

GOD'S UNFOLDING STORY OF SALVATION

The Christ-Centered Biblical Storyline

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Resource Publications

An imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3

Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

isbn 13: 978-1-62032-046-4

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®

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Introduction

Why Study Redemptive History

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (REV 4:11).

One sunny afternoon in autumn my family and I parked our car and headed onto the Bruce Trail in southern Ontario. We entered the woods at the trailhead with only a few instructions obtained from the Internet—nothing else. My husband, daughter, and I were experienced hikers who should have known better. In the Rocky Mountains we always carried backpacks with emergency supplies. Yet on this day, we acted as if we were out for a short stroll in a city park. Once in the forest we wandered around in circles until my husband noticed the location of the sun. Using the sun as a bearing, he guided us onto the right path.

My family and I knew we were lost in the forest when we started to recognize certain trees for the second time. A well-worn expression came to mind: “You can’t see the forest for the trees.” While wandering among the trees, we could not tell the size or shape of the forest. Only an aerial view would be the best way to gain that sort of information.

The Bible is like a forest and individual books are similar to trees. Studying small portions of Scripture is worthwhile and necessary. Nevertheless one of the first steps of discipleship after salvation should be an understanding of the big picture in the Bible. This book will teach believers that the biblical storyline is Christ-centered.

As you progress through this study guide, you may feel as if you are in an airplane touching down randomly here and there. This is not the

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case. I pay close attention to the chronological order of events. As time passes, God builds on previous truths and explains more of his plan of salvation. Thus the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament takes precedence.

Often people think of redemptive history only in terms of its promises in the Old Testament and its fulfillment in the New Testament. There is much more to the story than this. Throughout the Old Testament God the Father prepared for the coming of his Son, the promised seed. Furthermore in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit also pointed to Christ through direct prophecy, pictures or types, and anticipation.

As John Piper explains, “The term *redemptive history* simply refers to the history of God’s acts recorded in the Bible. It is called redemptive history not because it isn’t real history, but because it is history viewed from the perspective of God’s redeeming purpose.”¹ Written over a 1500-year period, the Bible explains how God has worked and is continuing to work throughout history to accomplish his plan of salvation.

The Lord wants us to know the whole tale. Otherwise he would not have given it to us. Moreover, since God’s story ultimately affects each one of us, it is worth the time and effort required to understand it. If you do this, you will discover a pearl of great value. As you study, you will learn the steps God took to procure the spiritual salvation of believers—the most marvelous love story ever told. Forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God are the greatest needs of everyone past, present, and future. This redemption story brings glory to God and benefits believers.

The Benefits of Understanding Redemptive History

After studying the big picture in the Bible, you will know God always tells the truth and always keeps his promises. He is reliable. The Lord loves and cares for everyone, but especially his own. Repetition aids in learning. Time after time God carries out his plan of salvation by working through ordinary people. Nothing or no one can thwart the sovereign God. He carried out his plan of salvation in spite of the opposition of Satan, his demons, and nonbelievers. Knowing these facts will reinforce your faith. It is also comforting. Whenever you are suffering in a difficult situation, you can count on God to lead you through the hard times.

1. Piper, *Desiring God*, 40n.

The second benefit for understanding redemptive history is to keep from error. So many people, who have grown up in the church and have attended Sunday school regularly, have no idea of the timeline of the Bible. They may be very familiar with the major Bible stories, but they are unable to put those stories into historical context. Without a proper understanding of the biblical timeline, people may unwittingly develop tunnel vision. The result is a misunderstanding of Scripture when meditating on a particular passage. Therefore it is wise to keep the big picture in mind at all times. That is why I continually cross-reference related passages.

The third benefit for understanding redemptive history is to gain an overwhelming desire for evangelism because we love others and want them to repent of their sin and trust our Savior. This is what characterized the early church, and it should be the same for us. Those early believers loved the lost, prayed, and witnessed to their unsaved friends and neighbors.

The most important reason for understanding redemptive history is to gain an appreciation of Jesus' sovereignty. While Jesus was alive, he promised his disciples that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. After his death and resurrection, God exalted Jesus and gave him all authority. As creator, he is king over all. However, by his death and resurrection, Jesus became the king promised in the Old Testament. Because of his authority we can be assured that the church will continue to grow until the end of time.

Guidelines for Group Study

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth”
(JOHN 16:13).

I designed this study for small groups of believers, both older teenagers, and adults. That is why there is an icebreaking question at the beginning of each lesson. To be effective, everyone must be willing to invest time in individual Bible reading and in answering the questions at home. Some lessons do require a lot of reading and flipping to several books in the Bible. Everyone should also make a commitment to work on every lesson in the proper order. This is very necessary because each lesson builds on

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the previous one. Not completing a lesson would be like building a house and ignoring one of the support beams.

I have divided the lessons into four parts: “Preparing for the Promised Seed”; “The Prophets: Waiting for the Promised Seed”; “Jesus, the Promised Seed”; and “The Church: Proclaiming the Promised Seed.” You will receive the most benefit by completing this study as one unit. If the group wants to take a break, however, you may stop at the end of one of those parts.

You will find a title and subtitle for each lesson. The title points to the timeline of the Bible. The subtitle describes the spiritual application of that particular lesson. Because each lesson does have a spiritual application, guests who come to the group will benefit.

Leaders and teachers, make sure no one dominates the group discussion. You need to know if everyone understands what the Bible teaches at that point in history. If you have nonbelievers in your group, pray that the Holy Spirit will speak to them, convict them of their sin, and their need for the Savior.

