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Old & new heaven & earth



The old has gone; the new has come

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1. Introduction

***Inclusio!** Sounds like some sort of food, doesn't it, but is a literary device to end a text where it starts. It's also known as a bracket, an envelope, or a bookend. I prefer to call them, colloquially, sandwiches. To a text, sandwiches provide structure, the association between ideas, highlighting one big idea or theme. In between, is an appetising filling. In this series, **Sandwich** papers deal with Bible books, or slabs of Bible texts.*

This first **Sandwich** paper deals with the whole Bible, in which the first two chapters of Genesis record the creation of the first heaven and earth, and the last two chapters of Revelation record the creation of the new heaven and earth. That suggests there is something radically wrong with our current world if God is going to create a new one. This transformation from old to new frames the structure of the whole Bible and suggests at once its big idea or theme. Also, along with structure, the setting of a literary work, and its style of writing, are crucial to its understanding. So, let me say something about each of these briefly.

Structure

Everything has structure. Just take the human body. The skeleton is a person's basic structure, but it is not the complete person. It is the 'what'. The muscles and internal organs are essential to the performance of the structure and the complete person, but these are not the complete person either. They are the 'how' the structure works and 'why'. Finally, the externals of the person are the 'who', the identity, the style. However, without the structure, the human body is just a collection of bones and tissue.

Similarly, a house has structure, or framework, on which we hang claddings, doors and windows, and interior fit out to give it style and identity, and make it complete. Without the structure, there is no home - just a heap of building materials.

Moreover, structure, or pattern, appears in non-material things such as music and literature. At the micro level of a text, words have structure, words are structured into sentences, sentences are structured into paragraphs, and at the macro level, paragraphs are structured into parts of a whole. Without structure, there is no work of literature - just a jumble of words.

On the next page is a more detailed graphic of the Bible's seven-step structure, which is taken from my eBook, *A Bird's-eye view of Sacred Scripture*, which is available on this website. (For an alternative seven-point structure of the Bible, see B. [Harrington](#), *Story of the Bible*. His seven steps are Creation, Curse, Covenant, Covenant People, Christ, Church, Consummation).

For me, the big idea or theme of the Bible is 'kingdom', firstly God is King, and secondly, mankind is king authorised by God to rule for Him on planet earth (Genesis 1:28). But the man failed to rule himself and wanted to be God. From this ruined, **primeval kingdom**, God's story of transformation works through four other kingdom phases until it reaches the seventh and final form of the kingdom in the new heaven and earth. There, *the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him* (Revelation 22:3), and *To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne* (Revelation 3:21). Notice the important difference: in the first creation mankind rules **for** God; in the new creation redeemed mankind rules **with** Him.

Progressive forms of all of the kingdoms



Bible's story progressively takes us from current to new world



Bible Structure

When we open the first page of the Bible, we are not told anything about the God-King and His kingdom that existed before His creation. Nevertheless, we will find the details about this elsewhere in the sacred text. His is the **preeminent kingdom**, existing before all other kingdoms, and controlling them all. As far as earth and mankind is concerned, the first man Adam's disobedience began a downward spiral reflected in Nimrod's pagan kingdom, the first mention of 'kingdom' in the Hebrew Bible.

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Bible Structure continued

At that time, God began to execute a correction to man's waywardness in His promised kingdom, which is progressively unfolded in the various forms of the Hebrew Bible, including the priests, the prophets, and the psalms. All of these display God's character as ruler, and exemplified in the life and ministry of Christ as He taught that God's kingdom was proximate, or near at hand. He, of course was slain, but His power kingdom has been on full display since His ascension.

When I go to the last page of this masterpiece the Bible, after Christ defeats all of His enemies, He will usher in a new universe, a new heaven and earth that supersedes the one we have now, a new paradise but with the same God-King of the universe on the throne (Revelation 22:3). This is God's final, and eternal paradise kingdom.

In the **primeval kingdom**, Adam's regal realm is planet earth, which he is to bring into subjection - the seas, birds, cattle, wild animals and plant life. Notable by its absence is any obligation or power to control earth's climate, and no wonder, because it was never part of God's delegating it to mankind. For, *the heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings* (Psalm 115:16). That is, the aerial, planetary, and abode-of-God heavens are off limits to us. They are in the sphere of God's control; controlling the climate is part of God's job description, not ours.

I have called the final form of the kingdom, the Paradise kingdom, because Paradise is mentioned in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 2:7). Further, what characterises this new heaven and earth is that God removes all the sad things associated with the present world: no more tears, or death, or mourning, crying and pain (Revelation 21:4). Positively, it gets a new capital city for the God-King and His redeemed people, the new Jerusalem, in contrast with Jerusalem of old, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, and Babylon (Revelation 11:8, 17:5). This new Jerusalem *that is above is free, which is the mother of us all* (Galatians 4:26), but Jerusalem of old is the *mother of whores* (Revelation 17:5). Sadly, the Jerusalem that was once *the city of the great King* (Matthew 5:35) is greatly fallen and destroyed.

