

# READING THE BIBLE LIKE JESUS

## SESSION SEVEN: LITERATURE FOR A LIFETIME

### RECAP – THE BIBLE IS:

1. **Human and Divine Literature** – The Bible’s creation, formation, and preservation is a result of God’s people working in partnership with God’s Spirit, which reflects the way God desires to walk and work with us now, in partnership.
2. **Unified Literature** – The Bible is an intentional unified work communicating one main message across its whole, reflecting God’s desire that we too may have lives that lead to that same message.
3. **Messianic Literature** – The Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus by telling and building up a portrait of this anointed Messiah figure who comes to rescue and restore humanity. We too, in Jesus, are called to point to Him as Messiah and be his hands and feet in His mission.
4. **Communal Literature** – The Bible is designed to be literature engaged in with community. It was written by a community, to be read in community, in order to shape the community whole.
5. **Ancient Literature** – The Bible was written in a different time, place, language, and culture and we must honor this context of the Bible in order to discover the meanings and interpretations that the authors intended. When we engage in this cross-cultural work by building up an understanding of their world, we will begin to discover the deeper meanings under the text.

**Luke 24:44-47** - <sup>46</sup> and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

**Remember our goal is to read the Bible in the way Jesus would have. A crucial piece to this paradigm is learning to read the Bible as Meditation Literature.**

### THE TWO WAYS

#### Psalm 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup> How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.

<sup>3</sup> He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,  
Which yields its fruit in its season  
And its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

When you slow down, read it out loud, and pause long enough to hear the repetitive, yet distinct words and phrases, then you begin to see a progression. The blessed person isn't being established with the wrong crowd but is being established in the Scriptures of God. He '*meditates*' in the scripture.

'*Meditate*' is used 25 times in the Hebrew Bible. By looking at these uses, we can understand the full meaning of this word used in Psalm 1.

הָגָה / Hagah

[ haw-gaw' ]

## Translations

To meditate, mourn

## Definition

To speak, mutter

**Joshua 1:8** - This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate** (**hagah**) on it day and night....

**Job 27:4** - My lips certainly will not speak unjustly, Nor will my tongue **mutter** (**hagah**) deceit.

**Psalm 2:1** - Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples **devising** (**hagah**) a vain thing?

**Psalm 37:30** - The mouth of the righteous **utters** (**hagah**) wisdom, And his tongue speaks justice.

**Psalm 63:6** - When I remember You on my bed, I **meditate** (**hagah**) on You in the night watches...

**Psalm 77:11-12** - I shall remember the deeds of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will **meditate** (**hagah**) on all Your work And muse on Your deeds.

**Isaiah 31:4** - "As the lion or the young lion **growls** (**hagah**) over his prey....

After looking at these uses of 'hagah', **to meditate means to slowly and quietly, murmur or whisper something over and over again to yourself. It is repetition and reflection that leads to remembering and renewing.** (Psalms 1:3)

## THE BIBLE AS MEDITATION LITERATURE

*"The eight laws of learning are explanation, demonstration, imitation, repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition." - John Wooden*

**The Bible is ancient Jewish literature that is artistically designed to interpret itself and encourage a lifetime of re-reading and reflection.**

**This means it was designed to be read, reread, reflected on, and read again. It is the idea that the Bible is literature for a lifetime. As you engage it repeatedly and meditate on it, the Bible interprets itself through layers of revealed meaning.**

The Bible works like the movie *Tenet* directed by Christopher Nolan. The whole movie doesn't watch in a single linear progression of time. Instead, there are inversions, parallels, moments of mirroring as characters go backwards through scenes they already went forwards in. And each time you watch the scene, you gain a fuller understanding of the plot. All which is based on the *Sator Square* puzzle found on a wall in Pompey, full of words spelt the same forward, backward, up, and down. (Palindromes)



The Bible works in a way where later stories model, replay, and intensify previous stories. They are connected in a way that builds on the previous messages and themes to give a new and deeper layer of understanding to both stories. It is a design pattern that may seem redundant and repetitive to the modern writing world, but it is very much on purpose and intentional. **The text is designed to encourage the reader to recall earlier stories, compare them, and rethink their meanings in connection with one another. In turn, revealing the intended interpretation and meaning. This is meditation literature.**

