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Journey Through God's Word

PHILIP YANCEY AND
BRENDA QUINN

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A Note to Our Readers

Welcome to *The Bible Revealed*!

You are embarking on an incredible journey with the world's all-time best-seller. No book has had a more profound impact on human history than the Bible. Two and a half billion people on the planet now identify as Christians¹, and together they look to the Bible for answers to life's deepest questions. Why are we here? What does God have in mind for planet earth? Can we truly get to know God personally?

Yet the Bible can be a daunting book, whether you are reading a single chapter or attempting to read from cover to cover. After all, it includes sixty-six different books by several dozen authors whose writing styles vary widely. To understand the individual parts, it helps to get an overview of the entire sweep of the Bible.

We feel privileged to serve as your guides, starting with the book of Genesis and continuing to the book of Revelation at the end. We've carefully chosen key passages from each book of the Bible as a kind of sampler, and our background notes and explanations piece together the story of God's relationship with people throughout history.

There are 366 readings in *The Bible Revealed*, one for each day of the year. The readings consist of either (1) a suggested Bible passage accompanied by comments about the passage, or (2) a personal Reflection by either of the editors, Philip Yancey or Brenda Quinn. The Reflections will offer thoughts about the previous few readings and also make practical applications to daily life.

Such an overview plan is no substitute for mastering the entire Bible, of course, but it may help lower barriers and point the way down a path for further study. Think of it as something like a guided tour through a great city or a national park. You won't get to see every site of interest, but you will learn the basic layout and may acquire a taste that will entice you to return again and again.

We have arranged the biblical material in rough chronological order. You will read the psalms attributed to David as you read about David's life, and the books attributed to the prophets as you read about their context. Portions from the Gospels, too, are interspersed, giving a composite picture of Jesus' life on earth; and Paul's letters are pegged to the record of his travels. This arrangement should help convey the Bible's "plot."

For the best experience, please **read the entire noted Bible passage first before reading each day's entry in *The Bible Revealed***. Sometimes a portion of the selected

passage is provided for you, but it's always best to read the entire referenced passage. If you don't have a Bible, search for a translation that is easy to understand. We recommend using a printed Bible that you can mark with a highlighter or add your own notes to. If you prefer, use a phone or computer to read Bible passages. (While online access may be the most convenient, be aware of the distractions it may introduce.) Audio listening also provides a good option.

We live in an age of diminishing attention spans. The amount of information continually available at our fingertips can pull our focus in several directions at once. Yet the Bible deserves our committed, sustained attention. Push through your tendency to lose momentum, and stay with it. You may miss days here or there. If so, simply continue reading day by day, with no pressure to finish in a year. As you persist, you will be rewarded in your journey with God's Word, from beginning to end.

We echo the psalmist's prayer: "I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word" (Psalm 119:16).

God's Story and Your Story

No doubt you approach the Bible with your own questions, perhaps wondering how you relate to Scripture or to God. Maybe you have a different religious tradition, or an unfavorable opinion of Christians, or some wounds that make it hard to consider the possibility of a loving God. You're not alone. Even if you don't believe in God, you are welcome here. Join us in exploring how the simple act of engaging with the Bible each day might provide a way forward. You may find that the story of Scripture is more your story than you ever could have imagined.

The Bible tells of people from long ago whose stories range from heartwarming to shocking. In the process we begin to see that the story of God and his people is our story, *your* story. We find ourselves over and over again in the pages of the Bible. God gave us this book to reveal himself and to reveal who we are as his beloved creation. Along the way, we learn how to relate to him.

We hope you will find yourself in the Bible and, as you do so, will enter a life with God that fills you and overflows into the world. The Bible is a gift from our God who speaks to us each time we open its cover and read.

So, let's begin!

Philip Yancey and Brenda Quinn

Free online resources to help you choose a Bible, explore Bible translations and alternate language Bibles, and access audio Bible options: Bible Gateway, Bible Hub, YouVersion.

PART 1

Beginnings

Creation

Genesis 1:1–2:3

As you begin Day 1, please read “A Note to Our Readers” on page xvii. Then, in your Bible, read from Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:3. After reading the passage, proceed by reading the comments below. Follow this pattern each day.

Everything, truly everything, begins here. The story of the Bible—more, the history of the universe—starts with the simple statement “In the beginning God created,” and the rest of the chapter fills in what he created: stars, oceans, plants, birds, fish, mammals, and, finally, man and woman.

Genesis 1 says little about the processes God used in creation; you’ll find no explanations of DNA or the scientific principles behind creation. But the opening chapter of the Bible does insist on two facts:

Creation was God’s work. “And God said . . . And God said . . . And God said . . .”—the phrase beats in cadence all the way through the chapter, which mentions the word *God* thirty times. And in this first chapter, the very first glimpse we have of God is as an artist. Butterflies, waterfalls, bottlenose dolphins, praying mantises, kangaroos—they were all God’s idea. This entire magnificent world we live in is the product of God’s creative work. All that follows in the Bible reinforces the message of Genesis 1: Behind all of history, there is God.

Creation was good. Another sentence tolls softly, like a bell, throughout this chapter: “And God saw that it was good.” In our day, we hear alarming reports about nature: toxic plastics, polluted oceans, vanishing species, climate change, the destruction of rainforests. Much has changed, much has been spoiled since that first moment of creation. Genesis 1 describes the world as God wanted it, before any spoiling. Whatever beauty we sense in nature today is a faint echo of that pristine state.

