Class Notes

Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

Reading Skills

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Have you ever wondered where the Bible came from? This class is all about the origins of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and how to develop the skills necessary for reading it well. We'll explore the biblical and historical data about the production of the biblical scrolls, focusing on why and how these texts were formed into a unified collection. We'll also cover some of the most important skills for reading biblical narrative and poetry so that you can take your own study of the Bible to the next level.

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Module 1: The Shape of the Hebrew Bible

SESSIONS 1-6

What is the Hebrew Bible? Explore this and how it's organized as the TaNaK.

Session 1: What on Earth Is the Hebrew Bible?

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew Bible can present particular challenges for different people, such as talking animals, genocide, the portrayal of God, and how to truly apply this ancient text to our modern lives.
- When approaching the Hebrew Bible, it is helpful to be aware of our own assumptions and questions and to pay attention to the intent of the biblical authors.

Does Christianity Need the Old Testament?

One of the goals of this class is to learn how to read the collection of narratives and poetry that make up the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). We want to learn how to do that without imposing our own cultures, agendas, preconceived notions, etc., onto the text. Instead, we want to learn how to understand what the biblical authors intended to communicate through these ancient texts.

> "One of the most fundamental questions which has faced theology and the Church in every age … is whether or not Christianity also needs an Old Testament. Is the Old Testament to be thrown away as obsolete, or preserved as a relic from days of yore, or treasured as a classic and read by scholars, or used occasionally as a change from the New Testament, or kept in a box in case it should be needed some day? Or is the Old Testament an essential part of the Christian Bible, with continuing validity alongside the New Testament?"
>
> Baker, D.l. (2010). *Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments.* IVP Academic. Cited in Alexander, T. Desmond (1998), "Royal Expectations in Genesis To Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology." *Tyndale Bulletin*, 49 (2). 191-192.

Reflection Question

What are common experiences you or those in your context have with the Hebrew Bible? What are some ways to move through challenges?

Session 2: How Jesus and the Apostles Read Their Bibles

Key Takeaways

- Jesus and his first followers portray the Hebrew Bible as a unified collection of wisdom literature that tells a story about a future anointed one who will rescue humanity.
- The Hebrew Bible is about an anointed representative who enters into suffering and death, goes through death and out the other side, and offers new life for humanity.
- By recovering a way of reading these texts that matches the contours of their design intentions, we will learn to read the Hebrew Bible as Jesus did.

Jesus and the TaNaK

Jesus and his first followers consistently portray the Hebrew Bible as a unified collection of wisdom literature that tells a forward-pointing story.

Luke 24:25-27 **NIV***

[25] [Jesus] said to [the disciples], "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" [27] **And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets**, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Luke 24:44-47 **NASB***

[44] Now he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are **written about me in the Torah of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms** must be fulfilled." [45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, [47] and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Timothy 3:14-17 **Instructor's Translation**

[14] You [Timothy], continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned, [15] how from childhood you have known **the sacred scriptures** which are able to **give you wisdom** that leads to salvation through faith, which is in Messiah Jesus. [16] All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in doing what is right, [17] so that God's people can be proficient, equipped for doing good.

How did Jesus and his followers reach this conclusion? They did not invent this way of reading the Hebrew Bible. Rather, they inherited from their Jewish tradition a set of convictions about the origin, nature, and meaning of these texts. They also grew up in communities that modeled how to read and make sense of the Hebrew Bible.

Notice that Jesus refers to the Hebrew Bible as a two-part ("Torah ... and Prophets") or three-part ("Torah ... Prophets ... Psalms") collection. Jesus is not alone in this. He is expressing the most common way the Bible was referred to in Jewish culture during this period.

The Apostles and the TaNaK

Also, when we look at how Jesus and the apostles actually interpret and appeal to the Hebrew Bible, they see it as a repository of patterns or "types" (τύπος) in Greek.

> **Romans 5:14** **NASB***
>
> Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, **who is a type/pattern** of him who was to come.
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

> **1 Corinthians 10:1-11** **NASB***
>
> [1] For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; [2] and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; [3] and all ate the same spiritual food; [4] and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ... [11] Now these things happened to them as a **type/pattern**, and **they were written for our instruction**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

> **1 Peter 3:20-21** **NASB***
>
> [20] who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. [21] A matching **type/pattern** to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Reading Like Jesus and the Apostles

These passages help us set an agenda for this class.

- We will examine the writing, collection, and composition of the Hebrew Bible.
- We will recover a way of reading these texts that matches the contours of their design intentions.

Reflection Question

Summarize how you would express what Jesus and the apostles thought the Hebrew Bible was all about. And what do you make of this idea? Is it similar or different from how you typically view the Hebrew Bible?

Session 3: The Ancient Shape of the Scriptures

Key Takeaways

- Jesus' Bible was a three-part collection of scrolls called the TaNaK. TaNaK is a designation for the Hebrew Bible taken from the first letter of its three major sections. T stands for Torah, which is Hebrew for "instruction;" N is for Nevi'im, meaning "prophets;" and K is for Ketuvim, meaning "writings."
- The three-part macro design dates to somewhere in the 3rd-2nd century B.C.E. This order is preserved in modern Jewish tradition and is well-attested in Second Temple Jewish texts and the New Testament.

The Macro-Shape of the TaNaK

> **Luke 24:25-27** NIV
>
> [25] [Jesus] said to [the disciples], "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" [27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

The Hebrew and Greek Scriptures that Jesus and the apostles read consisted of a three-part collection called the TaNaKh (a.k.a. TaNaK) in later Jewish tradition.

The final composition of the TaNaK scrolls dates somewhere in the 3rd-2nd centuries B.C.E. This date is provided by the latest books added to the collection (Chronicles and Esther in the 4th-3rd century B.C.E.), and also by the probable date of the final editorial activity that adapted scrolls into the collection (the expanded editions of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc.).

TaNaK Compared with the Christian Old Testament

The organization and order of the TaNaK differs in a couple significant ways from the way the same content is arranged in the Old Testament of modern Christian Bibles.

TaNaK	Christian Old Testament
Torah (The Law)	Pentateuch

TaNaK Compared with the Christian Old Testament. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

TaNaK	Christian Old Testament
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Nevi'im (The Prophets) Former Prophets Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings Latter Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	**History** Joshua, Judges, Ruth 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings 1-2 Chronicles Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
	Poetry Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
Ketuvim (The Writings) Psalms, Job, Proverbs Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther [The *Megillot*] Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles	**Prophets** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations Ezekiel, Daniel Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

TaNaK Compared with the Christian Old Testament. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Ancient Evidence for the Shape of the TaNaK

When Jesus alludes to the order of the Hebrew Bible, he assumes a three-part design, which agrees with other contemporary Jewish authors who allude to the ordered sections.

- Luke 24:44: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Torah of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."
- Luke 11:50-51: "Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary."
- Abel was murdered by Cain in Genesis 4, and Zechariah son of Jehoiadah was murdered by Joash in 2 Chronicles 24, which corresponds to the TaNaK order.
- Prologue to the Wisdom of Ben Sirach: "Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law [= Torah], and the Prophets [= Nevi'im], and the others that follow them [= Ketuvim] ... So my grandfather Yeshua devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other scrolls of our Ancestors."
- Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT): "The scrolls of Moses, the words of the prophets, and of David."

- Philo of Alexandria (*De Vita Contemplativa*, 25): "The laws and the oracles given by inspiration through the prophets and the Psalms, and the other scrolls whereby knowledge and piety are increased and completed."

Reflection Question

What are some of the main differences between the TaNaK arrangement and the Christian arrangement of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible? Could a different arrangement change the meaning of a text in the Bible?

Session 4: Seams Between Texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Key Takeaways

- The Dead Sea Scrolls preserve the technology of scroll making during the pre-Christian period, revealing what the Hebrew Bible would have looked like in Jesus' synagogue.
- Within the specific technology of the time, the beginning and end of a scroll are two of the most likely places we can look to find intentional clues and hyperlinks.

The Editorial Design of the TaNaK

The three-part shape of the Hebrew Bible isn't simply a matter of arrangement. Rather, the books themselves have been designed to fit into this particular shape. If you look at the editorial seams of the major sections (remember, the technology was papyrus or leather scrolls), you'll find intentional design clues at the beginning and ending of these sections.
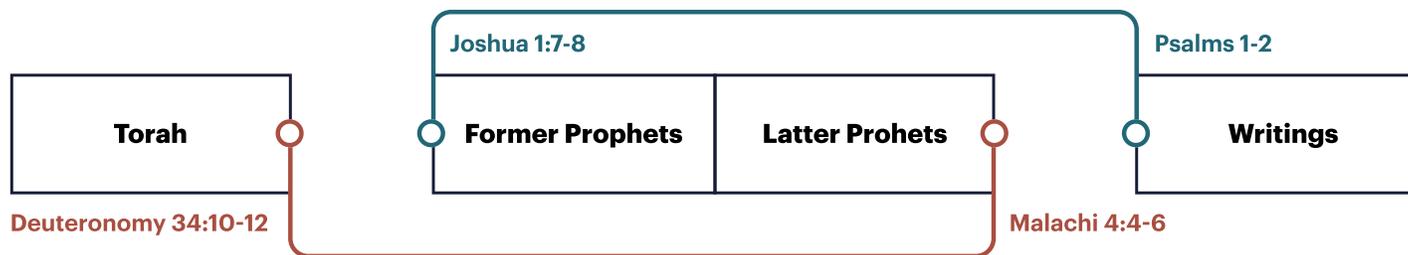
Tanak Editorial Design. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reflection Question

How does viewing the Hebrew Bible as a series of scrolls rather than a bound book impact how you understand it?

Session 5: The Prophet to Come: The Seams of the Torah and Prophets

Key Takeaways

- The final sentences of the Torah and the opening sentences of the Prophets ("Seam One") anticipate a coming Moses-like prophet who is promised but is yet to come.
- The final sentences of the Prophets and the opening sentences of the Ketuvim ("Seam Two") anticipate a coming Elijah-like prophet who will call the people back to the Torah and restore the hearts of Israel to Yahweh.

The Seams of the TaNaK

Seam One

The final sentences of the Torah and opening sentences of the Prophets:

- **Deuteronomy 34:10-12**: Anticipation of a coming Moses-like prophet who was promised but never came.
- **Joshua 1:1-9**: God's appointed leader Joshua, who will lead the people into the promised land, must meditate on the Torah day and night to find success.

Seam Two

The final sentences of the Prophets and the opening sentences of the Ketuvim:

- **Malachi 4:4-6**: Anticipation of a coming Elijah-like prophet who will call the people back to the Torah and restore the hearts of Israel before the Day of the Lord.
- **Psalm 1-2**: The righteous one who will be vindicated in the final judgment is one who meditates on the Torah day and night to find success (Ps. 1). This righteous one is the future messianic king from the line of David, who is appointed by God to rule the nations and overcome evil once and for all (Ps. 2).

SEAMS: THE TORAH & LATTER PROPHETS

MOSES

DEATH?
SINAI / HOREB

/ \

STONE ALTAR   CAVE

ELIJAH

DEATH?
CARMEL / HOREB

/ \

STONE ALTAR   CAVE
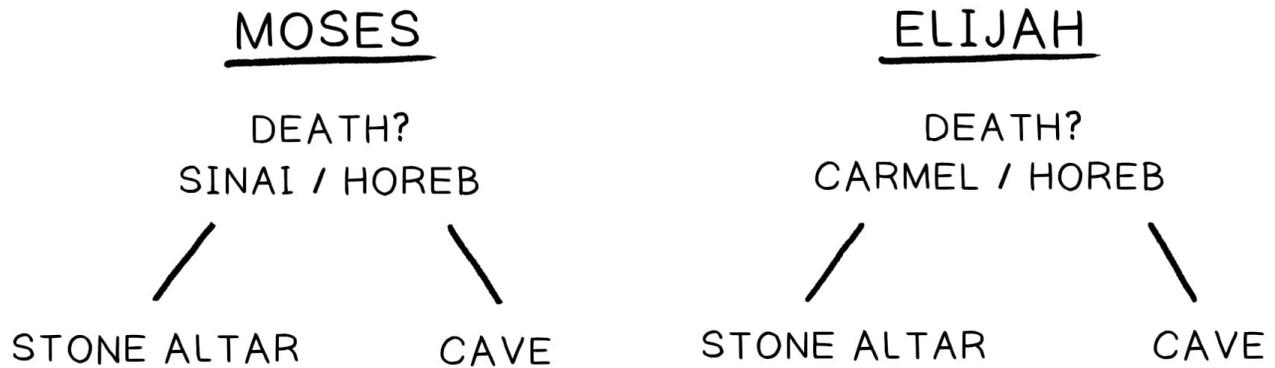
TaNaK Seams: The Torah and Latter Prophets. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Structure Reveals Purpose

The seams of the TaNaK help illuminate what the authors and compilers of the Hebrew Bible intended as the purpose of this collection of writings.

The Hebrew Bible is meditation literature that is designed to foster:

- A lifetime practice of reading and pondering the meaning of these texts.
- Future hope in the promised prophet who will herald the arrival of the Day of the Lord and the messianic kingdom (Deut. 34; Mal. 4).
- A covenantal way of life that creates a counterculture to the prevailing world systems (Josh. 1; Ps. 1).

Reflection Question

The seams of the TaNaK describe the kind of leader humanity really needs. What do the Torah and Prophets say this person is like?

Session 6: The Prophet to Come: Psalms 1 and 2

Key Takeaways

- Psalm 1 paints a picture of a righteous human who meditates on the Torah day and night, bringing forth life around him.
- Psalm 2 describes the righteous human of Psalm 1 as the future messianic king from the line of David who is appointed by God to rule the nations and overcome evil once and for all.
- The portrait of the Spirit of God woven throughout the Bible helps us see the collaboration between God and humans more clearly, revealing how the Bible's origin truly is human and divine together.

The Divine Inspiration of Scripture

Where did this remarkable collection of scrolls come from? Why were they written in the first place and then collected and formed into an organized whole?

Descriptions of the Bible's origins found within the Bible consistently describe its origins in a partnership between humans and God's guiding presence through the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16 **Instructor's Translation**

All Scripture is God-breathed …

> God-breathed = Greek *theopneustos* (θεόπνευστος), a compound word from: *theos* = "God" + *pneustos* = "spirit/breath"

2 Peter 1:19-21 **Instructor's Translation**

[19] And we have the reliable prophetic word, to which you would do well to pay attention, as to a lamp shining in a place of gloomy darkness, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, [20] knowing this firstly important thing, that no prophecy of Scripture comes of one's own interpretation. [21] For prophecy was never brought by the purpose of a human, but being carried by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.

In both of these texts, the apostles reflect on how the Scriptures are not merely the result of human purpose and activity. Rather, the Bible is the product of a human-divine partnership, neither one canceling out the other.

The following texts draw upon a whole network of texts that portray the biblical prophets as humans were who energized and empowered by God's Spirit to speak to their generation.

Micah 3:8 **Instructor's Translation**

> As for me, I am filled with power with the Spirit of Yahweh, and with justice and strength,
> to announce to Jacob his rebellious act, and to Israel his sin.

Isaiah 61:1 NIV*

The Spirit of Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Samuel 23:1-2 NASB*

[1] Now these are the final words of David.
David the son of Jesse declares,
the man who was raised on high declares,
the anointed of the God of Jacob,
and the sweet psalmist of Israel,
[2] "The Spirit of Yahweh spoke through me,
and his word was on my tongue."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Reflection Question

We've been talking about how the seams of the TaNaK describe the kind of leader humanity really needs. What do Psalms 1 and 2 add to that portrait?

Module 2: The Origin of the Hebrew Bible

SESSIONS 7-13

Explore the unique nature of the Hebrew Bible and how it should shape the way we read it.

Session 7: An Important Premise: The Inspiration of Scripture

Key Takeaways

- The Bible's narratives, poems, histories, letters, prophecies, and other writings come from a profound collaboration between humanity and God.
- Whenever the biblical authors talk about the Spirit's activity, they describe the Spirit working with and through God's human partners, not in spite of human partners.
- God's divine word is communicated through the words of the human authors. So when we talk about the human author, we are talking about the divine author at the same time.

The Divine-Human Partnership
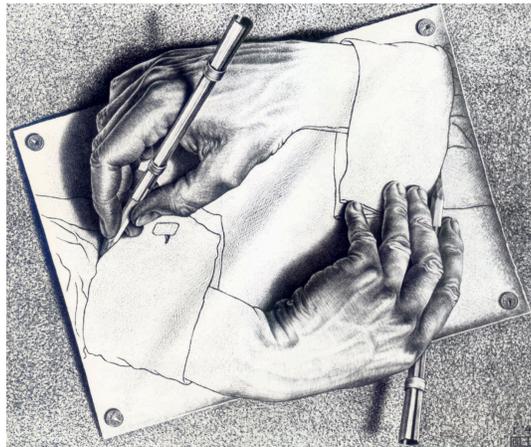
Escher, M.C. (1948). Drawing Hands. Art Hive.

We are asked to imagine what seems like a paradox that is well illustrated by the famous image by M.C. Escher called "Drawing Hands" (1948).

The Scriptures claim to be the product of a divine-human partnership. Both are necessary, but neither alone are sufficient causes to explain the origins and nature of the biblical text. God's involvement does not diminish the human dimension. Within the biblical story, the Holy Spirit enhances and energizes human beings to be more fully the divine-image they were created to be. The agency of God's Spirit does not work at the expense of human agency. Rather, humans become more human through the empowering influence of the Spirit. This is true of all the Spirit-empowered figures in the Bible (Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, the prophets, the apostles, etc.).

When we look at biblical descriptions of the writing of biblical books, notice how the prophetic figure is not in a trance but is in full possession of their faculties (see Exod. 17:8-14; Jer. 36; Isa. 8). This gives us an important window into the production of biblical literature.

On the occasions where we do see prophets in a state of elevated consciousness, they are not writing or producing texts. Instead, they are experiencing a vision or interpreting the meaning of a vision in light of their understanding of the Scriptures (Dan. 9-11; Ezek. 1-3).

Dive deeper into the portrait of the Holy Spirit in the Hebrew Bible with these books.

- *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament*, Christopher J.H. Wright
- *Presence, Power, and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner

Visualizing the Divine-Human Partnership
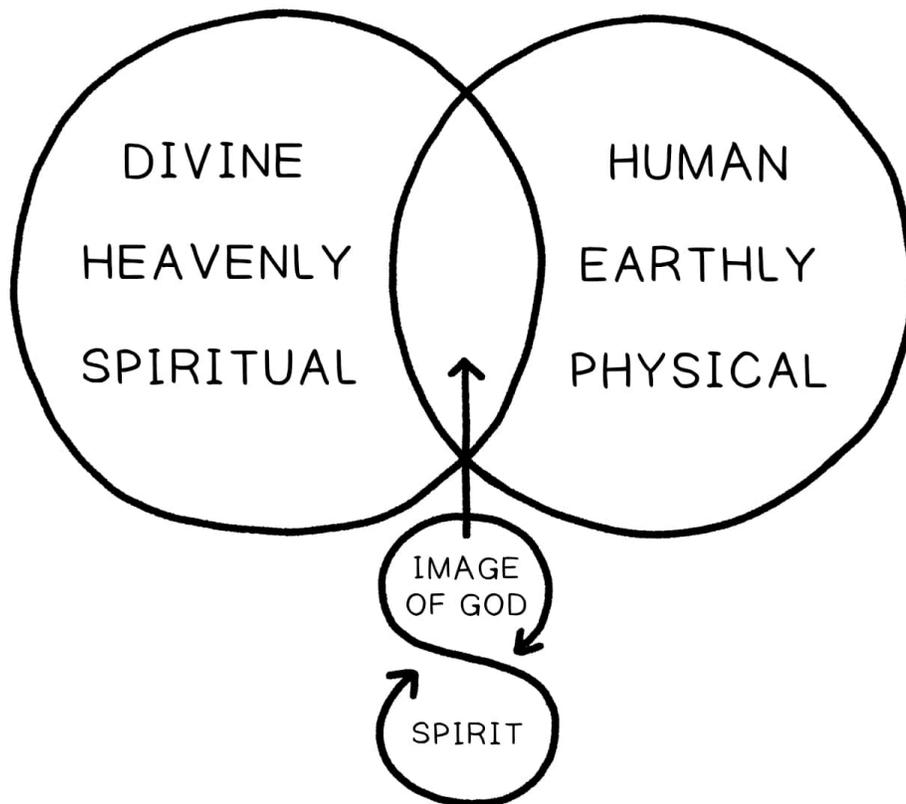
Overlap of Divine and Human in Scripture's Origin. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).
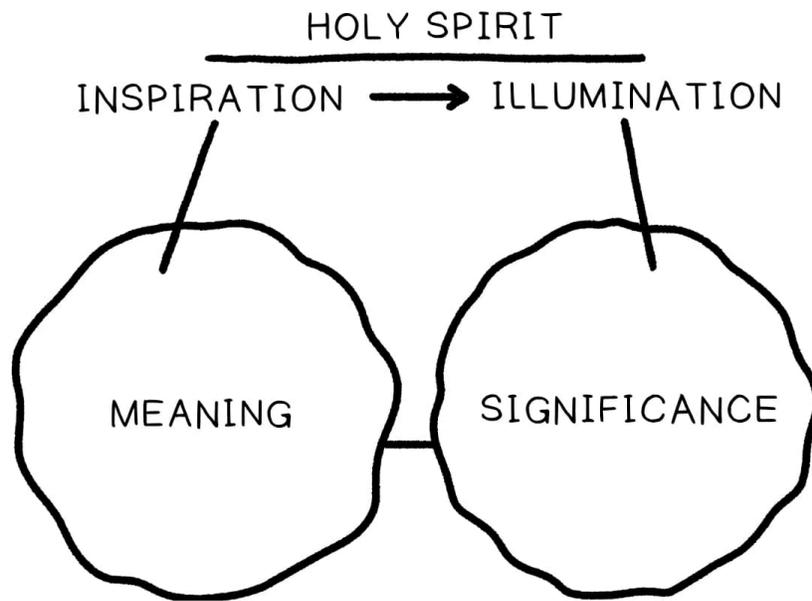
Meaning and Significance in the Inspiration of Scripture. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Reflection Question

Do you or those in your context tend to view the spiritual and physical realms as very distinct? How do you think this affects your view of the inspiration of Scripture?

