

SELF-FEEDER

"The Story of Scripture "
September 24, 2023

In his work entitled "The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories," Christopher Booker reveals that there are only a handful of stories in the world. These stories serve as the basic plot for every movie you watch, every book you read, and each TV show you binge watch. In more than 700 pages, Broker's tome speaks of seven different plots — "overcoming the monster," "rags to riches," "the quest," "voyage and return," "comedy," "tragedy," and "rebirth."¹ In his mind, every story can be assigned to one of these seven categories.

From a human perspective, the Bible perhaps follows the rebirth plot. However, we know that Scripture can't ultimately be assigned to any human category. It has a genre of its own. Its plot is God-given. Produced by the Holy Spirit of God, the story of Scripture is unlike any story ever told. Still, it helps us to think about the overarching story of Scripture. What is the point of the Bible?

Many have sought to answer this question by proposing all sorts of ideas. Some would say Scripture is all about God, God's kingdom, or God's dealing with humanity. While all those themes are important, and though they are all at the heart of Scripture, perhaps it best to think of Scripture as being primarily about one person — Jesus Christ. Scripture contains the story of the way in which the Lord enacted a plan to purchase a people for himself through the person and work of his Son.

In order to become healthy self-feeders, we have to be aware of these realities. We must see that Jesus is the point of all Scripture. To err in this regard will cause all types of problems in our Bible reading and Bible study. Jesus must remain at the center of Scripture if we wish to interpret and understand Scripture correctly. Let's consider this reality by examining four ideas — the story of Scripture and its plot, the story of Scripture and a Christian world view, the story of Scripture and the genres of Scripture, the story of Scripture and Jesus.

THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE AND THE PLOT OF SCRIPTURE

Some relegate Jesus to the New Testament alone. They see the Old Testament as being about obscure historical stories, religious customs, and gruesome wars. They fail to see that the entire narrative of Scripture is about God's plan to send Jesus for the salvation of his people. A few concepts will help us see how Jesus is the overarching story of Scripture.

"Before the Foundation of The World"

In Revelation 13, the Lord spoke about the deception that will be present on the Earth in the last days. In doing so, he told of how the Lord will preserve his people from such deception. However, he also spoke of how the rest of the world will follow the course of end-times deception and idolatry. He said, "...and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain" (Revelation 13:8).

¹ Booker, Christopher. *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2004).

The primary meaning of Revelation 13:8 is that the entire world will fall prey to the apostasy that will mark the last days. At the same time, the verse spoke of the nature of such people. It spoke of the way their names were not “written before the foundation of the world in the book of life.” The verse seems to indicate that the Lord has known his people since before time began.

Moses gave witness to these realities. When the Lord considered destroying the nation of Israel because of their unfaithfulness in relationship to idolatrous religion, Moses prayed, “But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written” (Exodus 32:32). The man’s prayer revealed that he knew about the Lord’s eternal book. He knew that the Lord knew all his people before time began. This knowledge underscores the theme of Scripture. The story of the Bible is the story of the Lord securing a people for himself through the person and work of Jesus. It is the drama of the Lord performing a work for all the people whose names are recorded in his pre-Earth book of life.

The Promised One

We find the first mention of Scripture’s theme in the first few pages of the Bible. After Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord told Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Though Satan tried to hijack God’s purposes for humanity, the Lord had a plan to purchase the redemption of his people. The story of Scripture is the story of the Lord accomplishing that plan.

The First Two Chapters and the Last Two Chapters

Have you ever thought of Scripture in this way — the first two and the last two chapters have a startling resemblance? In Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22 we see humanity living without sin, in a perfect place, and in perfect fellowship with the Lord. Man and woman first lived in a perfect paradise, but sin compromised their estate. The story of Scripture is the story of the Lord returning humanity to its original intent. There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. The 1,185 chapters in between the first two and the last two tell about the way the Lord purchased a people for himself through the life and death of his Son. To be solid self-feeders, we must think of Scripture in these terms.

THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE AND A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

In considering the overall story of Scripture, it is helpful to think about the topic of worldviews. Chuck Colson, a former cabinet member of the Richard Nixon administration of the United States presidency, wrote a book that served as a primer on the subject of a Christian worldview. In that book, he proposed that everyone has a worldview and that every worldview seeks to answer four basic questions — 1. Where did I come from? 2. What’s wrong with the world? 3. What’s the solution? 4. What’s our purpose?²

Colson’s four questions provide a good framework for thinking about the world, but they also provide a good framework for thinking about the Word. In essence, all of Scripture is a heaven-sent reply to those questions. The Bible tells of the way Jesus answers each of them. The story of Scripture tells us where we came from, what’s wrong with the world, what the solution is, and what our purpose in life is.

