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How to Find Jesus in All of Scripture This Christmas



Cover Story

Around the year 1520, a Christian book publisher by the name of Daniel Bomberg decided to print a new version of the Rabbinical Bible: a collection of Old Testament books, commentaries, and other materials in Hebrew for a Jewish audience. Bomberg's Second Rabbinical Bible was published in 1524 after Bomberg found some of the best Hebrew scholars to edit the project. But his first two editors created a bit of a problem.

According to Bryan College Greek Professor Dr. Jud Davis, Bomberg's first two editors converted to Christianity while studying the Hebrew texts (our Old Testament) that prophesy the coming of the Messiah. Felix Pratensis and

Jacob ben Hayyim ibn Adonijah both became Christians while working on this text for Jews. Davis says the editors saw clearly that Jesus Christ was woven into all the key figures and narratives of the Old Testament; it was impossible not to see Jesus as the Messiah once they began serious study of the Hebrew texts.

Christmas is a natural time to focus our Scripture reading on the classic texts of the New Testament that tell us of Jesus' birth. But subtle plot lines and allusions to Jesus are scattered throughout the Bible. When we read the books of the Bible for the various literary genres that they are, we see God weaving together a grand story — or *meta-*

narrative — of his own graciousness and love, in which all signs point to Jesus.

Once we know what to look for in other parts of the Bible, we can better understand and appreciate Jesus as we celebrate his Advent. The framework for all this, though, begins with seeing the Bible as God's grand drama: the metanarrative.

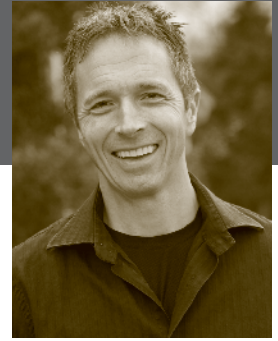
Metanarrative Is the Framework for Finding Jesus Everywhere

When we say the Bible is a story, some people may think we are demoting it to the level of say, Dr. Seuss' *Horton Hears a Who*.

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from the president's desk

a word from dr. jeff myers



The prophets envisioned a messiah who would drive death and humiliation further and further from the field of battle until it disappeared altogether. In fact, the very last statement of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5–6, says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Then there was silence. Four hundred years and no word from God.

But because of the incarnation we now see this silence as a 400 year downbeat, with orchestral sounds of redemption arising through the infant cries of the baby in the manger. The music of the spheres proclaims that the Messiah in swaddling clothes just so happens to be the Lord over space, time, and history.

We know this because Luke tells us that John the Baptist is the one Malachi prophesied about, the one who would come in the wild spirit of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord (Luke 1:17). And John the Baptist, in turn, testified that the “Lord” was Jesus Christ himself, sent to earth to “re” everything. *Renew. Restore, and Reconcile.*¹

From the Garden of Eden to now, the music has never

stopped, and God the conductor has never left the podium. Rather, he weaves pain, confusion, and doubt into expressions of redemption, harmonies more profound than creation itself could have ever expressed.

In short, the incarnation was not a new musical theme. It was a rising of a familiar theme but with a new melody: Jesus is not only the Messiah, he is the *prophesied* Messiah.² The first two chapters of Matthew alone mentions five different fulfillments from the prophets: Jesus’ virgin birth, Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah, Jesus’ return from Egypt, and Herod’s killing of children.

The Old Testament is filled with tension. Jesus resolves it. Where there was confusion, Jesus brings clarity. Where there was terror Jesus brings confidence. The minor key of the Old Testament swells into an anthem of hope in the New Testament. The Old Testament raises questions; in Christ we have the answer.

And this answer is more than just freedom from our spiritual burdens. It is a promise of renewed abundance, to “restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25). As Thomas Howard puts it:

The Incarnation takes all that properly belongs to our humanity and delivers it back to us, redeemed. All of our inclina-

tions and appetites and capacities and yearnings and proclivities are purified and gathered up and glorified by Christ. He did not come to thin out human life; He came to set it free. All the dancing and feasting and processing and singing and building and sculpting and baking and merrymaking that belong to us, and that were stolen away into the service of false gods, are returned to us in the Gospel.³

Christ’s coming is a banner across the sky: “God is king over everything!” The famine is over. The feast is set. And you’re invited. With this thought in our minds and hearts, we at Summit wish you the very merriest Christmas.

