

READING THE BIBLE LIKE JESUS

SESSION THREE: A UNIFIED STORY

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

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. To lessen the contributions of either God’s people or God’s Spirit is to lessen the intentionality and message behind this partnership: That since the beginning, God has desired that His people rule with Him, reflecting and representing His character, and that through Jesus, being fully human and divine, we have been reconciled back to this human and divine partnership.

WHAT DOES ‘UNIFIED’ MEAN?

“UNITY - State of being undivided; having oneness; a condition of harmony.”

– Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary.

Deuteronomy 6:4

“Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God,
the Lord is one!

John 17:21

That they may all be one; just as You,
Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they
also may be in Us, so that the world
may believe that You sent Me.

God’s character and nature is unified. This was core to the Jewish belief, as is to ours. Jesus knew this and even prayed that God’s people would reflect this and that they too would be unified with God’s fullness. All things of God are to reflect and represent that unity. Therefore, the unity of the Bible reflects the nature of God and His desire for this human and divine partnership.

Seeing the Bible as unified impacts how we read the story and message of the Bible.

Consider various movie series being unified in their story (i.e., Harry Potter) or some that are in tension or conflict with one another (i.e., Star Wars sequels)



UNIFIED IN COMPOSITION

The Bible is unified in its composition. Meaning that even its ordering and structure has a purpose and meaning behind it that gives the story within a greater unified message.



For example, how did people figure out the organization of the scrolls?

One example of this unified composition is in its seams. The seams in the Bible are found at the end of one scroll and the beginning of another, tying them and the stories together. You can see this in each scroll in the Torah but also in the whole TaNaK!

THE 'SEAMS' IN THE TORAH

Genesis 50:22-26 (CSB)

²⁴ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will certainly come to your aid and bring you up from this land to the land he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." ... ²⁶ Joseph died at the age of 110. They embalmed him and placed him in a coffin in Egypt.

Exodus 1:1-8 (CSB)

⁶ Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation eventually died. ⁷ But the Israelites were fruitful, increased rapidly, multiplied, and became extremely numerous so that the land was filled with them. ⁸ A new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt.

At the end of the scroll of Genesis you find Joseph and all of Jacob's sons in Egypt. Joseph even makes a vague promise that God will come to their aid and bring them out of Egypt. Opening the scroll of Exodus, we read again about the family of Joseph and his brothers, immediately connecting you to the previous story. Not only that, but the stage is also then set for God to come to their aid because a new king rose up who didn't know Joseph and his God. This is an example of a seam in the Torah. Look at some others and identify the connections.

Exodus 40:34-38

³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Leviticus 1:1

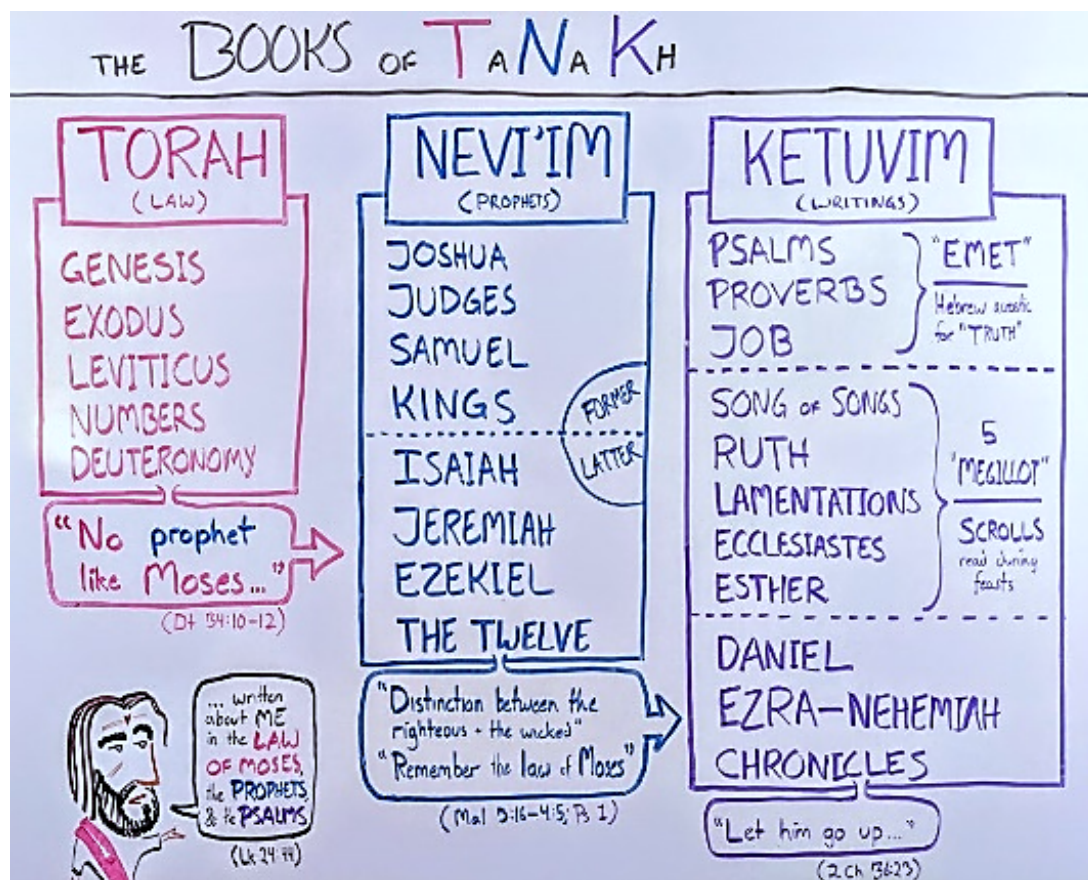
¹ Now the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,

