

Rethinking Scripture

Trust The Story

Many of us have tried to use the Bible as a 'how to' manual for life, or a set of morals, and felt confused or distant when reading it, wondering if we're missing something important. The hopeful truth is that when we learn to read Scripture in a way that fits the text itself—understanding its context and story—everything changes. Confusing passages make sense, God's character becomes more loving and consistent, and the Bible transforms from a puzzle to solve into a living invitation to know the heart of a God who has been pursuing us with relentless love from the beginning.

Hermeneutics is the art of not just reading Scripture, but *seeing* and *listening* to it. It's how we learn to let the Bible speak—clearly, honestly, and beautifully. It's not about bending the text to our will, but about opening ourselves to its deeper voice. Learning to read Scripture well doesn't complicate faith—it liberates it.

Definition: Hermeneutic

Hermeneutic: Refers to one's method and principles for interpreting and applying scripture. It acts as a lens for how to read and understand the Bible.

Our Driving Value: Honest to the Text

Every hermeneutic is shaped by a driving value—something at its core that guides how interpretation happens. For us at Casas Church, that driving value is to be honest to the text.

This means that as we form and apply our interpretive methods, we're continually asking:

- *Are we really letting the text speak for itself?*
- *Are our lenses, tools, and approaches helping us see what's there—or are they distorting it?*
- *Are our assumptions and methods consistent with how the text was actually written?*

Being honest to the text means resisting the urge to make Scripture fit our preferences, traditions, or systems. Instead, we return—again and again—to what's actually written: the language, the structure, the voice, and the context.

Our aim is for our hermeneutic to serve the text, not the other way around.

It's a posture of humility and curiosity. We don't come to the Bible to control it—we come to listen.

Interconnected fields of study

Text - The oldest and most numerous manuscripts that are closest to the original.

Canon - From the Greek *kanōn*, meaning "rule" or "measuring rod," the **canon** refers to the officially recognized collection of sacred writings that are **normative and inspired by God**. The process of canonization involved discerning which writings bore the marks of divine inspiration, apostolic origin, theological consistency, and widespread use in worship and teaching.

Inspiration (*theopneustos*) - "God-breathed" 2 Tim 3:16, "*All Scripture is 'inspired'*" **The study of inspiration deals with how we hold the sacred texts of Scripture**—it looks specifically at how God was involved in their creation. There has been a wide range of beliefs about how inspiration works. On one end of the spectrum, some believe that God chose faithful, trustworthy people to write about what they experience. On the other hand, some hold that God dictated every word exactly, using the writer almost like a pen—leaving no room for personal thought, emotion, or influence. Inspiration becomes deeply connected to views of inerrancy.

Hermeneutics - Refers to one's method and principles for interpreting and applying scripture. It acts as a lens for how to read and understand the Bible

Theology - From the Greek *theos* (God) + *logos* (word, reason, discourse), theology literally means "the study or discourse about God." It is the discipline of exploration and wrestling about divine truth—a reflective, rational, and often communal process of seeking to understand God, Scripture, and spiritual reality. **Think of theology as a living conversation about scripture, God and spiritual realities.**

Doctrine - From the Latin *doctrina*, meaning "teaching" or "instruction," doctrine refers to defined, authoritative teachings about theological truths. Doctrines are the *results* of theological reflection that have been clarified, systematized, and affirmed by theologians, or a community of faith (often through creeds, confessions, or statements of faith). **Think of doctrine as beliefs that can stand as self-contained assertions that can stand on their own.** They allow theologians to build upon them.

Christocentric Hermeneutic: Three Key Principles

1. Start with Jesus, Not Doctrine

2. Trust the Story

3. Bring the Text into the Context

Trust the Story

The Bible as Story

Notes:

Story Within a Story

The Bible is a **library of stories** telling the larger story of God relating with humanity. If we don't understand the overarching story (meta-narrative), we will miss the purpose of individual passages.

Key Insight: If your interpretation of a passage contradicts the overall story arc of Scripture, you may need to reconsider your interpretation.