Session 8: What the Torah Says About the Bible's Origins

Key Takeaways

- The first three mentions of the writing of the Bible in the Torah give us important clues to the purpose of the Bible.
- The Bible shows us that it was written (1) to tell the story of how God has rescued and formed a people, (2) to invite those rescued people into a covenant partnership to represent him to the rest of the world, and (3) to call to account the betrayal of the covenant while offering hope for the future of God's people and his world.

The Origin of the Bible as Told Within the Torah

The first mention in the Bible of the writing of the Bible comes in Exodus.

> **Exodus 17:8-9, 14** NIV*
>
> [8] The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. [9] Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." ... [14] Then Yahweh said to Moses, "**Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered** ..."
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This is a "salvation story." Israel has just been rescued from slavery and oppression in Egypt, and as they wander in the wilderness toward Mount Sinai, the Amalekites (ancient kinsmen) pounce on the vulnerable Israelites. God delivers the Israelites through Moses and Joshua, and this is the occasion for Moses' first writing activity.

The origins of the Bible are first and foremost concerned with telling the story of how God delivers his people.

The second mention of the writing of the Bible comes after the Israelites have encamped at Mount Sinai.

> **Exodus 24:3-4** NIV*
>
> [3] When Moses went and told the people all Yahweh's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything Yahweh has said we will do!" [4] **Moses then wrote down everything Yahweh had said**.
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This is a "covenant story." In Exodus 19-24, God invited Israel into a covenant partnership so that they could be his royal-priestly representatives to the nations (Exod. 19:4-6). Moses has just spent time on top of Mount Sinai

in the presence of Yahweh, and he wrote down the 10 plus 42 terms of the covenant partnership. This is what the people agree to and what Moses writes down.

The final mention in the Torah of Moses writing comes in Deuteronomy 31.

> **Deuteronomy 31:19, 22, 24-26** Instructor's Translation
>
> [19] And Yahweh said to Moses, "Now therefore **write this song** and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, so that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel." … [22] So Moses **wrote this song** the same day and taught it to the people of Israel.
>
> [24] It came about, when **Moses finished writing the words of this Torah in a scroll** until they were complete, [25] that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, saying, [26] "Take **this scroll of the Torah and place it beside the ark of the covenant** of Yahweh your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you."

After 40 years of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness, Yahweh tells Moses to write a prophetic song that anticipates the entire story of Israel in the promised land. It is one long history of failure and self-destruction, with periodic bright moments of hope for the future of God's promise.

Moses' song is a prophetic witness of accusation, and it's also a memorial of future hope that Yahweh will not abandon his promises to restore his divine blessing to all of the nations through the family of Abraham (Gen. 12).

What the Bible Tells Us About the Purpose of Its Origins

From these three examples, we can draw conclusions about the meaning of the Bible and why it came into existence. The Bible was written:

- To tell the story of how God rescued and formed a people (Exod. 17).
- To invite those rescued people into a covenant partnership so they can represent him to the rest of the world (Exod. 24).
- To accuse the covenant partners of their failure and rebellion and to offer hope for the future of God's people and his world (Deut. 31-32).

Reflection Question

How would you summarize why the Bible was written? What is its purpose?

Session 9: What the Prophets Say About the Bible's Origin

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew Bible claims to come from a tradition of prophetic leaders in Israel that stems from Moses.
- The texts reflect a minority report within ancient Israel that comes from those who were faithful to Yahweh and remained true to the covenant.

Joshua as the Guardian of the Covenant Texts

Joshua 1:7-8 NASB*

7 Be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all **the Torah** which Moses my servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. 8 This **scroll of the Torah** shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Joshua 8:32-35 NASB*

32 [Joshua] wrote there on stones a copy of the **Torah of Moses**, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel. 33 All Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of Yahweh ... 34 Then afterward he read all the **words of the Torah**, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is **written in the book of the Torah**. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Joshua is presented as a new Moses who guards the covenant Scriptures and who guides Israel in their role as Yahweh's representatives. He is a faithful leader throughout his life.

Notice how Joshua 8 continues the association of the covenant texts with the ark of the covenant. Notice also that the Torah is short enough to be written on memorial stones (like the Mesha Stele here). This likely refers to a "proto-Torah" rather than to the current form of the Torah.

Louvre stèle de Mésha (840) Wikipedia

National Apostasy and Prophetic Critique

After Joshua dies, Israel abandons its covenant partnership with Yahweh and begins a centuries-long history of apostasy and covenant rebellion.

Judges 2:6-10 **NASB***

[6] When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. [7] **The people served Yahweh all the days of Joshua**, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of Yahweh which he had done for Israel. [8] Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Yahweh, died at the age of one hundred and ten. … [10] All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; **and there arose another generation after them who did not know Yahweh, nor yet the work which he had done for Israel**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

From this point on, Yahweh has to choose from a minority of faithful representatives among the Israelites who are called prophets. They are Yahweh's covenant representatives who provide regular critique and guidance to Israel's kings, priests, and prophets.

The biblical prophets, on the whole, are suspicious of the Israelite institutions of the monarchy, temple priesthood, and the official prophets. Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Elijah, and Elisha all confronted Israel's kings, priests, or prophets.

The prophets spoke in resistance to the Israelite monarchy and its abuses and apostasy, and they critiqued the Israelite priesthood and their sponsored prophets.

1 Samuel 12:13-15, 19-20 **NASB***

[13] "Now therefore, **here is the king whom you have chosen**, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you. [14] If you will fear Yahweh and serve him, and listen to his voice and not rebel against the command of Yahweh, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow Yahweh

your God. [15] **If you will not listen to the voice of Yahweh**, but rebel against the command of Yahweh, **then the hand of Yahweh will be against you**, as it was against your fathers." ...

[19] Then all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to Yahweh your God, so that we may not die, for **we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king**." [20] Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. **You have committed all this evil**, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve Yahweh with all your heart."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

See also Amos 7:10-17; Isaiah 39; Jeremiah 36

Jeremiah 5:30-31 NIV*

[30] A horrible and shocking thing
has happened in the land:
[31] The **prophets** prophesy lies,
the **priests** rule by their own authority,
and my people love it this way.
But what will you do in the end?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Jeremiah 32:32-33 NIV*

[32] **The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me** by all the evil they have done—they, **their kings and officials, their priests and prophets**, the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem. [33] They turned their backs to me and not their faces ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

See also Hosea 4:4-9; Amos 7:14; Isaiah 28:7; 1 Kings 17-19

Late in the Israelite monarchy, the covenant texts of the Scriptures are neglected and forgotten until they are discovered by a Moses-like king (Josiah) and interpreted by a Moses-like prophet (Huldah) in 2 Kings 22:1-20.

The Faithful Prophetic Remnant

The biblical scrolls claim to come from a tradition of prophetic leaders in Israel that stems from Moses. These texts reflect a "minority report" within ancient Israel that comes from those who were faithful to Yahweh and remained true to the Sinai covenant.

The story of Judges through 2 Kings depicts the majority of Israelites and their kings as apostate. This portrait could only come from the minority group of Israelites who remained faithful to Yahweh and critical of the majority (think of the "7,000 who haven't bowed to Baal" in 1 Kgs. 19:14, 18).

For this faithful prophetic remnant within Israel, the Torah remained a source of covenant authority to diagnose Israel's present failure and a source of future hope for the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham.

Hosea uses the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20 and Deut. 5) and the covenant curses (Lev. 26 and Deut. 28) to accuse Israel of apostasy in Hosea 4:1-6.

Amos derives much of his language and imagery from the Pentateuch. Covenant curses should generate "repentance" (Amos 4:6-11, derived from Deut. 28-30).

Pentateuchal narratives are paradigmatic for even the earliest prophets: Hosea 12:2-4 sees Israel's entire history anticipated in the Jacob narratives of Genesis.

The imagery of future hope is rooted in the storyline and key texts of the Torah: the messianic seed from the line of Judah, the future priest-king who resembles Melchizedek, the need for a new covenant, and the re-creation of the human heart by the power of the Spirit.

The Babylonian Exile and the Making of the Bible

The institutions of the monarchy, priesthood, and court prophets were all eliminated when the nation was scattered from the land and carried off into exile.

> **Lamentations 2:6-9** **NIV***
>
> [6] He has laid waste **his dwelling** like a garden; he has destroyed **his place of meeting**.
> Yahweh has made **Zion** forget her appointed **festivals** and her **Sabbaths**;
> in his fierce anger he has spurned both **king and priest**.
> [7] Yahweh has rejected his **altar** and abandoned his **sanctuary**.
> He has given the walls of her **palaces** into the hands of the enemy;
> they have raised a shout in the **house of Yahweh** as on the day of an appointed festival.
> [8] Yahweh determined to tear down **the wall** around Daughter Zion.
> He stretched out a measuring line and did not withhold his hand from destroying.
> He made **ramparts** and **walls** lament; together they wasted away.
> [9] Her **gates** have sunk into the ground; their **bars** he has broken and destroyed.
> Her **king and her princes** are exiled among the nations,
> the **Torah** is no more, and her **prophets** no longer find visions from Yahweh.
>
> *Key Words Adapted by Teacher

A minority group among the exiles turned to the writings preserved by the true prophets, whose words about Israel's judgment had come to pass.

- Isaiah's *limmudim* (disciples) continued Isaiah's high view of the prophetic Scriptures (Isa. 8:11-20).
- Daniel looks to the Mosaic Torah as the product of "Moses and the Prophets" (Dan. 9:9-10) that points forward to the restoration of the new Jerusalem after a "hyper-Jubilee" period.
- Malachi 3:16-18 reflects the mindset of the community behind the Hebrew Bible. They meditate on the Scriptures, called "the scroll of remembering," which fosters hope in a future "sorting out" of Israel.

The exiles who return from Babylon have a high view of the Torah and Prophets, and they anticipate the fulfillment of the prophetic promises of restoration.

- Ezra's main task was to teach the Scriptures (Ezra 7:6, 25-26; Neh. 8).

- The exilic prophets are aware of their dependence on the pre-exilic Scripture (Zech. 1:2-6; 7-8).

The final canonical shape of the TaNaK collection has a post-exilic stamp, and it elevates the importance of immersing oneself in the Scriptures (Josh. 1, Ps. 1) to foster the future hope of restoration (Deut. 34:10-12; Mal. 4:4-5) and countercultural faithfulness in the present.
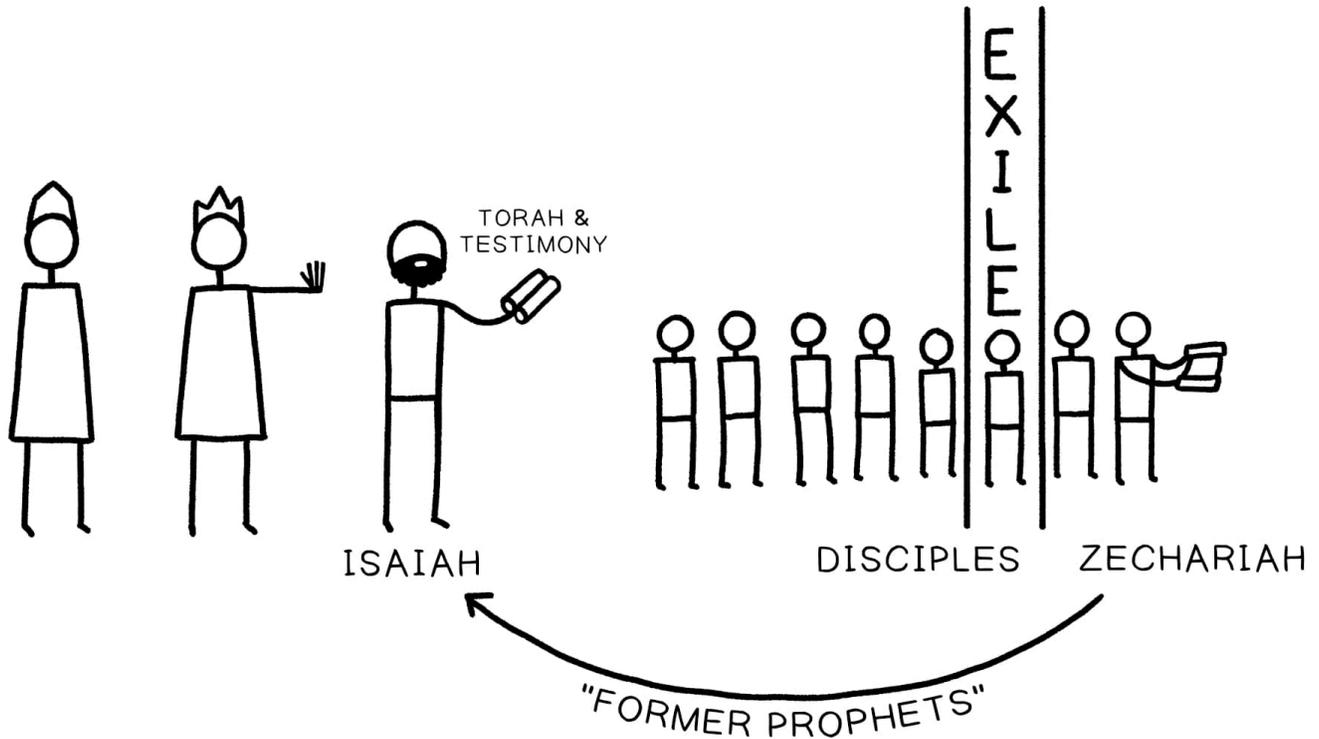
The Faithful Prophetic Tradition. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Reflection Question

Reflect on the idea that the Hebrew Bible was written over a long period of time by a minority group criticizing the nation's leadership. Does this change or challenge your view of the Hebrew Bible in any way? If so, how? How do you think this idea contributes to what you find in the Hebrew Bible?

Session 10: The Origin of the Bible From a Historical Perspective

Key Takeaways

- The Bible's divinity and authority doesn't negate the human processes that brought it into existence.
- The Hebrew Bible is a collection of collections made up of preexisting textual materials from different periods of Israel's history and literature.
- We find clues throughout the Hebrew Bible that reveal how each book is an organized collection of preexisting materials that have been brought into, and play a new function within, a new composition.

The Origins of the Bible From a Historical Perspective

The written origins of the Bible are also illuminated through historical research into the technology of writing, text production, and transmission in ancient Israel and their surrounding cultures.

The Hebrew Bible is a collection of collections made up of textual materials from all periods of Israel's history, religion, and literature. Ancient Israelite tradition literature came into existence through a multistep process that is still discernible by looking at literary evidence within the texts themselves.

Events ↘	• The life of Abraham, the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, settlement in the land of Canaan, etc.		
	Oral Traditions ↘	• The family history of Abraham's ancestors, the wilderness wanderings • Early songs: Exodus 15, Judges 5, Psalm 29, etc.	
		Early Written Traditions ↘	• "This is the scroll of the generations of humanity" (Gen. 5:1) • "The scroll of Jashar" (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18) • "The scroll of the wars of Yahweh" (Num. 21:14)

The Origins of the Bible From a Historical Perspective. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

	Early Collections of Written Traditions ↘	• "The scroll of the deeds of the kings of Israel" (1 Kgs. 14:19, 29, etc.) • "The commentary of the scroll of the kings" (2 Chron. 24:27)
	Proto-Editions of Biblical Books ↘	• "The proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah compiled" (Prov. 25:1) • "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended" (Ps. 72:20) • The "Mosaic" Torah (Exod. 21-23 and Deut. 12-26) • First edition of Jeremiah (Jer. 36)
		TaNaK Editions of Biblical Books

The Origins of the Bible From a Historical Perspective. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

The Scribal Origins of the Bible

We have an abundance of evidence about the status and practice of the professional scribe in the ancient Near East. For recent scholarship, see the following:

- John Walton and Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*
- William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*
- Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*

Scribes were a professional class in the ancient world who handled and created texts in a variety of ways.

- They created new texts that were commissioned such as letters, receipts, and diplomatic correspondence.
- They preserved the cherished traditional literature of their culture such as poems, epic stories, ritual texts, and cultural mythology.
- They preserved the official records of their political and religious institution such as the annals of the king's wars and activities.

Reflection Question

Summarize what you think is most important for people to understand about the compositional process of the Bible or about the nature of the Bible as human and divine.

Session 11: The Hebrew Bible as a Mosaic

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew Bible is a collection of scrolls that has been arranged with a mosaic (i.e., composite) unity.
- The Ketuvim (i.e., the Writings) acts as mini-commentaries on the themes and ideas at work elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.
- The Hebrew Bible can be likened to a family quilt made up of individual pieces from various people throughout different time periods. And each individual piece adds new layers of meaning and significance when viewed within the context of the piece as a whole.

How the Hebrew Bible is Like a Family Quilt

A quilt is made of many preexisting materials and consists of individual pieces (like Ruth or Esther) or sub-collections (the laws at Mount Sinai, Psalms). These earlier materials can be incorporated as they stand or editorially reshaped to fit the new context. But the new overall context of the final quilt gives each individual piece a new layer of meaning when viewed within a larger context and frame of reference.

The first line of Ruth hyperlinks the story to the time of Judges, and its final section is a genealogy that leads to David. The ordering of modern Christian Bibles reflects this by placing Ruth chronologically between the time of the book of Judges and the book of Samuel. The book of Ruth also reflects key language that hyperlinks the character of Ruth to Lady Wisdom from the book of Proverbs. The ordering of the TaNaK places Ruth thematically after the book of Proverbs, where Ruth serves as an expanded commentary on Proverbs 31.
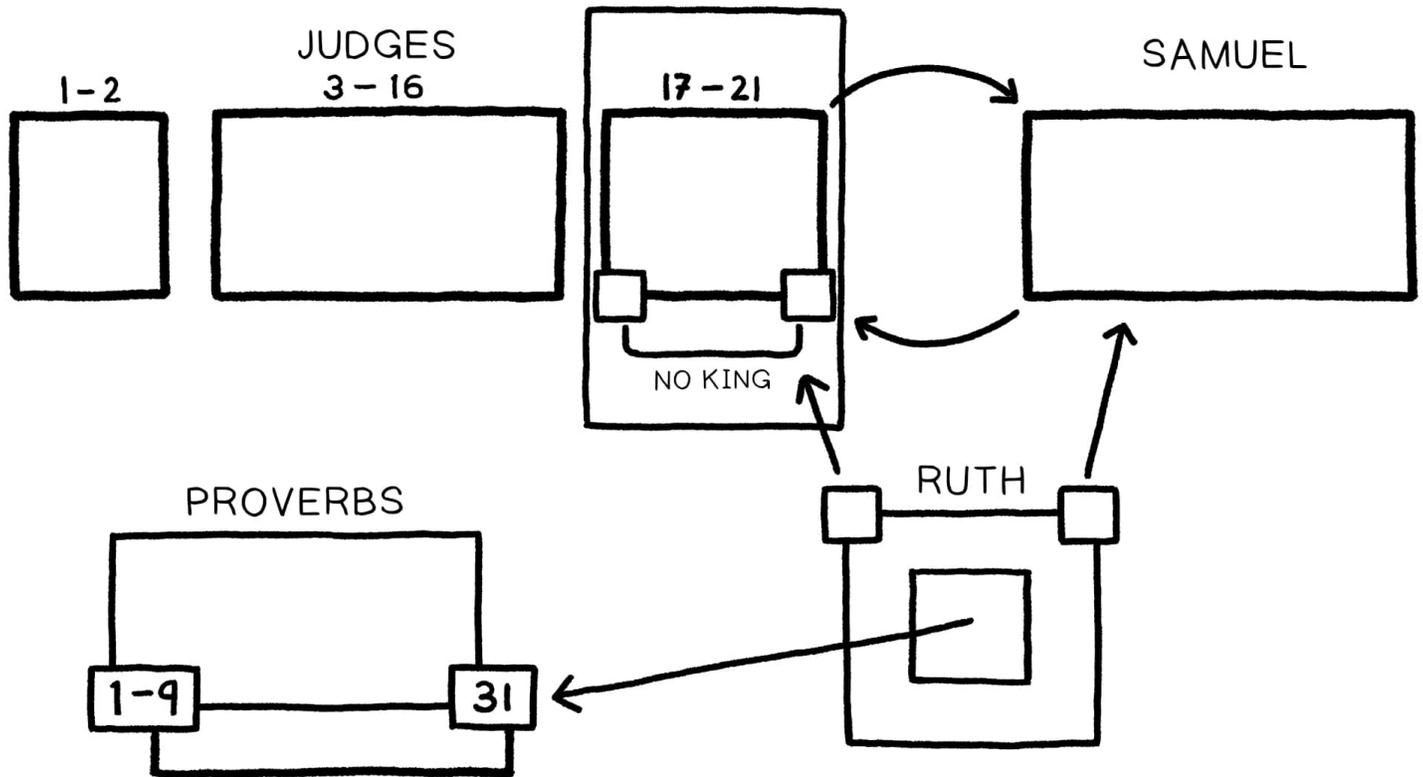
Ruth's Position in the Bible. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Reflection Question

You've seen how the book of Ruth is hyperlinked to Judges, Samuel, and Proverbs. This happens all throughout the Hebrew Bible! Do you think that seeing these hyperlinks is necessary for understanding the meaning of a text or book? Explain your reasoning.

