

THE WHOLE MESSAGE
OF THE BIBLE IN

16

WORDS

CHRIS BRUNO

“Biblical theology is the essential starting place for understanding Scripture rightly. This short, accessible book will help you grasp the Bible’s big story by tracing the most important themes of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. This is a tremendous resource for pastors and congregations alike. Let Chris Bruno give you a guided tour of the central themes of Scripture—you won’t regret it.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President and Joseph Emerson Brown
Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological
Seminary

“Here is an ideal resource for either personal Bible study or for small-group curriculum. Chris Bruno’s concise and readable explanation of sixteen biblical words or concepts provides a lens through which we can see the overall message of the Bible with greater precision. Readers of this book will be better equipped to grasp how the parts of the Bible relate to the whole and how all of history can be understood through biblical theology.”

Chris Brauns, Pastor, The Red Brick Church, Stillman Valley,
Illinois; author, *Unpacking Forgiveness, Bound Together*, and *When
the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search*

“Chris offers a clear, brief, and winsome trip through the pages of Scripture as he examines major unifying themes of the narrative of redemption. This is a wonderful contribution to the growing number of works that help Christians learn biblical theology; it helps us ‘put our Bibles together’ and better grasp the story of God’s saving reign through Jesus. I commend this book to you, and pray that it blesses and teaches many in the church.”

Jon Nielson, Ministry Director, Christian Union, Princeton
University; coeditor, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*

“Trustworthy tools like this are greatly needed for equipping the saints to understand and apply the whole story of the Bible to all of life and ministry. I’m looking forward to putting this resource to work.”

Bill Walsh, Director of International Outreach, The Gospel
Coalition

“Building on the success of his incredibly helpful work *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses*, Chris Bruno returns to his craft to produce an equally powerful tool for the church in her mission to make disciples. Bruno displays his insightful grasp of biblical theology and his passion for developing the next generation of servant-disciples in a style that is both accessible to the average layperson and challenging even to the most seasoned believer. Allowing his personality to shine through on each page, Bruno guides his readers through a full-orbed understanding of God’s story through the entirety of the Bible. Brilliant in its structure and its delivery, *The Whole Message of the Bible in 16 Words* promises to live up to the high standard Bruno has already set and, more importantly, serve the global church in her understanding of God’s Word.”

Jonathan Arnold, Assistant Professor of Christian Theology and Church History and Director of The Augustine Honors Collegium, Boyce College; Fellow, Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies

“The Great Commission is a thread that weaves its way through the gospel story from beginning to end. Chris simply and clearly brings out the themes of God’s Word that form the basis for Christian life and mission. *The Whole Message of the Bible in 16 Words* takes serious biblical theology and makes it accessible and enjoyable. This book will be a blessing to the church in America and around the world.”

Scott Dunford, Vice President of Mobilization, ABWE International

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the Bible in 16 Words*

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OF THE BIBLE IN
16 WORDS

Chris Bruno

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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To my parents,
Jerry and Kim Bruno,
who have constantly pointed me to the
God who makes all things new

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PREFACE

The book you are holding is a sequel of sorts to my earlier book *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses*. In that book, I wanted readers to understand the importance of seeing the whole Bible as one big story, so I picked sixteen key passages as stopping points, or prominent trees, in the big-picture forest of the Bible. While you don't have to read that book before you read this one, this book might be more useful if you have a handle on the story of the Bible. If you want a short, accessible introduction to the storyline of Scripture, *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* might help.

In the preface to that book, I say that it is important to see both the forest and the trees of the biblical story. In this book, I want to change our analogy. Instead of talking about the forest and the trees, I want us to see the whole story of the Bible as a rope that is woven tightly together. The goal of this book is to pull out sixteen key strands that compose this rope, look at how they contribute to the overall message, and then put them back in place.

Another image we can use for the structure of this book is a building. In the first two chapters, we are going to lay a foundation by thinking about God and his plan in history—in

Preface

reverse order. Then we will look at three themes that frame the structure of the overall message of the Bible: creation, covenant, and kingdom. The third and longest section will cover eleven other themes. We can think of these as the superstructure of our building.

