



BEHOLDING



CHRIST

NANCY GUTHRIE

A Daily Guide to Seeing Jesus in All of Scripture

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Jen Wilkin, Bible teacher; author, *Women of the Word*; *None Like Him*;
and *In His Image*

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INTRODUCTION

You and I were made to behold God in the face of Jesus Christ. The Bible's story begins in Genesis with God's bending down face-to-face with Adam, breathing life into him (Gen. 2:7), and it ends in Revelation with restored humanity once again in God's presence, where we will see his face (Rev. 22:4). In between, however, the reality the Bible presents is that no sinner can look upon the face of God and live (Ex. 33:20). But that does not take away the innate desire we have as humans made in the image of God to see and enjoy the fullness of his being.

We cannot help but long to share the confidence of Job when he writes, "After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:26). We want to say with Moses, "Show me your glory!" (Ex. 33:18). We want to pray for that one thing David determined to ask the Lord for: "That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4). We long to see what Isaiah saw when he "saw the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1).

Of course, for thirty-three years ordinary people were given "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). But that glory was veiled. Only when Jesus took three of his disciples up a mountain where he was transfigured were those three able to behold the glory of the eternal God radiating from the face of Jesus, the glory we long to behold. For now we are waiting. For now we see through a mirror dimly and long for the day when at last we will see him face-to-face (1 Cor. 13:2; Rev. 22:4). On that day we will finally experience that for which we were made as forever we will behold God in the human face of Jesus Christ, never to be separated from him again.

So how do we behold him as we wait for that day? How can we nurture our love for this one we have not yet seen with our eyes (1 Pet. 1:8)? We behold him now by gazing into the word that he has given to us, seeking to understand from it who he is, why he came, the implications of what he accomplished, and what we can anticipate at his sure and certain return. My hope and prayer are that the daily reading introductions in this book will help you to do exactly that.

I have created the daily reading introductions with two primary aims. The first is to provide background, context, and perspective that will increase your understanding of that day's Scripture reading. Each day's reading is designed to be read before you read or listen to that day's passage of Scripture, to provide insight that will aid your understanding of how that passage fits into the larger

storyline and message of the Bible. We can easily read through passages of Scripture and come away with more questions about what we have read than insight into it. But we do not want to simply check off that we have read the passage, having understood little of what was communicated in it. And sometimes we need help to deal with difficult, confusing, or obscure portions of Scripture. It can often be a challenge to grasp the import and implications of a character's attitudes and actions, ancient places, cultural conventions, or biblical storylines, or to trace the writer's argument. As we read through a passage, we want first to grasp its intended message for its original audience—the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, living in the land, in exile, or returned from exile, or first-century believers living under Greco-Roman rule. This is what helps us to grasp rightly its implications for us as modern readers and is a key aspect of what I have sought to present in these reading introductions.

The second all-important aim of this resource is to help you to see the person and work of Christ shadowed or shown in every day's passage. Each day begins with a statement about Christ that arises organically from that passage, though it may not be immediately on the surface. Sometimes this statement brings out a correspondence of Christ to something or someone in the passage, while other times it shows Christ in profound contrast to something or someone in the passage. As you work your way throughout the whole of the Bible, you will be presented daily with Christ's beauty, sufficiency, and superiority. As Jesus said, "Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). Each day, whether reading in the Old Testament or the New, we will seek to see what was written about Jesus Christ and behold him in the way that he is presented in that passage.

Each day's reading introduction ends with several prompts, hints of what to look or listen for while reading or listening as well as encouragements in how to respond in prayer, personal examination, meditation, and worship. As you follow these prompts, my prayer is that you will grow day by day in loving the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27). I pray you will be consistently drawn to wonder and praise and that your longing to behold your Savior face-to-face will increase.

I pray that these daily reading introductions will not only prepare you to grasp more fully what you read but also propel you to persevere in working your way through the whole of the Bible. Each of the readings is given a date, as many readers may have the goal of reading through the entire Bible in a year. But that may not be your goal, or sometimes we set out with that goal but, if we get behind, give up altogether. I hope you will see those dates as a general guide while recognizing that the real goal is to work through the whole of the Scriptures, however long it takes—even if you cannot accomplish this in the prescribed 365

days. You should also know that, although I tried to make the length of the daily Scripture readings relatively even day by day, I leaned more toward dividing up the passages in a way that would serve the reader's understanding, and so some of the readings will be longer or shorter than others, and sometimes they will end or begin in the middle of a chapter.

