

Bible Overview – The Wooing God

by Beth Ann Phifer



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magnifying the beauty of God's Word

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Summary of the Bible
3. Jesus Christ
4. The Old and New Testaments
5. Five Things to Remember

1. Introduction

This *Bible Overview* and the accompanying *Bible At-A-Glance* available in our Shop were created for people who feel overwhelmed by the size of the Bible and would like an overview.

2. Summary of the Bible

God created man and woman for relationship with Himself. As they walked closely with Him in intimate fellowship, their lives would be full of joy and abundance. God expressed His love to them with His loving presence and an earth full of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and pleasures to enjoy with Him and each other.

The Bible contains the stories of God working in the lives of the people He created to woo them to Himself, beginning with Adam and down through history to Noah, then Abraham's family, Moses and the rest. God called Abraham to leave his country and follow Him to a new country. God chose to use Abraham's descendants to communicate His light to the world. He chose them, not because they were smarter or more important than everyone else, but because He wanted to communicate His love to them so that all other nations could also see His character of love displayed through their lives. Then they too could experience this relationship with the Sovereign Lord of the Universe.

God also endowed humankind with the ability to choose His ways or their own. From the beginning, they drank from the empty wells of selfishness rather than from Him, the fountain of living water. They often deemed their ways better than His. But some turned toward Him and reflected His ways of love.

Throughout the history of the Bible, God spoke his heart through His prophets. He spoke words of encouragement, comfort, hope, warning, sadness, and hatred for the way they cruelly treated one another. Whatever the prophet's message, they were mouthpieces of God. They also foretold the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in intricate detail hundreds of years before His birth.

The overarching message interlaced throughout the Bible was God's desire to love, forgive and redeem the people He created. His redemption would enable His creatures to enjoy the fullest intimacy with Him and the fullest joy.

3. Jesus Christ

Christ was the ancient Greek word meaning *anointed*. Its Hebrew translation is *Messiah*. Christians are people who follow Jesus Christ, because they believe He is the living Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament).

God's grand plan to forgive and redeem the people He created was culminated in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. The Apostle John, one of Jesus' closest disciples, inspired by the Holy Spirit, called Jesus the *Only Begotten of the Father*, meaning one substance with the Father. The mystery of the incarnation of Jesus is that God came to earth to reach us, heal us, teach us, and take upon Himself the penalty for our waywardness (sin), past, present and future. His redemption would transform our hearts to love Him by the power of the Holy Spirit if we would receive Him (John 1:12-13). This is what Jesus called being born again (John 3:3-7). Imbued with the Spirit of the Living God, we would possess expressions of His life (spiritual gifts) to bless and benefit others.

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Jesus is called God's Son to represent the closeness of the relationship. He was God Himself in the flesh. This is not a contradiction simply because our finite minds cannot grasp it. We bow before His majesty in gratitude for the incomprehensible gift of forgiveness and eternal life offered through Jesus Christ. John wrote (in John 3:16-21) the essence of Christ's purpose – "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." The little word "so" in the original Greek does not mean "very" but "in this way." God chose to love us in this very particular way, through granting us access to Him through Jesus Christ.

The author of the book of Hebrews (Chapter 1:1-3) said this well, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the world. He is the radiance of His glory and the exact expression of His nature, and He sustains all things by His powerful Word."

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word for "God" in this verse is Elohim. Elohim is the plural of El; this does not mean many "gods" since the word is accompanied with singular verb and adjective forms. Rather, Elohim's plurality conveys one God Who is three in one. From the beginning of creation, God's heart was *relationship*.

4. The Old and New Testaments

The Old and New Testaments refer to the Old and New Covenants of God with His people. The Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament foretold the New Covenant.

- From the book of Joel (the Hebrew prophet) 2:28-29,
It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.
- At the last supper, Jesus ushered in the time of the new covenant (John, Chapters 13-17).
Specifically, Jesus said (John 16:7),
"It is to your advantage that I go away, because if I do not go away, the Paraclete [Koine Greek for Helper, Comforter, Advocate, or One who comes along side] will not come to you."

And in verse 13 and 14 following, He said,

"When He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth...He will glorify Me, because He will take of Mine and disclose it to you."

- The author of Hebrews 8:6 quotes from Jeremiah 31:31 and following,
But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry as the mediator of a better covenant, enacted on better promises, for if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. The Scripture says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts...and all will know me... for I will be merciful to their iniquities, and will remember their sins no more. When he said "a new covenant" he has made the first obsolete.

5. Five Things to Remember When Reading the Bible

a. Translation

The books of the Bible were originally written in three languages:

- Hebrew – most of the Old Testament
- Aramaic – used in half of Daniel and two passages in Ezra
- Greek – the entire New Testament

All English Bibles are translations, interpreted from copies of the original manuscripts.

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b. Genre

Genre is the literary type of each book. Some portions of the Old Testament are narratives (true stories with characters and plots); they are accounts of what happened in which we see God at work. The people are not always models to emulate, but examples of how God worked through ordinary people to speak to them about Himself.

Other portions of Scripture contain the moral, civil and ceremonial law that displayed the loyal covenant between Israel and God; other portions contain songs, poetry and bits of profound wisdom, while others contain the cries of the prophets.

The New Testament contains narrative accounts of the life of Jesus Christ; the lives of his people filled with His Holy Spirit; letters of instruction and encouragement from Jesus' disciples and apostles to the churches in various cities; and finally John's profound and detailed vision of the end of time in the book of Revelation, the unveiling of what is happening in the heavens that mirrored the visions of Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets hundreds of years prior to John's vision. The Bible ends with this wide-open window of anticipation to the future.

c. Context

Each sentence should always be understood within the larger context of the paragraph, chapter and book surrounding it. All meaning is dependent on the context.

d. Original Intent

We must always seek first to understand what the original author of the particular book intended to say to the original audience. Only then can we understand how to apply the words to our own lives.

Here is an example of a wrong interpretation that could have had a wrong application as a result of not understanding the author's intent:

Years ago, I was trying to make a decision about whether or not to buy a house. I opened my Bible to Psalm 84:3 that says, "The bird also has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young..."

I took this as a sign that I should buy the house. However, the Bible is not a spooky book with haphazard guidance like a horoscope. Rather, we are to interpret it using God's gifts of intelligence and wisdom.

So let's start with the author's original intent: The Psalmist wrote Psalm 84 to the Israelites as a song. His heart yearned for God's presence and being in the courts of His temple, because this gave Him the greatest joy. He writes that, just as the bird has found a home, he too has found his home at God's altar. In the Old Covenant, the temple and the altar represented God's presence.

In the New Covenant, His presence is our home. We apply this verse by knowing that no matter where we go or where we are, we are always at home because He is with us. If we have received Him, His presence is *in* us. This knowledge gives us great joy!

e. God meeting us

God revealed truth according to the recipient's ability to grasp it; He used aspects of their cultures to help them understand eternal truths. God has always met us where we were and spoken truth in a way we could see it through our particular lenses. This is why it is helpful to understand the cultures surrounding the writings.