

READING THE BIBLE LIKE JESUS

SESSION TWO: Author or authors?

WHO WROTE THE BIBLE & WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“Don’t let your experiences define Scripture but let Scripture define your experiences.”

“The way you view what a book is for shapes how you approach the book and what you get out of that book.”

“The Bible isn’t a cruise ship experience where we get to take all of your stuff with us. We must leave our luggage at the door, our own culture behind, and allow the authors of that day and time to immerse us in the portrait of which they saw their God, their world, and their part in that hope.”

WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?

2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God....
(NASB)

...breathed out by God (ESV)

...God breathed” (NIV)

2 Peter 1:20-21

²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (NASB)

...Carried along (CSB)

In both of these texts, the apostles reflect on how the Scriptures are not merely the result of human purpose and activity. Rather, the Bible is the product of a human-divine partnership, neither one cancelling out the other.

Remember, ‘*Scripture*’ in these contexts still refers to the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) of their day. This doesn’t mean the New Testament isn’t inspired but it is important to realize the New Testament was still being written.

‘Inspired by God’ or ‘God breathed’ most literally is translated ‘God-Spirited’ – **It is the idea that God’s involvement in the Scriptures is like an invisible breath that brings life or the invisible wind that ‘carries along’ things that otherwise wouldn’t have been moved. This is the picture we get of God’s Spirit being actively but invisibly involved in the creation and formation of the Scriptures.**

‘Moved’ or ‘carried along by the Holy Spirit’ has often been a way of referring to the empowering of the Holy Spirit on people. See Deuteronomy 1:31, 32:11; 1 Kings 18:12; Psalm 28:9; 1 Chronicles 5:26

THE DIVINE & HUMAN PARTNERSHIP

When we look at biblical descriptions of the writing of biblical books, notice how the prophetic figure is not in a trance, but is in full possession of their faculties. This gives us an important window into the production of biblical literature.

Exodus 17:8-14

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this in a book (lit. scroll) as a memorial and recite it to Joshua...."

Other Scriptures:

Luke 1:1-4, Jeremiah 36, Isaiah 8

Jeremiah 36:1-4

¹ In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, ² "Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you...."

On the occasions where we do see prophets in a state of elevated consciousness, they are not writing or producing texts. Rather they are experiencing a vision or interpreting the meaning of a vision in light of their understanding of the Scriptures.

Habakkuk 2:1-3

² Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run.

Other Scriptures:

Daniel 9-11, Ezekiel 1-3

Revelation 1:9-11

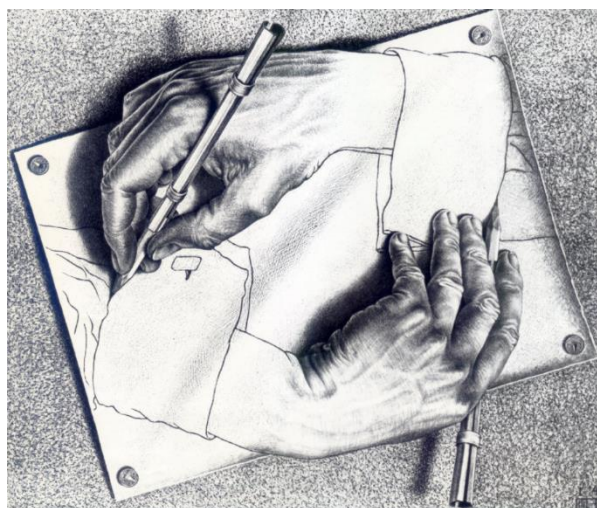
¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet ¹¹saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches...."

THE DRAWING HANDS:

We are asked to imagine what seems to us like a paradox that is well illustrated by the famous image by M.C. Escher, "Drawing Hands" (1948).

The Scriptures claim to be the product of a divine-human partnership. Both are necessary, but neither alone are sufficient causes to explain the origins and nature of the biblical text.