Numbers 36:13

¹³ These are the commandments and the ordinances which the Lord commanded to the sons of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan *opposite* Jericho.

Deuteronomy 1:1-5

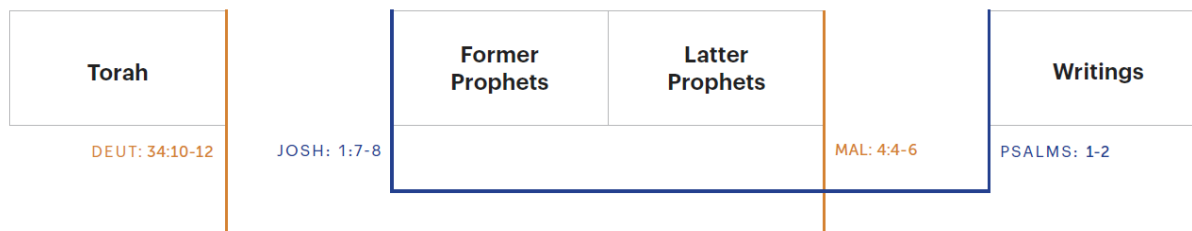
⁵ Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this Law, saying,



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
<i>Former Prophets</i> Joshua - Judges - Samuel - Kings	Joshua - Judges - Ruth 1-2 Samuel - 1-2 Kings 1-2 Chronicles Ezra - Nehemiah - Esther
<i>Latter Prophets</i> Isaiah - Jeremiah - Ezekiel <i>The Twelve</i> Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Jonah - Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi	Poetry
	Job - Psalms - Proverbs - Ecclesiastes - Song of Solomon
Kethuvim – The Writings	Prophets
Psalms - Job - Proverbs Ruth - Song of Songs - Ecclesiastes - Lamentations - Esther Daniel - Ezra-Nehemiah - Chronicles	Isaiah - Jeremiah - Lamentations Ezekiel - Daniel Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Jonah - Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi

THE 'SEAMS' IN THE TANAK



Seam #1: The end of the Torah and the opening of the Prophets:

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

¹⁰ Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, ¹² and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Joshua 1:1-9

⁷ Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Seam #2: The end of the Prophets and the opening of the Kethuvim:

Malachi 4:4-6

⁴ "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. ⁶ He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Psalms 1-2 summary:

The righteous one who will be vindicated in the final judgment, is one who meditates on the Torah day and night to find success (Psalm 1). This righteous one is the future messianic king from the line of David, who is appointed by God to rule the nations and overcome evil once and for all (Psalm 2).

HYPERLINKS IN THE SCRIPTURES

What is a hyperlink in the Bible? A word, phrase, or theme that the author brings up to intentionally make you recall and connect earlier passages, stories, and themes.

Example of hyperlinking in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23, the last passage of the TaNaK:

²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah—the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying, ²³ “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him; go up then!’”

Ezra 1:1-3 ¹ Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying: ² “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 29:10-14 ¹⁰ “For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.’

Daniel 9:1-2 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans— ² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was *revealed as* the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Why all this hyperlinking? The author of Chronicles, as you finish the TaNaK, wants you to recall the circumstances of Israel during Ezra-Nehemiah and the hope provided through prophecy of Jeremiah: That after the *desolation of Jerusalem* God would restore Israel, *in heart*. So, the writer is saying, if this is your desire, it is time to go up and see. Turn the page in the Bible from Chronicles and what is it that we see?

Matthew 1:1-18 ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows....

WHAT ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The New Testament hyperlinks to the Old Testament A LOT! At least 800 times! Why? Because the authors want to upload Old Testament stories, ideas, and themes to your mind so that you can compare and contrast these two passages and walk away with a greater understanding and meaning in what the author is communicating.

