

## Shifting the Paradigm

When people come to the Bible, they will bring with them their own paradigms that need to be deconstructed. Most of these paradigms have good intuitions behind them, but ultimately, they don't reflect what the Bible actually is.

There is a core paradigm that sees the Bible as a reference book, and it gets expressed in a few different ways. The reference book approach to the Bible is often expressed through seeing the Bible as:

- A theology dictionary
- A moral handbook or rule book
- A devotional grab bag

The reference book approach to the Bible sees the Bible as a book that one can refer to when they have questions, a need, or are confused about something.

This mentality is expressed in a number of ways in Christian traditions. Let's look at a few of them and understand the intuition behind them and what needs to shift.

### The Bible as a Theology Dictionary

**Paradigm:** The Bible exists to give me precise definitions about theological issues.

**Good Intuition:** The Bible is designed to shape my view of reality and what is true about the world, God, myself, and others.

**Shift:** We need to move from the idea that the Bible teaches us truth about theological topics to the idea that the Bible is meditation literature.

### The Bible as a Moral Handbook

**Paradigm:** The Bible exists to give me clear rules from God about how to live.

**Good Intuition:** The Bible must instruct me on how to flourish as a human and be in right relationship with God and others.

**Shift:** We need to move from the idea of the Bible as a rule book to the Bible as wisdom literature that can transform our character, through God's Spirit.

### The Bible as a Devotional Grab Bag

**Paradigm:** The Bible exists to find personal inspiration and connection to God, so I can pick and choose what inspires me and makes me feel God's presence.

**Good Intuition:** The Bible is designed to connect us to the living God and God's purposes in the world.

**Shift:** We need to move from the idea that we can pick and choose how the Bible should influence our own individual lives to seeing the Bible as inspired literature that is meant to be read and reflected on in community to discover how our lives fit into the grand story of God's purpose for creation.

Now that we understand the common paradigms that we need to dismantle, let's look closer at the seven components that make up the paradigm through which we are striving to see the Bible.

### The Bible Is Messianic Literature

The story of the Bible and all of its main themes come to their fulfillment in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit.

This component comes from the following key places in the New Testament.

Now he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” —Luke 24:44-47 (NASB95)

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to deliverance through faith in Messiah Jesus. —2 Timothy 3:14-15 (NASB95)

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ... —1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NASB95)

- The word “messiah” means anointed, and it refers to two institutions in the story of Israel that thematize what the entire biblical story is about: the king and the priest.
- Humanity is appointed as God’s royal priest to represent God’s presence and character to creation. They forfeit this calling, and so the entire biblical story is about the cyclical nature of human nature. Each generation partly succeeds, but most fail at the job, and each generation’s failure generates hope for a coming royal priest. At the same time, each generation’s success leaves behind a narrative portrait of the need and role that a new royal priesthood will have to play.
- We see examples of this cycle in the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Joseph and Judah, Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, the judges, Ruth, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, the kings of Israel and Judah, the prophets, Esther and Mordecai, and Daniel.
- The Hebrew Bible is not primarily predictive literature. Rather, it generates future expectation through prospective analogy (Andrew Teeter and Jacob Stromberg). Early stories and characters are set on analogy to past stories and characters (retrospective analogy), and these patterns set the readers’ expectations that the future resolution of this plot tension will follow the same patterns as the past resolutions.

Examples:

- The Torah: Exodus 19-34
- Israel agrees to a covenant with Yahweh and then violates that covenant
- Yahweh’s justice threatens to destroy Israel
- Moses intercedes and offers his own life for the people’s sins
- The Prophets
- Israel agrees to and then violates their covenant with Yahweh (Isa. 1)
- Yahweh’s justice threatens to destroy Israel (Isa. 2-11)
- A Moses-like servant will come to offer his own life for Israel’s sins (Isa. 42-55)
- The Gospel Accounts
- Israel lives in a state of covenant violation
- Yahweh’s justice threatens to destroy Israel (Mark 13:4-8)
- Jesus arrives as a Moses-like intercessor to offer his own life for Israel’s sins (Mark 1:9-16:8)