



# One God, One Story

SESSION THREE

Validation of the Bible  
as One Story



# Narrative Structure



- Setting/Prologue

- The setting provides the necessary background for understanding the events and details that occur within the story. Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 35.

- It often introduces the “ideal” by articulating the protagonist’s desires.

Charles Baylis, “The Biblical Story: The Individual Rule of the Christ through the Nation of Israel,” unpublished class notes for DM205 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Winter Session, 2014), 14.




# Narrative Structure



- Initial Conflict/Inciting Incident

- A problem is introduced that upsets the status of the setting.
- Concerning the fall of man in Genesis 3, C.S. Lewis said that this story “fulfills the condition of great story better perhaps than any other, for, more than any other, it leaves things where it did not find them.” C.S. Lewis. *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 133.





# Setting, Initial Conflict and Identifying Plot



# Discovering Plot



- The plot is discovered by asking, “What is the conflict in this story and how is it resolved?” Sidney Greidanus, “Detecting Plotlines: The Key to Preaching the Genesis Narratives,” *CTJ* 43 (2008), 65.

- The plot is then constructed by the meaningful arrangement of stories that, through their interconnection, carry the plotline. Shimon Bar-Efrat. *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2004). 93.



# Narrative Structure



- Rising Action
- This section of a narrative traces the activity of the protagonist to solve the problem created by the inciting incident.

