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— THEOLOGY FOR EVERYDAY LIVING —

Bible Reading Blueprint Worksheet



FOUR VITAL ELEMENTS EVERYONE NEEDS TO
KNOW TO READ THE BIBLE EFFECTIVELY.

#1

Understand the Big Picture

Every great story has an overarching storyline. The beauty of the Bible is that, while it consists of 66 books (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament), there is one overarching story.

When confronted by the religious leaders of his day, Jesus rebuked them 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).

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples and rebuked them and said,

“And he said to them, “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?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24.25-27).

While it may seem like a Sunday school answer, the answer to every question in the Bible—at least according to Jesus—is Jesus. When Luke wrote “and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets”, he was letting the reader (us!) know that from Genesis to Malachi (the entire Old Testament) that there is one hero. There is one main character.

AVOID THIS! Oftentimes, in an effort to affirm this, many a well-meaning preacher, teacher, and student jumps over much of the Bible to get to Jesus. For example, in teaching Psalm 22, many have made the claim that this psalm was a prophecy of Jesus.

This is true at one level. But in order to get there, we can’t just see that there are foreshadowings of the crucifixion. Rather, we need to do the hard work of understanding the original context and tracing the story through the epochs (or eras) in the Bible and then seeing their ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah.

#2

Place the Passage in the Three Horizons

Even though there is one story and one main character, there are many scenes. There are scenes divided up by time—also known as epoch. That is, since the beginning of Creation, God has been graciously interacting with his creatures through covenants. The major covenants in Scripture are delineated by the person the Lord initiated the covenant with (aka, a “covenant head”). These major covenants are: Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New. It is important to place a passage of Scripture in its historical context and see it in the development and climax in the New Covenant instituted by Jesus.

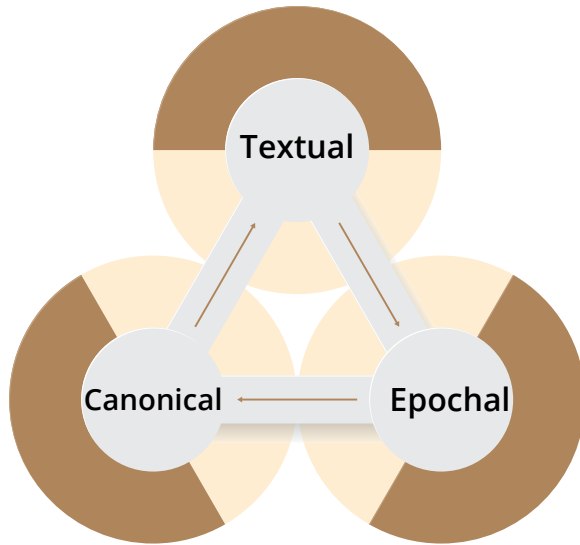
AVOID THIS! If attention is not paid to where a passage is in the development of the covenants, then you could have Christians going to Jerusalem and trying to take the city by violence—in mirroring the conquests of Israel in the Promised Land.

Instead, it is vital to understand how God’s dealings with his people developed from Adam to Noah to Moses to David to Jesus. It is vital to understand the temporary nature of the ethnic identifying markers of the people of God as they foreshadowed and prepared the storyline for the ultimate and perfect covenant-keeping Messiah, Jesus.

There are three horizons you must pay attention to: textual, epochal, canonical.



This concept depends upon the work of Richard Lints' Fabric of Theology.



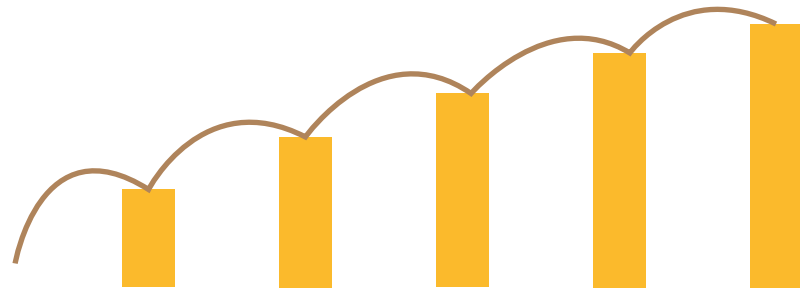
The textual horizon looks at not only the verse in relation to the paragraph, but also in relation to the chapter, in relation to the book. What more, it is always beneficial to compare the idea in that verse with other writings by that same author. For example, when reading Deuteronomy, it is good to see ideas that are conveyed in Numbers (since Moses wrote them both). When reading Acts, corroborate with Luke (since he wrote them both).

