

**TUTORIAL**  
**2.1**

# Looking through different eyes

We will look at the point in God's Narrative at which we have now arrived. Then we will introduce the next part of the journey, where we will explore where we have come from, and what we now have in Christ.

## Introduction

Very shortly we'll continue with God's account - in the book we know as *Acts* or *Acts of the Apostles* - of what took place after His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, returned to the realm where He always existed as part of the Three-in-One-God.

A hugely significant player in the ongoing Narrative will be the third person of that Divine Unity - the Spirit - His role as He comes into the world to live in and among those who believe in Jesus as their Saviour. We'll hear about some of the extraordinary things that happened to those who'd followed Him while He was on earth, and to those who became His followers over the next 50 or 60 years.

The Story describes how God continued to communicate with His people as He brought completion to His special Revelation, which He had written down by specially gifted individuals chosen by Him. Before we launch into that next chapter of God's story, we're first going to review some of the highlights from the part of the Narrative we've already covered. Because it is familiar territory, we'll move fairly quickly, and only stop here and there at significant landmarks. But the pace at which we go will not be the only difference. The perspective - the lens we look through - will be new in certain key aspects.

As we moved through the Narrative the first time, the whole flow was towards the coming of the Promised Deliverer. Our choice of what specific parts to cover and the things we focused on all built towards the arrival of God's Son in the world that He himself had created, a world that desperately needed the salvation He alone could provide.

Then, once He was on the scene, we observed how His life moved towards the climactic events of history - His arrest, execution, burial and resurrection.

Everything in God's Narrative was drawing us on towards that great resolution of the terrible situation the world and its human inhabitants are in. What Jesus from Nazareth accomplished changed everything. From that point on nothing was, or ever will be, the same.

For us too, having followed the Narrative and then arriving at this point in the way we have, things should not be the same. Even if we were formerly very familiar with the Bible, hopefully this has brought into perspective again for us the incredible things God accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus His Son.

That's the amazing thing about the Good News that is at the heart of God's Story - the Bible tells us that it is a living, active and powerful force. Hearing truth communicated clearly - hopefully that's taken place here - should be a life-changing experience. For a new believer who's just accepted the Gospel by faith for the first time, the changes are obviously enormous. For those who've been God's children for longer, even if things are not quite so dramatic, the process of hearing God share His Story that culminates in the Gospel, should still have an impact...should still change our perspectives and help us see just a little bit more the way He sees things.

So, again, before we just steam ahead with the rest of the Narrative, we're going to take a brief time to enjoy looking back from this new perspective. Through the lens of what Jesus has achieved for us through His sacrifice.

## Looking through different eyes

In many ways, the first time through the Narrative presents a very grim picture. On the whole, it is a story of rebellion, of separation, of pain and failure. The great Dilemma, the Problem, that man as a whole and individual people face in this world has strongly featured in the Story.

The results of Adam and Eve's sin jump out at us everywhere. God's Enemy Satan has usurped God's place and taken the human race captive through His deceit. Created in God's image and intended for a great purpose, men and women are incapable of fulfilling their intended destiny. They are cut off from God, with no way back. They are under His righteous judgement.

And this corresponds to what we see in daily life. It *is*, in many ways, a grim picture. There's just no way of getting around that. Of course in the Narrative, even at the initial dark moment of man's rebellion and fall, the small light of hope shone in the form of God's promise to send a Rescuer. And we saw that God continued to communicate. He provided a way for men to approach Him. But even there, we saw Cain's failure to come humbly in the right way, with terrible results. Things got so bad at one point in fact, that God even destroyed all but a tiny handful of the people on earth!

Of course, despite all this, God continued faithfully to move ahead with His plans to bring the Redeemer through a chosen line. He never gave up in His commitment to communicating with men, reaching out to them. His grace continued throughout as a shining strand of gold in the murky depths of human depravity and hopelessness.

And when Jesus, the light of the world, came, it was like dawn beginning to break. But it was really what He did by allowing himself to be crucified at Golgotha, and then what God did by accepting this payment for sin and bringing Him back to life, that finally broke the control that darkness had on the world. And for those who've recognized their absolute need and turned to Him in faith to save them, that light has illuminated their spirits and their lives.

So before we move on into new territory, we're going to take a quick look back at where we've come from...but this time with new eyes, as it were. Where before we kept coming back to the terrible situation the human race finds itself in before a holy God, now we're going to enjoy what it means to find ourselves forgiven by a holy God. Where before all the events in the narrative - the Flood, Isaac on the altar, the Israeli nation at the Red Sea - were powerful metaphors for us of the terrible situation humans without God are in, this time we'll see in those same events wonderful illustrations of what it means to be those whom God has rescued.