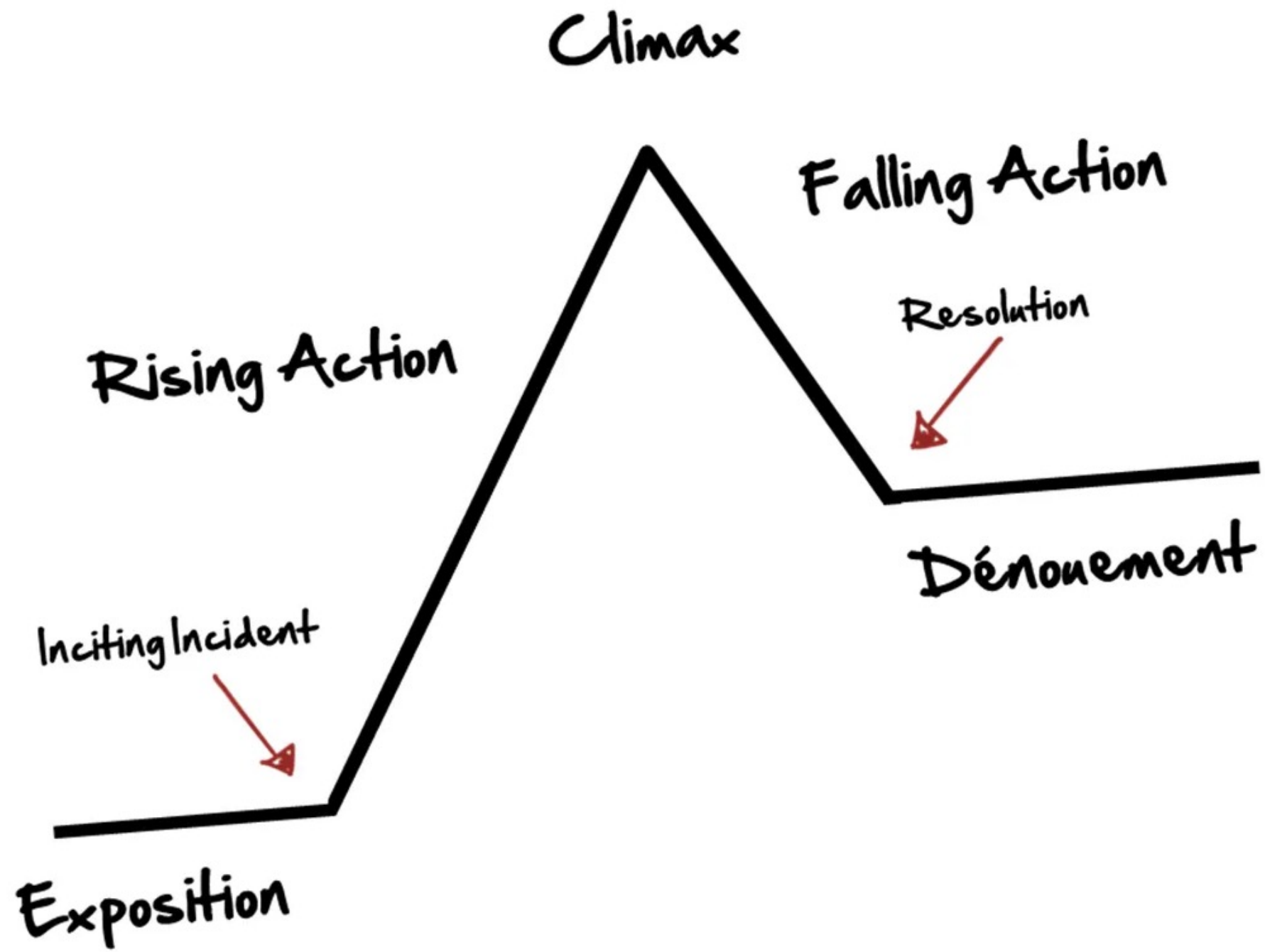


# Narrative Structure



- Climax

- This is a major turning point in the narrative because the conflict and rising action reach a tipping point.
- The highest point of action...when the resolution of the conflict becomes a foregone conclusion. Adam and Missy Andrews. *Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education* (Rice, WA: The Institute for Excellence in Writing, 2004), 6.
- The falling action follows the climax, whereas everything prior to the climax is moving towards that event.





# Narrative Structure



- Resolution

- The point in a literary work at which the chief dramatic complication is worked out.

Merriam-Webster, (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

- This is where the tension in the narrative breaks and the philosophy or plan of both parties (protagonist and antagonist) are either vindicated or disproven.



# Narrative Structure



- Epilogue:
  - The final outcome of the main dramatic complication in a **literary work**. Merriam-Webster, (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).
  - This is where the reader finds the results of the victory that re-establish the purpose of the **protagonist**. Charles P. Baylis, “The Story of the Bible: Introduction.” Unpublished class notes for DM 205 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Winter Session, 2014), 14.





# Types of Narrative

Episodic Narrative or Dramatic Plot?



# Episodic Narrative



- Constructed as narrative by a succession of loosely connected incidents rather than by an integrated plot. Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms



# (Dramatic) Plot



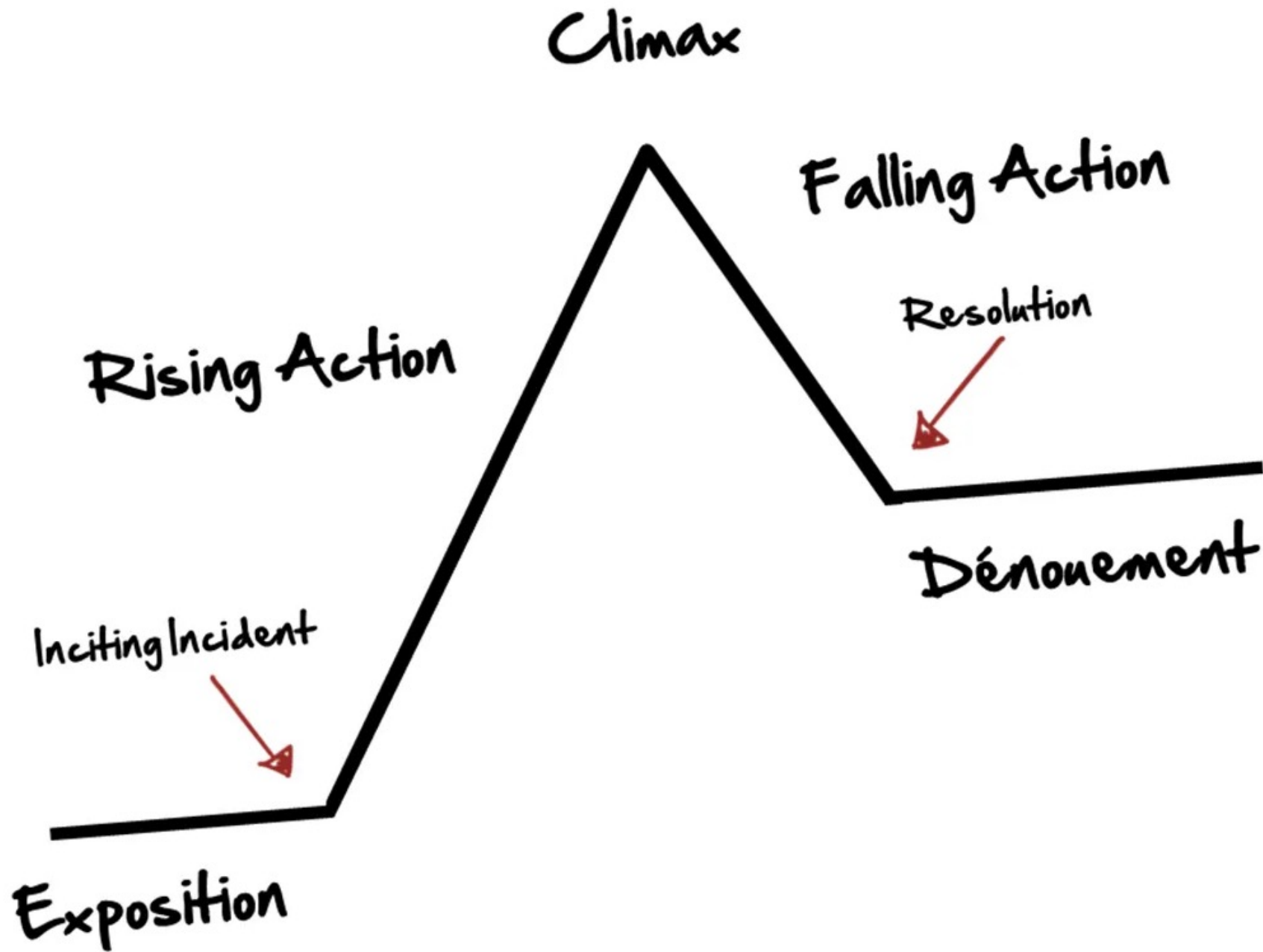
- The pattern of events and situations in a narrative or dramatic work, as selected and arranged both to emphasize relationships—usually cause and effect—between incidents and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader... Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms
- Individual stories are connected by an overarching plot progression that is developed through the individual narratives.
- In the case of the Bible, this overarching plot progression is enhanced through the nonnarrative portions of Scripture and sometimes through the narrative portions that are running parallel or supplemental to the main plotline.





