdom!

Act 2: Rebellion

One day a deceitful, lying serpent came up to Eve and asked her a question. He asked, "Did God really say that you couldn't eat of any of the fruit in this garden?" Eve told him, "No that's not what God said, we can eat from any tree in the garden. It's only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that we are not allowed to eat from - or even touch - or we will definitely die."

Still trying to trick Eve the serpent said, "You won't die! God just knows that as soon as you eat of that fruit your eyes are going to be opened, you will become just like Him. You will know everything!"

"I will know everything?" Eve thought. She looked at the delicious fruit contemplating the decision then she believed the lies of the serpent over the teachings of the good God. She reached out her hand and ate some of the fruit and gave some to her husband Adam, who was there with her and he ate it as well. In that moment their eyes were opened, they became full of shame and quickly tied fig leaves together trying to cover up their nakedness. They had rebelled and chosen to live outside of the good reign of God and were immediately experiencing the devastating effects of that choice.

Later on that day, Adam and Eve heard God walking in the garden as He always did that time of day. When they heard Him, their shame caused them to try to hide themselves behind some of the bushes in the garden.

God called out to them. "Where are you?"

Adam answered, "I heard you coming, and I was afraid because I was naked."

God answered and asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to?"

Adam replied to God, "It was that woman that you gave to me... she handed me the fruit!"

Then God said to Eve, "How could you do this?"

Eve said, "The serpent tricked me into eating the fruit!"

So God spoke to the serpent and said "Because you have done this, you and your kind will eat of the dust of the ground the rest of your lives. You will now be the enemy of the woman and her offspring. You will bite at his heels, but he will crush your head!"

Then God turned to Adam and Eve, He knew that His good creation would be drastically effected by their choice to live outside His good reign. He knew that they would be subjected to sickness, pain, suffering, and even death now as a result of their decisions. But because He is just and good and cannot allow injustice or rebellion to remain in his presence forever, He had to punish them for their rebellion.

He told them the consequences of their decision:

- Women will have great pain in bearing children.
- Men will struggle, toil, and sweat while trying to cultivate the land – only to get a little bit of food from it.
- You will both struggle for power in your relationship.
- Then you will return to the dust from which you were formed.”

Even though He punished them with the consequences for their rebellion, God still loved and provided for them. He gave them clothes made from the skins of some of the animals that they had previously named and cared for. They could clearly see their choices had affected the whole of creation.

God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden and then sent mighty warrior angels to guard its entrance so that they would not be able to re-enter it. He also put a flaming sword in place to guard the Tree of Life so that people could no longer eat from it. God’s good creation was now a drastically different place now that it was twisted and distorted from how He had made it. In the midst of the realization that they were now living on a world under a curse, Adam and Eve still knew that the good God had told them someone who would crush the serpent- a Victor had been promised.

Act 3: Promise

Now what you have to understand is that the story doesn't end with the Rebellion in the garden. Like any good story, there is a hope. And the hope of this story lies in the promise that God is still on His mission...

After the rebellion in the garden it didn't take long for that rebellion to continue to manifest itself. Adam and Eve had two sons. One of them murdered the other! And it continued to go downhill after that.

It gets so bad that at one point God looks at the people of the earth and sees that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." God decided humanity was essentially lost and without hope. He decided he would send a great flood over the entire earth to wipe this rebellion and wickedness out. But God was still on mission...

You see he didn't wipe every single human out. There was still Noah and his family who were saved through the flood. And after the water subsided, God put a rainbow in the sky and covenanted with Noah that He would never again destroy the earth.

You might think that Noah's descendents figured it out and started loving and following God. But the rebellion ran deep. Pride dominated the whole world. The people came together from all over the world to build a tower to heaven and make a name for themselves rather than serve God. But God was still on mission.

Rather than destroying the people again or letting them have their way in their pride, God was gracious to them and dispersed them across the earth, confusing their language.

But God didn't just leave the nations out there to be confused and without hope. He called out to one man, Abraham. God made a covenant with Abraham that He would bless Abraham, multiply his offspring, and that his offspring would bring blessing to all the nations!

Abraham did have a child, Isaac. Isaac would multiply into a great nation called Israel. But Israel wound up enslaved to the mighty Egyptians. They were beaten, abused, and hopeless. They cried out in misery to God. But God was still on mission...

He heard their cries for help and he rescued them by His mighty hand out of Egypt. This Exodus from Egypt would be the great act of God that Israel would always

look back on to remember that God was their savior and would keep His covenant with them.

