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# God's **EPIC** Adventure

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Changing Our Culture by the Story We Live and Tell

**WINN GRIFFIN**

HARMON  
P R E S S

God's EPIC Adventure: Changing Our Culture by the Story We Live and Tell  
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HARMON  
P R E S S

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for  
*Donna Faith,*  
wife, mother, teacher, friend  
*Jason Jonathan,*  
son, entrepreneur, friend  
and  
*Jeramie Joy,*  
daughter, giver, friend  
*JR and Nancy Short,*  
friends whose generosity made this book possible.

---

Verses are a convenient way  
to look up a reference.

But, that's where their usefulness ends.

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# Contents

A list of the Acts in God's EPIC Adventure

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What someone habitually does, and  
the symbols around which they order  
their lives, are at least as reliable  
an index to their worldview  
as the stories they 'officially' tell.

(N.T. Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*)

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# Introduction

A preface, as to a book.

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When we examine how stories work in  
relation to other stories, we find that  
human beings tell stories  
because this is how we perceive,  
and indeed relate to, the world.

(N. T. Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*)

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## Thanks

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Are there any original thoughts? There is nothing new under the sun according to the preacher in Ecclesiastes. I believe that all of us are the product of those who have given input into our lives. I know that such is the case for me. As you will see from the pages that follow, I am indebted to many resources in the material that is presented. To each one that God has called to scholarship and the writing of their findings, I am grateful.

It is apparent to me that first I must acknowledge my family for their continual support while I was writing this project.

To Donna Faith, my wife, from the memorable quote in Jerry McGuire, “you complete me.” You are my best friend. Your kindness to allow me to take this journey is without measure. You have been caring and understanding of my time used for study and writing. Your reading of the manuscript many times was an awesome task. I don’t know what I would have done without your eagle eye. Thanks, Donna Faith.

To my son Jason, who is flexible in life, who uses his sense of humor to bring comic relief to me in some stressful times. You brought me healing on more than one occasion. Thanks, Jason.

To my daughter, Jeramie Joy, who hounds me to talk to her in several different voices, who laughs and giggles when a voice shows up and talks to her. What voices you say? Matilda, Vern, Scratchnose, and Goofy, to name a few. You are such a delight. Thanks, Jeramie Joy.

To my learning partners who provided an extensive education for me during my second Doctor of Ministry at George Fox University and are truly caring and insightful, friends and colleagues for life: Rick Bartlett, Tony Blair, Jason Clark, Rick Hans, George Hemingway, Nick Howard, Todd Hunter, Randy Jumper, Eric Keck, Mike McNichols, Ken Niles, Craig Oldenburg, Rob Seewald, Rick Shrout, Dwight Spotts, and Dave Wollenburg. Thanks, guys. To the above list I would add Loren Kerns who was always available to help our doctoral cohort journey through the maze of the online world of WebCT and who also added incredible insights.

To my mentors over the years. To Kent Yinger, who drove me to think and reflect and then corrected my thinking and reflection with gracefulness and kindness in those long papers that I wrote. Thanks, Kent.

To Leon@rd Sweet who has taught me to think further outside the box than I was already thinking. Your desire for me to think and reflect with images and text, for me to be all that God wants me to be, will carry me for the rest of my life. Your model for writing books is truly amazing. I hope to follow in your footsteps. Your acrostic EPIC turned my head to title this book: God’s EPIC Adventure. I really appreciate that Len agreed to write the Foreword for this book. That is such a blessing. Thanks, Len.

In addition to the present mentors, I would like to mention three more: In my college and seminary career, some of my formation came from Dr. Russ Spittler, now Provost of Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, CA. He taught me to be a critical loyalist. Second, Dr. James Kallas, a Lutheran New Testament specialist, now retired, who demonstrated to me that one could be a scholar and pastor at the same time. Next, to my friend, the late John Wimber, who took me along side of him when I was

## Introduction

broken in ministry and helped me find worth in my own calling. Thanks, Russ, James, and John. John is now a part of that “cloud of witnesses” that has passed on to “life after death.” I wonder if he can read what I wrote.

To my friend Brian McLaren. I first met Brian in Seattle when he addressed a small group of eager listeners as he told the story of his encounter with a young harp player and how he and she began an email conversation to share about her life’s journey. I have followed his “emergent” rise with great interest. I am very thankful that he has taken time to write the Afterword for this book. Thanks, Brian.

To my pastors, Rich and Rose Swetman. They truly are intentional about living in God’s EPIC Adventure. They lead an incarnational missional community of faith that is focused on bringing justice locally and globally. Thanks, Rich and Rose.

Finally, to JR and Nancy Short whose generosity has helped this book come to print. They are delightful folks who work continuously in the trenches of God’s EPIC Adventure. Thanks, JR and Nancy.

In the Story that we present in this book, we follow the suggested outline of Bishop N. T. Wright and his five-act-play model. I have had the honor of meeting Bishop Wright two times, but on many more occasions than that through his books. Thanks, Dr. Wright.

However, I have taken the liberty to expand the model of Bishop Wright to include more scenes. I take full responsibility for the use and expansion of his framework. Many of his thoughts have influenced the writing of this book. He may or may not like the conclusions that I have come to. I am alone responsible for my own conclusions.

Winn Griffin  
Woodinville, WA  
October 2007

## God's EPIC Adventure

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The EPIC in the book's name is a double entendre. Len Sweet has coined the word as an acronym for life's activities: Experiential, Participatory, Image-Rich, and Connectivity. Living in God's Story should certainly be characterized as EPIC. The second meaning of the word used in the poetic world is a literary or dramatic composition that resembles an extended narrative poem celebrating heroic feats. God's Story fits within that characterization. He is the hero of the Story. We should learn to Read Scripture with Both Eyes Open<sup>1</sup> and, in doing so, God's Story Could Be Hazardous to Your Status Quo.<sup>2</sup> So with that in mind, here is the flow of the Story presented in this book.

### Prologue

In the Prologue, we will cover four areas: an introduction to Story as a profound way of communicating; the Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments; how Story is an antidote for fragmentation; and the concept of the Kingdom of God as a prism through which we can understand the Story of God.

### Setting The Stage

Before we begin Act 1, we look at why it is important to read the Story in the Old Testament. Next, we define the words: Bible, Scripture, and Testament. Then, we will look at some information about the Bible the Storytellers in the New Testament used. Finally, we will overview the background of the first Stories looking at material about the worldview of the ancients and comparing it with the scientific worldview of today.

### Act 1. Creation: Creating the Stage On Which the Story Will Be Acted Out

Beginning in Act 1 of the drama (Genesis 1-2) —“there was a time when God spoke all things into existence....” This Act will demonstrate the attitude of Scripture about the Creation narratives and show its polemic use in early Israel as a tract to help her realize that God was serious about not breaking the first stipulation of the Covenant.

### Act 2. Separation: From Dependence to Independence

In Act 2 (Genesis 3), we discuss the so called “fall.” True humanity became distorted and could no longer see God's image clearly. Humankind, the crown of God's creation, decided to worship what God had created, in order to become more godlike, instead of worshipping the Creator of the universe. This Act will show how the choice of humankind has had an effect on God's creation since the choice was made.

### Act 3. Israel: The Called People of God to Be the Light of the World

In Act 3, we will present the Story of Israel (the rest of the Old Testament). God created and called a people, Israel. It was God's desire to have a people that would be the light of the world, to demonstrate what God was like within a pagan society. Israel's vocation, bestowed by a missionary God, occurred with four great events. *First*, the Exodus / Redemption of Israel in which God bought a slave from the slave market. *Second*, the Covenant, a national charter to help Israel to understand how to be the people of God regardless of circumstances, so they could demonstrate what being truly human was all about. *Third*, the Kingdom was where vocation was passed from nation to individual with a forward

## Introduction

view toward the coming one who would be “truly human.” *Finally*, the Exile/Return from Exile, a time when Israel had all but lost her sense of vocation. This Act is designed to show God’s call of Israel to be a “light unto the world.”

### **Act 4. Jesus: The True Human Being**

In Act 4, we present the Story of Jesus. His story begins with what is called Second Temple Judaism. This time frame sets the stage for Act 4 and was a significant period in the development of Jewish thinking which influenced the thought world of Jesus’ time. During this approximately four-hundred-year period, Israel understood herself as living in exile, waiting for the “promised one” who would bring her freedom. This Interlude is designed as an overview of this period of time in Jewish history.

In the fullness of time, according to Paul in Galatians, Jesus arrived on the scene of human history proclaiming the Kingdom of God in this Present Evil Age. God honored his covenants with Israel and his promises by sending his Son Jesus into the world born truly human, as God intended humanity to be. The Story of Jesus in Act 4 is the apex of God’s EPIC Adventure. He called Israel to “Repent and Believe” and stop trying to be God’s people via quietist, military means, or compromising ways, and begin living as he would show them to live by his words and works. Jesus came telling the Story in his own words (what it means to be an authentic disciple) and demonstrating the Story with his works (healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead). This Act will help the reader understand the apex of the life and ministry of Jesus.

### **Act 5. Scene 1-6: The Rest of the Story in The New Testament**

In Act 5, Scenes 1-6, we will discuss the rest of the Story that is presented in the New Testament. Act 5, Scenes 1-6 of God’s EPIC Adventure is the creation by the Spirit of the church as God’s re-created humanity living in community. The church’s focus, like Israel before her, is to be the light to the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit who releases his gracelets to accomplish his work. The Story of her struggles to be the people of God are shared in the New Testament’s Acts of the Holy Spirit and the rest of the New Testament. This Act will help the reader understand the Story of the New Testament books presented in chronological order.

### **Act 5. Scene 7: Imagination, Improvisation, and Stories**

The opening of Act 5, Scene 7 begins at the end of the first century and has continued until today as you read this book. In this section, we will present the concepts of imagination, improvisation, and share some stories about some folks who are currently endeavoring to live out their lives in God’s EPIC Adventure. There are a few clues about how the Story ends (Act 5, Last Scene: Olivet Discourse, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Revelation, etc.). We conclude by asking the question: When will it end?

### **Help for Reading**

---

The headings in this book will help you keep on track throughout each Act. There are four major headings. They are as follows:

## Introduction

### Covenant



**Learning Objective**  
Understand the Covenant stage of Israel's history.

### Dictionary Articles

Read the following Dictionary Articles in *New Bible Dictionary*, Third Edition. D. R. W. Wood, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, D. J. Wiseman, and I. Howard Marshall (Editors) InterVarsity Press. 1996.

Exodus  
Exodus, Book of., Search Google for these two online resources: *Easton's Bible Dictionary* and *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE). Easton's is about a century old and ISBE is about seventy-five years old. If you like lots of color pictures, try *The Revell Bible Dictionary* now out of print but still can be ordered from amazon.com.

## Heading 1

---

This heading marks out each of the Acts of the Story.

### Heading 2

This heading follows Heading 1 as a major sub-heading of the act.

### Heading 3

Heading 3 marks out sub-headings under Heading 2.

### Heading 4

Heading 4 is used rarely but supplies information pertaining to Heading 3.

### So What?

These sections endeavor to put praxis to the material presented above it.

### About Biblical Book

Each book in the Old and New Testament has a brief overview which is marked out by this heading.



#### BOOK READING GUIDE: JOSHUA

Each of the books of the Old and New Testament have a separate reading guide which forms the overall StoryLine and are marked by this heading.

### Reading the StoryLine

---

This is a major heading that keeps you abreast of the overall StoryLine in each Testament.

There are visual graphics at the top of each left or right column of the page (see above on this page) that provide a place marker for where you are in the overall StoryLine along with a Learning Objective for that section. These Learning Objectives are listed on the beginning page of each new Act.

In addition, there are special word definitions which are blocked off. When you see something like the following ❖ **sacrificial offerings** ❖ look in the left or right column and you will see an explanation.

Each book also has a basic information block which appears in the left or right column (see next page). This information provides a quick glance at a book's author, age written, aim, audience, etc. In addition, there is also a section in the left or right column called Dictionary Articles (see example in right column above). In each Dictionary Article section, there are articles that are recommended for further study. This is the full note for Dictionary Articles on this page. In the rest of the book, there is an abbreviated one when it appears the first time, and then a shorter one throughout the rest of the Act. Reading these will greatly increase your understanding of a part of the story.

In addition, in the right or left column, there are interactive Question(s). One should not think of these questions as having a final answer. It would be better to see them as conversation starters, which may last three minutes, three hours, three days, three months, three years, or a lifetime. Use them at your own risk.

**Sacrificial Offerings:**  
**Origin.** The beginnings of sacrifice are found in the primitive ages...

### QUESTION

Why are symbols important to use in our gatherings?

## Introduction



**Learning Objective**  
Understand the Covenant stage of Israel's history.

Genesis 1.1-11.26. TBB. 7-18.

### **AUTHOR**

Unknown, Traditionally  
Joshua

### **AGE WRITTEN**

Sometime after the  
Conquest

### **AIM**

To teach the people of God  
to trust God to give them  
what he promised.

### **AUDIENCE**

Those who need to  
understand  
success of spiritual battles

### **KEY CONCEPTS**

Conquest

### **KEY LESSONS**

The process of learning to  
obey God

### **GEOGRAPHY**

Israel 📍 South 📍 North

Finally, each major reading section is keyed to *The Books of the Bible* (TBB), a newly formatted Bible from International Bible Society using *Today's New International Version*, which has deleted all chapter and verse references to make it easier for you to read and grasp the Story. You may see a reference like:

These early stories in Genesis 1.1-11.26 represent the Hebrew understanding of the Primeval History of the world...

and in the left or right column you will see the text address, TBB, and a page reference.

I trust that the reading and study of *God's EPIC Adventure* will help you locate your own calling to live in his Story as a part of the new humanity that he has created, modeled after Jesus, and that with all your energy, empowered by the Holy Spirit, you live life to its fullest and for the sake of the world. Let it be so!

There are EndNotes in the back of the book for all footnotes found within *God's EPIC Adventure*.

### **EndNotes**

1. N. T. Wright, *The Original Jesus: The Live and Vision of a Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 105, 124.

2. Leonard I. Sweet, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 80.



## **Foreword by Leonard Sweet**

A preface or an introductory note, as for a book,  
especially by a person other than the author.

---

If it's not "play," it's not a Jesus Revolution.

(Leonard Sweet: Foreword)

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## No Table, No Play, No Revolution

---

The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me.

—Martin Luther

The more choices are available to us, the more we seem to be forced to choose between “the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea.” When you’re reduced to choosing the “lesser of two evils,” which means the outcome is still evil, it’s time for a revolution.

“Revolution” is one of the words (along with missional, emerging, organic, etc.) that is bandied about to describe what God is up to in these dawning days of the twenty-first century. Two popular but very different books even proclaim the coming “revolution” in their title: George Barna’s *Revolution* (2006) and Shane Claiborne’s *Irresistible Revolution* (2006). This “revolution” language is pervasive outside the Christian traditions as well, as can be seen in the book by Noah Levine, *Against the Stream: A Buddhist Manual for Spiritual Revolutionaries* (HarperOne, 2007).

What kind of “revolution” are we talking about? And when does a revolution mean mere rotation, and when does it mean true innovation?

Mao Zedong led a cultural revolution in China that cost tens of millions of lives. When asked to explain how this could be, the Chinese dictator shrugged: “A Revolution is not a dinner party.”

Sorry, Mao Zedong, but a Jesus Revolution IS a dinner party.

One of the best definitions of the gospel I’ve ever encountered is this one: “Jesus ate good food with bad people.” Goethe, in a famous essay, suggested that Leonardo’s “The Last Supper” was written to convey Christ’s words “one of you shall betray me.” But why not “Take, eat: this is my body?” Why not Christ instituting the eucharist rather than foretelling his betrayal?