Where Did I Come From?

The Bible reveals that we came from God. We exist for the purpose of knowing God and making him known. Such a purpose is conveyed through some of the first words of Scripture. In

² Colson, Charles and Nancy Pearcey. *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999).

Genesis 1:26, we read, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” Did you notice a reference to Jesus in those words? The first-person plural pronouns “us” and “our” can be seen as a reference to the Trinity. In the beginning, the triune God made man and woman to function in his image. He made them as relational beings who were designed to take dominion of the Earth for his glory.

What’s Wrong with The World?

The Bible also gives a clear and accurate description of what’s wrong with the world. It posits that a three-lettered word — sin — has a lot to do with humanity’s demise. God is holy, and as a holy lawgiver, he has established a moral law for his created order. However, humanity has rebelled against his law (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-7). Because of such rebellion, sin and death has infected the human condition (Romans 3:10, 23; 6:23). The story of Scripture is the story of Christ coming to Earth to do away with sin and all its consequences (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What Is the Solution?

A Biblical worldview maintains that Christ is the solution to all that ails the world. He lived a perfect life as a substitute for sin (1 Peter 3:18). He died as a sacrifice for sin, he was raised from the dead, and he ascended to the Heavenly Father. These facts about Jesus secured man’s pardon from the penalty and power of sin. The image of God was marred in humanity through the first sin, but one can be forgiven and restored through the person and work of Christ. Such is the solution for humanity’s greatest problem: “... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

What’s Our Purpose?

The story of Scripture makes the purpose of humanity clear. As mentioned earlier, being made in the image of God means that humanity has a special relational capacity. Humankind is made for a relationship with God and relationships with others (Matthew 22:37-40). In addition, the image of God means that humanity has a God-given function to manage and exercise stewardship over God’s creation. These things teach us that mankind has a status that is elevated above the one belonging to the animal kingdom. Humanity is the crown of the Lord’s creation.

Jesus is central to humanity’s purpose. Though each of us is under the curse of sin, and though the image of God has been tragically marred in all, the work of Christ restores humanity to a degree. It cancels the penalty of sin and grants one eternal life. Restored and renewed, God’s people are ordained to represent the Lord upon the Earth. He wants to use each of his people for his glory, spreading his fame throughout the world (Matthew 5:16). The story of Scripture is centered on these realities.

THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE AND THE GENRES OF SCRIPTURE

I’ll never forget English class during my senior year of high school, nor will I forget the teacher of that class, Mr. Blankenship. His class stands out in my mind for a particular reason. He seemed to take delight in threatening soon-to-be graduates with a failing grade. Using a weighted system of grading, he assigned the heaviest weight on his infamous final writing assignment. A failing grade on that paper could have easily resulted in a grade of “F” for the class, which in turn could have prevented a student from graduating with the rest of his or her class.

Passing Mr. Blankenship’s class sure caused a lot of stress during my final year of high school. However, I now must admit that I don’t remember much from that class. I remember some assignments and I remember a little about writing my final paper. Regardless, there isn’t much that sticks in my memory concerning that difficult class.

Despite my foggy memory, there is one thing I remember. I recall learning about the concept of “genre.” The word is a literary one used to categorize literature types. During my senior year, we were instructed to read a Mark Twain novel entitled “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.” When it comes to genre, I remember learning that the book was a work of historical fiction.

You are likely aware of the concept of genre. Did you know the Bible contains several different genres of literature? Furthermore, did you know that these genres contribute to the overall story of Scripture — God redeeming a people for himself through Jesus Christ? Let’s briefly consider the different genres of literature in the Bible and consider how they contribute to the story of the Bible.

Law

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis-Deuteronomy) provide us with Old Testament Law. These books point to Christ through the way they speak of the origin of mankind, the sin of mankind, and the first mention of God’s plan of redemption (Genesis 3:15). In addition, they tell of the way that God selected a special nation to be the conduit for his Anointed One. They introduce us to covenants, patriarchs, a nation, laws, and customs that paved the way for Jesus’ coming to Earth.

