

A WALK (RUN) THROUGH THE BIBLE

Summarized from: The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology:
<https://stpaulcenter.com/studies/courses/genesis-to-jesus>

There is a single plot and story to the Bible. It's not just a collection of individual books. All those individual books, when joined together and put in order by the ancient Church Fathers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit now make up a single book. And this book tells only one story – Jesus.

How a Catholic Reads the Bible

Divine Revelation: How God Speaks to Us

Christianity is a religion of the Word, not of a book! The Word is a Person – Jesus Christ. He is God's "final word" on everything. Through Jesus, God has revealed everything He wanted to reveal to us about who He is and what He intends for our lives. God's revelation of Himself comes to us in three ways:

- 1. Scripture (the Bible)**
- 2. Tradition (especially the liturgy of the Church - the Mass and the sacraments)**
- 3. The Magisterium (the Church's teaching office, creeds, dogmas, doctrines)**

The Holy Spirit is at work through all three channels - He inspires Scripture, animates the Church's living Tradition, and guarantees the teaching of the Church's Magisterium (Catechism 81-82).

When Reading and Interpreting the Scripture There Are Three Rules:

1. The Content & Unity of Scripture:

Though Scripture is made up of different books, we can't just read them as separate books. We have to read each one in light of the rest. There is a unity in God's plan for man, and that plan is revealed in Scripture and fulfilled in Jesus. This plan is called Salvation History and unfolds according to God's divine pedagogy.

St. Augustine used to say that: "The New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New." Jesus showed us how the things that God says and does in the Old Testament pointed to what He says and does in the New. In turn, what Jesus says and does in the New Testament sheds light on the promises and events in the Old.

2. The Church's Living Tradition:

We must always read Scripture within the context of the Church's Tradition. That means that we should always see how the Church interprets certain Scripture passages, especially in the prayers and readings it uses for the Mass and special feasts in the Church. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*.

3. Analogy of Faith:

Just as Jesus is both human and divine, so too is the Church a human and divine institution. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures also safeguards the Church's teaching authority. If we're going to read and interpret Scripture properly – the way God intends it to be read – our interpretations cannot contradict the interpretations found in the Church's creeds and other statements of doctrine.

Scripture is Divine: Inspiration

The Church teaches that just as Jesus was "true God and true man," the Bible is truly a work of human authors and at the same time is truly the work of God as the divine author.

This is the mystery of the divine "inspiration" of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). The word "inspired" in the Greek, literally means "God-breathed." Just as God fashioned Adam out of the clay of the earth and blew the breath of life into him (Genesis 2:7), God breathes His Spirit into the words of the human authors of Scripture and makes them the Living Word of God.

The human authors used their literary skills, ideas and other talents in writing the pages of the Bible. But while they were writing, God was acting in them so that what they wrote was exactly what He wanted them to write (see Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, pp. 11-12; Catechism, nos. 105-107). The human writers were "true authors" of Scripture, and so was God.

Because God is its co-author, and because God cannot err or make mistakes, we say that whatever we read in the Bible is true, free from "error" and has been put there for our salvation. This is called the "inerrancy" of Scripture.

This is a very complicated concept, but it's important to always read the Bible on its own terms. The Bible doesn't set out to teach modern history, science or geography or biography. So we shouldn't try to compare what it says about the creation of the world, for instance, to what modern science teaches us.

That doesn't mean the Bible is ever wrong. The Bible, entire and whole, is true and without error - not only in what it teaches about faith and morals, but also what it says about historical events and personages. It will never lead us astray. But we have to interpret it responsibly - we have to understand that it is giving us history and natural events from a "religious" and divine perspective, and often uses symbolic language.



Scripture is Human: The Bible as Religious Literature and History

Practically speaking, the "divine-human" authorship of Scripture means we have to read the Bible differently than we approach other books. When we read the Bible we must remember that it is the Word of God told in human language. It's important that we understand the "human element" of Scripture. As we'll see, this human element can't really be separated from the divine element.

But it's important when we read the Bible to remember that it is:

- **Literature:** The Bible uses literary forms, devices, structures, figures, etc. We must look for the "literary" clues that convey a meaning.
- **Ancient:** The Bible is ancient. It's not written like modern literature. It's meaning is wrapped up with the way the ancients looked at the world and recorded history. Although they were interested in recording history, they were not interested in "pure history." History was more than just politics, economics and wars - it had a deeper significance.
- **Religious:** Today people think of religion in terms of personal piety. Not so for the ancients. The word "religion" comes from the Latin, "religare," - "to bind together." For the ancients everything - culture, history, the economy, diplomacy - was bound together by the religion. The Bible gives us history, but it is religious history. It is history from God's perspective.