A Jesus revolution is a dinner party, the art of play more than work, celebration more than cerebration. Anything artistic involves “play,” whether sports or music or video games. You “play” baseball, not “work” baseball. You “play” the piano or violin, not “work” the instrument. You “play” video games on PlayStation3 or listen to music on RealPlayer. Liturgy is not something you “work” at but “play with.” If it’s not “play,” it’s not a Jesus Revolution.

The bookends of the Bible are “Eat” and “Drink.” God’s First Command in the Bible is “Eat Freely” (Genesis 2.16). God’s Last Command in the Bible is “Drink Freely” (Revelation 22.17). In the middle: The Table. In his book *God’s EPIC Adventure*, Winn Griffin shows how everything in between is a never-ending banquet, not a snack, on which we feast on Him in our hearts with thanksgiving (eucharistia). If the revolution is to mean anything, and if Jesus has anything to do with the revolution, it must “revolve” around that Table. For as Griffin shows in his winsome book, on that Table is spread out a feast that can give life to a dying people and planet.

After reading *God’s EPIC Adventure*, I thought of what Mahatma Gandhi said to his Christian friends about their trying to live their life and

## Foreword by Leonard Sweet

conduct their “revolutions” without feasting at the Table: “You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilization to pieces, turn the world upside down, and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature.”

The Jesus Revolution IS a dinner party. And Griffin’s book is an invitation to the party of your life.

Leonard Sweet  
Drew University  
George Fox University  
[www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com)



# Prologue

An introduction or preface,  
especially a poem recited to introduce a play.

---

Most, if not all, of our reading of Scripture only reinforces a belief that the Bible is just a collection of little nuggets that one can choose from when a small portion is thought to be helpful.

---

When you finish this session, you should be able to:

- ◆ Understand the Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments
- ◆ Know how Story is an antidote for fragmentation
- ◆ Visualize the Kingdom of God as a prism through which you can understand the Story of God

Our initial focus in this section is to overview three main areas before we start with the overview of the Story of Scripture. First, we will look at the Western world's penchant for breaking the Story into fragments often reducing one's understanding of God to fragments. Then, we will talk about how story is an antidote for fragmentation. Finally, we will preview the concept of the Kingdom of God as a prism through which we can understand the Story of Scripture.

The Bible Says What?  
Those Shades Are Cool!  
Where Are We Going!  
Houston, "We Have A Problem..."  
A Little Known Problem  
Where Do We Begin?  
A Penchant for Minutia  
Foundationalism. How Did We Get to Where We Are?  
From Philosophy to Theology  
A Proper Foundation: Two Answers  
Chapters and Verses. An Aid to Foundationalism  
Illustrations of the Problem of Reading Fragmentarily  
Summary  
Story. The Antidote to Foundationalism  
What Are Stories?  
Story. Bausch's Perspective  
[Thirteen Characteristics of a Good Story]  
Story. Fee and Stuart's Perspective [Scripture's Narrative]  
Story. Brueggemann's Perspective [An Old Testament View]  
Story. Wright's Perspective [Gospel as Story]  
Story. Hays Perspective [Letters as Story]  
Story. Sweet's Perspective [The Importance of Story]  
Story. Peterson's Perspective [A Voice of Reason]  
Story. Corporate America's Perspective [Squirrel Inc.]  
Story. Recent Attempts to Hold the Story Together  
Influenced by a Desire for Improved Reading  
Influenced by Tom Wright's Five Act Play Model  
Influenced by a Biblical Theology Motif  
Story. Other Voices and Perspectives  
Summary  
The Kingdom of God  
The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament  
The Lord-Servant Treaty (Ex. 19.2-Num. 10.10)  
The Kingdom of God in the New Testament  
Summary

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### Learning Objectives

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### Preview of Prologue

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### Outline of Prologue

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Praxis and symbol tell us a good deal  
about a worldview, but stories are  
the most revealing of all.

(N. T. Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*)

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## The Bible Says What?

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**Learning Objective**  
Understand the Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments.

The Bible has been around for a long time, but not as long as God has. It's been here for several millennia in its literary form and several millennia before that in its oral form.

The Bible is one of the most exciting books in the world to read. However, sometimes it is difficult to read and understand. There are several reasons for this. *First*, the Bible was written to a different culture in a different time frame. People spoke, thought, and lived differently. There were no cars, jets, flat screen TVs, or computers. *Second*, because of the way it is printed—in chapters and verses—we tend to read incomplete portions of Scripture instead of whole stories.<sup>1</sup> *Third*, we don't know where it came from or how it developed. *Fourth*, we overlook the part that man played in God's plan to share his story with us.

Hundreds of hours are devoted to reading and studying the pages of the Bible. I am sure that most followers of Jesus have gone to, or are a part of, an ongoing Bible study. Bible studies come in all shapes and sizes. All colors and sounds. Here's a type of Bible study that I have seen over the years in many churches.

It was bitter cold outside. The temperature was dipping into the low teens as Justin prepared the living room for the weekly meeting of the church's Bible study. He stoked the fire to get it roaring so that the hot ambers would keep the room comfortably warm as the group studied that evening. He could hardly wait for the study to begin.

After the evening meal that all the small group shared together, they gathered in the front room around the cozy fireplace and began to sing some choruses that truly bored Justin and were what his friend Jason called "Jesus is my girlfriend" songs. The melodic line almost caused him to gag and he would often put his finger down his throat while the group was singing, mimicking a gagging action. Of course, no one would see him do such a thing because they all had their eyes closed and looked like they were in some kind of trance.

Soon the musical interlude was over and Mason pulled out his Bible and told everyone to turn to Genesis chapter 1. Justin almost split a gut when someone couldn't find the passage in their Bible and, of course, Trudy had only brought a New Testament to the evening fray.

Mason began by telling everyone that in his considered studies that he was convinced that the earth was no older than 4004 years and that all that Science had discovered had to fit into that time frame, including the dinosaurs.

He began by telling this little eager group that God created the *universe* and by that rendering he meant that creation was recorded in one verse, therefore, creation was a "uni-verse." He challenged others to go look up *universe* in the dictionary to understand what he was talking about. He then took the group on a long expedition through quantum physics.

Next, he told the group about a new generation of Christian scholars and scientists, armed with earned doctorates and a literal view of the Genesis creation narrative. This group hoped to breathe new life into the theory that the earth is thousands, not billions, of years old with a hope that they could finally overcome Darwinism.

## Prologue

### Learning Objective

Understand the Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments.

“I found a new product while surfing the net,” he told them with great enthusiasm. “It’s called the ‘Handy Dandy Evolution Refuter.’ I’ll give you the web site URL later.”

Without skipping a beat, Mason took the group quickly through “seven evidences against evolution.” His monotone voice was about to lull Justin to sleep.

Without visiting any of the content in Genesis 1 where the group had been taken, Mason asked them to turn to Genesis 14.10 which reads, “Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits....”

“Even the tar pits were created in full bloom by God,” Mason postulated with some glee in his voice. “This was to spoof modern science and trick them into believing that the earth was really older than it really is.”

Now turn to Proverbs 16.4a which says, “The Lord hath made all things for himself....”

Mason continued, “In the years that man has been on earth, he has come to believe that the earth is for his own enjoyment, but this verse teaches us that God made the earth for himself.”

“And in Habakkuk 3.11, God demonstrates his power to do anything he wants to with what he has created. The Bible tells us that the ‘sun and the moon stood still,’” Mason barked out as his voice grew to a fevered pitch.

Justin was thinking, *the Bible says what*, as he raised his hand. His gag reflex was about to turn to a fluid eruption.

Mason responded, “Yes, Justin, do you have a comment?”

“More like a question,” Justin replied, wondering if he should really ask it.

“Go for it,” said Mason.

“Well, do you think it is wise for us to be trippin’ around through all these verses in such a disjunctive fashion to try and understand what God is saying? Why is it so important to prove the theory you have suggested that God created everything 4004 years ago? Would not your supposed theory be better to add the 2000 years or so since the birth of Christ, so wouldn’t you really be saying about 6,000 years ago? Even then, what you are doing really makes no sense to me,” Justin concluded.

“In fact this reminds me of a story I heard recently about a young minister who was asked to give a Bible Study. Here is what he said:

“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus who went down to Jericho by night, and fell on stony ground, and the thorns choked him half to death. He said, ‘What shall I do? I shall arise and go to my father’s house.’ And he arose and climbed into a sycamore tree. The next day, Solomon and his wife Gomorrah came by, and they carried him down to the ark for Moses to take care of. As he was going through the Eastern gate of the ark, he caught his hair on a limb, and he hung there for 40 days and 40 nights. And afterwards he was hungered and the ravens came and fed him. The next day the three wise men came and carried him down to Nineveh, and when he got there, he found Delilah sitting on the wall, and he said, ‘Chunk her down, boys,’

and they said, ‘How many times shall we chunk her down, till seven times?’ And he said, ‘Nay, but until 70 times 7.’ And they chunked her down 490 times, and she burst asunder in their midst, and they picked up 12 baskets of the fragments that remained, and they debated whose wife she would be in the resurrection.”

The group took a collective sigh as Mason opened his mouth to respond...

Been there and done that, huh? I have. It is true that as readers of Scripture we read, meditate, and study it in such a fragmented way. I think there is a solution to this problem. It’s story. God has given us a Story to live in and this book is created to give you an overview of that big story of God so that you can discover where you, in the present scene of his story, can become the actor and play the role he has called you to play, and intentionally being focused on being his partner in the redemption of his creation.

So where do we begin our journey?

### Those Shades Are Cool!

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It has become fashionable in the West to wear sun shades to protect the eyes. They come in all shapes and sizes and all kinds of colors. It just so happens that as readers of Scripture we all wear some shades of color in our reading glasses. These shades are like our ❖ **presuppositions** ❖ that we bring to the text we are reading. We all have them. Once in a discussion with my father-in-law about Scripture, he announced that he did not have any presuppositions when he read the Gospels. My reply was, “Your presupposition is that you don’t have any presuppositions.”

We all start somewhere. The starting point will determine the ending point. As an example, on the West Coast of USAmerica, there is a main Interstate highway with the number 5 (I-5 for short). It runs from Blaine, WA, in the North to the Mexican border below Chula Vista, CA, in the South. Let’s say you were in Portland, OR, and you wanted to go South to San Francisco, CA. You can’t get there on I-5 South. You can go part way, but I-5 doesn’t go to San Francisco. Driving South on I-5 from Portland predetermines where you are going. You can’t get anywhere else except where I-5 delivers you.

The same is true with our presuppositions. They predetermine before we start where we will end. Assume that you believe that Jesus is returning to rapture the Church before the Tribulation. That is your presupposition, your starting point, and as you read the text of Scripture, you find all sorts of verses that support that presupposition. Such is the flaw of the *Left Behind Series* of books.

“So what,” you may be saying. “I’m perfectly happy reading Scripture that way because it is the truth that Jesus is coming back before the Tribulation.” What if you put on a different color of shades through which you are reading the text of Scripture? What if, instead of collecting verses to prove a point, Scripture is a Story to be lived in for the sake of the world? How would that change your way of reading the text?

In the course of this book, we are going to offer you a different way of reading and thinking about Scripture, a different set of shades, if you please, a different set of presuppositions. My hope is that you will give

**Learning Objective**  
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#### QUESTIONS

Have you ever attended a Bible Study like the one storied on the left? What are your reflections? What do you think is helpful or harmful about this kind of Bible Study?

**Presupposition:** To suppose or assume beforehand; take for granted in advance. In our study it stands for root belief you have from which all your other beliefs flow.

#### QUESTION

Can you list your presuppositions about the Bible?

## Prologue

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time and attention to the way in which you presently read Scripture. If any of the thoughts presented herein find lodging with you and you decide to change some of your presuppositions, well, let's just say that I would be pleased with your transition even though it might be very painful for you to make that move.

### Where Are We Going!

In the Prologue, we are going to cover three areas:

1. The Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments
2. How Story is an antidote for this fragmentation
3. The concept of the Kingdom of God as a prism through which we can understand the Story of God.

### Houston, "We Have A Problem..."

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One of America's finest hours in space flight came when an oxygen tank exploded on Apollo 13. The quote "Houston, we have a problem" is actually a misquote. The actual quote is "Okay, Houston, we've had a problem here." This was a major problem for those on board the *Odyssey*. The crew in space and the crew in Houston had to put their minds together to solve this problem and bring the three astronauts back to earth safely.

It is natural when a problem occurs to try to find a solution. However, sometimes a bigger problem occurs: we don't know we have a problem. This is the situation with millions of readers of Scripture. We have a problem when we read Scripture and we may not even know it.

### A Little Known Problem

The little known problem in Scripture reading is the fragmented way in which we have come to read it: A little snippet here and a little snippet there, a Bible bit here and a Bible bit there. So, if it is a problem, what do we do about it?

### Where Do We Begin?

One might think of the Bible as a book that demonstrates how God has acted in relationship with his people. According to Dr. George Ladd, the late Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Fuller Seminary, "Scripture is the ❖ word of God ❖ written in the words of men."<sup>2</sup> For him ❖ acts and words ❖ are an inseparable unity.<sup>3</sup> God has delivered these acts and words in a variety of literary forms, among them narrative. According to Fee and Stuart, narrative or story comprises about forty percent of the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> Narrative is the primary genre of the Gospels,<sup>5</sup> and an underlying substructure of the writings of Paul according to Richard Hays.<sup>6</sup>

My argument is that the church's understanding of the Story of God in Scripture is, for the most part, seriously fragmented. Understanding the whole Story is not a concept that is celebrated in the church at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

I have deep concerns for the church moving across a cultural divide, that members on each side of the divide (Modern and Postmodern) have ample opportunity to have a holistic look at the overarching Story of God as it is presented in Scripture. This book is intended to be a challenge to the church to understand what her story is and how to become the people

*Word of God:* The biblical mode of revelation is the revealing acts of God in history, accompanied by the interpreting prophetic word that explains the divine source and character of the divine acts. Acts and words; God acts and God speaks; and the words explain the deeds. The deeds cannot be understood unless they are accompanied by the divine word. The word would be powerless unless accompanied by the mighty acts of God. Scripture is *words-works* revelation.

*Acts and Words:* God both acts and interprets the meaning of his acts. Scripture is the *works* and *words* of God. This is a *key* concept for understanding Scripture. For us to understand the faithfulness of God, we need to become familiar with how God has acted in faithfulness to his children and what he says those acts mean. *Christ's death* is the act of God. *Christ died for us while we were sinners* is his word of explanation for us.

of God living as his recreated humanity, as a light to this Present Evil Age. Knowing the story will help in answering the question: How are the people of God to advance the gospel as they improvise the Story of God for the sake of the world?

One of the primary reasons for not knowing the overarching Story of Scripture is the way readers have come to use Scripture. Individuals and the church have developed the malignant disease of *versitis*<sup>7</sup> (proof texting), which has grown to epidemic proportions. Readers take small fragments (verses) and quote them *ad nauseam* and usually out of context. Scripture is rarely read as a whole complete Story from beginning to end.

Most, if not all, of our reading of Scripture only reinforces a belief that the Bible is just a collection of little nuggets that one can choose from when a small portion is thought to be helpful. It's like using the Bible as an encyclopedia of God's knowledge. When you have a problem, just look up a reference and quote away. Readers of Scripture need to stop memorizing verses of Scripture and then quoting them as proof texts, brutally tearing them from their God-given context and ordering them in a human fashion, as if a reader could do a better job than the Spirit in putting the text together. If followers of Jesus are going to memorize, then they need to memorize the overarching Story and the myriad of stories therein, according to Len Sweet, a current postmodern author.<sup>8</sup> The church and individual readers need to recover the whole Story of Scripture. It is my argument, therefore, that we will never reside in the biblical narrative and make it our way of life if we keep pulling single verses from their context and use them as proof texts to argue our own theological agenda.