The Four-Part Meta-Narrative Pattern

Part 1: God Has a Dream

God's vision for relationship with humanity

Part 2: God Chooses What He Wants

God moves toward humanity, extending invitation

Part 3: People Choose What They Want

Humanity's response (often choosing control over trust)

Part 4: God Meets People Where They Are

God's faithful response despite human failure

The Garden (Genesis 1-3)

Genesis chapters one and two lay the foundation for the overarching story of scripture through the two creation narratives found in chapters one and two. Written in the style of ancient poetry, Genesis is filled with imagery and symbolism designed to help the listener understand how God sees them—their worth, their place, and their role in the world. Ancient creation stories always tied human value to the gods and described what was required of people in return. In the dark uncertainty of the ancient world, the pressing question on human minds was: *How must I relate to the gods in order to survive in this world?*

In the dominant Mesopotamian myths, humanity was little more than a disposable servant class to the gods—valuable only for the service they could provide. Chaos ruled over order, fate over intention, and humans were an afterthought in the minds of the divine.

Against this backdrop, Genesis paints an entirely different picture: a beautiful garden representing life and relationship with God. Here is a God utterly unlike the others—a God who creates deliberately and methodically from a vision of what He desires. Humanity is not a reluctant afterthought but the crescendo of His plan, made by design as a reflection of the Creator. For the first hearers, these opening chapters would have been earthshattering, something utterly unique.

The Two Trees: Central Biblical Metaphor

Tree of Life

- **Represents:** Faith, trust, relationship with God
- **Characteristics:** Vulnerability, dependence on God for identity/worth
- **God's invitation:** "Let me hold your security, value, purpose, and belonging"
- **Result:** "Naked and felt no shame" - complete security in God's love

Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

- **Represents:** Control, certainty, self-reliance, religion
- **Characteristics:** Fear, shame, hiding, blaming, performance-based relationship
- **Human desire:** "Give me the knowledge so I can control my relationship with God"
- **Result:** Spiritual exhaustion, never enough certainty

Reality: You can't have both Faith and Religion - they are two different stories.

Notes:

Part 1 - God Has a Dream

At the center of this garden stands the Tree of Life. The source of life itself—the wellspring of human value, worth, and purpose—flows from trusting God’s love for His creation. To feed one’s soul from the Tree of Life is to live in trust. This trust makes possible the most genuine relationship, where one can be truly vulnerable yet completely alive in who they are, and with God and others. Genesis captures this in the closing line of chapter two: *“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* Vulnerable, being truly themselves and yet unashamed, they could relate to one another without fear. This is God’s dream for the creation He loves: people with freedom of will, filled with purpose, their souls sustained by the grace of their Creator.

Yet by the very nature of the dominion and freedom this a part of God’s design, there must also be another tree. The Tree of The Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree recognizes humanity’s freedom to hold their worth and identity for themselves, apart from God. It is not, in itself, evil—rather, it is deeply symbolic of control and certainty. It is a story of how humanity will nurture it’s soul.

- God creates humanity in His image with free will
- "Rule over" - dominion given as blessing, not burden (Gen 1:26)
- "It is very good" - God's delight in creation (Gen 1:31)
- God wants to bless people
- God _____ His creation.

"Rule over" in Genesis 1:26 reveals that free will is not a terrible thing - it's how we reflect God's image and can choose to love Him.

Ancient Near Eastern Context

Enuma Elish (1200-1900 BC)

- Babylonian creation narrative about Marduk
- Seven tablets of creation.
- Universe begins as watery chaos (Tiamat and Apsu)
- Marduk kills Tiamat, creates earth and heaven from her body
- Humans created from blood and dust to do the work the gods didn’t want to do
- Note: Marduk later took the name Bel (Semitic "lord" = Hebrew "Baal")

Epic of Atrahasis (2000-6000 BC)

- Sumerian creation narrative
- Older gods burden younger gods with forced labor
- Younger gods rebel by burning their tools
- Solution: Create humans from clay, blood of Aw-ilu, and divine spit
- Humans created as lemmings: maintain rivers, canals, crops, animals

Part 2 - God Chooses What He Wants (Genesis 2)

- The Garden as symbol of life and relationship
- The Tree of Life represents love and _____
- Tree of Life at the center - nourish yourself in relationship with me
- "Naked and felt no shame" - complete vulnerability without fear
- "Naked" *ârom* [ah'rôm].

The Story: God continually moves toward humanity, inviting us into a relationship of faith and love.

Notes:

Part 3 - People Choose What They Want (Genesis 3)

- "Shrewd" *ârûm* [a'rum] - The capacity to achieve desired outcomes through one's own intellect and cunning, maintaining control through calculated self-reliance.
- Tragedy: Instead of choosing to be **with** God, they choose to be **like** God
- Eyes opened but they see their nakedness (comparison, shame, fear)
- Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil is about _____ and _____
- First responses: cover up, and hide
- Second response: blame, control, and deceit
- Adam names Eve (control) - no control existed in relationship before sin

Alternate Story: We need to move toward God seeking to please Him out of our own power. This is a story about control and certainty. This is Religion.

