

"This book will help you to read, think, and pray your way through the Bible."

—Colin Smith, The Orchard Evangelical Free Church

ONE YEAR DAILY DEVOTIONAL FOR STUDENTS

The

STORY



THE BIBLE'S GRAND
NARRATIVE OF REDEMPTION

JON NIELSON

The
STORY

THE BIBLE'S GRAND
NARRATIVE OF REDEMPTION

JON NIELSON


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2014 by Jon Nielson

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817.

Scripture quotations are from *ESV Bible*® (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The content in “A Bible Study Method” is adapted from chapter 10 of *Bible Study: A Student’s Guide* by Jon Nielson (P&R Publishing, 2013).

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

ISBN: 978-1-59638-812-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-813-0 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-814-7 (Mobi)

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013921305

This book is dedicated to my daughters: Adelyn and Averie. May you both grow up reading, loving, and obeying God's precious Word!

CONTENTS

Preface 7

ACT 1 9

Adam to Abraham

ACT 2 21

Abraham to Samuel

ACT 3 121

David to Exile

ACT 4 163

Exile to Jesus

ACT 5 259

Jesus to the End

A Bible Study Method 383

PREFACE

Dear Student,

I've been there. It was the start of a new year. Your church, parent, or youth pastor had challenged you about daily devotions. Maybe you tried to do a “read through the Bible in a year” plan. Maybe you tackled the Old Testament—diving right in at Genesis. Maybe you got bogged down somewhere in the book of Leviticus and wondered when you were going to get out of the part about laws, sacrifices, and infectious skin diseases! Let's face it: Reading the Bible—especially reading it every day—is hard work. It takes serious discipline. I think, though, sometimes it's hard for us to read it every day because we forget two important truths about the Bible—truths that make all the difference.

First, we forget that the Bible is not just a book *about* God; the *Bible is God speaking*. The apostle Paul tells Timothy that the Bible is “God-breathed,” that is, inspired by God. There are, of course, many different human authors who wrote the books of the Bible over hundreds of years, but the doctrine of inspiration means that, ultimately, there is one author of the Bible: God himself. The God who made us—and everything else in the universe—made sure that his written Word contained exactly what he wanted it to contain. Nothing in the Bible is there by accident! The Bible is God speaking to us, and he says what he says on purpose. This truth has huge implications for how we read, study, and listen to the words of the Bible. We don't read it just to get more knowledge or to get the “right answers” at youth group. We read it to hear God speaking to us! Reading the Bible should be, first and foremost, personal. Do you read the Bible that way? Sometimes I don't. I forget that the Bible is God speaking—to me—today. That makes a huge difference in how we approach it.

Second, we forget that the Bible is not just a collection of random books and writings; the Bible is *one story*. This truth comes from the fact that the Bible has one main author: God. If that is true—if God inspired the Bible and is the ultimate author of it—it makes sense that it would all hang together.

And it does! The Bible has an incredible unity to it—a unity that would be impossible if God hadn't designed it that way. The Bible is one story. It's a story of God's love and salvation for the people he has created. It has a beginning: creation (Genesis). It has an end: new creation (Revelation). It has a climax: the cross and resurrection. It has a hero: Jesus Christ, God's Son. And the best part is that we are living in the final act of the story. We are living as part of the church of Christ, waiting for Jesus to come back. We are "Bible characters"!

I've put this devotional together with you in mind. You're a student, between the ages of 15 and 21, and you (like many Christian people your age) have probably had some frustrations trying to get into reading the Bible every day. This devotional will take you through the entire story of the Bible in one year. You won't read every single chapter of the Bible, but you'll read at least portions from every part of the developing story of God's salvation for his people. Each day, you'll read a Scripture passage—usually one chapter or so and sometimes just a few verses. After reading the passage, you'll read an explanation of the passage, which will seek to make the passage clear, remind you of its place in the story, and make an application to your life.