History of Israel

The books of Joshua-Esther tell of history related to God’s special nation. In these books we learn of the way the Lord provided a land for his chosen people. In addition, we learn of the way he intended to establish a monarchy through which his Anointed One would be born. In all these things, there was a foreshadowing of the way Jesus will one day rule over all the Earth. In addition, Israel’s history demonstrated humanity’s need for the gospel of Jesus, as the nation repeatedly demonstrated her failure to keep the Lord’s covenant obligations.

Wisdom Literature

In the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, we have what are commonly known as the books of wisdom literature. Containing proverbs, prose, and songs, these books poetically present Christ as the embodiment of all of God’s wisdom (Proverbs 8). At times, they also foretell of Christ’s coming (Psalm 2). In addition, they display humanity’s fallen state apart from Christ, the folly of not following Christ, and the forlorn condition of those who do not hope in Christ.

Prophecy

From Isaiah to Malachi, we have books known as books of prophecy. These books foretell of Christ’s coming at times. But they also “forth-tell” important divine reminders to God’s people. In these books, we are reminded of the utter failure of national Israel, but we are also pointed to glorious appearing of Jesus.

Gospels

The gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, John — contain the full unveiling of the Lord’s Anointed One. Here we read of Christ’s birth, life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection. Christ is presented as the fulfillment of God’s Law (Matthew 5:17) and as the one of whom the prophets spoke (Matthew 1:22-23). The gospel message first mentioned in Genesis 3:15 is realized in fuller detail through the God-Man who was born in Bethlehem.

History of the Early Church

The book of Acts contains history of the early church. It tells of the way Jesus ascended victoriously to the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11). It also recounts the Lord’s Great Commission

to his church (Acts 1:8). It then describes the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). After the scene at Pentecost, one reads of the way the church spread throughout the world, making inroads into both Jewish and Gentile territories.

Epistles

The epistles, or letters, within the New Testament contain systematic teaching concerning gospel truth. Most every epistle was written to confront inferior teaching that was threatening the early church. While the gospels and the book of Acts present gospel truth in mostly a narrative, or story-telling fashion, the epistles elaborate on gospel truth in a didactic, or teaching fashion. Epistles provide readers with a detailed explanation of truth related to the person and work of Christ.

Apocalyptic Literature

The book of Revelation is classified as apocalyptic literature. While there are many different interpretations of this book, and though much controversy is often generated by those varying interpretations, one thing is agreed upon. The book presents the way Jesus will one day return, establish a kingdom of righteousness, and rule forever with his people on the New Earth. The book was originally written to comfort persecuted believers with the certainty of such realities. These realities should be kept in mind as one reads the book.

Jesus and the Genres

Focusing on the types of genres in Scripture is perhaps not the best way to follow the flow of Scripture. We will offer a better approach in our next study. For now, it is helpful to see that the different types of literature in the Bible are not disjointed from one another. The Lord chose many different styles of literature to beautifully tell of the work of his Son. Though written by around 40 people over the span of approximately 5,000 years, the Bible has one magnificent theme. As we delve into the different genres of the Bible, we should always remember that they all contribute to a single story — the Lord redeeming a special people for himself through Jesus.

THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE ACCORDING TO JESUS

In regard to Bible study, Robert Letham has said, “There is a noticeable tendency among many who are self-taught to peddle obscure views as if they are central and important...The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”³ We have already discussed how Christ is central to the story of Scripture. However, it is worth asking whether or not the Bible really supports this reality. More specifically, we could ask, “Did Jesus regard himself as the central storyline of the Scriptures?” Let’s consider three passages of Scripture that shed light on this subject.

“You Search the Scriptures”

John 5 contains an account of one of Jesus’ many confrontations with his religious opponents. On the Sabbath, after Jesus had healed a man who couldn’t walk, self-righteous religionists were enraged. In their minds, Jesus had violated God’s Law. To make matters worse, when they confronted Jesus about the matter, he made a claim of divinity, saying, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17).

The problem with Jesus’ opponents was that they misunderstood the nature of God’s Word. They saw the ceremonies outlined by Moses as a means of earning God’s favor. Additionally, they completely missed prophecies concerning Messiah’s suffering. Jesus

³ Letham, Robert. *Why Study Theology?* Retrieved at <https://www.uniontheology.org/resources/doctrine/introduction/why-study-theology>

responded to his religious opponents by saying, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40).

Our Lord’s reply indicated that the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures gave “witness” to him. Instead of being a holy observance to earn favor with God, the Sabbath was a day of rest that pointed to the spiritual rest Messiah would provide. If the religious leaders of Jesus’ day would have understood the story of Scripture, they would have been less prone to religious error. Jesus’ frank words gave testimony to the main point of the Bible — Jesus Christ!

