

THE  
MOST  
IMPORTANT  
STORIES  
OF THE  
BIBLE

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD  
THROUGH THE STORIES IT TELLS

CHRISTOPHER D. HUDSON  
AND STAN CAMPBELL



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We treasure every moment we can serve together  
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engage, and apply the Bible.  
Thanks for joining us on the journey.

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# Introduction

*The Most Important Stories of the Bible* examines seventy-five stories throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. But (spoiler alert!) it won't take you long to discover that the Bible is really all one story. From beginning to end it details the flow of what God has planned, what God has already done, and what God has in store for those who love him.

These stories are presented in chronological order to help you understand the timeline and sequence of biblical events. Each one begins with a short synopsis that ties it to previous stories, and when appropriate, that synopsis shows how the significance of the story is relevant to stories that follow.

You might recognize classic “Sunday school” stories from the Old Testament, some parables Jesus told and miracles he performed from the New Testament, and other portions of Scripture. Search for new insights in those familiar accounts. Their impact, placed in context with those passages less well-known, should provide an eye-opening review of Scripture for longtime believers as well as a sturdy foundation for newcomers to biblical literature.

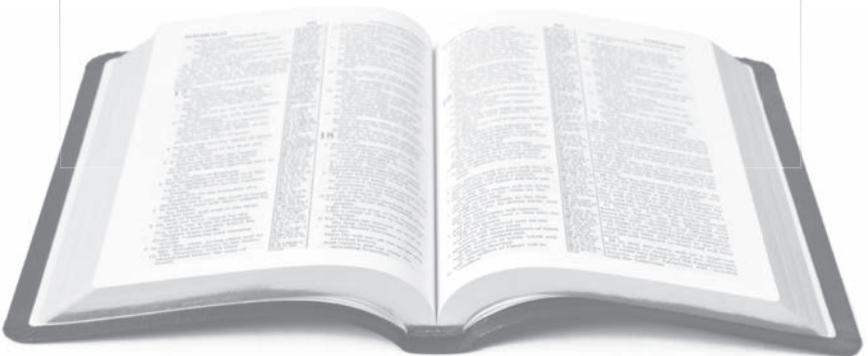
You might discover that some of your favorite stories are missing from this collection. Considering the scope and depth of Scripture, more content must be omitted from this book than can be

included in the space available. In many cases you'll find only a sampling of one or two events from a historical era or a person's life (the judges, the prophets, the life of David, the life of Jesus, and so on), although so much more might have been covered. If you're looking for an account not included here, perhaps you'll review that story in its historical context as you're going through this guide.

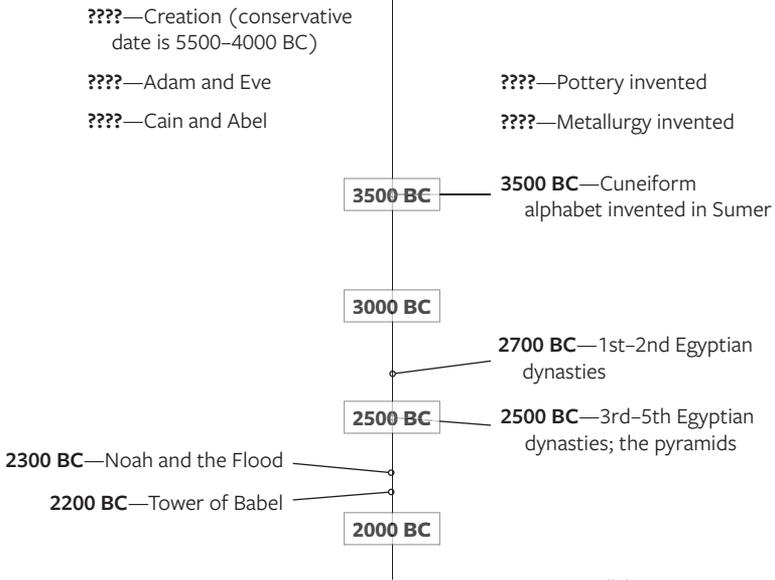
Some people are quick to dismiss Bible stories as fiction or myth. They find it difficult to believe in giants defeated with slingshots, prophet-swallowing fish, or floodwaters that part to allow dry passage. The stories are presented here as they are in Scripture—as historic events, with no attempt to “prove” them. Rather than debating and defending our belief in the historical accuracy of the Bible, we've chosen to look instead for *why* each story is included in inspired Scripture. Whether or not you consider biblical accounts *factual*, you should be able to discern *truth* from them.

