

The **WHOLE**
BIBLE
STORY
ILLUSTRATED EDITION



*Everything That Happens
in the Bible
in Plain English*

DR. WILLIAM H. MARTY



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17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my mother,
a single mom, who sacrificed
to give me what she never had
—an education—
and the students at MBI
who challenged and motivated
me to become a lifelong learner.



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Preface to the Illustrated Edition

A few weeks ago I was eating lunch with an upperclassman and asked him about his experience at Moody. He said he was grateful for the opportunity and especially thankful that I had required students to read the entire Bible in his first year at Moody. He said that though he was from a Christian home, he had never read through the Bible before coming to Moody. And I have heard many times of experiences similar to his. Even students who have read all the books of the Bible at one time or another are surprised to discover that there is a storyline in the Bible. It has been my privilege in my thirty-five plus years of teaching at Moody to explain that in the sixty-six books of the Bible we have God's grand story of redemption—his rescue plan for men and women who have rebelled against him.

Though for decades I have required students to read the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and twenty-seven books of the New Testament in the first year survey courses, I was surprised when Andy McGuire contacted me in 2010 and asked me to write a book on the storyline of the whole Bible. I agreed but had doubts. I wondered why people wouldn't prefer to read the actual Bible rather than an abbreviated

story of the Bible. After he explained the purpose of the book, I became convinced of the value of such a book and became excited about the project. I realized that reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is intimidating for most people. They are not familiar with the storyline, and the books of poetry, prophecy, and the epistles do not directly advance the storyline. Though those books give additional insight about people and events in the story, they are not included in *The Whole Bible Story*. *The Whole Bible Story* traces the storyline from the creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis to the creation of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation.

I now know that Andy was right. *The Whole Bible Story* has been sold all over the world and translated into Korean. Churches have used the book for classes for new members and for classes on basic Christianity. Some have given it to all graduating high school students. A Moody graduate, who serves as a chaplain in a prison, told me *The Whole Bible Story* is ideal for use in his prison ministry. I have also received notes from individuals thanking me for *The Whole Bible Story* because for the first time they have understood the storyline, and many have said they are now motivated to read the whole Bible.

And here's the exciting news. *The Whole Bible Story* is now available in an illustrated version. With more than eighty pictures, charts, and maps, the book will be more appealing and give more insight into God's grand story.

Acknowledgments

In a sense this book is not my own. The idea came from Andy McGuire at Bethany House. He also guided me in writing and organizing the content and started the process of transforming my academic content and style into a popular and contemporary story of the Bible. I would also like to give credit to Christopher Soderstrom, who used his editorial skills to put the manuscript into its final form. Having read the proofs, I have a new appreciation for editors. Without their revisions, this book would read like my lecture notes at Moody Bible Institute. Both men were positive and helpful encouragers when I am certain they could have been critical.

I owe a great debt, not so much for this book but for my life as a follower of Christ and my career as a teacher, to two of my former teachers. It was never my goal to go into ministry. After college, I was commissioned as an officer in the US Army. After four years and a tour of duty in Vietnam, I resigned my commission and made a life-changing decision. I enrolled in Denver Theological Seminary. Because there wasn't an official diagnosis of post-traumatic stress syndrome, I didn't know why I was at risk emotionally. Two men, both of whom are now with the Lord, modeled for me what it meant to be a follower of Christ. Dr. Bruce Shelley, professor of church history, and Dr. Vernon

Acknowledgments

Grounds, president and professor of pastoral ministry, not only taught what to believe but showed me how to live as an authentic Christian. Without their example and personal counsel, I would have never graduated from seminary and gone on to a career as a pastor and eventually a Bible teacher.

I am also grateful for my wife, who encouraged me in the challenging work of writing and proposed using the book of Revelation as the epilogue for the book. My wife is a wonderful gift from the Lord.

Introduction

A friend recently asked me for a Bible. Knowing that she didn't know anything about it, I gave her a study Bible.

She opened it and flipped through a few pages, then looked up with a bewildered expression and asked, "How do I read this? Where do I start? What's in it?"

I gave her a brief explanation and wrote down some of the biblical books she should start with, but I realized she needed more help than just this.

Simply reading the Bible from cover to cover is a daunting task. The Bible is long—sixty-six books from Genesis to Revelation—and it can be difficult to follow the storyline because the books are not recorded in chronological order.