Salvation History and Covenants

The first thing to understand is that the Bible gives us history from God's perspective. It shows us that all throughout time, God is working to bring us salvation. That's why we say that the Bible gives us "salvation history."

This salvation history, in turn, hinges upon the "**covenants**" that God makes with his people throughout the Bible. The great early Church Father, Irenaeus, recognized the need for studying salvation history in terms of the covenants:

"Understanding ... consists in showing why there are a number of covenants with mankind and in teaching what is the character of those covenants" (Against the Heresies, Book I, Chapter 10, no. 3).

What is a covenant? Let's start with what it's not. A covenant is not a contract. Contracts are deals where two parties make a promise that involves some exchange of goods or services or property. Usually, they seal their contract by giving their "**word**" - their name - in the form of their signature. When parties make a covenant, they swear oaths. Oaths are more than promises. Instead of swearing by their own name, they swear by the highest name, by the name of God.

"Do you swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" That's an oath formula. You ask for God's help to tell the truth ("so help me, God") and it's implied that if you lie, you're going to be punished by God.

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Covenants involve, not an exchange of property, but an exchange of persons. You don't give somebody your services or goods when you swear a covenant oath - you swear to give them yourself.

I will be your God; you will be my people; I will dwell in your midst. The Covenant at Sinai.

Marriage is a good example. It's a covenant because in the exchange of vows, the woman gives herself to the man and the man gives himself to the woman.

When God says to Israel, "You will be my people and I will be your God," that's a covenant. What's happening is that Israel is swearing an oath to God - to live according to God's law as His people, His children. In turn, God is swearing to be Israel's God, its divine parent. There are blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it.

In the ancient world, covenants made families. Even ancient treaty documents between nations used "father-son" imagery. Outsiders were "adopted" into a tribe through covenant oaths. So, when we study the Bible we need to see how the meaning of "covenant" is steeped in that ancient idea of family-making.

The whole Bible can be outlined as a series of family-making covenants.

That's the "point" of the whole Bible story - how God, through these covenants, reveals more and more of Himself to his creatures and asks them to enter into a family relationship with Him. St. Paul sums up God's intentions, this way: "As God said: 'I will live with them and move among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.'....'I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty." (see 2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Throughout the salvation history told in the Bible God acts through His covenants to extend the Family of God. He starts small with just two people, Adam and Eve, and proceeds - through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David - until finally all nations are brought into the covenant through Jesus Christ.

The plan from the beginning was to make all men and women into His sons and daughters through the covenants, which are all summed up in Jesus' New Covenant, where God sends us "a Spirit of adoption, through which we can cry, Abba, 'Father!'" (see Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5).

Key covenants serve as the outline for reading the whole Bible. If we know them and understand them, we'll have a good working understanding of the "plot" of the Bible

The Old and New Testaments

Why is the Bible divided into Old and New Testaments? Some Christians ignore the Old Testament because it was what happened before Jesus. This is in fact an ancient heresy. But to understand that salvation history began with the creation of the world in the Old Testament and progressed through the series of Old Testament covenants, you realize why the Old Testament is so important. The division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments is much more than a literary or historical marker.

Remember, "testament" is just another word for "covenant." And what goes on in the Old Testament is all about preparing the way for and announcing what's going to happen in the New Testament. Christ and His cross, is like the "hinge" between the Old and the New Testaments. All the covenants that God made in the Old Testament find their fulfillment - their full meaning and purpose - in Jesus, in His "new Covenant."

Starting in the Beginning: An Introduction to Genesis

The Story of Creation

Too often people read the story of creation in terms of a religion vs. science debate. Yet, that imposes our historical situation on the text and misses the literary clues that explain to us the "religious" meaning the story had for ancient Israel, and the religious meaning that God intends for us in the 21st century.

Genesis 1:1 tells us that in the beginning the world was "formless and empty." The plot proceeds by showing us how God sets out to fix this - first, by giving the world form and then filling it.

In Days 1-3, God creates the "form" or the "realms" of the world - the day and the night; the sky and the sea; the land and the vegetation.

In Days 4-6, God fills these realms with "rulers" or "governors" - the sun, moon & stars (which "rule over the day and over the night"; verses 14-19); the birds and the fish to fill the sky and the seas; and man and beast, which rule the land.