Notes:

Part 4 - God Meets People Where They Are (Genesis 3)

- God's first move: clothes them (care in their shame)
- No curse on the man or woman - curses the ground and serpent
- Redemption story begins immediately in Genesis 3
- God will not allow people to control Him
- Genesis 3:22 "Stretched out" *shalach* [ja'laχ]
- Genesis 3:23 "Send him out" *shalach* [ja'laχ]
- Genesis 4—God goes with them

Reality: You can't have both Faith and Religion - they are two different stories.

Abraham's Story (Genesis 12-17)

In Genesis 12, we see God's expansive vision unfold in concentric circles of blessing that begins with one man and extends to the entire world. God approaches Abraham—who has done nothing to earn this favor and is actually worshiping other gods at the time—with an unconditional promise: "I'm going to bless you." But God's dream doesn't stop with Abraham. The blessing flows outward: first to Abraham personally, then to his family, then that family will grow into a great nation, and ultimately that nation will become a source of blessing to all the nations of the world.

This pattern reveals God's heart—He doesn't just want to rescue individuals, but to create a people through whom His love and blessing can reach every corner of the earth. What's remarkable is that this entire global restoration plan begins not with human initiative or worthiness, but with God's unmerited choice to move toward one ordinary person and say, "Let me bless you." It's the Tree of Life in action: God as the source of blessing, freely given, designed to overflow from one person to the whole world.

Part 1 - God Has a Dream (Genesis 12)

- God moves toward Abraham (who worshiped other gods - Joshua 24:2)
- "I want to bless you" - unconditional blessing
- **Question:** What has Abraham done? **Nothing!**
- **Question:** What tree is this? _____

Notes:

Part 2 - God Chooses What He Wants (Genesis 15)

(For more please listen to BEMA EP 10 - 'Walking the Blood Path')

- Stars in the sky promise: "So shall your offspring be"
- In what way was this Tree of Life?

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- Abraham believed and "God credited it to him as righteousness"
 - **Question:** What has Abraham done to earn this? **Nothing!**
 - **One-sided covenant ceremony:** God alone walks between the halved animals
 - Message: "Even if you don't live up to your end, I will still be faithful"

Notes:

Part 3 - People Choose What They Want (Genesis 16)

After ten years waiting for God's promise, Sarah suggests Abraham sleep with her servant Hagar to finally have a child. They weren't rebelling—they genuinely wanted to advance God's plan. But in trying to help God through human effort, they shifted from faith to control, from the Tree of Life to the Tree of Knowledge. The result? A mess still affecting the Middle East today. Even good intentions can lead us astray when we choose certainty over trust.

- "A Really Bad Good Idea" - Hagar and Ishmael
 - Ten years pass without pregnancy
 - Sarah's plan: "Abraham should sleep with my servant"
 - **Question:** Are they trying to sin? Or are they seeking to advance God's plan?
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- In what is this the Tree of Knowledge of Good, and Evil?

Notes:

Part 4 - God Meets People Where They Are (Genesis 17)

- At age 99, after they've made a mess
- "As for me, this is my covenant with you" - God remains faithful
- Gives them new names as if they had succeeded
- They have Isaac - God's faithfulness despite their failure

Big Story: God keeps moving toward us, inviting us into a relationship of faith and love. People keep trying to move toward God with certainty and control out of their own power.

Question: Which story will you trust?

Notes:

Mount Sinai: The Wedding That Wasn't (Exodus 6, 19-21)

Part 1 - God has a Dream (Exodus 6:7-8)

God makes a marriage proposal to Israel through Moses: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God...I will bring you to the land." This isn't typical religious language—it's intimate, romantic covenant speech. "I will take you" is suitor language, while "I will bring you to the land" is ancient groom-speak for preparing a home. God wasn't just rescuing them from slavery; He wanted a wedding—direct, intimate relationship with His people.