I've called this devotional *The Story* because that's what the Bible is. It is God's story, God's direct communication with us. This devotional has been organized into five acts, just as you would find in a play. This division comes mainly from Matthew, the gospel writer, who begins his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus that is divided up into three main sections: Abraham to David, David to the Exile, and the Exile to Jesus. When we add an act on either side (Adam to Abraham, and Jesus to the end of the world), we begin to understand that the story of the world can be summarized in this way. We're living in Act 5—we are waiting for Jesus to return!

Before you start, let me say one more thing. Please, please, PLEASE read the Bible passages. Don't just read my devotional thoughts. If you do that, you will have missed the most important and life-giving part of this process: hearing *God* speak to you through his inspired Word. The devotional thoughts are meant to help you understand God's Word better, not to stand alone as your time with God. If you stick with this thing—every day, with discipline, being consistent—I really do believe that God will speak to you and that you'll come to better understand the Bible as one big story of God's salvation for his people. And it's my prayer that you'll hear God's voice more and more as you get into his Word!

In Christ,
Jon

A C T 1

A D A M T O A B R A H A M

GENESIS 1

My family has a big, strong, beautiful English boxer. Seventy-five pounds of pure muscle, she can jump several feet in the air and sprint much faster than I can. Scout gets excited when new people come to our house and jumps all over them, pawing at their clothes. Sometimes she wants to play so badly that she'll start trying to bite my ankles or shoelaces. Scout knows how to sit, but when she gets wound up, she doesn't listen to anything I say. In my house—with regard to my dog—my words often have very little power!

Contrast this with the creation of the world. “In the beginning,” we read, “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (1:1–2). Then something happens: “And God *said*” (1:3). Have you ever really considered this? When God created the world, he didn't even get his hands dirty. He spoke *words*. The God we worship, know, love, and follow *spoke* an entire universe into existence.

This refrain (“And God said”) as God creates everything in the world is echoed by another refrain: “And God saw that it was good.” God was pleased with all that he had made; it was good.

Then comes something different. God has a brief “conversation” within the Godhead. The God we worship—one God in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)—says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness” (1:26). God creates human beings in a completely different way—for a completely different purpose—than anything else in all creation! Human beings alone are created in the image of the eternal, glorious, three-person God. God gives these beings dominion over the earth, and he blesses them and tells them to multiply.

So begins Act 1 of the story of the Bible—the story of the whole world. It begins with God speaking the world and human beings into existence. It begins with God's affirmation of every good thing he had made. And it begins with God setting apart human beings in a special way for a special purpose. This, to God, is “very good” (1:31).

Take some time to praise God, the marvelous Creator of all things, including you. Marvel at the power of his Word. Remember that he made you for his specific purpose. Don't forget to pray about the specific concerns and joys of your day today.

GENESIS 2:1–3

The idea of Sunday rest was unclear to me growing up, especially because Sunday didn't seem very restful to me as a child. I had to comb my hair, which I hated. I had to dress up, which I hated. And we'd spend the entire morning at church. After the service, my brothers and I would usually be stuck waiting for my parents, who seemed to want to talk to every single person in the congregation before going home. Was this really restful?

You only read three verses today, but they are verses that introduce a key concept that will echo throughout the whole Bible story: the *rest* of God. You can see that after God finished creating the world, he rested on the seventh day. This rest of God becomes the foundation for the Sabbath day for God's people—a day for them to celebrate and remember God's rest. Followers of Jesus celebrate this as the Lord's Day until Jesus' return.

I want you to notice something interesting about this short passage. Do you remember the repeated phrase at the end of each of the first six days of creation? “And there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day.” Look at verses 1–3 again. Can you find that phrase after the seventh day? It's not there. The seventh day never ended. In other words, we are living in the seventh day right now! God, enthroned in heaven, is dwelling now in a state of perfect rest. It's not that God has stopped working completely, but he has stopped the work of creation.