There's a perfect order to all this. First God creates the "structure" of the world, and then He fills that structure with living beings. It's like He's making a house and then putting inhabitants into it. After each day of creation, God sees that His work is "good." After the six "work days" are through, God sees that His work is "very good." The word "very" is used to mark the end of the creation cycle, since God had finished creating the realms and the rulers.

The Word and the Sabbath

Something also to note as we read these first few verses of the Bible. How does God create? By speaking His Word. He says, "Let there be..." and things come into being. We know by reading the Old Testament in light of the New Testament that the Word of God by which He created the world is Jesus (see John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17).

That's something to remember - not only when you read the rest of the Bible, but every time you go to Mass, too. God's Word always does things. God's Word does what it says it's doing. When He says, "Let there be light," His Word creates light, really and truly. God's Word does what it says it's doing.

This same power of the living Word of God is at work in the sacraments of the Church. When the

priest, speaking in the person of Christ, speaks the Word of Jesus: "This is My Body," the bread and wine at the altar become the Body and of Christ. When the priest speaks the Word of Jesus: "I absolve you" or "I baptize you," that Word creates the reality it speaks about. The creative power of the Word of God is one of the most important things to learn from these early verses of Genesis.

On the seventh day, God rests and blesses His creation. (see [Genesis 2:2-3](#)). It's not that God got tired. We should see this cosmic rest and blessing as the first of the cycle of covenants that we will see throughout the Bible.

God, by His act of establishing the Sabbath, is making a covenant with His creation, and especially with all of humanity, represented by the man He created in His own image. This is what Jesus is getting at when He says: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" ([Mark 2:27-28](#)). It makes sense, when you think about it: God doesn't create the world for no reason - to be detached or somehow unrelated to Him. He creates the world and the human family out of love. The Sabbath is the sign of that covenant and that love.

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life.

God explains this later when He gives Moses the Sabbath laws for the people of Israel. He says the Sabbath is "a perpetual covenant" (see [Exodus 31:16-17](#)). That's why the Catechism calls the creation story the "first step" in God's covenant-making and "the first and universal witness to God's all-powerful love" (no. 288).

Man and Woman: The Original Image – God's First-Born Son

God, we're told, "created man in His image...in the divine image...male and female" (see [Genesis 1:26-28](#)). What does it mean that God created man in "the divine image"? It means that the human person is a child of God.

How do we know that? Remember, the way a Catholic reads the Bible is to interpret the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. So, we turn to the Gospel of Luke. There you'll find it explained that Adam is "the son of God" ([Luke 3:38](#)). We, see too, elsewhere in Genesis, that the phrase "image and likeness" is used to describe the birth of Seth, Adam's son (see [Genesis 5:3](#)).

In the language of the Bible, to be born in someone's "image and likeness," means to be that person's child. So, when God creates man in His image, He creates Him to be His son. From the very beginning, then, we see that God intended people to be His children, His divine offspring.

The Fall

How are we, sophisticated, 21st-century Catholics that we are, supposed to read the account of Adam and Eve's fall from grace in [Genesis 3](#) - with its fable-like setting, its talking trickster snake, its gullible

couple, oddly named trees, and forbidden fruit?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us some good advice here:

"The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents" (see no. 390).

First, the story in Genesis 3 is written in "figurative language" - it's more like poetry than journalism, more like a painting than a documentary film. Nevertheless, the story "affirms" an actual event that indeed "took place" at the beginning of human history. What's more, that event, "the original fault" of Adam and Eve, forever "marked" human history.

We can't, then, read Genesis 3 like we're reading a newspaper. But we can't read it like it's a myth or a fairy tale or a fable - as if it's about something that never happened. Scholars tell us that Genesis is best understood as an example of the ancient literary style known as *mashal* - "a riddle" or a "proverb" in which there are layers of double meaning. And when we read Genesis 3 closely, we find the story turns on a number of tricky passages, and words filled with multiple meanings: life, death, wise, trees.

The Snake

Who is this "serpent"? We're all used to the storybook Bible image of the long, thin snake slithering around the apple tree. But we might have to change our visual image of this scene. The Hebrew word used to describe the "serpent," *nahash*, implies something much more deadly.

Throughout the Old Testament *nahash* is used to refer to powerful, even gigantic, evil creatures. Isaiah calls the *nahash* a sea dragon, the great Leviathan (see [Isaiah 27:1](#)). Job also uses *nahash* to depict terrible sea monsters (see [Job 26:13](#)).