You might think that after being rescued out of slavery Israel would be the group that finally forsakes their rebellion from God. But that wasn't the case. As they journeyed to the land God had promised them, they began grumbling against God. They even wished they could go back to their slavery in Egypt! At one point they took all their gold jewelry and made a golden calf to be their God. But God was still on mission...

After forty years, God raised up a man named Joshua to finally lead Israel out of the wilderness and into the beautiful land God had promised to them. God had saved them from slavery and into their own safe fertile land.

You might think now that Israel was safe in their land, they would break the cycle of rebellion against God. But they actually fell quickly into a devastating cycle of rebellion. Over the next centuries they would fall further and further away from the God who had rescued and delivered them. But God was still on His mission...

Even though God should have been their King, He gave them a king. His name was David. David ruled well and brought the nation together. As David was about to die, God made a covenant with David that one day one of David's sons would reign over God's people forever.

But David's sons didn't follow after their father, and they certainly didn't follow God. They turned to all the gods of the other nations and led the nation away from God. Because of their rebellion, God brought other nations in to conquer and exile Israel from their land. All seemed lost. But God was still on mission...

In the midst of the exile, God spoke through prophets to the people. He gave them a great promise that He would one day come and rescue His people. One day, he would send a mighty, yet humble servant to redeem His people.

And so, God's people were left, waiting, longing, hoping for the day when God would rescue them.

Interlude

The Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans – for centuries these empires had squashed, deported, exiled and minimized God’s people - and their God!

Surely God would answer. Surely He would rescue. After all...

- He promised Noah he would never destroy the earth.
- He promised Abraham his descendents, the people of Israel, would be blessed.
- He rescued their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt.
- He blessed them and gave them the land through Joshua.
- He promised David a son who would rule forever.
- And He promised to rescue His people out of exile.

So, for 400 years they were waiting... longing... hoping... for God to rescue.

God’s people began looking for the Messiah – that anointed one, that man sent by God, to be their King. Over and over their hopes would rise with a great political figure, or some powerful revolutionary. But over and over, the self-proclaimed would-be-Messiah failed. Over and over, their hopes were dashed.

Act 4: Redemption

But God was still on His mission. On a quiet night in Bethlehem, the same city King David had grown up in a millennium before, a little child was born. The child’s name was Jesus, the Aramaic translation of Joshua. On the night this child was born a group of angels came down from Heaven to herald, or to welcome this child into the world. These weren’t little pudgy baby angels with harps. These were mighty warrior angels who had come down to announce the arrival of the One and True King to the world. All they could say in utter worship was, “Glory to God in the highest!”

That baby grew into a man. Around the time he was 30 years old, he began to tell people that He was the King they had been waiting for. He told people, “There is good news! No more waiting, no more longing, no more false Messiahs! Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

Jesus began teaching people what life was going to be like under the rule of this True King in His Forever Kingdom. He not only taught people how to live in this Kingdom but he gave them a foretaste of what the Kingdom would look like.

- In His Kingdom there is no blindness. He gave sight to the blind.
- In His Kingdom there is no sickness. He healed the sick.

- In His Kingdom there is no sin. He forgave sin.
- In His Kingdom nature is at peace. He calmed the storm.
- In His Kingdom there are no evil powers. He cast out demons.
- In His Kingdom there is no death. He raised the dead.

Many people followed Jesus. They wanted to be a part of His Kingdom. They believed he was finally God's answer to their longings. Of the thousands that followed him, he pulled out 12 apprentices He would train to carry out His mission after he left. They dropped everything to follow Jesus on His way to the throne. They believed Jesus was going to overturn the Romans, set God's people free, and bring in the golden age, the end of history! They wanted to be near. So they followed Jesus. They loved Jesus. They served Jesus. They stayed close by the side of Jesus.

But not everyone loved Jesus. To the Jews, He was flipping their religious system upside down after they had worked so hard to build up. To the Romans, they saw Him as an insurrectionist. And to make matters worse, he claimed He was God. So, needless to say, not everyone loved Jesus.

After three years of proclaiming the Kingdom and setting himself up as the King, the Messiah, the rescuer, Jesus came into Jerusalem, the City of David, to celebrate the Passover. The Passover was that holiday where the people of Israel remembered God's great saving act of rescuing them out of Egyptian Slavery so many years before. Many people welcomed Jesus into the city believing that he would be the King who would do the next great saving act of rescuing them out of Roman Slavery.