**Again, the Bible is ancient Jewish literature that is artistically designed to interpret itself and encourage a lifetime of re-reading and reflection.**

### Psalms 29

- 1 **Give** to Yahweh, O sons of God,  
**Give** to Yahweh glory and strength.
- 2 **Give** to Yahweh the glory due his name.  
**Worship** Yahweh the majesty of holiness.
- 3 **The voice** of Yahweh is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders.  
Yahweh is over the mighty waters.
- 4 **The voice** of Yahweh is powerful.  
**The voice** of Yahweh is majestic.
- 5 **The voice** of Yahweh breaks the cedars.  
Yahweh breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 And he makes Lebanon leap like a calf;  
Mt. Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 **The voice** of Yahweh strikes with flashes of fire.
- 8 **The voice** of Yahweh shakes the wilderness.  
Yahweh shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 9 **The voice** of Yahweh causes deer to give birth  
and strips the forests bare.  
And in His temple everything shouts, "Glory!"
- 10 Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood,  
and Yahweh is enthroned as King eternal.
- 11 Yahweh **gives** strength to his people.  
Yahweh **blesses** his people with peace.

Psalms 29 is a great example of the poetics of the Bible. When the reader reflects over these passages and connected passages, the intended meaning is drawn out and can be applied. Through biblical meditation, I am encouraged to submit myself to God's sovereignty, for the text reveals His power but also shows He cares for His people.

### Genesis 1

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.... <sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ...

### Luke 8:22-25

<sup>23</sup> But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they *began* to be swamped and to be in danger. <sup>24</sup> They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.

### Revelation 5:11-13

<sup>13</sup> And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

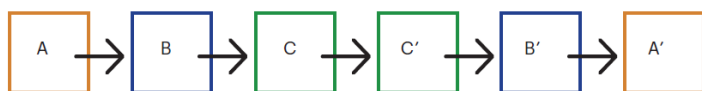
This practice also applies to narratives. See 2 Kings 4:1-7 (Repetition is highlighted)

<sup>1</sup>Now **a certain woman** of the wives of the sons of the prophets **cried out to Elisha**, “Your servant my husband is **dead**, and you know that **your servant** feared Yahweh; and **the lender** has come to take my **two children** to be his slaves.” <sup>2</sup>And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” <sup>3</sup>and he said, “Go, request for yourself **vessels** from outside, from all your neighbors, empty **vessels**; do not get a few. <sup>4</sup>And **you shall go in and shut the door behind you and your sons**, and you shall **pour out** into all these **vessels**, and you shall set aside **what is full**.” <sup>5</sup>and **she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons**; they were bringing to her and **she was pouring**. <sup>6</sup>and it came about when the **vessels** were full, and she said to her son, “Bring near to me **another vessel**.” and he said to her, “There is not **another vessel**.” and the oil stopped. <sup>7</sup>and **she came and she told the man of God** and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay **your lender**, and you and your sons can **live** on the rest.”

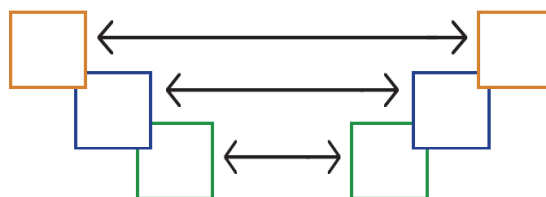
The story seems like a jumble of repetition, but the main themes and the plot arc of the story are clear: The woman’s situation changes from death and debt into life and abundance, all because she obeys the word of the prophet.

However, if the reader ponders (and memorizes) the story, reciting it and breaking it down into its smallest literary units, the repetitions fall into a sophisticated literary arrangement. **This is what the author is inviting the reader to do, to read the story in two dimensions (just like biblical poetry!)**

1. A forward sequence



2. A non-linear symmetrical sequence



**The story can be read in a forward linear sequence. But it also is built to be seen in a non-linear symmetrical sequence.** This invites the reader to compare and contrast matching “scenes” in the text (think of it like movie scenes, then the camera angle changes). Then, in using this skill, certain details become more evident. **(Layout is shown on next page.)**

- The story moves from “death” (A) to “life” (A’), and potential slavery (A) to freedom. These are important coordinated images drawn from the Exodus narrative where death and slavery are the opposite of life and liberation.
- The key agent who turns death into life, is the word of the prophet, who is called “the prophet” (A) and the “the man of God” (A’).
- The word of God through the prophet creates a “test of faith” for the woman, whether she will trust that God can provide “oil” (an agricultural staple) out of nothing (B and B’).
- The woman’s home and jars change from “empty” (C) to “full” (C’) because of her trust in God’s power.