Captain Frank Borman, one of America’s Apollo astronauts, read from this chapter of Genesis on a telecast from outer space on Christmas Eve 1968. As he gazed out of his window, he saw Earth as a brightly colored ball hanging alone in the darkness of space. It looked at once awesomely beautiful and terribly fragile. It looked like the view from Genesis 1.

—PY

Daily Contemplation

When was the last time you really noticed the beauty of the natural world? What do you notice today?

Adam and Eve

Genesis 2:4–25

After presenting the cosmic view in chapter 1, Genesis repeats the story of creation, narrowing the focus to human beings. We alone, of all God’s works, are made “in God’s image.” Over the years people have disagreed on what, exactly, that phrase “image of God” means. Is it immortality? Intelligence? Creativity? Relationship? Perhaps the best way to understand is to think of “the image of God” as a mirror. God created us so that when he looked upon us, he would see reflected something of himself.

Nothing else God created reflects that same likeness to God. Alone of all creation, human beings received the very breath of life from God. Genesis declares that human beings, in God’s eyes, possess a value far beyond other living things. Similarly, humans have value that can never be equaled even by today’s increasingly powerful computers, no matter how intelligent and lifelike they may be.

Genesis 2 shows human history just getting underway. Marriage begins here: Even in a state of perfection, Adam feels loneliness and desire, and God provides woman. From then on, marriage takes priority over all other relationships. Work begins here too: Adam is given authority over the animals and plants. Ever since, humans have had a kind of mastery, or “stewardship,” over the rest of creation.

Only the slightest hint of foreboding clouds this blissful scene of Paradise. It appears in verse 17, in the form of a single negative command from God. Adam enjoys perfect freedom with one small exception—a test of obedience.

Throughout history, artists have tried to recreate in words and images what a perfect world would look like, a world of love and beauty, one without guilt or suffering or shame. Genesis 1–2 describes such a world. For a time in Genesis, peace reigns. When God looks at all he has created, he pays humanity its highest compliment. “Very good,” he pronounces. Creation is now complete.

—PY

Daily Contemplation

Think about a close friend or family member. In what way does this person reflect God? Does some quality or personality trait speak of what God must be like?

The Fall of Man

Genesis 3:1–24

The “fall of man,” theologians call it, but really it is more like a crash. Adam and Eve have everything a person could want in Paradise, and yet still a thought nags them: *Are we somehow missing out? Is God keeping something from us?* Like every human being who has ever lived, they cannot resist the temptation to reach for what lies beyond them.

Genesis gives few details about that first sin. Only one thing matters: God labeled one tree, just one, off-limits. Many people mistakenly assume sex is involved, but in fact something far more basic is at stake. The real issue is *who will set the rules*—the humans or God? Adam and Eve decide in favor of themselves, and the world has never been the same.

Adam and Eve react to their sin as anyone reacts to sin. They rationalize, explain themselves, and look for someone else to take the blame. They hide from each other, sensing for the first time a feeling of shame over their nakedness. Perhaps the greatest change of all, however, occurs in their relationship with God. Previously they walked and talked with God in the Garden as a friend. Now, when they hear his approach, they hide.

Genesis 3 tells of other profound changes that affect the world when the creatures choose against their Creator. Suffering multiplies, work becomes harder, and a new word, *death*, enters human vocabulary. Perfection has been permanently spoiled.

The underlying message of Genesis goes against some common assumptions about human history. According to these chapters, the world and humanity have not been gradually evolving toward a better state. Long ago, we wrecked against the rocks of our own pride and stubbornness. We’re still bearing the consequences: All wars, all violence, all broken relationships, all grief and sadness trace back to that one monumental day in the Garden of Eden.

—PY

Daily Contemplation

Have you felt hemmed in or stifled by any of God’s commands? How have you responded to this feeling?

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1–24

Creation, the origins of man and woman, a fall into sin—in three chapters Genesis has set the stage for human history, and now that history begins to play itself out. The first childbirth—imagine the shock!—the first formal worship of God, the first division of labor, the first extended families, and cities, and signs of culture all appear in chapter 4. But one “first” overshadows all the others: the first death of a human being, a death by murder.

It takes just one generation for sin to enter the world; by the second generation, people are already killing each other. The malignant results of the Fall spread that quickly. Cain offers a sacrifice to God with a poor attitude and then kills his brother when he learns God is more pleased with Abel’s offering (see also Hebrews 11:4). God steps in once again with a custom-designed punishment: Cain must bear a mark of shame the rest of his life. The slide continues, though, for a few generations later a man named Lamech, a descendant of Cain, will brag about his own murders.

Not all the news is bad. Civilization progresses rather quickly, with some people learning agriculture, some choosing to work with tools of bronze and iron, and some discovering music and the arts. In this way, human beings begin to fulfill the role assigned to them by God to be masters over the created world. But despite these advances, history is sliding along another track as well. Every person who follows Adam and Eve faces the same choice of whether or not to obey God’s word. And, with numbing monotony, all make a choice similar to that of their original parents. The next few chapters tell of an ever-worsening spiral of rebellion and evil.

—PY

Daily Contemplation

Look at Cain’s response when God confronts him. What do you think you would say if God appeared in person to confront you about your sin?