**Recap** - To this point you’ve learned what the Bible is, how we got it, and how it’s organized. You’ve spent some time becoming familiar with your own Bible and some of the basic tools provided within it. This week, and for the rest of our time together, we will be learning the VERY BASIC principles for READING the Bible. Our next course will expand on what you learn in the next few weeks to teach you how to STUDY. You will have unanswered questions! Make note of them, and when the time comes, register for the Winter Study where hopefully we will answer those questions! This is where we begin to rebuild some of what you may feel has been deconstructed over the last few weeks, and hopefully today you’ll see some of the benefit in having done that.

**Objective: To understand that the Bible tells one story – and all its parts tell the same story. To understand and become comfortable using the term: Metanarrative. To begin reading the Bible holistically from that frame of reference.**

**As we learn to read God’s word, we should begin with coming in humble submission to its – His – message. That message – that story – has three layers.**

**- the top layer is God’s universal plan for all creation**

**- the middle layer is how God is using a specific people – Israel – to move His plan forward**

**- the bottom layer is made of the individual stories that make up the greater narrative of Israel, which in turn makes up the ultimate narrative of God’s redemptive plan.** This is where our stories fit, but they come even after the close of these other narratives. In order to know our layer, we first have to understand the others.

**So, in the reverse we have individual narratives within a major narrative within an ultimate narrative (Fee) which is telling ONE STORY about how God is using flawed men and women to accomplish His purposes.**

**If you’ve taken Panorama, what you’ve studied are the middle and bottom layers – the chronological progression of the story of Israel and the individual stories that comprise it in its movements. The top layer, the Metanarrative and the One Story, is not the same. That is our focus today.**

**Remember what we discussed regarding** ***verification***? Just as we can’t take a verse out of its home and context… Just as we cannot open a novel from our modern bookshelf, flip to a page, and have ANY understanding of the author’s writing… nor can we treat the bible likewise. **The organization of the word as we studied last week has done us and the word a disservice in that it ENCOURAGES us to cherry-pick verses out of their tree**. **But…**

**The Bible is ONE STORY**, and it was meant to be read cohesively, holistically, just like any other book. Every small story contributes to the Metanarrative, but you will never appreciate the fullness of even the small story until you read the WHOLE story. **For this reason and all the others we just discussed, you need to establish a habit of reading the whole Bible EVERY YEAR… every day.** Put your fuel into your tank!

**20 min:**

**First Principle for Reading the Bible -** The Bible is NOT ABOUT YOU…

We will talk about this at length, but if you remember this one rule, it will change your relationship with the Word entirely… and with the God of the Word.

The Bible is not ABOUT us, but it is FOR us – *to instruct, rebuke, correct, train*…2 Tim 3:16

*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us….* Romans 15:4

**The problem is simply** that we have been taught to approach the Bible and use it in ways that would be completely foreign to the original writer and reader, and we need to reclaim their point of view, beginning with that first principle**.**    
**So, if we approach scripture without looking for personal McNuggets, we can let it breathe and have its own way.**

**Second Principle builds on the first – There are 3 Components behind every text written in Scripture**

**1. Author** –

**Q.** Who is always the **first Author** scripture? **A.** God

**Q.** Who determines the **meaning** of a text? **A.** God. **His is the only meaning or message that matters**. “What does it mean TO ME?” is invalid interpretation!

**Q.** **Through whom does God communicate?** **A.** Man (remember inspiration – God works through man in his time, in his place, with his people…THERE and THEN)

**Q. Who determines the audience for the text? A.** Author

**2. Audience** - The text is FIRST to the ORIGINAL audience and must be understood FIRST in the way THEY understood it,

which leads to the third component…

**3. Contex**t - geography, social customs, economic/religious/political elements, and any other cultural ideas of the author and audience’s THERE AND THEN have an impact on the meaning or message of every text and can’t be neglected or bypassed to find HERE AND NOW meaning or application.