Session 12: The Hebrew Bible Is Like an Aspen Grove

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew Bible can be likened to an aspen grove—it's a collection of texts that are distinctive yet share interconnected origin points and grow together as a united structure telling one cohesive narrative.
- Another way to describe hyperlinks is intertextuality, where a specific text only means what it means in light of the entirety of texts it is connected to. The meaning is found in the interconnection of the texts.

How the Hebrew Bible Is Like an Aspen Grove

Our common conception of the canon of the Hebrew Bible is similar to a collection of potted plants. Each book is a self-contained entity that was formed in basic isolation from the others, and there was a long process of pots/books being moved in or out of the garden until one day the gardener decided to put up a fence and lock the gate so that no more movement can take place.

The Spruce (2021) Pinterest

A view of the canon informed by both historical and textual data found within the Hebrew Bible is more similar to a grove of aspen trees. There is an oldest root system underground that branches out and grows new trees that are distinct above ground. But they are interconnected underground and share the same genetic code so that they grow symbiotically and mutually until they all reach maturity together.

J Zapell (2013) Wikipedia

Analogy adapted from Julius Steinberg and Timothy Stone (2015), "The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity," in *The Shape of the Writings*. Eisenbrauns. 5-11.

Reflection Question

The Hebrew Bible can be likened to both a quilt and to an aspen grove. Do either of these analogies strike you as particularly helpful? Why or why not?

Session 13: The Different "Encyclopedias" of Authors and Readers

Key Takeaways

- Learning to read the Hebrew Bible well requires an awareness of our personal "encyclopedias of reception" and a discovery of the "encyclopedias of production" assumed by the biblical authors as they communicate.
- The Hebrew Bible is carefully crafted literature with every word placed intentionally to convey a specific message.
- Learning to read the Hebrew Bible requires studying the specific conventions and ways the biblical authors wrote narrative, poetry, and discourse.

Two Revolutionary Ideas About the Hebrew Bible

1. The Old Testament is an ancient text.
2. A text is an act of intentional literary communication.

Theory of Textual Communication
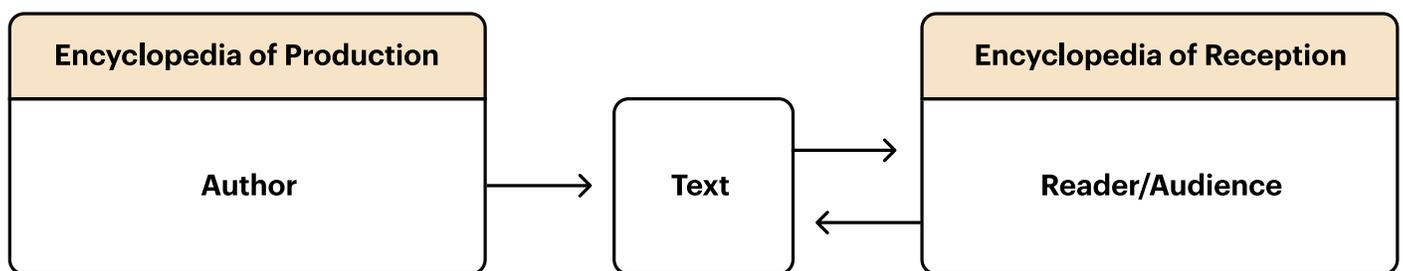
Textual Communication. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Where is meaning located? At first, it is in the mind of an author. But in the case of ancient authors, we no longer have access to their minds apart from the text. The text is the literary embodiment of an author's purposed communication.

"Encyclopedia of Production" and "Encyclopedia of Reception"

Our "encyclopedia" is the mental storehouse of words, ideas, images, and stories that we gather and store in our memories from our first waking moments. Every text we read will be interpreted and understood in light of

our current operating encyclopedia. Authors have their encyclopedias from which they produce texts, and readers have encyclopedias they use to process and understand texts.

The model reader who wants to understand an author on their own terms will adapt their encyclopedia of reception by learning about the author's encyclopedia of production.

For more on this distinction between the encyclopedia of production and encyclopedia of reception, see Stefan Alkier, *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (pages 3-21).

Overcoming Challenges of Differing Encyclopedias

One of the great challenges in reading the Bible is that it takes work to become aware of our own modern encyclopedias of reception that we (unknowingly) impose upon the biblical author. This shows up when we, for example, impose modern cosmology onto the ancient cosmology of Genesis 1, or when we attribute much later doctrinal ideas/debates to the biblical authors (e.g., debates about Calvinism versus Arminianism, divine sovereignty and human free will, etc.).

Another significant challenge is that it takes effort to discover the encyclopedia of production assumed by the author as they communicate. We can increase our understanding of the author's encyclopedia by learning something about Hebrew, ancient Near Eastern worldviews, and ancient Israelite history and culture. The biblical authors also assume a high degree of familiarity with the TaNaK because it was first produced and read within a small community that was immersed in its textual world. It is a highly hyperlinked set of texts, whose puzzles and ambiguities become more clear after repeated re-reading over a lifetime.

Literature and Poetics

What is literature? Literature is a form of written communication through which an author conveys a "what" (the message) through a carefully and intentionally crafted "how" (an artistically formed/shaped literary work).

> "A text-focused approach sets out to understand not the realities behind the text, but the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect. What does this piece of language … signify in context? What are the rules governing the transaction between the storyteller or poet and the reader? … What image of a world does the narrative project? Why does it unfold the action in this particular order and from this particular viewpoint? … How does the work hang together? In what relationship does each part stand to the whole? To pursue this line of questioning is to make sense of the work as an act of communication, always goal-directed on the writer's part and always requiring interpretive activity on the addressee's. The author wields certain linguistic and literary tools with an eye to certain effects on the reader, while the reader infers a coherent message from the signals, and it is the text itself that mediates between these two, embodying the author's intent and guiding the reader's response."
>
> Sternberg, Meir (1987). *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Indiana University Press. 15.

Poetics (noun) is the unique set of literary techniques, conventions, and strategies employed by the biblical authors. Biblical narrative, poetry, and discourse all have a particular stylistic profile that is both similar to and different from other ancient Near Eastern literature.

> "A coherent reading of any work of art, whatever the medium, requires some detailed awareness of the grid of conventions upon which and against which this particular work operates. Usually, these are elaborate sets of tacit agreements between artist and audience that create the enabling context in which the complex communication of art occurs. Through our awareness of convention we can recognize significant or simply pleasing patterns of repetition, symmetry, or contrast; we can detect subtle cues and clues as to the meaning of the work; we can spot what is innovative and what is traditional at each part of the artistic creation. ... One of the chief difficulties modern readers have in perceiving the artistry in biblical narrative is precisely that we have lost most of the keys to the conventions out of which these texts were shaped."
>
> Alter, Robert (2011). _The Art of Biblical Narrative_. Basic Books. 47.

Reflection Question

How would you respond to someone who says, "I don't need to understand the ancient conventions of the author because I think God will speak to me through the text even though I don't understand the ancient context"?

Module 3: Interpreting Hebrew Poetry

SESSIONS 14-17

How do we read poetry in the Bible? Take a deep dive into Hebrew poetry and discover its most common conventions and how it communicates.

Session 14: How Biblical Poetry Communicates

Key Takeaways

- Hebrew poetry is shaped into a line-rhythm or verse. It is not metrical (based on syllable counts) but a form of free verse.
- Hebrew poetry uses intentional, creative language (e.g., heavy use of metaphor) with unique word combinations, repetition, patterns, and hyperlinking to other parts of Scripture.
- The biblical authors build out their theology of God's character, essence, and purpose from within their worldview.

The Poetics of Biblical Poetry: Translation and Literary Design of Psalm 29

1 **Give** to Yahweh, O sons of God
   give to Yahweh **glory** and **strength**.
   2 **Give** to Yahweh the **glory** due his name;
      worship Yahweh in **the majesty** of **his holiness**.

3 **The voice** of Yahweh is **over** **the waters**;
   the God of **glory** **thunders**,
      Yahweh **over** **the mighty waters**.

4 **The voice** of Yahweh is powerful;
   the voice of Yahweh is **majestic**;
5 **the voice** of Yahweh **breaks** the **cedars**;
   Yahweh **breaks** in pieces the **cedars of Lebanon**.

6 He makes **Lebanon** leap **like a calf**,
   Mount Sirion **like a young wild ox**.

7 **The voice** of Yahweh strikes with flashes of fire.
   8 **The voice** of Yahweh **shakes** the desert;
      Yahweh **shakes** the Desert of Kadesh;
9 **the voice** of Yahweh **shakes** apart **the oaks**
   and strips **the forests** bare.

And in his temple everything shouts, "Glory!"

10 Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood;
    Yahweh is enthroned as King eternal.

11 Yahweh gives strength to his people;
    Yahweh blesses his people with peace.

Psalm 29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Definitions and Features of Poetry in General

Encyclopedia Brittanica defines poetry as "a kind of literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of one's experience or emotions by means of well-crafted language that is chosen for its meaning, sound, and rhythm."

> "Poetry is a kind of human language that says more, and says it more intensely than does ordinary language."
>
> Perrine, Laurence (1968). *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry.* Harcourt College Publishers. 3-4.

> "Poetry conveys thought; there is something the poet wants to communicate. And poetry conveys that thought in a self-conscious manner, through a special structuring of the language that calls attention to the 'how' of the message as well as the 'what.' In fact, in good poetry, the 'how' and the 'what' become indistinguishable. As Robert Alter puts it: 'Poetry … is not just a set of techniques for saying impressively what could be said otherwise. Rather, it is a particular way of imagining the world.'"
>
> Berlin, Adele (1996). "Introduction to Biblical Poetry." *New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. IV*. 301-315.

Typical Features of Poetry

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

A rhythmic use of language (meter, rhyme, measure) that places constraints on the poet and forces an economy of expression, a compression of thought so words have to perform unusual functions.

Psalm 29 uses these poetic features to take the reader from the landscape of Israel to the cosmic throne of God where he rules over the storm and the waters.
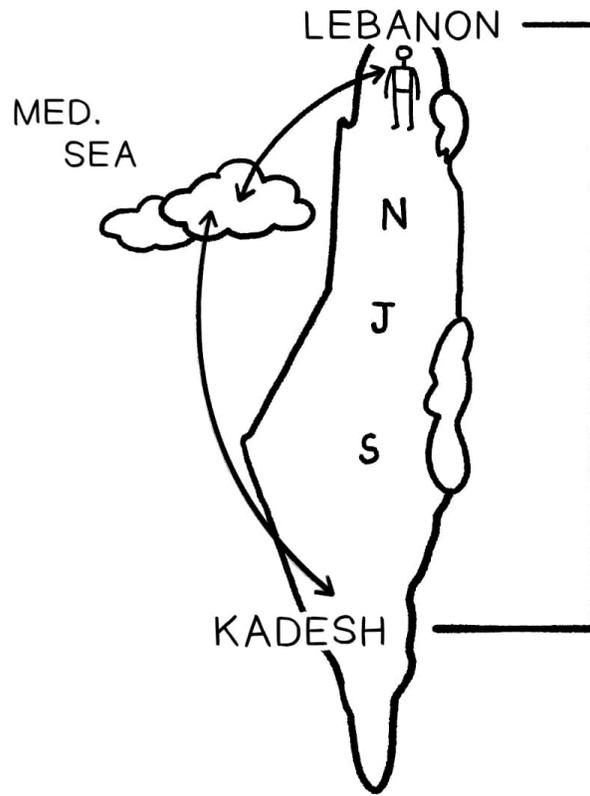
Rough Map of Israel. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

God's Throne Over All Creation. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Reflection Question

Summarize what you've learned so far about how biblical poetry works. What are some of the things to look for as you read?

Session 15: Common Poetic Conventions in Biblical Hebrew

Key Takeaways

- Poetry is a form of communication that invites the reader into a partnership with the written word in order to discover its meaning.
- Learning the function of repetition and of literary design is the most fundamental tool for reading and understanding biblical literature.
- When reading biblical poetry, the fundamental communication tool is repetition with slight variations that create patterns that build anticipation and expectations for the reader.

This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

What is the primary communication tool used in biblical poetry? How do you think it helps us understand the meaning of the text?

Session 16: How Hebrew Parallelism Works

Key Takeaways

- Biblical authors often use parallelism in their poetry, which causes the readers to place two or more things in comparison with each other to show their relation.
- At its root, parallelism is a form of comparison and analogy. It assumes that to truly understand and experience a thing, you need to grasp not only that thing but also another thing that is both similar and distinct at the same time.
- Parallelism employs comparison techniques such as analogy, complement, contrast, and sequence— each requiring and aiding the reader to discover the uniqueness and meaning behind the poetic lines.

Poetic Conventions in Ancient Israel

The ancient Israelite poetry preserved for us in the Bible doesn't fit any kind of master system like meter (though some think so). However, the Israelites were aware of a certain kind of speech that was poetic, dense, and distinct from normal speech. They even have vocabulary for it.

- Song (Heb. *shir / shirah*): "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song …" (Exod. 15:1)
- Psalm (Heb. *mizmor*): "A *mizmor* of David" (Psalm 3; many psalms have these headings)
- Lament (Heb. *qinah*): "David lamented this *qinah* over Saul and Jonathan" (2 Sam. 1:17)

These compositions show a unique, cultural form of Hebrew poetry that is not a formal system but a series of characteristics.

> "The Verse of the Hebrew Bible is strange
> The meter of Psalms and Proverbs perplexes
> It is not a matter of number,
> No counting of beats or syllables
> Its song is a music of matching,
> Its rhythm a kind of paralleling
> One line makes an assertion;
> The other part expresses in other words
> Sometimes a third part will vary yet again."
>
> Hollander, John (2001). *Rhyme's Reason, A Guide to English Verse*. Yale University Press. 26.

Rhythm and Free Verse

Hebrew poetry is shaped into a line-rhythm or verse. It is not metrical (based on syllable counts), but a form of free verse composed of poetic lines.

- Verse = a description of poetic form: "A succession of words arranged according to natural or artificially created rules, forming a complete line; a verse is one of the lines of a poem or a piece of versification" (Oxford English Dictionary).
- Line = The smallest segment of poetry, consisting of a dense, complete statement. People have proposed many words to describe the poetic line (stich, colon, verse, membrum), but "line" is the most simple and common English word.

> "The poetry of the Hebrew Bible is a natural, free, and rhythmic system. The poems have no consistent metrical scheme, and so have a freedom from predetermined arrangments. But their language is organized so as to create impressions and fulfill the functions of poetic rhythm. Free verse is totally free, it is verse, but it's free to play with the verse rhythm in a variety of ways, making use of all manner of linguistic artistry."
>
> Dobbs-Allsopp, F.W. (2015). _On Biblical Poetry_. Oxford University Press. 120-121.

The line in Hebrew poetry is most often (1) a complete sentence or subordinate clause (2) consisting of three to five words (3) marked by repetition and clear end-stop signals.

For example, take a look at Psalm 51.

> **Psalm 51:1-4** NASB
>
> [1] Be gracious to me, O God, according to your lovingkindness;
> according to the greatness of your compassion blot out my transgressions.
> [2] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
> and cleanse me from my sin.
> [3] For I know my transgressions,
> and my sin is ever before me.
> [4] Against you, you only, I have sinned
> and done what is evil in your sight,
> so that you are justified when you speak
> and blameless when you judge.

Parallelism

In _Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews_ and his commentary on Isaiah, Robert Lowth created the first comprehensive synthesis of features in biblical poetry (Lowth, 2004).

> "There is a certain conformation of the sentences, which is chiefly observable in those passages which frequently occur in Hebrew poetry, in which they treat one subject in many different ways, and dwell upon the same sentiment; when they express the same thing in different words, or different things in a similar form of words: and since this artifice of composition seldom fails to produce an agreeable and measured cadence, we can scarcely doubt it must have imparted to their poetry an exquisite degree of beauty and grace."

Lowth, Robert (2004). _Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews_. Kessinger Publishing.

> "The correspondence of one verse or line with another, I call Parallelism. When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it, in sense; or similar to it in the form of grammatical construction; these I call parallel lines; and the words or phrases answering one to another in the corresponding line, I call parallel terms."

Lowth, Robert (2021). _Isaiah_. HardPress Limited. 14.

There are many diverse types of parallel relationships. It causes us to place two or more things in comparison with each other so that their uniqueness and meaning becomes more visible after the comparison.

Comparison/Analogy

The corresponding words and images are meant to stimulate imaginative reflection on the shared metaphorical attributes of the paired items.

Psalm 33:6 **NASB***

By **the word of Yahweh** the heavens were made,
and by **the breath of his mouth** all their host.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 44:3 **NASB**

For **I will pour out** **water** on the thirsty land,
and **streams** on the dry ground;
 I will pour out **my Spirit** on your offspring
and **my blessing** on your descendants;

Contrast

The corresponding words and images stimulate imaginative reflection on the differences highlighted by the contrast.

Proverbs 10:11 **NASB**

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
but **the mouth** of the wicked conceals violence.

Complement

The second line complements the first in a general way, to complete a thought or image, or to heighten the point in some way.

Psalm 133:1 **NASB**

Behold, **how good and how pleasant** it is
for **brothers to dwell together** in unity!

Habakkuk 3:2 **Instructor's Translation**

LORD, I have heard the report about you; I fear.
Yahweh, **renew your work** in the midst of the years,
in the midst of the years **make it known**;
in wrath remember mercy.

Sequence

The lines are not strictly parallel but develop a short narrative sequence.

Psalm 31:1 **NASB***

In you, Yahweh, I have taken refuge;
let me never be ashamed;
in your righteousness deliver me.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 31:22 **Instructor's Translation**

As for me, I said in my alarm,
"I am cut off from before your eyes";
however, you heard the voice of my petition
when I cried to you.

Proverbs 4:10 **NASB**

Hear, my son, and accept my sayings
and the years of your life will be many.

For a longer example, take a look at Psalm 32.

Psalm 32:1-7 **NASB***

[1] How fortunate the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered!
[2] How fortunate the one to whom Yahweh does not impute iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit!
[3] When I kept silent, my body wasted away,
through my groaning all day long.
[4] For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my energy was drained,
with the heat of summer.
Selah.
[5] I acknowledged my sin to you,
and my iniquity I did not hide;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD;"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.
[6] Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you

in a time when you may be found;
surely in a flood of great waters
they will not reach him.
7 You are my hiding place;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with songs of deliverance.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The Function of Repetition and Double-Poetic Expression

This "speaking in pairs" creates opportunities to use multiple words and images to communicate one core idea from many angles. This type of poetic style is a wonderful way to express complex thoughts through pairing words and images in order to communicate more through juxtaposition.

The biblical authors developed vocabulary for this technique. The Hebrew word *mashal* (משל) means "comparison, analogy, proverb."

> "The parallel lines of biblical poetry are like a pair of binoculars. Some centuries, the lenses of a field glass were set in cylinders that could be slid in and out, but they remained in a single tube. The lookout on a ship looked through it with one eye. Today's field glass is a binocular: we look through two cylinders, with both eyes, so that we have the advantage of seeing depth. Our eyes, with or without binoculars, see 'in stereo.' The effect results from the fact that one eye has a slightly different angle than the other, and so produces a minimally different image. These two pictures are easily superimposed and assembled into one image inside our brain. Biblical parallelism does something comparable: this poetic device creates two subtly different images with two lines that are to be associated through parallel expression. It allows us an opportunity to consider both pictures separately, and then let them sink in together ... The point of similarity between two parallel lines is their very difference! Only those who look closely and have patience will discover and savor the role played by dissimilarity, its surprises, and its richness of meaning."
>
> Fokkelman, J.P. (2001). *Reading Biblical Poetry*. Westminster John Knox Press. 8-79.

> **Psalm 62:11-12a** **Instructor's Translation**
>
> 11 One thing God has spoken
> two things I have heard:
> that power belongs to God,
> 12 and covenant loyalty is yours, O LORD.

Reflection Question

What would you say is the benefit of communicating with parallelism? What does it do that narrative and discourse do not?

Session 17: Macro-Level Repetition in Biblical Poetry

Key Takeaways

- In biblical poetry, the authors invite us to compare parallel words/images in lines that are not next to each other through the use of symmetry (e.g., a symmetrical design such as ABBA).
- The biblical authors often employ wordplay using graphically similar words in Hebrew to convey relationships and meaning.

Poetic Conventions in Ancient Israel

Poetry is a form of speech that achieves a unique balance of maximum communication and ambiguity at the same time.

> "If we could hear God talking, making his will manifest in words of Hebrew language, what would it sound like? Poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communication. It's not only solemn, weighty, and forceful, but also densely woven with complex internal connections, meanings, and implications. It makes perfect sense why divine speech in the Hebrew Bible is most often represented as poetry. ... The form of this divine poetry helps explain why these texts have touched the lives of millions of readers far removed in time, space, and situation from the small groups of ancient Hebrews who produced and first read these texts."
>
> Alter, Robert (2011). *The Art Of Biblical Poetry*. Basic Books. 141.

Recommended Resources

Here is a starter's bibliography on biblical poetry.

- J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*.
- Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Words*.
- Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*.
- F.W. Dobbs-Allsop, *On Biblical Poetry*.

Larger Levels of Symmetry and Parallelism in Biblical Poetry

The biblical poets employ symmetrical parallelism in "multiple dimensions," so to speak. They can invite the reader to compare parallel words/images that are next to each other in the text sequence, but they can also signal that words/images should be compared with a parallel in a text that is distant. This signal is called symmetry. The poetic lines are given a symmetrical design so that the reader notices parallels in non-juxtaposed lines.

Symmetry Between Individual Poetic Lines

A If I forget you Jerusalem
    B let my right hand wither.
    B Let my tongue stick to my palate
A if I don't remember you.

Psalm 137:5-6. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

A Yahweh frustrated the plans of the nations;
    B he reduces to nothing the schemes of the peoples.
A Yahweh's plan endures forever,
    B the schemes of his heart, from generation to generation.