I'll go ahead and warn you that at times we'll have to paint with some fairly broad strokes. So I've suggested two "connecting verses" at the end of each chapter—one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. Take a few minutes at the end of every chapter to read each verse in its larger context and to reflect on how each one connects with the other verse, with the theme of that chapter, and with the whole message of the Bible. I've also provided a short summary statement at the end of each chapter to help you remember the main points.

At the beginning of my previous book, I say that if you are reading that book, you are interested in biblical theology, even if you don't know it yet. The same is true for this follow-up. The goal of biblical theology is to trace the progressive development of a theme or cluster of themes in the Bible. In this book, we are going to trace sixteen words that help us better understand and apply the whole message of the Bible. If you are reading this book, then, you are on your way to becoming a biblical theologian!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Anyone who thinks that writing isn't a team sport probably hasn't written very much. More people than I could mention in this brief section have helped me with this book.

My wife, Katie, read the entire manuscript and helped to improve the original product in many ways. She and my sons, Luke, Simon, Elliot, and Noah, unfailingly support me and always remind me of what matters most. They also provide me with some great illustrations, and they all at least feign excitement about their dad's books.

As I developed the material and basic structure of the book, Jared Compton, Matt Dirks, David Griffiths, Kevin McFadden, Todd Morikawa, Christian Siania, and Justin White all gave valuable input that shaped the project. The fellows of the Center for Pastor Theologians helped me refine and rework the structure of the book. David Griffiths read an earlier draft of the whole manuscript and helped strengthen it in several ways. I'm eager to return the favor when he starts writing more.

During the early stages of the writing of this book, I served at Northland International University. The entire staff, especially the administrative team I worked with there—Daniel Patz, Scott Dunford, and Jonathan Arnold—was beyond encouraging as

Acknowledgments

I pursued this and other projects. While writing most of the manuscript, I served at Cedarville University, where the president, Thomas White, and my dean, Jason Lee, along with the rest of my colleagues in the Bible department, provided support and good interaction along the way. Special thanks are due Ched Spellman, who read the entire manuscript and provided valuable feedback as well.

Besides using it in my courses at both Northland and Cedarville, I presented some of this material at Brantwood Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio; Addison Street Community Church in Chicago, Illinois; and the Grace Partners Fellowship in greater Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I'm grateful to these groups for helping to refine my thinking in several ways.

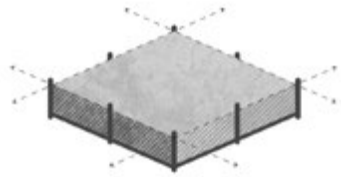
I also have to thank the team at Crossway for their help—in particular Dave DeWit, who has become a valuable mentor to this young author, and Greg Bailey, who vastly improved the quality of the manuscript.

If I tried to list all the people who have prayed for me as I've worked on this book, I might exceed my word limit and fall out of the good graces of those nice Crossway people I just thanked. You know who you are. Your prayers have been crucial. I'm more grateful than you know.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my parents, Jerry and Kim Bruno. It has not been an easy year for them, but I have seen the way the whole message of the Bible shapes the way they respond to hardship, and I'm grateful to have examples like them. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for pointing me to the God who makes all things new. To him alone be glory.

PART 1

THE FOUNDATION



THE END

We begin at the end, because the end actually starts in the beginning. Confused? Just hang with me for a little while, and hopefully you'll see where we are heading.

If you knew in advance that Frodo survives the journey to Mordor in *The Lord of the Rings*, but only barely; that Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's dad in *Star Wars*; and that Bruce Willis is dead the whole time in the *Sixth Sense*, would it ruin these stories? You might think that it would, but according to a 2011 study published in *Psychological Science*, people actually enjoy stories more when they know the ending.¹ What we call "spoilers" could actually be called "improvers"!

Whether that study is right or not, knowing the end of the story of the Bible not only increases our enjoyment of it, but is also crucial for understanding it.

Making All Things New

In one of the last chapters in our Bibles, the apostle John describes the incomprehensible vision that God gave him of the end of history:

And 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. He 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.”