Becoming more familiar with Scripture is beneficial and satisfying (besides being able to answer challenging Bible questions on *Jeopardy!*), but Bible knowledge for its own sake isn't necessarily rewarding. As you read through these most important stories of the Bible, we hope they leave you hungry for more. The purpose of this book is to help readers go beyond mere Bible knowledge to develop or strengthen an ongoing, growing relationship with the Author of the Bible. Nothing is more essential than that.

# BEGINNINGS



BIBLE EVENT	WORLD EVENT
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*All dates are approximate.*

# Creation

Genesis 1:1–2:3

## The Story Begins

The book of Genesis opens with a clue that God is eternal: “In the beginning God . . .” Our world was just beginning, but the story of God has no origin. He was here before everything he created for us. He has always existed, and he always will.

## The Essential Story

The earth wasn’t a spectacular nor even distinctive planet. It was pitch black, barren, and just one of trillions and trillions of lifeless specks scattered across a boundary-less universe. But then . . .

The voice of God cracked the silent darkness, and light appeared. He coalesced the light, separated it from the darkness, and then called it a day.

In his next act of separation, on the second day, God spoke again. He divided up the waters, creating a heavenly atmosphere apart from the waters of the earth. Between them God placed a vault of sky.

Continuing the separation process on day three, God next collected the earth’s waters together to allow dry ground to form. The planet was taking shape with land and seas. God deemed his creation “good,” but the day was not yet over. God then established a variety of trees and seed-bearing plants, all with a self-sustaining capacity to reproduce.

Day four saw the creation of the sun, moon, and stars. In addition to providing light day and night, the predictable movements of the heavenly bodies were intended to establish the regularity of days and years and to “mark sacred times” (Genesis 1:14).

On the fifth day, the waters began to teem with all kinds of sea creatures as the skies filled with a colorful assortment of birds. The creatures of earth had God’s blessing to “be fruitful and increase in number” (v. 22).

Land creatures soon followed on day six, both wild animals and livestock. And finally, in his ultimate act of creation, God made humankind. He also made some important distinctions at this point. To begin with, the humans—both male and female—were created in the image of God. They were also given the privilege and responsibility of overseeing the whole of God’s creation. They were to both subdue and rule over the animal kingdom, and they had their choice of plants for food.

In addition, as God prepared to create humanity, he said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” (v. 26). To whom was he speaking? Bible scholars tend to think either he was addressing the heavenly court of attending angels, or that the “us” was a reference to the collective Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that compose the one God of Christian faith. (Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters even before day one.)

God was finished with his work but not with his week. On the seventh day he rested. An omnipotent God never tires, so scholars again presume that his day of rest was a symbolic action, for our benefit more than for his. Indeed, the entire concept of Sabbath that became so vital to Jewish law and Christian practice was based on this example. As it was in the beginning, so it continues until this day.

## Essential Truth

God created the earth, humanity, and all things, and he called them good.

# Adam and Eve

Genesis 2:4–25

## The Story Continues . . .

The book of Genesis also provides a second creation account. The first was a description of creation on a grand scale. This one is more up close and personal, with much more attention devoted to God's relationship with his newly created humans.

## The Essential Story

In the first five days of creation, God had spoken light and life into the blackness of the universe. He had separated light from darkness, atmosphere from waters on earth, land from seas. He had set the heavenly bodies in the skies. He had prepped the world for vegetation, watering the land with a mist rather than with rainfall. But before the land greened out, God determined to create someone to care for it.

Using dust from the ground, God formed a man and brought him to life by breathing into his nostrils. He placed the man in a newly planted garden called Eden, located in a lush and fertile area amid four rivers, including the Tigris and Euphrates. The man, Adam, was assigned to work the land and care for creation.

Scripture identifies two specific trees in the garden. One was the Tree of Life; the other was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—the only plant in Eden whose fruit was off-limits to Adam. (Little is said of either tree at this point, although both will be significant in the story that follows this one.)

In addition to his gardening duties, Adam was given the privilege of naming the animals. God paraded all the birds, beasts, and livestock before Adam, who gave them whatever name he wished. During the process (as God had planned, of course), Adam saw

that all those animals had mates, that he was the only one-of-a-kind creature in the garden.

God had affirmed that everything he created was good, yet he knew Adam's lack of a human companion was "not good" (Genesis 2:18). God placed Adam in a deep sleep, during which he took one of Adam's ribs and created from it a woman who would come to be called Eve. We can only surmise that Adam must have been more than a little pleased when he woke up. Even though neither Adam nor Eve had human parents, they set a precedent that, from that point forward, "a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (v. 24).

