

# Overview of the Bible

Bible

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-10-21

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## Introduction

Robert Sumner tells the story of a man who was blinded and horribly disfigured by an explosion.<sup>1</sup> He was a brand new believer and after his recovery he desperately wanted to read the Bible. He knew that blind people can learn to read using a system of dots known as Braille. In your outline you can see the Braille alphabet and another picture of a person reading a book by feeling the raised series of dots. The trouble was that he had lost both hands. He had hoped to learn to read with the stumps of his arms, but the scar tissue was too insensitive to be able to feel the raised bumps on the page. So this was his greatest disappointment - that he could not read the Bible for himself.

One day he learned that a lady in England had learned to read braille with her lips. So he tried to do so, but to his disappointment he found that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed and he couldn't distinguish any of the dots. One day as he brought the brailled pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters, and he could feel them. Like a flash it dawned on him that he could read using his tongue. And at the time that Robert Sumner wrote his book (which was 1969) this man had already "read" through the entire Bible four times.

Can you imagine reading the Bible four times with your tongue? What is it that would give a man such a hunger for the word of God that he would go through that kind of inconvenience? I believe it was because he was a brand new Christian and had not yet learned how to stifle the natural impulse of a Christian heart. 1 Peter 2:2 says "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." That verse implies that spiritually new Christians always hunger for the Word of God. But it also implies that we can lose that newborn hunger for the word of God. And the logical deduction from that verse is that if you don't have that hunger for the Word, you are either not born again or you are spiritually sick. God implants in every new believer an insatiable appetite for the Bible. And Hebrews 5:12 says that as you mature, God will increase your appetite for not only the easy things of Scripture (what he calls the milk of the Word), but also for the difficult things (what he calls the meat of the Word). The meat takes chewing

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Sumner, :asin|B0007FEM8E|The Wonders of the Work of God::

to get through, but it nourishes us and strengthens us.

And over the next year and a half I am going to take you on a fast tour through the entire Bible, giving you only one sermon on each book, but giving it in a way where it captures the essence of that book. You will be seeing which is the first book that you should give to an unbeliever - and no, it is not a book in the New Testament. You will see which books emphasize leadership, marriage, church discipline, philosophy, administration, redemption, politics, and so many other parts of life. It is a complete library for everything that you need. And the sermons will probably range from 30-45 minutes. There will be no guarantees, but that is what I am shooting for.

Today I want to do something much harder - I want to give you an overarching look at the Bible as a whole. And just as I will try to summarize each book with one word, and give a key verse for each book, and show the key themes of that book, the structure of the book, and why that book is critically important, I will try to do the same with the Bible as a whole this morning.

## **I. What one word captures the essence of the Bible?**

Let's try to capture the entire Bible in one word. I have not written that in your outline because I want to test you on it. The word "is" often stands for an = sign in Scripture. So if the Word of God equals something one would expect that the Bible would describe itself with an "is," or that Jesus would describe God's Word with an "is." So see if you can finish this sentence. These are words that Jesus prayed to the Father. "Your Word is \_\_\_\_\_" (truth). And that's exactly what Jesus said in His High Priestly prayer to the Father. He boils the entire Bible down into one word in John 17:17. 17:17 - that should be an easy reference to remember. It says, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." Now, that's not the only time that the Bible says that it is truth. Psalm 119:43 says that it is "the word of truth." Psalm 119:160 says, "The entirety of Your word is truth." There is not a single verse that does not fit this summary description. Ephesians 1:13 calls the Bible "the word of truth." Daniel 10:21 calls the Bible, "the Scriptures of Truth."

This is the starting point of Christianity. You do not start with philosophy. You do not start with the assertions and opinions of man. You do not start with feelings, self-esteem, or overcoming your pain and misery, or even important things like your salvation. The first presupposition for true Christianity is that God's Word is truth.