**The entire bible was written by middle eastern men, to a middle eastern audience, in a middle eastern context, regarding middle eastern events.**

So, if the Bible isn’t ABOUT us or TO us, then how do we understand it and use it FOR us? **We look for its first meaning.**

**The First Rule for *Understanding* Scripture is** –  **A TEXT CAN’T MEAN (to us) WHAT IT NEVER MEANT (to them)**

The story has the same ***meaning and message*** HERE and NOW that it had THERE and THEN

- As we work to understand the scripture we’re reading, relying on the Spirit to understand the first message, we cannot CHANGE the Word to suit our purposes. You don’t have “a word” until you have a word from THE WORD, and it must be the FIRST WORD and meaning which doesn’t change with time or culture. “*I just really* ***feel like*** *God is telling me* ”… or *“what this means to me is…”* is an invalid method of interpretation.

**There is no VALID special revelation or “personal message” to individual believers that can be wrung from a passage of scripture. The first message is the only legitimate message. Remember the guidelines of revelation? It is done.**

I see all the wheels turning in your heads… the challenges, the tests you’re running… I’ve been there! Be patient! Learn the principles as if you’ve never read the Bible before, then TEST THEM in practice and you’ll see that they are a true guide and trustworthy for helping you understand what you’re reading. **And isn’t it comforting to know that there is a clear message that doesn’t change, isn’t subjective and doesn’t have to be somehow supernaturally heard to understand it?** Even the unbeliever can *understand* the message itself, even if he will not accept it. God wants to be known. He has revealed Himself plainly for all to see and understand.

\*There is the caveat here that scripture is a PROGRESSIVE REVELATION, and so the first author was not always aware of the message those of us who “have the mind of Christ” would be able to discern within his writing that ***history proves*** was hidden before the Spirit was poured out. There is “typology” in the OT that “conceals and reveals” the NT message. (Ruth) But if we go back to **God being the first Author** – His message is still the one we’re looking for!

So the Bible is not about us. It has a Middle Eastern Author, writing to a Middle Eastern Audience in a Middle Eastern Context regarding Middle Eastern Events… **but what is the Bible ABOUT? What is its plain message?**

**READ: John 1:1, 14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**.

**Luke 24:2**7 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures **concerning himself**.

**Q:**  **How** **do these verses set our first and highest purpose in reading scripture? What are we looking for first before all when we approach scripture? A. It’s about God, concerning Jesus.**

These are the foundational principles for reading ALL Scripture. **Every time you approach a text you consider the AUTHOR, the AUDIENCE (the first, specific people), and the CONTEXT surrounding each.** Then, you look for what the text is saying ABOUT GOD. Because the message is always about God, ***the meaning is unchanging and timeless regardless of history, politics, culture, or changing norms***. (These are probably the things you discover in the introductory material to every book in your Bible.)

**Q. How does that affect you right now as you consider your relationship with the Word?**

At the Macro-level of the whole Bible, God reveals Himself through **a Story**. Through **NARRATIVE**. Today we’re going to learn one of the tools necessary for understanding Narrative and will build on this in the next lesson.

First, we need to understand that the **whole Narrative** of the Bible from Genesis to The Revelation is called the **METANARRATIVE** - an overarching account (top layer) or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people’s beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences. (OED)

**Metanarrative:** *how God is acting in history from creation to the fall, to redemption, and ultimately to the final consummation and restoration of God’s plan.* The “big picture” into which all the smaller scenes fit, each one serving the larger purpose of telling that story. *“[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—****to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ****”* ([Ephesians 1:9–10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%201.9%E2%80%9310)).

Because scripture is first of all Narrative, the Big Story is told using a device called a **Plot Arc** - – a device that determines the path for the story to follow.

Diagram

Description automatically generatedUsing your work in Genesis 1-3 as our Source Document for the Metanarrative, let’s examine its story using a **Plot Arc**.

**Explain terminology and function (see below and work through slides). HANDOUT!**

**Genesis 1-3** PLOT – Using your work in **Genesis 1-3** let’s see how the Plot Arc develops.

Introduction/Exposition (Once upon a time: In the beginning), Rising action (Problem is presented: Man to work with one restriction), Climax (Decision Point: man chooses poorly), Falling action (Result of climax: shame, hiding, self-effort), Resolution/Denouement (The End: sacrifice, exile, promise)

**Now let’s take that basic plot and expand on it. Important to note** – Adam and Eve are real true historical people, but they are also a proto-type – a representation of all human beings.

**Remember: The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed.**

This short narrative is **one of those caveats**: It has a **clear and plain meaning** that is timeless there and then as well as here and now and forever, but it is **also typology** that shows its readers that the BIG story is not over – and it won’t be until it is resolved. On this side of the cross we can see that more clearly than even Moses – the first author – could have understood.