The story pauses at this point with a telling observation: "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (v. 25). It was an idyllic lifestyle in paradise that may sound too good to be true. We see in the next story why that degree of intimacy would not last long.

## Essential Truth

As it's been from the beginning, God's desire is for humans to have fulfilling work, intimate relationships, and unfettered access to his presence.

# The Fall

Genesis 3

## The Story Continues . . .

Adam and Eve, newly created, were enjoying immense freedom in a lush paradise called Eden. They lived in innocence, experiencing no pain, no shame, and no fear as they interacted with God

and the other creatures. They had access to a vast variety of food sources, and they had been encouraged to eat from every tree in the garden—except one (Genesis 2:16–17).

## The Essential Story

One restriction. Just one. And not a big one at that.

Yet it was enough for one of the creatures to plant a seed of doubt in the humans' minds. The serpent, noted as more "crafty" than the other animals, sidled up to the woman and asked, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1).

It seemed like a simple yes-or-no question, but it was a cunning tactic. They both knew only one tree had been deemed off-limits, yet by misquoting God, the serpent craftily pulled Eve into a conversation when she attempted to clarify the truth. He made her suspect that God was hiding something from her. The more she thought about the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the better it looked to her. But what ultimately sold her was the serpent's promise that the fruit would provide as yet unrealized wisdom. She took a bite and then passed it on to Adam, who did the same. That changed everything.

In an instant, the two went from being unashamed (Genesis 2:25) to hurriedly trying to cover their naked bodies with fig leaves. They had previously walked with God in the garden; now they hid from him. When God called them into account, the man blamed the woman, and the woman blamed the serpent, but their excuses were hollow. God passed judgment on all three: from now on the serpent would crawl on its belly and eat dust; the woman would become subject to her husband and experience pain in childbirth; and the man would forevermore struggle to make a living amid thorns, thistles, and sweat. And lest Adam and Eve then eat of the Tree of Life and live forever in separation from God, they were cast out of the garden. An angel wielding a flaming sword was positioned to prevent reentry.

Yet God’s displeasure was tempered with mercy. Adam and Eve would die—eventually—but in the meantime God provided animal skins rather than leaves for covering (the first hint of death in Scripture). He also foretold an ongoing conflict between the woman and the serpent: in future generations one of the woman’s descendants would suffer at the hands of the serpent yet would persevere over it (traditionally interpreted as Jesus’ triumph over sin and Satan). The woman’s offspring, Jesus, would one day undergo a much more intense temptation, but he would not succumb to it.

### Essential Truth

Any form of disobedience to God is called sin, and sin separates people from God. Reconciliation is possible only because of his great love and mercy and through his provision of salvation.

## Cain and Abel

Genesis 4

### The Story Continues . . .

Adam and Eve, cast out of Eden, now have children. Their separation from God has led to their propensity to sin, which has carried on to this next generation. Sibling rivalry, it seems, dates to the very first siblings.

### The Essential Story

Cain weighed his options and made a terrible decision. He told his younger brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field” (Genesis 4:8).

Cain steadfastly worked the soil to put food on the table, and he had endured dust, weeds, and sweat to bring an offering to God. But all Abel had to do was tend the livestock and then kill one of them. Cain couldn't understand why his offering had been rejected while Abel's found favor with God, and he didn't like it at all.

The Lord knew Cain's thoughts, of course, and he'd given him another opportunity: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (v. 7). But that opportunity had been accompanied with a warning: "If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (v. 7).

Perhaps Cain tried to come to terms with God's ruling, but he eventually decided he would settle the matter himself. He lured Abel into the field and killed him—clearly a premeditated action. As God had done after Adam and Eve's sin, he confronted Cain with a question: "Where is your brother Abel?" (v. 9).

Adam and Eve had made excuses, but Cain lied to God outright: "I don't know. . . . Am I my brother's keeper?" (v. 9).

God's stern response quickly let Cain know God was not fooled. Because the ground had absorbed Abel's blood, Cain was no longer allowed to work the earth. He had distanced himself from God, and now he was being separated from his livelihood, forced to become "a restless wanderer on the earth" (v. 12). The consequence of his sin struck fear in Cain as he realized he would become a vulnerable target of anyone who might want to kill him. Even though Cain had to leave his family behind and he "went out from the Lord's presence" (v. 16), God placed a protective mark on him. (Scholars can only speculate about the nature of the "mark" and an explanation for the other people Cain would encounter.)

Cain found a wife and started a family, but the little said about his successive generations reveals a rapid spread of sin, with references to evil, murder, and revenge. Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had another son, and they named him Seth. Seth's descendants, in contrast, would eventually lead to Noah.