Much later in the Bible story, this theme of God's rest comes up again. The author of Hebrews references the passage you read today and says these words: “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:9–11). What is the rest of God, which is ultimately foreshadowed in this passage from Genesis? It is the joyful rest of humans who are saved, not by works, but by grace. Have you entered God's rest—his gracious salvation—through Jesus Christ who lived and died for you?

Take some time to praise God that he worked magnificently in creation. Think about the fact that now God rests—that we live in the seventh day of creation. Ask him to give you the deepest rest in your soul as you seek to know him more and follow him completely through faith in Jesus Christ, his Son.

GENESIS 2:4–25

We have a play table for our one-year-old daughter. On that table are little wooden cars, people, houses, trees, boats, and planes. Sometimes when I'm feeling creative, I'll set up the table with everything in its place. What do you think happens when I turn our one-year-old loose on that table? That's right: destruction! The policeman goes flying, the boat ends up on the other side of the room, and the forest (six or seven wooden trees) is destroyed mercilessly. Genesis 2 gives us a perfectly organized scene that is—unlike a play table—not meant to be destroyed.

This passage takes place *before* the fall—before Adam and Eve give in to temptation and disobey the Word of God. We get a glimpse in Genesis 2 of what God intended for human beings. Here we see that God made the man to work under the authority of God's Word in a God-designed, foundational relationship with the woman.

Look at verse 15: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *work* it and keep it." Work is not a result of the fall; work is a good thing! Work is a God-given responsibility designed to bring joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment. How is Adam to work? Under the authority and guidance of God's Word. In verses 16–17, God gives instructions to Adam about how he should live in the garden; he gives Adam his Word to guide his life and work. Finally, we come to the record of God's creation of the woman. This is the perfect, God-designed helper for the man. You can see how fundamental and prominent this relationship is in verse 24. This is the beginning of marriage.

In Act 1 of the great story of God's work in the world, we find ourselves with a God-designed pattern for man. We were made to work. We were made to live under—and by—the Word of our Creator God. And we were made as male and female because God invented the perfect pattern of companionship. Sadly, we'll see tomorrow how human sin horrifically damaged this entire pattern.

Begin today by thanking God for his creative and generous gift of this amazing pattern. Then look at your life. Confess the ways that you do not work for the glory of God. Confess the areas of your life that may not be totally guided by God's Word. Pray that God would help you live today with a clear realization that he is *your* Creator and that you need to be guided by his Word every minute.

GENESIS 3:1–7

The famous World War II invasion of the beaches of Normandy (known to most of us now as D-Day) has been immortalized in movies, books, and television shows. It was an amazing battle and one that cost the Allied forces around ten thousand casualties. In any war there are certain arenas—key geographical points—that must be secured to achieve victory. The beaches of Normandy were such a point. The victory there by the Allied forces led to the German army's loss of position in most of France. The battle for the beaches of Normandy was in some ways *the* key battle of the entire war.

There is an epic battle going on in Genesis 3:1–7. The key arena is not a beach; it is God's Word. The serpent—Satan himself—chooses the Word of God as the key arena for his battle against God and humans. Look at the very first phrase out of the serpent's mouth: "Did God actually say . . . ?" His first strategic move is to question the reliability and truth of what God has said. What should Eve do without hesitation? She should cry out, "Yes, God said it! I believe it! Everything he says is faithful and true, and I will live by and under his Word!" But she doesn't. In fact, she attacks God's Word in a different way. She adds to it. And Satan, seeing that God's Word has already lost its grip on the humans' hearts, seduces them into rebellion against God's Word with the promise of knowledge and life.

Men, where is Adam during this whole conversation? Surely if Adam had been there, he would have shut down the smooth arguments of the serpent! Look again at verse 6: "She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*." Adam is right there. He watches as God's Word is attacked by the serpent and doubted by his wife. And he does nothing.

