

# THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

## Unit 1a Introduction and Course Overview

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Hello. My name is Dr. Steve Grusendorf and I'll serve as your instructor as we journey together through this course, Christian Narrative 1. I'm excited about our time together and the content that we'll cover. In this first session, I want to talk to you a bit about two things. First, I want to cover some of the philosophical underpinnings for our course. And then second, I want to review with you the student learning objectives for our course. You see, both the focus and the student learning objectives will give you a clearer picture of the direction it will take as well as the goals that we're seeking to achieve during our time together in this course.

So, let's first turn our attention to some of the philosophical underpinnings that are helping to develop and shape our course. First, this is a course that's built on the foundation of an intentionally Christian or biblical worldview. The word "worldview" is defined as that lens by which we interpret all other things in our lives. So a worldview is how we make sense of everything around us. And here's the interesting part. Everyone, either intentionally or unintentionally, exercises a worldview as they make the choices they do in their lives. It's true. So for example, take the decision to pursue more education as an adult. Certainly, you're not the only responsible adult that's taking online courses these days. But let me ask you a question. Why did you choose to take this course? Why not choose a course on economics or maybe a course that would further your professional career? Or if you are taking courses in addition to this one that do further your professional life, how did you decide to take this course and pursue both at the same time? Did you pray? Talk with a respected Christian friend or pastor? Choose on a whim? Maybe you're taking this course because you want to know more about the Christian faith. So in this case, how did you go about deciding to learn about faith in which you don't yet fully believe?

All of us go through life exercising a worldview, intentionally or otherwise. Now, one of the reasons for this is because a worldview is not an inherently spiritual idea per se. Rather, a worldview is a rational way that people try and relate to the world around them. This is why being Christian doesn't make you more, or less for that matter, likely to exercise an intentional worldview. However, if you are a Christian follower today and you decide and desire to live a full Christian life, then you need to begin to develop a Christian or biblical worldview. Now, we've already noted that a worldview is the lens by which we interpret all other things in our life. A biblical worldview is a worldview that then uses the Bible or Christian teaching as its interpretive lens. So you can expect for us to spend a good amount of time in the Scriptures because it is the Bible that's going to help us interpret our reality. In fact, in this course, we'll be working to develop a working biblical theology.

Now, biblical theology is simply the study of the things of God as revealed through the Scriptures. But theologian James K. