



the Story

How the History of the Universe Impacts Yours

The Story

“Once upon a time...” is a classic line in English. It is the best way to begin a story. Stories, of course, are not limited to English; human beings have told each other stories since the dawn of time. The reason we do so is because stories communicate the deepest truths of life. Historian and theologian N. T. Wright says: “A story is the best way of talking about the way the world actually is.” Fictitious or factual, stories have the power of transmitting satisfying answers.

There is a true story that is larger than life: the story of the Bible. On it, we find the answers to life’s biggest questions: Who am I? How should I live? Where can I find love? And so on. In this guide we will dive deeper into the biblical story, in company with the sermon series *The Story*. I invite you to grab your Bible and plunge into the greatest story ever told!

Chapters from The Story

Chapter 1	God
Chapter 2	Creation
Chapter 3	War
Chapter 4	Israel
Chapter 5	Messiah
Chapter 6	Church
Chapter 7	You
Chapter 8	New Creation

How to Use This Guide

Congrats on making Bible study a priority! This is a simple study guide to be used in companion with the series *The Story*. There are five devotional readings on this and each other guide. This is how I suggest you use them:

- Pick a time and place to read the daily devotional. It should take you as little as 10 minutes (and as much as you would like).
- Read it from Sunday—Thursday. That way, you’ll have a couple of days to catch up if you fall behind.
- Make sure you start and end with prayer.
- If you have extra time, meditate and further study the passage of the day.
- Write down your answers, and any other thoughts you may have had while studying.
- Try joining the prayer meeting on Tuesday nights, at Parker Task Force. We will take a few minutes to review the study guide.
- **Pro tip:** pick a partner to study together. You can sync up once a week, or as often as you’d agree on, and remind/encourage each other.

RESOURCES CHAPTER 8

Keller, Timothy. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, New York, NY, Penguin Group, 2008.

Wright, Christopher. *The God I Don’t Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2016.

Wright, N. T., *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY, HarperOne, 2009.

Chapter 8: New Creation

Revelation 19:11-16⁽¹⁾ ¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ is coming back. The ubiquitous testimony of Scripture is that he is coming back. In the New Testament, his second coming is mentioned or alluded, in average, every fourteen verses. Before his passion, Christ promised: “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). He has never broken a promise, and never will. We can be confident that he is coming back.

Christ is coming *soon*. He finishes the book of Revelation promising: “Surely I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:20). That was written almost two thousand years ago. Obviously, that word is relative. How soon is he coming, then? On the one hand, all the prophetic times have been fulfilled (1,260 days, 2,300 days, etc.). So, there are no more prophetic times to wait. Most prophecies have been fulfilled. If Paul could say back then: “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11), surely that is truer for our generation. On the other hand, no one knows “the day and hour” (Matthew 24:36). No matter how much we try to predict God’s plans, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Hence, we need to be always prepared: “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

The coming of Christ is mentioned in Revelation after every vision cycle (chapters 7, 11, 14, etc.). The last cycle of visions, chapter 19-22, focuses specially on his second coming. The verse from today describes the event: “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.” His coming will be a visible and audible event; it will not happen as a “secret rapture;” Scripture has not a shred of evidence about that. Christ will come as a warrior to save his people and judge the world. That day will be of joy and sorrow. One group will say: “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us” (Isaiah 25:9, NKJV). The other group will be terrified, and will ask the mountains and rocks: “¹⁶Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:16-17). Christ will put an end to all injustice, evil, and suffering. He will save those who sought him and trusted him, regardless of their tradition. The ultimate hope that Christianity offers is eschatological. As good as your current Christian experience is, it will get much better when Jesus comes.

The “blessed hope” of the Christian is the “appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ” (Titus 2:12). Christians can encourage each other with the ancient saying: “*Maranatha*” (1 Corinthians 16:22, NASB) which means, “Our Lord, come!”

Questions

How does the second coming make you feel? Happy? Stressed? Worried?

⁽¹⁾ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are from the ESV.

Chapter 8: New Creation

Revelation 20:4-6 ⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

When Christ comes, he will rescue his people, those that are alive and those that are dead. Let's examine each group.