New Testament Book	Old Testament Verse Occurrence
The Gospel of Matthew	96
The Gospel of Mark	34
The Gospel of Luke	58
The Gospel of John	40
Acts of the Apostles	57
Romans	74
1 Corinthians	41
2 Corinthians	13
Galatians	16
Ephesians	11
Philippians	3
Colossians	3
1 Thessalonians	2
2 Thessalonians	2
1 Timothy	6
2 Timothy	2
Hebrews	86
James	16
1 Peter	20
2 Peter	10
1 John	6
Revelation	249
Total	855 Times *

Hyperlinking helps us gain a fuller understanding of a word, passage, idea, theme, or even a whole book! Practicing this skill can really open up your understanding of Scripture and its unified message.

Look at how many hyperlinks are tied into **Matthew 1:1** - The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, ^(A)the son of David, ^(B)the son of Abraham:

- A. Matthew 1:1 : 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:3f; 132:11; Is 9:6f; 11:1; Matt 9:27; Luke 1:32, 69; John 7:42; Acts 13:23; Rom 1:3; Rev 22:16
- B. Matthew 1:1 : Matt 1:1-6; Luke 3:32-34; Gen 22:18; Gal 3:16

THE QUILT METAPHOR

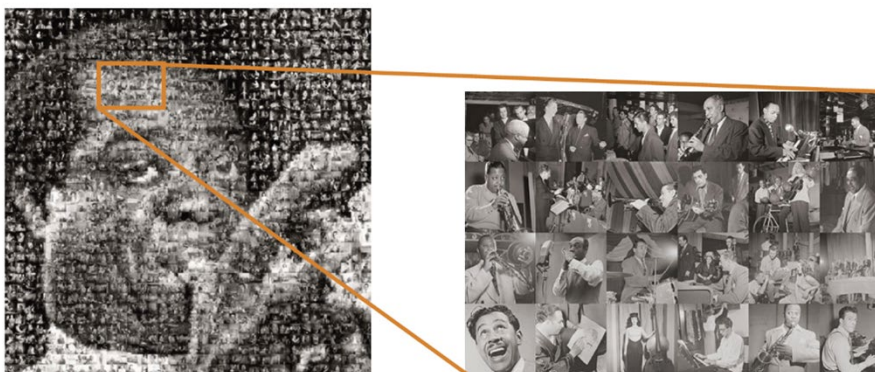
A quilt is made of many pre-existing materials, consisting of individual pieces (like Ruth or Esther) or sub-collections (the laws at Mt. Sinai, Psalms). These earlier materials can be incorporated as they stand or editorially reshaped to fit the new context. But this new overall context of the “final quilt” gives each individual piece a new layer of meaning when viewed within a larger context and frame of reference.



The idea is that every thread of the Bible shows and reveals its own picture, story, and meaning, but every thread is also connected and contributes to the fuller picture, story and message of Scripture. This is what it means to see and engage the Bible as unified.

THE PHOTOMOSAIC METAPHOR

Portrait of Louis Armstrong, created by Robert Silvers



The unique “unity” of the larger photomosaic is achieved precisely by its composite nature. The thematic arrangement of light/dark/great tiny squares becomes a tool in the artists hand to create larger patterns of color that provide an ordered, unified picture of the subject. The Hebrew Bible displays this kind of “mosaic unity” on a large and small scale level. The Bible is a collection of collections that has been written, adapted, and edited into a unified whole, maintaining its smaller *pictures*, while contributing to the whole.

We have probably all learned that the Bible leads to Jesus but typically when we look at the Old Testament we just see a history of a bunch of stories. We don’t see the focus trajectory. When we start seeing the Bible as unified literature and meditation literature, we now have a guide, a path, and we can start seeing the hyperlinks throughout it more and more, pointing toward a Messianic hope and need!

We just have to train our eyes.

UNIFIED IN CONTENT

Remember, Jesus explained that all of Scriptures was about Him! But how?

Luke 24:27

²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

The Biblical Story: Plots within Plots within Plots....

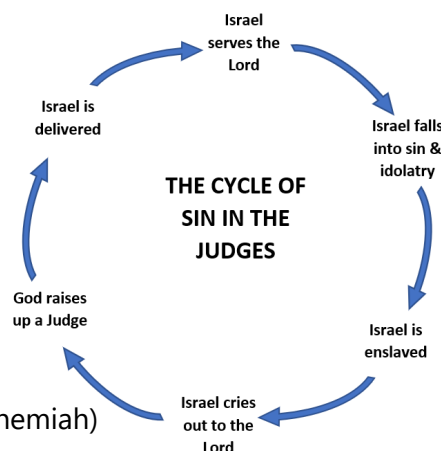
The entire biblical narrative works like a complex interweaving of plot layers, each sub-plot contributing to the higher level, and each higher level determining the ultimate meaning of the sub-plot.