Another challenge is content. The Bible is written in a variety of literary forms. In addition to historical narrative, there is poetry, law, prophecy, and parable. Epistles (letters) make up almost half of the New Testament.

Many of the Old Testament's prophetic books, plus Revelation, are what we call apocalyptic literature. This type of writing describes catastrophic events associated with the end of time in vivid and bizarre

imagery. For someone first attempting to read the Bible, this all can be very confusing.

When you write a book, editors want you to be able to state its purpose in a sentence or two. Here's my attempt: *The purpose of this book is to tell the story of the Bible.*

It is not a paraphrase of the Bible's sixty-six books, and it is not intended to replace Bible reading. My hope is that it will motivate people to read the Bible.

This book skips important information. It is an effort to synthesize the storyline of the Old and New Testaments minus the laws, messages (sermons), prophecies, and parables (stories). It does not include Old Testament poetry (wisdom literature) and prophecy, and it does not include the New Testament Epistles.

It is not a direct translation of the Bible; instead, it tells the story in plain, simple English. With very little commentary, I'm trying to give "just the facts"—to tell the story as it is recorded.

One thing to keep in mind: Just because an event is recorded in the Bible does not mean God approves of it. The nature of historical narrative is to record what happened. The writers of Scripture assume the reader will look at events from God's perspective.

I need to warn you up front, also, that reading the Bible will change you. It's not like reading other books. The Bible compels you to become a participant in the story.

Simply put, the Bible is about God. It tells the true story of creation from his perspective. It is about God revealing himself to men and women who are in some respects like him, and who were made to have a relationship with him.

As you read you will discover that God has a plan for you and for all of creation. Though that plan has been corrupted by failure, God has not abandoned us. Those who enter into his story can experience what it means to enjoy life both now and forever.

Introduction

Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament books, called the story of the Bible “good news.” In the book of Romans he wrote, “I am not ashamed of the good news, because it is the power of God for saving everyone who believes the wonderful message of God’s love that has been made known in Jesus Christ.”

I hope this book not only helps and encourages you to read the Bible but also convinces you to join in God’s story, which is also your story.

1

From Creation to Babel

MAIN CHARACTERS

God (the Lord)
Adam and Eve
Cain and Abel
Noah

SETTING

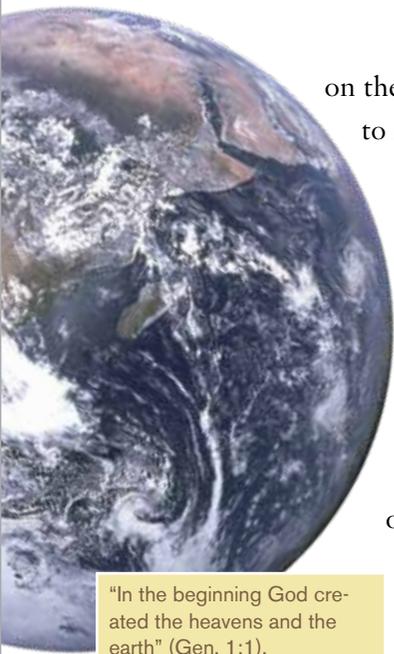
Mesopotamia

Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In its original state the earth was empty and dark. Like a bird watching over its young, the Spirit of God hovered over the watery surface of the earth.

God created light on day one. On day two, he placed the sky between the earth and the heavens. He made land and vegetation on the third day, and on the fourth day, he put the stars, the sun, and the moon in place. On day five, God filled the sky with birds and the oceans with creatures of the sea. God created animals on the sixth day, and finally, last but not least, he made humankind in his image. (This means they were like God in certain ways.) God enriched their lives by providing them food to eat and giving them responsibility for the rest of creation.

When God finished his work, he saw that everything he had made was perfect. There was absolutely no defect in his creation. He rested



"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

on the seventh day and set it apart as a day to rest and to remember that God is the creator of the universe.

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden and made Adam the caretaker. He made all kinds of trees grow in the garden, and in the middle of the garden he designated two trees as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. The Lord gave man permission to eat from all the trees in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned Adam that if he disobeyed by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would immediately die spiritually and eventually die physically.