Psalm 33:10-11. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

A Love the Lord,
    B all you his godly ones!
        C The Lord preserves the faithful
        C and fully recompenses the proud.
A Be strong and let your heart take courage,
    B all you who hope in the Lord.

Psalm 31:23-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Symmetry Between Parts of a Stanza (Group of Poetic Lines)

A Hear, my son, and accept my sayings
    and the years of your life will be many.

B I have directed you in the way of wisdom;
    I have led you in upright paths.

B' When you walk, your steps will not be impeded;
    and if you run, you will not stumble.

Take hold of instruction;

A'   do not let go.
         Guard her, for she is your life .

Example of Biblical Poetry Structure. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Symmetrical Design of an Entire Poem

 May God be gracious to us and bless us
         and make his face shine (יאר) upon us. Selah

         That your ways may be known in the land ,
   your salvation among all nations .

         May the peoples praise you, O God;
         may all the peoples praise you.

               May the nations be glad and sing for joy,

                     for you rule the peoples with justice

               and guide the nations of the land. Selah

         May the peoples praise you, O God;
         may all the peoples praise you.

   Then the land will yield its harvest,
   and God , our God , will bless us .

 May God   bless us ,
   that all the ends of the land might fear (ייראו) him.

Psalm 67. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

This pattern invites the reader to compare and contrast lines that are parallel and distant from one another.

The poem begins by calling upon God in the language of the blessing of Aaron from <u>Numbers 6:24-26</u>.

A comparison of symmetrically matching lines yields a deeper layer of meaning in the poem.

The opening and closing lines call for God's blessing upon Israel, but for what purpose? The final line makes clear that God's blessing serves a larger purpose, namely, so through Israel all the nations will come to recognize the power and authority of Yahweh.

This same theme is carried deeper by the next pair of lines: Yahweh's "ways" and "salvation" are to be made known in all the land. How, exactly? By the land producing such a rich harvest of divine blessing that they will be forced to acknowledge Israel's God.

The refrain in the center of the poem makes clear that Israel's blessing fits into a wider purpose that all nations come to honor Yahweh the way that Israel does.

The poem's central lines focus on this theme. It's a request for the nations to experience the same divine presence and blessing that Israel does by Yahweh bringing justice and his royal rule to bear upon them.

This entire poem, therefore, is a poetic meditation on the role of God's promise to Abraham that through his seed God's blessing might be restored to all the nations. The symmetrical parallelism fosters and increases the visibility of this theme.

Different Ways of Reading. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).
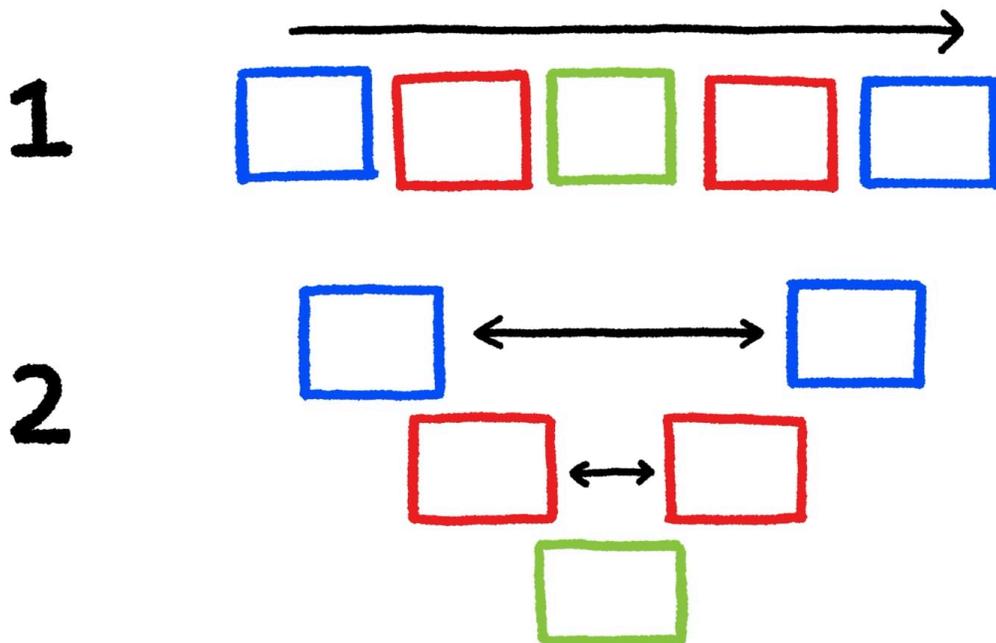
Reflection Question

Repetition can occur between poetic lines and also between larger chunks of text called stanzas. What are some practical ways to help you notice when repetition occurs between stanzas? What do you think this kind of repetition contributes to the meaning of a poem?

Module 4: Interpreting Biblical Narrative

SESSIONS 18-21

Narrative is the most common form of literature in the Hebrew Bible. Gain the tools needed to read it.

Session 18: Literary Representation and "Reality"

Key Takeaways

- When we read biblical narrative, we are reading an interpretation of the biblical events within the stylized poetics (i.e., conventions) of biblical narrative.
- Biblical narrative invites us into the narrative world of the authors, and it also invites us to view the world from the their perspective. The narratives work on you, and over time, they begin to affect the way we view ourselves and the world we're living in.
- When reading the Hebrew Bible, it is helpful to familiarize ourselves with the basic elements of ancient Near Eastern culture to gain insight into the culture of the ancient Israelites.
- However, the main key to understanding the text is the text itself. For example, to understand one narrative in Genesis, we need to understand it in light of the entire Genesis scroll and the TaNaK as a whole.

The Poetics of Biblical Narrative

Biblical narrative is a highly stylized kind of literature that (1) recounts Israel's history while (2) at the same time offering a prophetic interpretation of that history.

- Discerning the historical truthfulness of the biblical story is an important topic of research and debate, but it should not be confused with interpretation of these carefully crafted narratives. In other words, apologetics should not be confused with interpretation.
- Biblical narrative does not offer us security-camera footage of ancient Israelite history. Rather, the authors have employed the historiographical tools of "selectivity" and "thematic arrangement" to construct narratives with stylized conventions of plot, characterization, setting, and design patterns. Their rhetorical goal is to help the reader see the meaning and significance of the story they are telling.
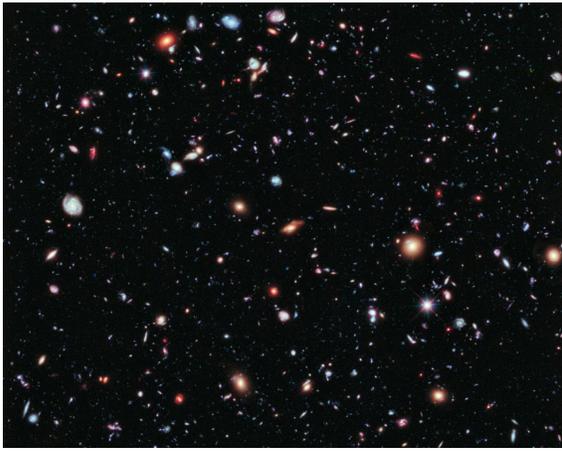
Left: Hubble Telescope (2009). *Hubble Deep Field Image*. ([Wikimedia Commons](#)). Right: van Gogh, Vincent (1889). *The Starry Night*. ([Wikimedia Commons](#)).

To illustrate this point, consider these two images of stars in the sky. Which image presents the night sky as it actually is?

Neither one, of course! Both images are representations of the starry universe portrayed through different media, for different purposes, and with different effects on the viewer.

Neither one is the starry universe itself. The Hubble photo represents a maximal realism, while *The Starry Night* employs an impressionistic style. But both are images, or colored pixels on a two-dimensional surface of digital paper. That is a far cry from the actual night sky!

The Starry Night conveys the impression and feeling of the night sky as it is relevant to a small human community. It communicates much through minimal detail, and uses juxtaposition and contrast (swirling skies versus geometric human buildings) as well as similarity (blue tones in the sky and on land).

> "A photograph of a tree is a good example of the distinction between a text and the event depicted in it. A photograph is a representation of a tree, yet it does not have bark and leaves, nor is the sky behind the tree a real sky. To say that a photograph only represents the tree but is not actually the tree does not mean the tree never existed or that the photograph is inaccurate because it only shows one side of the tree. The same can be said of the biblical narrative texts. To say they re-present events but are not the events themselves is simply to recognize a very obvious fact about biblical narratives: They are texts, which means we stand not before events, but representations of events through words."
>
> Sailhamer, John (1999). *[Introduction to Old Testament Theology](#)*. Zondervan Academic. 47.

Text Versus Event and the Meaning of Biblical Narrative

A text provides a literary representation of an object that helps the reader grasp its meaning and significance from a particular perspective.

"The Treachery of Images" by Rene Magritte provides a classic example of the difference between an object and its representation.

> "Ah, the famous pipe. How people reproached me for it! And yet, could you stuff my pipe? No, it's just a representation, is it not? So if I had written on my picture 'This is a pipe', I'd have been lying!"
>
> Harry Torczyner, _Magritte: The True Art of Painting_. 85.

Magritte, René (1929). _The Treachery of Images_. Wiki Art

In the Bible, the real world is mediated to the reader not only through the narrative text but also via the narrative world that frames the author's text.
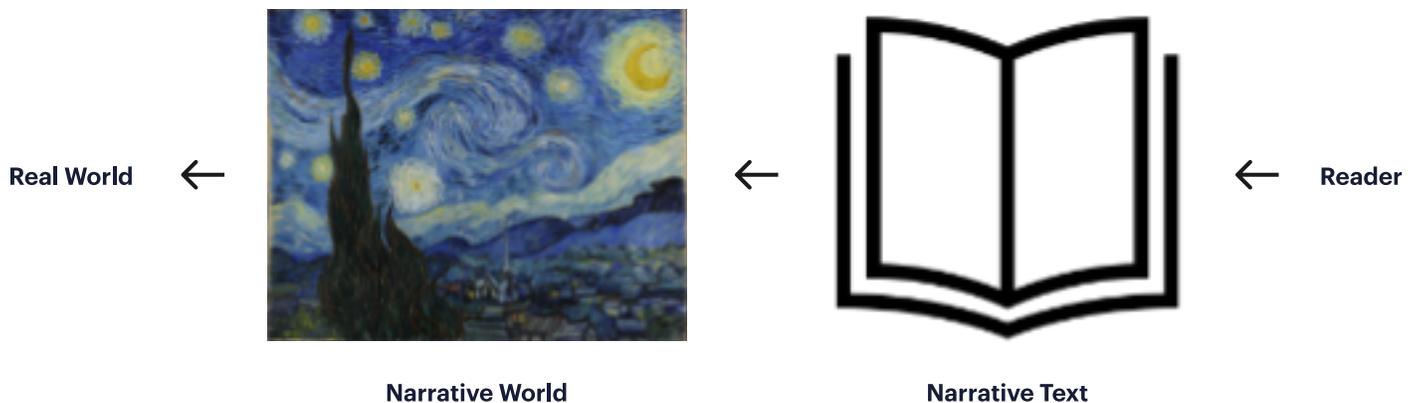
The Mediation of Meaning Through Narrative. Diagram created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

> The biblical authors "take the raw material of language and shape it into a version of the world of empirical reality. It's essentially linguistic structures that are adapted to conform to events in real life ... The reader looks at the events in the narrative in much the same way as he or she would look at events in real life, which makes it easy to forget that one is looking at words not the event itself ... While there are other avenues through which information can be gained about the real world events beyond the text, they are not, in fact, part of the text and not controlled by the author of the text. Whatever may be said about the world behind the narrative, it should not be identified with the narrative world depicted in the text itself. The textual world is a version of the events it depicts. It should not be taken as their replacement."

Sailhamer, John (1999). *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*. Zondervan Academic. 51.

What Does This Mean for the Hebrew Bible?

The Hebrew Bible is a literary representation of Israel's history that claims to be a divinely inspired, prophetic interpretation of Israel's history. It is not a history of Israel but a theological interpretation of Israel's story in the context of a cosmic history of creation (Gen. 1-11). The narrative claims to both represent history and to show its meaning and significance, with the aim of eliciting a response from the reader.

When reading the Hebrew Bible, we need to become familiar with the basic elements of ancient Near Eastern culture, but the primary focus of our efforts to understand the text should be the text itself. In other words, the entire TaNaK is the first and most primary context for the meaning of the biblical text.

Recommended Resources

Here is a starter's bibliography on biblical narrative.

- J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*.
- Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.
- Adele Berlin, *Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*.
- Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*.

Reflection Question

Have you ever thought of the biblical text as a representation of reality rather than as the reality itself? What does this mean for what we will encounter in the text? If it is a representation, can it still be truthful?

Session 19: Plot in Biblical Narrative: The Story of Jonah

Key Takeaways

- The plot of a narrative invests the story with meaning—the conflict within a plot and how the conflict is resolved invests the narrative with its ethical message.
- Narrative meaning can also be found through plot sequence, or the use of conflict, climax, and resolution to convey a message. The same characters in the same conflict but with different resolutions of the climax can have a different message.

Keys for Interpreting Biblical Narrative: Plot

Plot is the arrangement of characters and events into a meaningful sequence in order to communicate the meaning of the story.
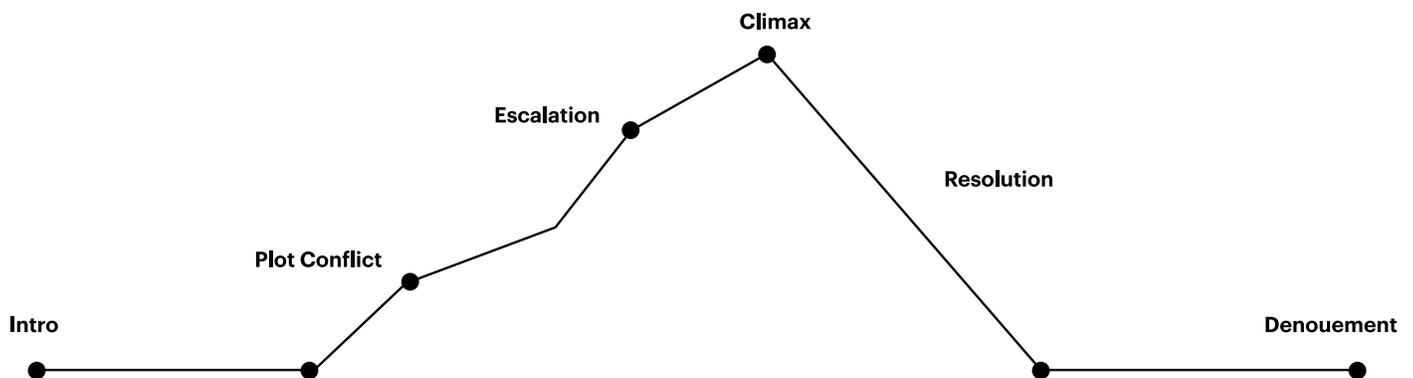
Plot Structure. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

> "Stories and plots are the crucial agents that invest events with meaning. The way the facts are described, the point at which the tension is created and the climax occurs, the selection and arrangement of the parts, these all indicate the meaning which the events are believed to possess, and thus what an author means to communicate by telling them to the reader."
>
> Wright, N.T. (1992). *The New Testament and the People of God*. Fortress Press. 79.

Narrative Meaning and Plot Sequence

Narratives communicate by identifying a particular event as the problem that ignites tension and forces the characters into a story of finding a resolution. With the selection of the problem and the way characters overcome it and find a solution, these plot points assume and manifest the narrator's ethical value set, and they are part of how stories make moral claims on the reader.

The same exact series of events can carry a totally different moral message based on the chosen plot conflict and resolution.

- Story #1: Billy is a growing young boy. He keeps sneaking cookies from the cupboards at night. His mom keeps catching him, and so he develops more and more creative ways to steal the cookies.
- Story #2: Billy is a growing young boy. He keeps sneaking cookies from the cupboards at night. His mom gets more and more concerned, and eventually develops a reward system so that if he cleans his room weekly he can earn lots of cookies.

Tracking the Plot: Jonah

Reading biblical narrative requires the developed skill of tracking the plot so that we get the message intended by the author.

Let's look at the story of Jonah. What is the real plot conflict?

In Jonah 1, we are presented two plot conflicts:

1. God and Nineveh: The word of Yahweh came to Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me." (1:1-2)
2. God and Jonah: "But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (1:3)

In Jonah 2, the second plot conflict is addressed as Jonah nears death, prays to God, and is delivered.

In Jonah 3, the first plot conflict is addressed as the Ninevites turn away from their evil after Jonah's message.

If the story ended in chapter 3 (as it does in many children's books), it would be a nice and neat story: People should turn away from their evil (like the Ninevites) and rebellion (like Jonah) and obey God.
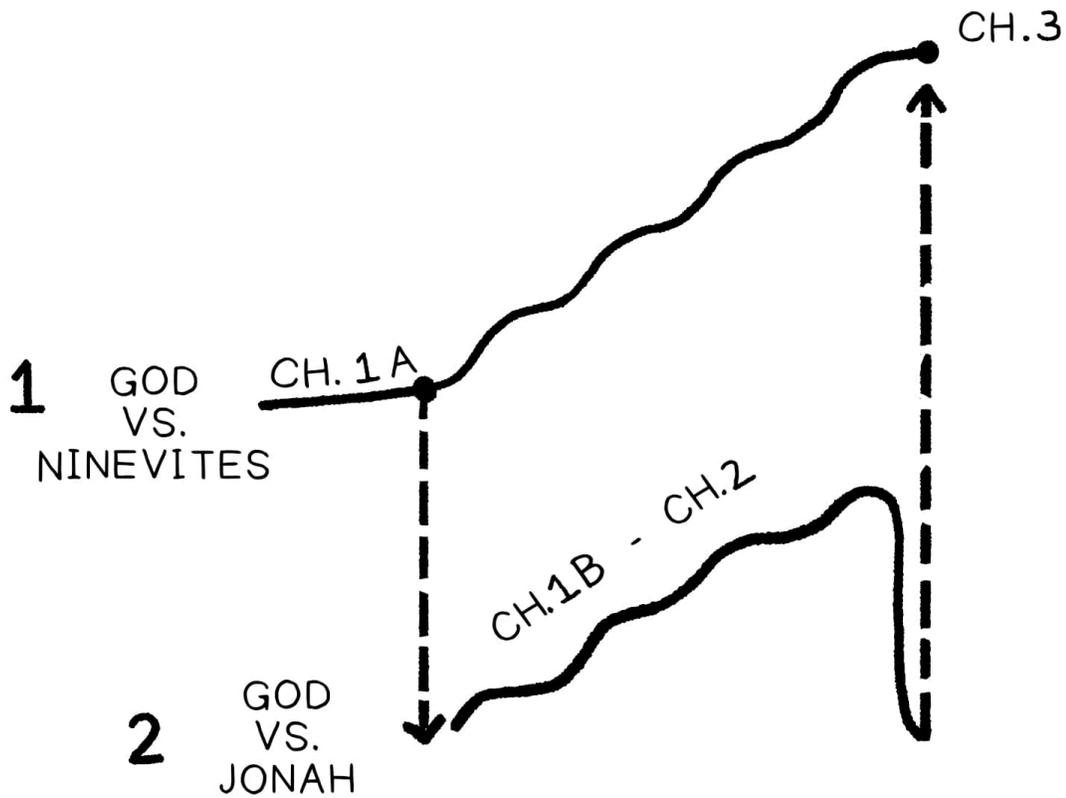
Jonah Plot Through Chapter 3. Diagram created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

But Jonah chapter 4 problematizes all this! Here we find out that while Jonah has technically obeyed, he still harbors anger, resentment, and contempt for God. In other words, plot conflict #2 was never really resolved, and the book ends with that conflict up in the air.

The four-chapter book is about how God's own people can become the biggest obstacle to God's purposes in the world!
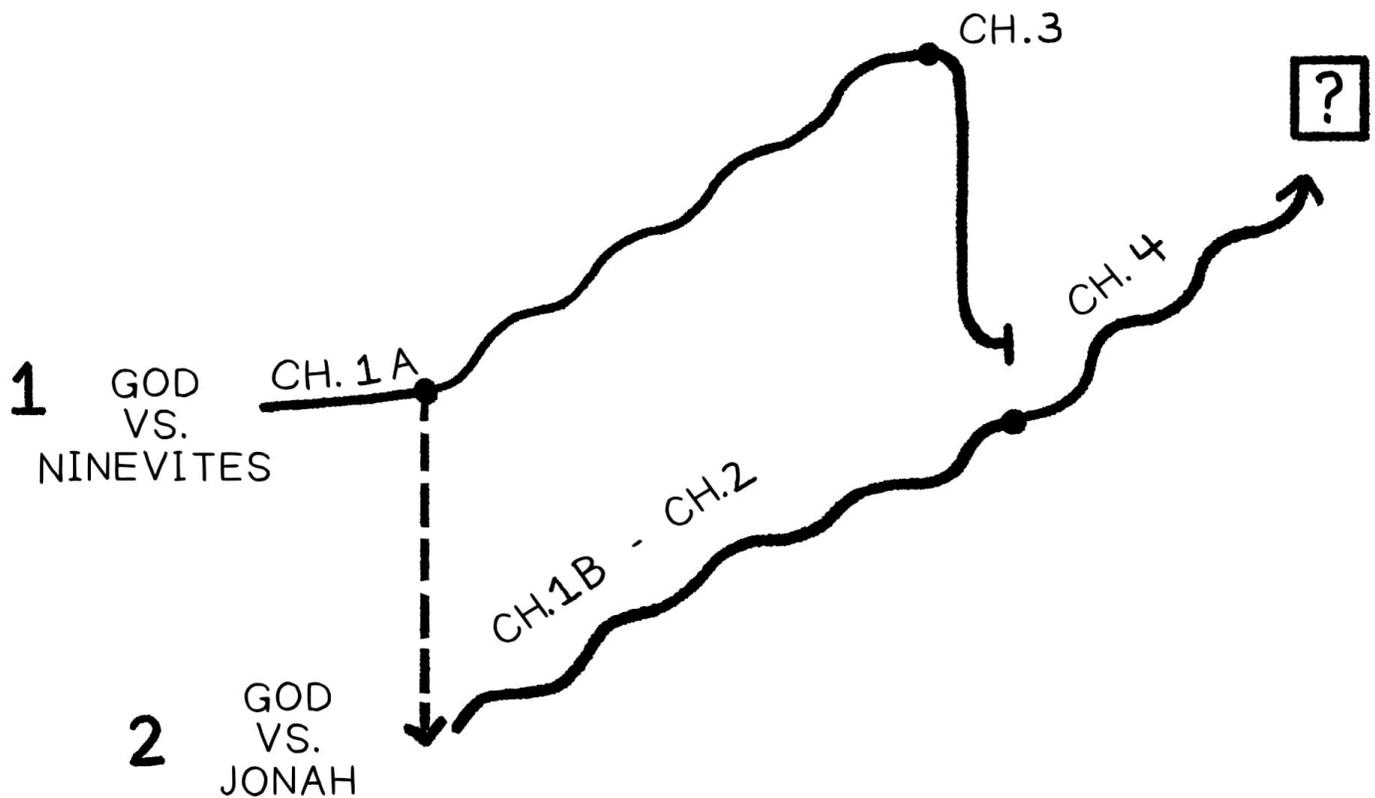
Jonah Plot Through Chapter 4. Diagram created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Overlapping Plotlines: Abraham

Biblical stories consist of multiple overlapping plotlines. The reader must distinguish between the overall plotline and the many subplots that make up the "episodes" of a larger story. But not only that, the lower-level plotlines all connect with and contribute to the bigger plotline.