We want to hear everything God has to say to us. We want to see everything he has to show us. We want to understand, engage with, and enjoy his word. And we want to grow in our love for Christ. Each part of the Bible in its various genres and its variety of emphases and audiences helps us to behold Christ in various ways and from multiple angles. I pray that, as you work your way through these reading introductions along with each day's Scripture passage, your heart will burn as your eyes are opened to behold Christ in fresh and life-altering ways.

Nancy Guthrie

JANUARY 1

GENESIS 1-2

All things in heaven and on earth were created through and for Jesus Christ and will be recreated through him to reflect his own glory, goodness, and beauty (Col. 1:16).

We might think that the story of Jesus begins when we get to the Gospels. But the Gospel writers work from Genesis to introduce us to Jesus, the Christ. Matthew 1 begins with the “genealogy” [Gk. “generations” or “genesis”] of Jesus Christ. Luke traces Jesus’s ancestry all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23–38). John begins his Gospel with “In the beginning,” mirroring Genesis 1:1, telling us that Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), was there in the beginning and that all things were made through him (John 1:3). John tells us that “in him was life” and that that life “was the light of men” (John 1:4), revealing that to eat of the tree of life is to feed on Christ and that to bask in the light that radiated through creation is to see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

In Genesis 1–2 we read about the triune God’s creation of a realm in which he intends to dwell with humanity made in his image, reflecting his own glory. We get a sense of his original purpose when we hear the instructions given to the man and the woman. They are to work and keep the garden, evidently reflecting God’s ordering and filling work in the way they are to be fruitful and multiply, bringing order to the wilderness surrounding the garden, thereby expanding its boundaries so that eventually the wilderness would be eradicated and the whole of creation filled with image-bearers. They would live in this garden sanctuary, which would eventually extend to every corner of the earth, and enjoy his abundant blessing, including the blessing of his very presence in their midst. We could say that from the very beginning God intends for his son and his bride to enjoy sabbath rest in his presence in a new creation. That is what we see in these first two chapters, though we know it is going to be thoroughly disrupted or derailed in the very next chapter. But, as we continue working our way through the Bible, we will discover that this intention will not be thwarted. Indeed, this is still God’s intention. The heavens and earth created in Genesis 1–2 will be recreated, culminating in a new heaven and a new earth, which will be filled with those who bear God’s glorious image living in a garden sanctuary that will extend to every corner of the earth. This is where the story of the Bible begins and where it is headed.

Genesis 1–2 begins the Bible with so much bright beauty and expectation—a creation in which families live and work together, enjoying the presence of

the one who made them, exercising dominion by bringing order and beauty to the barren wilderness that surrounds the garden, and anticipating the rest to come when the work is finished. Crowned with a measure of God's glory (Ps. 8:5), they anticipate becoming even more glorious should they pass the test of the forbidden tree.

 As you read Genesis 1–2:

- ❖ Look for the ways the formlessness, emptiness, and darkness of 1:2 are dealt with throughout the rest of Genesis 1. Allow this to fill you with hope regarding any emptiness or darkness in your own life.
- ❖ As you read through the description of the original creation, take time to gaze into the beauty of its abundance (rivers flowing from it, precious stones embedded in it), the purpose set out in it, and the rich relationship enjoyed in it—and the way this all reflects the beauty of the craftsman who has created it (Prov. 8:27–31; Col. 1:16).

JANUARY 2

GENESIS 3

*Jesus Christ is the offspring of the woman who will deal
with the curse brought upon creation by crushing the head
of the ancient serpent, even as his heel is bruised.*

The scene of Genesis 1–2 was so good and so beautiful that we hate for anything to spoil it. But that is exactly what occurs in Genesis 3. A serpent slithers into the garden paradise to suggest to the woman that God is not as good as she and Adam have been led to believe and that, when God said they would die if they ate of the forbidden tree, he was lying to them. Sadly, she believes the serpent! It sounds so simple when we read, “She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate,” but the impact is cosmic.

This should be the end of the story. The man and woman made in God's image have sinned and deserve to die. But instead, when we hear God's footsteps in the garden, what we find is the beginning of a greater story. God comes and curses the serpent, putting enmity (or ongoing conflict) between the serpent and the woman. God is not going to allow the woman to make peace with the serpent and his evil. This is cause for hope. There will be ongoing conflict between her offspring and the offspring of the serpent, which helps us to make sense of all