God's involvement does not diminish the human dimension, just the opposite. Within the biblical story, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as one who enhances and energizes human beings to be more fully the divine-image they were created to be. The agency of God's Spirit does not work at the expense of human agency, just the opposite. Humans become more human through the empowering influence of the Spirit. This is true of all the Spirit-empowered figures in the Bible (Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets, the apostles, etc.) (Examples include Exodus 31:1-11, 2 Samuel 23:1-2, Isaiah 61:1, Micah 3:8)



At the same time, human involvement does not diminish the fingerprint of the divine in the writing of the Bible. If anything, God's work is highlighted all the more just not in the way many would assume. For from the beginning, God's desire has been to do His work and will through His people. This has been God's primary way of working in the world: through His image bearers, His Spirit filled people. Therefore, it is in the human words we meet the divine Word. It is in this human work that we get a work written and designed by the Spirit of God. It is in the ordinary that we experience the extraordinary. A partnership.

FORMATION, STRUCTURE, & DESIGN

Once we see this human & divine authorship of Scripture, we begin to see **everything is there on purpose**. Every word, the design, the organization, the gaps in the story, the run-on sentences, the repeated words,... EVERYTHING! IT IS ALL INTENTIONAL.

FORMATION:

When we look at the Bible, one of the ways we look at it the way Jesus did is by recognizing the number of human hands who worked on writing and organizing its pages but also in how the Holy Spirit inspired and preserved the Bible throughout the ages.

The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) went through a process of begin passed down orally, then written on *scrolls*, which were then collected, sorted, and added to over the course of a large amount of time. It wasn't until 300-200 B.C. that this portion of the Bible contained all 39 books that we have in our Old Testaments today.

The New Testament was written over a shorter period (50 years) but the compilation of all its narrative accounts and letters didn't come together in a singular form for another 200 plus years. It wasn't until a couple hundred years after Jesus that the whole Bible (the Old and New Testaments) were even referenced as being connected and one.

It took nearly 1600 years, 40 plus different authors, across several languages, cultures, and times and history to write the books of the Bible. It took even more time to compile all of these books together and even then, it would still be hundreds of years away from being in a book form for the public.

This just further shows how active God Spirit was behind the scenes working through God's people to write, form, and preserve the Scriptures to the point that nearly 3500 years later, we have the Bible in its current form, translated into our language, and as accessible as we have it today.

STRUCTURE

The Hebrew Bible that Jesus and the apostles read consisted of a three-part collection called the TaNaK.

The TaNaK compared with the Christian Old Testament

Torah	Pentateuch
Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy	Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy
Nevi'im — The Prophets	History
<p>Former Prophets</p> <p>Joshua - Judges - Samuel - Kings</p>	<p>Joshua - Judges - Ruth</p> <p>1-2 Samuel - 1-2 Kings</p> <p>1-2 Chronicles</p> <p>Ezra - Nehemiah - Esther</p>
<p>Latter Prophets</p> <p>Isaiah - Jeremiah - Ezekiel</p> <p>Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Jonah - Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi</p>	Poetry
	Job - Psalms - Proverbs - Ecclesiastes - Song of Solomon
Kethuvim — The writings	Prophets
<p>Psalms - Job - Proverbs</p> <p>Ruth - Song of Songs - Ecclesiastes - Lamentations - Esther [The Megillat]</p> <p>Daniel - Ezra-Nehemiah - Chronicles</p>	<p>Isaiah - Jeremiah - Lamentations</p> <p>Ezekiel - Daniel</p> <p>Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Jonah - Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi</p>

Luke 24:44

⁴⁴ Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

When Jesus alludes to the order of the Hebrew Bible, he assumes a three-part design, which agrees with other contemporary Jewish authors who allude to the ordered sections.

The most reasonable case to be made is that there is an intentional compositional ordering and organization here. The order is important and contains something meaningful that you and I should return to. When we do, we notice certain things when read from this perspective, and we notice different things when it’s organized in a different way.