This is clearly the image the Book of Revelation has in mind when it describes "a huge red dragon" in the heavens, "the huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world" (see [Revelation 12:3,9](#)).

The Church, of course, has always interpreted the serpent in Genesis 3 as Satan, the Devil in slithering form (see Catechism, nos. 391-395). So we know, as readers, something that Adam probably didn't know - that this encounter with the serpent was a test against evil, a battle for the soul of mankind.

But we need to see what Adam saw. Once we appreciate that the serpent was a lot more than a little garden-variety snake, we begin to understand why Adam failed in his duties to "guard" his wife and Eden (see [Genesis 2:15](#)).

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Scared to Death

To put it bluntly: Adam was scared to death, scared of dying. He saw the serpent as a threat to his life.

We know that Adam understood what death was, because God warned him that he if he ate the fruit he would die (see [Genesis 2:17](#)). If Adam didn't know what death was, God's warning wouldn't have made any sense. Adam was scared that if he didn't do what the serpent wanted, he would be made to suffer and die.

This story, this understanding of Adam's failure, explains a passage we find in the Letter to the Hebrews. It says the Devil has "the power of death" and says also that "through fear of death," the human race had been held "subject to slavery" (see [Hebrews 2:14-15](#)).

That doesn't mean Adam didn't have any moral choice or responsibility in the matter. He chose to save his life but wound up losing it. He feared dying more than he feared disobeying the Father who loved him and gave him paradise. And in this he plunged the whole human race into slavery.

Why are we talking about Adam? Why is it his fault? Isn't the whole story about Eve? After all, the serpent first addresses "the woman." In fact, the phrase, "the woman" is used four times in six verses and the man doesn't come into play until the very end, when it's mentioned that "her husband" was also "with her."

Clearly, it would seem, Genesis wants us to know that it's the woman's fault: She did all the work, negotiating with the snake, weighing the pros and cons, and finally taking the fruit. The man just ate the fruit the woman gave to him.

But is that really the point? Why does St. Paul and the tradition of Church teaching after him, understand this episode as depicting the sin of Adam (see [Romans 5:12-14](#); [1 Corinthians 15:22](#), [45](#))?

First, we need to stress what the story only tells us at the end - that Adam was with her all along (see [Genesis 3:6](#)). In fact, in the Hebrew, every time the serpent says the word "you" he's speaking in a tense that we don't have in English - something like "second-person-plural." He's saying, in effect, "you both." So Adam was on the scene the whole time. Why didn't he speak up, why didn't he take up the serpent's challenge?

That seems to be the point. In his fear for his own skin, Adam left his wife hanging, left her to fend for herself. He was "her husband," the text emphasizes. Husbands are supposed to stand up for their wives - even lay down their lives for them. That's what marital love is (see [Ephesians 5:25](#)).

Test of Love - Failed

What's going on here in the Garden? Adam failed a test of his love - not only of his love for Eve, but his love for God. God gave Adam the responsibility of guarding the garden sanctuary, the dwelling place of God and man. In the confrontation with the serpent, he failed in his duties. He didn't protect the



garden or his wife or himself.

Why did God test him like this? Because covenant love requires total self-giving. Self-sacrifice is essential to fulfilling the obligations of the human relationship with God. A covenant means that God "gives Himself" to His people and the people, in turn vow to "give themselves" to God. In the Scriptures, each of the covenants requires the people to make a symbolic offering of themselves to God.

There is no covenant without sacrifice. The sacrifice is offered by the people to symbolize their offering of "themselves" to God. The sacrifice is a kind of token of their commitment to the covenant, their commitment to give all that they have and all that they are to God.

We see in Adam's failure the beginning of this pattern. In fact, because the human race was so weakened by Adam's original sin that no one could give himself completely to God. And because of Adam's sin, humanity lost its birthright - its divine inheritance, its membership in God's family.

Death Threats

But before we move from Adam to Jesus, let's look at the riddle of the story. God tells Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. "The moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die," he warns (see [Genesis 2:17](#)). In the Hebrew there is a "double death" threat here - literally "You shall die die" or "die the death."

The serpent directly contradicts God. He tells Adam and Eve: "You certainly will not die" (see [Genesis 3:14](#)). He says, too that they will be like "gods who know what is good and bad" (see [Genesis 3:5](#)).