Also, this new world is holy, it's God's home filled with God's imagination, it's a city of life, light and labour, populated with Jew and Gentile believers who get new names (Revelation 2:7, 3:12), its physical dimensions express the equality of its citizens although kings, the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its central and only temple, and both God and the Lamb are the Kingly administrators. As [Moltmann](#) puts it nicely, the Kingdom of God has been indestructibly planted into the earth with the cross of Christ.

The heaven and earth are new (*neos*), not, meaning "novel" or "young," but *kainos*, meaning "fresh" or "renewed." That is, the new earth will be the old earth made new again by purging out by fire all the age-long evidences of sin and the curse, decay, and death (2 Peter 3:10-12), then all brought together again by the Creator in a perfect world "wherein dwells righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). Now, in **Paradise kingdom**, man rules, no longer *for* but *with* God. Indescribably stunning? "Yes". Incredible? "Yes". Immediately desirable? "Yes".

Bible Setting

In addition to structure, a literary work comes from a time, geographical, topographical places including roads, hills, mountains, valleys, rivers and seas, flora, fauna, geology, climate and cultural and political settings, which we need to understand to correctly interpret the biblical text. So, the Bible is set in the ancient Middle East, in the land of Israel and the surrounding countries, such as Egypt, Moab (now Jordan), Syria, Lebanon, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Asia Minor (now Turkey), Greece and Italy.

The biblical writers used the physical spaces of the biblical world to communicate their message, and these landscapes are the context for images, metaphors, similes, narratives, psalms, prophecies, and parables. The Bible land magnifies the Bible, and to understand its landscapes is to be satisfyingly enlightened of its meaning and truth.

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Bible Style

Finally, a note about the importance of recognising an author's writing style. In the field of fashion, style comes from the choices people make of their clothes. So, in writing, style comes from the choices writers make with the words they use. Style is the author's thumbprint—a unique and indelible mark on the voice and personality of the work ([Glatch](#)).

Also, [Bandy](#) (2010) says that the meaning of a written text is intimately related to both genre and structure. 'Genre' (pronounced like jonra) essentially means the literary clothes that hang on the structure, or in other words, the author's writing style.

Specifically, the author's style is the manner in which ideas are presented. This artistic dimension includes words, sentences, tone, imagery, symbols, similes, metaphors, allegories, points of view, figurative language, mood, narrative, history, biography, figures of speech, poetry, wisdom, dramatic literature, short stories and tales, prophecy, apocalyptic, gospel, oratory, and letters.

Also, we need to understand that Scripture's imagery originated in lived human experience, in the culture, customs, and lands of the ancient Middle East, far removed in time and place from our own. This highlights the importance of injecting ourselves into that culture and customs to be effective interpreters of Scripture.

The 66 books of the Bible were written in different literary styles. If we don't discern what style a book, or part thereof is written in, we will miss out on the author's intention. Now, almost half of the Bible is narrative or story, the most universal form of human communication, that takes events and puts them in chronological order with interesting characters for the reader or listener to detect the author's meaning and purpose.

The next largest style in the Bible is poetry, which accounts for about one third, and uses colourful images and metaphor to help us see the world from a different perspective. That's why there are songs, and pithy wisdom sayings that best express the imagination and emotions of the writer.

Finally, the remaining quarter is prose, which is a way of writing that matches how people speak. Here we will find speeches, letters, or essays to persuading the audience with logical reasoning. Good examples of this are the Law, the wisdom literature, and the New testament letters.

And, to make things more complicated, but interesting, some writers combine literary genres. All in all, the Holy Spirit Who oversees the words of God written in the words of men recognises that we have different preferences in our reading. Some readers are verbal, so narrative and prose writings appeal more to them. In contrast, visual readers prefer the image and picture style and so they like poetry, colourful images, metaphor, symbols, and similes.

Conclusion

What a delicious sandwich! After Adam as a disobedient king of earth and who ruined everything, could God could have abandoned his descendants to their own devices? No, He couldn't.

So, He has steered humanity through thousands of years of history to recognise the perils of disobeying Him, and what it cost Him through His son Jesus Christ to rid the universe of the evil enemy. And to bring us to a new creation, the original renewed and refurbished without all the flaws of the first heaven and earth, and unimaginative pleasures in the presence of the Creator for evermore. As Neander put it so beautifully in his hymn written almost 400 years ago, *Praise to the Lord...the King of creation* on the next page.

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1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; now to his temple draw near,
join me in glad adoration.

2 Praise to the Lord, above all things so wondrously reigning;
sheltering you under his wings, and so gently sustaining!
Have you not seen all that is needful has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?

3 Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend you;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
if with his love he befriends you.

4 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him.
Let the Amen sound from his people again;
gladly forever adore him.

Author: Joachim Neander (1680)

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