Notes

1. For more on the importance of “re” words, see John Stonestreet’s Two-Minute Warning program, <http://www.breakpoint.org/bp-home/news-a-events/15575-2-min-warning>.
2. A good resource for the things discussed in this section is Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), pp. 55–102.
3. Thomas Howard, *Evangelical Is Not Enough* (Ignatius Press, 1984), pp. 36–37.

“There are lots of stories,” someone might say. “How could you relegate the Bible to nothing more than one of those?”

First, we need to distinguish between good stories and bad stories. A story is not good just because it is long and complex. There’s more to it. Look closely, and you’ll find the following elements in all well-written stories:

- **A theme.** There may be many subplots, but there will be one overarching plot that brings everything else into focus.
- **Tension arising and being resolved.** A good story features competing voices and counterpoints that get “worked out” within the larger storyline.
- **Diversity within unity.** Like a fascinating painting, unity is not a stark “oneness” but a coming together of a multitude of details. In a good story the reader is able to see how all of the details weave together by the end.

We find each of these elements in the Bible. Even a quick glance shows that it doesn’t resemble a textbook, encyclopedia, or other books whose primary purpose is to communicate information. The Bible is telling a story, but it’s a particular type of story.

That’s why it is essential, sec-

ondly, to understand the difference between an ordinary story and a metanarrative. Narrative means “story,” and “meta” means “beyond.” A metanarrative is the story beyond the story — the story by which we make sense of all stories.

A good story has depth and offers insights that we can take and apply to our lives. A metanarrative may have these things, but it primarily is offering a story that claims to be *true*. Its primary function is not merely to be useful, but to describe the world we live in. A metanarrative is a type of story, but unique in that it asks us to conform to its view of the world.

About half of the Bible can be classified as “historical narrative,”¹ while the rest — including wisdom literature, poetry, prophecies, and letters to churches — are books written from within the historical narrative of the Bible. The historical narrative, though it includes stories and details from particular times and places, spans from the beginning to the end of human history.

To best understand how the diverse books of the Bible come together in one coherent story, we must grasp the kind of story a metanarrative is.

The Christian worldview (as do all worldviews) offers a metanarrative, and this idea can help us make sense of the Bible. If God is the ultimate divine author of Scripture, it would make sense

that the details and subplots of the Bible would come together to tell one story.

The Biblical Metanarrative Can Be Organized into Six Acts

Theologians Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen summarize the biblical story as a six-act drama of the Kingdom of God:²

- **Act 1:** God establishes his kingdom through creation (Genesis 1 and 2)
- **Act 2:** Humans rebel (Genesis 3–11)
- **Act 3:** God the king initiates redemption by choosing the nation of Israel (Pentateuch, historical books, wisdom literature, and the prophets that make up the Old Testament)
- **Act 4:** Christ comes as king (Jesus) and accomplishes redemption (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)
- **Act 5:** News of the king’s redemption spreads through the church, from Jerusalem, to Rome, and then the whole world (Acts and the epistles of the New Testament)
- **Act 6:** The return of God the king and completion of his plan of redemption (Revelation)

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While Jesus' Incarnation puts him squarely in the spotlight of God's story in the Gospels, he is actually mentioned, referred to, or foreshadowed in the whole of the Bible. Jesus and his coming are the theme of all of God's story.

So How Can We Look for Jesus throughout the Story?

Jesus himself indicated that he is to be found throughout all of Scripture. After his resurrection, Jesus talked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24 tells us: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (v.27).

Though we don't know what Jesus said in this conversation, we can look back through scripture to see what he *might* have said. The first major sign in the Bible that points to Jesus takes place immediately after Adam and Eve sin. In Genesis 3:15 we find what scholars call the *proto-evangelium*, the first proclamation that God would make right what Satan and man had broken: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." While the first half of the verse speaks to the struggle between Satan and all of Eve's offspring (humanity), the second half specifically points to one man who will defeat Satan.

This one man is Jesus.

But numerous other stories, exhortations, and prophecies point to Christ. Davis said there are two simple questions we can ask when reading any Scripture passage to help us see Jesus in it:

1. If the given passage is a positive passage (Passover, for example), how is it or its characters like Jesus? What similarities are there? Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22, for example, is a perfect foreshadowing of Jesus, Davis says. Here a father takes his cherished son to Mount Moriah — later the site of the temple in Jerusalem — and was prepared to offer him as a sacrifice to God. "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son," Abraham tells Isaac (v. 8). The parallels between this story and Jesus' crucifixion aren't coincidental. "How in the world did that story get there 1,500 years before [the crucifixion] ever happened?" Davis asked. "God really did hide the person of Jesus in plain sight. The moment you come to faith, you realize the story was put there by God to bring honor to his Son."