That is quite different from saying that the Bible is true. If Jesus had simply said, “Your Word is true,” it would imply that the Word was being judged for its truthfulness by an outside standard. But by saying, “Your Word is truth,” Jesus was affirming that the Bible is the standard of truth and the measure of all claims by man to something being true. Nothing in man is the standard, whether that be emotions, experience, tradition, science, human authority, or anything else. John Frame summarizes the claims of Biblical epistemology (which is just a ten dollar word for understanding how do we know that we know anything) by saying this:

The only way to find truth is to bow before God’s authoritative Scripture... [And Scripture is just another name for the Bible. He goes on:] The very essence of knowledge is to bring our thoughts into agreement with God’s revealed Word. Thinking God’s thoughts after him is to be the rule not only in narrowly religious matters, but in every sphere of human life... history, science, psychology, sociology, literary criticism... business, sports, family life, worship, politics... God calls us to ‘presuppose’ him in all our thinking. This means that we must regard his revealed truth as more important and more certain than any other, and find in it the norms or criteria that all other knowledge must meet.<sup>2</sup>

This is why Paul insisted in 1 Corinthians 4:6 that the church may “not think beyond what is written.” This is not just an optional presupposition. This is the foundational presupposition for all true Christianity. In Matthew 15:2 Jesus categorically condemned “the tradition of the elders.” Why would He do so? They were the experts of the day. Well, the text says that He condemned them because their truth claims “went beyond the commandment of God” (v. 3) and because it was “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (v. 9). Anything that goes beyond the Bible is opinion (which may or may not be true) and can only have varying degrees of probability or certainty. In contrast, the Bible speaks of the “certainty of the words of truth” (Prov. 22:21) and the certainty of Scriptural history (Luke 1:4).

So John 17:17 captures the essence of the bible in one word - truth. And any Christianity which disparages truth in favor of love, action, change, relationship, unity, experience, etc is a false view of Christianity. The Bible does discuss those things, but all those things must be defined by something even more fundamental - the standard of truth, which is the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.

## **II. What single verse expands on this one word?**

If I were pushed to give one verse that expands on this central word, it would be 2 Timothy 3:16. Everybody knows John 3:16, which gives us the

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<sup>2</sup> John M. Frame, “Cornelius Van Til,” Handbook of Evangelical Theologians, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 163.

heart of the Gospel. But this 3:16 gives us the heart of the Bible. Why don't you turn there with me. I will actually cheat and give you two sentences, rather than one. Those two sentences are contained in 2 Timothy 3:14-17. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Let me give you seven axioms we learn from those three verses. These are absolutely foundational starting points that you will find mentioned throughout the Bible.

First, the Bible affirms that God exists. God doesn't prove He exists. Starting in Genesis 1:1 He just says that He exists and that He is the creator and sustainer of all things. And we come to find out that nothing makes sense if this presupposition is not true.

The second axiom is that this God reveals Himself to man in the Bible. And this is actually what I started with - what the Bible says is the most fundamental axiom of Christianity. I probably should have listed this one first. You might think that Van Til was right when He said that the Triune God was the starting point. But how did Van Til know that God was Triune and had all the other attributes of the true God? He knew it because of a more fundamental axiom that God revealed Himself in the Bible and he had read the Bible. A philosophical way of saying it is that epistemology must precede ontology. On this, Gordon Clark was correct, though I value both presuppositionalists. Anyway, our text says, "all Scripture is given by inspiration." The Bible is God's Word. It is our standard for truth.

Third, this Bible is the foundation for knowledge. Verse 15 says, "and from childhood you have known the Scriptures..." And verse 14 shows what that Scriptural knowledge produced. "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them..." Since God made all things and sustains and governs all things, God's interpretation of all things in the Bible gives us absolute assurance in our knowledge. The Bible is the foundation for certain knowledge. Jesus called the Bible the key to knowledge in Luke 11:52. Without it you can't open the door to knowledge.

Fourth, God draws people to Himself and sovereignly divides humanity into two classes - those who are men and women of God and submit to His Word and those who are His enemies and who reject the Scripture. Verse 7

describes unbelievers who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” On your own you cannot come to the knowledge of the truth no matter how much you study. But verse 17 speaks of the man of God who is thoroughly equipped through the truth of the Bible.

Fifth, verse 15 shows covenant succession of the faith from one generation to another. And from Genesis 1 through to the end of the Bible, the covenant is so important.

