

The heart of God's plan for mankind



G O D ' S L O V E
S T O R Y

—— Edited by Brian Dowler ——

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INTRODUCTION

God's Love Story provides a broad overview of the Bible, from start to finish. It is intended to help you grasp the story and purpose of God's plan for humanity. This book contains selected portions of the Bible, placed in chronological order as a means of enhancing readability and understanding. Book, chapter, and verse markings have been removed to allow the text to read more like a novel.

God's Love Story is divided into 39 compact chapters which can easily be read in one setting. Some explanation has been added (in shaded boxes and italics) to aid in understanding and to bridge gaps over sections which were excluded from this reading program. Care was taken not to interject personal biases or viewpoints, but to let Scripture speak for itself. The Bible text provided in this book is taken from World English Bible translation, an uncopyrighted, modern translation of the American Standard Version of 1901.

The reader is encouraged to refer to the entire Bible text and additional translations to supplement your study. A Bible Reference Map is provided at the end of this book to help you locate book, chapter, and verse for additional study.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

God's Love Story can be explored in a number of ways. First, as an individual reader, you can create your own personal reading and study plan. Follow the 39 chapters for a 39-day study, a 39-week study, or even longer. This book could also serve as an outline for family devotionals, presenting many opportunities for discussion.

You may choose to work through *God's Love Story* as a congregational study. Your minister could select a sermon topic from each week's text to reinforce your Bible study. There are also student workbooks for elementary, teen, and adult level studies.

Finally, you can use this study as an outreach to your community. There is great interest in the Bible and many outside the church would be willing to participate in a structured overview of God's Word.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Brian Dowler is originally from Parkersburg, WV and is a faithful member of the Lord's church. He and his wife, Cathy, have served the church in Camp Hill, PA as teachers and Brian served as an elder. He is currently an elder at Zelianople Church of Christ in Harmony, and lives in Cranberry Township, PA. Brian was recently named Alumnus of the Year by Ohio Valley University in Vienna, WV.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of our dear Brother Paul Cantrell, who was a tireless servant of God, a caring man who dedicated his life to preaching and teaching the Word of God. Since his passing on September 1, 2012, he is greatly missed.

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THE BEGINNING

From Creation to Destruction

The Bible is called “The greatest story ever told,” and for good reason. Men through the ages have asked the questions, “Who put me here?”, “Why am I here?” and “What will happen to me when I die?” The Bible answers these questions, laying out the purpose for our existence and giving us answers to these important questions.

Starting at the beginning, we see God’s hand controlling the creation of our world and universe, as well as influencing major and minor events among the people of the world. From the majesty of the heavens to the beauty of the earth, his work is marvelous; but the crowning glory of his creation is man, who is made in God’s own image. The purpose of the entire creation is for our benefit. And the purpose of our creation is for the glorification of God.

Behind every event that God puts into motion, is his grand plan. Whether God speaks to one of his believers in a dream, or causes a nation’s course to be changed by war, like a grand master at the chessboard, there is a purpose behind every move. And that purpose is to provide a means of salvation for mankind.

In the Old Testament portion of the Bible, the stage is being set for the coming of the “Messiah,” Jesus Christ, God’s only son, to be the perfect sacrifice that makes it possible for the sins of man to be washed away. In the New Testament portion of the Bible, the life and teachings of Jesus are given. The son of God takes on a fleshly form, living a perfect life, culminating with His death, burial and resurrection from the grave. With this sacrifice, God has given us the gift of eternal life. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, we can have confidence that He can also raise us from the dead, to live a joyful existence in heaven with him eternally.

The New Testament portion continues with the story of the church, the body of believers in Christ Jesus. The church, lovingly called the “Bride of Christ,” grows rapidly, but then suffers from persecution. Despite this suffering, the church continues to prosper. The Bible ends with the book of Revelation, a book of prophesy about the church and end of time, giving

hope to those who are being persecuted for the name of Jesus. In this final prophesy we receive confirmation that Jesus will reign supreme in heaven with those who obey him.

The purpose of our life is to obey God, thus bringing him glory. Despite the difficulties of life, if we are faithful to God, who loves each of us, he will reward us beyond measure.

This grand narrative, the Bible, is truly God's love story.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep. God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters.

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw the light, and saw that it was good. God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." There was evening and there was morning, one day.

God said, "Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse "sky." There was evening and there was morning, a second day.

God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together to one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. God called the dry land "earth," and the gathering together of the waters he called "seas." God saw that it was good. God said, "Let the earth yield grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with its seed in it, on the earth"; and it was so. The earth yielded grass, herbs yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with its seed in it, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a third day.

God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of sky to give light on the earth"; and it was so. God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of sky to give light to the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of sky." God created the large sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind. God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the

waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

God said, "Let the earth produce living creatures after their kind, livestock, creeping things, and animals of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. God made the animals of the earth after their kind, and the livestock after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind. God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food. To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so.

God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

The heavens and the earth were finished, and all their vast array. On the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because he rested in it from all his work which he had created and made.

This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens. No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to till the ground, but a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground. Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Yahweh God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground Yahweh God made every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became four heads. The name of the first is Pishon: this is the one which flows through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good. There is aromatic resin and the onyx stone. The name of the second river is Gihon: the same river that flows through the

whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel: this is the one which flows in front of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. Yahweh God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die."

Yahweh God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." Out of the ground Yahweh God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field; but for man there was not found a helper suitable for him. Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall on the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. He made the rib, which Yahweh God had taken from the man, into a woman, and brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh. They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'"

The woman said to the serpent, "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

The serpent said to the woman, "You won't surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate. The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.

Yahweh God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

The man said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

Yahweh God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Yahweh God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed above all livestock, and above every animal of the field. On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."