Marriage proposal: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" Exodus 6:7

- Very intimate language - not typical priest-to-people communication
- "I will bring you to the land" - groom speak (preparing a home)

Question: Which tree is this? _____

Notes:

Part 2 - God Chooses What He Wants (Exodus 19)

(For more please listen to BEMA EP 21 - 'Under the Chuppah')

- Engagement - Exodus 19:6-17
- Vision: "A nation of priests" - direct relationship with God for everyone
- Not the typical system: God → Priest → People
- God's desire: "I want all of you to have direct access"
- The people say yes - **we have an engagement**

Wedding Scene Elements:

1. Engagement agreement (Gen 19:6-8)
2. "Be pure" - no consummation yet (Gen 19:12)
3. Bride prepares herself (Gen 19:14)
4. Trumpet blast - wedding announcement (Gen 19:16)
5. Moses brings people to the mountain (Gen 19:17)
6. Ten Commandments as wedding vows

Notes:

Part 3 - People Choose What They Want (Exodus 20)

The tragic response (Exodus 20:18-19):

- "When the people saw thunder and lightning... they stayed at a distance"
- "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die"
- Translation: "Moses, you be the priest. Give us the knowledge of what to do."

Question: What tree is that? _____

Notes:

"This is one of the saddest verses in the entire Bible. They stayed at a distance."

Part 4 - God Meets People Where They Are (Exodus 20:24, 21:1)

- "If all you'll give me is friendship, I'll take it"
- "Make an altar... I will come to you and bless you"
- "These are the laws you are to set before them"
- **The law was never the goal** - it was God's kindness to those who won't trust Him
- First time we get the Mosaic law is **after** people refuse relationship

Notes:

Jesus: The Climax (Prophets through Hebrews 9)

Part 1 - God Has a Dream

Gospel message through the prophets:

- Isaiah 49:6 “The Servant is made *a light for all nations*, so that God’s salvation reaches *the ends of the earth*.”
- Isaiah 42:1 & 6 “The chosen Servant will bring justice to all nations and is given *as a light for the gentiles*.”
- Zechariah 9:10 “The coming king *will proclaim peace to all nations*, his rule reaches *to the ends of the earth*.”
- Amos 9:11-15 “the fallen tent of David raised up again”
- Joel 3:17-21 “a cleansed Eden”
- Zephaniah 3:9-20
- Zephaniah 14 “New Jerusalem”, “New Temple”, “New River of Life”

Part 2 - God Chooses What He Wants

Jesus shows up in person!

- Demonstrates inclusive love: Roman soldier, Samaritans, outcasts
- Embodies the Tree of Life

Part 3 - People Choose What They Want

- **Height of religious achievement:** Pharisees and Essenes
- In what way is this the Tree of Knowledge, Good & Evil?

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- Their belief: “When enough people are holy, God will send the Kingdom”
 - **Question:** Have they done this in rebellion and desire to sin? _____
 - **Blood sacrifice system** at its peak - but it never cleared the conscience (Hebrews 9:6-7)
 - There had to be atonement by shedding blood.

Role of Blood Systems in Ancient Religion

Across cultures—Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Roman, Jewish—blood sacrifice was universally understood as necessary to appease divine anger and atone for human failure. Blood represented life itself, the most precious offering to bridge the gap between holy gods and sinful humanity. This wasn't unique to Judaism; every major ancient religion required blood to deal with guilt and restore relationship with the divine.

Hebrews 9:7 captures this reality: the high priest "never entered without blood." Yet this system, as universal as it was, could never clear the conscience or remove the shame that drove people to hide from God in the first place

Hebrew Blood Rituals

1. Olah (עולה) - Burnt Offering

Blood ritual: dashing blood against the altar - the blood was collected in bowls and thrown/dashed against all sides of the altar base

2. Chatat (חטאת) - Sin Offering

Blood ritual: This offering differs from the others in the special treatment of the blood of the animal. For priest's sin: Blood sprinkled seven times before the veil

- For ruler's sin: Blood put on the horns of the altar with the priest's finger
- For common person: Blood applied to altar horns
- Remaining blood poured at the base of the altar

3. Asham (אשם) - Guilt Offering

Blood ritual: Similar to sin offering - blood dashed against the altar on all sides

4. Shelamim (שלמים) - Peace Offering

Blood ritual: Blood thrown/dashed against all sides of the altar

5. Pesach (פסח) - Passover Sacrifice

Blood ritual: Take a sprig of hyssop, dip it in the bowl containing the animal's blood, and wipe the blood on the doorposts and the beam above the door of your house

- In Egypt: Blood painted on doorposts and lintels
- In Temple times: the blood was sprinkled on the altar

6. Yom Kippur (יום כיפור) - Day of Atonement Sacrifices

This involved the most complex blood rituals:

Par Kohen Gadol (פר כהן גדול) - High Priest's Bull: he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat

- Blood sprinkled on the mercy seat seven times
- Blood sprinkled before the mercy seat seven times

Se'ir L'Adonai (שעיר לה') - Goat for the Lord: The blood of the first goat was sprinkled on the ark

- Same blood sprinkling pattern as the bull
- Blood mixed with bull's blood
- Combined blood applied to altar horns
- Sprinkled on altar seven times

7. Korban Tamid (קרבן תמיד) - Daily Offering

Blood ritual: Blood collected in vessels (mizrakot) and dashed on two corners of the altar so it would reach all four sides

8. Korban Yoledet (קרבן יולדת) - Childbirth Offering

Blood ritual: Standard procedure - blood dashed against altar

- According to Leviticus 12, a woman who gives birth to a son remains impure for a week, and afterwards immerses in a body of water to purify herself
- If a woman cannot afford to bring a lamb, she must bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons.
 - "When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord... and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons'" - Luke 2:22-24

Other Cultures Blood Systems

Aztec Blood System (1345 AD - 1521 AD)

- **Debt Payment Theory:** Humans owed a "blood debt" to gods who sacrificed themselves to create humanity
- **Gladiatorial Sacrifice (Tlahuahuanaliztli):** Captured warrior fought against multiple Aztec warriors while tied to stone
 - Blood collected as it flowed during combat - called 'harvest' wars
 - Enemy warriors' blood was considered more potent than common victims' blood
- **Blood-soaked paper offerings:** Bark paper soaked in blood burned to send messages to gods

Mesopotamia Blood System (1500 BC - 194 BC)

- **Substitute King Ritual:** A relatively rare ancient Mesopotamian religious rite of human sacrifice performed to safeguard the king from danger perceived to come from evil omens - once poisoned, their blood was shown as proof of death
- **Scapegoat Atonement:** Sins of individuals were transferred to an animal driven away into the desert.
- **Sacrificial Blood for Divine Communication:** Babylonians believed they could appease gods and avoid divine wrath through blood offering.

Celtic Blood System (500 BC - 100 AD)

- **Druidic Blood Power:** Druids believed human blood had immense power for ceremonies, killing victims to examine blood flow for divination
- **Blood for Divine Balance:** Blood rituals honored spirits of nature and seasons, maintaining balance between human and divine realms for land fertility.
- **Blood as Life Force:** Celtic druids viewed spilled blood as essential for cosmic order and divine communication with supernatural governing spirits.

Roman Blood System (40 AD - 400 AD)

- **Gladiator Blood Medicine:** Romans drank gladiator blood to cure epilepsy, believing the "warm, living blood" provided essential life force.
- **Blood for Dead Atonement:** Gladiatorial games were funeral blood-rites to appease dead spirits, with human blood purifying deceased souls.
- **Blood as Scapegoat Power:** Gladiators were pharmakos (scapegoats), their spilled blood curing illness while quieting evil spirits.
- **Blood for State Atonement:** Roman sacrificial rituals transferred regenerative power of spilled blood to emperors and the state.

Part 4 - God Meets People Where They Are (Hebrews 9:6-14)

- The old system couldn't clear the conscience (Hebrews 9:9)
- It left people in shame and fear
- **Jesus enters our system** (Hebrews 9:12)
- **The greatest gift:** "I will die on your tree of knowledge of good and evil so that you can live from the fruit of my tree of life"

God continually moves toward humanity, inviting us into a relationship of faith and love.

- Will we trust the story?
- Will we see scripture through the lens of its story?

Hermeneutical Application

The story of Samson. Ruth (when you get to part 3, don't assume that they always choose the tree of knowledge of good and evil). The woman who washes Jesus' feet, who is Simon in this?

Key Questions for Bible Study:

1. Do I see one or both of the trees represented symbolically in this passage?
2. Am I reading this in a way that leads to faith/love or control/certainty?
3. If you ignore the meta-narrative, how could you misread the passage?
4. If you take the meta-narrative into account how could you interpret it?
5. Do you see any or all 4 parts meta-narrative patterns in this story?
 - a. Do I see God's Dream
 - b. Does God choose what He wants
 - c. What did people choose
 - d. Does God meet people where they are

Warning Signs of Misinterpretation:

- Interpretations that increase shame and fear
- Emphasis on behavior modification over heart transformation
- God portrayed as distant or punitive rather than pursuing
- Focus on human performance rather than divine grace

The Central Question: "Am I interpreting the Bible in a way that takes me towards the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or am I seeking to understand any passage in a way that actually takes me towards the tree of life instead?"

