

The Grand Story of the Church

Definition: the church “consists of all the elect who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ its head” (WCF 25.1, modernized). In other words, the church refers to the people of God, spanning all ages, past (even before Christ), present, and future.

I. God’s creation purposes

- Gen 1:26–28: the community of God’s image-bearers was to fill the world with glory. They were to be priest-kings, who would worship and rule for God.
- Gen 3: Adam and Eve align with Satan in a counter-community against God.

II. The beginnings of God’s people

- Gen 3:15: The promise of a remnant who would align with God against Satan.
- Early men of faith: Adam (3:20), Abel (4:4), Noah (6:8). But not yet a people.
- The bulk of humanity: allied together against God (Babel: 11:1–9).
- God promises to make a people out of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 15:5; 22:16–18).

III. The church foreshadowed in Israel

- God’s people emerges in Egypt, but they are oppressed (Exod 1:7).
- God makes a people for himself by rescuing Israel (Exod 6–15), making a covenant with them (Exod 20–24), and re-instituting worship (Exod 25–Lev 9).
 - Exod 6:7: “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.”
 - The purpose: to re-create what was lost in the garden: a people who love and obey God.
- A twofold structure: priests (Lev 8–9) and kings (2 Sam 7): renewal of worship and rule. Civil and religious spheres overlap.
- A clear divide between outsiders and insiders: circumcision (Gen 17:14). But gentiles can become members (Exod 12:48; Josh 2:10–13; Ruth 1:16).

IV. Israel’s rejection of God and God’s promise to remake Israel

- Although there were isolated people of faith in this period (e.g., David, Josiah, Daniel), sin won in Israel. They rejected God’s covenant and pursued other gods.
- Therefore God disowned them: “not my people” (Hos 1:9) and banished them into exile.
- But God promises to remake his people.
 - A new exodus (Isa 40–55).
 - A new covenant (Jer 31).
 - A new nature for the people: righteousness in the heart (Jer 24:7; 32:39–40; Ezek 36:26–27).
 - A new composition of the people: gentiles too! (Isa 2:3; 19:24; 49:6; Jer 3:17; Zech 2:11; 8:21–23)

V. The church as new Israel

- Jesus is the new and true Israel, the firstfruits of God’s people (Matt 2:15; 3:15; 1 Cor 15:20, 23). He is the ultimate priest-king, who atones for our sin and leads us in rule and worship.
- In his resurrection, he became the first heir of God’s promises, the beginning of God’s end-times people (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:12–50).

- When people are united to Jesus by faith, they become heirs of all that he himself has already received. In him, we are the new Israel, the people whom God promised he would raise up (1 Pet 2:9–10).
- We also inherit Jesus' priestly-kingly mission. We are to bring in the fullness of God's people (Matt 28:18–20): evangelism and discipleship and worship and love.

VI. The church in glory

- But the church is not yet gathered in completely. We do not yet see:
 - All God's elect united to Christ and made part of his body.
 - All God's elect perfect in holiness and obedience to God.
 - All God's elect gathered as one in perfect, embodied worship.
- Therefore we await the return of Jesus and his resurrection, at which time his people will appear in perfect beauty (Rom 8:22–23; Rev 21:2).

Reflections, questions, and applications

- The church and Israel are one in Christ. There are not two peoples of God, but one. Do you think of the faithful saints from OT times as part of the body of Christ (Rom 4; Heb 11)?
- Did Jesus found the church?
- When you understand where the church fits in to God's story, how does that help you understand *your* place in God's story?
 - How does God consistent pursuit of an obedient priest-king people help us understand what we are called to do and be? Look at the pictures in Eden and Israel to understand what God is seeking in your life.