The serpent attacks God's Word, Eve begins to doubt the truth of God's Word, and Adam does not stand up for God's Word. The man and woman rebel, and sin enters the world. This is a very sad day.

Begin today by thanking God for his Word. Are you doubting it? Do you add things to it? Do you not stand up for its truth? Pray that today God would help you to listen more carefully to his Word.

GENESIS 3:8–24

I don't know about you, but one of the scariest phrases I could imagine as an eight-year-old was "Wait until your father gets home." That phrase, spoken by my mother, surely came after I had done something wrong; her warning surely meant that a serious spanking was coming. When I heard the door open and my father entered the house, there was one thing I wanted to do more than anything else: run and hide!

That's a little tiny picture of what Adam and Eve are feeling in Genesis 3 after they have blatantly disobeyed the Word of God and eaten the fruit that he commanded them not to eat. As soon as they hear God approaching them, they run and hide like scared children. It's not a pretty picture for Adam and Eve when God confronts them, either. They begin to play the blame game. "The woman whom *you gave to be with me*," Adam begins, daring to point the finger first at his wife and then even at God himself (3:12). Eve blames it all on the serpent: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (3:13). God, of course, knows how it all went down. The serpent—Satan himself—is not without blame. But Adam and Eve must be punished as well. Ultimately they will pay the price with their very lives, and they are sent out from the garden to live and work in toil and struggle until the day of their death.

Where's the hope in all this? It's a chapter full of sin, sadness, judgment, and loss of life. It is the very end of paradise! Yet God speaks a word of grace into this seemingly hopeless situation. In the midst of his curse on the serpent, God points forward to the ultimate victory over Satan, sin, and death won by a descendant of Adam and Eve. The offspring of Eve will one day bruise the head of the offspring of the serpent. This promise in verse 15, sometimes called the *protoevangelium* or "first gospel," is God's way of pointing us to his Son, Jesus, even at the darkest point of the story thus far. Jesus, who is God in human flesh, is the one who will one day clean up this mess, conquer death and sin, and finally crush the head of Satan. The war is not lost!

Take some time to think about the wonder of God's grace—that he would promise victory over sin and death even in the midst of human sin and resulting judgment. Praise him for Jesus, who has won the ultimate victory over Satan (and our sin!) by dying on a cross for us and rising from the dead.

GENESIS 4

In case we were wondering whether or not the fall of Adam and Eve really did something to the world, we have Genesis 4 as our clear answer. The sin that entered the world through our first parents' rebellion against God's Word took immediate effect, even in the lives of their children. Think of sin as a deadly poison; it infects the entire world, dispersing itself to every corner of creation.

Genesis 4 is a sad chapter in the Bible. In verses 5–8, we see an effect of the fall—infectious sin—taking over Cain, the son of Adam and Eve. He evidently does not bring offerings of worship to God in the right way. He gets angry at God. Even after God warns him about the sin that threatens to devour him, he deceives his brother Abel, lures him into a field, and murders him in cold blood. This is a terrible day in God's creation.

Amazingly, God shows a measure of grace to Cain. While Cain will be a wanderer in the earth, God nevertheless puts a hedge of protection around Cain and warns any person who might try to hurt him. This is the second time in the Bible that God shows mercy to sinful human beings. Cain is an angry, bitter, selfish man who murders his own brother very intentionally. Does he deserve to die? Absolutely. But God gives him mercy.

Unfortunately the cycle and infestation of sin seems to get worse as the chapter goes on. We are introduced to Lamech, who seems to be a violent, prideful jerk of a man. He brags to his wives about killing a young man and claims that no one should dare come near him to do him harm. Adam and Eve have loosed a plague—an infection—that would creep into every corner of creation. But God is not done. There is a faint glimmer of hope as the chapter closes with the birth of a son named Seth and the beginning of the public worship of God. We have an ugly infestation—and a God who still has a plan for his people.