And it's true that when they eat the fruit, they don't keel over and die. Instead, their eyes are opened just like the serpent said they would be (see [Genesis 3:7](#)). Even God has to admit, "See! The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (see [Genesis 3:22](#)).

Adam and Eve do die the moment they eat the fruit - spiritually. The truth in Satan's lie was this: Adam and Eve would not die a physical death once they ate the fruit. Adam and Eve lost something greater than natural life when they sinned; they lost supernatural life, the life of grace in their souls.

Seduced into trying to be like God without God, they died the death. Yes, they chose the fruit freely, like God they exercised free will. But their freedom only led them into slavery. Their eyes were indeed opened, and they discovered their nakedness and were ashamed.

We know that Satan has "the power of death" (see [Hebrews 2:14-15](#)). Adam and Eve should have listened to God, whose warning seems to echo in these words of Jesus: "And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna" (see [Matthew 10:28](#)).

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The Second Coming of Adam and Eve

But even as His children have exiled themselves from paradise through sin, God promises them redemption, a homecoming. He promises that throughout human history there will be an "enmity" between the serpent, Satan, and the woman, "the mother of all the living," and between their offspring (see Genesis 3:15, 20).

The early Fathers of the Church called this the "First Gospel" (Proto-Evangelium). God was promising, here in the first pages of the Bible, a new Adam and a new Eve, to undo the damage done by the first couple. St. Paul called Jesus the "last Adam" or the New Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49; Romans 5:14). And the tradition of the Church has always seen Mary as the "new Eve" (see Catechism, nos. 410-411).

As Adam called Eve "woman," we see Jesus call Mary "woman" (compare Genesis 2:23 and John 2:4). As Eve disregarded God's commands, Mary offers herself freely to the will of God and says "Do whatever He tells you" (see Luke 1:38; John 2:5).

Finally, as Eve was the "mother of all the living," Mary is given by Jesus to be mother of the people of God (compare Genesis 3:20 and John 19:26). Jesus enters the world as the new Adam - the One who does what Adam was supposed to do. He comes, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him. He comes to serve and to offer His life as a ransom for many (see Mark 10:45; John 15:13).

Jesus enters a garden and experiences the curses of Adam - the dread of death, falling to the dirt, sweating blood from his face in His agony (compare Genesis 3:17-19 and Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:44).

He is crowned in thorns and stripped naked (see Matthew 27:29, 31). And He is led to a "tree," the Cross - which the early Church saw as a symbol of the Tree of Life in the Garden (see Acts 5:30; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24).

Yet on the Cross He was obedient, saying to God in prayer: "Not as I will, but as You will" (see Matthew 26:39).

He does not grasp at "equality with God" as Adam did (see Philippians 2:5-11), but lays down His own life in sacrifice for the sake of the "garden" - the world, for His bride, the Church.

Adam's bride Eve was created from his side while he slept. The Church, the bride of Christ, was born from His side, which was opened by the soldier's lance while he slept in death on the cross. His side issued forth blood and water, symbols of baptism and the Eucharist (see Genesis 2:21-22; John 19:34; Catechism, nos. 766; 1067).

Finally, the resurrected Jesus appears in a garden ("in the place where he had been crucified") to a "woman" and is mistaken as a "gardener" - perhaps a reference to Adam's task to be keeper of the garden of paradise (see John 19:41; 20:14-18).

All this God promises in the "first gospel."

After Eden, Before the Flood – Cain the Wicked

The chapters that follow (see Genesis 4-5) show us the "fruits" of Adam and Eve's original sin: We see that human seed now is mixed between the good and evil. The tension between the two seeds - already prophesied by God in the garden (see Genesis 3:15) - shapes much of the remainder of Genesis, especially the book's first 11 chapters.

The "first fruits" of Adam and Eve - their son Cain - is born of bad seed; his younger brother, Abel, of good. Cain kills Abel, becomes the world's first murderer. As Adam and Eve, the first children of God, rejected the Fatherhood of God, their bad seed rejects the family of man that God intended to create. This is symbolized in Cain's pitiless, spiteful words to God: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (see Genesis 4:9).

Cain's wicked line grows and one of his descendants becomes the first to take two wives - a perversion of the order of marriage God established in the garden (see Genesis 2:21-24) - and boasts of his murderous, vengeful ways (see Genesis 4:23-34).

Seth the Righteous

Then Adam and Eve produce a good seed - Seth. It's the children of Seth, born of Seth's son, Enosh, who first begin to develop a personal, prayerful relationship with God - they "invoke the Lord by name" (see Genesis 4:26). The word for name in Hebrew is shem. Just remember that for now, it will become important later.