And 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.” (Rev. 21:3–5)

These words, God tells us, are trustworthy and true. They are the reality we need to cling to in the midst of a confusing world. Because our lives are filled with summer blockbusters, increasingly amazing technological advances, and so many comfortable things, it can often be easy to forget what is *really real*. But the hope and reality of every Christian is that God himself—not the president, Parliament, or the United Nations—is making all things new. This reality should change the way we see everything in the world—and the way we read everything in our Bibles. We need to see that the end of the Bible is closely connected to the beginning of the story. But we also need to see that the end of the story changes the way we live right now, because the end has already been brought into the present.

Even if you have not read Genesis recently, you probably know the main idea of the creation story. God made the world and everything in it. He created humans in his own image and put them in the garden of Eden. But Adam and Eve doubted God’s kindness to them and wanted to be like him, so they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the *only* fruit they weren’t allowed to eat). Because of their disobedience, the world and everything in it was broken. And that is

basically what we see when we look out the window or turn on the news today. We live in a world where we can still see God's hand in both the beauty of creation and the creativity of people, but it is also a world filled with broken people looking for some way to fix everything that has gone wrong.

If we really want to understand the story of the world and the story of the Bible, we need to see that God told us about the solution almost as soon as we broke the world. And he started to provide for that solution as soon as he told us about it. In Genesis 3:15, he told Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent. In other words, he would undo the fall and restore his good creation. From the very beginning, God was committed to stepping into history to change it, renew it, and make it better than we could ever imagine—for our good and his glory. And that, in a nutshell, is what we mean by eschatology.

When many Christians talk about eschatology, they are thinking about a way to understand biblical prophecy and such events as the rapture, the return of Jesus, and the millennium. More often than not, they have charts and timelines to help graph all of these events, and many of them are more than happy to guess where we are on those timelines and how close we might be to the end of the world. The word *eschatology* literally means “the study of the last things,” so you can understand why the emphasis is on these sorts of questions.

The return of Christ and the new creation is obviously a big part of what we mean by eschatology. But I have something bigger in mind. When I talk about eschatology, it starts with God keeping his promises, forgiving sin, sending his Spirit, and reigning as King.

So when we talk about the end, we can't just start with the

last page of the Bible. We need to see everything that God has done and is doing to get us to that last page. While we need to see that eschatology is heading toward the end, we also need to see that the end shapes the whole story. In fact, that is how I would define eschatology—the study of God’s work in history to bring the story to his intended end. So when we talk eschatology, we have to start in Genesis.

Eschatology in the Old Testament

Just after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God promised that Eve’s offspring would crush the head of the Serpent. In other words, he promised that, through the line of Adam and Eve, he would defeat the Serpent and reverse the fall. Adam and Eve were designed to be God’s representative rulers in the garden—that is a big part of what it means to be made in his image. But they failed to rule as God intended. And because of this, both the human race and creation itself no longer reflect God’s perfect rule over them. We call this the curse.

So a big part of God’s work in history is reestablishing his perfect reign as King over all things. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God working to do just that—first through his people Israel, as he reigned as their King, and then through King David and his descendants—so that he might entrust the rule of creation to them again.

But the Old Testament story is a tragic one. Time and again, God’s people failed to see how he was working to rescue them from their enemies, failed to submit to him as their King, and failed to see how he was going to crush the Serpent (as he promised Adam and Eve) and use them to bless the world (as he promised Abraham).

Already and Not Yet

While the Old Testament gives us hope and hints about God's work to establish his rule, save his people, and bring history to its ultimate end, it is only when we arrive in the New Testament that we begin to see his eschatological work clearly.

First of all, we see that Jesus talks about the kingdom both as having arrived and still yet to come. He says things like "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28) and "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21b). But he also teaches us, in the Lord's Prayer, to pray that God's kingdom might come (Matt. 6:10). This means there is some aspect of the kingdom that is *already* present and some aspect that is still *not yet* fully here. We see this *already-and-not-yet* reality on display in other places in the New Testament. In fact, almost everything we read in the New Testament has a bit of an already-and-not-yet flavor to it. Have you ever noticed this?