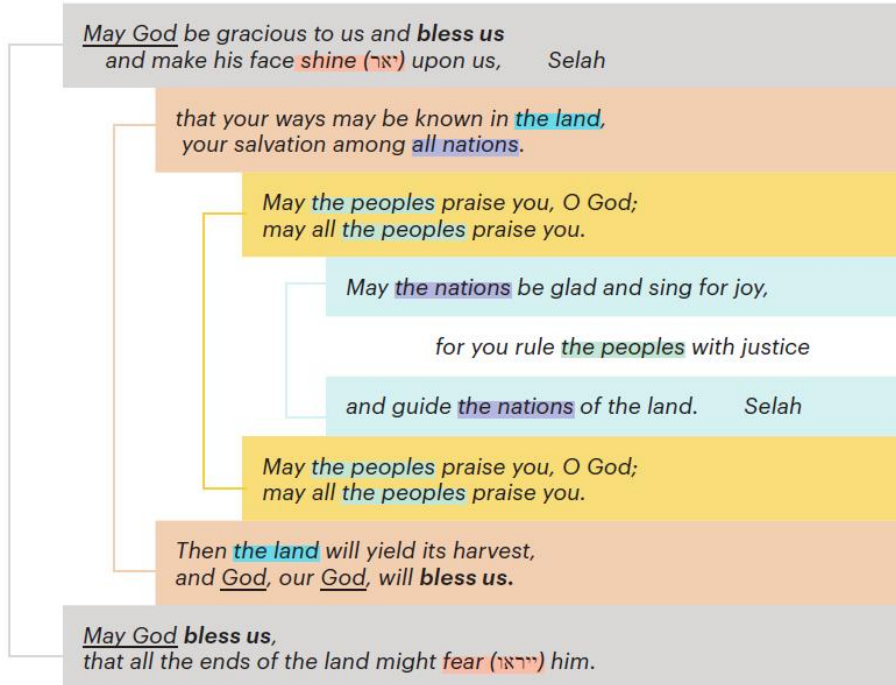
Luke 11:51

⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house *of God*; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’

Abel was murdered by Cain in Genesis 4:8, and Zechariah son of Jehoiadah was murdered by Joab in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22, which corresponds to the TaNaK order, from its beginning to its end.

LITERARY DESIGN & PATTERNS: Symmetrical Design of an Entire Poem

Psalm 67



This pattern invites the reader to compare and contrast lines that are parallel and distant from one another. The poem begins by calling upon God in the language of the blessing of Aaron (from Numbers 6:24-26)

A comparison of symmetrically matching lines yields a deeper layer of meaning in the poem:

The opening and closing lines call for God's blessing upon Israel, but for what purpose. The final line makes clear that God's blessing serves a larger purpose, namely so that through Israel all the nations come to recognize the power and authority of Yahweh.

This same theme is carried deeper by the next pair of lines: Yahweh's "ways" and "salvation" are to be made known in all the land. How, exactly? By the land producing such a rich harvest of divine blessing that they will be forced to acknowledge Israel's God.

The refrain in the center of the poem makes clear that Israel's blessing fits into a wider purpose, that all nations come to honor Yahweh the way that Israel does.

The poem's central lines focus on this theme: It's a request for the nations to experience the same divine presence and blessing that Israel does, by Yahweh bringing justice and his royal rule to bear upon them.

This entire poem, therefore, is a poetic meditation on the role of God's promise to Abraham, that through his seed, God's blessing might be restored to all the nations. The symmetrical parallelism fosters and increases the visibility of this theme.

LITERARY DESIGN & PATTERNS: Hyperlinks in John

Hyperlinks, just like in digital documents, are words or phrases that link you to other stories and themes throughout the Bible, taking you into a deeper meaning of the text when these stories are compared and contrasted.

John 1:1, 14 ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Revelation 19:13 – “*He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.”

Exodus 21:16 – “The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.”