# A Case for a Metanarrative of Scripture





Literary  
Structure  
at a  
Macro  
Level



# Literary Structure: Macro Level



- “The first question is whether there is a progression of plot. Specifically does the setting (Genesis 1–2), and the failure or conflict (Genesis 3), impact the rest of the Bible? Put another way, does the rest of the Bible describe the reaction to, or is it a result of, Genesis 1–3?” Charles P. Baylis, “The Story of the Bible: Introduction.” Unpublished class notes for DM 205 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Winter Session, 2014), 12.



# Literary Structure: Macro Level



- “The Bible possesses an overarching narrative unity. Taken as a whole, the Bible tells a story that has a beginning, a middle and an end.” Leland Ryken. *Words of Delight* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 31.



# Literary Structure: Macro Level



- “The canon of scripture consists of sixty-six books, yet the combination tells a complete story. This story has a beginning, middle and end.” Elliot Johnson, *A Dispensational Biblical Theology*, 32.



# Literary Structure: Macro Level



- “Israel’s ancient Scriptures are framed with a narrative, an unfinished narrative of a certain shape and type. [When you read the Old Testament]...you are still left with a sense that this story is supposed to be going somewhere but that it hasn’t gotten there yet.” N.T. Wright. *How God Became King* (New York: Harper One, 2016), 66.



# Literary Structure: Macro Level



- “Speaking of the Bible as one story is not to say that it is like a single volume with a tightly woven story line with no loose ends...Yet in its basic overall structure the Bible does tell an overarching story.” Michael W. Goheen. “The Urgency of Reading the Bible as One Story,” *Theology Today*: Vol 64 (2008), 473.



# Literary Structure: Macro Level

- A first heaven and earth (Genesis 1)
- B Husband and wife (Genesis 2)
- C Judgment pronounced on Satan (Genesis 3)
- C' Judgment executed on Satan (Revelation 20)
- B' Husband and wife (Revelation 21)
- A' Last heaven and earth (Revelation 22)

W. Graham Scroggie, *Ruling Lines of Progressive Revelation* (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), xix. See also Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, 19, and Miles V. Van Pelt, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 34.



# Interdependence



- Almost every book that follows the Torah references it in some way, thereby implying literary and theological dependence.
- Sometimes interlocking devices are used to link books.
- **Allusion:** “A literary allusion is a literary device utilized by an author whereby allusive textual markers are placed into the alluding text so that the rhetorical relationship between the two contexts can be determined and the meaning created by the allusion can then be imported into the author’s developing textual meaning.” David R. Klingler. *Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of Literary Allusions in the Hebrew Bible* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 75.