“Abraham Rejoiced to see my Day”

We find another validation to our point concerning the story of Scripture a few chapters later in John’s gospel. In yet another intense interaction with the religious leaders of his day, Jesus pointed to the way the Old Testament pointed to him. After he promised everlasting life to those who embraced his teachings, the Jewish religionists became livid. They asked, “Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” (John 8:53). Jesus responded to his adversaries by explaining, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).

What did Jesus mean? He meant to highlight the fact that all the promises made to Abraham were promises concerning Christ’s work of redemption. The patriarch understood all these things. He himself had a soul-saving faith in the Anointed One (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:9). He knew that the Lord would redeem a people through the Messiah and that the Messiah’s glory would spread throughout the Earth through his chosen people (Genesis 12:3).

These things make it plain that Christ is the story of Scripture. Promises given to Abraham were not unrelated to the work of Christ. The man was not a mere patriarch over a vast nation. He was an instrument of God for sending Messiah to Earth. Jesus is the central theme of all Scripture!

“He Opened their Hearts...”

Luke’s gospel contains a fascinating story that emphasizes Jesus’ role as the central theme of Scripture. After his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples. The two happened to be traveling. They were on a road, heading to the city of Emmaus. Jesus’ exact identity was kept from the men. As they strolled toward their destination, they didn’t know that it was the Lord who was walking with them.

When Jesus approached to travel with the men, the two were engaged in an intense conversation. Jesus inquired about the subject of their discussion. The two replied, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” (Luke 24:18). The men were speaking about the crucifixion of Jesus, but they didn’t know that Jesus was right beside them. As they traveled with the Lord, they told more about the works of Jesus and the way their Messianic hopes had been dashed.

After listening to the men opine, Jesus cried out, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25-26). Luke spoke of the way Jesus then led the men in a Bible study — “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27). The designation “Moses and all the Prophets” was an abbreviation Jews used to speak of the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures.

According to our Lord, he is the central story of all of Scripture. Mosaic laws and messages from the prophets all pointed to him. From front cover to back cover, the Bible tells the story of God’s plan to redeem a people for himself by sending the Son of God to live and die for sins. If we want to become solid self-feeders, we must grasp these realities.

Conclusion

The story is often told of the way the hall of fame American football coach Vince Lombardi would often begin a new season by holding up a football. Before the first practice drill, and long before the first game, he would tell his team, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” He would then proceed to rehearse the basic object of the game his men knew so well. Next, he would define basic rules and strategy. His method was meant to instill a firm grasp of the “big picture” of football at the outset of the season.

Christians often need a similar reminder when it comes to Bible study. Perhaps, it wouldn’t hurt us to hold up our Bible every once in a while, and say, “This is a book about Jesus.” By being aware of the main story of Scripture, we would be more equipped to interpret Scripture correctly. Many stumble and stray in their study because they forget the big picture of the Bible.

I would like to offer one word of caution before we conclude this section of study. Though the Bible has one marvelous theme, such a reality does not remove the difficulty often associated with Bible study. When it comes to comprehending Scripture, there are no magic bullets or quick fixes. Because we are finite and fallen, we will “see through a glass dimly” as long as we are on Earth. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave caution in this area, saying, “My friends, we are not meant to understand all we read in the Scriptures. It is beyond us. Our minds are too small, and we are born in sin. We come to this as little children, not to comprehend it all, but to worship and to praise, and to receive it.”⁴

Yes, knowing that Jesus is the central theme of Scripture is helpful as we aim to become self-feeders. However, Scripture is an other-worldly book that mere mortals can never master. As a result, we should humbly rely on Jesus’ Spirit for help and accept mysteries that are beyond our comprehension. In addition, we should make ourselves aware of other themes and tools related to Bible study. We will do this for the remainder of our study. We will next consider the storyline of Scripture by examining the biblical covenants. Then we will move on to provide an interpretive method for studying Scripture — the “E.A.R.S.” acronym.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Can you think of a favorite movie that has a “ruin and redemption” plot? What parallels does the storyline of that movie have with the story of Scripture?
2. Jesus is the big story of the Bible? Unfortunately, some miss this reality. What do some people mistakenly think the Bible is all about?
3. How does seeing Jesus as the big story of the Bible change how you read and study the Bible?
4. Can you think of some Old Testament stories that, though don’t mention Jesus explicitly, they teach themes related to Jesus’ redemption in an implicit (implied) way?

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. 387.