

GOD the CREATOR



*Our Beginnning, Our Rebellion,
and Our Way Back*

STUDY GUIDE | EIGHT SESSIONS

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 HarperChristian
Resources

God the Creator Study Guide
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ISBN 978-0-310-13520-3 (softcover)
ISBN 978-0-310-13521-0 (ebook)

First printing May 2021 / Printed in the United States of America

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The story of the Bible reveals that heaven and earth are woven more closely together than we might think. All through the Bible, we find two parallel and beautiful dramas unfolding.

There is the **lower story**. Humans live on earth and see things from a horizontal perspective. We can't see what is around the bend but must make decisions on which way to go, where we will live, and how we will respond to what happens to us. We focus on getting through the day as best we can. We interpret why we think other people do what they do. We struggle to know why certain things happen and why other things don't happen.

Then there is the **upper story**. This is how the story is unfolding from God's perspective. Heaven is breaking into our world, and the story of God's seeking love, perpetual grace, and longing for a relationship with ordinary people is breathtaking. Of course, as humans living on this earth, we won't always be able to see what is taking place in this upper story. But we can be sure that God is always present, at work, and active in every detail of our lives.

The objective of *God the Creator*—the first in a series of three small-group studies in The Story series—is to introduce

you to these lower and upper stories. In this study, you will look at how God created the world and walked with his first children in a beautiful garden before sin destroyed that harmonious relationship. You will see how God called Abraham to build a nation, how Joseph saved his people from famine, how Moses led the people out of slavery, and how Joshua led them to conquer the promised land. You will explore the story of the judges and close with a look at a woman named Ruth—from whom would come the Messiah.

God wants to be with you. He wants to fill your life with greater purpose, meaning, and understanding. He wants to weave your lower story into his greater upper story that he has been writing. He wants to walk with you in every situation of life. As you recognize how closely his story and your story fit together, you *will* experience his love, grace, and wisdom.

SESSION OUTLINE

Each session is divided into two parts. In the group section, you will watch a video teaching from Randy Frazee and follow along with the outline that has been provided. (Note that you can watch these videos via streaming access at any time by following the instructions found on the inside front cover of this guide.) You will then recite the key verse(s), the key idea, and engage in some guided group discussion through the questions provided. You will close your group with a brief time of prayer.

PERSONAL STUDY

At the end of the group section, you will find a series of readings and study questions for you to go through on your own

during the week. The first section will help you *know the story* by asking you to read several key passages from the Bible that were covered during your group time. The next section will help you *understand the story* through a short reading from Randy Frazee that will help you grasp the main takeaways. The third section will help you *live the story* by challenging you to put what you have learned into practice. The final section will help you *tell the story* through a short prompt for a conversation starter around a meal or dinner table. **The personal study is a critical component in helping you grasp the overall story of the Bible, so be sure to complete this study during the week before your next group meeting.**

GROUP SIZE

God the Creator can be experienced in a group setting (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small-group gathering) and also as an individual study. If you are doing the study as a group with a large number of participants, it is recommended that everyone watches the video together and then breaks up into smaller groups of four to six for the discussion time. In either case, you can access the teaching videos via the streaming code found on the inside front cover.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Each participant in the group should have his or her own study guide. Although the course can be fully experienced with just the video and study guide, participants are also encouraged to have a copy of *The Story*, which includes selections from the *New International Version* that relate to each week's session.