Exodus 34:6 – “Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.”

John is using hyperlinks to connect Jesus to the word of God from the beginning of the Bible, who spoke creation to be, that Jesus is God’s Word and the fullness of God’s glory and character rest on Jesus!

John 1:19-23 ¹⁹ This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹ They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he *said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²² Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

Malachi 4:5 – “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 18:15 – “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.”

Isaiah 40:3 – “A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.”

John is again using hyperlinks to show who John the Baptist was. He wasn’t the Messiah, ‘The Prophet’ that would be like Moses and Elijah. Instead, John was the one pointing to that Messiah, pointing to Jesus! The Bible is FULL of these hyperlinks.

LITERARY DESIGN & PATTERNS: Narrative Plot and Conflict

Narrative stories contain just as much depth and meaning as poems and hyperlinking does. For example, the story of Jonah: What is the real plot conflict?

Ch. 1: Two plot conflicts:

- #1: God and Nineveh: 1:1-2: The word of Yahweh came to Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”
- #2: God and Jonah: 1:3 “But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

Ch. 2: Plot conflict #2 is addressed, as Jonah nears death, prays to God, and is delivered.

Ch. 3: Plot conflict #1 is addressed, as the Ninevites turn away from their evil after Jonah’s message.

If the story ended at Ch. 3 (as it does in many children’s books), it would be a nice and neat story: People should turn away from their evil (like the Ninevites) and rebellion (like Jonah) and obey God.

But Ch. 4 problematizes all this! Here we find out that while Jonah has technically obeyed, he still harbors anger, resentment, and contempt for God. In other words, plot conflict #2 was never really resolved, and the book ends with that conflict up in the air.

The four-chapter book is about how God’s own people can become the biggest obstacle to God’s purposes in the world!

“Stories and plots are the crucial agents that invest events with meaning. The way the facts are described, the point at which the tension is created and the climax occurs, the selection and arrangement of the part, these all indicate the meaning which the events are believed to possess, and thus what an author means to communicate by telling them to the reader.” — N.T. WRIGHT

SO WHAT?

This is just the beginning on how Jesus saw and engaged the Bible.

Once you see the intentionality people put into the Bible and the invisible work of the Spirit, because of their faithfulness to God and God’s Spirit putting the work on their hearts, you will know that everything, EVERYTHING, in the Bible is there on purpose and meant to guide you into deeper understanding and life change in Jesus.

How does seeing the Bible's authorship as a human & divine partnership affect us?

- 1) It allows us to see in greater detail the Bible as the masterful literary work of art that it is. For how we view the Bible affects how we read it, interpret it, and apply it.
- 2) It allows us to consider the greater context of a story, how it fits into that time and culture, but also how it fits into the whole of the Bible, its placement, and its surrounding themes.
- 3) It also affects our daily living, because we too are a human & divine partnership in Jesus.

YOU – A HUMAN & DIVINE PARTNERSHIP

Genesis 1 shows us that since the beginning, God's blessing on us has been to partner with Him as rulers and representatives, a human and divine partnership. But we messed that up.

Jesus, being human and divine, restored that access to this partnership.

John 15:26-27

²⁶ "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, ²⁷ and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

Though the Bible is a result of a human and divine partnership, so are we. Jesus has given us the Spirit to *help* us, *carry* us, and *inspire* us into a greater understanding of the Scriptures and of Jesus. In turn, as the restored images of God in Jesus, we too are to testify about Him and His words.

"Without God we cannot. Without us, He will not." – Saint Augustine

The Bible is this uniquely special place where God speaks to His people, pointing us to the story of Jesus. And it pushes us into an ongoing story of Him ruling with us in life. Engaging the bible in this way not only allows us to find greater meaning in its pages, but it magnifies our role and relationship with God as partners to His testimony, in light of the humanity and divinity of Christ.

PRACTICE

This week, read through Ruth considering the human & divine partnership in the Bible and in us! (More instructions in the practice handout.)