

The Bible—

Novel or Short Story Collection? Part ONE

and why it matters tremendously, now and forever

Why this topic is important

- Even though you may have not considered the question of whether the Bible is like a collection of short stories or a novel, how you answer it is foundational to your understanding of the Bible,
- **AND more importantly, in many ways how you respond to it.**
- If on the one hand, we believe the Bible is the creation of human authors, though we feel it might have some inspiring and morally valid advice, it is our choice as a fellow human reader to pick and choose what we follow.
- ***If on the other hand, we truly believe the Bible is ONE Story, with the structure of a Novel instead of a collection of short stories, written by God Himself, our Creator and the One to whom we will one day give account—our obedience and understanding of it isn't optional.***

We'll explore this topic in TWO parts

- **In Part One**, we'll first examine our presuppositions about how the Bible came to be and how it is structured, how we got them and why most people unthinkingly hold these beliefs today.
- We'll then look at an overview of the difference between the ONE Story structure of a Novel contrasted with the structure of a collection of Short Stories and how it influences how we view the Bible.
- Finally in this part, we'll look at a classic model of novel structure that was developed in 1863, by Gustav Freytag, a German writer, advocated a [plot-story-line] model based upon Aristotle's theory of tragedy. . . . which divides a drama or novel into five parts—a comparison I think you'll find fascinating.
- **In Part Two**, the lesson that goes along with this, we'll look at three other topics that support the reality of the Bible as ONE Story—God's view and use of Time, Progressive Revelation, and the one Voice of the Bible—be sure to check it out also so you get the entire picture of this topic.

To begin, our presuppositions matter

- We don't approach anything we read without presuppositions, whether it is the Bible or anything else...
- Let's look at the results of looking at the Bible from these 2 presuppositions—
- One, that it is like a novel, in that it is one story by one author.
- Two, that it is like a collection of short stories, written by a group of authors.

Initially, here are some dangers of the short story collection view of the Bible

- Instead of the Bible being one book, written by God, the short-story view of the Bible assumes it is a collection of writings written by solely by humanity.
- This view assumes that we do not know for certain who the authors of the books of the Bible were or precisely when they were written or collected.
- This is the current presupposition of many biblical scholars, popular writers, and TV programs about the Bible today.
- Programs for example that search for the “real” Jesus, or present various theories about what “really” happened in the Bible.

- At their base, each of these views assume the Bible is a collection of books written by human authors.

Where did this view of the Bible as a collection of short stories (though they may not call it that) come from?

- Though this view is currently the predominate one in some scholarly circles and most popular writers and television programs on the Bible, it is a fairly recent development in how the church has viewed the Bible.
- I would highly recommend an excellent book on this topic: *God's Word Alone, the authority of Scripture* by Matthew Barrett, for a detailed and scholarly history of this view of the Bible, but very briefly,
- The author relates how through most of Biblical and human history including the history of the Christian Church through the Reformation, the Bible was viewed as the inerrant Word of God and human reason was **subject to it**.
- He then talks about the rise of the primacy of human reason (via the Enlightenment through post-modern philosophy) and that gradually the view of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God shifted to seeing the Bible as a scattered collection of religious writings that human reason needed to step in and determine what was useful or true.
- Here (in part, and there have been volumes written on this topic) is how it worked out in practice in the scholarly world which then filtered down into popular culture.

In contrast to the view (held for over 3,000 years) that Moses was the author of the Torah, a group of scholars came up with—

The Documentary Hypothesis

- The **documentary hypothesis (DH)** is one of the models used by biblical scholars to explain the origins and composition of the Torah (or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).^[4] A version of the documentary hypothesis, frequently identified with the German scholar Julius Wellhausen, was almost universally accepted for most of the 20th century.^[5] It posited that the Pentateuch is a compilation of four originally independent documents: the Jahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P) sources. The first of these, J, was dated to the Solomonic period (c. 950 BCE).^[1] E was dated somewhat later, in the 9th century BCE, and D was dated just before the reign of King Josiah, in the 7th or 8th century. Finally, P was generally dated to the time of Ezra in the 5th century BCE.^{[3][2]} The sources would have been joined together at various points in time by a series of editors or "redactors."^[6] From Wikipedia
- It sounds so scholarly and one assumes these very learned individuals know what they are talking about, but on close examination.....who wrote each of the documents? What independent manuscript proof do we have of them?
- There is no documentary support for them, no textual proof, no historical accounts of any of the supposed individuals who redacted (a favorite work used to describe their work, which simply means to edit) any of the supposed fragmentary documents.
- IN CONTRAST to solid manuscript evidence and thousands of years of scholarly studies that affirm Moses as the ONE author of the Pentateuch.