**Summary:** This story is about how the word of God through the prophets can turn death into life, and abundance out of nothing, if only God’s people will trust him as Creator.

## 2 Kings 4:1-7 Symmetrical Layout

When the reader pays attention to the narrative sequence and the repetitions, it becomes clear the story has a symmetrical shape of both key words and plot/character element (all indicated in the right column).

A	<p>a <sup>1</sup>Now <b>a certain woman</b> of the wives of the sons of the prophets <b>cried out to Elisha</b>,</p> <p>b "Your <b>servant</b> my husband is <b>dead</b>,</p> <p>b' and you know that <b>your servant</b> feared Yahweh;</p> <p>c and <b>the lender</b> has come to take my <b>two children</b> to be his slaves."</p>	<p>Woman to prophet Elisha</p> <p>Conflict:</p> <p>death &amp; debt</p>
B	<p>a <sup>2</sup>and Elisha said to her,</p> <p>b "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?"</p> <p>a' and she said,</p> <p>b' "Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a <b>jar of oil</b>."</p>	<p>Man/woman Dialogue:</p> <p>he said</p> <p>she said</p>
C	<p><sup>3</sup>and he said,</p> <p>"Go, request for yourself <b>vessels</b> from outside,</p> <p>from all your neighbors,</p> <p>empty <b>vessels</b>;</p> <p>do not get a few.</p> <p><sup>4</sup>"And <u>you shall go in and shut the door behind you and your sons,</u></p> <p>and you shall <b>pour out</b> into all these <b>vessels</b>,</p> <p>and you shall set aside <b>what is full</b>."</p>	<p>Command:</p> <p>Get Empty vessels</p> <p>pour out until full</p>
C'	<p><sup>5</sup>and <u>she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons;</u></p> <p>they were bringing to her and <b>she was pouring</b>.</p> <p><sup>6</sup>and it came about when the <b>vessels</b> <b>were full</b>,</p>	<p>Fulfillment:</p> <p>Empty vessels</p> <p>poured out until full</p>
B'	<p>a and she said to her son,</p> <p>b "Bring near to me <b>another vessel</b>."</p> <p>a' and he said to her,</p> <p>b' "There is not <b>another vessel</b>."</p> <p>c and <b>the oil</b> stopped.</p>	<p>Man/woman Dialogue:</p> <p>she said</p> <p>he said</p>
A'	<p><sup>7</sup>and <b>she came and she told the man of God</b>.</p> <p>and he said,</p> <p>"Go, sell <b>the oil</b> and pay <b>your lender</b>, and you and <b>your sons</b> can <b>live</b> on the rest."</p>	<p>Woman to man of God</p> <p>Resolution:</p> <p>life and debt paid</p>

Another detail, noticed in this meditative reflection, is that the story uses an excessive number of words to tell the story but immediately ends as soon as the oil stops. The abundant oil and abundance of words are connected. **The message of abundance from the word of the Lord is built into both the structure as well as the story.**

The simplest way to practice this is by tracking repeated words and themes. For example, let's track a theme and word starting in **Genesis 1**.

<b>Gen 1:4</b>	And God saw that the light was good (וירא...כי טוב)
<b>Gen 1:10</b>	And God saw that it [the dry land] was good (וירא...כי טוב)
<b>Gen 1:12</b>	And God saw that it [the vegetation] was good (וירא...כי טוב)
<b>Gen 1:18</b>	And God saw that it [the lights] was good (וירא...כי טוב)
<b>Gen 1:21</b>	And God saw that it [the sea life] was good (וירא...כי טוב)
<b>Gen 1:25</b>	And God saw that it [land life] was good (וירא...כי טוב)
<b>Gen 1:31</b>	And God saw all that he had made, and look, it was very good (וירא...והנה טוב מאד)

Remember, repetition is supposed to get your attention and cause you to begin meditating on the words or themes being presented. By meditating on these repeated lines in Genesis one, the reader can begin to conclude that **God is the provider and evaluator of what is truly good**. In Genesis one, “good” defines the ordered environments that make life possible (Day 1-3) and the abundant creatures that fill these environments (Day 4-6).