## **What it means to be safe**

There's a moment in the early part of Lord of the Rings, when Frodo, Sam and the other hobbits are rescued from terrifying danger and brought to Rivendell. Frodo wakes up in bed, unsure of exactly where he is but glad to know he's safe. The passage says, "He lay a little while longer looking at patches of sunlight on the wall, and listening to the sound of a waterfall."

If God's Narrative has been clear to us, one thing we should know is that human beings on their own are in terrible danger. In fact, their fate is sealed. They live, often totally unaware, at the mercy of God's Enemy. Death is an ever-present reality of life. And death represents the end of any chance to know God or to avoid an eternity of separation from Him. Each of us has been in that situation, but God has made this clear to us. His revelation to people all through history - and to us, as we have been witnesses of His interaction - has been a cry of warning. As we become aware of our real situation, the appropriate response is fear...fear before a God whose holiness we can never live up to. But as we've recognised that and put our faith in Jesus, God's perfect sacrifice who died in our place, He has forgiven us. That means we are now safe from His judgement.

Like Frodo, when he took that moment to luxuriate in the safety of a warm bed after being conscious of terrible danger and all the fear that goes along with it, let's take the opportunity to enjoy - and to understand a little more - what it

means to be really safe. At that moment, Frodo didn't realize that before long he and his companions would set out on an epic quest. That, of course, is fiction, but God actually writes us into His Great - and real - Narrative. He calls us to be part of His Cause, His Rescue plan for the fallen race of His image-bearers. Before we learn more about that and, hopefully, embrace that Cause as our own, let's take a moment to gather our strength - or perhaps more accurately, allow God to give us strength - for what's ahead, by reviewing how He has related to His people in the past...reminding ourselves of all that He historically did for those who followed and served Him.

## **Different identities**

There's another difference to note about our perspective now as we take a brief look back at where we've been. One of the really important themes in God's Narrative runs almost in the background and therefore often unnoticed - almost like a computer operating system - it is the whole issue of identity. Even though we've approached the Narrative ourselves for this first time as believers, we have not focused on our identity as His children. Because we were following the events more or less chronologically, we did not jump ahead to consider the implications of the Gospel in terms of who we, or who anyone else is. The identity of everyone before they've accepted the Gospel is dominated by our common ancestor, Adam. All the important things that came to characterise him after the Fall - rebellion, deception by Satan, suffering, death - also characterised us...the "us", that is, before we each repented and accepted by faith the salvation offered to us.

But now, having followed the Narrative to this point, we can enjoy looking through the lens of the Gospel - through the eyes we now have to see, because of what Jesus has done. Now we look back as the people we actually are, because instead of being characterised by and identified with Adam now, we're characterised and identified with Jesus Christ...and God says that He's pleased with, He's delighted by, He's fully satisfied in, His Son.

## **Transition to a new sector of the journey**

Finally, there's something else very important to consider about the point we've reached. For much of the journey, we were covering the part of God's Narrative that we call the Old Testament - the large section of the Bible that takes its name from the initial covenant God made with His people the Israelites... defined by the Law He gave them. Then, when we got to the part where God's Son was born as human, we moved into the part of the Bible we call the New Testament - named for the second covenant that was instituted through Jesus' blood, His death. But the four accounts of Jesus' life - the Gospels - as a block, really form a transition between the two periods covered by those respective covenants or agreements. And the Gospel itself forms the actual pivotal point between the two great epochs of history. Now, as we start to hear the story of the first group of Jesus' followers, we're really moving into

the second of those historical periods...all the realities and events of the past, present and future under the second of the great Covenants.

On an epic journey like this, it's worth taking stock of where we've come from, so we're prepared for where we are going. An illustration that has been used is of a long journey broken into two parts. The first has been overland, across mountains and plains. Then, having arrived at the shore, the travelers embark on a ship to complete their journey on the ocean. So that's where we are now, we're about to start on the second stage and we're reminding ourselves of all that has happened so that we're prepared for what's ahead in this challenging but exciting journey.



## DISCUSSION POINTS

*Looking through different eyes*

1. Describe in *narrative* rather than *propositional* terms what you understand the Gospel to be. Based on the Narrative so far (i.e. without quoting proof texts), reflect on what you feel it means when we say that the Gospel is powerful.
2. What has been your observation or personal experience of what typically happens to new believers in churches? Have you seen instances of a good plan being in place to take people where they are and help them on to maturity? Have you observed situations where pressure (intentionally or otherwise) is put on new believers to change their behaviour...to begin to "act like a Christian"?
3. Picture yourself chatting with someone online who you haven't met in person. After a while they tell you they are a Christian. What do you say in response? How do you describe yourself? Do you ask them any questions to clarify what they mean when they say they are a "Christian"? If you would ask questions, what kinds of things would you be looking for in their answers?