- Conclusion: This view makes no sense unless you previously have an anti-supernaturalist view, that God could not be the author of the Bible and want to support that opinion

Though thoroughly discredited, the results of this and similar theories

- Have been incredibly destructive, even if we aren't consciously aware of how we treat the Bible because of it as this is the view presented to us and based on that, here's how it works to undermine your view of the Bible—
- If you don't know for certain the identity of the authors of the books, when they were written, or when they were finally compiled into the form you have today (ALL FALSE ASSUMPTIONS) the obvious conclusion is that the authors, editors and compilers, were human and therefore the Bible is merely a book **about** God, not necessarily **from or by** God.

It then follows, according to this view....

- That the teachings in the Bible are useful if they speak to human need (and more precisely, YOUR need at the moment), but they can be ignored if they appear outdated or offensive or you don't personally agree with views in them.
- It also follows in this view that there might be spiritually useful material in the biblical books, but the books are also filled with errors and human opinion.
- Human reason and scholarship are then needed to make the distinctions between truth and error. ***The Bible becomes a book where the reader decides what is true, instead of discovering what God says is true.***
- As it is sometimes summarized, this view believes the Bible might contain the words of God, but overall, it IS NOT the WORD of God.

Without thinking approaching the Bible in this way is how most people read it today

- This view has permeated more than scholarly circles and television specials about what really happened in the Bible, or who is the real Jesus.
- If you think that doesn't apply to you, think back to the last time you were in a Bible study and someone asked, "What do you think this passage means?" or "How do you feel about this?"
- I don't want to beat up on anyone, I realized in doing this study that I've done that far more in the past than I'd like to admit.
- Without thinking I've put myself in the position of deciding the value of the Bible and to correct that I realized I needed a correct overview of the Bible itself and that's what I want to share with you in this and the next lesson.

A suggested, corrected view is to look at the Bible more like a novel containing ONE Overall Story than a collection of short stories

- Here is a chart that summarizes the differences
- It is available in the Handouts that go with the lesson available on www.Bible805.com and www.Bible805Academy.com.
- Next, we'll look at how the structure of the Bible follows the classical structure of a novel.
- This is based on the classic analysis of the structure of a novel from 1863, where Gustav Freytag, a German writer, advocated a [plot-story-line] model based upon Aristotle's theory of tragedy. . . . which divides a drama or novel into five parts.
- Without getting too philosophical, it seems that the structure of stories

from the classics of Greek drama to modern novels and movies all follow a pattern somehow written into the core of our minds and hearts.

- Something inside us says, “this is how a story should be structured” and if these parts aren’t there and in order, something seems off.
- Let’s now look the 5 parts and see how the Bible lines up with them. The initial definitions are from Freytag and then my comments on how the Bible content fits that part.

The 5 structural parts of a Novel, ONE STORY structure

- They are:
- **Exposition**
- **Rising action**
- **Climax**
- **Falling action**
- **Denouement**
- I’ll next define each part from Freytag’s definitions and then how the story line of the Bible fits that part.

Exposition

- **Exposition defined:** *The first phase . . . introduces the characters, especially the main character, also known as the protagonist. It shows how the characters relate to one another, their goals and motivations, as well as their moral character. During the exposition, the protagonist learns their main goal and what is at stake.*
- **Exposition in the Bible:** Our Triune God (Father, Son, & Holy Spirit) is the primary protagonist in all the Bible. All other characters are subordinate to God, though their actions are meaningful. In the opening of Genesis, God created a world and placed the humanity created in His Image into a perfect garden. He met them there and walked with them.