The Lord allowed Adam to name all the animals so he would realize none of them were made like him. But the Lord also knew Adam needed a wife. When Adam fell into a deep sleep, the Lord made a woman from Adam's rib. When Adam woke up, he was thrilled. The woman was perfect. Adam called her "woman" because she was made from his side. God united them in marriage, and though they were naked they did not feel embarrassed or think about exploiting each other.

The Fall

Their relationship with the Lord and each other couldn't have been better, until Satan came to Eve in the disguise of a snake and raised doubt in her mind about the integrity of God's prohibition. Satan lied and told Eve she would become like God and would be able to make moral decisions independent of God.

Satan's argument made sense. When Eve looked at the fruit, it looked good to eat, so she decided to eat it and then gave some to Adam. They immediately realized they had sinned. Both were overwhelmed

with guilt and were shocked when they saw they were naked. Adam and Eve awkwardly tried to cover their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together.

When the Lord returned to the garden, Adam and Eve were so afraid they tried to hide. It didn't work. The Lord knew what had happened. When Adam and Eve didn't meet him, the Lord called out, "Where are you?" Like a criminal caught in the act, Adam tried to cover up his sin. He told the Lord he was afraid because he was naked; he was actually afraid because he knew the Lord would punish him for his disobedience.

When the Lord asked Adam if he had eaten the forbidden fruit, Adam tried to blame Eve. He said it was her fault. She had given him the fruit. The Lord then asked Eve what had happened, and she blamed Satan. She admitted Satan had deceived her.

Because Satan had taken the form of a snake to deceive Eve, the Lord cursed both the snake and Satan. The Lord said Satan would be humiliated and he would grovel in dust like a snake crawls on the ground. The Lord also predicted there would be a constant struggle between the followers of Satan and the descendants of the woman, but one of Eve's descendants would eventually crush the head of Satan.

As a consequence of her disobedience, the Lord said Eve would suffer pain in bearing children, and Adam and Eve's marriage relationship would suffer from a sinister conflict. Eve now would have a sinful desire to control and manipulate Adam; Adam would attempt to dominate and exploit Eve.

Because Adam had listened to his wife and had eaten the forbidden fruit, he would always struggle to eat. The soil of the earth would become his enemy; it would produce thorns and thistles. Adam would die and his body would return to the ground from which he was created.

But the Lord was also kindhearted to Adam and Eve. He covered their nakedness with the skin of an animal. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve forfeited the opportunity to eat from the tree of life, so the

Lord expelled them from the garden and ordered angels to guard the tree of life.

The Sons of Adam and Eve

Adam slept with Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She was amazed; she was able to produce life just like the Lord had done. She named her son Cain and thanked the Lord for giving her a son. She then had another son, Abel.

When the two boys became adults, they chose different occupations. Abel became a herdsman and Cain a farmer. They both brought an offering to the Lord. Cain merely fulfilled an obligation by bringing some of his harvest, but Abel did his best to honor the Lord, bringing some of the best animals from his herd. God approved of Abel's offering, but not Cain's. This made Cain furious. He was red-hot with anger.

The Lord tried to warn Cain. He told him his uncontrolled rage would lead to violence. Cain refused to listen. He tricked his brother by inviting him into one of his fields, and then he killed him.

The Lord knew what Cain had done but asked him a rhetorical question: "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain defiantly lied and said he didn't know. He then expressed his contempt for the Lord with his own rhetorical question: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The Lord told Cain there was an eyewitness to his crime. It was his brother's blood, crying out from the ground. Because of Cain's heinous murder of his own brother, the Lord banished him from the ground he had cultivated for his livelihood. Realizing he could not survive as a homeless wanderer, Cain was desperate. He complained that his punishment was more than he could endure. Someone would undoubtedly kill him if he was a homeless wanderer. The Lord understood and assured Cain of special protection. Cain was satisfied, but he refused to stay in the presence of the Lord. He went east and lived in the land of Nod (which means "land of wandering").

Cain married, and his wife had a son, Enoch. Instead of accepting his punishment, Cain started a city in the east and named it after Enoch. Enoch had several sons, including Lamech. Lamech married two wives, Adah and Zillah. Jabal, his son by Adah, became the first shepherd, and Tubal-Cain, his son by Zillah, was the first to make tools of metal. Lamech killed a man who offended him. Knowing he might be held accountable, he boasted to his wives that if anyone tried to punish him, he would kill that person as well.