This time, let's look at the way plotlines overlap in the story of Abraham. Start with the question, "What is the plot conflict?"

Genesis 12:1-3: God calls Abraham to an act of radical faith so that the divine blessing can be restored to all the nations through him.

Potential plot conflict: "Those who bless you, I will bless, and those who curse you I will curse. And all the families of the land will find blessing through you" (Gen. 12:3).

Genesis 12:4-9: Abraham obeys and goes to Canaan!

Genesis 12:10-20: Abraham lacks faith and leaves the land, and he then lies about his wife, placing her in danger of being taken by other men. God then brings death plagues on Pharaoh's house. Abraham's lack of faith brings a curse and not blessing on the nations. So Pharaoh gives him wealth and slaves, and sends him back to Canaan.

Genesis 15: God promises Abraham that a child will come from his body and not another, and this descendant will become God's blessing to the nations.

Genesis 16: Sarah and Abraham sexually abuse Hagar, an Egyptian slave, in an effort to produce a son by their own wisdom, resulting in the birth of Ishmael.

Genesis 21: Abraham and Sarah have their own child, Isaac, and Sarah jealously exiles Hagar and Ishmael. So Abraham abandons them to their fate by sending them out into the desert with a small amount of water. He loses his firstborn son.

Genesis 22: God "tests" Abraham by demanding back the life of his beloved son. Abraham finally surrenders his most precious and valued son, and God spares him by providing a substitute (the ram). This is why God says he will fulfill his promise from Genesis 12:3 (see Gen. 22:15-18).

As we trace the plot conflict through the Abraham story, we see how the biblical author has set up the questions driving the narrative forward. The overarching plot conflict of Genesis 12-22 is created by God's choice of Abraham. God has committed to spreading his divine blessing to all nations through this man and his wife. But Abraham and Sarah actually become the problem that God has to overcome!

> "The very first, and only really rigid, rule in literary theory is that texts must be read from beginning to end. The meaning of a word is not determined by its definition, but by its context. So also a single story's meaning is only determined by the relationship of all its elements to the whole text."
>
> McEvenue, Sean (1994). *Interpretation and Bible: Essays on Truth in Literature*. Liturgical Press. 171.

Reflection Question

What are some of your main takeaways from this discussion on biblical plot and subplot in the book of Jonah?

Session 20: Plots and Subplots

Key Takeaways

- One way biblical narrative uses plot is through plot embedding, or layers of storylines working together to tell the overall story of the Bible.
- Individual narratives are framed within a larger context that gives them a meaning that transcends the individual events.
- The Hebrew Bible is about our need for the messiah, and the New Testament reveals that Jesus is the Messiah we need. Both Jesus and the apostles appeal to the Hebrew Bible to reveal Jesus' true identity.

Plots Within Plots Within Plots

The entire biblical narrative works like a complex interweaving of plot layers. Each subplot contributes to the higher level, and each higher level determines the ultimate meaning of the subplot.

Plot Level 1: God and the Nations

Genesis 1-11 sets the story in motion.

- Humans are installed as divine images to rule on God's behalf
- Humans foolishly forfeit their responsibility, and they are exiled unto the land of death
- But God promises to raise up a "seed" who will overcome evil through death
- From outside Eden to Babylon (Gen. 4-11)

Plot Level 2: God and Abraham's Family

Genesis 12 through the rest of the Hebrew Bible tells the story of God and Israel.

- Abraham's family and the covenant promise (Gen. 12-50)
- The exodus (Exod. 1-18)
- The covenant at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19-Num. 10)
- Wilderness wanderings (Num. 10-Deut. 34)
- Entry to the promised land (Josh.)
- The failure of the judges (Jud.)
- The failure of the monarchy (Sam.-Kgs.)
- Return from exile and unrealized hopes (Ezra-Neh.)

Plot Levels 1 and 2 Combine: Jesus and the Restoration of God's Reign

The New Testament brings together both levels of the plot of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus is both the faithful human image that rules the world with God (plot level 1) and the faithful Israelite through whom God's covenant promises can spread to the nations (plot level 2).

Plot Level 3: The Plot of Each Biblical Narrative

The plot at levels 1 and 2 is carried along by a vast number of shorter narratives, each with their own plotlines. Hundreds of individual narratives make up all of the larger movements. Every individual narrative is framed within its larger plot context. The ultimate meaning of these individual stories depends on their placement in the overall story.
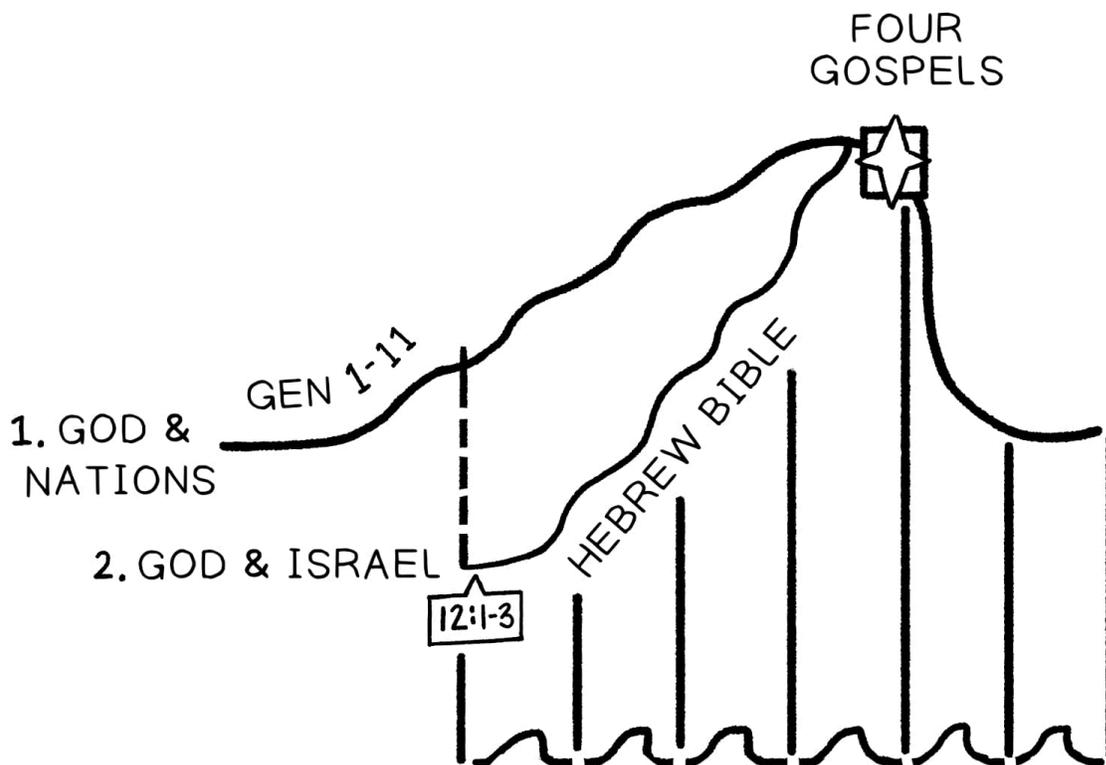
The Plotline of the Bible. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Reflection Question

How would you summarize the way that the story of Abraham's family relates to the story of the whole Hebrew Bible?

Session 21: Characterization and Setting in Biblical Narrative

Key Takeaways

- Biblical authors use characters as vehicles for their message primarily through showing rather than telling.
- Narrators rarely make comments in biblical narrative, and when they do, it's with small details or brief phrases.
- Biblical authors give us the trace of a character but we have to fill in the rest based on the little we know.
- The minimalist policy is very intentional. It forces us, the readers, to participate in the making of meaning.
- Biblical authors use the setting as a tool in biblical narratives to evoke memories and emotions and to generate expectations about what could happen in the story.

Characters in Biblical Narrative

Narrative and Moral Values

Narrative characters are the most effective means of communicating the moral vision of the biblical authors. But how exactly?

> "Most of an author's view of the world and the values they want to communicate are embodied in the narrative and expressed through the characters. Not only do characters serve as a narrator's mouthpiece, but also what is and is not related about them, which of their personality traits are emphasized and which are not, these all reveal the ethical values and moral norms within the narrative. The decisions that characters are called upon to make when confronted with moral choices, and the results of their decisions provide undisputable evidence of a narrative's ethical dimension."
>
> Bar-Efrat, Shimon (2004). *Narrative Art in the Bible*. T&T Clark. 47.

Characters in the Bible are not so much models for behavior as they are mirrors for self-reflection. Through means of identification, the reader comes to either sympathize with a character's challenges and choices, or they disassociate by viewing their behavior as ethically inferior or unwise.

By sympathizing with the plot-conflict of the characters, the narrator invites us to view ourselves in light of this story and its resolution.

Biblical Style in Narrative Characterization

> "The Greek storytelling tendency of loading the story with details is one that modern literary practice has by and large adopted and developed. Precisely for that reason we have to adjust our habits as readers in order to bring an adequate attentiveness to the rather different narrative maneuvers characteristic of the Hebrew Bible. The underlying biblical conception of people's character is that they're unpredictable, constantly emerging from and slipping back into ambiguity. Thus, biblical narrative style is marked by the art of reticence."

> Alter, Robert (2011). *The Art Of Biblical Narrative*. Basic Books. 129.

Direct Characterization

The biblical narrators sometimes provide direction, description, or evaluation of a character, but not as often as we might assume. For example, the physical appearance of a character is mentioned occasionally, but only when relevant to the narrative, like with Joseph's good looks, Saul's tall stature, and Esau's hair. The biblical narrators also occasionally give a moral evaluation of a character, like with the phrase "So and so did evil/good in the eyes of Yahweh."

Direct characterization is not as common in the Bible as is often assumed. In *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Adele Berlin uses the illustration of two types of painting styles: realism (modern Western novels) versus impressionism or pointillism (ancient biblical narrative) (Berlin, 1994).

Instead of direct characterization, the biblical authors give us a few small details.

- Esau is hairy. In the story, this means he's "outdoorsy" and primitive and behaves like an animal.
- Eli is old and blind. This means he is literally and relationally blind because he ignores the rebellion of his sons.
- Saul is tall and David is small. This speaks to the contrast of their characters. Saul imposes himself from above, while David humbly allows God to exalt him from below.

> [In impressionist art,] "the suggestion of a thing may be more convincing than a detailed portrayal. This is due to the tendency of our brains to project meaning onto images in order to complete our expectations. We see what we expect to see, and the surrounding information guides our perception. This is why we fill in a partially drawn figure to conform to our expectations, and in some cases too much information may destroy the image. The trick, from the artist's point of view, is how much detail to include and how much to omit. This is a good corrective for those who wish biblical stories provided more concrete details, but this is precisely its narrative technique. The gaps left in biblical narratives are intentional, so that with a few deft strokes the biblical author engages the imagination of the reader to construct a picture that is more 'real' than if he had filled in David or Abraham or Joseph's portrait with more detail. Minimal representation can give maximal illusion."

> Berlin, Adele (1994). *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Eisenbrauns.

Indirect Characterization

> "Biblical narratives demonstrate a decided preference for using deeds to reveal character, letting us learn about characters through observing the way they behave in various situations. They prefer showing to telling."

Lubeck, Ray (2011). *Swallowing Jonah: Strategies for Reading Biblical Narratives*. Lambert Academic Publishing. 9.

Moses kills an Egyptian, but we aren't told why. Was this justice? Is this a good or a bad decision? Abraham gives Sarah away, twice, but the narrator doesn't chime in to say this was wrong. David commands Solomon to go on an assassination spree to eliminate enemies, but this wasn't commanded by God.

Instead of moralizing about characters' decisions, biblical narrators simply show you the decision and consequences of characters' decisions and allow you to ponder the significance.

Dialogue, Speeches, and Poetry

Character Dialogue: Biblical authors use dialogue in sophisticated ways to offer a window into the motives and moral values of the character.

Speeches: Very often a narrative will pause, a key character will offer a long speech, and the reader is left to determine the character's authenticity and motives.

Examples of Key Speeches

- Joshua in Joshua 24
- Samuel in 1 Samuel 8 or 12
- Solomon in 1 Kings 8

Inset Poems: Poems are often inserted into the narrative in order to summarize the core themes of the story so far, or to preview the themes that are going to be developed in the following narrative. Often the poems use dramatic or cosmic imagery in order to show how the narrative links up to the larger scale storyline of the biblical narrative.

Examples of Key Poems/Songs

- Jacob in Genesis 49
- Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15
- Moses in Deuteronomy 32-33
- Deborah and Barak in Judges 5
- Hannah in 1 Samuel 2
- David in 2 Samuel 22-23

Setting

Space in Biblical Narrative

Place is a key feature of biblical narrative. As the biblical story develops, places begin to take on a symbolic/meaningful significance based on the events that happen there.

Example: Garden of Eden > The East > Babylon. The human spiral of sin and selfishness moves from the garden to Babylon (Gen. 1-11 = tragic).

- Adam and Eve are banished "to the east" (<u>Gen. 3</u>)
- Cain is banished "to the east" (<u>Gen. 4</u>)
- People move "to the east" to build Babylon (<u>Gen. 11:1-2</u>)

Babylon becomes a superpower in the story that comes back to take over the family of Abraham.

Egypt, Moab, the wilderness, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem all become loaded with more and more meaning as the biblical story develops.

Time in Biblical Narrative

Pay attention to the difference between narrative time and time of narration. You can tell which events are most meaningful to the author's message by what gets the most airtime and by what time periods are given the most textual space.

The Bible as Anti-Didactic Literature

> "One you realize the Bible's 'anti-didactic' style is a narrative policy, you gain insight into the role of the aesthetic subtlety of these stories. They almost always shun extended commentary or explanation, let alone homiletics [= sermoning, moralizing]. These authors intentionally leave gaps for the reader to puzzle over—discontinuities, indeterminacies, non-sequiturs, unexplained motives—and they're fully aware of the disorienting effect this has on readers as they try to draw lessons from the past. Biblical narrators conceal the meaning of their stories to an extent seldom equalled by any other literature in history. This style was not inherited by Israel's neighboring cultures, rather it was invented and elaborated in the Israelite tradition of narrative and it's nothing less than deliberate. …
>
> In day to day life, knowledge and information and the ability to understand the meaning of events is power. But in reading the Bible, we're constantly puzzling over the gaps in the stories [Why did Moses do that? Why did God do that?], and this is is strategic: our puzzlement is an imitation of our real position in life. It exposes our ignorance about the meaning of history or our lives. Biblical stories imitate our real-life conditions of inference, as we too are daily surrounded by ambiguities, baffled and misled by appearances, reduced to piecing fragments together by trial and error of interpretation, and we're often left in the dark about the meaning of our lives to the very end. The scarcity of commentary by the biblical narrators forces us to constantly evaluate the character's motives and the meaning of the plot as we look for clues. It is only by sustained effort that the reader of biblical narratives can attain to the point of view that God has possessed all along. Making sense of biblical stories is to gain a sense of being human."
>
> Sternberg, Meir (1987). *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Indiana University Press. 42, 47.

Reflection Question

Why might the narrator leave ambiguities in characterization? What is the effect of creating complex characters or leaving gaps?

Module 5: Repeated Words and Design Patterns

SESSIONS 22-29

Sharpen your understanding of repeated words and design patterns found in the Bible.

Session 22: Design Patterns and Literary Units

Key Takeaways

- The Bible is like a photomosaic with identifiable smaller literary units crafted and arranged to work together and create a larger, overarching message.
- Biblical authors use repeated scenes, often with slight variations, to develop themes throughout the story.
- A concordance is a very helpful tool for identifying repeated words and phrases in our Bibles.

Design Patterns and Literary Analysis

Recall our earlier exploration of the origins of the Hebrew Bible and how it's a collection of collections that has been written, adapted, and edited into a unified whole. Let's take a look at two additional analogies that will help us understand the significance of this fact for how we read and interpret biblical literature.

Analogy 1: The Photomosaic

This portrait of Louis Armstrong, created by Robert Silvers, consists of hundreds of smaller photos taken from actual recording sessions with Louis Armstrong.

Silvers, Robert (2000). *Louis Armstrong*. Photomosaic.com.

The unique unity of the larger photomosaic is achieved precisely by its composite nature. The thematic arrangement of light/dark/gray tiny squares becomes a tool in the artists hand to create larger patterns of color that provide an ordered, unified picture of the subject.

The Hebrew Bible displays this kind of mosaic unity on a large- and small-scale level.

Analogy 2: Repeated Motifs and Themes in Film

Movie directors often create a cohesive unity with the themes and plotline of a story by repetition and variation. By building up viewer expectations through repetition, the director can introduce variation and surprise.

In *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, consider the motif of the "ring temptation" scene. Some characters are tempted by the ring's power and they succumb to it (Smeagol, Boromir, Frodo). Other characters resist its power, but in different ways: Bilbo (just barely), Gandalf and Galadriel (through fear and trembling), and Aragorn (like it's no problem!).

This diverse set of responses to the ring's power creates a rich palette of characters and a complex portrait of power in the story.

Jackson, P. (Director). (2001-2003). *The Lord of the Rings Series* [Film]. New Line Cinema.

The biblical authors were masters of this technique. In fact, this basic principle of patterned repetition and analogy is the most fundamental tool in their repertoire. And it's accomplished through the simplest of means: strategic repetition of key words.

Identifying Literary Units (Segmentation)

These two analogies illustrate different features of the TaNaK collection, which creates the need for two related reading strategies.

1. Identifying literary units (segmentation): Just as a photomosaic consists of hundreds of smaller photos, so the epic biblical narrative consists of hundreds of smaller episodes. Learning to identify the beginning and ending of literary units that make up the larger mosaic of a biblical book helps the reader begin to see the structure of the text.
2. Identifying repeated words and themes that weave the literary units together (coordination): Just as the smaller photos in a photomosaic are organized according to patterns of color, light, and tone, so the literary units of the biblical narrative are woven together through patterns of repeated words, themes, and images. These repetitions invite the reader to see continuity and an ongoing argument that develops through the course of the story.

The next session will explore coordination, the strategy of identifying repeated words and themes.

Markers of Literary Units in Narrative

If we imagine the individual images in a photomosaic or the smallest pieces of a quilt, then segmentation means paying attention to the boundaries of the smallest literary unit. The biblical authors have a wide variety of techniques to indicate the opening and conclusion of literary units, depending on literary genre and context. The most helpful introduction to this method of study is found in David Dorsey's book, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, chapters 1-5.

To identify the boundary markers of these literary units, one key strategy is to watch for a shift in character, time, setting, or plot.

Example: The addition of new characters and shifting to a new time and setting, like when Abram and Sarai go to Egypt and Pharaoh is introduced in Genesis 12:10-20. The action initiated in the unit's beginning comes to a resolution at its end, like in Joshua 2:1 (the spies are sent) and Joshua 2:23-24 (the spies return).

Another feature of biblical narrative that can help us identify unit markers is when the authors clearly mark the conclusion of one narrative by the beginning of the following unit, as in Genesis chapters 14, 15, and 16 (see 14:1 , 15:1 , 16:1 , etc.).

Hierarchies of Literary Units in Biblical Narrative

When all of the above principles are applied to a literary analysis of Genesis 2-3, it yields the following outline of the Eden narrative.

Verses	Unit	Part	Movement
2:4-6 No garden, humans, or rain	**2:4-17** From Wasteland to Eden	**2:4-25** From Isolated Wasteland to Communion in Eden	**2:4-3:24** The Eden Narrative: From Garden to Exile
2:7-9 God plants a garden and forms human			
2:10-14 The Eden river flows to become four rivers			
2:15-17 Human put in the garden + divine command			
2:18-20 Problem: a human alone	**2:18-25** From Isolation to Communion		
2:21-23 Solution: two humans out of			

Identifying the Literary Units of Genesis 2-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Verses	Unit	Part	Movement
one			
2:24-25 Two humans married			
3:1-5 Dialogue between snake and woman	**3:1-13** Folly and the Fall		
3:6-7 Woman and man eat from the tree			
3:8-13 Dialogue between God and humans			
3:14-15 Curse on the snake	**3:14-24** The Fallout	**3:14-24** The Fallout and Exile from Eden	
3:16 Consequences for the woman			
3:17-19 Consequences for the man			
3:20-21 Provision of garments			
3:22-24 Humans exiled from Eden			

Identifying the Literary Units of Genesis 2-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

When the same information is displayed in a vertical form, you can begin to see the hierarchy of context for any given story, which is itself made up of many nested layers of smaller episodes and scenes.