Rising action

- **Definition of Rising Action:** *it starts with a conflict. . . . an event that catalyzes the protagonist to take action. Rising action initiates the progression of events until the climax.*
- *In this phase, the protagonist secondary characters understand the goal that will resolve the conflict and begin to work toward it. Smaller problems thwart their initial success and their progress is directed primarily against these secondary obstacles. This phase demonstrates how the protagonist overcomes these obstacles.*
- **Rising action in the Bible:** The catalyzing conflict in the Biblical story is when the human couple God created for a relationship with Himself, turns their back on him and does the one thing He told them not to do—to eat the forbidden fruit. They chose to believe the enemy of God, Satan, rather than God. The consequence is death. First temporal, physical death and finally eternal death or separation from God.
- The only solution to the eternal death of his created characters is for God Himself to enter the broken world and by a sacrificial death repair the breach and accomplish redemption for fallen humanity.

Rising action, continued

- **The Rising Action continues:** The Old Testament story-line is the progression of events about God’s preparation for this work of redemption.

- Through the lives of a chosen people and the messages of his prophets, God illustrates and explains who God is what He expects, and what He will do to accomplish the promised redemption.
- He can no longer walk with them, so He communicates through his Word (the written scriptures that become our Bible), again through records of events in the lives of a chosen people and His chosen messengers.
- Just as the rising action makes up the bulk of a novel, the rising action told in the Old Testament makes up the majority of our Bibles and much of human history.
- Like any careful story-teller, God is not in a hurry, He takes His time to tell the story and prepare the world for...

Climax

- ***Climax defined:*** *The climax is the turning point or highest point of the story. The protagonist makes the single big decision that defines not only the outcome of the story, but also who they are as a person.*
- **The climax in the Bible: consists of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.** In that, humanity sees in Jesus the perfect Man, how they were designed to live and obey God.
- Then that perfect Man, Jesus, by an act of his free will takes his life and offers it in the place of his creation as a sacrifice for their sins.
- God the Father accepts the sacrifice, and the enemy, Satan and death are defeated, the breach is healed, the redemption price is paid.

Falling action

- ***Falling action defined:*** *The climax is not the ending, but it determines the ending. The falling action phase consists of events that lead to the ending. Depending on the complexity of the story, there are often multiple secondary plot lines yet to be worked out.*
- **The Falling action in the Bible,** comes after death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus back to heaven. His disciples are charged with the task of sharing the message of salvation with the world. The secondary plot lines involve the establishment of the church and how his disciples are to live out the work of reconciling the world to God that is now possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- The New Testament tells the story of the falling action not only of the characters when it was first written, but it invites us to join in and become part of the story in our lives as followers of Jesus.

Denouement

- ***Denouement defined:*** *In this phase the protagonist and antagonist have solved their problems and either the protagonist or antagonist wins the conflict. The conflict officially ends. Some stories show what happens to the characters after the conflict ends and/or they show what happens to the characters in the future.*
- **The Denouement in the Bible** is Christ's return to earth, the casting of Satan into the Lake of Fire, and the creation of the New Heaven and New Earth where God once again, physically, tangibly walks with His people forever.
- Paradise lost has become paradise regained.
- C.S. Lewis' description of the denouement at the end of the *Last Battle* can describe our coming denouement of human history also, as he says--
- *"The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the*

morning. . . . the beginning of the real story. All their life and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Summary of the 5-part structure

- I found the way the Bible fits the structure of a novel to be very exciting when I first discovered it—I hope you do too.
- And I trust it was a good illustration to show that the Bible is one complete, organic story—the greatest of Novels written by One divine Author.
- It is not a scattered collection of short stories written by faceless writers who could have never collaborated independently to produce this **ONE** storyline over the centuries the Bible was written.

To review and summarize

- The Bible is not a collection of isolated stories with anonymous authors written who knows when, but the greatest Novel, the greatest story ever written,
- By God the One Author inspiring the human authors to write the Bible to show His creation His ways, what went wrong in our world, and what Jesus did and will do to set all things right.

Suggested Application—read the Bible!

- The best way to see the Bible as ONE STORY is to read it in Chronological Order—Bible805.com has lessons and reading plans to help you do this.
- I'll also be doing revised lessons on reading your Bible in Chronological Order in the coming months—all posted on Bible805 and the Bible805Academy.com
- Another note: though there are many excellent study Bibles, and they have a place when we need background or application notes, it is easy to get distracted by all the notes and lose the sense of the text itself.
- Consider using a PLAIN Text Bible, or one with minimal notes. Even better is one organized in paragraphs, rather than verse by verse if you want to get more of a sense of the Bible as ONE Book.
- As to what translation?
- ***The best translation the one you will read or listen to.***
- Listen or read, whatever translation it is your choice, but as Nike says, JUST DO IT!