Sixth, verse 15 shows that the Bible is sufficient for salvation. Unlike Roman Catholics who insist that one needs to add church tradition to the Bible to have enough to be saved,<sup>3</sup> verse 15 shows the simplicity of the true Gospel, which even a child can understand. It says, “and from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

And seventh, verses 16-17 show that the Bible is sufficient to provide everything we need for faith and life. Verse 16 speaks of its doctrine providing the standards for appropriate thought and action. Its reproof challenges inappropriate thought and behavior of man. It’s correction tells us about the patterns of thought and behavior that need to be put off. It’s instruction in righteousness gives us the blueprints for success in life that need to be put on. And the Bible is not only sufficient for all of this, verse 17 says that it is more than sufficient to make the man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So if you want one two-sentence paragraph that captures the essence of what the Bible provides for us, 2 Timothy 3:14-17 would be it. And if you just want one verse, it is verse 16.

### **III. Every book of the Bible points to Jesus, who in turn points us to God**

Now, I have run across Christians who only value the red letters in their red letter Bibles because those are the words of Jesus. But in this series we will be seeing that the whole Bible was given by God the Son and points us to Jesus, who in turn points us to the Father. The Person and Work of Christ are

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3 For example, Roman apologist, Karl Keating, wrote, “Fundamentalists say the Bible is the sole rule of faith. Everything one needs to believe to be saved is in the Bible, and nothing needs to be added to the Bible ... Catholics, on the other hand, say the Bible is not the sole rule of faith and that nothing in the Bible suggests it was meant to be.... The true rule of faith is Scripture plus...” Austin P. Flannery, ed., Documents of Vatican II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 134.

seen everywhere in the Bible. And if we miss Jesus on the black-letter-pages of the Bible, we will have missed the main message of the Bible. Even those passages that don't have Jesus as the subject, certainly have Jesus as the author of the book instructing us in how to live. He is the Word of God who communicates the Father's mind by the power of the Spirit.

Jesus told the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." That's John 5:39. The Scriptures testify of Jesus. And so it is natural that Luke 24:27 says of Jesus, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." There is something in every book of the Bible that points to Jesus. And we are going to be seeing how that is the case in this sermon series.

## **IV. Preliminary descriptions of the Bible**

### ***A. It is God's very words communicated by inspiration through uniquely prepared prophets***

Let me give you a few other details about this marvelous book, called the Bible. Even though the Bible is a library of 66 books, those 66 books are so united by its one divine author that it is described as one book over and over again. That's why I am preaching this introductory sermon on the whole Bible - the Book of books. Though God used over 40 prophets to record the message of its pages, and though they wrote the various parts of the bible over a period of about 1500 years, 2 Peter 1:21 tells us that these prophets didn't originate the Scriptures. They were moved by the Holy Spirit (the divine author) to communicate God's mind to the church.

And you can think of the Bible in a similar way to the incarnation of Jesus. God the Son came to earth and took to himself a human nature without ever ceasing to be fully divine. Scripture says that Jesus was fully God and fully Man, but previous to the incarnation He had always existed as God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. So Jesus had all the attributes of divinity even while on earth, but He also had attributes of humanity such as hungering, thirsting, growing tired and sleeping, etc.

Well, in a similar way, the Bible is God's Word (so the Word existed before the prophets who communicated the words of the Bible were even born). In our Revelation series we saw that illustrated so well in Ezekiel with the image of the little scroll. The individual book that Ezekiel was going to write was handed down to him from heaven on a little scroll written on both sides.

It existed in God's mind before Ezekiel wrote it. Ezekiel ate it infallibly by divine inspiration and then he communicated it infallibly by divine inspiration. The same image was given of the small book eaten by John in Revelation. So the Bible existed before it was written, and that is why it spoken of as being eternal.

And God's eternal Word was incarnated (so to speak) through the language, vocabulary, experiences, emotions, and different personalities of the prophets. 2 Peter 1:19-21 says that no prophecy of Scripture ever originated in man's will. Moses didn't wake up one day and think, "I think it would be fun to write a book." Instead, God moved him infallibly to write the exact words that God wanted written. But God didn't dictate those words by bypassing man's mind and vocabulary. In order to connect with His people in a very personal way, God communicated every word through the vocabulary of human prophets with all of their feelings, so that we could relate to the Scriptures. It was divine in its origin, but it was communicated through human vocabulary and personalities. And we are going to be noticing quite different human features to the different books.

