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The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses

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The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses

Description

This book highlights 16 key Bible verses that stand as “turning points” in the biblical storyline—enabling us to see God’s incredible plan to redeem his people and glorify his name from Genesis to Revelation. Whether it’s exploring the creation of humanity, the establishment of the covenants, or the coming of the Messiah, this book will help Christians see how God’s Word tells a single story about his sovereignty, glory, and grace.

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THE WHOLE STORY
OF THE BIBLE IN

16 VERSES

CHRIS BRUNO

“How would you answer the question, What’s the main message of the Bible? How does the Bible itself answer that question? Introducing readers to biblical theology, Bruno teases out answers to these questions from Scripture, methodically tracing the major milestones of redemptive history to illuminate the gospel thread and to tie it all together. Whether you’re new to the Bible or have grown up hearing its stories in Sunday school, Bruno’s book will lead you to a greater love for God’s Word and hope in the Savior to whom every part of it points.”

J. Mack Stiles, CEO, Gulf Digital Solutions; General Secretary, Fellowship of Christian UAE Students (FOCUS), United Arab Emirates; author, *Evangelism*

“This compact and insightful book is ideal for one-on-one discipleship, as well as more formal teaching contexts. All Christians, whether mature or young in the faith, will find much to meditate on and rejoice in as Bruno faithfully sketches in the story of redemption.”

Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In order to understand our Bibles, we need to understand the big story of God’s redemptive plan. Chris Bruno focuses on sixteen key texts to provide a clear and accessible outline of this big story. I recommend the book highly.”

Douglas J. Moo, Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College

“Chris Bruno captures the plotline of the Bible in sixteen short verses. Each verse is vital for understanding the unfolding story, but the story is also greater than the sum of its parts. When seen together, the cumulative picture is breathtaking and life changing.”

Jason C. Meyer, Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota

“Chris Bruno’s book leads us through the Bible as a whole story in just sixteen verses. It gives us a secure grasp of the overall unity of the message of the Bible through accessible chapters and bite-size portions of the text.”

Josh Moody, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois; author, *Journey to Joy: The Psalms of Ascent*

The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses

THE WHOLE STORY
OF THE BIBLE IN

16
VERSES

CHRIS BRUNO

 CROSSWAY
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

To Luke, Simon, and Elliot

May you enter this story with
joy in the Promised One, Jesus

Contents

Preface	11
Acknowledgments	13

Part 1

The Time Is Coming

1	Creation (Genesis 1:31)	17
2	Human Beings (Genesis 1:27–28)	23
3	The Fall (Genesis 3:6–7)	29
4	Redemption Promised (Genesis 3:15)	35
5	Abraham (Genesis 12:2–3)	41
6	Judah the King (Genesis 49:10)	49
7	The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:23)	55
8	King David (2 Samuel 7:12–13)	63
9	The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:6)	71
10	Resurrection Promised (Ezekiel 37:3–5)	79
11	New Creation (Isaiah 65:17)	87

Part 2

The Time Has Come

12	Fulfillment! (Mark 1:14–15)	95
13	The Cross (John 19:30)	101
14	Resurrection (Romans 1:3–4)	107

15	Justification (Romans 3:21–26)	115
16	Glory (Revelation 21:1–4)	121
	Where to Go Next	129
	Notes	131
	General Index	133
	Scripture Index	137

Preface

If you are reading this book, you are interested in biblical theology, even if you don't know it yet. Unlike systematic theology, which gathers together everything the Bible teaches about a particular subject into one place, biblical theology is concerned with unpacking the chronological development of a theme or cluster of themes in the Bible. The goal is to trace a particular theme or the overall storyline as it unfolds in the Bible. In this book, we are going to trace the storyline of the Bible and look at how some of the central themes are developed throughout its pages. So congratulations—you are on your way to becoming a biblical theologian!

Some biblical theology books are forest books. They paint with broad strokes, showing us the main parts from one section of the Bible or even the big picture of the whole Bible. These kinds of books help us see the overall shape of the Bible's main themes. Other biblical theology books are tree books. They take one tree—either a theme or a passage from the Bible—and carefully saw it apart, count the rings, and then give us a thorough explanation of how that particular tree fits into the forest. But there aren't a lot of books—especially shorter books, like this one—that are both forest and tree books.

This book is an attempt to see the forest by looking at the trees (verses or passages). While we won't look at the trees as closely as some books, we will look at sixteen important trees

Preface

(we might even call them guideposts) that will help us get a sense of the whole forest. After this short tour through the forest of the Bible, I hope you will be excited about finding a few forest books and a few tree books to help you get a better grasp of the story of the Bible both in its whole and in its parts.

So let's set out on our journey together. We will start at the very beginning, with the creation of the world.