One last thought when we look at the Bible as a novel

- All novels come to an end.
- And so too does the story of salvation in the Bible and so too will our world.
- And though the ending of the Bible does promise a potential happily ever after, each person must make the decision to trust that the message of the Bible is true, and that Jesus is the only way to salvation for that to be true for them.
- God did not write the Bible to entertain us, but to save us or as J.I. Packer put it--
- ***The Scriptures are a lifeline God throws us in order to ensure he and we stay connected while the rescue is in process.***
- My prayer is that you daily grab ahold of the ONE STORY of the Bible as if your life depended on it...because it does, for your life today and your destiny now and forever.

DISCUSSION GUIDE for The Bible—Novel or Short Story Collection? Part ONE

Brief Lesson Summary

This lesson explains why it is important to understand the Bible as one unified story authored by God rather than merely a collection of unrelated stories. It contrasts these two approaches, discusses how modern assumptions have shaped Bible interpretation, and compares the Bible's overall storyline to the classic five-part structure of a novel: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. The lesson concludes by encouraging believers to read the Bible as one continuous story centered on God's plan of redemption through Jesus.

Ice-breaker Question

When you read a book, do you usually enjoy stand-alone stories or one long story with an overall plot? Why?

Discussion Questions for a Group; Journal Questions for Individual Study

1. Why does the way we think about the Bible before we read it affect how we understand and obey it?
2. What are some practical differences between viewing the Bible as one story written by God and as a collection of unrelated religious writings?
3. What concerns does the lesson raise about relying on human opinion rather than God's authority when interpreting the Bible?
4. How does the five-part structure of a novel help you better understand the overall message of the Bible?
5. Why is Jesus the climax of the Bible's story, and how does His life, death, and resurrection change everything that follows?

6. How might reading the Bible chronologically help you better understand God's unfolding plan of redemption?

Life Application Suggestions, consider and respond

- Ask God to help you approach the Bible as His unified message rather than as disconnected stories.
- Begin reading the Bible in chronological order to see how God's plan unfolds across history.
- When studying a passage, consider how it fits into God's overall story of creation, redemption, and restoration.
- Share with someone this week one way seeing the Bible as one story has strengthened your confidence in God's Word.

Prayer Focus

Thank God for giving us His Word as one unified story of redemption. Pray for wisdom to understand the Bible correctly, confidence in its authority, and a growing desire to read, obey, and share its message with others.

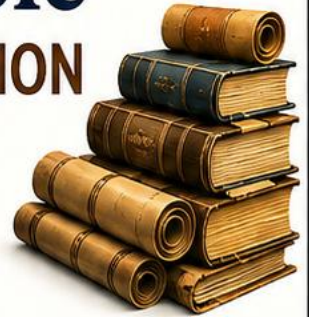
Two Views of the Bible

NOVEL vs. SHORT STORY COLLECTION



Each view is an often unspoken presupposition about the Bible that we have before we open a page of it. Each has an incredibly important impact on how we read it, respond to it, and order our lives according to it.

Bible805 believes it is imperative for our eternal salvation and ordering our lives correctly that we see the Bible as a Novel, written by one Author, our God.



Please go to www.Bible805.com for the lesson, *The Bible, Novel or Short Story Collection and why it matters*, for an in-depth study on the topic.

BIBLE AS NOVEL <i>One Story, One Author, One Purpose</i>	BIBLE AS SHORT STORY COLLECTION <i>Many Stories, Many Authors, Many Voices</i>
 One story, one coherent plot line	 Many stories that are loosely tied together
 One Author – God Infallible, true Outside of time	 Multiple human authors, editors, and redactors, fallible and a product of their times
 Inspired human authors in the supernatural sense of God speaking through them	 Human authors inspired by God in a non-supernatural sense as anyone is inspired by lofty subject
 The Word of God	 Contains some words of God, human reason needed to decide
 Supernatural, miracles and events accepted as reported	 Seemingly supernatural events have natural explanations
 Problems in understanding require prayer and patience	 Problems in understanding allow human judgement
 Application imperative	 Application optional