Think of the human element this way. If you had a musical piece that you wanted to play (think of the musical notes as God's divine word), you could play it using a trumpet, a flute, an oboe, a violin, or some other instrument. Each instrument will give a different feel, and sound, and flavor to the notes, even though exactly the same notes are being played. And in the same way, God prepared special human instruments known as prophets. For example, Jeremiah and the apostle Paul were both said to have been set aside in the womb to be prophets and had been crafted from the time of their conception to be the exact kind of instrument that God would later use to communicate His Words.

So in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul said, "when you received the word of God which you heard from us [So there is the human; but he goes on to say:], you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." Every word of the Bible is God's Word, but it is communicated using the vocabulary, experiences, emotions, etc. that would give the exact feel for that particular book of the Bible that God wanted to give. And this explains why each of you, having different personalities, may connect with different books, even though you appreciate each one. Every book of the Bible has a different human element to it, even though the notes are precisely the notes and only the notes that God played through them.



## ***B. Though written by many different prophets, it unveils a unified message***

And though it was written by 40 some prophets over 1500 or so years, it speaks of the same covenant and showcases Jesus in a remarkably unified way. In Luke 24 Jesus explained to His disciples His nature, office, and work through all the books of the bible. We describe the theme of redemption that is found throughout the Bible as the scarlet cord of redemption (scarlet representing Christ's blood of atonement). You see that weaving all the way through the Bible. But that is true of other doctrines as well. On every doctrine you will see that every book of the Bible gives us a united story. It's a remarkable story. And I am looking forward to showing you book by book God's progressive revelation.

## ***C. And this story was progressively unveiled***

And that is the next point: this is a book of divine revelation that was progressively unveiled from Genesis to Revelation. And reading the Bible in the order in which it was given can help us to have a much better grasp of the Bible's message. I actually recommend that you read F. LaGard Smith's *The Narrated Bible in Chronological Order*<sup>4</sup> at least one time in your life. It's unfortunately based on the NIV, but it is a very remarkable chronological journey through the Bible with the Psalms placed into the histories that they are connected with. I do not recommend the New King James Chronological Bible. They did a lousy job.

But reading through the whole Bible at least occasionally is a particularly helpful exercise as it gives you the larger context of the covenant. Take your favorite novel and imagine only reading only two or three chapters, and reading those two or three chapters over and over because they are your favorite chapters. I don't know anyone who does that with a novel, but just imagine that you did do that. That is akin to reading only the New Testament or only a few of our favorite books. You don't get the full story, and you certainly are not captured by the drama of that developing story.

## **V. Four central themes we will discover in the books of the Bible**

Well, speaking of drama, there are four central themes that you will find in the various books of the Bible. Those four central themes are creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Some people speak of that as the four great acts of God's great drama: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

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4 F. LaGard Smith, [The Narrated Bible in Chronological Order](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999)

The creation story is not just recorded in Genesis 1-2. You will find the creation account to be a central theme that is repeated over and over in the bible. For example, Romans 1:25 says that since God is the Creator of all things, it is blasphemy to worship the creation rather than the Creator. That is turning reality upside down. It's a logical implication of Genesis 1-2. And other Scriptures affirm that creation necessarily points to God as being our Lord, our Lawgiver, our Providential controller, and as being the source of meaning for life, etc. The creation story of Genesis is presupposed and referred to throughout the Bible. Paul bases the order of marriage upon it.

Of course, the fall of man into sin messed up everything. Not only did sin instantly mess up man's relationship to God, it messed up man's relationship to man, to his environment, to authority, to purpose, and fifteen different areas that I will have in my notes.<sup>5</sup> And as we go through the books of the Bible we will see how God deals with the fallen nature of man. Even this shows us much about our beautiful God - a God who is not only love and patience, but wrath and judgment. And His love and patience shines the brighter because of the Fall. This theme of the fall is central to the story line.

But Genesis 3:15 begins a long story of God's redemption. God saved not just Adam and Eve out of their sins, but He will save a vast multitude which no man can number and will save the very creation. So redemption is a constant theme that we will see in the Bible - and it is redemption of every kind of thing. If you were to just read a few of the favorite verses thrown around by Evangelicals, you might get the impression that redemption only relates to the salvation of your soul. But God redeems marriages. God redeems work. The very universe enters into His redemption according to Romans 8.

The last theme that is prophesied throughout the Bible is the success of redemption in restoring people and the entire cosmos to God. Satan will not be the ultimate winner; God will. Restoration of all things will go far as the curse is found.