Plot Level 1: Genesis 1-11 - God and the Nations

- 1) **Established** - Humans are installed as divine images to rule on God's behalf
- 2) **Fallen** - Humans foolishly forfeit their responsibility, and are exiled unto the land of death.
- 3) **Restoration** - BUT, God promises to raise up a "seed" who will overcome evil through death...
- 4) **Repeat** - From outside Eden to Babylon (Gen 4-11 – Repeat #1-4)

Plot Level 2: God and Abraham's Family: Genesis 12-the rest of the TaNaK

- The Story of God and Israel Abraham's family and the covenant promise (Gen 12-50)
- The Exodus (Exod 1-18)
- The covenant at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19-Num 10)
- Wilderness wanderings (Num 10-Deut 34)
- Entry to the promise land (Joshua)
- The failure of the judges (Judges)
- The failure of the monarchy (Samuel-Kings)
- Return from exile and unrealized hopes (Ezra-Nehemiah)



The whole Hebrew Bible is about how we need someone to rescue us and break us from the constant repetition of Genesis 1-11 (Established, Fall, Restored, Repeat). The whole of the Bible begins building up a picture of this solution: The Messiah.

We will dive into the Bible's main theme (The Messiah) starting next week.

HOW TO START READING THE BIBLE AS UNIFIED LITERATURE

When we start seeing the Bible as unified literature and meditation literature, we now have a guide and a path. We can start seeing the connections throughout the Bible more and more, pointing us toward a Messianic hope and need! We just have to train our eyes to practice this.

Seams – Read and examine the seams between scrolls. Usually you will be able to find, not only a connection between them, but the greater message of these passages when combined. (Ex: Proverbs 31:10-31 – All of Ruth [3:11])

You can also trace the seams in stories. Think of it like movie scenes: when it feels like the camera has changed to a new scene, ask why and what does this change communicate to me now? (Ex: Look at the ending of Ruth 1 and the beginning of Ruth 2.)

Hyperlinks – Look for words, passages, and themes that seem to be repeated in order to connect you to a previous story. The author wants you to upload that previous story to your mind. Then we can read the current story in light of the context of past themes and ideas presented in previous stories. (Ex: Ruth 1:1 – All of Judges)

Hyperlinks are also called *cross-references*. Many Bibles have these (such as the CSB version on any Bible app). You can look at these cross-references to see what Bible scholars have connected a passage to, and then go read it! (Ex: Pull up the CSB version on your phone and click on any of the cross-references [hyperlinks] in Ruth and see how they connect with the story.)

Patterns / Repetition – Look for repeated patterns, especially out of Genesis 1-11. Every book somehow fits into the *Established, Fallen, Restoration, and Repeat* themes of Genesis 1-11. (Ex: How does the Book of Ruth present this design and pattern?)

You can even just trace a single word and allow the context of that word to reveal the deeper meaning of that word and story. (Ex: Trace the word *kind/kindness* in Ruth)

Start With the End in Mind – “God wrote the end of the Bible first.” What this means is God always had Jesus in mind. Jesus was plan A, not plan B. Therefore, when we read the Bible, we should have in our minds the big picture, that is Jesus. Then, we allow the Bible to point us to Him. Don’t force it though. Let the Bible communicate on its own terms.

Keep Reading – Too many people stop reading a story and come out of it with a life lesson or twisted conclusion that the Biblical authors never intended to give. We must keep reading the Bible, recognizing that the story isn’t over. Plus, we must read it in light of the context of the whole. (Remember the Quilt and Mosaic analogy)

Meditation Literature – The Bible is highly designed to not only tell you a story, but as you read and reread and reflect on these stories, the writing, their structure, and their messages, the Bible will unfold new depths of meaning and wisdom for your entire life.

ONE FINAL WORD

This is only part two of our paradigm shift. As we learn and adopt all seven of these ways of engaging the Bible, the *way* we read and the *what* we get out of it will transform and grow!

BUT, it doesn't stop with just reading the Bible....

As we discussed previously, God desires to partner with you in His work! He desires a human and divine partnership. Not only that, but God desires unity. Remember Jesus's prayer:

John 17:21

²¹ That they may all be one; just as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

God desires us to be unified with Him and His church. Embracing this idea can also transform other aspects of your life.

Finally, in the same way God and His people have created the Bible to be unified down to even the smallest *thread*, God is also working all things in your life for the ultimate good. Even the smallest thread.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

I hope this leaves you with some encouragement, not only in reading the Bible like Jesus, but also in just living for Jesus with greater confidence and hope!

PRACTICE – Reading Ruth as part of a Unified Work

Read Ruth, again! Follow the hyperlinks that connect it to other stories. Ask, what words are repeated in the story and why do you think that it?

(Find more information in the Ruth Practice Handout)