But not everyone loved Jesus. You see they liked it the way it was. They didn't want the status quo rocked. And if there is one thing that a man claiming to be both God and the promised Deliverer does it is rock the boat of the status quo.

Some of the religious leaders made a plan to take Jesus out. They conspired with Judas, one of Jesus' twelve apprentices exactly how it would go down. They turned Him over to the Romans calling him an insurrectionist, a rebel. They demanded He, the one and true King of the earth, be beaten and killed! Not just that, but they wanted him crucified. Crucifixion was the most torturous, humiliating and excruciating death ever configured by the human mind.

So on a little hill outside Jerusalem, the City of David, hung Jesus, the one and true King of the world. Hanging on a cross was the one they had been hoping, waiting, longing for. John looked on in horror. The King willingly hung on a cross and died... according to plan.

True Story

From Creation to Restoration

According to plan? Surely not! How could that be? Wasn't the plan that he goes up to a throne, wears a crown of jewels, and every living creature bows down before him? The plan wasn't supposed to be go up to a cross, wear a crown of thorns, and have his enemies spit and curse at him!

The one and true King was now the crucified and dead King. He had become a victim of the rebellion in the Garden of Eden just like the rest of creation. He seemed no different.

But God was still on His mission. The cross wasn't outside of God's plan to redeem and restore God's creation. It was the white hot center of it.

Three days later some women went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. He was gone! They told His disciples who ran as fast as he could to the tomb. They found it... empty. Soon they would learn that Jesus was indeed... alive!

The crucified and dead King showed that he absolutely was the one and true King. He did not succumb to the powers and effects of that original rebellion. He rose from the grave. He defeated death! He conquered the curse! And He squashed Satan's head in the process!

Jesus was alive. The one and true King had defeated the most deadly enemy. The one and true King had decisively defeated the enemies of the Kingdom.

Act 5: Church

After His death and resurrection Jesus gathered his followers back together. He began to show them from their history and their sacred writings that what had happened to Him was according to plan. God was still on a redemptive mission and He was sending them out to play key roles in that mission.

Over the next 40 days Jesus showed them that His death and resurrection was needed to :

- Take the penalty for their sin on Himself.
- Defeat Satan.
- Redeem them from their slavery to sin.
- Secure the renewal of His creation.

So Jesus followers were stoked! They were sitting there in Jerusalem with Jesus, the one and true resurrected King. He is teaching them. He is about to take his throne and usher in the end of History! Finally its what they had been waiting for!

Not so fast. Jesus tells John and the others that it 's not yet time, the story isn't finished yet. There are more people who still need to hear about the King and His good Kingdom. It was not yet time for His Kingdom to come in full. Jesus apprentices learned that they and their friends were going to be sent out into the world as ambassadors for the true King.

Just as those angels had heralded the good news of the King's birth so many years before...

Just as Jesus had heralded the news of His Kingdom and showed people what it looked like in His Kingdom....

They too were going to be sent out to herald the good news of the true King's life, death and resurrection. Together their lives and their voices would be a foretaste of and an invitation into the Kingdom life.

Before he ascended to go back to His Father, Jesus told his apprentices, "I am leaving you now, but I will come again one day. But for now, while you are here, I am going to send the Spirit of God to live in and among you. He will empower you for your mission to bring the good news of me and my Kingdom, making new apprentices of me in every tongue, tribe and nation." And then he left ascending to the right hand of the Father.

So Jesus followers' (about 120 of them) sat in Jerusalem waiting for the Spirit that had been promised to help them live out the mission Jesus had called them to live out. They waited and prayed as days went by, then a week- then finally on the tenth day The Spirit arrived with a great rush of wind, and tongues of fire were seen

leaping above their heads. They were united, empowered, and directed to live out the mission Jesus gave them. In order to carry out the mission they were empowered to speak in languages that they had never studied or spoken before in their lives- so that people could hear the good news.

Now, there were many people coming into town because it was the time of Pentecost, a Jewish feast that drew people to Jerusalem from all over to celebrate the end of the spring harvest and God's grace in providing for them. When those people heard the great sound of the wind they came rushing to see what was going on. Peter and his friends, empowered by the Spirit started to connect the dots for people showing how their longings for a Deliverer, a true and perfect King, were fulfilled in Jesus, the one whom they had killed. He was truly the Messiah, the Deliverer-and they had to repent and believe in the true King: Jesus. Thousands of people believed the true story that day.