So if you want to understand the incredibly beautiful drama of the Bible, you need to keep these four themes in mind: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. You will get a lot more out of the Bible when you read it through

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5 For example, Adam's sin affected mankind: Spiritually (Gen. 2:17; 3:1ff) Physically (Gen. 3:7,16-19) Mentally (Gen. 3:1-13) Emotionally (Gen. 3:8) Volitionally/the will (Gen. 3:6-19) Religiously (Gen. 3:7; 4:3) Psychologically (Gen. 2:25 with 3:7-19) Motivationally (Gen. 3:6,7,8,12,16; 4:1-25) Teleologically (Gen. 3:7; 4:7-8,17,19-24) Deontologically (Gen. 4:23-24) Socially (Gen. 3:12; 4:4-7) Individually (Gen. 4:9,12) Environmentally (Gen. 3:17-19) Generationally (Gen. 5:3; Rom. 5:12) Cosmically (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:19-23)

the lens of those four themes.

## **VI. Seven metaphors of the Bible that help us to appreciate its many dimensions**

### **A. A sword (*Heb. 4:12*)**

Of course, there are many other dimensions to the Bible because it speaks to all of life. And I have listed a few metaphors that will give you a feel for what the Bible does.

### **B. A hammer (*Jer. 23:29*)**

Jeremiah 23:29 likens the Bible to a hammer. It says, “Is not My word... like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” Unlike the false prophets in that chapter who gave people what they wanted to hear, God’s true Word was designed to destroy anything that exalts itself against the true knowledge of Him. It breaks rocks and tears down strongholds and fortresses. God’s Word sometimes has to act in our lives like a hammer because of rebellion - especially if you are stubborn. You are not going to get the comfort of the Scripture if you are stubborn. You will find passages of the Bible, and sometimes entire books that bring discomfort. Presuppositions that you had thought were unassailable are suddenly left in splinters as you read one verse. How did that happen? Well, God used Scripture as a tool of demolition.

This has happened to me many times. Usually I have been open to God’s correction, but to my shame I refused to study Postmillennialism in my twenties because with my presuppositions it seemed ludicrous. But one day I read a footnote in Bahnsen’s *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, that just gave a list of Scripture references showing that all nations would one day submit to God’s law. And in less than the three minutes it took me to look up those verses, my entire eschatology was completely changed. He hadn’t even mentioned the term eschatology, but the verses in that footnote were a hammer blow to one of my presuppositions that had kept me from rightly interpreting the Bible. It’s amazing how God works. And God does it because destruction is often needed before He rebuilds. Don’t neglect the uncomfortable portions of the Bible. If you openly embrace them, the change will be much less painful.

### **C. A seed (*Matt. 13:18-23; 1 Pet 1:23*)**

The Bible is also likened to seed that grows. Matthew 13:18-23 interprets the

parable of the sower, and says that the Bible is like seed. Seeds won't grow if they are planted on rock. Seed doesn't last if it is planted among thorns. 1 Peter 1:23 says, "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." So the seed of the Word springs to life when it is planted in hearts. That's one of the functions of the Bible. The Spirit uses it to regenerate our hearts and create new life and to continue to bring new things to life.

#### ***D. A mirror (James 1:23-25)***

James 1 says that the Bible is like a mirror that shows us what we look like. And frequently it ain't pretty. We can ignore what the mirror is saying, which James says happens to a lot of people. You probably all know people who go through an entire day apparently never having looked in a mirror at their tousled hair. They look like Einstein. But those who look in the mirror of the Bible and seek by God's grace to let the Word do its work, grow like crazy. Why do we look in mirrors? To make sure there are no boogers hanging out of our nose, and that our hair is combed, and that we are presentable. The Scripture helps with that. We might sometimes feel embarrassed that the Bible reveals a spiritual booger hanging out, but we should be thankful and remove it. Don't ignore the mirror when it is pointing out defects in you. It's a gift; it's a blessing.

#### ***E. A fire (Jer. 20:9; 23:29)***

Jeremiah twice likens the Bible to a fire. God asks, "Is not My word like a fire?" Matthew Henry comments, "Fire has different effects, according as the matter is on which it works; it hardens clay, but softens wax; it consumes the dross, but purifies the gold. So the word of God is to some a savour of life unto life, to others of death unto death."<sup>6</sup>

#### ***F. A lamp (Ps. 119:105)***

It is a lamp to our feet according to Psalm 119, showing where we should walk and keeping us from stumbling.