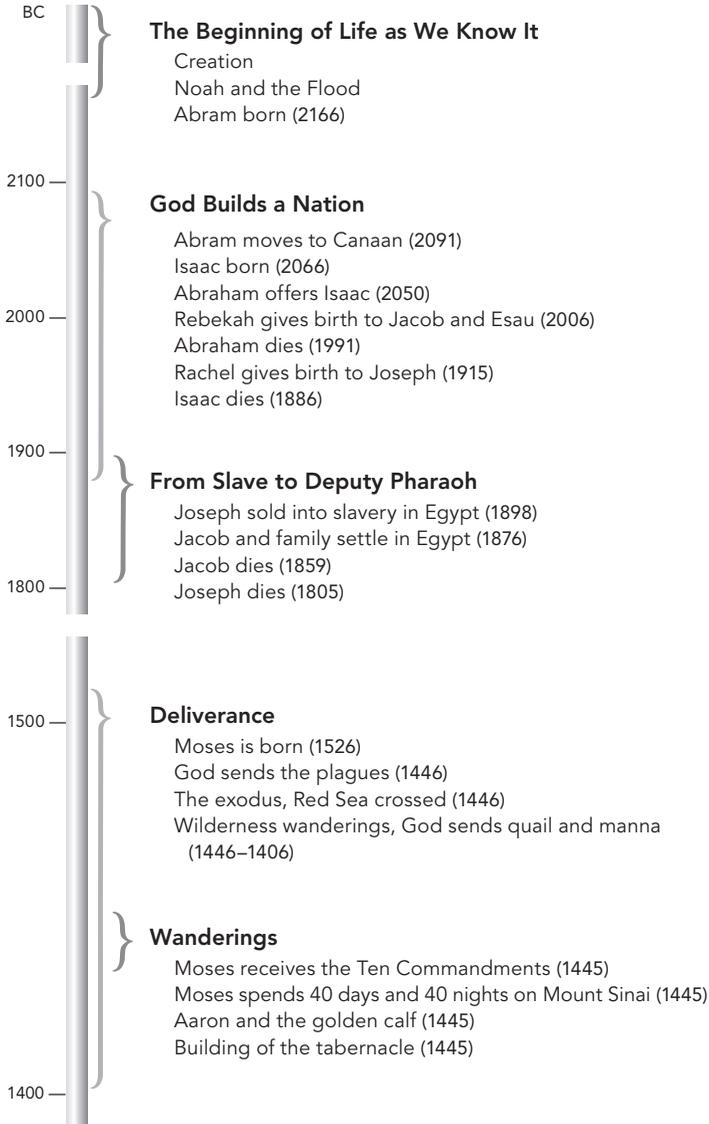
Reading *The Story* as you go through the study will provide even deeper insights and make the journey even richer and more meaningful.

FACILITATION

Each group should appoint a facilitator who is responsible for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Facilitators may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring everyone that has the opportunity to participate. (For more thorough instructions, refer to the the leader's guide that is included at the back of this guide.)