People that have died "in Christ" will come back to life. Paul expresses his faith: "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Corinthians 4:14). Notice that the hope of the Christian is being raised *as Christ was raised*. Their hope is not going to heaven when they die, but to come back to life, with a physical body in a physical dimension, just as Christ was risen. His disciples were able to see him, touch him, and eat with him. Such will be the future of the saints that have perished in Christ. This will happen at the second coming of Jesus. In Revelation 20, after he comes and judges the world, the martyrs "came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (more on the thousand years in the next lesson). Paul is specific in the timing: "²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then *at his coming* those who belong to Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

People that are alive when Christ comes (hopefully us!) will be transformed. Paul tells us how this will be: "⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:50-53). Our bodies will be transformed and perfected. The theological term is *glorified*. What does that mean? Any disease, infirmity, or defect that our bodies carry will be healed. The natural decay of our present bodies will be removed. We will be altogether new. And yet, it will still *be us*. We will be aware that we are ourselves, we will remember our story, and we will be able recognize our loved ones. Our personality will be kept, but every fault and stain will be perfected. We will be perfect like Christ! (cf. 1 John 3:2).

Paul joins these two groups, the risen saints and the remnant alive at the coming of Christ, in an amazing passage: "¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). As you can see, we will go to heaven when Christ come (temporarily, while he cleanses the earth; see next studies). Also, pay attention to the last verse. The reason we can be encouraged is *not* that when we die, we go to heaven. The reason is that, when Christ comes, he will rise our family, and he will take us with him as well!

Questions

Is there someone you wish to see at the second coming?

What do you think will happen to our bodies when they are perfected?

Chapter 8: New Creation

Revelation 20:11-15 ¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Hell, as an eternal place of torment, is totally foreign to the Bible. It's one of the most effective lies from Satan to slander the character of God. As examined in previous lessons, the wages of sin is death. Those that don't go with Christ to heaven, will perish, or cease to exist.

How exactly will these events take place? Space does not allow a full treatment of eschatology, or the study of the last things. We can just briefly survey the last chapters of Revelation. They are mostly linear. In chapter 19, Christ comes back in a visible way, to judge the nations and rescue his people. In chapter 20, we read: ¹"An angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while." (Revelation 20:1-3). Satan will be in chains because the saints will be taken to heaven (as examined yesterday), and the dwellers of the earth will be "slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse" (19:21). Hence, Satan will have no one to mess with.

During those thousand years,⁽²⁾ the saints will reign with Christ in heaven (20:4). Then, ⁷"when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever"⁽³⁾ (20:7-10). The dwellers of the earth are risen at the end of the millennium. They are deceived by Satan once again, but completely exterminated. This is the "second death," with no hope whatsoever of resurrection.

As our text today indicates, there will be a last judgment: "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened." A transparent trial where the entire universe will understand that God has always been fair and just. Those that were lost brought it upon themselves. Then, "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." They will be thrown into the lake of fire to perish. Satan will be exterminated too, and evil will be eradicated from the universe forever. The saints, on the other hand, will return from heaven to earth, after the divine fire purifies the earth. They will enjoy a renewed and restored creation.

Questions

Do you think some people deserve to suffer more in the lake of fire? Explain.

(2) Given the prophetic nature of Revelation, these thousand years may be symbolic. (3) "Forever and ever" is in the context of finite beings like Satan. Once he's annihilated, the fire will be extinguished. Isaiah 34:8-10, Jude 1:7, etc. speak of an "eternal fire" that burned Edom, Sodom, and Gomorrah. Once it consumed these cities, it was extinguished, and it is not seen in the present day.

Chapter 8: New Creation

Revelation 21:1-5 ¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” ⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

After the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the ultimate extermination of all evil, the Lord will complete his work of re-creation. This is the very last episode in the cosmic story. The last two chapters of the Bible contain the description of that new reality.