#### ***G. Food (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:2)***

And it is food according to a number of Scriptures. Just as you wouldn't eat food only once a week, you shouldn't read the Bible only once a week. Feed upon it and let it spiritually nourish you.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1275.

## **VII. Essential attitudes if you are to benefit from reading the Bible**

And those metaphors highlight the next point, that we must have certain attitudes if we are to benefit from Bible study. If we are not being transformed by the Bible, then the Bible is hardening us. There is no in between. And by the way, you can read the Bible without faith and without the enlivening influence of the Holy Spirit. I have witnessed many unbelievers who can quote Scripture to you. I actually studied modern Hebrew under a professor who knew both the Old and the New Testaments inside out and who was fascinated with the Bible as he studied it for literature, history, sociology, ancient law, or other issues. But he was an unbeliever.

Jack Kuhatschek's professor said that he met a man who had memorized the entire Old Testament in Hebrew.<sup>7</sup> Initially he was skeptical and asked for a demonstration. The man said, "Where shall I begin?" The professor said, "Why don't you start with Psalm 1." The man began reciting Psalm after Psalm from the Hebrew with word-perfect-accuracy. So the professor suggested harder books. For two hours the man continued to recite the most difficult and obscure portions of the Old Testament that the professor could find, and did so word-perfect. The stunned professor stared at him for a while after this amazing performance, and then started to ask some questions as to what motivated him to do this study. To his astonishment, the man said that he was an atheist. He had memorized far more than most Christians, yet did not know the God of the Bible and had not been transformed by the message of the Bible.

If we only read the Bible with intellectual fascination, we will have missed out on the fact that God intends to change His people with this book. And every portion of this book has the power to change us for the better. I don't want you going through the Bible in the next year-and-a-half simply getting an academic appreciation for the beauty of Bible. It is beautiful, and I admire its beauty too. But I want the Bible to grab you and conform you more and more into the image of Jesus.

And one way that can happen is as you prayerfully ask God to (first) open your eyes - your spiritual eyes or discernment. David prayed, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (Ps. 119:18). Second, ask God for a humble heart that is receptive to the Word, soft to conviction, quick to change, and passionate for God. The Pharisees had memorized the

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<sup>7</sup> Jack Kuhatschek, *Taking The Guesswork Out of Applying The Bible*, IVP, 1991, p. 16.

Scriptures too, but Jesus told them,

For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. (Matt. 13:15)

Instead, if the prayer of Paul for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:17-21 is answered for you, you will constantly grow in the Word and will increase in joy and love and all the fruits of the Spirit. Paul prayed, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead...

When you pray that prayer with sincerity, the Lord will open the Scriptures to you and change you and fill you and make you equipped.

## **VIII. Ways the Bible has been structured**

### ***A. Christ's two ways of structuring the Old Testament (Luke 24:44)***

**Law and prophets (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16,29,31; 24:27; see John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 26:22; 28:23; Rom. 3:21)**

It's helpful to know the basic structure of the Bible when you are reading it. With only one exception, Jesus referred to the whole Old Testament as the law of Moses and the prophets or more frequently He would shorten it to the law and the prophets. This two-fold division of the Old Testament was a very common way of structuring the Old Testament among Jews. And it flowed from the fact that the first five books of the Bible are the foundation and everything else is building on on the foundation. Or another way to say it is that the first five books of the Bible contain a complete listing of all the laws of God and a complete theology of the Gospel, while the rest of the books have prophets who either help God's people to apply the Pentateuch or who bring covenant lawsuits against those who have rebelled against the Word.<sup>8</sup> This emphasizes the fact that the first five books of the Bible has in

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8 We saw in our Revelation series that even the New Testament does not add one iota to the law of God. The new commandment that Jesus gave was not νέος new, as in never having existed before, but rather was καινός new, or new in expression. Jesus had said, "A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another as I have loved you." The newness was "as I have loved you." For the first time in human history we have a perfect keeper of the old commandments to imitate and model ourselves after

at least seed form everything that is later amplified in the rest of the Bible - including the New Testament. And I wish I could amplify on that, but for time's sake I have cut that out of my sermon.