Keep reading into **Genesis 2** and the word “good” is used again.

#### Summary of “good” in Genesis 1 and 2

##### Genesis 1:1-2:3

*“and God saw that it was good”*

*“and God saw that it was good”*

*“and God saw that it was good”*

...

*“and God saw that it was very good”*

##### Genesis 2:4-24

*“from the tree of knowing good and bad you shall not eat”*

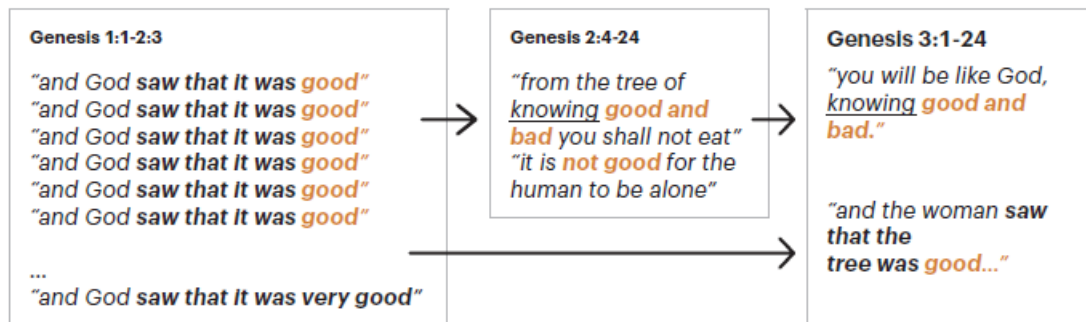
*“it is not good for the human to be alone”*

Once again, God is the evaluator of what is good and not good (as in Genesis 1), and once again he provides what is good for the human: a partner without whom he cannot accomplish the image of God mission given in Gen 1:26-28.

**Genesis 3** begins with a new character that presents itself as one with superior “knowledge” about God’s “knowledge.” He contradicts God’s wisdom, saying that taking the knowing of good and bad will not lead to death, but to greater wisdom.

The key phrase “and the woman saw...good” is precisely the same phrase that was repeated 7 times in Genesis 1. Eve is being portrayed as one who usurps the role and prerogative of God. Not that what God was as good, he “gave,” whereas what the woman sees as good, she “takes.”





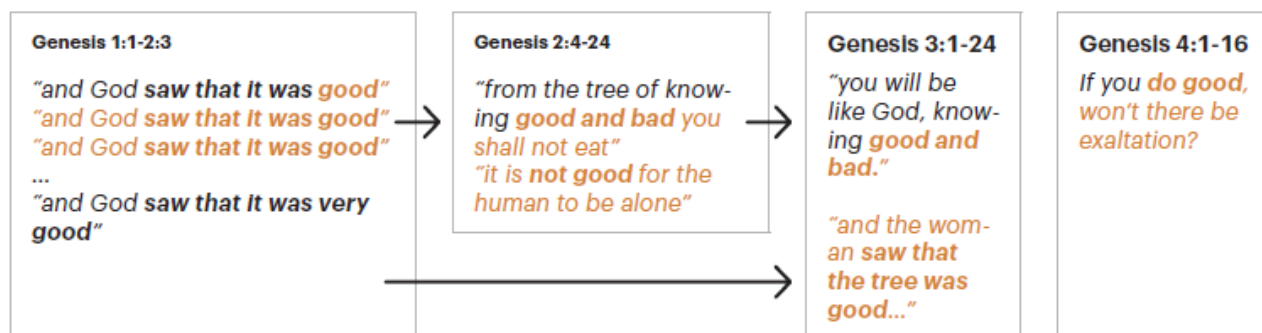
**Genesis 4** continues growing the story originally told in Genesis 2 and 3. The profile of Adam and Eve's actions in Genesis 3 provide a template for the next generation, that replays the failure of their parents. The failure of Cain in Genesis 4, is deliberately set on analogy to the story of Genesis 3, **using all of its key vocabulary.**