In addition to *versitis*, readers have also developed *topicalitis* (a contagious and deadly Bible teaching disorder), and *systematitis* (the art of propositional gathering). *Topicalitis* is best seen in the form of topical preaching and teaching while *systematitis* is extended *topicalitis* in the form of Systematic Theologies. Westerners have developed a penchant for minutia. Is it possible that fragmented teaching produces a fragmented believer who is anemic, listless, and weak with no sense of vocation as a follower and experiencer of God?

These three epidemics are caused by foundationalism, which among Evangelicals has caused too "low" a view of Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Why? Evangelicals have come to believe in the authority of the book that we have made Scripture to be. Evangelicals believe that God somehow has given us the wrong sort of book and it is our job to turn it into the right sort of book by engaging in the fissiparous<sup>10</sup> use of Scripture. How did this happen? To provide a beginning answer we will look at several authors and their discussion about the rise of foundationalism.

### A Penchant for Minutia

Foundationalism, as we will see below, has a penchant for minutia which seems to assist readers of Scripture to read it fissiparously. Foundationalism has produced for us the plagues of *versitis*, *topicalitis*, and *systematitis*.

The Bible was designed by God to be heard and read. In the "Welcome" section to the *Contemporary English Version*, its mission is described as being a translation that can be read, heard, and listened to

### Learning Objective

Understand the Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments.

### QUESTIONS

How often have you quoted verses of Scripture out of their context? What, if any, has been your experience(s) of memorizing Scripture passages? In your practice of memorization, do you think that memorizing stories might be a better choice than verses? Why or Why not?

## Prologue

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with enjoyment.<sup>11</sup> We must remember that the Bible was first meant to be heard<sup>12</sup> as its stories were told and read later after they were written down. Of course, we in the Western world have a difficult time wrapping our minds around the idea of an *oral Bible*. We think that literacy comes from being able to read *written* works, so if one only had an *oral* work, the person presenting and the people listening would thereby be illiterate. Susan Niditch argues the opposite point of view in her book, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*.<sup>13</sup>

In light of the early Israelites being an oral community, picture the following example in contrast to the story we told earlier about a local Bible Study.

The sun was setting and leaving an array of colors in the western sky. A cool breeze was beginning to take over from the heat of the sun. Jedaiah was stoking the fire to keep it alive for the gathering outside the tent of his father, Shimri. Jedaiah was seventeen years old, a sturdy lad with deep brown eyes.

All day Jedaiah daydreamed about what story Moses might share with his family during the cool of the evening. Would it be the story of Abraham and his journey to Egypt? Maybe it would be about Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt. Egypt had been a hard life for him and his family. The events over the last few months that had brought them to the foot of Sinai had been breathtaking.

Later after the evening meal, Moses arrived with two of his children. He greeted all who were gathered around the fire and found a comfortable place to sit and enjoy its warmth. The evenings in the desert could get a little chilly. Moses shared a couple of events from his busy day. One was particularly interesting to Jedaiah. Moses spoke of an interaction with a family who had a young son, Boaz, who was awestruck with the daughter of the family just two tents away from his family's tent. Mariah was "drop dead gorgeous," a dazzlingly beautiful, magnificent woman of eighteen years. As Moses relayed the story, Jedaiah fixed his eyes on Hannah with a wry grin on his face.

From the corner of his eye, Moses caught his longing look and said, "Maybe soon, I can return here to the tent of Shimri and have a similar conversation concerning Jedaiah and Hannah." If it had not have been so dark with only the light from the flickering fire, everyone would have seen the flush on the face of Jedaiah.

"Moses," Shimri inquired, "what story did you share with the families of Boaz and Mariah?"

"The same story I am going to share with you tonight," replied Moses.

A solemn hush readied everyone for the story that would fall from the lips of Moses.

"Out of a chaotic time, the voice of Yahweh thundered, 'Light, come into existence,' and in the blink of an eye there was light in the midst of all the chaos."

"You know how dark it is here in the desert just before dawn when most of the family fires have long been extinguished, and over the horizon light appears, a new day dawns. This daily event should always remind us of the creative majesty of Yahweh."

## Prologue

“Remember also that in Egypt we were asked to worship the god of the Sun. Our Egyptian friends would bow each morning and give praise and thanks for the rising of the light globe in the East and many of our people entered into this worship with their Egyptian friends.”

**Learning Objective**  
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“However, the story of Yahweh’s creation of all that we see tells us that he is the only God that we are to worship as he has said to us in the first of the stipulations he gave us from the mountain.”

Moses paused for a moment and asked, “What are some of the other things that Yahweh created?”

Shimri spoke up and said, “Animals, like the sheep that Jedaiah tends.”

“Remember, when we were in Egypt, our friends wanted us to worship at the foot of an idol that looked like a sheep, asking this god to protect our flocks from the harm of the jackals.”

Those around the fire gave an affirmative shake of their heads to this recollection.

“Well, the story of creation tells us that there is no sheep god, only the God who created sheep, and when we worship, we should worship him and not what he created.”

Shimri was chagrined and his face dropped so that his chin was touching his chest.

“Why the long face, Shimri?” Moses inquired.

“I was one that gave in to the pressure of my Egyptian friends and often bowed to worship the sheep god. I had not heard this story of our Creator God. I only knew the story of the sheep god and the people who worshiped him.” Shimri continued, “How can I change my ways to reflect a life ordered by the worship of Yahweh, the Creator of all the animals?”

Moses continued telling the story of God’s creative power ending with the creation of humankind. Here again, Moses paused to comment on how in Egypt they were expected to worship the Pharaoh, who was human, as a god, but that God’s stipulation in the Covenant he had made with them was that there couldn’t be any other gods, including human ones.

“The story of creation,” said Moses, “demonstrated that God created humans and gave them authority to be his agents in the world he had created, but humans themselves were not meant to be worshiped as a god.”

The chatter went on for almost two hours, but who was counting as long as Jedaiah could see Hannah. Soon the meeting broke up and Moses left with his two sons to return to his tent. Shimri commented on how inspiring it was to hear the creation story.

Jedaiah went to bed that night thinking of how living in the story of creation that Moses told would be when he and Hannah were wed. Being alive in his community and being the light to the world in which he lived truly excited him.

The stories around the campfires of Israel were as much “Bible” for them as the “written” word is a “Bible” for us.

### QUESTION

What do you think about the statement: “the stories around the campfires of Israel were as much ‘Bible’ for them as the ‘written’ word is a ‘Bible’ for us?”

## Prologue

### Learning Objective

Understand the Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments.

While the Bible is the bestselling book of all times, it is often the least understood, at least by Americans.<sup>14</sup> In Barna's survey on the Bible he says, "Three-quarters of Americans (75%) believe that the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves."

Readers have memorized its fragments, sometimes without knowing it. Although we may not have realized it when we say, "out of the mouth of babes" we are quoting Psalms 8.2. When we describe a person's attitude as being "holier than thou," we are quoting Isaiah 65.5. Some of the greatest speeches in the world have quoted Scripture. One famous line from Abraham Lincoln was, "A house divided against itself cannot stand,"<sup>15</sup> which was a line from the pen of Luke. Parents have told their children to "beware of wolves in sheep's clothing." They are quoting Jesus or misquoting him (Matt. 7.5). While we know some of the classic sayings (verses) of Scripture, we are often still illiterate of its overarching meaning and the power of its Story.

In addition to verse quoting, we story-quote as well. Christians often know lots of stories from Scripture, like the story of creation, Noah and the ark, the tower of Babel, Moses in the bulrushes, the crossing of the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho, etc., yet still do not know how these stories fit into the overarching Story of Scripture.

Readers have focused on the smallest part of Scripture, chapters, verses, and stories and are often content with collecting these fragments in a systematic way and presenting conclusions that may not be the intended meaning of the texts being collected. By doing so, readers become mentally poorer in knowing Scripture's overall meaning.

Some find the Bible a dull read. As I have written elsewhere "the Bible is definitely not a dull book!"

It is one of the primary ways that God uses to help us know him better and to become more like him for the sake of the world. Our task as readers of HIStory is to understand what God has said. We are too often driven to study the Bible before we have learned to read it well. Study sounds so ominous, so foreboding, and it can be! As followers of Jesus we want to know God, so we jump in and begin our study without having a goal in mind, sometimes without knowing all that study involves. One of our biggest hindrances in our own culture is that we bring good old American foundational presuppositions about topics such as love, grace, mercy, hell, heaven, and many others to our study. America has taught us that "right is might." Therefore, we often study to prove a point rather than hear what God wants to say to us. Instead of topics to prove, God has given us a Story to live within.

God chose to give us his Story through many different authors, media, and centuries. The Story comes through many books written over a 1500-year period with no fewer than forty authors. These individuals included kings, prophets, shepherds, philosophers, the educated, and the unlearned. Each book, like all books, has a beginning, middle, and end. Together they all have historical context and together deliver HIStory.<sup>16</sup>

I once shared the concept of how we read Scripture with an eye to find proof for our arguments with folks with a friend of mine. I challenged him to read for a week with the intention of enjoyment and not with the "hidden" intention of finding proof. The next week he shared with me that for the first time in his adult life, he had enjoyed reading the text of

### QUESTIONS

Have you ever heard or made this complaint before? If you have heard it or made it yourself, how did you respond to the person who said it or to your own complaint about Scripture being dull?

Scripture as he freed himself from the plague of versitis. Give it a try for yourself and enjoy the refreshment of hearing God’s Story with fresh ears as if you were reading it for the first time.

**Learning Objective**  
Understand the Western world’s penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments.

**Foundationalism. How Did We Get To Where We Are?**

As culture moves to what is being called the postmodernity ethos, the demise of the modernist approach to knowledge seems to be its causality.<sup>17</sup> This can be seen in the rejection of foundationalism that characterized the Enlightenment ❖ **epistemology**. ❖ In the modern era, a period extending roughly from 1860 to the present, the reading and understanding of Scripture has been deeply influenced by the Enlightenment’s nature of the understanding of knowledge that had at its heart the epistemology that is often called foundationalism.<sup>18</sup> The quest of postmodernity is to discover a nonfoundationalist or Postfoundationalist epistemology.<sup>19</sup>

*Epistemology:* The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity.

**QUESTION**  
Have you heard the term “foundationalism” before? Was it presented as positive, negative, or neutral in value?

Grenz and Franke in their book, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, suggest the following:

In its broadest sense, foundationalism is merely the acknowledgement of the seemingly obvious observation that not all beliefs we hold (or assertions we formulate) are on the same level, but that some beliefs (or assertions) anchor others. Stated in the opposite manner, certain of our beliefs (or assertions) receive their support from other beliefs (or assertions) that are more “basic” or “foundational.” Defined in this manner, nearly every thinker is in some sense a foundationalist.<sup>20</sup>

From a philosophical point of view, the heart of foundationalism is the desire to overcome the uncertainty generated by our human liability to error that leads to so many disagreements. The foundationalist mindset is convinced that the only way to solve this problem is to discover some way of grounding human knowledge on an unconquerable certainty, i.e., the search for absolute truth! Walter Brueggemann, notes, “Descartes’ philosophical reflection was an urgent effort to fend off the coming chaos so evident in the world around him.”<sup>21</sup>

Using the metaphor of a building, foundationalism advances the argument that like a building, knowledge has to have an irrefutable foundation that consists of a set of unquestioned beliefs. All other knowing proceeds from that foundation. This set of unquestioned beliefs is believed to be universal, context free, and available to anyone. The code of foundationalism reasons that reasoning can only move in one direction—from the bottom up, from the unquestioned beliefs to their logical conclusion.<sup>22</sup>

Foundationalism requires that the foundations of human knowledge be unshakably certain and asserts that the only way of knowing proceeds from *deduction* (such as deducing other truths from the unquestioned beliefs [Descartes]) or *induction* (as deriving truths from sense impression caused by the material world [Locke]).<sup>23</sup>

Grenz and Franke offer a brief overview of the rise of foundationalism.

- ◆ The quest for a means by which we can justify our claims to knowledge dates to the ancient Greek philosophers.
- ◆ The quest for a means by which we can justify our claims to knowledge became acute in Western philosophical history in the Enlightenment.

## Prologue

### Learning Objective

Understand the Western world's penchant for minutia and the breaking of the Story into fragments.

**René Descartes** is often called the father of modern science. He established a new, clear way of thinking about philosophy and science by rejecting all ideas based on assumptions or emotional beliefs and accepting only those ideas which could be proved by or systematically deduced from direct observation. He took as his philosophical starting point the statement *Cogito ergo sum* — “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes made major contributions to modern mathematics, especially in developing the Cartesian coordinate system and advancing the theory of equations. <[http://www.answers.com/rene\\_descartes](http://www.answers.com/rene_descartes)>

- ◆ The French philosopher ✦ **René Descartes** ✦ is believed to be the father of modern foundationalism because he began his philosophical work by attempting to establish a foundation.
- ◆ Living in troubled times after the Reformation, Descartes' travels revealed how culturally based and culturally dependent beliefs actually were.
- ◆ Descartes' response to this situation was to seek to find certainty for a knowing mind.
- ◆ To accomplish his task, he scrutinized all of his beliefs and assumptions by doubting everything until he arrived at a belief that he could no longer doubt, namely, that he doubted.
- ◆ This led to his famous dictum, “I think: therefore, I am.”
- ◆ He believed that he had established the foundation of knowledge by the appeal to the mind's own experience of certainty.
- ◆ From this foundation, he began to construct a new human knowledge edifice.
- ◆ For him, this new epistemological program yielded knowledge that was certain, culture and tradition free.<sup>24</sup>

Some philosophers, like John Locke, took issue with specific aspects of Descartes' proposal. Locke rejected Descartes' view that our basic beliefs consist of innate ideas from which we deduce other beliefs. He argued that the foundation of human knowledge lies in sense experiences that are observations from the world. His system is known as empiricism.<sup>25</sup> However, most thinkers, despite some disagreements of other particulars, readily adopted Descartes' desire to establish some type of sure foundation for human knowing.<sup>26</sup>

Brueggemann suggests that the outcomes of the work of Descartes are threefold:

- ◆ “A new model of knowledge grounded in objectivity, and capable of providing a new epistemological security to replace that which was lost in the dissolution of the Medieval worldview.”
- ◆ “The pursuit of ‘pure reason,’ free of every contingency....”
- ◆ A “Cartesian masculinization of thought and the flight from the feminine.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***From Philosophy to Theology***

From the guild of philosophers, the concerns of Descartes spilled over into theology, which became impregnated with a foundationalistic point of view. This led many eighteenth century religious thinkers to two conclusions: *first*, they appealed to the Bible or the church as the foundation one could accept as classical Christian doctrine. *Second*, they embraced the skeptical rationalism that seemed to be the final product of the enlightened mind.<sup>28</sup>

A new cast of theological thinkers in the nineteenth century refused to be boxed in by these two options. These thinkers sought a new foundation on which to construct their theology.

### ***A Proper Foundation: Two Answers***

The debate over finding a proper foundation produced two answers. *First*, the bedrock foundation could only be religious experience. While personal in nature, they believed that it was universal. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, often called the leading nineteenth century theologian of the Protestant church, first voiced this approach to theology.