## Essential Truth

God cares more about our attitudes and motivations for our gifts than he cares about the gifts themselves (1 Samuel 15:22; 2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 John 3:12).

# Noah and the Flood

Genesis 6–9

## The Story Continues . . .

The problem of sin had never been worse. Adam and Eve suffered the consequences of their disobedience as had Cain for his crime. In a short time, the propensity to sin had proliferated until the whole of humanity no longer acknowledged their creator. It reached the point where “the Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled” (Genesis 6:6). Yet one person remained righteous.

## The Essential Story

Noah thought the forty days of rain had been bad enough. He had seen the waters not only fall from the skies but also gush up from springs below to cover the earth. They had floated for five months before the ark finally settled atop Mount Ararat on dry ground. What Noah didn’t know then was that his time in the ark wasn’t even halfway over!

God’s instructions had been precise, and Noah had followed them to the letter. The ark—450 feet by 75 feet, and three decks high—was big enough for what God had in mind, and Noah and his wife, along with his three sons and their wives, had prepared all the food and collected pairs of animals as God commanded.

More importantly, the ark had proven seaworthy. God himself had shut the door behind them, and the waters came. Then it was a matter of waiting . . . and waiting . . . and waiting.

After the Mount Ararat touchdown, it took another three months for other mountaintops to appear above the waterline. Noah waited yet another forty days and then sent out a raven that only circled the ark. When he sent out a dove, however, it was forced to return because there was no other place to perch. Noah sent the dove out again seven days later, and this time it returned with a sign of hope: a freshly plucked olive leaf. In still another seven days, when he sent out the dove a third time, it didn't return. Yet even then, after Noah removed the covering of the ark, the waiting still wasn't over. It took almost two more months for the earth to dry sufficiently to release the animals. When God finally said it was okay to come out, Noah and his crew had been in the ark a year and ten days.

The first thing Noah did upon his release was to build an altar to God and make a sacrifice. God reinstated human authority over animals, although from this point forward the creatures would develop a sense of “fear and dread” toward people (Genesis 9:2). Humans had evidently maintained a vegetarian diet so far, but God okayed a meat diet so long as the blood was drained prior to preparation. And finally, God told Noah and his sons to “be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it” (v. 7).

God made a covenant with Noah, promising to never again destroy the earth or creatures because of human misbehavior (after earlier noting in his own heart that “every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood” [Genesis 8:21]). God formalized the covenant by placing a rainbow in the sky—a reoccurring reminder of his ongoing mercy (vv. 13–16).

## Essential Truth

Even in his judgment, God delivers the righteous and extends mercy to those who put their faith in him (2 Peter 2:4–9).

# The Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:1–9

## The Story Continues . . .

The great flood had been the result of unbridled sin on earth. God had promised Noah that he would never again destroy the earth in such a way (Genesis 9:14–16). Yet along with the reemergence of humanity came a renewed resistance to God.

## The Essential Story

God’s instructions to Noah and his family after the flood couldn’t have been clearer: “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1).

Subsequent generations had certainly increased in number, yet they had become blatantly defiant about the “filling the earth” clause.

At the time, all humanity spoke the same language. Determined to put down roots, they settled on a large and attractive plain called Shinar. Their plan was to establish a great city with a grand tower that reached to the heavens. By using bricks and tar rather than stone and mortar, they anticipated unprecedented success.

Building a city was nothing new or particularly problematic, yet the motives of the people reveal a severe underlying complication. They had two goals: to make a name for themselves and to keep from being scattered over the face of the earth. In other words, they were planning a life that not only rejected any need for God but also directly defied what he had clearly said to do—fill the earth.

We aren’t told how far along they got with their monument to human pride, but the next thing we know, God “came down” to see the city and tower (Genesis 11:5). (If their goal was to reach to the heavens, they still had far to go!)

God quickly put an end to their delusion that they were all-sufficient without him. Rather than responding with a severe punitive action as he had done with the flood, though, he decided to “confuse their language” (v. 7). With the sudden inability to communicate effectively, the project was abandoned, and the different language groups scattered to various geographic locations, as was God’s intention from the beginning.

The location of the tower came to be known as Babel, a name derived from the word that meant “to confuse” or “to mingle.” In one sense, the name always harkens back to the language confusion of the Tower of Babel event. However, the name also became a synonym for “Babylon” in ancient Hebrew thought and writing. The mind-set of self-sufficiency and denial of any need for God aptly applied to Babylon as it grew into a more and more influential nation.

## Essential Truth

God’s will shall be accomplished, with or without human cooperation.