# Literary Features: Themes



- E.g., the *Creation Mandate*
- Genesis 1:26-28
- Genesis 9 :1-6
- Psalm 8
- Hebrews 2:5-8
- 1 Corinthians 15:25-28



# Literary Features: Progressive Revelation

- A concept introduced early in the biblical story is developed with increasing clarity and specificity as the storyline unfolds. E.g., “Seed.”
- Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 21:12; 22:17-18; 28:13-15; 49:10; Galatians 3:16; Revelation 5:1-10.
- “As regards Genesis 3:15 we are now in a better position to appreciate (a) why some Jewish sources offer a messianic interpretation of this verse, (b) why certain New Testament allusions to Genesis 3:15 see it as relating to the Messiah, and (c) why this passage was viewed by at least some of the early church fathers as the first announcement of the gospel ...” T. Desmond Alexander. “From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis,” in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 61:1 (1989), 19.



# Literary Features: Closure and Unresolved Conflict



- Unresolved conflict leaves the reader waiting for a resolution.
- “...individual episodes are not wholly self-contained but derive part of their suspense from the ongoing story of Abraham’s quest for a son.” Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 64.
- As the Old Testament narrative of Scripture unfolds, one begins to realize that closure and resolution are presented as a future hope.
- The Old Testament ends without any real sense of closure.