He maintained that “the essence of religion is an awareness of absolute dependence or the experience of God consciousness.”<sup>29</sup> Others of a more conservative bend sought to find a different foundation. As a *second* answer, they concluded that this invulnerable foundation lay in an error-free Bible, which they viewed as the storehouse for all divine revelation. This led to sayings such as the one by Charles Hodge, a Princeton theologian, that the Bible is “free from all error, whether of doctrine, fact, or precept.”<sup>30</sup>

The *second* answer bolstered the process of propositional thinking and teaching in the form of systematic theology. Systematic theology took the fragmented view to a larger scale presenting themes without context instead of stories, by thinking it was teaching what the Bible says on any given topic where the “adept theologian claimed that he was only restating in a more systematic form what scripture itself says.”<sup>31</sup>

Hodge suggested that just as a natural scientist uncovered the facts pertaining to the natural world, so the theologian brought to light the theological facts found in Scripture by drawing theological propositions from the text and compiling these various facts. With such a foundation, conservative theologians were confident that they could deduce from Scripture the great truths about God or any other category and deliver an objective view of these beliefs.<sup>32</sup>

Just as the legacy of Schleiermacher dominated the liberal project to the present, the foundationalism of Hodge and other nineteenth century conservatives sets the tone for what would become the theological paradigm of Evangelical theology through most of the twentieth century. This “compendium of truths” that can be unlocked through scientific induction came to be the character of American fundamentalism and can be seen in Wayne Grudem’s definition of systematic theology as the attempt to determine what the whole Bible teaches about any given topic. Grudem says, “Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic.”<sup>33</sup>

A Statement of Faith is an example of this systematic approach. Statements of Faith are attempts at a brief systematic theology (*systematitit*) by breaking the Story into fragmented parts that are held up as “final” beliefs to which one is to ascribe, believing that it has captured all knowable truth on the subject visited. However, I believe that Story is the beginning of belief not the conclusion of belief. The church needs to have restored to her a sense of the “whole” that emphasizes history and story as God’s method of revealing himself to her. Could it be that even the early “creeds” like the Apostle’s Creed was a shorthand story beginning with God the creator of the universe and ending with everlasting life and not really a “statement of faith” in the sense of what “statements of faith” have become today?

While at odds with each other, those following the legacy of Schleiermacher and those following the legacy of Hodge have one thing in common: they seek to maintain the credibility of Christianity within a culture that glorifies reason and deifies science.<sup>34</sup>

Could it be that the foundation of nonfoundationalism is to believe that there is no foundation? What then of a possible solution? Scripture appears to speak of an objectivity of a future eschatological world that is God’s determined will for his creation. How do we proceed toward this

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**QUESTIONS**  
Have you ever been taught that you don’t need to know any history, etc., around a Bible passage; all you need to do is just “experience” what the passage says to you?  
Can you see where that kind of teaching may have come from?

**QUESTIONS**  
Have you been taught inerrancy, i.e., that the Bible is free from all error?  
What did you think about that teaching?  
Do you think the Bible is free from error?  
If asked could you tell the story of how the church started teaching this “doctrine?”

**QUESTION**  
Have you ever considered the Apostle’s Creed to be a “shorthand story” of Scripture?  
What do you think about the idea?

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eschatological world? According to Grenz and Franke, we have a mandate that says that we are to be participants in God's work of constructing a new world that reflects God's own will for his creation, a world which finds its connectedness with Jesus Christ. Where do we find this mandate? We discover it through the Spirit's primary tool: narrative/story. In God's Story, the Spirit's goal is to bring us to view all reality in accordance with God's program for recreation.<sup>35</sup> The redemptive event in which Christians have participated makes each a Story-liver and Storyteller as she or he lives as a newly created being for the sake of the world while telling others the Story by deed and word. Will we know or discover absolute truth? Only in the eschaton will we know truth in its absolute fullness. Until then, we read the Story/stories and live the Story/stories to our fullest capacity with the empowerment of the Spirit.

### Chapters And Verses. An Aid To Foundationalism

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*Chapters and Verses:* The books of the Old and New Testaments were divided into chapters from an early time. The Pentateuch was divided by the ancient Hebrews into 54 *parshioth* (sections), one of which was read in the synagogue every Sabbath day (Acts 13:15). These sections were later divided into 669 *sidrim* (sections) of unequal length. The Prophets were divided in the same manner into *haphtharoth* or *passages*.<sup>37</sup> In the early Latin and Greek versions of the Bible, similar divisions were made. The New Testament books were also divided into portions of various lengths under different names with titles and heads or chapters.

In modern times this ancient example was imitated, and many attempts of the kind were made before the existing division into chapters was fixed. The Latin Bible published by Cardinal Hugo of St. Cher in A.D. 1250 is generally regarded as the first Bible that was divided into our present chapters, although it appears that some of the chapters were fixed as early as A.D. 1059. This division into chapters came gradually to be adopted in the published editions of the Hebrew Bible, with some few variations, and in the Greek Scriptures. The division into verses came in A.D. 1551 when Robert Stephens introduced a Greek New Testament with the inclusion of verses. The first entire English Bible to have verse divisions was the Geneva Bible A.D. 1560.

The modern reader has to read the Story of Scripture through the added distraction of ❖ **chapters and verses.** ❖<sup>36</sup> The reduction of the metanarrative to chapters and verses added in the 1500s became the root for fragmentedly reading Scripture. Chapters and verses are clearly not a part of the metanarrative. The use of chapters and verses diverts the reader's attention from the larger Story by the practice of being encouraged to memorize verses. From our earliest reading experiences, we have learned to read in chapters. Verses, on the other hand, pose a whole different obstacle. Verses are a convenient way to look up a reference. But, that's where their usefulness ends. The addition of verses to the pages of the Bible is the single most harmful barrier to reading and understanding its Story. Most verses are only part of a sentence. To only read them or memorize them has no real meaning. These little groups of words that have been sloganized, placed on banners, greeting cards, and plaques are not God's word when seen, memorized, or printed by themselves apart from their historical context. It is true to say that readers would not read one of their favorite books in this fragmented way.

#### An Illustration: Psalm 119.11 and 1 Thessalonians 5.22

One might note that the understanding of one Bible verse (Psalm 119.11) has largely been responsible for verse memorization. Its meaning may actually demonstrate that Story, not verses, is a preferred method for memorization. Secondly, the text of 1 Thessalonians 5.22 in the King James Version is often quoted making the author of the text say something that he did not mean to say.

#### *Psalms 119.11*

Verses are not helpful when it comes to reading the stories in Scripture. Giving attention to verse breaks would be like reading this sentence:

<sup>3</sup>I love the sound <sup>4</sup>of your voice in the springtime.

Then, for some unknown reason we decide to memorize only verse 4, "of your voice in the springtime." After memorizing it, we quote it over and over again hoping it will help the hearer in some moment of need. Doesn't make much sense, does it?

Remember, the books of the Bible were broken down into chapters and verses a long time ago. You may wish to note, however, that the original writers did not write this way, nor did the original readers read this way.

It is unfortunate that we have been taught to memorize and quote verses. We were taught this because of a verse (wouldn't you know) from the book of Psalms.

I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you (119.11 NIV).

We have interpreted *word* in this verse as “verse or verses.” The context of this verse is vv. 9-16 which form a complete section of the larger poem of Psalm 119. It begins with a question reminiscent of a style of *Wisdom* writings in the Old Testament (Prov. 23.29f.; Ps. 25.12f.). The question posed is: *How can a young man keep his way pure?* The answer is in the second part of the ❖ **parallelism**: ❖ *By living according to your word.* *Word* can have many meanings in the Old Testament, among them *an event* such as the covenant with Abraham as recorded in Genesis 15.1-21. In 119.9, *word* is the “divine word” that proceeds from the mouth of God as it is in Psalms 17.4 and 33.6. *Word* can indicate:

- ◆ A particular message as in Jeremiah 7.2, or
- ◆ The sum total of God's revealed will as in Deuteronomy 4.2.

In 119.11 the Psalmist says that he has treasured the words of God so that they may determine his actions in life. The word *word* (*imrah*) here is a poetical synonym to the word *word* (*dabar*) in verse 9 and usually means the *Law* in Psalm 119. Law should be understood as instruction rather than a legal prescription.

On one occasion the word *word* means a promise as in 119.140. The followers of God in the Old Testament were taught the stories of God and their meanings. It is in this context that we should render this section of Psalm 119.

To *hide his word in our hearts* is at the very least to hide the stories of how God has acted in faithfulness on behalf of his children throughout the Bible. These action-packed stories should determine how we approach life as a child of God.

### 1 Thessalonians 5.22

The following is an illustration of how quoting memorized verses often causes misquoting the intended contextual meaning of the verse.

The text of 1 Thessalonians 5.22 reads, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (KJV). This is one of the most misused and abused passages from the King James Version in the New Testament. This was my mother's all time favorite verse that she quoted to me hundreds of times. She quoted it to provide the basis for living a holy life every time she thought that a request to participate in an activity that she deemed as “unholy,” was requested by me. She took it completely out of its context when she quoted it. The verse is part of a conclusion that Paul is making in regard to prophecy and should read as follows:

Do not attempt to put out the fire of the Spirit by treating prophecies with contempt; test every prophecy and act on the good ones while avoiding the bad ones.

Paul is suggesting to the Thessalonians that the things to be avoided are prophecies that have been tested and found not to be from the Spirit. To use this text in any other way is not to use it at all, but to abuse it, thereby making God say something he never intended to say at this point. There

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**Parallelism:** Hebrew poetry makes use of a literary device called *parallelism*, a thought rhyme in which the second line of a section echoes or reiterates the thought of the first line.

### QUESTIONS

Have you ever quoted, or should I say, misquoted this verse?  
What other verses may you have misquoted?  
Can you replace those misquotations with stories?

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are other Scriptures, but not this passage, which urge us to live a holy life and even go to lengths to tell us what evil to avoid, (Gal. 5.19ff. for *evil to avoid* and 5.22ff. for *the Kingdom life to be lived*).

As we will suggest below, if one is going to memorize Scripture, then story memorization might be the choice over verse memorization.

It is almost impossible to find Scripture published without chapters and verses. *The Message* by Eugene Peterson is an exception to the rule and so is *The Books of The Bible* from International Bible Society. Publishers continue to aid the misreading of Scripture by formatting the text of Scripture with the obstacles of chapters and verses, and these additions aid the reader in thinking about the smallest realm rather than the larger realm of the metanarrative.

Sermons are infamous for presenting a topic supported by a few scattered verses. The presentation of sermons in this vein continues to reinforce a fragmented way of thinking about Scripture. Wright suggests that “most churches, even those with well-developed educational programmes, have a long way to go in their teaching of Scripture.”<sup>37</sup>

Propositional thinking led to systematic theology which was aided by chapters and verses that served as the basis for the propositions of systematic theology.

### Illustrations Of The Problem Of Reading Fragmentarily

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There are several ways in which readers of the Old and New Testament have been enticed to read and understand its contents. The implicit idea behind these possible solutions is that knowledge<sup>38</sup> of Scripture is a primary benefit for a believer. The late Stan Grenz has said, “Knowledge is good only when it facilitates a good result — specifically, when it fosters wisdom (or spirituality) in the knower.”<sup>39</sup> While knowledge that “fosters wisdom” is a worthy goal, the following solutions do not offer a connected Story of Scripture that holds Scripture together and energizes God’s people for mission and orders their life. Rather, these possible solutions may often offer a backdrop from which misreading of Scripture has now become so common that they are accepted by large segments of the church as correct readings.<sup>40</sup> Many of these possible solutions offer stories from within the metanarrative but do not offer any connectors to the metanarrative. Thus, the individual stories become fragments themselves.

One of these ways of reading Scripture is the *Reading the Bible through in a Year* approach. In this approach, there is usually a minimum of three chapters a day to be read in order to reach the goal of finishing the Bible in a year. Often the chapters to be read daily are picked from both the Old and New Testament. What if you read your favorite book in such a fragmented way? What if you read two chapters from the front of the book and a chapter from the middle of the book and then two chapters from the back of the book? How would you ever understand the story presented in the text? To read in such a fashion goes against the continuity of seeing the Story presented in Scripture. If you wouldn’t normally read a book that way, then why would you read the Bible that way?

Another offering of the Church to help followers of Jesus is Sunday School. Lessoned materials, offered by the *International Sunday School*

### QUESTION

What has been your experience(s) of trying to read the Bible through in a year?

*Lessons* (ISSL), are often offered in a topical or thematic rather than storied way. ISSL offers denominations a listing of texts that are chosen to cover as much of the Bible “as is fruitful for group study”<sup>41</sup> in a six year cycle. Story is not the driving force of the material.

There are scholarly books such as Old and New Testament introductions, surveys, theologies, and commentaries, which are often written by specialist for specialist and cover lots of content, but still in a disconnected way. Commentaries are usually focused on the smallest part of the text: verses and words. While understanding the text, i.e., its word meanings, historical context, and theological significance, is of great value, it is often done in isolation from the storyline.

### So What?

The rise of propositional thinking in the Enlightenment, aided by the previous addition of chapters and verses in the text of Scripture, has led readers to read the text of Scripture in a fragmented way.

The rise of foundationalism was the result of Descartes’ decision, in the midst of culturally based and culturally dependent beliefs, to seek to find certainty for a knowing mind. The concept of foundationalism moved from the philosophical realm to the theological realm and led many eighteenth century religious thinkers to arrive at two conclusions. *First*, the Bible or the church was a sure foundation and *second*, skeptical rationalism was embraced.

Nineteenth century theological thinkers sought a new foundation. Two separate conclusions were drawn: Schleiermacher’s “experience of God consciousness” or Hodges’ “error free Bible” could be foundational. Hodges’ concept led to systematic theology and Scripture’s division into chapters and verses aided the foundational mindset along in producing systematic theologies. The systematic theology mindset has influenced a myriad of variations of the Biblical text which has led to fragmentation of the text and away from its Story intent. Educational materials are often built on the smallest fragments of Scripture: verses or sets of verses, topics made up of verses, or individual stories with no tie to the larger Story.

The church and individual reader is presented with a quagmire: fragmented reading of the text of Scripture. What is the antidote to this problematic situation? Story!

### Story. The Antidote To Foundationalism

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Story has become fashionable to write about in the two or so recent decades. William Bausch says in the introduction to his book, *Storytelling*, “We are creatures who think in stories,”<sup>42</sup> but have been trained to think in propositions.<sup>43</sup> Propositional thinking has caused us to reduce the text of Scripture from an overarching Story with many smaller stories to a set of propositions to believe. In the book *Why Narrative?* Stanley Hauerwas states, “In recent years appeals to ‘narrative’ and to ‘story’ have been increasingly prominent in scholarly circles, to the delight of some, the consternation of others, and the bewilderment of many. Such appeals have caused delight in that narrative and story appear to provide a cure, if not a panacea, to a variety of Enlightenment illnesses: rationalism, monism, decisionism, objectivism, and other ‘isms,’”<sup>44</sup> and one might add fragmentary-ism.

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Know how Story is an antidote for fragmentation.

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**QUESTION**  
What do you think of the statement: “We are creatures who think in stories, but have been trained to think in propositions”?

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### QUESTION

How does the form of the NT canon, i.e., Gospels, Acts, Letters, and Revelation, help or confuse you in trying to understand the Story of God?

It seems that story,<sup>45</sup> not proposition, is the design God picked to call us to our vocation: partnering with him in the redemption of his creation. The Story of Scripture is a continual Story beginning with Creation and moving toward the New Creation, although somewhat chopped up in the way our printed Bibles present the texts to us in its canonical form. It is not my purpose to resolve the question: Does inspiration include the form of canonization that we have in our modern Bibles? The short answer is: the form of the canon is an effort by humans to ratify what the church in the first three centuries thought to be in or out. The overall form of the New Testament is somewhat chronological in sequence, i.e., Gospels (the life and ministry of Jesus); Acts (the life and ministry of the church); Letters (the problems of the church presented in an ad hoc way, listing Paul's letters from largest to smallest with one exception and then the letters not from Paul); finally, Revelation (the consummation of the Kingdom). However, the overall form is not chronological. If that were the case the writings of Paul would have come first. More information on canonical formation can be found in the *Dictionary of New Testament Background*.<sup>46</sup>

We live in the present part of the Story and are connected to the previous episodes of the Story while moving toward its conclusion. Why is story important? To begin to answer that question we shall look at several authors to help us understand the concept of why story is the possible antidote to foundationalism's fragmented reading of Scripture.