Genesis 1-50												
Genesis 1-11												
Genesis 2:4-3:24 - The Eden Narrative												
2:4-25							3:1-13			3:14-24		
2:4-17				2:18-25			3:1-5	3:6-7	3:8-13	3:14-21		3:22-24
2:4-6	2:7-9	2:10-14	2:15-17	2:18-20	2:21-23	2:45-25				3:14-15	3:16	3:17-19	3:20-21

Nesting Literary Units in Genesis. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

This segmentation of biblical narrative is immensely helpful as a first step in understanding, but it raises the need for the next step: studying how all these different literary units have been woven together with developing themes and ideas. This is the study of coordination in biblical narrative.

Reflection Question

What are some different ways to identify where literary units begin and end? Why is this important?

Session 23: Identifying Repeated Words

Key Takeaways

- Repeated words, phrases, and parallel themes connect individual stories across the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.
- Biblical authors use repetition of lead words to create patterns that guide the reader's focus and create expectations for the reader.
- A "lead word" is a word that repeats significantly in a text or group of texts. The biblical authors use variations of Hebrew word roots to create wordplay and repetition.

Identifying Repeated Words (Coordination)

As the biblical authors collected and arranged the narratives and poems, they also created coordinating connections by linking units together through repeated words and themes. The biblical authors were masters of this technique. The most fundamental tools in their repertoire were patterned repetition and analogy, which they accomplished using the simplest of means: strategic repetition of key words.

Dense Repetition

Dense repetition of a word or word family can signal a core theme of a literary unit. These are known as lead words.

> "A lead-word (German: *leitwort*) is a word or word-root that repeats significantly in a text or group of texts, and by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text ... The repetition may not be of the same exact word, but of the word-root ... which intensifies the dynamic action of the repetition ... if you imagine the entire text stretched out before you, you can sense waves moving back and forth between key words, matching the rhythm of the text ... it is one of the most powerful means of conveying meaning."
>
> Buber, Martin (2012). *Schriften zur Bibel.* Gütersloher Verlagshaus. 1131.

Hebrew is based on a system of three-consonant root words. This illustration helps show how related words, visually and aurally obvious in the original Hebrew, would be used to create thematic groupings by repetition.
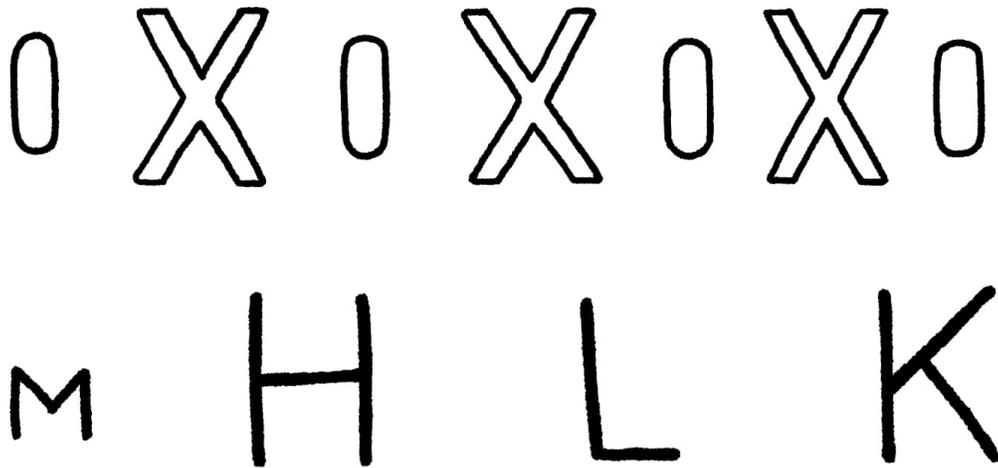
Genesis 1 Literary Units. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Repetition of "Good" in Genesis 1

- <u>Genesis 1:4</u>: "And God saw that the light was good (וירא ... כי טוב)."
- <u>Genesis 1:10</u>: "And God saw that [the dry land] was good (וירא ... כי טוב)."
- <u>Genesis 1:12</u>: "And God saw that [the vegetation] was good (וירא ... כי טוב)."
- <u>Genesis 1:18</u>: "And God saw that [the lights] was good (וירא ... כי טוב)."
- <u>Genesis 1:21</u>: "And God saw that [the sea life] was good (וירא ... כי טוב)."
- <u>Genesis 1:25</u>: "And God saw that [the land life] was good (וירא ... כי טוב)."
- <u>Genesis 1:31</u>: "And God saw all that he had made, and look, it was very good (וירא ... והנה טוב מאר)."

This phrase is like a drumbeat during days one through six, and it sets the reader's expectation so that the different wording of the seventh repetition of "very good" stands out and feels climactic.

In terms of God's character portrait, this repetition makes a clear claim: God is the provider and evaluator of what is truly good. In <u>Genesis 1</u>, "good" defines the ordered environments that make life possible (days one through three), and it defines the abundant creatures that fill the skies and the land (days four through six).
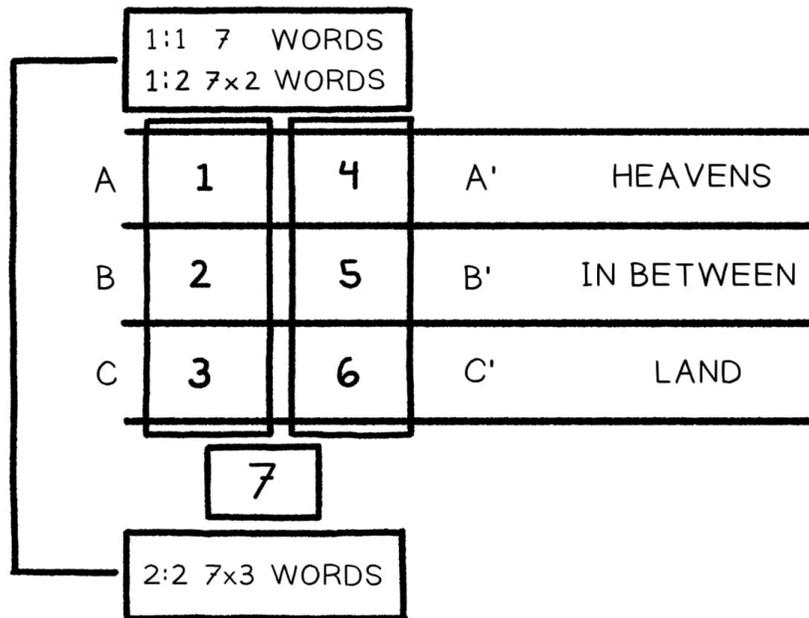
Genesis 1 Literary Units. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Repetition of "Bless" in Genesis 12:1-3

Genesis 12:1-3 **NASB**

[1] Now the LORD said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
and from your relatives
and from your father's house,
to the land which I will show you;
[2] and I will make you a great nation,
and I will **bless** you,
and make your name great;
and so you shall be a **blessing**;
[3] and I will bless those who **bless** you,
and the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be **blessed**."

Reflection Question

What stands out to you about how repetition or structure works in Genesis 1?

Session 24: Repeated Words and Literary Design

Key Takeaways

- The message of the text is bound up with its literary form, and the literary form is part of the message.
- Like biblical poetry, biblical narrative is intentionally designed with an identifiable structure.
- Although it might not be helpful for everyone, for some, studying the literary design of Bible passages can be exactly what they need in their journey of reading and understanding the Bible.

God's Covenant with Abram: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 12:1-3

The biblical authors use repetition to package the information of a narrative in multiple layers of interconnection. They use the same techniques for Hebrew poetry.

8 **And Elohim said to Noah** and to his sons **with him**, saying,

9 "And I myself, behold, **I set up my covenant** with y'all,
and **with your seed** after you;
10 and **with every living creature** that is **with you**,
the birds, the beasts, and every **living creature** of the land **with you**;
from everything that comes out of the ark,
even every **living creature** of the land.
11 And **I set up my covenant with y'all**;
and never again will **all flesh** **be cut off by the waters of the flood**,
and never again will there be a flood to ruin the land."

12 **And Elohim said**,

"This is **the sign of** **the covenant** which I am giving
between me and between you
and between every living creature that is **with you**, for everlasting generations;
13 I give **my bow in the cloud**,
and it will be for **a sign of** **a covenant**
between me and between the land;

14 and it will come about when **I cloud a cloud** over the land,
that **it will be seen** , **the bow in the cloud** ,
15 and **I will remember** my covenant,
which is between me and between you
and between every living creature of **all flesh** ;
and never again will the waters become a flood to ruin **all flesh** .

16 And **the bow is in the cloud** ,
then **I will see it** ,
to remember **the everlasting covenant**
between Elohim and between every living creature,
with all flesh that is on the land."

17 **And Elohim said to Noah** ,

"This is **the sign of** **the covenant which I have set up**
between me and **all flesh** that is on the land."

Genesis 9:8-17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

God's speech is designed with the features of Hebrew poetry. The symmetrically paired elements illuminate each other and deepen the significance through similarity and difference.

- Sources of identity: one's land // one's family
- Signs of blessing: great nation // great name
- Signs of divine protection: blessing // curse

The final sentence is also offset by its lack of a symmetrical partner, identifying it as a climactic statement.

Literary Design of 2 Kings 4:1-7

First, let's read the text and use color patterns to register all of the key repeated words.

Woman to Prophet Conflict: Death and Debt

A

a 1 Now **a certain woman** of the wives of the sons of the prophets **cried out to Elisha** ,
a "**Your servant** my husband is **dead** ,
b' and you know that **your servant** feared Yahweh;
c and **the lender** has come to take my **two children** to be his slaves."

Man/Woman Dialogue: He Said She Said

B

a 2 **And Elisha said to her**,

   b "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?"

a' **And she said**,

   b' "Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil ."

Command: Get Empty Vessels, Pour Out Until Full

C

3 And he said,

"Go, request for yourself vessels from outside,

from all your neighbors,

empty vessels ;

do not get a few.

4 "And you shall go in and shut the door behind you and your sons ,

and you shall pour out into all these vessels ,

and you shall set aside what is full ."

Fulfillment: Empty Vessels Poured Out Until Full

C'

5 And she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons ;

they were bringing to her and she was pouring .

6 And it came about when the vessels were full ,

Man/Woman Dialogue: She Said He Said

B'

a and she said to her son,

   b "Bring near to me another vessel ."

a' And he said to her,

   b' "There is not another vessel ."

      c And the oil stopped.

Woman to Man of God Resolution: Life and Debt Paid

A'

7 And she came and she told the man of God ,

and he said,

"Go, sell the oil and pay your lender ,

and you and your sons can live on the rest."

2 Kings 4:1-7. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

The story seems like a jumble of repetition, but the main themes and the plot arc of the story are clear. The woman's situation changes from death and debt into life and abundance, all because she obeys the word of the prophet. However, if the reader ponders (and memorizes) the story, reciting it and breaking it down into its smallest literary units, the repetitions fall into a sophisticated literary arrangement.

Reading in Two Dimensions

When the reader pays attention to the narrative sequence and the repetitions, it becomes clear that the story has a symmetrical shape made up of both key words and plot/character elements (all indicated in the right column).

The reader is invited to read the story in two dimensions (just like biblical poetry). The story can be read (1) in a forward linear sequence and also (2) in a non-linear symmetrical sequence.
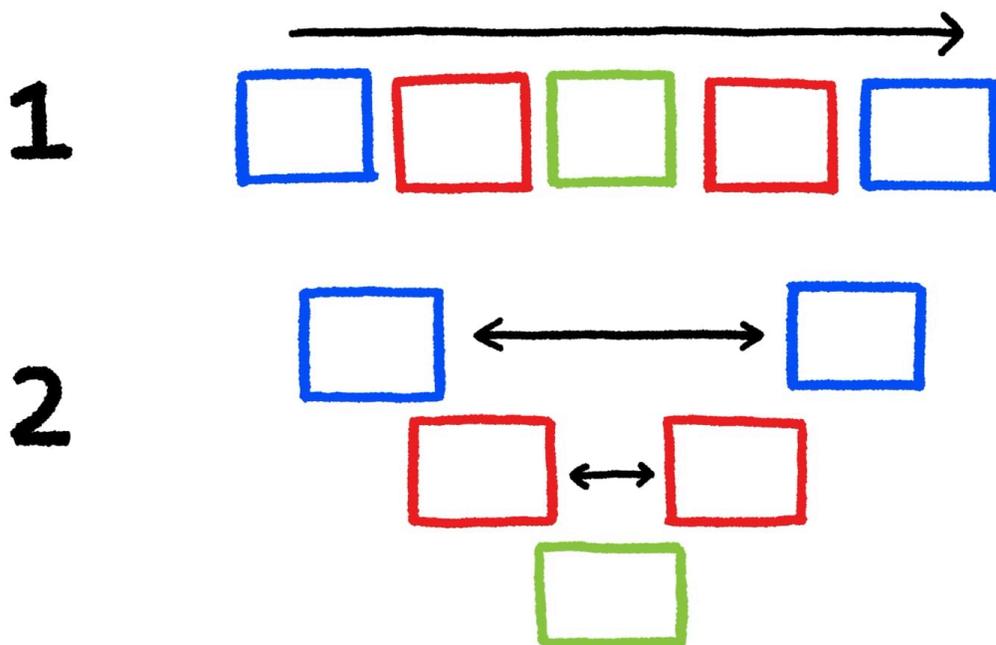
Different Ways of Reading. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Just as in Hebrew poetry, each corresponding part of the narrative invites the reader to compare and contrast matching scenes as though they were matching parallel lines. When the reader juxtaposes parallel scenes, certain details become more significant.

- The story moves from death (A) to life (A') and from potential slavery (A) to freedom (A'). These are important coordinated images drawn from the exodus narrative where death and slavery are the opposite of life and liberation.
- The key agent who turns death into life is the word of the prophet, who is called "the prophet" (A) and "the man of God" (A').
- The word of God through the prophet creates a test of faith for the woman. Will she trust that God can provide oil (an agricultural staple) out of nothing (B and B')?
- The woman's home and jars change from empty (C) to full (C') because of her trust in God's power.

This story is about how the word of God, through the prophets, can turn death into life and create abundance out of nothing if only God's people will trust him as creator.

Genesis 39: A Complex Example

a   ¹ Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt;

   b   and Potiphar bought him:

      c   an officer of Pharaoh,

      c'   **the captain (שר)** of the bodyguard,

      c'' an Egyptian man (איש מצרי)

   b'   from **the hand** of the Ishmaelites,

a'   who had taken him down there.

---

a   ² And **Yahweh was with Joseph** ,

   b   so he became a **successful** man (איש מצליח).

      c   And he was in **the house** of his master the Egyptian.

a'   ³ And his master saw that **Yahweh was with him**

b'   and how **everything that he did (כל אשר הוא עשה)** Yahweh made **successful (מצליח)** in **his hand** .

      c'   ⁴ And Joseph found **favor in his eyes (חן בעיניו)** and he attended him,

      and he appointed him over **his house**, and **everything that was his (כל יש לו)** , he gave into **his hand** .

---

⁵ And it came about when he appointed him in **his house** and over **everything that was his (כל אשר יש לו)** ,

Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus Yahweh's blessing was upon **everything that was his (כל אשר יש לו)** , in the house and in the field.

⁶ So **he abandoned (עזב)** **everything that was his (כל אשר יש לו)** in **the hand** of Joseph;

   and he did not know anything with him, except the food which he ate.

   And Joseph was beautiful of form and beautiful of sight.

---

⁷ And it came about after these things

   a   **and his master's wife lifted her eyes toward Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ And he refused**

      and he said to his master's wife,

      b   "Behold, my master does not know, with me, what is in **the house**,

      and **everything that is his (כל אשר יש לו)** he has given into **my hand** .

      c   ⁹ There is no one **greater** in **the house** than me,

      and **he has withheld nothing from me** except you, because you are his wife.

      b'   And how could I do this **great** evil and sin against God?"

   a'   ¹⁰ **And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day**,

      he did not listen to her to lie with her, to be with her.

¹¹ And it came about on this day

that he went into **the house** to do his work, and no man from the men of **the house** was there in **the house**.

b
> ¹² And she seized him by his garment , saying, "Lie with me!"
>
> And **he abandoned (עזב)** his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside .

b'
> ¹³ And it came about when she saw
>
> that **he abandoned (עזב)** his garment in her hand and had fled outside ,

a' ¹⁴ then she called to the men of her house

c
> and she said to them, "Look, **he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make fun of us**; he came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a great voice . ¹⁵ And when he heard that I raised my voice and cried out, **he abandoned (עזב)** his garment beside me and fled and went outside ."

a'' ¹⁶ So she rested his garment beside her until his master came to **his house**.

c'
> ¹⁷ And she spoke to him with these words, "The **Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make fun of me**; ¹⁸ and as I raised my voice and cried out , then **he abandoned (עזב)** **his garment beside me and fled outside** ."

¹⁹ And it came about when his master listened to the words of his wife,

which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned hot.

²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and gave him into **the house** of the prison, where the king's prisoners were.

---

a
> ²¹ And Yahweh was with Joseph and extended kindness to him,
>
> and gave him favor in the eyes (חן בעיניו) of the captain (שר) of **the house** of prison.

b
> ²² The captain (שר) of **the house** of prison gave into the hand of Joseph all the prisoners in **the house** of the prison,
>
> and **everything they were doing, he was doing (כל אשר עשים...הוא עשה)** .

b' ²³ The captain (שר) of **the house** of prison did not see anything in his hand

a'
> in as much as Yahweh was with him , and whatever he was doing (אשר הוא עשה) , Yahweh made it successful (מצליח) .

Genesis 39. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Genesis 37

Two dreams about Joseph as ruler

Royal robe given and taken
thrown into a pit

Descent #1

Genesis 39a

Joseph's *garments* taken
by Potiphar's wife

Descent #2

Genesis 39b-40

Thrown into prison/pit

Two dreams interpreted

Ascent #1

Genesis 41a

Two dreams + Joseph
lifted up from pit

New *garments* given to Joseph

Ascent #2

Genesis 41b

Joseph interprets **two dreams**

Joseph's **two dreams** part-fulfilled

Elevated as ruler and *royal robe* given
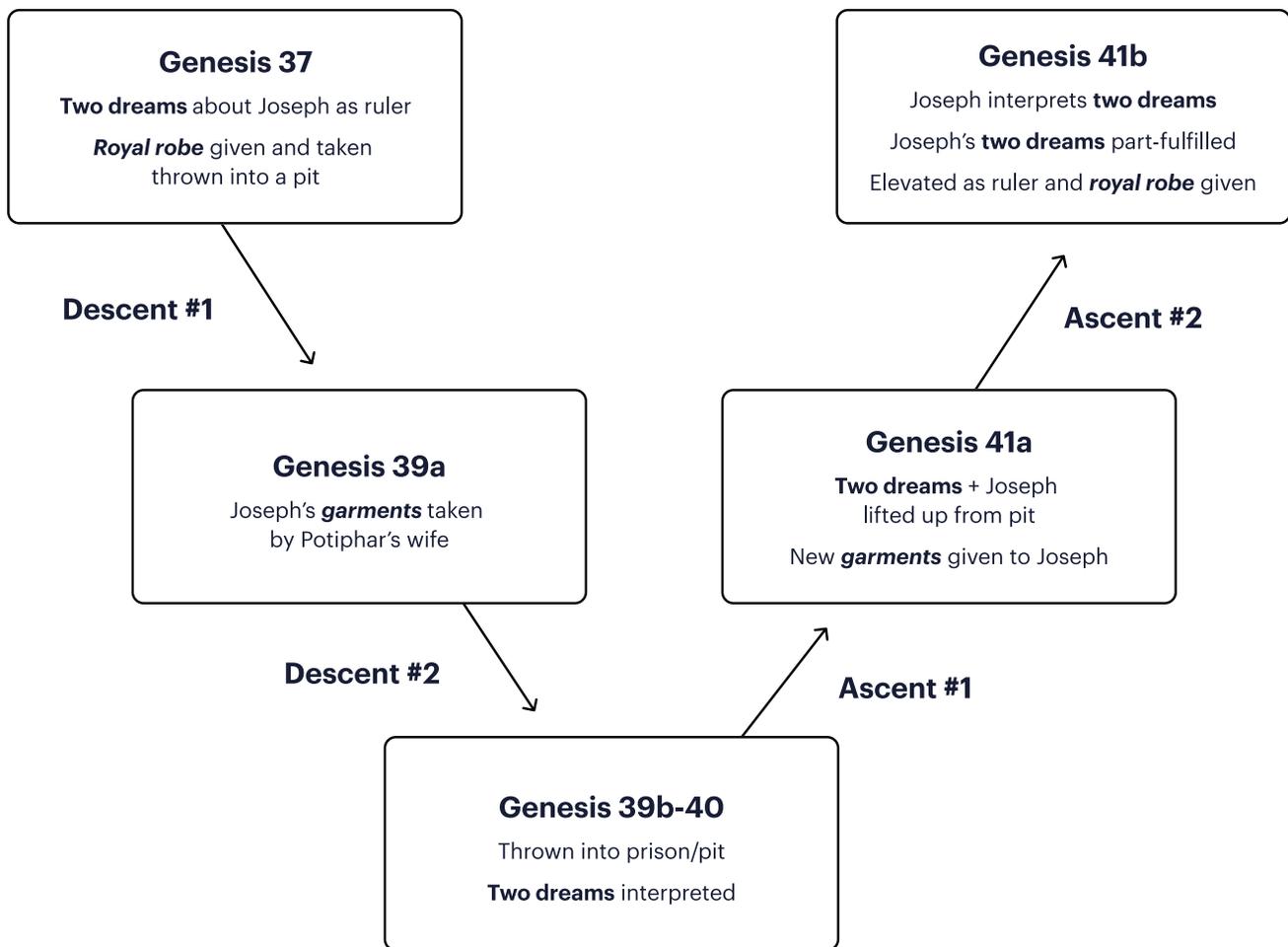
The Role of the Garment in the Joseph Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Reflection Question

What are some pros and cons of breaking passages down according to their structures? What does it help you see?