Reflection Questions

Easy/Starting Questions:

1. Which tree do you find yourself naturally drawn to and why?
2. Can you identify times when you've tried to "control" your relationship with God?
3. How does seeing the Bible as one unified story change how you read individual passages?
4. What does it mean to you that God "meets you where you are"?

Deeper Reflection:

1. How might your current struggles reflect the choice between the two trees?
2. In what ways do you see the four-part pattern playing out in your own spiritual journey?
3. How does understanding Jesus as entering "our system" change your view of the cross?
4. What would change in your daily life if you truly believed God's first move toward you is always one of care?

Application Questions:

1. How can you practically choose the Tree of Life in your current circumstances?
 2. What religious "rules" might you be using to avoid the vulnerability of faith?
 3. How can you extend the same "meeting people where they are" grace to others, as you see in the Bible?
 4. What aspects of your identity are you still trying to control rather than receive from God?
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Recommended Media:

Solomon, Marty (2023) *Asking Better Questions of the Bible*. NavPress

BEMA Podcast Episodes

Foundation Episodes:

- **Episode 0: "Introductory Lesson"** - Introductory conversation about the world of the Bible, and investigating the difference between Eastern and Western perspectives.
- **Episode 2: "Knowing When to Say "Enough""** - The story of the garden and what it's really getting at

Genesis and Origins:

- **Episode 4: "His Bow in the Clouds "** - Understanding the flood narrative in ancient context
- **Episode 5: "A Misplaced Curse"** - Noah's departure from the ark and tragedy that ensues

Abraham and Covenant:

- **Episode 9: "Letting Go"** - Genesis 12-14, covering the call of Abram and his initial adventures in the land of Canaan.
- **Episode 10: "Walking the Blood Path"** - The covenant ceremony and its meaning

Mount Sinai and Law:

- **Episode 22: "Under the Chuppah"** - Israel's arrival at Sinai and the covenant relationship (Exodus 19-23)
- **Episode 23: "Falling on Joyful Faces"** - Construction of the Tabernacle as a place of rest (Exodus 24-40)
- **Episode 24: "Creating a Space"** - What the Tabernacle means for our pursuit of God

Historical Context:

- **Episode 74 - 81: "Silent Years"** - This run of episodes explores the historical context surrounding Jesus' world - the geopolitical climate, cultural divisions that shaped first-century Judaism, and the specific environment Jesus entered during His ministry.

Jesus and Gospel:

- **Episodes 83 - 87: The Gospels** - A brief approach of the Gospels, who wrote them and who they were written to.

Glossary of Terms

Canon: What is sacred or God-breathed; the collection of books considered authoritative Scripture.

Christocentric Hermeneutic: An approach to interpreting Scripture that keeps Jesus at the center, using His life, death, and resurrection as the lens through which all other biblical texts are understood.

Doctrine: Self-contained beliefs that emerge from theological study and interpretation.

Hermeneutic: The method and principles used for interpreting and applying Scripture; acts as a lens for reading and understanding the Bible.

Inspiration: The belief that God worked through biblical authors - in the dynamic view, God picked reputable people and worked in such a way that their distinct personalities and writing styles were preserved while ensuring the text expressed God's intended message.

Meta-narrative: The overarching story that connects all the individual stories, laws, poems, and teachings in Scripture into one unified account of God's relationship with humanity.

Theology: Discussion and dialogue about God based on scriptural study and interpretation.

Tree of Life: Metaphor representing a life of faith and trust in God, where identity, security, and worth come from God's love rather than human performance. Characterized by vulnerability and dependence on God.

Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil: Metaphor representing the human desire for control and certainty, attempting to earn relationship with God through knowledge and performance. The heart of religion.

Covenant Ceremony: Ancient ritual where parties to an agreement would walk between halved animals, symbolically saying "may this happen to me if I break this covenant."

Nation of Priests: God's original intention for Israel where all people would have direct access to God rather than requiring priestly mediation.

Blood System: Ancient religious understanding that sin required the shedding of blood for atonement, common across many cultures in the ancient world.

Graphe: Greek word for "scripture" meaning written text or words.

Logos: Greek word for "word" meaning spoken, not referring to written text.

Biblios: Greek word for "book" referring to a single book or scroll.

Biblia: Plural form meaning "books" - the Bible is actually 66 different scrolls, letters, and books written by 40+ authors over 1,500 years.