TIMELINE OF THE STORY

TIMELINE OF GOD THE CREATOR

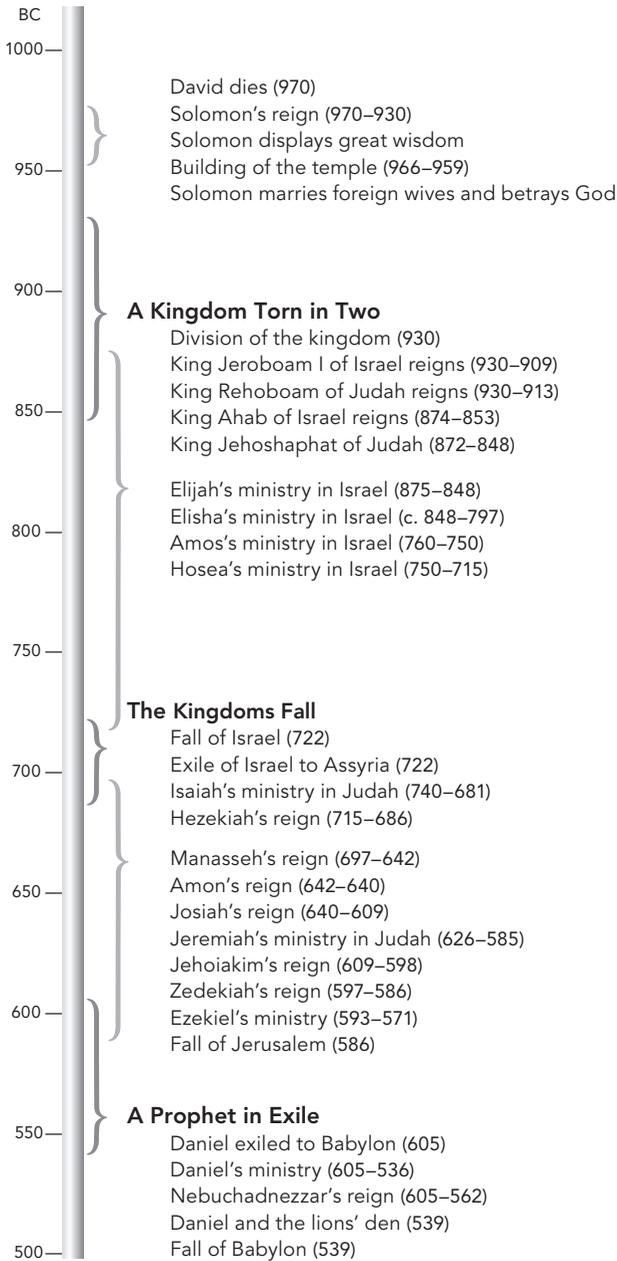


Note: Dates are approximate and dependent on the interpretative theories of various scholars.