PART ONE

Preparing for the Promised Seed

Lesson 1

The Beginning of the War: The Promised Seed

Before the birth of my first child, I panicked when someone told me that my philodendron had poisonous leaves. Therefore I packed up all my plants and stored them at my mother-in-law's house in a distant city. I did not want my child to eat the poisonous leaves and die. I also wanted to avoid fighting with my toddler.

Question: How do you react to confrontation?

Paradise

READ PS 148:1–13

1. List everything God created.

READ GEN 1:31—2:1

2. What kind of world did God create?

God's Unfolding Story of Salvation

Paradise Lost

READ GEN 3:1–5; REV 12:7–9

1. Who is the serpent in the Garden of Eden?
2. What did the serpent ask Eve?
3. How did she respond?
4. How did the serpent undermine God's authority?

READ GEN 3:6–13

5. What happened as soon as they ate the forbidden fruit?

READ GEN 3:14, 15

6. What did God promise Adam and Eve, which gave them hope for reconciliation?

READ GEN 3:16–24

7. What were the consequences of their disobedience?
8. Why did God shed the blood of an animal?

The Beginning of the War: The Promised Seed

READ LUKE 4:5–7; JOHN 8:44; JOHN 12:31; 1 JOHN 5:19

9. How did the sin of Adam and Eve benefit Satan?

Cain and Abel

READ GEN 4:1–7; 1 SAM 16:7

1. What sacrifices did Cain and Abel bring to God?

2. Why did Abel's sacrifice please God, but Cain's did not?

READ GEN 4:8, 9

3. How did Cain react to God's plea not to be angry?

4. Both brothers shed blood. What was the difference?

READ GEN 4:10–12

5. What was Cain's punishment?

READ HEB 11:1, 2, 4; JUDE 10, 11; 1 JOHN 3:12

6. Why did God declare Abel righteous?

God's Unfolding Story of Salvation

7. What kingdom did each of the brothers belong to?

Application: The Old Testament points to Jesus through preparation for his birth, direct prophecy, pictures or types, and anticipation. Which of these apply in this lesson?

Reflection: How do you know if you need a Savior?

Summary

After God created the heavens and the earth, God saw everything he had made. It was very good, including Satan. When Satan initiated a rebellion in heaven, he did not surprise God. No one, not even Satan, can thwart God's plans.

Later on Satan succeeded in tricking Adam and Eve into rebelling against the Lord. The consequence was physical and spiritual death for the human race. Once again God knew beforehand what would happen. Not caught unawares, he immediately set his plan of salvation into motion. First the Lord promised to send the Savior. Then he shed the blood of an animal for its hide to cover their naked bodies. Ever since Adam and Eve's rebellion, God has required the shedding of blood to atone for sin.

Because of Satan's rebellion, God and Satan formed their battle lines. Cain and Abel are evidence of this. As a result some have longed for the Savior to restore them to fellowship with God while others have not. The only hope of humanity lay in the coming of the promised seed. That is why no one can avoid confrontation in this world.

Timeline

Redemptive History in the Old Testament

Adam and Eve

Cain and Abel

Enoch

Noah and the flood

1951–1776 BC Abraham

Melchizedek, contemporary of Abraham

1851–1671 BC Isaac

1791–1644 BC Jacob (Israel)

1446 BC Escape from Egypt; formation of Israel as a nation

1406 BC Entering the Promised Land

1375–1050 BC Ruth lived during the time of the Judges

1010–970 BC David's reign

970–930 BC Solomon's reign

930 BC Kingdom divided into two—

the northern kingdom of Israel

and the southern kingdom of Judah

874–853 BC Elijah: Confronting Baal's prophets in Israel during the reign of Ahab

835–796 BC Joel (from Judah): Preaching to Judah

785–760 BC Jonah (from Israel): Preaching to Nineveh

760–750 BC Amos (from Judah): Preaching to Israel

753–715 BC Hosea (from Israel): Preaching to Israel

742–687 BC Micah (from Judah): Preaching to both

Timeline

740–681 BC Isaiah: Preaching to Judah
722 BC Fall of Samaria, capital of Israel, by Assyria
640–621 BC Zephaniah: Preaching to Judah
627–586 BC Jeremiah: Preaching to Judah
612–589 BC Habakkuk: Preaching to Judah
605–536 BC Daniel: Written in Babylonia
593–571 BC Ezekiel: Written in Babylonia
586 BC Fall of Jerusalem, capital of Judah, by Babylonia
538 BC Edict of Cyrus: God's people may return home
and rebuild the temple
520 BC Haggai: Exhortation to build new temple
520–480 BC Zechariah: Exhortation to build new temple
516 BC Temple rebuilt
458 BC Ezra taught the people the law of God
445 BC Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem
430 BC Malachi: Announcing arrival of the promised seed

Redemptive History in the New Testament

6/5 BC Jesus' birth
AD 26 Ministry of John the Baptist
AD 26/27–30 Ministry of Jesus
AD 35 Martyrdom of Stephen, First persecution
AD 35 Conversion of Saul (Paul)
AD 46–48 Paul: First missionary journey
AD 49 James, written by Jesus' half-brother, James
AD 49 Galatians, written by Paul
AD 50 First Christian council at Jerusalem
AD 51 1 Thessalonians, written by Paul
AD 55 1 Corinthians, written by Paul
AD 55–57 2 Corinthians, written by Paul
AD 57 Romans, written by Paul
AD 57–59 Paul imprisoned in Caesarea

Timeline

AD 60 Ephesians, written by Paul
AD 61 Philippians, written by Paul
AD 62–64 1 Peter, written by Peter
AD 67 2 Peter, written by Peter
Before AD 70 Hebrews, author unknown
AD 70 Destruction of Jerusalem
AD 95 Revelation, written by John