As described in the last sermon, the hope of the Christian is not going to heaven when they die. The hope is going back to the original design, to the Edenic perfection where everything was “very good.” That is what Christ taught us to pray: “your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The New Heavens and the New Earth will be a recreation of the earth. It will be physical, for everything in Rev 21 & 22 points in that direction. It will be on earth, for the New Jerusalem “comes down out of heaven from God,” and “the dwelling place of God is with man,” which indicates that it is God who comes down. Most importantly, the New Heavens and the New Earth are not a total erasing of the current earth. God does not say: “I am making all new things.” He does say: “I am making all things new.” The current things will be renewed, refreshed, and perfected. But they will be very much themselves. We will be able to recognize them. That’s why Jesus calls it “the *renewal* of all things” (Matthew 19:28, NIV), and Peter “the *restoration* of all things” (Acts 3:21, CSB). Wright says poetically: “The new creation will not be a blank page, as if God will simply crumple up the whole of human historical life in this creation and toss it in the cosmic bin, and then hand us a new sheet to start all over again. The new creation will start with the unimaginable reservoir of all that human civilization has accomplished in the old creation –but purged, cleansed, disinfected, sanctified and blessed.”⁽⁴⁾

The amazing news about New Creation is that what we do today has the potential to survive the purification process. What we do today can exist forever! After explaining the resurrection, Paul concludes: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Therefore – because of the physicality of resurrection, you know that your work today is not in vain. Your work: physical, mental, social, and spiritual, has the potential to be part of the New Creation. A different Wright says: “What you do in the present –painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself– will last into God’s future.”⁽⁵⁾ Therefore, work faithfully, honestly, creatively, and joyfully today.

Questions

How do you imagine life in the New Heavens and New Earth?

⁽⁴⁾ Christopher Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 202. ⁽⁵⁾ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 205.

Chapter 8: New Creation

Revelation 22:17-20 ¹⁷The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. ¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. ²⁰He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

We are finishing this eight-week study on the story of the Bible. We did it to build a *biblical worldview*, a biblical way to interpret reality. We first highlighted the need to start with Scripture. A biblical worldview starts and ends with the Bible. Faithful Christians through the ages have remained faithful to “the Word of God” and “the Spirit of Prophecy,” which mean the Old and New Testament (cf. Revelation 1:2; 1:9; 6:9; 21:11; 12:17; 20:4). As a reminder, the main acts of the biblical story are:

- 1. Creation.** God created a good world and human beings according to his image. Creation reminds us we have infinite value, as well as the mission to keep and cultivate the earth.
- 2. War.** God’s plan was thwarted by a maverick angelic being, Satan. He slandered God’s character and deceived the first humans to misuse their freewill. War reminds us that there is a cosmic war of ideas, and that evil and suffering do not come from God.
- 3. Israel.** God’s rescue mission was to be done through Israel. He delivered his moral law, the 10 commandments, so they could share it with the world. Israel reminds us there are moral absolutes in the universe.
- 4. Messiah.** God himself came to earth, as a humble servant, and was obedient to death – death on a cross! He died to save sinners, to neutralize death, and to vindicate his character. That is why we can have hope.
- 5. Church.** God created a community on earth to extend his kingdom. Church reminds us that we were made to live in community, and the local church is the best place to find it.
- 6. You.** God won the last battle in heaven when Christ ascended. He expelled the dragon. He is now furious and is waging war against the remnant of the woman, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. This is our current act, and it gives us a role to play in the drama: hold Scripture tightly and preach the gospel urgently.
- 7. New Creation.** God will bring the earth back to its original design. He will renew creation, which means that he’ll keep all that is pure, lovely, and just. New Creation reminds us that, since we are walking towards renewal, we can work diligently today.

That’s the story in a nutshell. We are living in the very last moments of the sixth act. Our role today is neither to add nor to remove from Scripture (Revelation 22:18-19). Our job is to build a holistic biblical worldview, so that we process our values, ideas, and plans through the biblical glasses.

While we wait, we are also asked to share the eternal gospel. Christ promised “Surely I am coming soon,” and he meant it. We can rejoice in that truth while we share it with as many people as we can. And we can join the people of God through the ages praying: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

Questions

Share the whole story in your own words.

Which was the most eye-opening stage in the story? Which was the hardest to grasp?