Everyday from the tic of birth to the tock of death<sup>47</sup> we write our own stories, maybe not in print, but nevertheless written in our lives. If they are not saved they will be forever lost.

Once I was creating a TV teaching script for my employer. I was using a computer; this was before personal desktops could be found everywhere. I was using a word processing program that was created by a friend of mine that was used on large computer systems. He had trained me to use the program. I had just added the finishing touch to the script when someone flipped the power off in the office where I was working. In just a flash of the moment, everything that I had created was gone. Stories can be like that.

While our stories may get lost from time to time, God's Story has survived for several millennia for followers of Jesus to read, hear, and see, so we can learn to live within the Story. We may need to learn to apply ourselves to the Story rather than the other way around: applying the Bible to our worldview.<sup>48</sup>

Stories have been around for as long as storytellers have had the ability to engage an audience in getting lost in the tales they are spinning. Our imagination plays a great part in the process of listening to a story. When I was a kid, before TV, I listened every Saturday evening to several radio dramas like *The Shadow*. You could hear the voices, the footsteps, the music, but you had to imagine what the people looked like and what the set looked like as they were playing out this drama. It made for a lively Saturday evening. It seems to me that TV simply spoiled the opportunity to imagine. Watching TV causes us to visually see what someone else imagined and then we take their imagination as reality for the drama being presented. Some believe that storytelling might be the most fundamental way that humans communicate. It just may well be that storytelling is the oldest human communication.

*The Shadow*: <<http://www.old-time.com/sights/shadow.html>>

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Once on a trip to my birth state, several members of my family got together for an evening. The event quickly turned to storytelling. The youngsters wanted to hear stories about the elders and the ones who now are not with us any longer. As I told them story after story, they kept saying, “I never knew that before,” or “I never knew mom or grandmother would think or do such a thing.” Stories are enlightening to their hearers. They keep the listeners grounded to their roots and teach them things they never knew before.

Stories are powerful. Alister McGrath tells a story in his book *Christian Spirituality*.

Stories are about finding one’s identity, and learning the story of one’s own people. This point was brought home to me particularly clearly back in 1990, when I heard an American professor of literature describe how he discovered the importance of learning one’s story. This professor, who taught at a leading university in Southern California, was a Kiowa (KAI a wa) Indian, a Native American from the Oklahoma region. He told how he learned the story of his people when he was still a young boy. One day, just after dawn, his father woke him, and took him to the home of an elderly squaw. He left him there, promising to return to collect him that afternoon.

All that day, the squaw told this young boy the story of the Kiowa people. She told him of their origins by the Yellowstone River, and how they then migrated southward. She told him of the many hardships they faced—the wars with other Indian nations and the great blizzards of the winter plains. She told him of the glories of the life of the Kiowa nation—of the great buffalo hunts, the taming of wild horses, and the great skill of the braves as riders. Finally, she told him of the coming of the white man. She told him about the humiliation of their once-proud nation at the hands of the white soldiers, who forced them to move south to Kansas, where they faced starvation and poverty. Her story ended as she told him of their final humiliating confinement within a reservation in Oklahoma.

Shortly before dark his father returned to collect him. His words on leaving the home of the squaw remain firmly planted in my mind. “When I left that house, I was Kiowa.” He had learned the story of his people, to which he was heir. He knew what his people had been through. Before he had learned that story, he had been a Kiowa in name only; now he was a Kiowa in reality.<sup>49</sup>

Could it be that when a follower of Jesus hears and understands God’s EPIC Adventure,<sup>50</sup> he or she will no longer be a Christian in name only, but will be a Christian in reality, one who lives his or her life in community for the sake of the world? God’s EPIC Adventure is a captivating Story, one that is bigger than our small “soap operas” that we so often live in day to day. When we are exposed to this story will we, like the professor in the story, be able to say, “When I finished reading the story, I was a Christian.” Before hearing the Story, is it possible that we are only Christian in name only, but after being exposed to God’s EPIC Adventure, that we become a Christian in reality?

### What Are Stories?

Stories are not a bunch of fragmented stuff that just happens. Stories are moving accounts that are headed for a destination. So when we hear or

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**Dualism:** The view that the world consists of or is explicable as two fundamental entities, such as mind and matter.

**Deism:** The belief, based solely on reason, in a God who created the universe and then abandoned it, assuming no control over life, exerting no influence on natural phenomena, and giving no supernatural revelation.

**Agnosticism:** The belief that there can be no proof either that God exists or that God does not exist.

**Atheism:** The doctrine that there is no God or gods.  
<<http://www.answers.com>>

### QUESTIONS

What do you think about the question presented in the paragraph to the right? So you live in the Story of God or do you apply “short” pieces of the story to parts of your life?

tell a story, it is a whole entity. We need to guard against putting fragments together<sup>51</sup> that produce the creation of a different story and then pass it off as if it were God’s story.

The Story of God that Scripture presents is to be told as a challenge to the story of the present world. God’s EPIC Adventure is subversive and will subvert the dominant paradigm when told and enacted. The telling and living of this Story challenges the authority of this Present Evil Age. In telling and living God’s Story, we are undermining the current worldview of what the world is and offering the world a new worldview. The Story we tell and live is that there is only one God. He is the creator of all that there is. He not only created the world, but he lives within his creation. He is not up there and we are down here (❖ **dualism** ❖). He is not a landlord who made the world and left it to run on its own (❖ **deism** ❖). He is not an absentee landlord (❖ **agnosticism** ❖). He is not absent (❖ **atheism** ❖).<sup>52</sup> This Creator God is transcendent over his creation and is deeply wounded by its fall away from goodness to sinfulness. He was loving enough that he was willing to get his hands dirty, as it were, to bring about its recreation.

The Story of God is about the world that was created by God and functions as an open invitation for all who choose to participate. The hearer can make the Story his or her own by turning away from idols that hinder one from making the Story one’s own and worshiping the God who is revealed in this Story.<sup>53</sup>

Knowing the Story is not an end in itself. The Story is there so that the Creator God may be glorified and that his creation may be redeemed. It is our task to be the vehicles through whom this magnificent Story is told and retold, not just in words but also with drama, art, or any form of creative expression. We have been entrusted with a great and wonderful privilege.

What if story, not propositions, is the cause of our actions? What if story, not propositions, gives us our worldview? What if story, not propositions, is at the root of the way we function as human beings? What if we changed our story from one of cultural consumerism, as an example, to God’s EPIC Adventure, which provides another view of the world? Wouldn’t it follow that we would change how we would relate to the world around us? What if story is the medium through which we develop our hopes and dreams, our joy and anger, our self-expression and fears?

Stories cause us to have emotions (joy, peace, love, fear, etc.). Stories bring ideas to us. We see ourselves in the characters presented in stories. Stories explode our curiosity. Stories are about sending and receiving. Stories include conversation that goes both ways providing interaction. It appears that we could all benefit from the effect of story.

As long as story captures our interest, we have an almost infinite capacity to hear and repeat it. In today’s economy, those who market and advertise know the power of story. It seems that story is one of the most powerful and effective tools that we have at our disposal to convey information with which we may engage people. An audience may be immersed in the story that provides them with the information that they need to take an action.

Once while teaching an Old Testament Survey class at the church level, I told the story of Genesis 1.1-2.4a. I provided the background for the writing and then placed the story of Genesis 1 into that background. The background

of the story is in the life of Israel, living at the foot of Sinai, being prepared to go to the land promised to their forefathers. They had made Covenant with God in which the first stipulation was that Yahweh was the only God they could worship. The story of Genesis 1 is about God as creator set against all the other formidable gods of the ancient world. In each successive period of creation, two gods were dethroned and Yahweh replaced them. This would have been clear to the Hebrews who were hearing the story. God was serious about being their only God. I ended with a question: “How many gods do we worship today?”

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The next time I gathered with that class, one lady brought me a paper that she had handwritten, answering the question I had asked. To her surprise, there were other gods being worshiped in her life that she discovered. God’s Story and the interaction with the Spirit brought a new freedom to this person’s life. She had improvised within the framework of the Story and gained new light on the gods that were controlling her life.

### **Story. Bausch’s Perspective [Thirteen Characteristics of a Good Story]**

In his book *Storytelling, Imagination, and Faith*,<sup>54</sup> William Bausch relates thirteen characteristics of a good story. These story characteristics are:

1. *Stories provoke curiosity and compel repetition.* Good stories are gripping. We want to hear them over and over again.
2. *Stories unite us in a holistic way to nature.* A good story causes us to feel connected to nature and for a believer to the God of creation of nature. That connection makes us have a feeling of holism.
3. *Stories are a bridge to one’s culture, one’s roots.* We have common stories that evoke our identity to past generations and our roots. We have clan, tribe, culture, family, and individual stories. It is even possible that an outsider can get a glimpse of a culture by looking at its stories.
4. *Stories bind us to the universal, human family.* We are puzzled, especially as believers, to discover that other cultures have similar motifs (like the flood stories in the Bible and in other cultures). These stories could have a binding effect and empower us to understand that we are all part of a universal family, regardless of color, race, or creed.
5. *Stories help us to remember.* The stories we hear and tell remind us of our roots, those things that we share in common, those things that we share in honor, and those things that we share in shame.
6. *Stories use a special language.* Stories use all kinds of language conventions to make the story vivid and memorable.
7. *Stories restore the original power of the word.* Spoken and written words carry great power.
8. *Stories provide escape.* A good story calls us away from the immediate and gives us an opportunity to reenter life. Think of how children forget their hurts by the time a parent finishes a calm and soothing story.
9. *Stories evoke in us right-brain imagination.* The Western world has molded most of us into a left-brain way of thinking. Stories bring about a balance by calling us to use the right side of our brain.
10. *Stories promote healing.* Stories can bring reconciliation and forgiveness.
11. *Every story is our story.* We can identify with something in every story.

**QUESTION**  
What resonates with you  
about Bausch’s 13 points  
concerning story? Why?

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12. *Stories provide a basis for hope and morality.* Stories call us to the imagination of hope. Reinhold Niebuhr once said, “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.”
13. *Stories are the basis for ministry.* It is from story that we minister for the sake of the world.<sup>55</sup>

Bausch also suggests that good stories are paradoxical which causes emotions to be stirred. He goes on to say, “We are being asked to learn a language again that resonates with rich metaphor and image. Too long we have been trapped in the perfect square of a stylized laboratory where all things are subject to our measurements.”<sup>56</sup> We are invited to learn about God from the stories that he told, not from the propositions that we take from the stories that he told.

Wright takes the position that Evangelicalism’s view of Scripture is often a “low view” of Scripture,<sup>57</sup> because we think that somehow the Holy Spirit didn’t do as good of a job as he could have done. We treat Scripture as if it were an unsorted Westminster Confession,<sup>58</sup> that we have to take out of the stories the important points to believe, and systematize them.

### Story. Fee and Stuart’s Perspective [Scripture’s Narrative]

The genre of literature that dominates the landscape of Scripture is narrative. There are some captivating as well as some shocking narratives. In many cases, we have been taught about the human characters within these narratives and how to discover ourselves in those characters. Who hasn’t tried, like Abraham, to help God bring a promise to its conclusion well before its time and in another way than it would naturally occur?

These stories, whose plots and characters are so intriguing, allow us in a powerful way to see God at work with his people. The Old Testament makes up seventy-five percent of Scripture and forty percent of its material is narrative.<sup>59</sup> There are many kinds of narratives in the Old Testament. As readers, we must understand the characteristic of Old and New Testament narratives as a first step toward becoming a competent reader of the Story which Scripture presents.

### A Two-Story House

Fee and Stuart present a metaphor of a three-story house. I have modified it to a two-story metaphor with a foundation/substratum (does that make me a foundationalist?). What Fee and Stuart call the first floor; I call the house foundation or substratum.

Think of Old Testament narratives as a two-story (no pun intended) building. The house has a foundation that is the big picture of God’s acts in his world—creation, the fall and its effects, sin and its power, redemption, and the coming of the Kingdom in Jesus. This foundation is the overall Story of God’s salvation history of humankind. The *first* floor centers on Israel—the Old Testament people of God. Its Story begins in Genesis 11.27 with the call of Abraham. It continues with the promise to Abraham to give him a land and a people and the rise of a nation beginning with the Exodus; the giving of the Covenant and the working out of that Covenant in the life of Israel; the rise of the United Kingdom and the Divided Kingdom and their restoration after the exile. The *second* floor contains several hundred individual narratives. Each narrative on

### QUESTION

How does the illustration of a “two-story house” help or hinder your thinking about reading the text of Scripture? Explain either way.

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this floor goes to make up the whole of the narrative of the *first floor*, Israel's history, and, finally, the foundation narrative, HIStory.<sup>60</sup>

We spend most of our time reading the stories on the *second floor*. To really grasp their intentional meaning, we must give due attention to the *first floor* story and the *substratum* of the house.

### **What Narratives Are Not**

In order to understand what narratives are and how to read them, it is helpful to observe what narratives are not. Fee and Stuart present a summary.<sup>61</sup> *First*, they are *not* stories about people who lived in an ancient age. They are stories about what God did to and through these people. *Second*, they are *not* stories filled with allegory or hidden meaning. *Third*, they are *not* always direct in their teaching. *Fourth*, they do *not* always have a specific moral of their own.

Next, they present some targets to shoot at when reading narratives.<sup>62</sup> *First*, they do *not* directly teach a doctrine. They illustrate doctrine that is taught elsewhere in Scripture. *Second*, they record what happened, *not* what should or could have happened; therefore, not every narrative has a moral. *Third*, the actions of the characters in the narratives are *not* necessarily the correct actions to imitate. Most characters are *not* hero models to follow. *Fourth*, the story does *not* usually tell us if the actions were good or bad. We are left to make up our minds based on what God has taught in the teaching parts of Scripture. *Fifth*, these stories are incomplete and selective. Not every detail or even all needed details are given. What does appear in the story is what the inspired author thought important for the reader to know.

The narrative is not written to answer theological questions. *First*, narratives may teach by stating something clearly, which should be the action of the reader, or by implying something without actually saying it. *Second*, God is the hero of all of the biblical narratives. In the final analysis, they demonstrate how he has acted in relationship to his people. By that we can know how he will act on our behalf.

Narratives according to Fee and Stuart are not written for the reader to become a monkey-see-monkey-do person. Remember, no biblical narrative was written especially for a person living today. The narrative concerning Joseph is about Joseph and demonstrates how God worked through him. We can learn a great deal from narratives, but we should never assume that God expects us to do exactly the same things that the Bible characters did. Otherwise, we would have to live part of our lives as sinners following characters that sin and become righteous when they show signs of righteousness. Our task is to learn from these narratives how God has acted concerning his children, not to do everything that was done in each one of them.

Narratives demonstrate and illustrate God's acts among men.<sup>63</sup> Why do we find things in narratives that are not there? Here are some possible reasons: *First*, we wrongly expect that everything in Scripture applies directly to each part of our lives. *Second*, we are desperate for information from God that will help us through some problem or situation. *Third*, we are impatient and want answers now from a specific verse in a specific chapter in a specific book in Scripture.

Fee and Stuart suggest that being selective by combining verses

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contextually that are not connected naturally and allegorizing them is not helpful.<sup>64</sup> The authors suggest: *First*, do not practice *selectivity*: Do not pick and choose specific words and phrases to concentrate on while ignoring the overall context of the passage. *Second*, Do not combine verses contextually not connected: Do not combine a verse from here and a verse from there and a part of a verse from yet a third place and place them together as God's word for a situation.

