

SESSION 1: GOD'S END VISION

Let's begin in the beginning. Or perhaps, more appropriately, before the beginning—in fact, before Genesis 1—in eternity past.

In 1 Corinthians 2:7 Paul says, and reading from the New Living Translation, "...the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God," referring to his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. God's dream is spoken of here as a mystery, devised and planned for, even from before the world began!

And knowing what God's dream is—this mystery—is so very important, because the Story of the Bible is all about God fulfilling his *before-the-world-began* dream. God is not making stuff up on the go, nor is he simply responding to history as it unpredictably unfolds. History is HIS-STORY. God has a purpose, and a plan to outwork that purpose to bring it to glorious fulfilment, and in a way that is beyond our wildest imaginations. That's why Paul goes on to say, in verse 9 "...as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.'"

So, just what is God's dream? Let's take a step back and take a look at the big picture, and then unpack the main features one by one.

There are five main features of the Bible's Story:

Firstly, God dreamed of a physical world, displaying the most stunning beauty, creativity and design! This is a world teeming with life and vitality, with its inherent ability for reproduction, growth and creative expression.

Secondly, this world would be a place that God himself would call home, where he himself would dwell, where the spiritual world and the physical world would fully and harmoniously integrate, and where God's life and his presence would sustain creation and enable it to survive, thrive and prosper.

Thirdly, central to God's world would be humankind (or Mankind or Man), made in God's very own likeness and image for a two-fold purpose: Firstly, to reflect God into God's world, and to reflect glory back to God from His world. Secondly, Mankind was to govern God's world, not as God's hired servants or subcontractors, but as sons having been adopted into God's very own royal family, to be an heir of God and of his kingdom. Man was not to govern *for* God but to govern *with* God.

Fourthly, the earth as we know it, either because of the 'fall' or in anticipation of the 'fall', was always meant to be temporary. It would 'wear out like a garment and be

changed' as we are told in Hebrews 1, making way for a renewed and eternal earth and universe, which God had planned for from before the world began.

And fifthly, all this was to happen as a process, and not as an instantaneous act of creation. The parables of Jesus such as those of the 'sower,' the 'mustard seed,' and the 'growing seed' all indicate a growth process over time, involving various stages of development and expansion, as opposed to an instantaneous creative event.

For example, Adam was created perfect but not complete. Completion for Man was always going to be a journey. Eden, in all its perfection and beauty, was to be extended over the entire earth, not just confined to one isolated portion of the earth, and humanity was to develop into families, clans, peoples and nations and populate the entire world.

God's presence and his glory were never to be confined solely to a 'garden.' It was always destined to fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea, as we are told in Habakkuk 2:14, and in many other passages as well.

All of this was part of God's dream and his plan from 'before the world began'.

So, in Genesis 1 and 2, we see the 'seeds' of God's dream planted and beginning to sprout. And then, all the way over to Revelation chapters 21 and 22 (the last two chapters of God's Story), we glimpse the 'fruit' of the planted seeds of God's dream blossoming and in full glory! This is God's end-vision and now 'eternal ages'!

Paul refers to this in Ephesians 1:10 as 'bringing unity to all things in heaven and on earth' (also in Colossians 1:20), and Peter says the same in Acts 3:21, where he talks about the 'restoration of all things.' (This exact term is from the NKJV.)

So what will that 'unity of all things' or God's 'end-vision' look like?

Well, in Revelation 21 and 22, we see heaven and earth fully integrated, with God permanently living with Mankind. We see nations fully developed, both enjoying God and glorifying God. We see the whole earth filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. We see the full expression of righteousness, peace and joy, with the complete absence of evil, darkness and despair. How cool will that be! In fact, we are told that God's glory is so bright that it outshines the sun! We also see a 'bride,' prepared to be Christ's companion, to rule and to reign together with Christ over God's new creation, for ever and ever and ever. Hallelujah!

So, in closing: Why is understanding God's 'dream', so very important? Why did Paul pray so passionately in Ephesians 1 for God's people to know the mystery of his will? Well, we will see as we journey on, that God wants us to know the mystery of his will so that we can be part of that mystery as it gloriously unfolds.

And if we don't understand God's 'dream' and his 'end vision', then of course, we won't understand his 'game-plan'—how he is working it out and moving it towards its climax and fulfillment. This is tragic because God's 'game-plan' involves us—his people—and our participation with God in fulfilling his dream determines our participation with God in his future world.

So, this series on the Story of the Bible is an attempt, in plain and simple language, to describe God's dream, his game-plan, and how he is bringing his awe-inspiring dream to its ultimate fulfillment – in the hope that God's dream becomes our dream.

In so doing, we will begin to understand—in a life-changing way—that God's dream is, without question, 'A Vision Worth Living For' – 24/7.