Session 25: Repeated Words Between Juxtaposed Literary Units

Key Takeaways

- The relationships between connected literary units can work in different ways (e.g., contrast, create a sequence), but at the core is an analogy.
- The reader is being asked to read a particular literary unit on analogy with another literary unit in order to discover a deeper meaning.
- Sometimes entire stories or scenes are designed to repeat elements of other stories. This involves not only repeated words but parallel narrative patterns, themes, and sequences.
- Sometimes the narratives to be compared are next to each other, like in Genesis 2-3 and Genesis 4. In these narratives, we watch Human and Life set a template for redefining "good" and "bad" on their own terms, which is replayed by the next generation.

Narrative Analogy Between Literary Units

> Narrative analogy is "[w]hen two or more characters, stories, scenes, or other aspects of a biblical text bear a significant amount of resemblance to one another, inviting further comparison between the two. The comparison sheds new light on both aspects of the text, highlighting parallels, foreshadowing, reversal, progression, or various other effects generated by their mutual resemblance and difference. Through this device, to quote Robert Alter, 'one part of the text provides oblique commentary on another.'"
>
> Sigmon, Brian (2013). _Between Eden and Egypt: Echoes of the Garden Narrative in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers_. Doctoral Dissertation, Marquette University. 46.
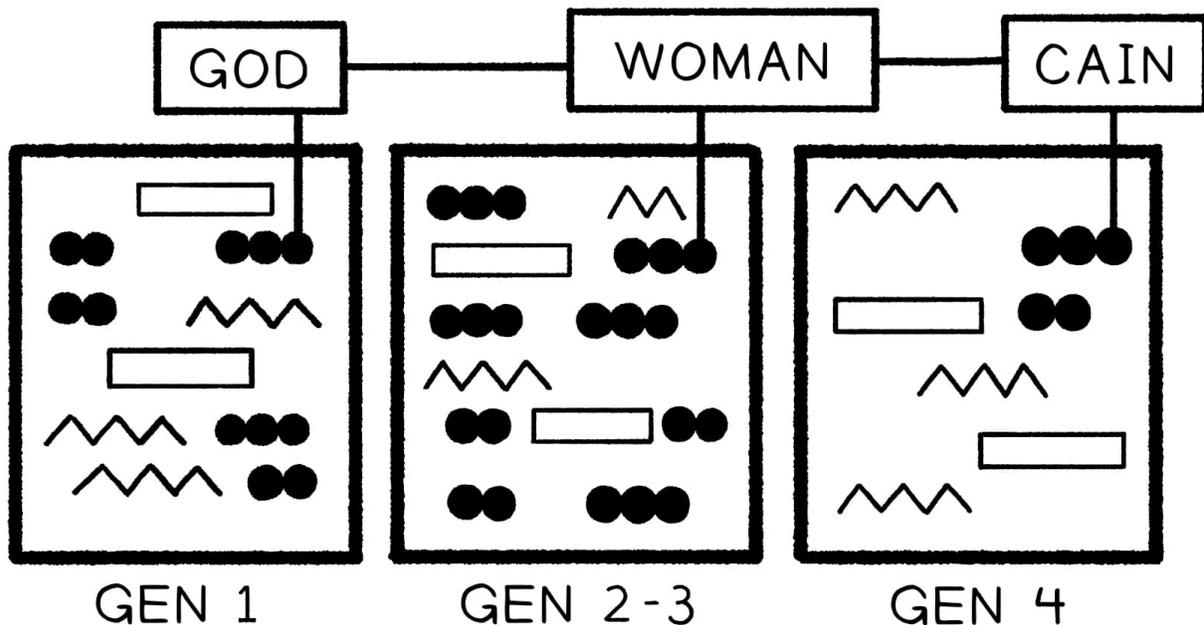
Repeated Words Linking Different Literary Units. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

"Good" in Genesis 1-3

- Genesis 1:4: "And God saw that the light was good (ויֹרא ... כי טוב)."
- Genesis 1:10: "And God saw that [the dry land] was good (ויֹרא ... כי טוב)."
- Genesis 1:12: "And God saw that [the vegetation] was good (ויֹרא ... כי טוב)."
- Genesis 1:18: "And God saw that [the lights] was good (ויֹרא ... כי טוב)."
- Genesis 1:21: "And God saw that [the sea life] was good (ויֹרא ... כי טוב)."
- Genesis 1:25: "And God saw that [the land life] was good (ויֹרא ... כי טוב)."
- Genesis 1:31: "And God saw all that he had made, and look, it was very good (ויֹרא ... והנה טוב מאר)."

In terms of God's character portrait, this repetition makes a clear claim: God is the provider and evaluator of what is truly good. In Genesis 1, "good" defines both the ordered environments that make life possible (days one through three) and the abundant creatures that fill the skies and the land (days four through six).

In the next literary unit, the Eden narrative (Gen. 2:4-3:24), we find this same vocabulary continued, but in new and creative ways.

Genesis 2:9 **Instructor's Translation**

And Yahweh God caused the growth of every tree that was desirable to see, and good for eating, and the tree of life was in the middle of the garden and the tree of knowing of good and bad.

Genesis 1 taught us that God is the provider, evaluator, and ultimate "knower" of what is good, and we know that he has appointed humans to rule the world on his behalf as his divine image. The humans have a choice before them, symbolized by two trees: one represents life (which is good), and the other represents knowing good and bad. Will the humans allow God to be the prime "knower" of what is good and not-good, or will they take this knowledge for themselves?

> **Genesis 2:18** Instructor's Translation
>
> Then Yahweh God said, "It is not good for the human to be alone …"

Once again, God is the evaluator of what is good and not good (as in Gen. 1), and once again he provides what is good for the human: a partner without whom he cannot accomplish the image of God mission given in Genesis 1:26-28.

Summary of "Good" in Genesis 1 and 2

> **Genesis 1:1-2:3** Instructor's Translation
>
> 10 "... and God saw that it was good."
> 12 "... and God saw that it was good."
> 18 "... and God saw that it was good."
> 31 "... and God saw that it was very good."

> **Genesis 2:17-18** Instructor's Translation
>
> 17 from the tree of knowing good and bad you shall not eat ...
> 18 ... it is not good for the human to be alone;"

"Good" in Genesis 3

3:1-5	**Theme:** dialogue about God's command concerning the fruit **Characters:** snake, woman (active) **Setting:** inside the garden	
	Snake: " **Did God really say you may not eat** from any tree in the garden?" Woman: "From the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, ' **You shall not eat** from it ...'"	
	3:6-7	**Theme:** the woman and man eat the fruit and are changed **Characters:** the woman and the husband **Setting:** the center of the garden
		A And **the woman saw that** **the tree** was **good** for eating B and desirable to **the eyes** and desirable for becoming **wise**

"Good" in Genesis 3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

		C and [she took] from its fruit and [she ate]
		C' and [she gave] also to her husband and [he ate] .
		B' And **the eyes** of the two of them were opened
		and they knew they were **naked**
		A' and they sewed the leaves of a **fig tree** and made garments.

3:8-13	**Theme:** dialogue about the eating of the fruit
	Characters: Yahweh, *ha'adam*, the woman
	Setting: inside the garden
	Yahweh: " [Did you eat] from the tree which I commanded you [not to eat from it?] "
	Woman: "The snake deceived me, [and I ate] from it."

"Good" in Genesis 3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

This story is the ultimate tragedy because the snake presents itself as one with superior knowledge about God's knowledge. He contradicts God's wisdom, saying that taking the knowing of good and bad will not lead to death but to greater wisdom.

The key phrase "and the woman saw ... good" is precisely the same phrase that was repeated seven times in Genesis 1. Eve is portrayed as one who usurps the role and prerogative of God. Note that what God saw as good, he "gave," whereas what the woman saw as good, she "took."

Lead Words and Analogies Between Genesis 3 and 4

The profile of Adam and Eve's actions in Genesis 3 is a template for the next generation, who replays the failure of their parents. The failure of Cain in Genesis 4 is deliberately set on analogy to the story of Genesis 3 and uses all of its key vocabulary.

Analogy	Genesis 2-3: Adam and Eve	Genesis 4: Cain and Abel
Human given a significant choice about "good"	2:16-17: "From any tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowing [good] and evil you should not eat, because the day you eat from it you will surely die."	4:5-7: But Yahweh did not regard Cain's offering, and Cain was very angry ... Yahweh said "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? Isn't it the case that if you do [good] , you will be lifted up?"

Lead Words Through Genesis 3 and 4. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Analogy	Genesis 2-3: Adam and Eve	Genesis 4: Cain and Abel
Human tempted by an "animal"	3:1: Now the snake was more crafty than any creature of the field … and he said to the woman, "Did God really say not to eat from any tree in the garden?"	4:7: "But if you don't do good , sin is a croucher at the door , and it's desire is for you."
Human gives into temptation with destructive consequences	3:6: When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and desirable to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom … she took	4:5: And Cain was very angry 4:8 And Cain spoke to Abel his brother and while they were in the field Cain rose up against Abel his brother and murdered him.
God shows up to ask a leading question	3:9: And God called out to the human, and said, " Where are you (איכה) ?" 3:13: And God said to the woman, "What have you done?" (מה עשית)	4:9: And God said to Cain, " Where is your (אי) brother Abel?" 4:10 And God said, "What have you done?" (מה עשית)
Human dodges the question	3:12: The human said, "The woman who you set with me, she gave to me and I ate."	4:9: "I don't know! Am I my brother's keeper?"
The perpetrator is cursed	3:14: God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed from every beast and from every creature of the field."	4:11: "And now you are cursed from the ground"
Inverted desire	3:16: "Your desire will be toward your husband, and he will rule over you."	4:7: "Sin … its desire is toward you, and you will rule it."
Working the ground will now be more difficult	3:17b: "in pain you will eat from the ground " 3:23: And God sent him from the garden of Eden to work the ground	4:12: "For you will work the ground , and it will no longer give its strength to you."
The human is banished from the divine presence	3:23-24: And [God] banished the human and he camped east of the garden of Eden	4:14: "Behold, you have banished me from the face of the ground and from your presence." 4:16 And Cain settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden .

Lead Words Through Genesis 3 and 4. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).
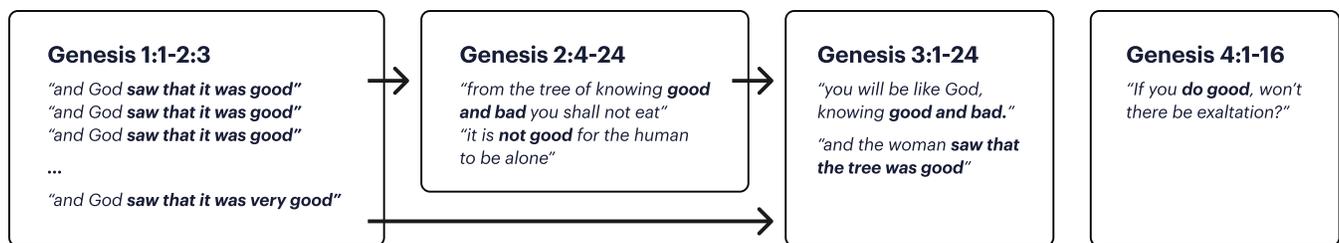
Notice that in each parallel element, the reader is invited to make comparisons and contrasts between the two stories that offer insight into Cain's character.

In both stories, the "tester" is presented as an animal—it's a snake in Genesis 3, and in Genesis 4 "sin" is animated as a "croucher," an animal-like reality that wants to take the lives of others for its own.

> Genesis 3 and 4 "were purposely juxtaposed for the effect they would have early on in the sequence of primeval episodes from Eden to the Tower of Babel ... The first human is probed within the garden, while Cain is tested outside the garden. The first test is that of the first human who is warned not to eat ... lest he die. The second test is that of his son Cain who is admonished to rule over sin, so that his brother doesn't die ... The first tester is a mysterious snake, the second is an animated character called 'sin.' While the man and woman share responsibility ... Cain alone is guilty for his crime."
>
> German, Igal (2016). _The Fall Reconsidered: A Literary Synthesis of the Primeval Sin Narratives_. Pickwick Publications. 4.

Summary of "Good" in Genesis 1-4

Genesis 1:1-2:3
"and God **saw that it was good"**
"and God **saw that it was good"**
"and God **saw that it was good"**
_..._
"and God **saw that it was very good"**

Genesis 2:4-24
"from the tree of knowing **good and bad** you shall not eat"
"it is **not good** for the human to be alone"

Genesis 3:1-24
"you will be like God, knowing **good and bad.**"
"and the woman **saw that the tree was good**"

Genesis 4:1-16
"If you **do good**, won't there be exaltation?"

Summary of "Good" in Genesis 1-4. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

- Genesis 1:1-2:3: God sees what is good and gives it freely.
- Genesis 2:4-24: Knowing good and bad is dangerous for humans. God also knows what is not good, and he provides good instead.
- Genesis 3:1-24: Humans who want god-like knowledge of good and not good quickly end up ashamed and guilty ...
- Genesis 4:1-17: ... and dead.

Reflection Question

We talked about the repeated word "good" a few sessions ago as well. Summarize what you've learned about how the author uses the word "good" to set up the story of the Bible.

Session 26: Repeated Words Between Distant Literary Units

Key Takeaways

- Sometimes the narrative comparison is prompted by an identical repetition in distant narratives. Through the use of key word repetitions, biblical authors lead us to compare and contrast characters in order to advance the narrative argument.
- Biblical authors often compare narratives and create patterns in subtle ways. To find a pattern, watch for embedded key words and images that link stories together, like the repetition of "see and take" in Genesis 3 and Genesis 6.

Narrative Analogy Between Distant Literary Units

Recall the most basic principle of Hebrew poetry: Parallel words and images invite the reader to make comparisons and contrasts, creating deeper insight into both texts. The same principle is at work here.

Genesis 6:1-8 and Genesis 3

Genesis 1:1-2:3
<mark>And God saw that it was</mark> <mark>"good"</mark> [7x]

And God blessed them, "Be fruitful and **multiply (רבה), fill the land (מלא + ארץ)**"

> **Genesis 3:6**
> <mark>And the woman saw (ראה) that the tree was</mark> <mark>good (כי טוב)</mark> for eating and that it was enticing to the eyes and it was desirable for gaining wisdom
>
> <mark>and she took (לקח)</mark> its fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband with her and he ate.

> **Genesis 6:1-2**
> And it came about when **humanity began to multiply (רבה)** on the face of **the land (ארץ) ...**
>
> and <mark>the sons of God saw (ויראו) the daughters of humanity (בנות האדם)</mark> that they were <mark>good</mark>

Lead Words and Narrative Analogy Between Distant Literary Units. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

(כי טוב) ,
and they took (לקח) for themselves wives from all which they chose.

Genesis 6:5
And Yahweh saw (וירא) that (כי)t **multiplied (רבה)** was the evil of humanity (רעת האדם) in **the land (ארץ)**.

Genesis 6:11
And **the land (ארץ)** was ruined before God, and **the land was filled (ארץ + מלא)** with violence.

Lead Words and Narrative Analogy Between Distant Literary Units. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

The twin introductions to the flood narrative consist of two literary units, Genesis 6:1-4 and 6:5-8, carefully shaped to coordinate with each other in a narrative analogy.

- Genesis 6:1-4: Humanity's multiplication leads to rebel spiritual beings seeing and taking human women.
- Genesis 6:5-8: Yahweh sees how, as a result of 6:1-4, evil and violence have multiplied in the land.

Both of these analogies are deepened when we recognize their dependence on the narrative analogy in Genesis 1-3.

- The sons of God and daughters of men are compared with Eve and the snake.
- The daughters of men are compared with the tree of knowing good and bad.
- The blessing about the multiplication of humans on the land in Genesis 1 is sadly turned into a multiplication of death in Genesis 6.

Reflection Question

Repeated words can connect sections of text that are both close together and far apart. The question is, how can you know when a repetition is meant to connect different sections or when it is just a coincidence? What are some ideas you have?

Session 27: Narrative Analogy: Sarai and Genesis 3

Key Takeaways

- The story of Abram and Sarai in Genesis 12:10-20 is set on analogy to Genesis 3 through the use of repeated words.
- The story is an example of one of the main themes of the Bible—the complex and tragic human condition as people give into temptation over and over again. This temptation pattern is marked by repeated words such as "see," "take," "desire," and "good in their eyes."
- The story in Genesis 12:10-20 is an example of a dynamic analogy. This means characters move dynamically in and out of previously established character slots from stories to which the author is hyperlinking. For example, in a story hyperlinking to Genesis 3, a character can play the role of the snake and also be an inversion of the snake because their deception brings life instead of death.

Genesis 12:10-20 Recalls Genesis 3

Introduction: Avram Goes to Egypt Because of a Famine

a   10 Now there was a **famine in the land** ;

  b   and Avram went down to Egypt to sojourn there,

a'   for the **famine** was severe **in the land** .

Avram Nears Egypt + Avram's Speech to Sarai

11 And it came about when he came near to entering Egypt,

and he said to Sarai his wife,

  "See now, I know that you are **a woman beautiful of sight** ;

  12 and **when the Egyptians see you** , **they will say** , '**This is his wife** ';

  and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

  13 Please **say that you are my sister** so that **there will be good to me on account of you** ,

  and that I may live on account of you."

Egyptians See Sarai and Pharaoh Takes Her

14 And it came about when Avram came into Egypt,

and **the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful** .

15 And Pharaoh's officials **saw her** and praised her to Pharaoh;

and the woman was **taken** into Pharaoh's house.

16 And **he did good to Avram on account of her** ;

and there was for him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

Plagues on Pharaoh + Pharaoh's Speech to Avram

17 And Yahweh plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues on account of Sarai, **Avram's wife** .

18 And Pharaoh called Avram and he said,

"What is this you have done to me? **Why did you not tell me that** **she was your wife** ?

19 **Why did you say** , ' **She is my sister,** ' so that I took her for **my wife** ?

Now then, here is **your wife** , take her and go."

Conclusion: Avram Sent Away From Egypt by Pharaoh

20 And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him;

and they sent him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

Genesis 12:10-20. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Key vocabulary links Genesis 12 back to Genesis 3 and sets the characters of each story on narrative analogy to one another. This analogy is not fixed. Rather, it is dynamic, allowing the biblical authors to recall earlier stories and shift the associations with the characters as they play out the different archetypal roles.

DYNAMIC ANALOGY

GENESIS 1-3 | ADAM | HAVAH | TREE | SNAKE

GENESIS 12 | | PHARAOH | SARAI | ABRAM
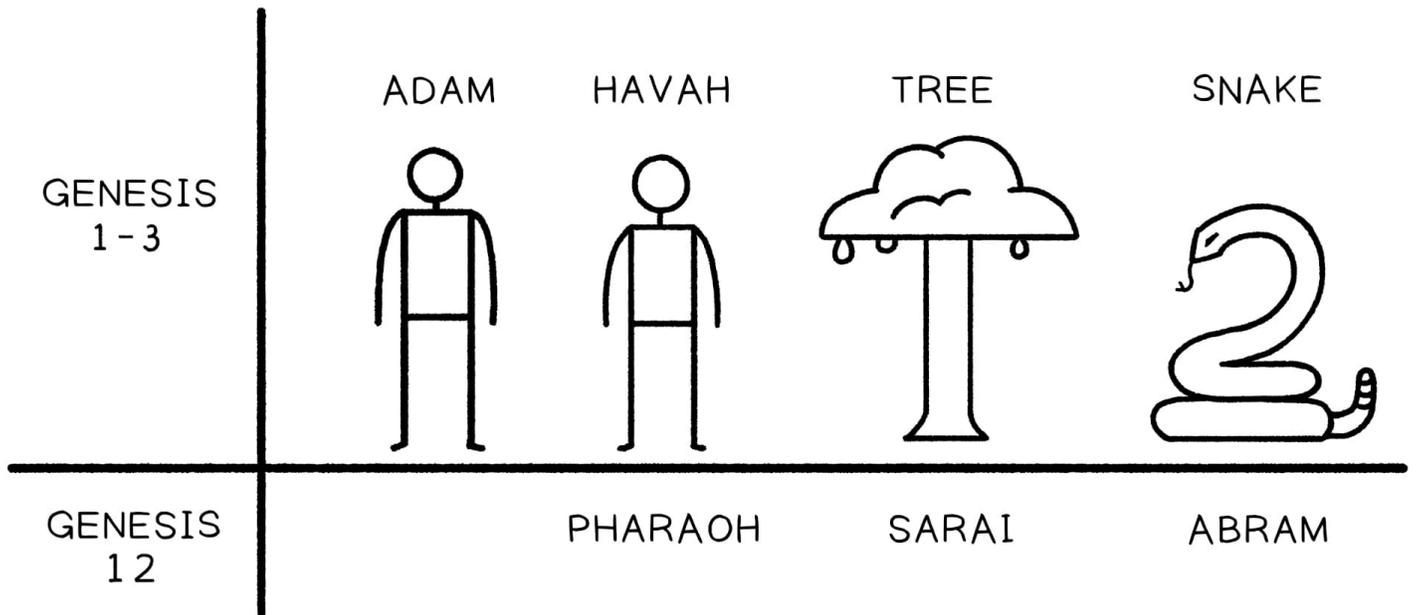
Dynamic Analogy. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Reflection Question

How does the Genesis 12:10-20 text relate to the previous pattern established in Genesis 3 of humanity choosing what is good apart from God?

