

READING THE BIBLE LIKE JESUS

SESSION SIX: A LONG TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY....

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. This is the native and natural setting and design behind the Bible, for us to read its pages together, in community.

OUT OF CONTEXT

Luke 24:44-45

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.” ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

“If there was one bit of wisdom, one rule of thumb, one single skill I could impart, one useful tip I could leave that would serve you well the rest of your life, what would it be? What is the single most important practical skill I’ve ever learned as a Christian? Here it is: Never read a Bible verse. That’s right, never read a Bible verse. Instead, always read a paragraph at least.” – Greg Koukl

Remember our goal is to read the Bible more like Jesus by learning a paradigm of Scripture framed in the context of the Jewish worldview. This paradigm will serve and partner with the previous ways we engaged the Bible to help us stay within the context the authors had in mind when they wrote these books.

Context defined:

- “The parts of a discourse (discussion or writing) that surround a word or passage and can clarify its meaning” - Merriam Webster Dictionary
- “The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and allowing for greater understanding.” - Oxford English Dictionary

To read within the context of the Bible, we must recognize the gaps we must bridge.

- **The Temporal Gap** – We are at about 2000 years removed from the time the New Testament took place. Even more for the Old Testament stories and events. This is a big gap, and we must recognize how much the world has changed.
- **The Distance Gap** – There is a 7000-mile difference between our hometown and Jesus' hometown. Combine that with 2000 years and there is a lot of difference between our two settings in time and place.
- **The Language Gap** – This is one of the biggest gaps – language. Our meaning of words today and their meaning of words in another language, 7000 miles away, 2000+ years ago can carry different meaning. (i.e., love, truth, heart, etc.)
- **The Cultural Gap** – Finally, all of these combined leads us to the biggest gap of all – culture, meaning the way they saw and engaged their world. Their culture influenced their time, place, and language, as does ours, which creates a massive gap for us to cross to understand more fully the message and words in Scripture.

In order to read the Bible like Jesus, we must return to the Jewishness of Jesus, to our Jewish roots. We must read the Bible as Ancient Jewish literature.

“As much of a hurdle as it seems to travel back in time to the Emmaus Road, the gap between us and the biblical world is actually wider ‘culturally’ than ‘temporarily’.”

- Lois Tverberg - Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus

THE BIBLE AS ANCIENT LITERATURE

“We believe the Bible was written for us, that it’s for everyone of all times and places because it’s God’s Word. But it wasn’t written to us. It wasn’t written in our language; it wasn’t written with our culture in mind or our culture in view.” - Dr John Walton

Everything we have discussed so far fits into and works with this idea of reading the Bible as Ancient literature and helps us read it in this context. For example:

- **Human and Divine** – This partnership in Scripture, the TaNaK structure, and human fingerprints throughout were influenced by the human and divine worldview they lived.
- **Unified** – Through hyperlinks, patterns, repetition, and more these authors wrote in a high degree of styles that fit and made sense in their culture more than ours.
- **Messianic** – Nationwide, everyone was looking for the Jewish Messiah that their God had promised. Of course, this Messiah is also the main thread throughout Scripture.
- **Communal** – Community was ingrained in the workings of culture, especially engaging Scripture. Their culture valued a communal identity over a personal one.

To read the Bible as Ancient literature is to recognize that the Bible was written in another time, place, language, and culture. In order to understand the Bible more, we must honor and understand this context. This is the cross-cultural work we are tasked with.

PSALM 29

Most of the Bible is saturated in a poetic literary design. Books like Psalms may be obvious, but the poetics behind narratives such as Jonah or Genesis may be less obvious. All this means is that, **like poetry, the Bible is written in a language and style that invites you in to communicate to you on a deeper level, to imagine.**

“Poetry conveys thought; there is something the poet wants to communicate. And poetry conveys that thought in a self-conscious manner, through a special structuring of the language that calls attention to the “how” of the message as well as the “what.” In fact, in good poetry, the “how” and the “what” become indistinguishable. As Robert Alter puts it: “Poetry is not just a set of techniques for saying impressively what could be said otherwise. Rather, it is a particular way of imagining the world.”