As time went on, Jesus' apprentices went out from Jerusalem. They went literally all over the known world. They told as many people as they could about the one and true King and what He had done. They set up communities wherever of people who believed and lived according to this true story they went, these were called churches and those who followed this King were called Christians. The true story that Jesus taught His followers began to revolutionize their lives and they began to devote their lives to *servicing* each other, being a *family* that was not defined by cultural norms or racial boundaries but by their crucified and risen savior, *learning* from the Scriptures and each other, and living as *missionaries* to the world.

Many of those who followed the true king were abused, tortured, and exiled for living their lives according to the true story, but still the good news of a risen Savior continued to spread bringing freedom and forgiveness to people across the world, in both cities and rural communities. People of all walks of life began to see the truth of the story that these witnesses of the life and death of Jesus were talking about. One such man was a religious leader who was killing Christians. Saul encountered the risen Christ and His life was transformed by the power of the gospel to the point that He is one of the main missionaries we learn from even today.

As these communities spread across the known world some of Jesus followers who had witnessed the risen Christ were directed by the Holy Spirit to write letters to some of these communities teaching them how to live faithfully on mission. They answered their questions, corrected their errors, and redirected them back to Jesus and His mission which was now theirs to carry out.

Through the church we see that God is still on His redemptive mission. It is as the church lives out her mission to declare and demonstrate the gospel, that people are

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able to see what it is to live under the good reign of God and come to worship the King: Jesus. It is the act of the story in which we find ourselves today.

Act 6: Restoration

Remember back a couple acts when Jesus was here how not everyone loved Jesus? Well, not everyone loves His followers either. The government thought they had done away with Jesus. So when one of Jesus' apprentices, John, went out leading people in a movement that asserted that the Jesus they had killed had resurrected and was the one and true King, you can imagine they didn't like it too much.

John found himself imprisoned on a small island. He sat in his prison cell and prayed to God. He wondered if God was still going to rescue His people. Just like God's people had wondered before Jesus came whether God was still on His mission – longing and waiting in agony. Well in the same way things began to seem so bleak for John there in that prison cell, so many years after Jesus had gone. John began to wonder, to cry out, to long to know that God was still on His mission.

God spoke to Him through a dream, a revelation. In a sequence of stories with rich imagery, God preached to John the true story that God was still sovereignly accomplishing His mission on the earth through the Church. Even though it seemed like the enemy was winning and all was lost, God was still behind the scenes and the Church and her King would one day win the final victory.

Finally, at the end of this vision, God revealed to him the end of the story: The End of the True Story:

One day the one and true King Jesus returns. He returns not as the sacrificial lamb that was slain, but as the conquering Lion. John paints this descriptive picture for us: He will return on a great white warhorse like a mighty general returning from battle. He has a great sword of righteousness coming out of His mouth. He has a tattoo on his thigh that says "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". He is wearing a crown of many jewels. And He is wearing a white robe whiter than anything you have ever seen. And the hem of His robe has been drenched in blood. But its not the blood of His enemies. Its His own blood. His own blood shed on the cross that his enemies might become His friends – His family!

The one and true King Jesus will return for one final battle where He will finally defeat Satan, sending Him into a Lake of Fire where he will burn forever.

After that, the one and true King Jesus will judge every person. Those who chose to choose death, who missed the mark, will be cast away, forever missing out on what is to come. Those who were a part of the redeemed community, who had been redeemed by the blood of Jesus will spend forever with Him in what was to come...

Then John saw it! He saw a picture of creation restored! He saw everything bad come undone:

- He saw all the effects of the curse, reversed.
- All the twisting of God's original intention, untwisted.
- All the tears, wiped away.
- Death, no more
- No mourning, no crying, no pain.
- All the false idols, false gods, false saviors, given up for the true savior.

He saw a picture of eternity. It was not some subconscious eternal soul stew. There were no clouds, no harps, no vague other-worldliness.

- There was a King.
- There was a renewed creation.
- There were people from every tribe, tongue and nation bowing down and living their lives in worship to the one and true King Jesus.

Not only did he see it, but he heard it. He heard a mighty voice declare from the throne, "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. Behold I am making all things new!"

Then John woke up. He knew that God is still on His mission. He knew that the one and true King was using John and the other followers as a community on mission to share and live out the good news of King Jesus.

John wrote down the things Jesus had shown him so that the rest of the Church could have the same hope and security that he now had. He ended his writing with this phrase: "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!"