God the Creator Study Guide



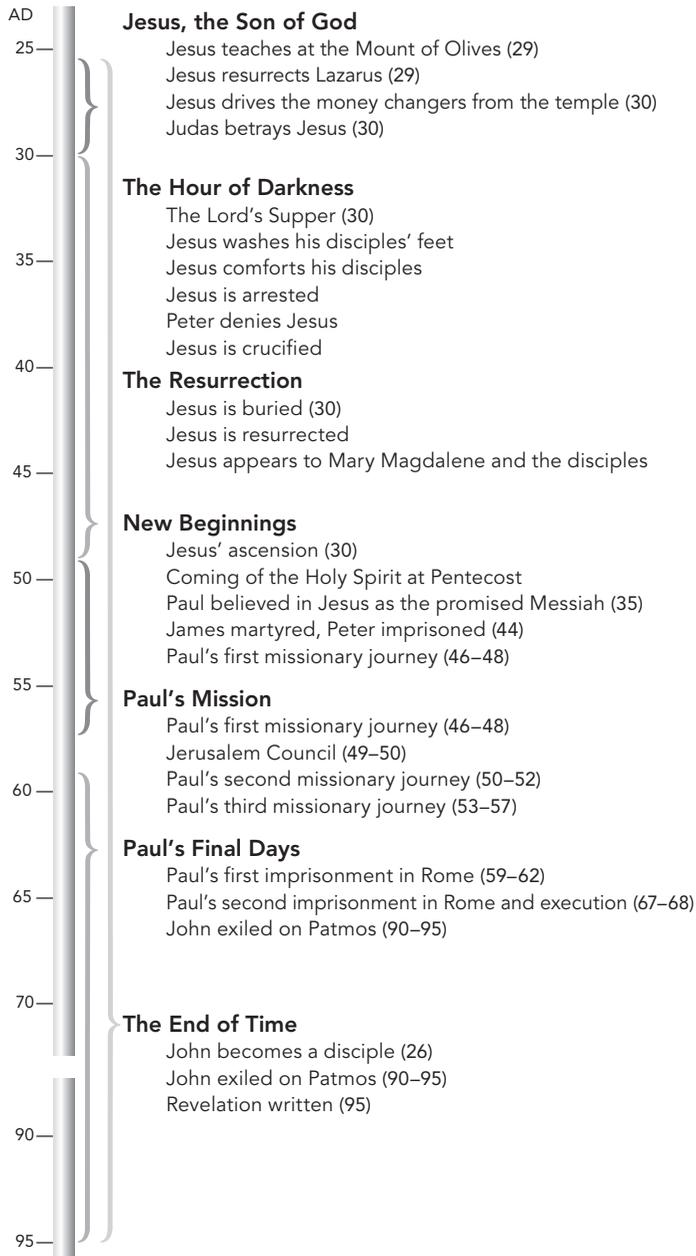
Timeline of The Story



God the Creator Study Guide



Timeline of The Story





Session 1



THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

GENESIS 1–11

WELCOME

The story of the Bible begins with a “big bang.” In the opening pages of Genesis, we read that the Spirit of God was hovering over a place that was formless, empty, and dark. But then God initiated the spark that would lead to the creation of our world . . . and our universe. This big bang was no accident. God was *intentional* in creating the heavens, the earth, and all the amazing things that are contained within them. But the *real* point of Genesis is even more amazing: God created this place *to be with us*. He no longer wanted only to enjoy the perfect community he had as the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The Ultimate Author of this grand story wanted to share it with us. “In the beginning” God came up with a plan to perfectly connect his upper story with our lower story. He literally desired to bring heaven down to earth—first to create

a paradise, then to create people in his own image, and then to come down and do life with us. Perfectly. Just as he had experienced perfect oneness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

Welcome to session one of *God the Creator*. If this is your first time meeting together as a group, take a few moments to introduce yourselves. Watch the video (see the streaming video access provided on the inside front cover) and use the following outline to record some of the main points. The answer key is found at the end of the session.

- God wants us to read the Bible like we gaze at a _____—a tapestry of individual stories that shout out a _____ message from God.
- The point of the _____, the purpose of the creation, the pride and joy of God's _____ is revealed on the opening pages. What is the apple of God's eye? The magnum opus of his work? _____—_!
- God's grand _____ was to go on walks with his children; to be in their presence. God creates the _____ story so he can come down from the _____ story to do life with us.
- In one act of _____, Adam and Eve rejected God's vision in exchange for a vision to be _____.

- Living with a _____, with other people with a _____, on an earth that is _____, is not the vision of life that God had in mind.
- The choice of Adam and the sin nature banished him from the _____ of God. Every one of us are born with this sin nature, separated from a _____ with God through the choice of one man.

GETTING STARTED

Begin your discussion by reciting the key verse and key idea together as a group. Now try to state the key verse from memory. On your first attempt, use your notes if you need help. On your second attempt, try to state it completely from memory.

KEY VERSE: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

KEY IDEA: God’s vision was to come down and to be with us in a beautiful garden. But the first two people reject God’s vision. Their decision introduces sin into the world and keeps humanity from experiencing community with God. The rest of the Bible is God’s story of how he made it possible for us to enter back into relationship with him.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. What part of this week's teaching encouraged or challenged you the most? Why?

2. What do you think it means to be created in the image of God?

3. What in the story of the garden gives you the most encouragement? Why?

4. How does the story of Cain and Abel unsettle you or challenge you?

5. What hope and promise do you find in the story of Noah?

6. What is your biggest takeaway as you reflect on what you learned this week?

CLOSING PRAYER

One of the most important things we can do together in community is to pray for each other. This is not simply a closing prayer to end your group time but a portion of time to share prayer requests and life, to review how God has answered past prayers, and to actually pray for one another. Use the space

below to record prayer requests and praises. Also, make sure to pray by name for people God might add to your group—especially your neighbors.

Name	Request/Praise
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

FOR NEXT WEEK

Next week, we will look at the story of how God’s covenant promise with Abraham would accomplish his upper story plan through building the nation of Israel. Before your next group meeting, be sure to read through the following personal study, complete the exercises, and memorize the key verse for the session.

VIDEO NOTES ANSWER KEY

mural, single / story, handiwork, people—us / vision, lower, upper / free will, their own gods / sin nature, sin nature, cursed / presence, relationship



PERSONAL STUDY

Every session in this guide contains a personal study to help you make meaningful connections between your life and what you are learning each week. Take some time after your group meeting each week to read through this section and complete the personal study. In total, it should take about one hour to complete. Some people like to spread it out, devoting about ten to fifteen minutes a day. Others choose one larger block of time during the week to work through it in one sitting. There is no right or wrong way to do this! Just choose a plan that best fits your needs and schedule and then allow the Scripture to take root in your heart.