– Adele Berlin, Introduction to Biblical Poetry.

“Poetry is a kind of human language that says more, and it says it more intensely that does ordinary language.” – Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry

Psalm 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.

Typical Features of Poetry

- Density of expression, terseness = fewer words than normal speech
- Intentionally creative use of language (unique word combinations, or repetition)
- Heavy use of imagery and metaphor: combining images that don’t normally occur to us.
- Poetry invites you into an **imaginative** experience in order to communicate more.

Verse 1-2 - From the beginning in verses one and two, we can see the repetition of particular words. First, throughout the whole poem, “Yahweh/LORD” is mentioned which signifies this is a poem that is mainly about God. Second, “give” is repeated three times, on three separate lines, but then changes to worship on the fourth. This is another intentional design meant to lead you to anticipate a fourth occurrence, only to change the word, thereby creating more emphasis. Instead of saying, “worship God”, the poem is *showing* you worship, which is giving God honor, power, and glory.

Verse 3 – We get our first example of vocabulary use. This verse uses words like “waters” and “thunder” to create imagery of a thunderstorm over the sea. But instead of saying that God is over this, it says “the voice of the LORD/Yahweh.” This is very intentional because the literal meaning of the Hebrew word used for “voice” here is, “sound” or “noise”. When it is a personalized sound, it becomes *voice*. But when it is an impersonal sound, it is *noise*. And when a storm makes its sounds, it is *thunder*. The understanding of this language use and its definitions, we now have a fuller picture here. That God’s voice is that like a powerful thunderstorm. Moreover, His voice is more powerful and is over the chaotic “waters”. This image implies another skill used here: hyperlinking. The image we now have is supposed to draw to our minds the picture found in Genesis 1, the voice of God speaking over the chaotic waters causing them to separate.

Verse 4-5 – This powerful voice continues to be described. After describing a picture of His voice, we now state outright it is majestic and powerful. This time, His voice “breaks the cedars of Lebanon.” If we have the picture so far of a thunderstorm, we might understand that storms can crack trees but again, here is another example of vocabulary use but it is directly tied to cultural context. These cedars were the biggest trees in the Mid-East and were not easily taken down. Moreover, Lebanon, the home of these cedars, was the northernmost part of Israel. This is a fact that becomes more important as we continue reading the full context.

Verse 6 – The connection here, following the imagery that has been given, is that God can cause even a mountain to jump. Like thunder scaring a deer or shaking a house, God’s voice is one of power that makes even mountains jump. This is just more imagery for us to picture. Specifically, Mt. Sirion, which is the northern most mountain sitting on the boarder of Israel. We will discover its importance more as we read.

Verse 7-8 – The voice of the Lord continues to do damage. This time the image of lighting begins this stanza and thunder shakes a specific desert. The “wilderness of Kadesh.” The wilderness of Kadesh was the southernmost point in Israel.

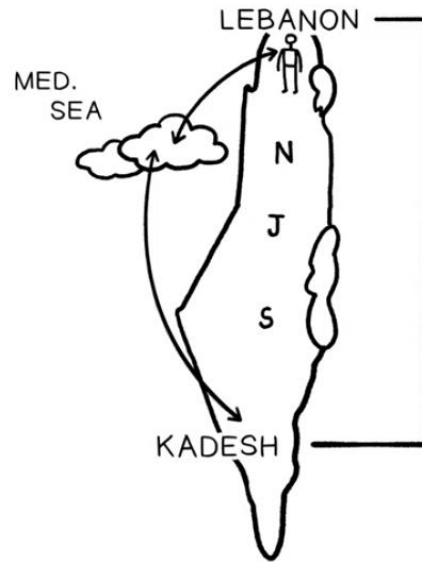
Verse 9-10 – Connecting all of the previous imagery together, these verses continue to show the power, majesty, of holiness of God above everything as “King eternal.”

Verse 11 – The psalm ends with familiar phrasing and words, tying us back to the first verses: *give to God honor, power, and glory*. This is framing, inviting you to compare and contrast these verses, showing you this inversion, bringing the whole psalm together: Yahweh, who is all powerful, full of glory, and above everything, deserving of all worship is the One who is blessing His people with peace and giving them strength. Genesis 1 continues to be the picture here of the Almighty God blessing His created people.

The whole image of Psalm 29 is that this writer, sitting on Mt Sirion is watching this massive thunderstorm come up off the Mediterranean Sea, move east into Lebanon with its trees, and then move south all the way down the nation of Israel breaking, striking, and shaking everything as it goes. All of which becomes a metaphor and a means of worship for the writer who sees the power of God's voice over the chaotic waters in Genesis 1 as the same voice that brings blessing on those who worship Him. God is the one who gives strength to His people.

That is the message, but it is delivered in a much more powerful way through this poem. This is how the whole Bible is designed to communicate.

"The 'what' the authors want to communicate is directly connected to the 'how' of the poetic form of the communication." – Bible Project Classroom, Introduction to the Hebrew Bible



NOTES:

CROSS-CULTURAL WORK

All of these methods of literary design and understanding we just discovered (Repetition, Intentional Vocabulary, Imagery, Hyperlinks, Cultural Context, Framing, Etc.) lead to one skill we must build in order to engage in this cross-cultural work. We must build up our **Cross-Cultural Database! (Encyclopedias)**

We must recognize the Bible is **ANCIENT TEXT**. Text that is intended to communicate intentionally across literary design. The text is the literary embodiment of an author's purposed communication. **Our challenge is to bridge the gap between how the biblical authors saw their world and how we see the world, just by reading the text.** So, how do we do this? **We do this by creating a cross-cultural database in our minds.**



Our "**database**" is the mental storehouse of words, ideas, images, and stories that we are gathering and storing in our memories from our first waking moments. Every text we read will be interpreted and understood in light of our current operating **database**. Authors have their **database** from which they produce texts, and readers have **database** by means of which they process and understand texts.

We must build up our **cross-cultural database**. We do this when we learn more about their context in time, place, language, and culture. Then, as we read the Bible, we adopt this new database of viewing the world and can now better understand what authors intended to communicate.

BUT HOW?

How do we build up and adopt a mental Cross-Cultural Database?

-FOLLOW REPEATED WORDS

The simplest form of communication is words and their meaning. One way to begin crossing this contextual bridge into ancient literature is by learning what biblical words mean. When we discover how they fully defined a word it will impact the meaning and interpretation we draw out of a passage. (Example: The definition of *Heart*)

FOLLOW REPEATED WORDS! Every time you engage a word that is obviously REPEATED, you are meant to **REFLECT** on and do **RESEARCH** to find out its meaning.

Reflect on its repeated usage in scripture with a **CONCORDANCE**. A concordance shows every use of a specific word, allowing you to look at the context and usage in each use. [Blue Letter Bible/Most Bible apps (App/Online) Strong's Exhaustive Concordance (Book)]

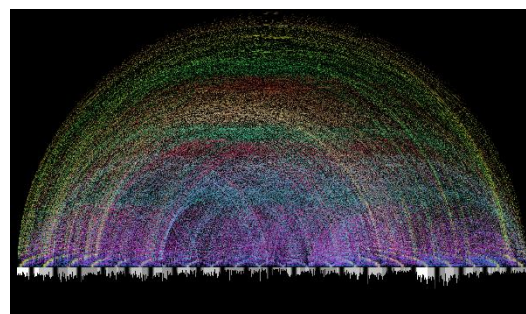
Research by looking up its definition with a **BIBLE DICTIONARY!** This helps define the use of biblical words, connecting them to their ancient context. [Resources examples: Logos Bible Software (App/Online), Holman Bible Dictionary (Book)]

Another way to reflect and research is by **USING MULTIPLE TRANSLATIONS!** The task of translating the Bible is extremely challenging because so many words have more than one meaning. By using multiple translations, you will begin to gain a fuller understanding of what a word might mean. (Look at Hebrews 11:1 in multiple translations for example, such as NASB, NIV, NLT, ESV, NKJV, and see how the definition of faith grows. BibleHub.com does this for you.)

-HYPERLINKS

Once again, the Bible is interconnected throughout all of its pages. **When the Bible begins to reference itself, it is linking the meaning and words of one passage to another to allow the reader to gain a greater understanding.**

Again, a concordance helps with this, but many Bible's and Bible apps will also include these hyperlinks (cross-references) for you!



An Artistic Representation of 63,779
Hyperlinks/Cross-References in Scripture

-COMPARE & CONTRAST

This is called **Parallelism** when the Bible places two or more things in comparison with each other, so that their uniqueness and meaning becomes more visible after the comparison.

We saw how Psalm 29 **framed** itself to encourage the reader to **compare and contrast** the beginning and the end of the psalm. We have also discussed how the **seams** between stories and scrolls also encourage this comparing and contrasting, to see the connections and messages communicated.

-READ, STUDY, LISTEN, & USE MORE TOOLS

Part of growing your Biblical Database is by turning to resources that will teach you more about the context of biblical times, places, language, and culture. (See the Resource Handout for more!)

THE BIBLE AS ANCIENT JEWISH LITERATURE

Recognize, as you grow your cross-cultural database, you are engaging in a lifetime of work. But as we grow in our understanding of the Bible and its context, we are better Reading the Bible like Jesus, but also better loving like Jesus.

“Am I willing to set my agenda aside and hear another person on their terms - not listening with the agenda of what I’m going to say next or what use I could put their words to in my own mind. Just to listen for listening’s sake. This is “Sermon on the Mount” kind of stuff, loving your neighbor as yourself. Imagine reading the Hebrew Bible as an act of loving your ancient neighbor.” – Bible Project Classroom, Session 13

One of the great challenges in reading the Bible like Jesus is that it takes work to...

- 1) ...become aware of our own modern database that we unknowingly impose upon the biblical authors.
- 2) ...discover the database the authors had when they went to communicate meaning through these now ancient texts.

“The Bible was written in another time and culture, and we need to honor that ancient historical context by coming to bridge the gap between us and that culture. At the same time, we must learn to leave our own cultural encyclopedias behind. Words are a way to do this. And learning about our cultural differences help.”

- The Bible Wasn’t Written in English, The Bible Project Podcast, Paradigm Ep 9

PRACTICE – Reading Ruth as Ancient Jewish Literature

INTRO RESOURCES (& More to Come)

GREAT RESOURCES

- A good **Study Bible**
- A **Commentary** like Warren Wiersbe's Be series or the Christ Centered Exposition series.
- A **Bible Dictionary**
- A **Concordance**

SOME GOOD BOOK SUGGESTIONS:

- **Listening to the Language of the Bible, Hearing It Through Jesus' Ears** – by Tverberg & Okkema
- **Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus, How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith** – by Spangler & Tverberg
- **The Forgotten Jesus, How Western Christians Should Follow an Eastern Rabbi** – by Robbie Gallaty
- **The Rock, the Road, and the Rabbi** – by Kathie Lee Gifford

WEBSITES & OTHER MEDIA:

- Bible Project Website (LOTS OF RESOURCES, videos, podcasts, blogs, classes, etc.)
- Logos Bible Software (Access to commentaries, word studies, dictionaries, etc.)
- Bible Hub (Easy Concordance and for multiple translations)
- Blue Letter Bible (Commentaries, Concordance, Dictionaries, and more)
- That the World May Know website (Articles, videos series, all about Jewish context)

APPS:

- **Bible Project** (An Interactive Reading Journey and way more resources)
- **Blue Letter Bible** (Access to interlinear, dictionaries, commentaries, and more)
- **Enduring Word** (Commentary)