Finally, God is overcome with "sorrow" and "regret" at "how corrupt the earth had become, since all mortals led depraved lives" (see Genesis 6:5,7,12). Remember: God doesn't actually get sorry or repent or change His mind like humans do - this is just a figure of speech to tell us how awful things had become (see Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6).

Saved Through Water

In the flood, God totally obliterates the line of Cain, drowns it out. The line of Seth continues through Noah, who "walked with God" and "found favor" with Him (see Genesis 5:27-29; 6:9-10).

The story of the flood (Chapters 7-9) is told as a new creation story, with lots of subtle and obvious references back to Genesis 1. In the context of the entire book of Genesis, the flood story shows us God giving the world a new start, starting His family anew in the line of Seth.

Noah is like a new Adam. Like Adam, Noah is given authority over the animals (compare 1:26 and 9:2-3). He is also given the same command as God gave to Adam: "be fertile and multiply and fill the

earth." (compare 1:28 and 9:1). Finally, as He did with Adam, God makes a covenant with Noah and through him with all living beings (compare 2:1-2 and 9:13).

With this covenant with Noah, God renews the covenant He made with creation in the beginning. The rainbow sign is like the Sabbath, a symbol of God's communion with His creation. We have here, the second of the major covenants that form the "organizational principle" of the Bible.

Remember, the Bible is organized according to a series of family-making covenants. With each covenant God reveals a little bit more of Himself to us. In the covenant with Noah He gives the family of God the shape of a nuclear family - Noah and his wife and their children. We've moved beyond the husband and wife model that He revealed in the covenant of creation.

Remember what else we said about the covenants in the Bible: Each one points us toward the new and everlasting covenant of Jesus. The covenant symbolized by Adam and Eve pointed us towards the covenant bond between Christ and His Church, which is to be a marriage-like union (see Ephesians 5:21-33).

The covenant with Noah points us to the sacrament of Baptism, by which we become, like Jesus and Noah, beloved sons and daughters in whom God is well pleased (compare Genesis 6:4,8 and Matthew 3:17). The Baptism He brings, like the flood, will destroy sin, and bring us the gift of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (compare Genesis 8:8-12 and Matthew 3:16).

As Peter tells us, the flood "prefigured Baptism." In both the flood and Baptism, the human race is "saved through water" (1 Peter 3:20-21; Catechism, nos. 701, 1219).

How do we know all this? How can we be sure that this is the "right interpretation" of what was really happening on the Cross? Because the Church, building on the testimony of the Apostles, has told us so. How did the Apostles know? Because Jesus taught them how to find Him in the Scriptures.

On the third day, when He rose from the dead, what was the first thing He did? According to Luke's Gospel, He appeared to some deeply saddened disciples making their way to Emmaus. As He walked, He explained the Scriptures to them. "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures" (see Luke 24:27).

When He was done interpreting the Scriptures to them, He celebrated the Eucharist. Notice the same pattern we observed in the feeding of the multitudes and at the Last Supper. At Emmaus, "He took bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them" (see Luke 24:30). Later that first Easter night, He appeared to the Apostles. Again, He "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (see Luke 24:45).

By Scriptures, of course, Luke means the books of what we call the Old Testament. There were no New Testament writings yet! But Jesus was establishing something very important - that what He said and did, the meaning of His life, death and Resurrection, can't be understood apart from what was written beforehand in the Old Testament.

He told them that God had foretold His coming in every part of the Old Testament, and explained to them "everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms" (see [Luke 24:44](#)).

Jesus taught His chosen Apostles how to interpret the Scriptures. And as He promised, He sent them "the Spirit of truth" to guide them "to all truth" (see [John 16:13](#)). What they learned and continued to have revealed to them "in the breaking of the bread" is inscribed on every page of the New Testament and in the Liturgy of the Church.

Indeed, there is not a page of the New Testament that's not infused with Old Testament quotations or allusions. Even relatively minor Epistles, like that of Jude, contain lessons drawn from the Old Testament.

Listen for the echoes of salvation history as you read the rest of the New Testament. You will hear the Apostles doing just what Jesus taught them to do - interpreting the Old Testament, explaining how all the great words and events of the past pointed to Jesus, the Messiah, the Word of God come in the flesh (see [Acts 8:26-39](#); [John 1:14](#)).