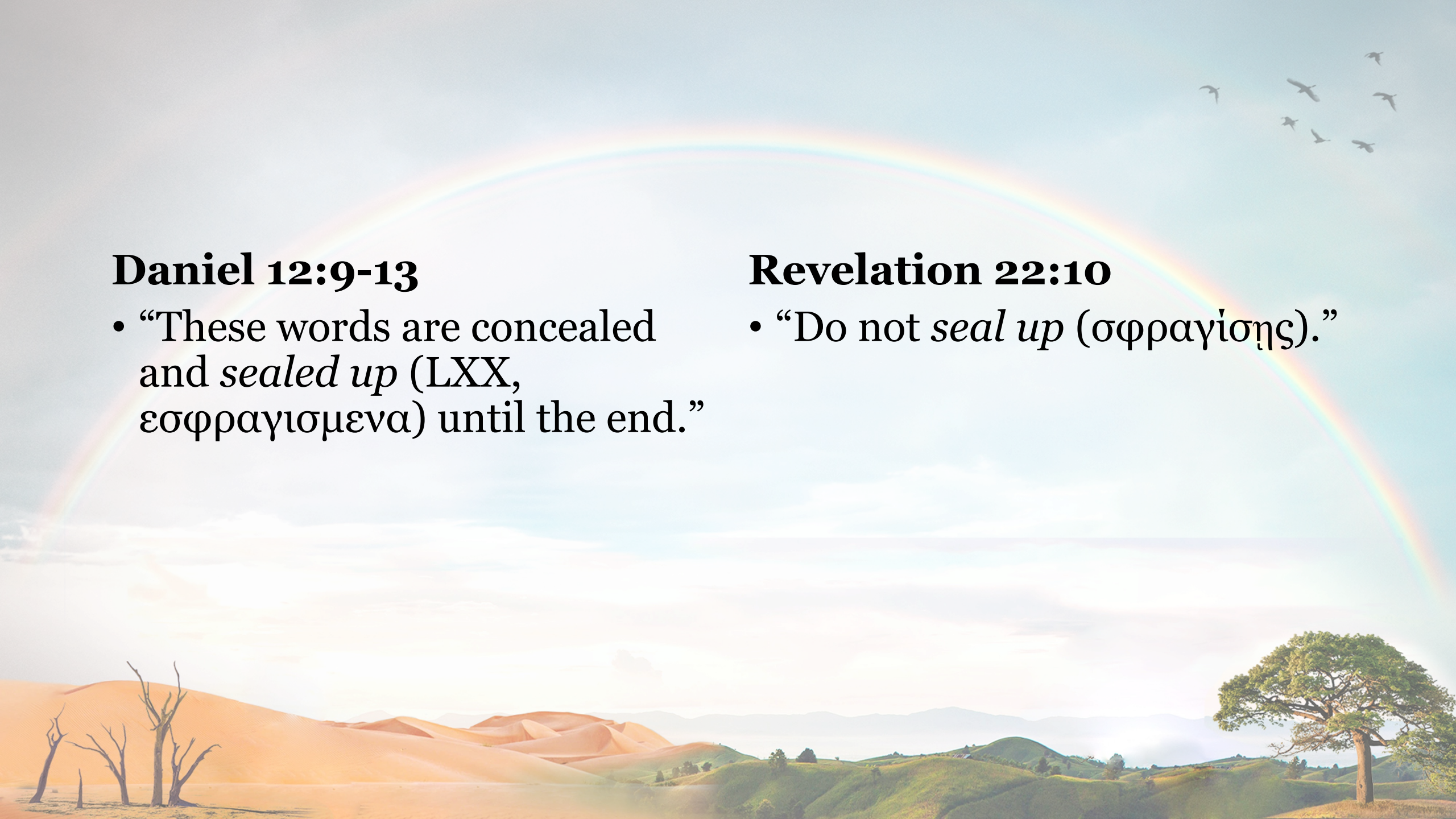


# Literary Features: Closure and Unresolved Conflict

- “The Greek Bible announces its closure with a strong apocalyptic finale. Daniel is handed a sealed book to be kept ‘until the time of the end’ (12:14). The canon of the Greek Scriptures is simultaneously sealed off.” Edwards then compares the ending of Daniel with that of Revelation to show the ultimate closure of the entire canon of Scripture. “In a direct allusion to the ending of Daniel, the author then reveals that his book is not to be kept a secret, and, finally, the closure itself is proclaimed . . . The final ‘Amen’ is the most appropriate ending there could be: it is both a declaration of fact and a strong closural word.”

Diane T. Edwards, “From the Garden to the City: Closure in the Bible,” in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text*, ed. Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier (London and Toronto: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 115.





## **Daniel 12:9-13**

- “These words are concealed and *sealed up* (LXX, εσφραγισμενα) until the end.”

## **Revelation 22:10**

- “Do not *seal up* (σφραγίσης).”



# The Claims of Christ



- Jesus recognized the literary unity of Scripture as being centered upon Himself (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).
- “We believe that all Scriptures center about the Lord Jesus Christ in His person and work in His first and second coming, and hence that no portion, even of the Old Testament, is properly read, or understood, until it leads to Him.” DTS Doctrinal Statement, Article I, the Scriptures.





# The Parts and the Whole



# Ways that Metanarrative Should Impact Interpretation



- The story as a whole casts light on the particulars.



<b>New beginning with Noah*</b>	<b>New beginning with Abraham</b>
Genesis 8:15-9:9	Genesis 12:1-7
Then God said to Noah (8:15)	The LORD had said to Abram (12:1)
Come out from the ark (8:16)	Leave your country (12:1)
Noah came out of the ark (8:18)	Abram left (12:4)
Then Noah built an altar to the LORD (8:20)	[Abram] built an altar there to the LORD (12:7)
Then God blessed Noah (9:1)	And I [God] will bless you (12:2)
“Be fruitful and increase” (9:1)	“I will make you into a great nation” (12:2)
“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants: (9:9)	“To your offspring I will give this land” (12:7)

\*John H. Sailhamer, ed. Frank Gaebelain. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. II.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 91.



Genesis 1	Genesis 9	Genesis 12*
Adam – God’s Man to carry out God’s plan on earth	Noah – God’s Man to carry out God’s plan on earth	Abraham – God’s Man to carry out God’s plan on earth
Blessed	Blessed	Bless
Fruitful and multiply/fill the earth	Fruitful and multiply/fill the earth	Descendants as numerous as the stars
Given the garden of Eden		Given the land of Canaan
Walked with God	Walked with God (6:9)	Walked before God (17)

\*1 Gordon J. Wenham. *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 37.