**SEE SLIDES FOR THE ANSWERS** [**https://fellowshipnwa.org/page/951?Item=5483**](https://fellowshipnwa.org/page/951?Item=5483)

**Author/Audience/Context for Genesis:** Moses is the speaker, Israel post-Exodus as the audience (former slaves – no rest, no provision, no protection, polytheistic, fearful, uncertain…), now in the desert not knowing where they’re going, why, or with whom.

**Q. Why do these people need to hear this message right here, right now?**

**Q. If the Author’s purpose and meaning rule… what does this tell us about how to read Genesis? What is its point? Is it a science textbook meant to explain the origins of the universe? What happens if we approach it that way – with that expectation?**

**Q. If the Author’s purpose and meaning are to establish Israel’s origin story, to reorient them to a God who will not deal with them as slaves, but as His own Creation… giving them a place to dwell with Him, and good restful purpose in His kingdom within His safeguards… what is the message to US?**

This is **the Bible’s Metanarrative**. In every book, chapter, story, verse, and word, God is telling this same story, over and over and over again.

God, The Sovereign Ruler created ***a place*** where ***He could dwell*** with His creation. He gave ***man*** special ***status and purpose*** – that of bearing His own image and co-creating more Image Bearers to fill the whole world, and to expand His kingdom. Man’s only ***restriction*** was to ***choose*** to let the Creator make the rules – and obey them. In failing that, man became aware of his imperfect image compared to the Creator’s perfect image and could find no solution by his own attempts. God provided the ***best solution*** – a sacrifice of covering, and exile from His holy and all-consuming presence and from the tree of eternal life – a protection that kept them from living forever in sin without the hope of reunion with their Creator. In their exile they clung to the ***promise*** that a Seed would one day come to crush their enemy forever.

When God calls Noah to build and Ark and re-creates the world – same story.

When God calls Abram to leave his country and go to a place that God will show him – same story.

When God delivers the Israelites from Egypt – same story.

When Joshua leads the people into the Promised Land – same story.

When David takes Jerusalem and makes it the center of his kingdom – and later home of the Temple – same story.

When Ezra and Nehemiah return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple – same story.

When Jesus enters the world – same story.

When Jesus calls us to be His image bearers in the ‘now and not yet’ Kingdom…

When Jesus leaves us in the world to go prepare a place for us – same story  
When He comes again to consummate all the promises of Eden – Same (but improved) story!

**God’s desire to dwell with man has never changed.** (His Spirit dwells IN us, and He is even now preparing a place for us)

Acts 2**,** John 14

**He has never stopped preparing a place for that to happen.** (He moves down, toward, in)

**God’s purpose for His Image Bearers has never changed.** (Go into all the world…)

Romans 8:29, Eph 4:24, 2 Cor 3:18, Phil 2:6-7, Col 3:10, Col 1:8-20, 1:6 & 10, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 6:7, 12:24, 19:20, Hebrews 4:9-10

**Man’s one restriction and decision has never changed. (**Schema! Love the Lord our God…)

**God’s best solution and promise for covering man’s failure has never changed! (** Jesus – the lamb of God, our perfect sacrifice)

Col 1:15-23, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 3:16-19, John 14:2-3, Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 28:19-20, John 14:23, Ephesians 1:7-14, Hebrews 2, 6-10

The practice of recognizing this pattern is scripture is called **Biblical Theology** *-* ***Recognizing from the Bible how God is acting with man in history, from creation and the fall, to ultimately bring about the final consummation and restoration of His plan through Jesus.***

This is a micro-example of that study, but it illustrates that the Biblical story is **ONE story**, t**old in smaller stories** – l**ike individual pearls makes one strand.** Each of the questions we just discussed represent repeated Themes in Biblical Theology, though there are many more. In your RESOURCES are some links where you can find more excellent information about Biblical Theology AND about how the Bible tells one story. **I hope you’ll spend some time with those resources this week.**

SO… the Bible is not about you, but it is for you. It is meant to introduce you to the God of Creation, and to show you where you fit in His story and in the work He is doing through Jesus to expand His Kingdom in the ‘now and not yet’.

**Q. Could you tell this story?**