Acknowledgments

This book began in a Thursday night class at the Antioch School Hawai'i, the pastoral training program I helped lead. In those two hours, we worked through most of the texts that ended up in this book. John Boehm, John Curran, Dustin and Britt Harris, Nathan Kawanishi, Todd Morikawa, Alton Uyema, Mark Watanabe, and Justin White—thank you for helping me trace this story. Thanks also to the congregation of Christ Fellowship Church in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, where I presented some of this material. My church, Harbor Church, and fellow elders, John Boehm, Matt Dirks, Justin Geer, and Ethan Pien, have been a constant joy and support to my family and me. Many other friends in ministry at the Antioch School Hawai'i, at the Northland International University, and scattered around the world have encouraged and sharpened me as I worked on this book. Special thanks are also due to Jim and Chelsea Pferschy, David Griffiths, and my wife, Katie Bruno, for valuable feedback as I prepared this manuscript. Finally, thanks to the folks at Crossway, and in particular Dave DeWit and Greg Bailey, for their editorial help and commitment to God-glorifying, gospel-driven Christian books. I pray this book approaches that high standard.

While I did not cite them in specific places, men such as Graeme Goldsworthy, Tom Schreiner, Greg Beale, and a host of others shaped the way I understand biblical theology. Though it may not have been as evident, men such as John Piper and

Acknowledgments

Doug Moo, along with John Calvin, have shaped the way that I read the Bible and do biblical exegesis. I am deeply thankful for their influence in person and on the page.

My wife, Katie, and sons are nothing but supportive of all the things God has called me to do. They also constantly remind me of what is most important. It is my prayer that my boys will know and love this story, and that their lives will be shaped by it. Because of that hope, I am dedicating this book to my sons, Luke, Simon, and Elliot.

PART 1

THE TIME IS COMING

1

CREATION

And behold, it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

Our view of the world begins with our view of God. The way we think about God shapes the way we think about everything else, along with the way we act and respond to every circumstance. Because of this, we need to get our thoughts about God straight at the beginning of our journey. In other words, as we set out to tell the story of the Bible, we have to begin with God. He is the Author of the Bible and the hero of every story found in it, so we can't even think about telling the story without starting with him.

To do this, we are going to start at the last verse of the first chapter of the Bible, which says:

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:31)

At first glance, Genesis 1 doesn't seem to give us much information about God. Instead, it seems as if we have just the story of creation, with the existence of God more or less assumed. But as we read through the account of the creation week in the first chapter of the Bible, the authority of God is pretty astonishing. God speaks, and things happen. If you have ever been in the room with a CEO, a senator, or maybe even the president, you've seen what happens when a person of authority speaks. Things happen, and they happen quickly. With God, we can see this same principle at work—multiplied by about a million.

If you aren't familiar with the creation story, let me summarize it: God made everything, and everything he made was good. We don't need to go much further to get the point. In the beginning, there was nothing, and God made everything just by speaking. He spoke, and creation obeyed. It obeyed by coming into being, by sprouting every living thing, and finally by submitting itself to God's sovereign power. The emphasis in the whole chapter, and especially in verse 31, is the ease with which God spoke the world into being and the harmony that existed between Creator and creation.

So at the very beginning, we meet a God who is able to create everything that exists with seemingly no more effort than it takes you or me to tie our shoes. We meet a God whose creative power and authority extend to every part of the universe.

When he had finished making everything, God looked at it all and saw that it was "very good." Notice that God was the One who pronounced the verdict. The entire universe came to be because he spoke, and he was the only one qualified to evaluate his creative work. We don't see the angels coming alongside God to give him some encouraging feedback. (In fact, we don't even know when and how God created the angels, though we can be pretty sure they started praising him

right away.) No, the focus at the very beginning is on God, his creation, and his authority over that creation.

When we put together God's power to create and his authority to evaluate his creation, we find that God is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. In other words, God is the King who has the right, the power, and the authority to rule over his creation. And the King's official decree over his kingdom is that it is "very good."

Isn't this kind of surprising, when we stop and think about it? If we look around our world or turn on the news, the world doesn't seem "very good." Everything is decaying, everyone is fighting, and no one seems to know how to fix anything. How, then, could God say this?

You don't have to be a Hebrew scholar to understand the meaning of this phrase in its context. First, we can see that God's declaration applied to *everything* that he had made. It's not as if just one part of the creation was good, another part was just okay, and still another part was kind of crummy. No, in the beginning, every part of the creation was good.

Second, not only was the creation good, it was *very* good. We are not talking about average work. I don't know about you, but whenever I try to create something with my hands, I can never quite get it right. I remember putting together a model Corvette when I was in middle school. The picture on the box displayed a sleek and shiny sports car—it looked even better than the real thing. But when I put the model together, the glue clumped up and the paint job looked like a four-year-old had done it. It was certainly not everything it was intended to be!

Even the best of our creative efforts lack something. Many musicians (of which I am not) consider Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* one of the best and most important musical scores in history. But after its premiere, not many people gave it much attention. The orchestra had time to rehearse it only

once before the performance, and at one point the musicians flubbed it so badly that Beethoven literally stopped the music and made them start over. Not many people pronounced the symphony “very good” after that first performance. But when God pronounced the creation “very good,” he meant that it was everything he intended it to be.