The problem of "selectivity" is addressed by Richard Hays under the concept of intertextuality, which is the "imbedding of fragments of an earlier text within a later one. . . ." <sup>65</sup> Kent Yinger sees "intertextual play" found in "all strata of the OT" which helps us have a "better understanding" of concepts like "grace and works" in the New Testament.<sup>66</sup> What Paul and others may be doing when they quote a text from the Old Testament (remember, the Old Testament was not yet canonized and certainly not versified at this time in history) is simply drawing attention to the whole story from which the text is being quoted. A present analogy would be the use of "keywords" in a search engine such as Google to find the larger context in which those words are recorded. It just might be that we have taken our propensity to proof text and projected it back on Paul and other writers of the New Testament.

### **Story. Brueggemann's Perspective [An Old Testament View]**

Brueggemann, in his book *The Creative Word*, focuses on the Torah as he declares the following five beliefs about story.

#### ***Story is concrete***

Biblical stories are about particular persons in particular times and places.<sup>67</sup>

#### ***Story is open-ended in its telling***

Brueggemann believes that the community of Israel was not interested in a static meaning or flat memories for Israel's new generation. Rather, she was concerned about creating a context, evoking a perception, forming a frame of reference that went beyond and did not depend on any particular version or nuance of any particular narrative. The storyteller requires fidelity, however, by knowing the boundaries of form and plot and characters.<sup>68</sup> Brueggemann appears to be saying that the boundaries are literary and he remains unclear about any historical boundaries.

#### ***Story in Israel was intended for the practice of imagination***

Brueggemann believes that the listener has as much freedom as the speaker in deciding what is happening in a story.<sup>69</sup> He says:

...there is no straight-line communication of data from speaker to listener. There is an open field of speech between the parties that admits to many alternative postures. This means that the listener has nearly as much freedom as the speaker in deciding what is happening. The listener is expected to work as resiliently as the teller. The communication between the two parties is a bonding around images, metaphors, and symbols that are never flattened to coercive instruction. Israel has enormous confidence in its narrative speech, sure that the images and metaphors will work their own way, will reach the listener at the point of his or her experience, and will function with a claiming authority. Such communication is shared practice of the secret which

evokes imagination. It includes the listener in the secret, thus forcing the awareness of an insider. And it serves to draw a line on the other side of the listener, distancing the listener from all the outsiders who do not know the secret. That is, once the secret is known, it cannot be not known. The telling of the secret evokes imaginative work in the listener. Thus the practice of imagination moves, on the one hand, with liberation. The listener has freedom to hear and decide, and is expected to decide. On the other hand, however, the story moves with authority to claim people for the inside. The authority that moves through it is not only the authority of the teller, but also the authority of the story. Israel's imagination is liberated and liberating. That does not mean unlimited and undisciplined, as though anything goes. The imagination of Israel is circumscribed by the scope of the stories about which there is consensus. Israel has a covenant with its tongue that the evoking of imagination does not move outside this consensus. We shall see that in the other parts of Israel's canon, there is a breaking beyond this consensus. For the Torah, however, it is enough to accept the consensus and to move around in it fully. It is the consensus on which stories are based that defines the arena for free imagination.

If Brueggemann is saying, and it is unclear to me, that there is no historical setting behind the story, then I would disagree. I am not yet convinced that history and grammar are to be given up in our quest to hear the meaning of a story. Surely, the storytellers told their stories within a context with a purpose in mind, and the collectors of these stories, via inscripturating, then place them in a certain order for a purpose. The author(s) of the Pentateuch did not start with the story of the Exodus, as important as it was, but placed it in its context for some purpose. I often wonder if those who espouse a "reading from in front" of the text would allow those reading their text to make of it what they will. I think not!

### ***Stories in Israel are characteristically experiential***

By experiential, Brueggemann does not mean personalized or privatized in the immediate time frame. Rather, he speaks of stories that were the public experience of Israel, a notion that is not easy in a culture beset by narcissistic individualism and subjectivity.

For Israel the personal immediate experience was not adequate for life. Some community shapes perception and governs personal experience. To speak of personal experience that is private is to be deceived. "As there is no 'presuppositionless exegesis' of the text, so there is no 'presuppositionless experience' of life." For Israel these stories were "a counter experience, a subversive alternative to an imperial consensus. Every time Israel told one of its stories, it meant an assault on and refutation of other stories." This point is well lost in the Western Church. "We have become gently benign, as though our stories were simply casual alternatives to some others that are also worthy of consideration. ...For Israel their stories meant to dismantle alternative worlds as well as to construct new ones for the listening community."<sup>70</sup>

### ***Story in Israel is the bottom line***

Israel had confidence in its stories, in and of themselves. Israel understood them not as instruments of something else, but as castings of reality. Israel's epistemological message was that they trusted the stories.

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### **QUESTION**

What resonates with you about Brueggemann's thoughts concerning stories in the Old Testament?

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Here stories were posited “to build a counter community, one that was counter to the oppression of Egypt, counter to the seduction of Canaan, counter to every cultural alternative and ever-imperial pretense.” Brueggemann asks: “Can we risk these stories?” His answer: “The answer is known only when we decide if we want to subvert the imperial consciousness and offer a genuine alternative to the dominant forms of power, value, and knowledge.”<sup>71</sup>

It is difficult to get a handle on Brueggemann’s belief about the historical background from the above references about story. However, in a more recent book, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, written with three others, the quartet is frank about their belief about a historical backdrop in reading the text, in their case, the Old Testament. They state:

There is increasing recognition that interpretation now takes place in a postmodern context, one in which the previously settled assumptions of the modern world have become unsettled and must, therefore, be reassessed. One of those assumptions, closely allied with the claims of historical criticism, was that history was the primary category for assessing the truth claims of the biblical text and the reality assumed to “stand behind” the text. In our view, the search for a historical reality behind the text sometimes did violence to the imaginative and rhetorical integrity of the text itself.<sup>72</sup>

Brueggemann points out in his book, *The Bible Makes Sense*, that the historical emphasis has waned.<sup>73</sup>

At this point, I am still persuaded that history and grammar cannot be totally laid aside in favor of one’s own imagination. What do we mean by Historical-Grammatical? It is the study of history and grammar surrounding the biblical account/Story. Each biblical document must be studied in its own context that includes language, types of literature, historical background, geographical conditions, and the life setting of the people, in order to discover that meaning.

It is my opinion that there is an interaction between the Old Testament and its ancientness, the New Testament and its first centuriness, and the church and me in all its twenty-first centuriness, when I hear its stories. How do I understand the Story? By using all the tools of historical exegesis to enable me to hear the words of the Old and New Testaments’ writers and writings as their first readers and hearers might have read and heard them, catching the full meaning intended by the writers, but always with an ear open for the unexpected word of God through the writers of the Old and New Testaments, challenging my own twenty-first centuriness and all its presuppositions and perceptions. William Lane captures this idea well in the introduction to his commentary on Mark.<sup>74</sup>

The fifteen contributors to *The Art of Reading Scripture* set a core of nine affirmations when interpreting Scripture. The fourth of the affirmations is as follows:

Texts of Scripture do not have a single meaning limited to the intent of the original author. In accord with Jewish and Christian traditions, we affirm that Scripture has multiple complex senses given by God, the author of the whole drama.<sup>75</sup>

While the authors do not reject historical investigation of biblical texts,

### QUESTIONS

Do you think that the authors of Scripture intended to say something to the audience to which he or she was writing? Why or why not?

they suggest that it should be used in “stimulating the church to undertake new imaginative readings of the texts.”<sup>76</sup> This is a move away from authorial intent and debatable. Fee and Stuart hold that, “a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his or her readers.”<sup>77</sup> If words had an “original intent”<sup>78</sup> then how do the meanings of those words change their meanings to a different audience? Would not that cause God to be saying one thing at one time and possibly something completely different at another time? If one loses the sense of the author’s intent, then it seems that a text can mean, and usually does, anything the reader wishes to say it means.

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**Story. Wright’s Perspective [Gospels as Story]**

Tom Wright suggests that the writers of the Gospels collected useful and interesting material about Jesus and strung the material together in “what looks for all the world like a continuous narrative, a story.”<sup>79</sup>

In the Gospels, according to Wright, it was no surprise that Jesus told and retold the Story of Israel as a part of his work.<sup>80</sup> He advances an argument in five stages: *First*, the announcement of the Kingdom by Jesus is best understood as evoking the Story of Israel and her identity. *Second*, the Story summoned Israel to follow Jesus in a new way of being the true people of God. *Third*, the Story included a climactic ending. There would be judgment and vindication. *Fourth*, the Story generated a new structure for Israel which put Jesus in conflict with others who had alternative agendas. *Fifth*, the retelling of the Story included a battle behind the rival agenda conflicts in which a real enemy was being faced.<sup>81</sup> Wright seems to see the Gospels as the collection of stories about Jesus within a Story of Jesus.

**QUESTION**  
How does Wright’s five-part summary help or hinder your understanding of story?

Wright works out his theology within the framework of critical realism.<sup>82</sup> Critical realism “is a way of describing the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence ‘realism’), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence ‘critical’).”

In the first of his proposed six-volume project on the subject “Christian Origins and the Question of God,” which is *The New Testament and the People of God*, Wright sees Story as an important ingredient in understanding the larger Story presented in the New Testament. He says:

The New Testament, I suggest, must be read so as to be understood, read within appropriate context, within an acoustic which will allow its full overtones to be heard. It must be read with as little distortion as possible, and with as much sensitivity as possible to its different levels of meaning. It must be read so that the stories, and the Story which it tells, can be heard as stories, not as rambling ways of declaring unstoried ‘ideas’. It must be read without the assumption that we already know what it is going to say, and without the arrogance that assumes that ‘we’—whichever group that might be—already have ancestral rights over this or that passage, book, or writer. And for full appropriateness, it must be read in such a way as to set in motion the drama which it suggests.<sup>83</sup>

He tackles the question of what might be called a pure postmodern reading of Scripture’s Story in which there seems to be a lack of need to see the historical by stating:

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While history and theology work at their stormy relationship, there is always a danger, particularly in postmodernism, that literary study will get on by itself, without impinging on, or being affected by either of the others [history or theology]. The more we move toward a climate in which ‘my reading of the text’ is what matters, the less pressure there will be to anchor the text in its own historical context or to integrate a wider ‘message’ of the text with other messages, producing an overall theological statement or synthesis. (Bracketed material by present writer.)<sup>84</sup>

### RESPONSE

Ponder the paragraph to the right and then respond.

We are, in fact, drawn irresistibly into the world of a *story*—and a story, moreover, which, like the modern ‘short story,’ invites us to share its world as much by what it does not say as by what it does. The questions posed are: How open is the story to new ways of being read? Or, what would count as a correct reading, and how important is it to try to achieve a correct reading? One might be left with the reality that there should be a distinction between things that can and must be right and things that must be left open to conversation.<sup>85</sup>

Wright suggests, “What we need, then, is a theory of reading which, at the reader/text stage, will do justice both to the fact that the reader is a particular human being and to the fact that the text is an entity on its own, not a plastic substance to be moulded to the reader’s whim.”<sup>86</sup> To Wright’s last statement, I would whole-heartedly agree.

Gordon Fee says that if one reads the stories of Scripture from “in front” of them taking no care of what lies “behind them,” then one will read the stories from “over” the text having control of what the text says to them. If, however, one reads the stories of Scripture from “in front” of the text while giving due attention to what lies “behind” the text, then one will learn to live “under” what the text says.<sup>87</sup>

Wright argues in *Scripture and the Authority of God* “neither for a variety of modernism, nor for a return to pre-modernism, nor yet for a capitulation to postmodernism,” but for what he hopes is “a way through this entire mess and muddle and forward into a way of living in and for God’s world...,”<sup>88</sup> which sees story as the vehicle.<sup>89</sup> Wright goes on to argue for a “totally contextual” reading of the Story and a fully “incarnational” reading of the Story.<sup>90</sup>

### Story. Hays’ Perspective [Letters as Story]

### QUESTION

What do you think about Hays’ “story-shaped” character in Paul’s writings?

We have certainly been taught that the writings of Paul and other New Testament letters are to be understood didactically, as intended to convey instruction to the reader. But as Richard Hays points out in his book, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 2:1-4:11*, there is a narrative/story substructure to Paul’s writings. Hays undergirded his belief in the Story-structure of Paul by showing that while we have not thought of Paul as a storyteller, his use of narrative is very important.<sup>91</sup>

Hays, who was educated at Yale in the ‘70s, was influenced by Hans Frei who contended in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* that biblical criticism had gone astray by failing to grasp the narrative sense of Scripture. This prepared the way for Hays’ dissertation and then his book entitled *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, which is a discussion of the phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” as being a *subjective* or an *objective* genitive in the original Greek language, but argues that this is set within a narrative

framework. It would be fair to say that Hays believes that there is a “story-shaped” character to Paul’s writings.<sup>92</sup>

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**Story. Sweet’s Perspective [The Importance of Story]**

Len Sweet<sup>93</sup> was the mentor of the *Leadership in Emerging Culture Doctor of Ministry* program at George Fox University when I did my second Doctor of Ministry. As the seismic writer of *SoulTsunami*, he says that “every kid in the world knows these four words:... ‘Tell Me A Story.’”<sup>94</sup> He believes that story came to be a negative word in the modern world. To be a “storyteller” was one of the worst things you could call a person, but in the postmodern world storytellers hold the future in their hands, especially those who use all the “basic media forms: print, software, audio, and video.”<sup>95</sup> He suggests that the life of Jesus was neither essay, doctrine, nor sermon, but was “a story.”<sup>96</sup> For Sweet the “Christian message is not a timeless set of moral principles or a code of metaphysics. The Christian message is a story....”<sup>97</sup> His favorite definition for preachers is “story doctors”<sup>98</sup>

**QUESTIONS**  
How does the definition for preachers as “story doctors” strike you?  
What do you think about Sweet’s “rut” and “river” metaphors?  
Where are your color crayons?

In *AQUAchurch*, he speaks about two kinds of stories: “rut stories” and “river stories.” A “rut story” limits us and locks us in place by keeping us stuck in “old tracks and trajectories.” On the other hand, a “river story” moves us forward. These stories “add life-giving software (accumulated memories and learning) to the brain’s hardware (billions of neurons).” He believes that the greatest “river story” is the Story of Jesus.<sup>99</sup> He further suggests that we do not discover “the Way, the Truth and the Life by memorizing verses and mastering facts.”<sup>100</sup>

In *Summoned to Lead*, Sweet says, “‘Telling stories’ used to be a euphemism for lying. No more. Story is crucial in communication.” He quotes John Raymond as distinguishing between “tradition-stories, map-stories, and vision-stories.”<sup>101</sup> Sweet suggests that we need all of these kinds of stories.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, in *Out of the Question... Into the Mystery*, Sweet suggests (as we have suggested above) that we should:

1. “Memorize and live out its stories.”
2. “Fall in love with a new passage every day.”
3. “Take it to bed with you.”
4. “Talk to it and hear it talk to you as you wrestle with the text.”
5. “Become a fifth gospel, a third testament.”<sup>103</sup>

He suggests that the Story of God is not yet finished that God has framed, “but that we are invited to have a hand in coloring.”<sup>104</sup>

**Story. Peterson’s Perspective [A Voice of Reason]**

For Eugene Peterson, story is the heart of language. He suggests that we need to present the story with some definition added and let the Holy Spirit help the hearer figure the story out without becoming impatient. By “some definition” I understood Peterson to mean “historical setting.” Peterson senses that the biggest fault of those who teach is that they don’t trust their students to really have the capacity to learn. He believes that one needs to understand the context from which the story is being taught and that the reader of the story needs to be aware of the “big picture” of the Story.