Session 28: Narrative Analogy: Jacob and Genesis 3

Key Takeaways

- Throughout the entire storyline of the Hebrew Bible, there will be snake-people and humanity-people, and they are going to be at enmity with one another in narrative after narrative.
- In the Hebrew Bible narratives, people can switch back and forth between being a seed of the woman and a seed of the snake. Even the people God calls to be his blessing to the world can become the seed of the snake.
- The birth of the nation of Israel is depicted as the birth of snake seed. The whole drama of the Jacob story is how God is going to turn Jacob (the snake-like deceiver) into a human.

Genesis 16 Recalls Earlier Narratives

Genesis 16	Genesis 3 and 6
16:1-2a: Now, Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian slave whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, Yahweh has prevented me from giving birth. Please go in to my slave; maybe I can be built up (בנה) through her." 16:2b: And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai (שמע + לקול)	2:21-22: And Yahweh God took from one of the sides of the human … and he built (בנה) the side into a woman. 3:17: Because you listened to the voice of your wife (שמע + לקול)
16:3-4: and Sarai took (ותתן) Hagar … and she gave (ותתן) her to Abram her husband (אישה) as a wife (לאשה). … And he went into her.	6:2-4: And the sons of God saw (ראה) the daughters of humanity, that they were good, and they took (לקח) for themselves wives (נשים) … when they went into (יבאו + אל) the daughters of humanity, and they gave birth (ילד).
	3:6: and the woman (אשה) … took (ותקח) the fruit … and she gave (ותתן) also to her husband (לאישה), and he ate.
Genesis 16 Recalls Earlier Narratives. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).	

Genesis 16	Genesis 3 and 6
16:4: and she [Hagar] saw that (ותרא כי) she was pregnant, and her master was cursed in her eyes (בעיניה). Birth becomes curse to Sarai instead of blessing 16:6: Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your slave is in your hand, do to her what is good (טוב) in your eyes (בעיניך)."	3:6: And the woman saw that (ותרא כי) the tree was good (טוב) for food, and desirable to the eyes (לעינים) "cursed is the ground because of you"
16:8: And [the angel] said to Hagar ... "From where (אי מזה) have you come, and to where do you go?"	3:9: "And Yahweh God called to the human and said, "Where are you (איכה)?"
16:10: And the angel of Yahweh said to her [Hagar]: "I will greatly multiply (הרבה ארבה) your seed ... You are pregnant (הרה), will give birth (ילד) to a son."	3:16: To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply (הרבה ארבה) your grief and pregnancy (הריונך), and in grief you will give birth (ילד)"

Genesis 16 Recalls Earlier Narratives. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

In this analogy, Abram and Sarai's actions are set on analogy to both Genesis 6:1-4 and 3:1-9, and characters become linked to counterparts in earlier stories through repeated words and phrases.

- Hagar is linked to the tree of knowing good and bad and to the daughters of humanity.
- Sarai is linked to Eve and to the rebel sons of God.
- Abram is linked to Adam.

Genesis 25 and 27, and Genesis 3

Jacob the Snake in Genesis 25

20 and **Isaac was a son of forty years**
  a when he took Rebekah,
    b the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram,
    b′ the sister of Lavan the Aramean,
  a′ to be his wife.

    a   21 And Isaac petitioned Yahweh
      b   on behalf of his wife, because she was barren;
  a′ and Yahweh was petitioned by him

b′   and Rebekah his wife conceived.

---

22 And they struck one another, the sons within her,
        and she said, "If it is so, why then am I?"
    And she went to inquire of Yahweh.
23 And Yahweh said to her,

a   "Two nations are in your womb;
a'   and two peoples will be separated from your body;
    b   and one people shall be stronger than the other;
    b' and the older shall serve the younger."

24 And when her days were fulfilled to give birth,
    behold, there were twins within her womb.

---

a   25 And the first came out red (אדם),
   b all over like a hairy garment (שער)
      c and they named him Esau (עשו).
a'   26 And afterward his brother came out
   b' and his hand was grabbing the heel (עקב) of Esau,
     c' and he called his name Yaaqov (יעקב);

and Isaac was a son of sixty years
when she gave birth to them.

Genesis 25:20-26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

There is only one other text in the Hebrew Bible that describes one character doing something to the "heel" (עקב) of another character.

Genesis 3:14-15 Instructor's Translation

14 And Yahweh God said to the snake …
15 "And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall strike you on the head,
and you shall strike him on the heel (עקב)."

The very next narrative about Jacob shows him deceiving his brother with food in order to usurp his place as the firstborn.

Rebekah and Jacob Deceive Isaac and Esau in Genesis 27

27:1-5 Isaac Instructs Esau To Prepare Food To Receive the Blessing

27:1 And Isaac called for Esau his older son ...

27:6-17 Rebekah Instructs Yaaqov To Prepare Food To Steal Esau's Blessing

5-6 And Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke (בדבר) to Esau his son ...
    and she said to Yaaqov her son, "Behold ..."
8 "And now, my son, listen to my voice ... go now to the flock and take for me ..."
15 She took the clothes of Esau her older son ... and clothed Yaaqov her younger son

27:18-29 Yaaqov Deceives His Father Isaac To Steal the Blessing

18-19 And he went to his father, and he said, "Who are you my son?"
    "I am Esau your firstborn ... arise and eat ... so that you may bless me!"

27:27-29 Poem of Blessing

27-29 "See, the smell of my son ..."

27:30-40 Esau Begs His Father Isaac To Give Him a Blessing

31-32 And he went to his father, and said, "Let my father arise and eat so that you may bless me!"
    "Who are you my son?" "I am Esau your firstborn."

27:39-40 Poem of Non-Blessing

39-40 "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling ..."

27:41-45 Rebekah Instructs Yaaqov To Flee to Paddan Aram

27:42 And it was reported to Rebekah thewords (דבר) of Esau her older son
    and she sent and called to Yaaqov her smaller son and said, "Behold ..."
27:43 "And now, my son, listen to my voice, arise and flee for yourself"

27:46-28:5 Isaac Blesses and Instructs Yaaqov To Go to Aram to Get Married

28:1 And Isaac called for Yaaqov ...

Narrative Analogies Between Genesis 27 and Genesis 1-3

Genesis 27	Genesis 1-3
27:1: And [Isaac's] eyes were weak/dim to be seeing	3:7: The humans' eyes are "opened" because of the forbidden food.
27:4, 7: Isaac requests that Esau bring fresh game "that I may eat (אכל), on which account (בעבור) my being will bless you (ברך) before I die (מות)"	3:6: and she took and she ate (אכל) 3:17: "cursed (ארורה) is the ground on account of you (בעבורך)"
27:8: "And now my son, listen to my voice (שמע בקול) to what I am commanding (צוה) you."	3:17: And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice (שמע + בקול) of your wife and ate of the tree that I commanded (צוה) you ..."
27:9: "Go now to the flock and take (לקח) for me two young goats, good ones (טוב) ... that he may eat (אכל) and bless (ברך) you before his death (מות)"	3:6: And she took (לקח) from its fruit and she ate (אכל)
27:12-13: "Perhaps I will be in his eyes (עיניו) like one who makes a mockery, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing (קללה ולא ברכה)." And she said, "May your curse (קללה) be upon me my son. Just listen to my voice (שמע בקול), and go and take (לקח) for me."	3:17: And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice (שמע + בקול) of your wife and ate of the tree that I commanded (צוה) you ... cursed (ארורה) is the ground on account of you."
27:14-15: And he went and he took (ויקח) and he brought to his mother ... And she took (ותקח) the clothes of Esau her son, the bigger one, the desirable ones (החמדת) which were with her	3:6: And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating, and desirable (תאוה) to the eyes, and desirable (נחמד) for becoming wise, and she took (לקח)
27:15: And she clothed (ותלבש) Jacob her son, the little one, and with the skins (ערת) of the goats she clothed (והלבישה) over his hands	3:21: And God made for the man and his wife garments of skin (עור) and he clothed them (וילבשם)

Analogies Between Genesis 27 and Genesis 1-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Genesis 27	Genesis 1-3
27:17: And she gave (ותתן) the tasty foods and the bread which she made into the hand of Jacob her son.	3:6: and she took from its fruit and she ate and she gave (ותתן) to her husband and he ate.
27:33: "Who then is the one who hunted game and brought it to me and I ate from all (ואכל מכל) …?"	2:16: "From every/all (מכל) tree in the garden you may eat (תאכל)"; cf. also 3:1-2
27:35-36: "Your brother came in deceit (במרמה), and he took (ויקח) your blessing." And [Esau] said, "Isn't he rightly called heel/deceiver (יעקב), for he heeled/deceived (עקב) me two times! He took (לקח) my birthright (בכרה), and he took (לקח) my blessing (ברכה)."	3:13: And she said, "The snake deceived me (נשא) and I ate"
27:43: "And now my son, listen to my voice (שמע בקול)"	3:17: "Because you have listened to the voice (שמע + בקול) of your wife"
27:44-45: "Dwell [in Aram] for a few days, until … he forgets that which you have done to him (את אשר עשית לו)"	3:13: And God said to the woman, "What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית)?" 3:14: And God said to the snake, "Because you have done this thing (כי עשית זאת)"
28:3: "May El Shaddai bless you and make your fruitful and multiply	1:28: And God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply"

Analogies Between Genesis 27 and Genesis 1-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Rachel Replays Sarah's/Eve's Sin in Genesis 30-31

Rachel and Bilhah	Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16
Genesis 3:6: And the woman (האשה) saw (ותרא) that the tree was good for eating … and she took (ותקח) from its fruit and she ate and she gave (ותתן) also to her husband (אישה) with her and he ate.	
Genesis 3:17: And God said to the man, "Because you have **listened** **to the voice** (שמע + לקול) of your	

Rachel Replays Sarah and Eve. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Rachel and Bilhah	Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16
wife …"	
30:1: And Rachel saw (ותרא) that she had not given birth for Jacob and she was jealous of her sister	Gen 16:1: And Sarai … had not given birth for Abram
30:2: And Jacob said, "Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" 30:3: "Behold (הנה), my maid-slave (אמתי) Bilhah, go into her and she will give birth upon my knees, and I will be built up, me too, from her (בנה + מן)."	16:2: And Sarai said … "Behold (הנה), Yahweh has bound me from giving birth. Please go into my slave (שפחה). Perhaps I can be built up from her (בנה + מן)." And Abraham **listened** **to her voice** (שמע + בקול).
30:4: And she gave to him (ותתן לו) Bilhah her slave (שפחה) as a wife (לאשה) and he went into her	16:3: And Sarai took … her slave (שפחה) … and she gave her to (ותתן ל–) Abram … as a wife (לאשה), and he went into her
30:5: And [Bilhah] became pregnant	16:4: And [Hagar] became pregnant and when she saw (ותרא) she was pregnant, her mistress was cursed in her eyes.
30:6: And Rachel said, "God has judged for me and also **he has listened** **to my voice** (שמע + בקול)"	16:11: "Behold you are pregnant, and you will bear a son and call his name ' **Yishma** el' (ישמעאל) for Yahweh has **listened** (שמע) to your suffering."

Rachel Replays Sarah and Eve. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Rachel's actions with Jacob are both an intensified replay of Sarah's actions with Abraham and a contrast with Rebekah from Genesis 25:21.

- Sarah is barren, so she schemes her own way to produce the promised seed, and she accuses Abraham when the plan doesn't work.
- Rebekah is barren, but Isaac intercedes for her and Yahweh restores fertility to her womb.
- Rachel is barren, accuses her husband for not giving her sons, and then schemes her own way (identical to Sarah's) to produce seed.

The Pattern of the Late-Comer

This story makes it clear that the book of Genesis is arranged as a sequence of generations feuding over the possession of abundance, blessing, and royal power.

Divinely Chosen Late-Comer	Non-Chosen Early-Comer
Adam & Eve	Beast of the field (= snake)
Abel/Seth	Cain
Shem	Japheth (also Ham the younger)
Abram	Nahor, Haran
Isaac	Ishmael
Jacob	Esau
Joseph	The brothers
Judah	Reuben, Simeon, Levi

Late-comer Pattern. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Later Iterations of the Genesis 3 Pattern

Joshua 6-7: Achan's Sin at Jericho

Achan's sin at Jericho reiterates the Genesis 3 pattern.

- Joshua 6 describes Israel's victory at Jericho. They march for six days, and on the seventh day they march seven times and shout. This reflects Genesis 1, with six days of work plus the seventh day of rest.
- Joshua 6:18-19: Joshua says to the people, "Only watch yourselves, don't take any of the dedicated plunder, lest you take from the dedicated plunder and place it in the camp of Israel … and bring trouble (עכר) to it. All the silver and gold and articles (כלים) of bronze and iron are holy to Yahweh."
- Joshua 7:1: "But the sons of Israel committed treachery with the dedicated plunder, and Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, he took from the dedicated plunder."
- Joshua 7:11: "Israel has sinned, and they have broken my covenant which I commanded them, and also they have taken from the dedicated things and stolen, and also they have lied and placed it in their baggage (lit. "articles" בכליהם)."
- Joshua 7:19-21: "And Joshua said to Achan, '… Tell me please, what have you done? Don't conceal it from me.' And Achan answered Joshua and said, 'Truly, I have sinned against Yahweh God of Israel. Such and such have I done: I saw (ראה) among the plunder a cloak of Shinar (אדרת שנער), a good one (טוב), and two hundred shekels of silver … and I desired them (חמד), and I took them (לקח) and look, they are hidden in the ground in the middle of my tent, and the silver is under it.'"

2 Samuel 11: David and Bathsheba

> **2 Samuel 11:2-4** Instructor's Translation
>
> And it came about at the time of evening, that David arose from his bed and walked about on the roof of the house of the king, and **he saw a woman bathing on the roof**, and the woman was **good of sight**, very. And David sent and he inquired about the woman ... and he sent messengers and **he took her** and he went into her ...

The Genesis 3 pattern of see and take is a core element of the biblical narrative and it repeats in various forms throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Recommended Resources: Narrative Analogy

- Robert Alter, *The Art of the Biblical Narrative*, ch. 3
- Yair Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass: Reflection/ Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible," pp. 139-152
- Brian Sigmon, "Between Eden and Egypt: Echoes of the Garden Narrative in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers"
- Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies, and Parallels*
- Jonathan Grossman, "Dynamic Analogies in Esther," pp. 394-414
- Joshua Berman, *Narrative Analogy in the Hebrew Bible*

Narrative Analogy and Inner-Biblical Hyperlinks

	Citation	Allusion	Echo
Level of Communication	Explicit	Implicit	Subtle
Reader's Comprehension	Assumed	Expected	Hoped for
Technique	Quotation of source text	Key words from source text	Key words, images, themes from source text
	Analogy		

Narrative Analogy and Inner-Biblical Hyperlinks. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

	Citation	Allusion	Echo
	Parallel design patterns of character, plot, setting, key words Indicating an intended analogy between whole storylines		

Narrative Analogy and Inner-Biblical Hyperlinks. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

Citation: An explicitly marked quotation from an earlier biblical text. Example: <u>Joshua 8:30-35</u> cross-references and quotes <u>Deuteronomy 27:4-6</u>.

Allusion: A non-explicit form of reference to an another text marked by multiple conspicuous words or images from a known source text. In this case, the full meaning of the text will be diminished if the reader fails to recognize the implied reference to the earlier text. Example: <u>Numbers 14:18-19</u> alludes back to <u>Exodus 34:6-7</u>.

Echo: A more subtle technique that may involve the inclusion of a single phrase, word, or image that alerts the reader to a reference to an another text. The text is fully intelligible to readers who don't recognize the echo, but those who do will experience a "surplus of significance" beyond the face value meaning of the text. Example: The Genesis 3 design pattern described above includes echoes.

In his article, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," Jeffrey Leonard gives four criteria for identifying intertextual allusions and hyperlinks (Leonard, 2008).

1. Clusters of shared words or phrases
2. Shared language consisting of unique vocabulary
3. Shared language within thematically similar contexts
4. Shared language between units that are united by other literary strategies (similar plot, themes, settings)

Literary Echoes and a Modern Example

> "Metalepsis [is] the literary technique of citing or echoing a small bit of a precursor text in such a way that the reader can grasp the significance of the echo only by recalling or recovering the original context of the echo and reading the two texts in fruitful juxtaposition. The effect of such an intertextual linkage lies in the unstated or suppressed points of correspondence between the two texts … creating a 'cave of resonant signification.'"
>
> Hays, Richard B. (2017). *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. Baylor University Press. 10-11.

On the night of Barack Obama's presidential election victory in 2008, he declared that American citizens could "put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day." This phrase was an allusion to a famous line of a speech of Martin Luther King Jr., but the new context also signaled a series of adaptations to the new rhetorical setting.

Barack Obama	Martin Luther King Jr.
"Tonight begins our chance to put our hands on the **arc** of history and **bend** it once more toward the hope of a better day." *A word of exhortation to recommit one's energies to building a better world, emphasizing the necessity of human agency to enact change.*	"The **arc** of the moral universe is long, but it **bends** towards justice." *A word of assurance that the civil rights struggle was governed by a larger providential purpose that would prevail.*
"We **may not get there** in one year or even in one term, but America, I promise you, we as a people will **get there**." *Obama depicts himself as Joshua the successor to Moses (= King), who will play his part in leading America to the next step towards the promised land.*	"I've seen the promised land. I **may not get there** with you." *King was depicting himself as a Moses participating in a new exodus, passing the baton to Joshua (= his listeners).*

Obama Speech MLK Allusions. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible (2019).

This is precisely the kind of explicit and more subtle use of a "cultural encyclopedia" that happens in all forms of communication, especially between people steeped in traditional literature.

Reflection Question

In the birth story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25, in what way is Jacob like the snake from Genesis 3? What tension does this create for the overall storyline?

Session 29: Design Patterns in the New Testament

Key Takeaways

- Design patterns are the main way biblical authors unify hundreds of stories. And every pattern develops a core theme throughout the whole biblical story that leads to Jesus.
- The stories of Jesus in the Gospels have been designed to carry the patterns of the Hebrew forward to their climax, namely, Jesus.

New Testament Examples of Design Patterns

Jesus' trial in the wilderness recalls Israel's trial in the wilderness. The New Testament authors portray Jesus as the obedient Adam and Israel.

Matthew 4:1-4 NASB*

[1] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the slanderer.

[2] And after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, and he became hungry. [3] And the tester came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

[4] But he answered and said, "It is written, 'A human cannot live on bread only, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 8:2-6, 15-16 NASB*

[2] You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you **in the wilderness these forty years**, that he might humble you, **testing you**, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. [3] He humbled you and **let you be hungry**, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but a human lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. [4] Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. [5] Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. [6] Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in his ways and to fear him. ... [15] He led you through the great and terrible **wilderness**, with its fiery **serpents** and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; he brought water for you out of the rock of flint. [16] **In the wilderness** he fed you **manna which your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and that he might test you, to do good for you in the end.**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

We see further glimpses of the pattern in passages like the following.

- In Exodus 16:3, the Israelites grumble. "Oh that we would have died ... in Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat, when we ate bread to fullness." God hears them and says he will rain "bread from the heavens" for six days and then rest for one day.
- In Exodus 16:4, Yahweh says, "I will test them, whether they will walk in my Torah or not."
- In Exodus 16:14-15, the Israelites wake up to manna. "In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp ... a thin flake, thin like frost ... and the Israelites saw it and said ... 'What is it (הוא מן)?'"
- In Numbers 11:4-5, the Israelites grumble again. "The mixed multitude ... desired a desire, and turned and wept ... and said, 'Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish we ate in Egypt.'"
- In Numbers 11:6-7, the Israelites continue to complain. "'There's nothing but this manna.' Now, the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance had the look of fragrant gum."
- In Numbers 11:18b, God hears them. "Yahweh will give you meat and you will eat it."
- In Genesis 1-3, God's word divinely orders the world in six days plus one day of rest, and in that time God's word provides the garden. In the garden, humanity is tested by the snake about forbidden food.

The "Snake-Crusher" of Genesis 3:15

- Abraham's seed who conquers enemies and blesses nations (Gen. 12:3; Gen. 22:17)
- The messianic star from Jacob (Num. 24:17)
- Joshua versus the five Canaanite kings (Josh. 10:24) // the five kings in Genesis 14
- Jael and Sisera (Judg. 4:21; Judg. 5:26-27)
- David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17)
- In the new exodus, Yahweh will crush the head of the future "Pharaoh" (Hab. 3:13)
- The righteous "trample the wicked under your feet" (Mal. 4:2)
- In the new exodus, Yahweh will deliver his people from the region of "snake" (Heb. *bashan*), and "crush the head" of his enemies (Ps. 68:21)
- The royal-priest of Jerusalem will strike the head of all rebel powers until all of God's enemies become his footstool (Ps. 110:1, 6)

Psalm 110:1-2, 5-6 Instructor's Translation

[1] Yahweh says to my Lord: **"Sit at my right hand** until **I make your enemies a footstool for your feet** ." [2] The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of your enemies!" ... [5] Yahweh is at your **right hand** ; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. [6] He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and **crushing the heads** of the whole earth.

In the minds of Jesus and the apostles, all of these texts are connected. These connections explain their constant allusions to Psalm 110, which activate the network of images that lead back to Genesis 3:15.

1 John 3:7-8 NIV*

[7] Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. [8] The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was **to destroy what the devil has accomplished.**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Corinthians 15:21-27a NIV

[21] For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. [22] For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. [23] But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. [24] Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. [25] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death. [27] For he "has put everything under his feet. "

Ephesians 1:19-23 NIV

[19] and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength [20] he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [21] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. [22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

1 Peter 3:21-22 NIV

[21] and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, [22] who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand —with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Reflection Question

What is your main takeaway from this course overall? Or what main questions still remain for you?