

Freshening Up Your Bible Study with Dr. Jim Coakley

Bookends

Introduction

The Bible does not communicate in a random haphazard fashion but is artistically structured!

Bookend Definition

The repetition of a concept, clause, or sentence at the beginning and end to tie a message together like bookends. This feature does help to establish literary boundaries and it does provide a sense of closure to a composition based on this “wrap around” element. This technique is also known as inclusio, bracketing or envelope structure. This can happen on the verse, paragraph, chapter, section or book level.

Examples:

Mark's Gospel:

- 1) in Mark's gospel he reminds his readers in the opening chapter that when John the Baptist baptized Jesus that he saw “the heavens being torn open” (**Mark 1:10**) and then at the end of his gospel he relays in the crucifixion scene that the “curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (**Mark 15:38**). These two downward “tearings” bookend the public ministry of Jesus and give a **divine sense of approval** to the whole life and ministry of Christ.
- 2) In addition to this example there are other bookends in the gospel of Mark: a verbal declaration that Jesus is the Son of God (**Mark 1:11** and the Centurion in **15:39**). The technical term for this literary device is inclusion

Matthew's Gospel:

- 1) Matthew's gospel contains another such bookend with a focus on the “with us” God. In **Matthew 1:23** it reads “they shall call his name Immanuel (which means God with us)” and in the last verse of the book Jesus announces to His disciples “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” This inclusion accentuates the theme that **God is present with us in the person of Jesus Christ** is indeed a key theme in the book.

Other examples:

- 1) Gen 1-3 with Rev 19-22
- 2) Psalm 8:1 with 8:9
- 3) Amos 1:2 with 9:3
- 4) Luke 2:1 and Acts 28:19
- 5) John 1:12 and John 20:30-31
- 6) Romans 1:1-7 with Romans 16:25-27

How to Freshen up your Bible Study

- 1) Intentionally look for repeated elements at the beginning and endings of your Bible reading.
- 2) Once you detect repetition at the bookends ponder what thematic or artistic purposes may be subtly communicated.