Look at the world around you. It is not hard to see how sin infects every part of life—government, politics, relationships, and, of course, our own hearts. Remember that God is not done! Think back to that promise that God gave to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 of the final victory over Satan, sin, and death. Hold on to Jesus today, as the only hope against sin's ugly—but temporary—hold on this world.

GENESIS 6:1–8

When God created Adam and Eve, he gave them a wonderful command: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). We see in that command God’s gracious intention for the human population to increase and live in the world he had created. But in Genesis 6 we begin to see how the multiplication of the descendants of Adam and Eve led to more and more people—and therefore more and more evil.

When you read the first few verses of Genesis 6, you probably asked yourself, “What in the world is going on here?” We read about sons of God marrying daughters of man and are introduced to a race of creatures called the Nephilim, who were mighty men in those days. Confusing stuff! It seems safe to say that the relationships between these sons of God and daughters of man were forbidden by God—probably because they involved relationships between God’s people and people who didn’t worship God and most definitely because they involved some kind of sexual perversion. The Nephilim (probably best understood as a race of giants) also seem to be lovers of violence and enemies of God, as they seem to be taking women by force.

One thing emerges clearly from this passage: evil has taken over the earth. We get a brutal summary of human life in the world in verse 5: “Every intention of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually.” This grieves God because God is holy and hates sin. God promises judgment against sin, vowing that he will destroy the earth he has made, along with the people who have rebelled against him so terribly.

The *but* in verse 8 is a beautiful conjunction. In the midst of the evil that has taken over the world, one man emerges who finds favor (or *grace*) with God: Noah. We don’t know much about Noah at this point, although we learn later in the story that he is not a perfect man. What does Noah have? Noah has “favor in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8). Because of God’s grace to this one man, there will be grace for humanity; God will save some people, even in the midst of his holy judgment against sin.

Are you absolutely sure that you have favor—or grace—with God today? Have you put your faith in his Son, whose sacrificial death for your sins allows you to have favor with God? If so, rest in Jesus today! Thank God that you have favor in his eyes because of Jesus. Ask God for strength to obey his Word and follow him, even in the midst of a world that has turned its back on God.

*Have you ever tried reading through the entire Bible,
only to bail partway through a huge list of names or
a chapter on infectious skin diseases?*

The sixty-six books of the Bible may seem pretty different from each other, but they actually tell one story—a story with one Author, one Hero, and one key plotline. (And yes, sometimes skin diseases do play an important part!)

This yearlong, daily study of God's Word guides you through five acts of his grand story of redemption. Although you won't read *every* chapter in the Bible, daily Scripture and devotional readings will equip you to understand the unity and development of God's story and to grow in your personal discipline of Bible study and prayer.

“An incredible resource for students to thoughtfully read the Bible.

It's true to Scripture, engaging, and concise yet thorough.”

—GLORIA FURMAN, Author, *Glimpses of Grace*

“Your daily Bible-reading times just got better! This one-year devotional presents the big picture of the Bible in ways that press home a greater devotion to God.”

—DAVID HELM, Pastor, Holy Trinity Church, Chicago

“Concise, clear, brief readings that will help anyone and everyone deepen their understanding of the big story of the Bible.”

—NANCY GUTHRIE, Author, *The One Year Book of
Discovering Jesus in the Old Testament*

“Will help young people by providing them with a framework and accessible commentary on various passages of the Bible underneath an overall gospel rubric.”

—JOSHUA W. MOODY, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton

JON NIELSON has worked as director of training for the Charles Simeon Trust, an organization that provides training in biblical exposition. He is currently college pastor at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and is author of *Bible Study: A Student's Guide*.

PRP
P U B L I S H I N G
WWW.PRPBOOKS.COM

Cover design by Kirk DouPonce, www.DogEaredDesign.com

YOUTH / DEVOTIONAL

ISBN: 978-1-59638-812-3

EAN



9 781596 388123