	Genesis 2-3: Adam & Eve	Genesis 4: Cain and Abel
Human given a significant choice about "good"	2:14 "from any tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowing <b>good</b> and evil you should not eat, because the day you eat from it you will surely die."	4:5-6: But Yahweh did not regard Cain's offering, and Cain was very angry... Yahweh said "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? Isn't it the case that if you do <b>good</b> , you will be lifted up?"
Humans tempted by an "animal"	3:1 "Now the <b>snake</b> was more crafty than any creature of the field...and he said to the woman, 'Did God really say not to eat from any tree in the garden?'"	4:6 "But if you don't do <b>good</b> , <b>sin is a croucher at the door</b> , and its desire is for you."
Human gives into temptation with destructive consequences	3:6 "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and desirable to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom... she took..."	4:5 "And Cain was very angry..." [4:8] And Cain spoke to Abel his brother and while they were in the field Cain rose up against Abel his brother and murdered him"
God shows up to ask a leading question	3:9 "And God called out to the human, and said "Where are you (איכה)?" 3:12 "And God said to the woman, 'What have you done?' (מה עשית)"	4:9 "And God said to Cain, "where is your (אי) brother Abel?" 4:10 "And God said, "What have you done?" (מה עשית)"
Human dodges the question	3:12 "The human said 'The woman who you set with me, she gave to me and I ate.'"	4:9 "I don't know! Am I my brother's keeper?"
The perpetrator is cursed	3:14 "God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, <b>you are cursed</b> from every beast and from every creature of the field'"	4:11 "And now <b>you are cursed</b> from the ground..."
Inverted Desire	3:16 "Your desire will be toward your husband, and he will rule over you."	4:7 "Sin...its desire is toward you, and you will rule it."
Working the ground will now be more difficult	3:17b "in pain you will eat from the <b>ground</b> " 3:23 "And God sent him from the garden of Eden to <b>work the ground</b> "	4:12 "For you will <b>work the ground</b> , and it will no longer give its strength to you."
The human is banished from the divine presence	3:24 "And [God] banished the human and he camped east of the garden of Eden..."	4:14 "Behold, you have banished me from the face of the ground and from your presence." ... [4:16] "And Cain settled in the land of Nod, <b>east of Eden.</b> "

Notice that in each parallel element, the reader is invited to make comparisons and contrasts between the two stories that offer deeper insight into Cain's character.

In both stories, the "tester" is presented as an animal: a snake in Genesis 3, and in Genesis 4 "sin" is animated as a "croucher," an animal-like reality that wants to take the lives of others for their own.

#### Summary of "good" in Genesis 1-4



It's as if we've watched two characters named Human and Life set the template, and their failure is to redefine "good" and "not good" in their own eyes. And it's as if now, in the next generation, we see a more concrete realization and replay of what their parents did.

This is an example meditation literature in Genesis 1-4. But these connections continue throughout the Bible. Look at Genesis 12:10-20

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

<sup>11</sup> It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; <sup>12</sup> and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup> Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you."