### **Law, prophets, and Psalms (Luke 24:44)**

But there is one passage where Jesus appears to give a three-fold structure. In Luke 24:44 Jesus says, "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." This division is not in contradiction to the previous one, but further subdivides the rest of the Old Testament into Prophetic writings that are non-poetic and the Psalms of those prophets which take the teaching and use it for worship and for singing. And so Luke 24:44 shows that it legitimate to speak of different genres. A couple verses earlier He had given the content division into law and prophets, but in this verse He gives three types of genre.

#### ***B. The Bible as literature with various genres***

In your outline I have listed for you a few of the basic genres of Biblical literature. They aren't necessarily divisions by which the Bible is structured, but rather styles of writing. Genesis is largely written in a historical genre. Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy have a mix of history, teaching, and law. The Psalms are poetry and Ecclesiastes and Job are often classified as wisdom literature. Many portions of the major and minor prophets follow a prophetic genre known as covenant lawsuit, though there is a bit of history and even an occasional poem, such as the poem in Habakkuk. The Gospels and Acts are historical genre again, with Romans - Jude being epistolary literature, and Revelation picking up the Old Testament pattern of prophetic covenant lawsuit genre once again.

The only reason it is important to understand the different genres is that it makes a huge difference in how interpret those books. Modern evangelical compromises try to say that Genesis 1-2 are poetry, not history. But those two chapters have all the signs of historical narrative, as Sarfati's commentary clearly shows. Each genre needs to be approached as unique literature or we will mess up our interpretations. If you were to interpret modern poetry in exactly the same way as legal court documents, you would

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- Jesus. So if you imitate Jesus, you are going to keep the Old Testament law. It's not the law that is new, but the tangible expression of it in a perfect human person that is new. And this interpretation is conformed by the apostles John who quotes Christ's new commandments, but then says in 1 John 2:7, that there is nothing new in the content of this new commandment. He says, "I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning." So this division that Jesus gives emphasizes a critical point. The first five books of the Bible are the law and the gospel completely written out. The rest of the Bible explains and applies that law. That is true even of the New Testament.

miss many dimensions of the poetry and might miss aspects of the legal court document. Everyone knows that you would approach those two types of literature differently. Well, in the same way, we need to be sensitive to the fact that this book, which is a library of books, also has an incredibly wide variety of genres. They actually go beyond the seven I have listed. In Fee and Stuart's book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (which by the way, I highly recommend), they say,

One of the most important aspects of the human side of the Bible is that to communicate His Word to all human conditions, God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronologies, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses.

To interpret properly the "then and there" of the biblical texts, one must not only know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, but one needs to learn the special rules that apply to each one of these literary forms (genres)...<sup>9</sup>

And I won't say more about that.

## **Law**

## **History**

## **Narrative**

## **Poetry**

## **Wisdom literature**

## **Covenant lawsuit/Prophecy**

## **Epistles**

### ***C. Thematic Structure***

But in your outline I have given a broad brush way that you could see Jesus as the central theme of the Bible. The Old Testament portrays the anticipation of Jesus, the Gospels are the manifestation of Jesus on earth, Acts contains the proclamation of Jesus in history (they are preaching That He has come), the epistles are the explanation of Jesus in doctrinal form, and revelation is the conquest by Jesus of all that was promised.

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, [How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth](#)1043beb5-6cda-4cca-93eb-c11f7be2e5b3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 20.



**Old Testament = anticipation of Jesus**

**Gospels = manifestation of Jesus**

**Acts = proclamation of Jesus**

**Epistles = Explanation of Jesus**

**Revelation = Conquest by Jesus**

And while I find that grouping to be very helpful as far as the subject matter of the parts of the Bible, it is also important to realize that Jesus was active in the Old Testament long before He was incarnate. The Preincarnate Jesus was still God the Son, and He was constantly acting in the Old Testament and constantly appearing to His people by way of temporary theophanies. So 1 Corinthians 10:9 does not just say that the wilderness Jews tempted God in the wilderness. They did indeed do that, but the Majority Text says, “nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents.” Though His human nature was not present yet, His divine Person was. And there are many other passages that speak of the pre-incarnate Christ at work in the Old Testament.