This doesn’t just mean that it was beautiful or awe-inspiring, though we can be sure that it was (and often still is). When God said the creation was “very good,” he was proclaiming that his creation was doing what he wanted it to do. Trees were growing where they should, fish were swimming the right way, and humans were relating to each other, the creation, and their Creator just as he intended (we’ll come back to that in the next chapter). In short, God’s kingdom was in perfect harmony with its King.

While you probably know that a couple of stops down the line we will see this perfect harmony broken, it is plain to see that God’s creation still reflects his mighty power. Think about the most beautiful place you have ever visited. For me, this is probably the Na Pali coast on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. Imagine a sixteen-mile stretch of towering green cliffs, dotted with waterfalls, some as high as four thousand feet above the ocean. When you sit on a small boat in the water looking up at these mountains, you feel very small. But you also see that God’s creation can still be very good. Maybe for you it is the vastness of a canyon, the view from the top of a mountain, the wonder of an untouched field the morning after a snowstorm, or any one of a thousand other aspects of nature. We don’t always see this when we look out our windows to see trash in the gutter or snow that is black with dirt, but God made the world to be “very good.”

In Psalm 104, we can see that the earth, the sky, and the ocean, along with all they contain, continue to reflect his

creative power and mighty authority. And verse 27 concludes, “These all look to you.” In spite of all that has gone wrong, God’s kingdom still looks to him and depends on him, just as it has from the very beginning.

Before we leave this first tree in our tour through the forest, it’s important that we insist on the ongoing goodness of God’s creation. Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 4:4 that “everything created by God is good.” He doesn’t say that *most* things created by God are good. He also doesn’t say that everything created by God *was* good. No, Paul affirms that God’s entire creation is still good.

I can understand why some people disparage the “physical world” and hope to escape to the purely “spiritual world.” After all, it’s not hard to find problems in the world today! But if we claim to have a truly biblical view of God’s creation, then we must continue to insist that God’s created work is good and that he has a purpose for it.

On the flip side, we also can’t forget that the world is not an end in and of itself. We cannot speak of the creation apart from the God who made it—and who not only made it, but also has authority over it and upholds it by his sovereign power. So if we are seeking the good of the created order (as we perceive it) to be the highest virtue in the universe, then we haven’t seen the whole picture. Instead, we have to affirm that its goodness depends on God, the Maker and King of creation.

Genesis 1:31 gives us a window into the creation story, but it is not the whole story. Even though God is the King of his creation, he doesn’t want to rule it alone. But to tell that part of the story, we need to move to our next tree.

The Time Is Coming

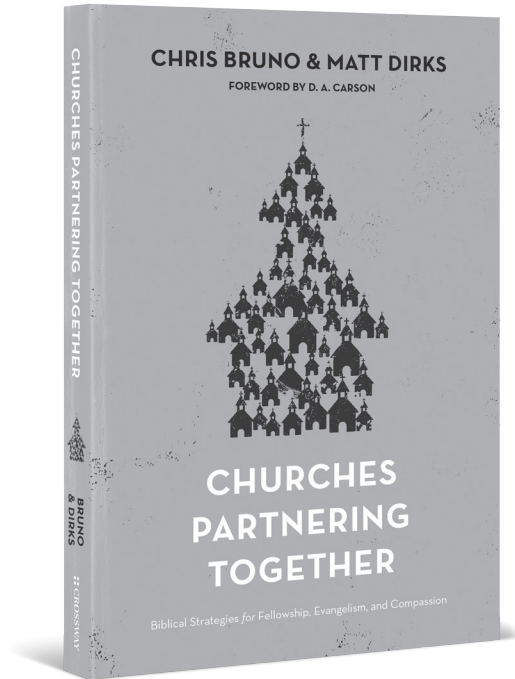
➤ **KEY BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL THEMES** ➤

Creation
Kingdom

➤ **THE STORY SO FAR** ➤

God created a kingdom, and he is the King.

The Importance of Church Partnerships for the Sake of the Gospel



“God can and does work miracles through local churches linked together by the gospel for the sake of loving their communities by introducing them to Jesus. I love the vision Chris and Matt live out and lay out in this book. May their tribe increase!”

COLLIN HANSEN, Editorial Director, The Gospel Coalition; coauthor, *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir*

“I welcome this new book. The rising generation of young evangelicals needs to embrace once again a fully biblical understanding of cooperation so churches united in faith can cooperate together to share the gospel with the world.”

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR., President and Joseph Emerson Brown Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

16 KEY VERSES. 1 OVERARCHING STORY.

This book highlights 16 key Bible verses that stand as “turning points” in the biblical storyline—enabling us to see God’s incredible plan to redeem his people and glorify his name from Genesis to Revelation. Whether it’s exploring the creation of humanity, the establishment of the covenants, or the coming of the Messiah, this book will help Christians see how God’s Word tells a single story about his sovereignty, glory, and grace.



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