Eve had another son. She named him Seth, which means “in the place of” (because Cain had killed Abel). During the lifetime of Enosh, Seth’s son, people began to worship the Lord through prayer and sacrifice.

Noah

Adam lived for eight hundred years after he became the father of Seth. He was 930 when he died. The descendants from Adam to Noah lived for hundreds of years, but they all eventually died just as the Lord had said they would. There was one exception. Because Enoch was fully devoted to the Lord, God suspended the penalty of death and took him from the earth. One of Adam’s descendants, Lamech, had a son at age 182 and named him Noah, which means “comfort,” because he hoped his son would bring relief from the harsh struggle of living under the curse on the ground.

During the lifetime of Noah there was a population explosion. “The sons of God” lusted after beautiful women and married them. (There are three major views on the identity of “the sons of God.” [1] They were fallen angels who took human bodies to cohabit with women; [2] they were godly descendants in the line of Seth, and “the daughters of men” were in the ungodly line of Cain; or [3] they were powerful tyrants who forced themselves on attractive women.) Their children were called Nephilim. (Some believe the Nephilim were mighty warriors, descendants of the union between “the sons of God” and “the

daughters of men.” Nephilim are mentioned later, in Numbers 13:33, but they could not be descendants of the Nephilim in this passage, since all humanity except for Noah and his extended family were destroyed in the flood. *Nephilim* is probably a general term referring to “physical giants” or “powerful warriors.”) The Nephilim became famous super-heroes and dominated the world. Until now, the Spirit of the Lord had spared humanity from judgment because of sin, but the Lord warned he would only withhold judgment for another 120 years.

A rampant explosion of wickedness throughout the earth both broke the heart of the Lord and made him angry. He was extremely disappointed in the people he had made but made the painful decision to destroy everything he had created.

In contrast to his contemporaries, Noah was a man of integrity and had a special relationship with God. His sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The rest of humanity was totally corrupt. There was complete anarchy. Because of Noah and God’s close relationship, God did not want to destroy Noah with the rest of humanity. God revealed his plan to Noah to destroy the world with a flood, and ordered him to build an ark out of gopher wood (probably cypress) and cover it entirely with pitch. He instructed Noah to build it so that it would not capsize during the flood. God said to build it with three decks but no windows, only



Bouarf/Wikimedia Commons

Mount Ararat, the area where Noah’s ark came to rest (Gen. 8:4)

an opening for ventilation eighteen inches from the top deck. Though there had never been a flood, Noah believed God and built the ark exactly as instructed.

After Noah finished building the ark, the Lord told him to take seven pairs of every clean animal, one pair of every unclean animal, and seven pairs of every species of birds into the ark. (The distinction between clean and unclean animals is based on differences as defined in the Law of Moses.) The Lord then warned Noah the rain would begin in seven days and would continue for forty days and nights.

At age six hundred, Noah brought his wife, his sons and their wives, and all the animals on board. As soon as he finished loading, the rain began. In addition to the rain, gigantic tidal waves from the oceans swept across the earth, covering it for 150 days. Everything was destroyed; only Noah and those on the ark survived.

After the flood, God kept his promise to Noah and all the animals on the ark; he closed the huge underground caverns of water that had broken open, and he stopped the rain. He sent a powerful wind to accelerate the evaporation of water. (There are two views on the extent of the flood. Some believe it was universal, covering all the earth. Others believe it was local and destroyed life only in populated areas.)

After 150 days, the ark landed somewhere on the mountains of Ararat (southeast of the Black Sea bordering on today's Turkey, Armenia, and Iran). Noah and his family stayed in the ark for another two and a half months until the waters had receded enough for them to see the tops of other mountains.

To make certain it was safe to leave the ark, Noah released two birds. First he released a raven that flew until it found a place to land and did not return. Second, he released a dove that returned because it could not find a place to land. Noah waited seven more days, then released the dove again. When the dove returned with an olive leaf in its beak, Noah knew there was dry land. But to be absolutely certain, Noah

waited another seven days and released the dove a third time. This time the dove did not come back.

Noah was now 601. It had been ten and a half months since the beginning of the flood, and Noah felt it was safe to remove the top covering of the ark. He could see dry land, but he waited another two months until the earth around him was completely dry.