Why is this important? Well, it means that the Pentateuch is not irrelevant to Christ’s kingdom. He gave it, and He gave it for a purpose. The Pentateuch contains the laws of King Jesus. The Prophets contain the covenant lawsuits of King Jesus. The Psalms contain the prayers of Jesus. And so forth. So don’t just limit the Old Testament to the anticipation of Jesus as the outline says. It includes that, but there is so much more. Jesus was in existence as God the Son long before He took a human nature to Himself in the incarnation. He was always at work. In fact, John 1 says that nothing that exists came into existence apart from the Word, which He identifies as God the Son.

***D. The double helix of covenant (relationship) and kingdom (responsibility)***

And though there are other ways people have sought to see structure in the Bible, I will just mention one more - the double helix of covenant and kingdom intertwining at every point of the Bible like the two strands of a DNA molecule. And I have given a picture of that double helix in your outline. Covenant and kingdom. Those are the two strands.

There is no time in history or eternity when the covenant was not at play. There was the eternal covenant of redemption before the world began. There was the covenant of life in Genesis 1-2. And when that covenant was broken, God instituted the covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15. And the elements of the covenant of grace keep being revealed more and more fully to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and in Jesus Christ's ministry on earth.

Where covenant looks to God's relationship with man, the kingdom strand of the double helix looks to man's responsibility to represent God's kingdom. You cannot separate covenant and kingdom or even separate the numerous DNA connecting ladder steps that we see spiraling forward from Genesis to Revelation. Grace and Law are not opposites, but the two interlocking strands on the DNA of God's purposes in history.

Covenant has at least three parts to it: our relationship to God, our identity in Jesus, and our obedience to His commands. Many passages in the Old Testament show five points (like Ray Sutton's book shows), and some passages show seven features, but there are at least those three: relationship, identity, and obedience. As we go through each book of the Bible we will be showing the many different facets of the covenant relationship that we have with God and with each other.

Kingdom is our responsibility to represent God to the world in all of its dimensions. And God's kingdom encompasses every atom of this universe. God's kingdom is over sex in the bedroom in the Song of Solomon and over politics in 1 and 2 Samuel. It encompasses things as diverse as administration in the book of Numbers and training your children in the book of Proverbs.

But kingdom and covenant always require each other and interplay with each other in the various books of the Bible. Even the Song of Solomon, the beautiful book on marital relations (or what Michael Pearl calls Holy Sex<sup>10</sup>), shows an interweaving of covenant and kingdom; of relationship and responsibility. Our covenant relationship with God will reflect upon how we represent God in our marriage and in every other area of life. And as Ronald Reagan once said, "Within the covers of one single book, the Bible, are all the answers to all the problems that face us today—if only we would read and believe." Of course, Reagan did not understand the full implications of that statement, but I hope over the next two years to give you easy-to-understand

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Pearl, [Holy Sex: Song of Solomon](#)1043beb5-6cda-4cca-93eb-c11f7be2e5b3 (Pleasantville, TN: No Greater Joy Ministries, 2002).

overviews of every book.

Do you want a book that deals with the comprehensive implications of Christ's redemption? Then go to Exodus. You might have thought that I would say "Go to John." or "Go to Ephesians." And yes, those are marvelous books on redemption. But there is nothing to compare with Exodus.

Do you want a book that highlights the holiness of God as no other book? Then go to Leviticus.

Do you want to understand the causes and cures of backsliding? Then go to Judges.

Do you want to understand fantastic principles of leadership? Go to Nehemiah.

These are not simply books of interest to antiquarians. They are books that God designed to inform our situation and to change us.

And no, they are not all fun. If you want to learn how to weep your heart out in intercession for those who are hurting, study Lamentations. They are the cries of the weeping prophet Jeremiah, who wept over an apostate nation. If you want a realistic look at the emptiness that post-modern man is right now experiencing, study Ecclesiastes. It is so relevant. If you are feeling overwhelmed at your inadequacies, you can express your heart through the Psalms or find step-by-step help from God in 2 Corinthians. If you are feeling sorry for yourself, read Ephesians or Philippians where God raises our vision of our incredible privileges in Christ. Do you have lazy kids? Well Proverbs gives some instruction on that, but so does 1 and 2 Thessalonians. If you are being influenced by cults, then you absolutely need to read 2 Peter and Jude.

Let me end with a quote of an unknown writer who tried to summarize in a nutshell what the Bible is all about. He said,

This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected

life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity.  
Amen.