The epochal horizon places the idea from a verse, chapter, and book in its overall place in the timeline of salvation history (i.e., God's gracious work of condescension to redeem people). Those epochs overlay with the covenants we spoke about above.

In our course, Bible Reading Blueprint, I give several examples of what this looks like. Sign up here!



The canonical horizon places the verse, chapter, and book in relationship to the whole canon of Scripture. This avoids making the mistake of saying that James and Paul contradict each other. Again, we will walk through these kinds of mistakes people often make when reading Scripture together in the Bible Reading Blueprint.



#3

Identify the Correct Genre

So many errors happen when reading the Bible because people fail to recognize the correct genre of a passage of Scripture. A genre is simple a classification of a piece of writing that shares form and style. Inherent in each genre is a certain way of teaching truths. That is, poetry conveys the beauty and power of God differently than narrative does. For example, poetry uses similes and metaphors to capture the essence of an idea. Compare these three passages:

Psalm 29

3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over many waters.
4 The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth
and strips the forests bare,
and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

Genesis 1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.



Mark 4

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

The first is a poem or song. The second and third are narratives. The psalm is intended to convey God's power and might and nearness. It does so through comparison with things in nature in order to make the invisible visible to us. The second and third simply convey actions as they happened. No metaphors or imagery—other than what happened in space and time.

The different genres in Scripture are:

- History / Narrative
- Poetry
- Prophecy
- Law
- Wisdom / Proverbs
- History / Gospel
- Parable
- Epistolary (Letters)
- Apocalyptic

A few key elements in this point. You have to start reading before you determine the genre. That is, you don't start by saying, "Genesis is an historical narrative, therefore I must read it in the way the genre dictates." This would be a mistake because, even within the one book of Genesis, there are multiple genres: historical narrative, poetry, law, prophecy. Genre is fluid and not a box that we put passages of Scripture into. This can take people aback, since we are typically used to one medium using one genre in our world. The authors of Scripture were able to move back and forth between these genres. We must do the hard work of reading first and then identifying the genre and then deducing the meaning of the text.



#4

Always seek to apply

After you have done the hard work understand a passage of Scripture, you need to answer the question: What does this mean for me? Too often, people come to Scripture with a problem or with a preconceived idea of what the Bible says. They seek to apply before they rightly understand. This is evidenced in a lot preaching today that is heavy on application, but has not done the hard work of understanding a passage of Scripture in its context. Instead, verses are piled on verses are piled on verses. However, these verses are taken out of their context. When that happens, then Scripture becomes a tool to say whatever the preacher wants it to say.

On the other hand, there are very many well-meaning preachers who want their hearers to understand a passage of Scripture, but then don't do the hard work of thinking through why and how it matters to the everyday stuff of life. That is, how should the fact that God's voice is powerful and gentle affect us.

You see, if Scripture is God's Word (and it is), then it is our Creator communicating with us. All communication seeks to affect. If I tell you I'm hungry or if I ask if you're hungry, I am really asking if you can go to the fridge and get me something to eat. Or I am asking if I can give you something to eat. In other word, every time we communicate, we are seeking to affect our current environment. This is no less the case with God.



Bible Reading Blueprint Worksheet

Date:.....

Scripture Passage:

Observations & Questions:

Who are the main characters?

In one sentence, summarize what happened:

What does this tell me about God?

Journal:

(this is a practice we'll outline in the Bible Reading Blueprint. Sign up here.)

How does this passage affect or inform how I approach my relationships and challenges right now?