Just as God had ordered Noah to board the ark, God ordered Noah to leave the ark and release all the animals to repopulate the earth. After he had set the animals free, Noah built an altar and sacrificed some of the approved animals and birds to thank the Lord for delivering him and his family from the flood. The Lord accepted Noah's sacrifices and was delighted with them. Though Adam's sin had permanently corrupted humankind, the Lord swore he would never totally destroy the world again. He promised there would always be a cycle of seasons to sustain life.

God blessed Noah and told him to repopulate the earth. Prior to the sin of Adam and Eve, the Lord had given humans dominion over animals but had not allowed them to eat meat. Now God gave humans permission to eat meat but said animals would fear people, perhaps because people would hunt them for food.

As a reminder of the high value of life, God did not permit the eating of blood—not because blood was unhealthy, but because blood was a symbol of life. God warned he would demand the life of anybody who killed (by implication, “murdered”) someone.

To assure Noah and all humanity he would never again destroy life with a flood, God designated the rainbow as a special sign.

Unfortunately the flood did not eliminate the problem of sin. The tragedy of sin overtook Noah and his sons. Noah got drunk on wine he had made from the vineyard he himself had planted. In his stupor, Noah removed all his clothes. When his son Ham entered Noah's tent, instead of respecting his father by covering his nakedness, he did nothing and told his brothers. His brothers, Shem and Japheth, exercised extreme

caution so they would not humiliate Noah by looking at his nakedness. They entered his tent backwards and carefully covered their father with a large blanket.

When Noah realized what Ham had done, he said Ham's flagrant act of disrespect would have consequences on future generations. Because his moral conduct exposed a serious character defect, Noah predicted Ham's son Canaan and his descendants would be oppressed by others. Noah also prophesied that God would bless the descendants of Japheth and Shem because they had shown respect for their father.

(Genesis 10 contains what is called "The Table of Nations." Though the list comes before the account of the tower of Babel in the book of Genesis, it shows the dispersion of the nations in the ancient Near East after God's judgment at Babel. It contains the names of individuals, tribes, nations, and even cities. All the people listed are in some way connected to Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah.)

The Tower of Babel

The consequences of Adam and Eve's sin surfaced again in rebellion against God in Shinar (the ancient region of Babylonia or southern Mesopotamia; this area is today's country of Iraq). As the population began to increase after the flood, God commanded people to repopulate all of the earth. Instead of obeying, they settled on a plain in Shinar. Because stone was scarce in that area, they developed the technology to make bricks and constructed a city. Motivated by pride and the desire to establish some kind of powerful humanistic empire, the rebels erected a skyscraper type of temple-tower in the city center.

The rebels' blatant defiance of the Lord did not go unnoticed. There was no limit to what they might do if God did not stop them. At this time in civilization's development, everyone spoke the same language. The Lord, knowing exactly how to stop them, confused them with different



Michael Lubinski/Wikimedia Commons

“They said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens’” (Gen. 11:4). Partially reconstructed ziggurat at Ur.

languages and forced them to scatter all over the world. The tower was given the name Babel. (This is a play on words. In Hebrew, *Babel* means “confusion,” but in Babylonian literature it refers to “the gate of god.”)

Chapter Summary

God created the earth and the whole universe in six days. As the climactic act, he made Adam and Eve. When he had finished his work, God rested on the seventh day.

He placed Adam and Eve in Eden and provided everything they needed to live and enjoy life. He gave them instructions on how to live, and warned them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Satan deceived Eve; she and Adam disobeyed God.

God told Satan, Eve, and Adam what their punishments would be, and he assured Eve that one of her descendants would triumph over Satan. He covered their nakedness but banished them from the garden.

Eve gave birth to Cain and later to Abel. Abel did his best to respect God, but Cain was godless. Cain killed Abel because he was jealous of Abel’s relationship with God.

As God had warned, Adam died. Because his sin affected the whole human race, as the population increased, the world became corrupt and violent. This broke the Lord's heart, but it made him so angry that he decided to destroy the world.

Noah was a good man. To protect Noah from the coming flood, God told him to build an ark for his family and for animals.

After the flood, God commanded Noah to repopulate the earth. He promised he would never destroy the world again with a flood, and gave the rainbow as his promise.

Instead of spreading out as God had ordered, people gathered to build a city and a tower. Because everyone spoke the same language, God put an end to their rebellion by confusing their tongues and scattering them across the earth.

The story of the Bible now narrows, from the history of humanity generally, to focus on Abraham and his descendants.