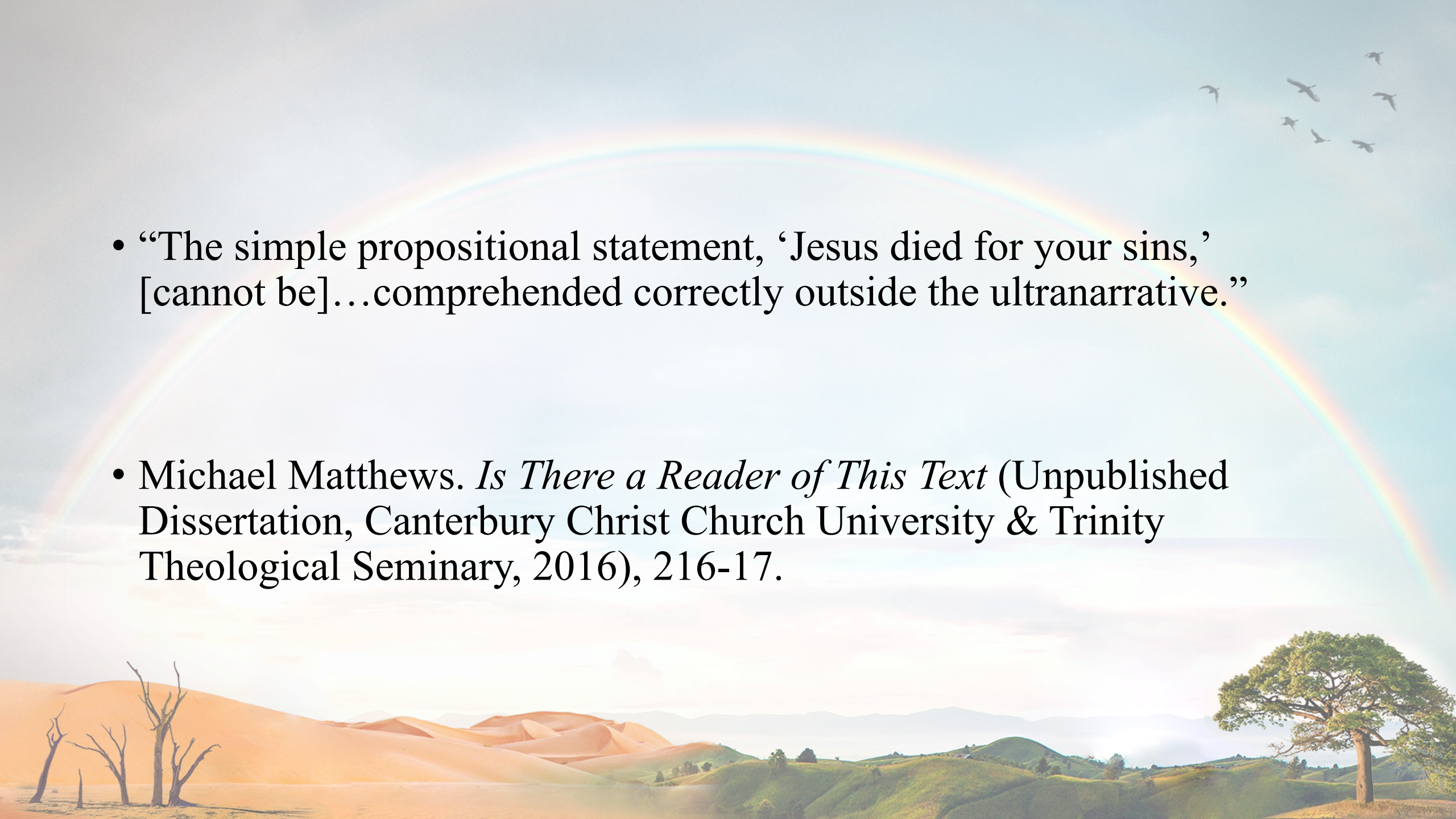


# Metanarrative and Interpretation



- Words have meaning in context; context is not limited to a passage or even an individual book of the Bible.



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- “The simple propositional statement, ‘Jesus died for your sins,’ [cannot be]...comprehended correctly outside the ultranarrative.”
  - Michael Matthews. *Is There a Reader of This Text* (Unpublished Dissertation, Canterbury Christ Church University & Trinity Theological Seminary, 2016), 216-17.



# Metanarrative and Interpretation



- Words have meaning in context; context is not limited to a passage or even an individual book of the Bible.
- E.g., Matt 3:17 cf. Heb 1:5



# Metanarrative and Interpretation



- The books of the Bible must first be seen as individual literary units that were intended to be understood as such. Books carried a specific message to a specific audience.



# Metanarrative and Interpretation



- As God progressively revealed Himself and His plan, certain themes and motifs are developed to greater clarity and specificity.
- The metanarrative of Scripture can bring greater clarity, depth and richness to something that was previously revealed.
- The metanarrative allows us to see the significance of a truth that may not have been fully appreciated when first given.
- Until the completion of the biblical story, some tensions will remain unresolved and themes undeveloped.



# Cautions and Other Considerations



- Though we are privileged to have the entire word of God, we must be careful not to read into earlier texts and understanding that was not there originally.
- The Bible contains many types of literature (not just narrative). In our study of Scripture, we must read each genre according to its own style and characteristics.



# Cautions and Other Considerations



- Nevertheless, even the books that are non-narrative occur within a narrative context.
- With the completed canon, we are in a unique position to understand God's word. We know how the grand story will end!