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For Peterson, “story is an act of verbal hospitality.” He insists, “We live in a world improvised of story.” Words provide a form of currency used to provide information. To be *schooled* is primarily to accumulate information. Motivational speech runs a close second to the accumulation of information. While both are important, they are impersonal. In them there is no discovery, no relationship, and no personal attentiveness. For it to be personal, we need story and storytellers.<sup>105</sup>

### **Story. Corporate America’s Perspective [Squirrel Inc.]**

*Squirrel Inc.* is sub-titled “A Fable of Leadership through Storytelling.” Its author is a well-known consultant for corporate America. His thesis is that “you can use the magic of narrative to lead....” He believes that you can transform change in an organization with six different kinds of stories that impact work and personal life.<sup>106</sup> It is intriguing to see that those outside the church are picking up on what the church has had from its beginning, but somehow got sidetracked over the past years as outside sources influenced the church instead of the church influencing the outside sources. While storytelling in cultures has never been dead, it has somewhat been diminished in the church in favor of the fragmentation of the Enlightenment.

### **Story. Recent Attempts to Hold the Story Together**

#### ***Influenced by a Desire for Improved Reading.***

Fee and Stuart, authors of the book *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, have added the volume *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* to help the reader of Scripture find his or her way through the morass of books. The authors provide an overview of the biblical Story in an attempt to set a grid through which to read their work.<sup>107</sup> They provide an introduction to each of the major sections of Scripture with information that puts this section into the overall Story, as well as a short section at the end of each book which attempts to place the book’s content into the overall Story. The downside: each book is still read independently of the other. There seems to be no attempt to put the books into the storyline. As an example, at the end of the section on Hosea one reads: “The book of Hosea, which burns with the fire of God’s love for his people, reminds us that the God of the biblical story judges unfaithfulness, even as he lays out hope beyond judgment.”<sup>108</sup>

Also, influenced by the desire for improved reading is *The Books of The Bible*. This new edition of *Today’s New International Version* is a groundbreaking new presentation of the Scriptures designed to accurately reflect the biblical authors’ intentions. This edition comes without any additives, i.e., the publishers have removed chapter and verse numberings from the text entirely. Blank line spacing is used as the text separator into units designed by the author with the goal to encourage meaningful units to be read in their entirety.

#### ***Influenced by Tom Wright’s Five-Act-Play Model***

Only recently, influenced by Tom Wright’s Shakespeare’s five-act-play model, has anyone produced a theological Story including both the Old and New Testaments.

*The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* believes that every “part of the Bible — each event, book, character, command, prophecy, and poem — must be understood in the context of

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the *one* storyline.<sup>109</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen follow Wright's five-act-play model stretching it into six acts and an interlude (Second Temple Judaism) borrowing from Wright the idea of Scripture as a drama.<sup>110</sup> This is an excellent book for those in college and was written with "first-year university students in mind."<sup>111</sup> The beauty of this book is that even the beginner will be able to grasp the Story of Scripture as an unfolding coherent story. In addition, they have added value through a website with downloadable information.<sup>112</sup>

### ***Influenced by a Biblical Theology Motif***

*The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* from InterVarsity Press states its purpose as "integrating the biblical Story into a coherent whole."<sup>113</sup> There are overtones of N. T. Wright in this book, but it is not written within the framework of the five-act-play model. Rather, the authors (there are six of them) look at each major section of the Old and New Testaments with the prayer that the book "will become an important tool of study for students, professors and ministers as well as for informed laity as they come to understand their own faith in light of the fulfillment of Israel's story in Jesus the Messiah."<sup>114</sup>

This volume appears to be a much more technical work than *The Drama of Scripture* mentioned above. As an example, in the Introduction the authors define Biblical Theology (the sub-title of their book) and then propose a question: "Can We Have a Biblical Theology?" In the answer section, words like *Heilsgeschichte* and *Religionsgeschichte* are used. While a translation of these words is provided, this sort of writing has a voice that is elevated beyond what the average attender of church might understand or even be able to pronounce for that matter.<sup>115</sup> The authors conclude that story may "qualify to be characterized as biblical theology in its own right" and suggest that Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God* may suggest such even though Wright may not, in fact, condone such a conclusion.<sup>116</sup> While *Drama* appears to retell the story, this book appears to work out a biblical theological view working to make a cohesive work of the Old and New Testament with all its unity and disunity problems.

The three books mentioned above are overt solutions to provide an overarching story over against the systematic fragmentation of the Enlightenment's foundationalism. Fee and Stuart's *Book by Book* makes a gallant attempt but falls short of putting the book by book reading into a storyline. *The Story of Israel* is well suited for an advanced study of story with a biblical theology motif. *Drama* is the closest to the book you are now reading.

The basic differences between this book and the books mentioned above are: *First*, I am providing a basic background of how we find ourselves in our present position of reading Scripture in a fragmented way. *Second*, In the Acts to come, I will stress the gluing theme of Covenant in the Old Testament and Kingdom of God in the New Testament, which appear to be two ways of saying the same thing: the rule of God has invaded this Present Evil Age. *Third*, I will offer a chronology of both the Old and New Testaments as a storyline for reading the Story. *Finally*, I will provide some thoughts in Act 5 Scene 7 about how we as actors in this great drama can "improvise" in our part of the play.

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Know how Story is an  
antidote for fragmentation.

### Story. Other Voices and Perspectives

There are other voices and perspectives that should be heard from, but the limitations here do not permit an interaction with them. Some of these are Hans Frei,<sup>117</sup> Paul Ricoeur,<sup>118</sup> and Stanley Hauerwas.<sup>119</sup> Hauerwas has a rather novel thought in his book, *Unleashing the Scripture*, where he states, “The Bible is not and should not be accessible to merely anyone, but rather it should only be made available to those who have undergone the hard discipline of existing as part of God’s people.”<sup>120</sup> I’m not exactly sure what “hard discipline of existing as part of God’s people” really means. I rather think that followers of Jesus should give due attention to understanding God’s EPIC Adventure and this book is given to helping that become real in the lives of those followers.

### So What?

The antidote to foundationalism’s fragmented reading of Scripture is Story. We can recognize this in the following ways. While we are creatures who think in stories, we have been trained to think in propositions. Stories are powerful and can place us within its reality as demonstrated by the story of the Kiowa professor. Different characteristics of story give us a language that resonates with rich metaphor and image and, if accepted, would lead us away from a low view of Scripture that is rearranged as if it were an unsorted Westminster Confession. Narrative is the genre of literature that dominates the landscape of Scripture. Narratives in the Old Testament are concrete and cast reality. The Old Testament Story is the ingredient that leads to an understanding of the continuing Story presented in the New Testament. The story of Jesus is not an essay but a story. The letters of the New Testament have a substructure which is story. Corporate America is turning to story as a way of teaching leadership. There have been three recent attempts to demonstrate that God has a Story that is presented in the Bible beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation. Scriptures are now being printed without chapters and verses to help readers grasp the Story without all the additives. This present book is an attempt to give its readers a guide to help comprehend God’s EPIC Adventure and to learn to live within its story and living therein as God’s new humanity for the sake of the world.

### The Kingdom Of God

**Learning Objective**  
Visualize the Kingdom of  
God as a prism through  
which you can understand  
the Story of God.

Scripture tells a single overarching narrative from Genesis to Revelation.<sup>121</sup> The Story is held together in Old and New Testaments by the concept of the Kingdom of God, i.e., the Lord-Servant Treaty concept in the Old Testament in which God is Lord/Ruler and Kingdom of God in the New Testament where God is Lord/Ruler.

### The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament

The Old Testament has fallen out of fancy with the modern reader of Scripture, except when one wants to proof text some special section of it. From the beginning of the Old Testament, God is pictured as king.<sup>122</sup> Picture language, i.e., metaphor and other literary devices, was the currency of the Hebrew storytellers and writers to help their listeners and readers grasp the Story.

From where did this notion about the Kingdom of God come? The

## Prologue

Kingdom of God concept is rooted in the Old Testament and is certainly broader than the specific term.<sup>123</sup> The term, however, does not even appear in the Old Testament.<sup>124</sup> Ladd writes, “While the idiom ‘the Kingdom of God’ does not occur in the Old Testament, the idea is found through the prophets.” He concludes after viewing several Old Testament references that “this leads to the conclusion that while God is the King, he must also become king, i.e., he must manifest his kingship in the world of men and nations.”<sup>125</sup> To comprehend this concept, we might need to look in the Old Testament for the idea even though the term Kingdom does not appear.

The article “King, Kingship” in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* says that king and kingship are common words in Scripture and goes on to give a brief overview of the Kingdom concept in the Old Testament.<sup>126</sup>

Arthur Glasser in his book *Announcing the Kingdom* suggests that the Old Testament sees God as King over the Kingdom he created.<sup>127</sup>

The Old Testament presents the Kingdom in the context of Jewish messianic expectation and eschatology. The Old Testament people believed that God would deliver them, which was their hope for the future. This deliverance is what Wright calls the “return from exile,” a central theme along with restoration that Israel believed herself to be acting out.<sup>128</sup> Israel reached its apex during the rule of Kings David and Solomon. From that point forward, Israel began to descend as a nation. At the death of Solomon, the Kingdom was divided into two Kingdoms with their own kings and governments. This division set in place a longing among the Jews for God to restore to them their past blessings. There were two ways which the Kingdom began to be understood according to James Kallas: the Davidic and the Danielic/Apocalyptic Concept.

**The Davidic Concept of the Kingdom.** Israel’s hope was that God would send a king like David. Israel’s focus was militaristic and geographic. Israel wanted a nationalistic kingdom to return.

**The ❖ Apocalyptic ❖ Concept of the Kingdom.** In the Second Temple Period (ca. 400 B.C. - A.D. 135)<sup>129</sup> hope did not diminish; it only assumed a new language with a modified meaning. The prophets hoped for a nationalistic kingdom, while the hope of the Apocalyptic writers was for a heavenly kingdom which would end this Present Evil Age.<sup>130</sup>

**Learning Objective**  
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**QUESTION**  
Can you see the Kingdom of God in the OT?

*Apocalyptic.* Writings that contained prophetic or symbolic visions, especially of the imminent destruction of the world and the salvation of the righteous.

### ***The Lord-Servant Treaty (Exodus 19.2-Numbers 10.10)***

This section of the Pentateuch is self-contained and describes some of the teachings that Israel needed on their way to the Promised Land. It covers the period from Israel’s arrival at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19.2) to their departure (Num. 10.10). The time period is about one year in the life of Israel.

### ***The Covenant***

The Mosaic Covenant was given to a redeemed people essentially in the form of an elaborate oath<sup>131</sup> often called a Lord-Servant (Suzerain-Vassal) Treaty.<sup>132</sup> The Covenant (Law) was not (as has been thought and taught) a way in which Israel could become God’s children. Israel was to have no other God. They were to worship no idols. The Covenant was a way in which these redeemed people could relate to God and to each other and demonstrate to the world what being the people of God was really like. He was their Lord (ruler), they were his people through whom his light was to

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Visualize the Kingdom of God as a prism through which you can understand the Story of God.

**Kingdom of God:** The Kingdom of God is the *Rule of God* on earth. Jesus brought the future rule of God into the present. We now live in the presence of the future.

be seen. The Lordship of God over his people is the same idea as the Kingdom (Lordship/Ruler) over his people in the New Testament.

Redemption/Exodus came first, then the Covenant (Law). The *law* was never intended to be a system of legal observances by which you could earn God's acceptance, if you obeyed them. The Commandments are the stipulations of the *Covenant relationship* which is rooted in *grace!* They are *basic statements* on the *quality of life* that must characterize those who belong to God. All of Scripture knows only one way of salvation... *the grace of God*. God reveals his redemptive purpose always based on grace, not on man's ability to obligate God to save him because he has kept the law.<sup>133</sup> Alas, they turned the windows of their lighthouse into mirrors.<sup>134</sup> We will return to this concept in Act 3: Israel.

### The Kingdom of God in the New Testament

Central to the ministry of Jesus was the concept of the ❖ **Kingdom of God.** ❖<sup>135</sup> The authors of the Synoptic Gospels fill their books teaching this concept. It seems like they had so much material about the Kingdom that they often summarized the teachings. The beginning of the Gospel of Mark is a great illustration. Mark 1.14-15 reads: "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" His brief summary told his readers what Jesus *did* and *said* during his ministry.

Tom Wright suggests that the phrase "repent and believe" should not be understood in some Pelagian way<sup>136</sup> but rather from its own historical context. Josephus uses the same phrase in describing an incident which took place in Galilee around A.D. 66. Josephus had traveled to Galilee to help with sorting out its factionalism. He met with a bandit named Jesus (there are 21 people by that name in the index of Josephus) who was plotting against the life of Josephus. After foiling the plot, Josephus told the bandit that he should "repent and believe" in Josephus. What was Josephus saying? He was telling the bandit that he should give up his way of living and trust Josephus for a better way of living.<sup>137</sup> It seems that the phrase used by Josephus could not mean anything less coming from the mouth of Jesus.

James Kallas suggests in his book *Jesus and the Power of Satan* that Jesus never explained the Kingdom because the people to whom he was speaking knew what it meant or thought they knew what it meant.<sup>138</sup>

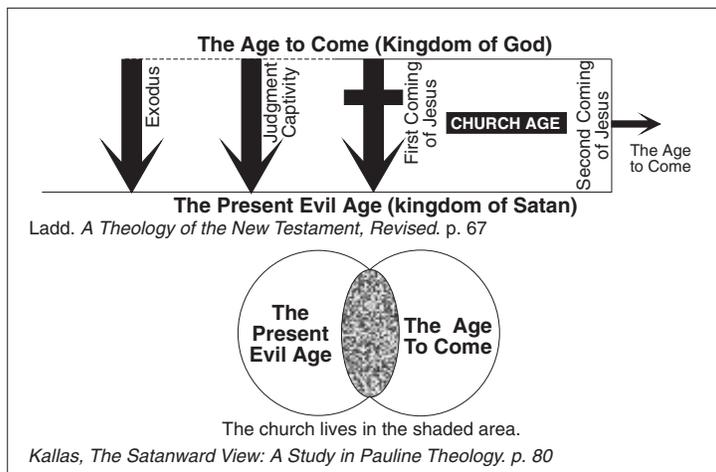
Matthew summarized the Kingdom as Mark did. He succinctly shows the ministry of Jesus in 4.23 and 9.35 as it centered on the Kingdom. Jesus also summarized the message of the Kingdom when he gave instructions to his twelve disciples (Matt. 10.1ff.). The gospel of the Kingdom is the only gospel that he instructed his disciples to preach. When Luke recorded the sending of the seventy disciples (Luke 10.1ff.), Jesus used similar language. The term Kingdom was frequently on the lips of Jesus. His *works* were designed to demonstrate how to enter the Kingdom (Matt. 5.20; 7.21). His *words* authenticated that the Kingdom was present in his ministry (Matt. 12.28). His *parables* informed us about the mysteries of the Kingdom (Matt. 13.11). His *prayers* modeled for his disciples the desire of his heart, which was that the Kingdom would come to earth (Matt. 6.10). His *death, resurrection, and ascension* made us the instruments of the Kingdom (Acts 1.8). His *second coming* promised the consummation of the Kingdom for his children (Matt. 25.31, 34).

One particular brand of popular theology in USAmerica called dispensationalism holds a distinctive concern that the Kingdom of Heaven as mentioned in Matthew means a future millennial kingdom. Rather, the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew and Kingdom of God language in the other Synoptic Gospels are simply equivalent phrases. The equivalence of the two expressions is indicated by their content, context, and interchangeability in the Gospels.<sup>139</sup>

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Visualize the Kingdom of God as a prism through which you can understand the Story of God.

John the Baptist proclaimed that there was one coming in which the Age of the Spirit would come. The words of Jesus in Mark clearly denote that the Kingdom had arrived<sup>140</sup> with Jesus. The *words* and *works* of Jesus form a unity in which the Kingdom of God is spoken about and demonstrated. In Jesus we have the presence of the future. Jesus has brought the rule of God from the future into the present.