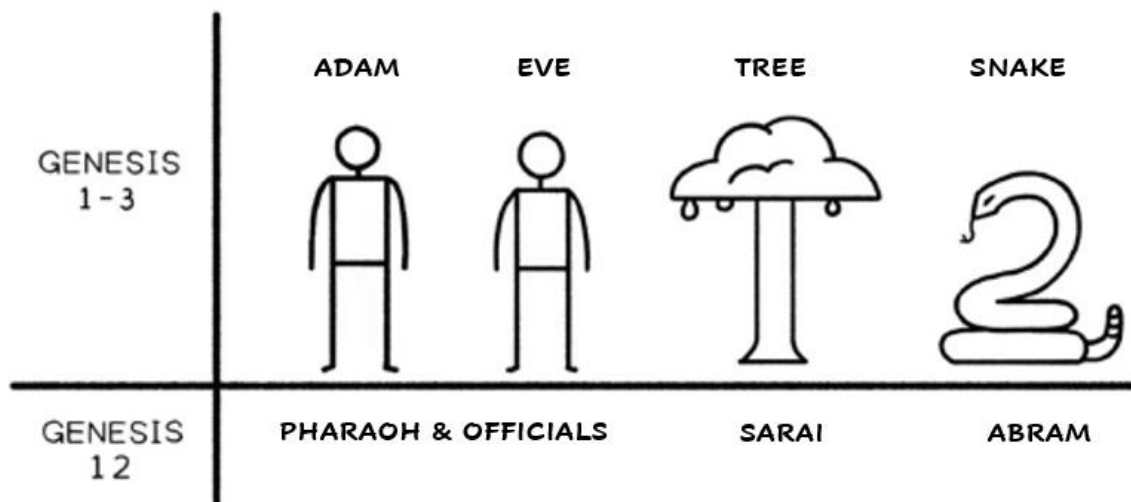
<sup>14</sup> It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup> Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. <sup>16</sup> Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

<sup>17</sup> But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. <sup>18</sup> Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? <sup>19</sup> Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go."

<sup>20</sup> Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.



This time, we do not see the word “**good**” but we see a synonym: “**beautiful**.” And this time, Sarai is the one who looks *good* and *desirable*. She is in the place of the **tree** in Genesis 3. Abram is the one who comes up with this plot of deception. He is the **deceiver**, the **snake**. And Pharaoh is in the place of **Adam and Eve** because he “**saw**” and “**took**” what he saw was “**good**.”



This is the theme of Genesis 3 being played out and is being repeated again and again.

### Genesis 16:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Now Sarai, Abram’s wife had borne him no *children*, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. <sup>2</sup> So Sarai said to Abram, “Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her.” And **Abram listened to the voice of Sarai**. <sup>3</sup> After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram’s wife Sarai **took** Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and **gave** her to her husband Abram as his wife. <sup>4</sup> He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. <sup>5</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was **despised in her sight**. May the Lord judge between you and me.” <sup>6</sup> But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is **good** in your sight.” So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.

Again, we have more Genesis 3 imagery throughout this passage. Sarai sees that Hagar may be able to provide what is **good** to her. Hagar becomes the **tree** here. Sarai then convinces Abram to go along with her plan to *define what is good for themselves*. Sarai becomes the **deceiving snake** and **Eve** in this story. Just like Eve listened to the snake, and Adam to Eve, Abram listens to Sarai. Sarai **takes** Hagar and **gives** her to Abram. Abram becomes **Adam** here.

**What about outside of Genesis? Let’s look at one more story.**

## 2 Samuel 11:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out *to battle*, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.

The story is already being set up to let you know something is wrong.

<sup>2</sup> Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof **he saw** a woman bathing; and the **woman was very beautiful in appearance**. <sup>3</sup> So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" <sup>4</sup> David sent messengers and **took her**, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.

Bathsheba is now in the role of the tree. She is what He **saw** was **good** and beautiful to him. David is now in the role of Adam and Eve who **took**. Then throughout the rest of the story, we see his playing the role of the snake as he **deceives** Uriah, eventually leading to **death** (Genesis 3) and **murder** (Genesis 4).

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

The Bible is ancient Jewish meditation literature that is artistically designed to interpret itself and encourage a lifetime of re-reading and reflection. **To what end?**

**Over time, as you meditate, the scripture works on you. It transforms you by giving you the wisdom to be God's rulers and representatives in this world.** Wisdom to be His image bearers that don't fall into the same sin and deception as Adam & Eve, Cain, Abram, Sarai, David, and countless others. **When you read the Bible as meditation literature, not only does it translate itself and invite you into a lifetime of reading, it also slowly transforms you - it gives you wisdom (Next weeks topic).**

It is meant to keep us engaged in its pages, engaged in its ancient context, engaged with community, engaged with the Messiah, engaged in unity, and engaged with the Spirit. All for the purpose of wisdom. That is meditation literature.

## WHERE ARE YOU PLANTED?

### Jeremiah 17:5-8

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord And whose trust is the Lord. <sup>8</sup> "For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit.

## PRACTICE – Reading Ruth as Meditation Literature