You may have heard a pastor talk about how we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. This is because our redemption is already and not yet. On the one hand, it's clear that our redemption as Christians has already happened. Paul says that in Christ, "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14). On the other hand, he also talks about redemption as a future reality. In Romans 8:23b, he says, "We wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." In some way, we are already experiencing while also waiting for redemption.

We can see the same reality when we talk about eternal life. In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life" (5:24a). He does not say we will have eternal life someday, but that we have eternal

life right now. But until Jesus returns, we all experience physical death. This is why Paul can talk about the day when God *will give* eternal life (Rom. 2:7) and how those who sow to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit (Gal. 6:8). The point is clear: eternal life is both already present but not yet here in its fullness.

Living in the Last Days

Another way of talking about the already and not yet is to say that we are living in the last days right now. Shortly after Jesus had ascended to heaven, Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost. He told the crowd that had gathered around that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus marked the beginning of the “last days,” as the prophet Joel put it (Acts 2:17). Later in the New Testament, John writes, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come” (1 John 2:18).

We could go on with examples that show how important it is to understand the already-and-not-yet principle—and, in some ways, I will do just that in the rest of this book. When we really understand the already-and-not-yet reality of the current age, it gives us confidence. God has worked and God will work. Because of what God has done for us in the past, we can be confident that he will work for us in the future. In fact, Paul says that the Holy Spirit is the down payment, or guarantee, that we will get our final inheritance (Eph. 1:14).

The German theologian Oscar Cullmann compared our time to the days between June 6, 1944, and May 7, 1945. Do you know what happened on those dates? On June 6—D-Day—and the days that followed, the Allied armies successfully invaded the European continent and began their advance to Berlin during World War II. At that point, the German forces were es-

entially defeated. But after the D-Day invasion, many more American, British, and French soldiers were killed in action. It was not until May 7, 1945, that the German armies finally surrendered.

While we are waiting for the completion of God's plan when Jesus returns in power, judges his enemies, and brings our final salvation in the new creation, we are living between the times. The turning point in history was the cross and resurrection. When Jesus went to the cross and then rose from the grave, he decisively defeated sin and death. The victory has already been won. But the final consummation of that victory has not yet come. In the meantime, we still feel the effects of sin and death, but we cannot forget that these are defeated enemies.

As we read our Bibles and look at these themes, we need to remember that we are living in the age of fulfillment—the last days, as Peter put it. The Old Testament promises have been fulfilled in and through Christ. But there is still much more yet to come.

Connecting Verses

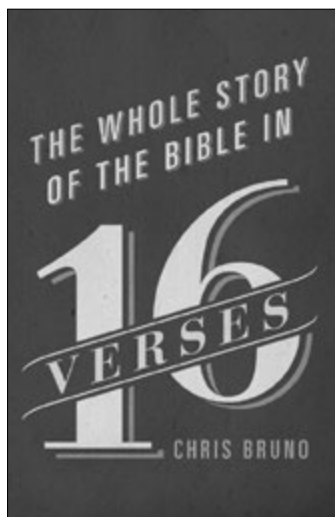
Old Testament: Genesis 3:15

New Testament: Revelation 21:3–5

Summary Statement

To know the whole message of the Bible, we must know that God's end-time promises have already begun to be fulfilled through Jesus, but they are not yet complete, and will not be until Jesus returns to make all things new.

16 Verses. 1 Story.



“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*

“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 and Associate Dean of the School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

For more information, visit crossway.org.

16 KEY WORDS. 1 OVERARCHING MESSAGE.

At the heart of the Bible is one overarching message: God saving his people through their promised Messiah. This accessible introduction to the main point of the Bible traces the development of sixteen key themes—creation, covenant, kingdom, temple, judgment, and more—from Genesis to Revelation, showing how both the Old and New Testaments come together to declare a single unified message. A concise primer to biblical theology, this book helps readers trace God's unfolding plan of redemption throughout the Bible.

“This short, accessible book will help you grasp the Bible's big story by tracing the most important themes of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. This is a tremendous resource for pastors and congregations alike.”

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JON NIELSON, Ministry Director, Christian Union, Princeton University

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PRACTICAL THEOLOGY / CHRISTIAN LIVING