We then live in *the presence of the future*, an expression often used by the late Dr. George Ladd to express Kingdom reality and the name of one of his books.<sup>141</sup> He often said that the church is *between the times*; she lives between the inauguration and the consummation of the Kingdom,<sup>142</sup> which Wright agrees with.<sup>143</sup>



To understand the Kingdom of God is to understand the theme from which the ministry of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament flow. We live in the *presence of the future*, the “now but-not-yet.” When we view any passage of Scripture in the New Testament, we must put on our Kingdom of God glasses and ask questions of that passage with that set of presuppositions.

Narrative is powerful and life-changing and the retelling of the narrative by the earliest preachers was good news that carried power to change people effectively bringing them under the rule (kingdom) of God.

The Covenant theme and the Kingdom theme are part of the gluiness that holds the Story together in the Old and New Testaments.

### So What?

The problem of fragmentized reading can be addressed by learning to read and comprehend the Story of Scripture using the gluiness of the Covenant and Kingdom. We have learned:

- ◆ Narrative comprises a large percentage of the Old Testament, the Gospels, and is the substructure of the Letters of Paul.
- ◆ Scripture tells an overarching story from Genesis to Revelation.
- ◆ The concept of the Kingdom is broader than the specific term, which is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but can be seen in the Covenant that was made between God and Israel.
- ◆ The Lordship of God over his people in the Mosaic Covenant of the Old Testament is the same idea as the Kingdom (Lordship/Ruler) over his people in the New Testament.

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Visualize the Kingdom of God as a prism through which you can understand the Story of God.

- ◆ The metanarrative of Scripture is held together by the concept of the Kingdom of God (the Lord-Servant Treaty concept in the Old Testament in which God is Lord/Ruler and Kingdom of God in the New Testament where God is Lord/Ruler).
- ◆ Central to the ministry of Jesus was the concept of the Kingdom of God.
- ◆ The concept of the Kingdom is the undercurrent of all the writings of the New Testament as demonstrated in the example of Matthew, Paul, John, and the other writers of New Testament books.



# EndNotes

Reference Information

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The stories which characterize the worldview itself are thus located, on the map of human knowing, at a more fundamental level than explicitly formulated beliefs, including theological beliefs.

(N. T. Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*)

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1. Story capitalized is a reference to the metanarrative of Scripture while story not capitalized means other stories.
2. George E. Ladd, *New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 12. The biblical mode of revelation is the revealing acts of God in history, accompanied by the interpreting prophetic word that explains the divine source and character of the divine acts. Acts and words; God acts and God speaks; and the words explain the deeds. The deeds cannot be understood unless they are accompanied by the divine word. The word would be powerless unless accompanied by the mighty acts of God. Scripture is *words-works* revelation.
3. *Ibid.*, 27. God both acts and interprets the meaning of his acts. Scripture is the *works* and *words* of God. This is a *key* concept for understanding Scripture. For us to understand the faithfulness of God, we need to become familiar with how God has acted in faithfulness to his children and what he says those acts mean. *Christ's death* is the act of God. *Christ died for us while we were sinners* is his word of explanation for us.
4. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), 89.
5. *Ibid.*, 127.
6. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1989), xxiv-xxv.
7. Edward W. Goodrick, *Is My Bible the Inspired Word of God?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), 86-88.
8. Leonard I. Sweet, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 77.
9. N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?," *Vox Evangelica*, no. 21 (1991): 7-32.
10. Tending to break up into parts or break away from a main body.
11. *The Promise: Contemporary English Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995), vi.
12. Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), ix.
13. Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 39-41.
14. "The Bible," *The Barna Group* [document online]; available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=7>; Internet; accessed 6 June 2005. "Three-quarters of Americans (75%) believe that the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves. (2000)"
15. "A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand," *The National Center for Public Policy Research* [document online]; available from <http://www.nationalcenter.org/HouseDivided.html>; Internet; accessed 7 June 2005. "Lincoln delivered this famous speech, noted for the phrase 'a house divided against itself cannot stand,' when accepting the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate from Illinois in June of 1858. In July of that year he challenged his Democrat opponent, Stephen Douglas to a series of debates over admitting Kansas into the union as a slave state, and, to a large extent, over the future of slavery and of the union itself. Lincoln, of course, represented the anti-slavery position. The skill with which Lincoln debated Douglas helped catapult him to the Republican Party's nomination for president in 1860, a race which he won."
16. Winn Griffin, *Old Testament Interpretation* (Woodinville, WA: Harmon Press, 1996-2005), 8-9.
17. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 173.
18. Stanley J. Grenz, and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post Modern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 29.
19. *Ibid.*, 28.
20. *Ibid.*, 29.
21. Walter Brueggemann, *Text Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 3.
22. Grenz and Frank, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 30.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 31.
25. "Empiricism," *Answers.com Fast Facts* [document online]; available from <http://www.answers.com/empiricism>; Internet; accessed 30 June 2005. "The view that experience, especially of the senses, is the only source of knowledge."
26. Grenz and Frank, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 32.
27. Brueggemann, *Text Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, 4.
28. Grenz and Frank, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 33.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 34.
31. *Ibid.*

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32. Ibid., 34-35.
33. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 21. This definition of systematic theology was taken from Professor John Frame under whom Grudem studied at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia.
34. Grenz and Frank, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 37.
35. Ibid., 53-54.
36. "Chapter," *crosswalk.com* [document online]; available from <http://www.biblestudytools.net/Dictionaries/EastonBibleDictionary/ebd.cgi?number=T773>; Internet; accessed 24 June 2005.
37. N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), 102.
38. Grenz, *Primer*, 172.
39. Ibid., 173.
40. One may look at the *Left Behind* series as an example of cobbling together fragments to produce a wrong-headed conclusion.
41. "General Information: The International Sunday School Lesson Plan," *Smyth & Helwys* [document online]; available online from <http://www.helwys.com/curriculum/usgeneral.html>; Internet; accessed 22 June 2005.
42. William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), 9.
43. Ibid.
44. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 1.
45. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 19.
46. S. E. Porter and C. A. Evans, "Canonical Formation of the New Testament," *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Electronic Edition, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
47. Richard L. Morgan, *Saving Our Stories* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 1.
48. William C. Placher, "Paul Ricoeur and Postliberal Theology: A Conflict of Interpretations?" *Modern Theology* 4, no. 1 (1987): 42.
49. Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 119-120.
50. The classic definition of story is: a narrative with a beginning, middle, and an ending that follows a main character through his or her struggle(s) to achieve a certain goal.
51. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 20.
52. N. T. Wright, *Bringing the Church to the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1992), 21.
53. Ibid., 152.
54. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith, Storytelling*, 29-80.
55. Ibid., 65-80. These paradoxes are: first, spirituality is rooted in earthiness; second, the absolute is known in the personal; third, freedom is discovered in obedience; fourth, triumph grows out of suffering; fifth, security is found in uncertainty; and sixth, prayer is offered through study.
56. Ibid., 79.
57. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?", 7-32.
58. Ibid., 11.
59. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 89.
60. Ibid., 91-92.
61. Ibid., 92-93.
62. Ibid., 106.
63. Gordon Fee, and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 90-91.
64. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth. Third Edition*, 102-106.
65. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the letters of Paul*, 14.
66. Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19.
67. Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 23, Brueggemann seems to be saying that the characters in the biblical stories are historical but you can read them without any "historical background."
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 24.
70. Ibid., 25-26.
71. Ibid., 26-27.

72. Bruce C. Birch, et. al, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 21-22.
73. Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), vii-viii.
74. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), xii. "Only gradually did I come to understand that my primary task as a commentator was to listen to the text, and to the discussion it has prompted over the course of the centuries, as a child who needed to be made wise. The responsibility to discern truth from error has been onerous at times. When a critical or theological decision has been demanded by the text before I was prepared to commit myself, I have adopted the practice of the Puritan commentators in laying the material before the Lord and asking for his guidance. This has made the preparation of the commentary a spiritual as well as an intellectual pilgrimage through the text of the Gospel. In learning to be sensitive to all that the evangelist was pleased to share with me, I have been immeasurably enriched by the discipline of responsible listening."
75. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 2.
76. *Ibid.*, 3.
77. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Third Edition, 74.
78. *Ibid.*, 23.
79. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 15.
80. *Ibid.*, 199.
81. *Ibid.*, 200.
82. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 35. In footnote 12 on page 35 Wright makes the following suggestion for clarity: "We should perhaps note that the adjective 'critical' in the phrase 'critical realism' has a different function to the same adjective in the phrase 'critical reason'. In the latter (as e.g. in Kant) it is active: 'reason that provides a critique'. In the former it is passive: 'realism subject to critique'".
83. *Ibid.*, 6.
84. *Ibid.*, 13.
85. *Ibid.*, 49.
86. *Ibid.*, 62.
87. Gordon Fee, *Tyndale Lecture Series* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Tyndale University College & Seminary), Tape 1: "The Reader As Interpreter."
88. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 6.
89. *Ibid.*, xiii.
90. *Ibid.*, 93-95. By "totally contextually" Wright says that "each word must be understood within its own verse, each verse within its own chapter, each chapter within its own book, and each book within its own historical, cultural and indeed canonical setting." By "incarnational" he says that one should pay "attention to the full humanity both of the text and of its readers."
91. Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), xxviii. "We have not thought of Paul as a storyteller, for the Jesus stories of the Gospels are absent from his letters. Yet his use of narrative is very important...., because Paul's central concern was to use the narrative to form a moral community.... Paul's most profound bequest to subsequent Christian discourse was his transformation of the reported crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ into a multipurpose metaphor with vast generative and transformative power.... In that gospel story Paul sees revolutionary import for the relationships of power that control human transactions.... Thus Paul's use of the metaphor of the cross resists its translation into simple slogans. Instead he introduces into the moral language of the new movement a way of seeking after resonance in the basic story for all kinds of relationships of disciples with the world and with one another, so that the event-become-metaphor could become the generative center of almost endless new narratives, yet remain a check and control over those narratives." (a quote from W.A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Mortality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 196-197).
92. *Ibid.*, xxiv-xxv.
93. *George Fox University* [document online]; available from <http://www.georgefox.edu/academics/seminary/degrees/dmin/index.html>; Internet; accessed 27 June 2005.
94. Leonard I. Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in the New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 423
95. *Ibid.*, 424.
96. *Ibid.*, 425.
97. *Ibid.*

## EndNotes

98. Ibid. "People come to worship with problem stories, with painful stories, with jostling narratives and 'narrative dysfunctions,' a condition and process 'by which we lose track of the story ourselves, the story that tells us who we are supposed to be and how we are supposed to act.' Preachers help heal people's narrative dysfunction and help them live out of new, whole stories. Bad stories hurt and impair; good stories heal and help."
99. Leonard I. Sweet, *AQUAchurch* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1999), 57. These images come from Donna Markova's *No Enemies Within* (Emeryville, CA: Publisher Groups West, 1994) as quoted in Robert Hargrove, *Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration* (New York: BusinessWeek Books, 1998), 65.
100. Ibid., 59.
101. Leonard I. Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 133.
102. Ibid., 134. I would suggest that all these kinds of stories may define the overarching Story of Scripture.
103. Sweet, *Out of the Question*, 77.
104. Ibid., 78.
105. Eugene H. Peterson, *Stories of Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), 7-8.
106. Stephen Denning, *Squirrel Inc.* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), xiii-xv.
107. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 14-20.
108. Ibid., 216.
109. Craig G. Bartholomew, Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 12.
110. Ibid., 13.
111. Ibid., 11.
112. *Biblical Theology* [document online]; available from <http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/index.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 June 2005.
113. C. Marvin Pate, J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, E. Randolph Richards, W. Dennis Tucker Jr., and Preben Vang, *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 9.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid., 12-15.
116. Ibid., 17, 23.
117. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1974).
118. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Translation: Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, vol. 1-3 (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1984).
119. Hauerwas, *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*.
120. Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Free the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 9.
121. Wright, *People of God*, 140. Fee, *Book by Book*, 14-20.
122. L. Ryken, J. Wilhoit, "King, Kingship," *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998): 476.
123. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 18.
124. Ibid., L. Ryken, "King, Kingship," 476.
125. G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 58.
126. Ryken, "King, Kingship," 476. The Hebrew-Aramaic word for king (*melek*) is one of the most commonly used words in the OT appearing about 2,700 times and the Greek word for king (*basileus*) about 175 times in the New Testament. Both terms are applied to human rulers as well as to God as ruler. When the verbal and other noun forms of these and related words are added (i.e., to reign, kingdom, etc.), we find an important biblical motif woven throughout the entire fabric of the Bible's message.
127. Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 24. The absolute reign of God over the Kingdom he created and the human beings who care for one another and for the created world depict both the divine ideal and will, as well as the painful truth of the Old Testament. The demand for an earthly king and the behavior of the people under the rule of the earthbound kings set the stage for the new covenant when Jesus would walk among humans and would declare a new covenant in his blood.
128. Wright, *JVG*, 127.
129. Wright, *People of God*, 147.
130. James Kallas, *Jesus and the Power of Satan* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 119-21. Ladd, *Theology*, 58-59. Ladd also covers some of the same concepts about a Davidic and Apocalyptic Concept.

131. Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 28.
132. *Ibid.*, 29-45.
133. W. S. LaSor, et al., *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament. Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 72-75.
134. I heard Tom Wright say this in a presentation.
135. Ladd, *Theology*, 54.
136. Wright, *JVG*, 247.
137. *Ibid.*, 250.
138. Kallas, *JPS*, 119. Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), 3.
139. C. C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992): Electronic Version.
140. Dr. Kent Yinger, my DMin. mentor (George Fox Evangelical Seminary), pointed out to me that Mark's 'has drawn near [*engiken*]' is debated and ambiguous; Luke 11:20 ["has come" *ephthasen*] is unambiguous already.
141. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974).
142. *Ibid.*, 218.
143. N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 72-73.

## Setting the Stage

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1. Margueritte Harmon Bro, *The Book You Always Meant to Read: The Old Testament* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1974).
2. Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 23.
3. *Ibid.*, 23-30.
4. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 135.
5. "Empiricism," *Answers.com Fast Facts* [document online]; available from <http://www.answers.com/empiricism>; Internet; accessed 30 June 2005. "The view that experience, especially of the senses, is the only source of knowledge."
6. In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years (Dan. 9.1-2).
7. Onias welcomed the envoy with honor, and received the letter, which contained a clear declaration of alliance and friendship. Therefore, though we have no need of these things, since we have as encouragement the holy books which are in our hands, we have undertaken to send to renew our brotherhood and friendship with you, so that we may not become estranged from you, for considerable time has passed since you sent your letter to us (1 Maccabees 12.8-10 RSV).
8. Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 1069.
9. *Ibid.*, 136.
10. "All Time Bestselling Books and Authors," *The Internet Public Library* [document online]; available from <http://www.ipl.org/div/farq/bestsellerFARQ.html>; Internet; accessed 3 September 2005. "No one really knows how many copies of the Bible have been printed, sold, or distributed. The Bible Society's attempt to calculate the number printed between 1816 and 1975 produced the figure of 2,458,000,000. A more recent survey, for the years up to 1992, put it closer to 6,000,000,000 in more than 2,000 languages and dialects. Whatever the precise figure, the Bible is by far the bestselling book of all time." A quote from *The Top 10 of Everything, 1997* (DK Pub., 1996, pp 112-113).
11. W. Musser Fant, Clyde E. Donald, and Mitchell G. Reddish, *An Introduction to the Bible, Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 60-62.
12. *Ibid.*, 61.
13. Bruce K. Waltke, "Book Review: Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy," *Crux* 41, No. 2 (Summer 2005): 42-44. The idea that historical setting is important is not held by all Old Testament specialists. As an illustration, in Bruce Waltke's review of Walter Brueggemann's book, he suggests that in regard to epistemology, "Brueggemann embraces what he calls a 'post liberal, non