2. If the given passage is negative, how is it or its characters unlike Jesus? How does Jesus make up for the failings therein? In the final passages of Deuteronomy, Moses — who led the Hebrews out of captivity, through the wilderness, and to

the borders of the Promised Land — dies. He never sets foot in the land God had promised to the Hebrews because he had previously doubted God (Numbers 20). Jesus, on the other hand, has delivered his people and will see them through to the final establishment of his kingdom. While Moses failed in this sense — as did all the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel — Jesus did not fail, Davis says.

This Christmas we will recount the Christmas story so often recited from Luke. But the Christmas story began with the first of creation, as God directed his story and wrote into every plot twist the one who came and dwelt with us: Immanuel, Jesus Christ.

Merry Christmas.

Notes

1. Statistics vary. Robert L. Plummer (*40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010], 191) cites "about 60 percent" for OT and NT combined. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart (*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* [3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003], 89) state "over 40 percent" of the OT is narrative.
2. See the outline in Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Drama of Scripture*, 27. Their outline (and use of drama) expands upon N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SOCK, 1992), 139–143.

Morrison Serves God in Illinois House

As a Summit student, Tom Morrison stood outside a Colorado Springs Planned Parenthood facility in the summer of 1992, as students did in every session. While they rallied near the parking lot, Morrison watched a young woman drive away. When she passed the students, she rolled down her window and shouted, “It’s my choice!” Morrison spotted a little girl sitting in the backseat quietly. *How many siblings has she lost?* he wondered.

Ten years later, Morrison was teaching at a Christian high school and organizing a pro-life student club’s trips to his home state’s capital in Springfield, Illinois. It was there a pro-life lobbyist told him he should consider running for state office. After more time teaching and a successful stint building a disaster restoration business with his brother, he was urged by conservatives in his hometown to run for state office against a six-term liberal Republican. His disaster restoration business ended up lending him fiscal credibility and a campaign theme: “Let’s take disaster cleanup to the state capitol.” He was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. He found running for office in one of the most liberal states in the country was easy after running a small business. “Running for office wasn’t too tough compared to the fire I’d already been through!”

Currently two nationally-covered issues are plaguing Illinois, and Morrison is finding himself in the thick of the fight. “On the fiscal front, our state has the worst funded public pension

funds in the nation, the worst state credit rating, and the country’s second highest unemployment rate,” Morrison said. He set an example from day one by opting out of the cushy pension package offered to state legislators. “Many of the conservatives (including me) have concrete plans to fix these problems, but it’s a huge hurdle to have them implemented when we don’t control the legislative process,” Morrison said.

The other major political issue is same-sex marriage. Despite Democratic control of the state legislature and governor’s mansion, attempts last session to ram pro-same-sex marriage bills through the legislature failed. “Black, white, Hispanic, Asian, evangelical, and Catholic churches and pastors have banded together like never before, and by God’s grace we’ve stopped it,” he said.

In these issues and more, Morrison credits Summit for helping him analyze what’s going on in culture, politics, and day-to-day life and recognize the causes of certain bad outcomes. “Summit helped me to understand the big picture, including the nature of government and the vision of the founding fathers for America,” he said. “As we’ve abandoned our roots, we’ve gotten ourselves into deeper and deeper trouble. I do my best to remind my colleagues and my constituents of the principles that enabled us to grow and prosper in the past. I try to consistently practice what I preach when I advocate for different policy positions.” Morrison became a Christian



Tom Morrison

years before attending Summit, but he hadn’t really changed any personal habits until then. “After the Summit, I came home and told my best friends that I was a Christian and that I’d be following Jesus and living for Him from now on.”

Morrison isn’t sure what’s next, but he’s willing to climb the ladder in Illinois politics if he’s called to. As one of the few conservatives in the legislature, that could very well happen. His one condition: it can’t hamper his ability to be a good husband and father to his two children. “In the meantime, especially with this marriage bill issue, I’m grateful that God has me right now in the Illinois House,” he said. “I’d like to serve as long as I think I can actually make a positive difference.”

For freedom Christ has set us free!

Galatians 5:1

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