The Apostles in turn pour out that Spirit upon the world - through the divine ministry of the sacraments. The sacraments, as the Apostles explained them, continued the mighty works of God in salvation history - localizing them, making them personal, ensuring that all people would be joined to the saving work of Jesus until the end of time. The sacraments - like everything in the New Covenant - were concealed in the Old and revealed in the new.

Baptism fulfills the covenant God made with Noah. No longer does water destroy the sinful. Now it saves the sinner, destroys the sin (see [1 Peter 3:20-21](#)). But whereas the flood and the ark saved only eight people, in the saving waters of Baptism, in the ark of the Church, all humankind may find salvation.

The waters of Baptism are also likened to the miracle of the parted waters of the Red Sea. When Moses led the people through the waters of the Red Sea, fed them with spiritual food and drink, it was to show us an "example" of our life in the Church. We will be saved in the waters of Baptism, guided by the Spirit, nourished by the Eucharist in the wilderness of the world (see [1 Corinthians 10](#)).

Receiving the Spirit in Baptism, each man and woman is made a "new creation" (see [2 Corinthians 5:17](#); [Galatians 6:15](#)). According to St. James: "He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (see [James 1:18](#))

This new birth is celebrated throughout the New Testament: "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God" (see [1 John 3:1](#)).

This is why the Apostles, like Paul, called themselves spiritual "fathers" (see [Philemon 10](#)) and referred to their new converts as "children" (see [1 Thessalonians 2:11](#)) and even "newborn infants" (see [1 Peter 2:2](#)).

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Remember, this was the purpose of salvation history in the beginning, the meaning and trajectory of every covenant - to make us children of God. This purpose is fulfilled in Jesus and the Church. In the Church, all are made part of what Paul calls "the family of faith" (see Galatians 6:10).

Completing the Word of God

In Jesus, we see the full disclosure of God's "eternal purpose," His plan from "before the foundation of the world" - to make all men and women His children by divine "adoption" (see Ephesians 3:11; 1:4-5)

Each of the Baptized has been given a "share in the divine nature" (see 2 Peter 1:4). Each has received "a Spirit of adoption," making them "Children of God, and if children, then heirs of God" (see Romans 7:15-16) - heirs to the blessings promised at the dawn of salvation history.

Drinking of the one Spirit in the Eucharist (see 1 Corinthians 10:4), believers in the Church are the firstfruits of a new, worldwide family of God - fashioned from out of every nation under heaven, with no distinctions of wealth or language or race, a people born of the Spirit. The Church, the restored Kingdom, "brings to completion...the Word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and generations past" (see Colossians 1:26).

In the Kingdom, in the Church, the Gentiles, the non-Jews, are "no longer strangers" but are made now "fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God" (see Ephesians 2:19; 3:5-6).

Much of the drama of Acts, the tension of Romans and Galatians, revolves around the growth and meaning of this Kingdom, how God's saving purpose was to include the non-Jewish peoples, how the Gospel is to be preached "to the Gentiles that they may be saved" (see 1 Thessalonians 2:16).

And throughout the New Testament we see the Church growing as a visible institution:

- under the leadership of Peter, teaching and interpreting the Scriptures with final and ultimate authority, guided by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 15:24-29);
- writing inspired letters and handing on oral traditions (see 2 Thessalonians 2:15);
- Baptizing and celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments (see Acts 10:44-48; 2:42);
- creating permanent institutions - priests, bishops and deacons - to carry on the work into the future (see Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:14;

Revealing the End

The New Testament promises that the Kingdom now visible on earth will be consummated in the "heavenly kingdom" (see 2 Timothy 4:18).

And we see a glimpse of that heavenly kingdom in the Bible's last book, the Book of Revelation.

The Bible began with the story of the creation of the world. It ends with the passing away of heaven and earth and the coming down of "a new heaven and a new earth" (see Revelation 21:1).

In Revelation, the Apostle John is "caught up in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (see Revelation 1:10) - that is, on a Sunday, possibly while celebrating the Eucharist.

What is revealed to him is the destiny of history, the "goal" or final end of God's saving plan.

Jesus is unveiled as "the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David" (see Revelation 5:5;3:7; 22:16) - in other words the Son of David.

He is "a male child destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod" (see Revelation 12:5), born of a Queen Mother - "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (see Revelation 12:1).

He is revealed as "the Lamb that was slain," now enthroned in heaven (see Revelation 5:6-14). He is clothed as a high priest and king (see Revelation 1:13) and He is called "the Word of God" (see Revelation 19:13) and "King of Kings and Lord of Lord" (see Revelation 19:16; 11:15).