KNOW THE STORY

The majority of people—even those who have attended church all their lives—view the Bible as an ancient book about what God did “in days long ago.” It is amazing when we come to realize that God’s upper story in the Bible connects with our own lower story of going to work, caring for our families, and trying to lead honorable lives. With this in mind, read the following key passages from *The Story*, and then answer the reflection questions that follow.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the

surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day (Genesis 1:1–5).

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day (Genesis 1:26–31).

The Beginning of Life As We Know It

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'" (Genesis 3:1-3).

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Genesis 3:6-11).

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he

placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:21–24).

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:5–8).

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” . . .

And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

“Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (Genesis 9:8–16).

The Beginning of Life As We Know It

1. What authority did God give to Adam and Eve?

2. How did Satan cause Adam and Eve to doubt God's one command to them?

3. What were the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin?

4. Why did God decide to send the flood against the earth?

5. What agreement did God make with Noah?

UNDERSTAND THE STORY

Humanity's tragic rebellion against God in the garden impacted *everything*. The disobedience of Adam and Eve, and

the rebellion of the generations that followed, took a God-ordained source of blessing and twisted it into a form of heartache. The stunning beauty and heart-wrenching tragedy of our world is explained and understood through these stories, helping us understand why something created so good has gone so terribly wrong.

God's Word shows us that human disobedience has universal implications. The choices and decisions that we make illustrate how we embrace or reject our Creator God. Although we tend to think of our choices as individual decisions that don't impact other people, this section of Genesis reveals that even a simple act—such as eating a forbidden fruit—can lead to suffering and death *for everyone*. The choices and decisions we make in this life are writing a moral drama, and our every deed illustrates how we embrace or reject our Creator.

The goodness of God's creation was not wholly destroyed by humanity's sin and rebellion. However, until the story is over, we cannot experience the good life that God intended for us apart from the taint of sin and the curse. As Paul wrote, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Romans 8:22). We live in a fallen world today that is waiting to be redeemed and made new by the Creator.

1. What do the stories you have read this week reveal about the impact of sin?

2. How will these stories you have read help you to better shape your choices?

LIVE THE STORY

Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden was more than just a fair punishment for their disobedience. It was a continuation of God's perfect plan to be able to live in communion with the people whom he created. The garden would remain pure, and God would adjust his plan to give you and me the possibility of living there with him forever. Today, he is as passionate as ever in meeting us outside the garden and walking with us through every experience in life.

As we see from the story of Cain and Abel, the sin nature first birthed in Adam and Eve has been transmitted to their offspring. In fact, as the population on earth grew, it became clear that when given a choice, men and women chose evil over good. According to the Bible, God saw that mankind had become so wicked that "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). Theologians call this the "doctrine of depravity." We are unable to "be good" on our own, leaving us unfit for God's community.

You would think this would be the end of the story—that God would have given up on us. But he didn't. This is perhaps the most mind-boggling thought in all the pages of Scripture: *in spite of our state of blatant selfishness and rebellion, God wanted us back*. Regardless of what Adam, Eve, Cain, and the descendants that followed did—and regardless of anything that *we* have done—God still wants to be with us. His upper story has not changed. He still wants to do life with us in a perfect and loving community of unified fellowship.

1. How will you be more intentional this week in pursuing a relationship with God?

2. What is one action you will take this week to put what you've learned into practice?

TELL THE STORY

The goal of this study is not only for you to understand the story of the Bible but also for you to share it with others. So, one day this week around a meal or your dinner table, have an intentional conversation about the topic of this session with family or friends. During your time together, read Genesis 1:1-31, and then use the following question for discussion:

Of all the things that God created, which is the one you find most interesting? Why?

Ask God this week to help you fully embrace the story of creation. Also, spend a few minutes each day committing the key verse to memory: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).