To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bear children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

To Adam he said, "Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will yield thorns and thistles to you; and you will eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The man called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Yahweh God made coats of skins for Adam and for his wife, and clothed them.

Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever..." Therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed Cherubs at the east of the garden of Eden, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

The man knew Eve his wife. She conceived, and gave birth to Cain, and said, "I have gotten a man with Yahweh's help." Again she gave birth, to Cain's brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. As time passed, it happened that Cain brought an offering to Yahweh from the fruit of the ground. Abel also brought some of the firstborn of his flock and of its fat. Yahweh respected Abel and his offering, but he didn't respect Cain and his offering. Cain was very angry, and the expression on his face fell. Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen? If you do well, will it not be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it." Cain said to Abel, his brother, "Let's go into the field." It happened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him.

Yahweh said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?" He said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Yahweh said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries

to me from the ground. Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. From now on, when you till the ground, it won't yield its strength to you. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth."

Cain said to Yahweh, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me out this day from the surface of the ground. I will be hidden from your face, and I will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth. It will happen that whoever finds me will kill me."

Yahweh said to him, "Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should strike him.

After Cain was cursed, he married, and bands of his descendants became known for the keeping of livestock, for the playing of musical instruments, and for the forging of brass and iron. Carrying on the tradition of Cain, one of his descendants, Lamech, also was known for murdering a young man.

From Adam and Eve's son Seth, a line of descendants populated the earth. In those days, men lived for hundreds of years, with the pinnacle reached by Methuselah, who lived to the advanced age of 969 years. Enoch, who was taken to be with God without dying at the age 365, was actually an exception to the longevity among the lineage from Seth to Noah, which totaled eight generations. Unfortunately, by this time nearly all men were consumed by wickedness.

This is the history of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time. Noah walked with God. Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. God saw the earth, and saw that it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make a ship of gopher wood. You shall make rooms in the ship, and shall seal it inside and outside with pitch. This is how you shall make it. The length of the ship will be three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a roof in the ship, and you shall finish it to a cubit upward. You shall set the door of the ship in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third levels. I, even I, do bring the flood of waters on this earth, to destroy all flesh having the breath of life from under the sky. Everything that is in the earth will die. But I will establish my covenant with you. You shall come into the ship, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. Of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every

sort into the ship, to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of the livestock after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every sort shall come to you, to keep them alive. Take with you of all food that is eaten, and gather it to yourself; and it will be for food for you, and for them." Thus Noah did. According to all that God commanded him, so he did.

Yahweh said to Noah, "Come with all of your household into the ship, for I have seen your righteousness before me in this generation. You shall take seven pairs of every clean animal with you, the male and his female. Of the animals that are not clean, take two, the male and his female. Also of the birds of the sky, seven and seven, male and female, to keep seed alive on the surface of all the earth. In seven days, I will cause it to rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights. Every living thing that I have made, I will destroy from the surface of the ground."

Noah did everything that Yahweh commanded him.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth. Noah went into the ship with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, because of the waters of the flood. Clean animals, animals that are not clean, birds, and everything that creeps on the ground went by pairs to Noah into the ship, male and female, as God commanded Noah. It happened after the seven days, that the waters of the flood came on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep were burst open, and the sky's windows were opened. The rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. All flesh died that moved on the earth, including birds, livestock, animals, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, of all that was on the dry land, died. Every living thing was destroyed that was on the surface of the ground, including man, livestock, creeping things, and birds of the sky. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ship. The waters prevailed on the earth one hundred fifty days.

God remembered Noah, all the animals, and all the livestock that were with him in the ship; and God made a wind to pass over the earth. The waters subsided. The deep's fountains and the sky's windows were also stopped, and the rain from the sky was restrained. The waters receded from the earth continually. After the end of one hundred fifty days the waters decreased. The ship rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on Ararat's mountains. The waters receded continually until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

It happened in the six hundred first year, in the first month, the first day

of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth. Noah removed the covering of the ship, and looked. He saw that the surface of the ground was dried. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

God spoke to Noah, saying, "Go out of the ship, you, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh, including birds, livestock, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply on the earth."

Noah went out, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives with him. Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, whatever moves on the earth, after their families, went out of the ship.

Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and took of every clean animal, and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. Yahweh smelled the pleasant aroma. Yahweh said in his heart, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again strike everything living, as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you will be on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the sky. Everything that the ground teems with, and all the fish of the sea are delivered into your hand. Every moving thing that lives will be food for you. As the green herb, I have given everything to you. But flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat. I will surely require your blood of your lives. At the hand of every animal I will require it. At the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in his own image. Be fruitful and multiply. Increase abundantly in the earth, and multiply in it."

I will establish my covenant with you: all flesh will not be cut off any more by the waters of the flood, neither will there ever again be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it will be for a sign of a covenant between me and the earth. It will happen, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters will no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow will be in the cloud. I will look at it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the token of the covenant which I have established between me and

all flesh that is on the earth.”

The sons of Noah who went out from the ship were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham is the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these, the whole earth was populated.

Noah lived three hundred fifty years after the flood. All the days of Noah were nine hundred fifty years, then he died.

After the flood, Shem, Ham and Japheth began families, and they eventually divided into nations. But when their pride led them to intend to “make a name for themselves” God intervened.

The whole earth was of one language and of one speech. It happened, as they traveled east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they lived there. They said one to another, “Come, let’s make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let’s make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad on the surface of the whole earth.”

Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. Yahweh said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. Now nothing will be withheld from them, which they intend to do. Come, let’s go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there on the surface of all the earth. They stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of all the earth. From there, Yahweh scattered them abroad on the surface of all the earth.

There were eight generations from Shem to Terah, the father of Abraham.

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