Jesus is seen summoning people to worship, to enter into His kingdom, to eat with Him, to be enthroned with Him in heaven (see Revelation 3:20-21).

The Church is revealed as "a kingdom, priests for His God and Father" (see Revelation 1:6).

Recall that this was God's purpose in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and making them a nation (see Exodus 19:6). The Kingdom of the Church, born of the new exodus of Christ, now fulfills God's purpose - to make a holy family of priestly people (see 1 Peter 2:9).

The Church is founded on "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" and open to the "twelve tribes of the Israelites" (see Revelation 21:12,14). It is made up of both Jews and Gentiles, as John sees it. There are 144,000 "marked from every tribe of the Israelites" plus "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue" (see Revelation 7:7,9).

All are gathered before a great throne and the Lamb, and heaven is filled with the sounds and actions of worship. Revelation, in fact, is a picture of the eternal liturgy of heaven, a liturgy that very much resembles the Mass the Church still celebrates on earth.

Through all the visions John records, there are scenes of tribulation and warfare, as the Church struggles against Satan, the great ancient serpent "who deceived the whole world" at the beginning of salvation history (see Revelation 12:9).

The first creation ended with the frustration of God's plan in the sin of Adam and Eve. The Bible ends with images of triumph and victory - "a new heaven and a new earth" (see Revelation 21:1).

All the Church is singing a great "alleluia" before the throne of God, joining in celebration of "the wedding feast of the Lamb" (see Revelation 19:6,7,9).

The Groom of the feast is the Lamb, Christ. The Bride is the Church - described as a "holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (see Revelation 21:2).

The Church, throughout the New Testament is referred to in female terms - as the "elect Lady" (see 2 John 1), as the bride made "one flesh" with Christ (see Ephesians 5:2), and finally as the "mother" of every Christian born in baptism (see Galatians 4:26).

In drawing these comparisons, Paul in particular, always pointed his readers back to the story of Adam and Eve. The Church is "one body" with Christ in the same way that Adam and Eve - and every married couple - are united as "one flesh" in marriage (see Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:30-31).

Remember that Christ is presented to us in the New Testament as a "New Adam." The Church, His Bride, is the New Eve.

We see this image also on the Cross. In John's Gospel, just after Jesus entrusted His mother, Mary, to His beloved Apostle John (see John 19:26-27), a soldier pierces His side and "blood and water flowed out" (see John 19:34).

In this too, the early Church, saw an allusion to Christ as the New Adam. As God cast Adam into a deep sleep and then took out one of his ribs to form Eve, the Church believed that in the same way, God drew the Church, the New Eve, from out of the side of Christ as He hung in the sleep of death on the Cross. The blood and water symbolized the sacraments of the Church - Baptism and the Eucharist.

In the garden in the beginning, then, with the "marriage" of Adam and Eve, God was drawing for us an image of what things would look like in the end.

He was showing us that the relationship He desires with the human race is full communion, intimate love. The only human relationship that can compare is that of the union of man and woman in the marriage covenant.

In fact, throughout salvation history, God compared His Old Covenant to the marriage covenant (see Hosea 2:16-24; Jeremiah 2:2; Isaiah 54:4-8). This explains why Christ described Himself as a "bridegroom" in the Gospels and performed His first miracle at a wedding (see John 2; 3:29; Mark 2:19; Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13).

The New Covenant fulfills God's marital vows to His people. He has become "one body" with them in the Church. This covenant is renewed in each Eucharist, as we are joined intimately to His Body.

As He promised through His prophets (see Ezekiel 27:26-27), God has made His dwelling with the human race: "He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God himself will always be with them" (see Revelation 21:3).

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This is the reality we live in now, according to the Bible's last book. We are heirs to the victory won by Christ - a victory foreseen by God since before the foundation of the world. We are the spiritual children, born of the marriage of the Lamb and the Church, having received the divine gift of "life-giving water" in Baptism, having heard God say to each of us: "I shall be his God and he will be My son" (see Revelation 21:7).

By His power, we have been given the "right to eat from the Tree of Life that is in the garden of God" (see Revelation 2:7), the tree spurned by Adam and Eve. We live in joyful hope waiting for the coming of the Lord again in glory, a coming we anticipate in every celebration of the Eucharist, a nuptial union with Christ our Bridegroom (see 1 Corinthians 10:26).

Summarize the Bible in five words: God want to marry you!

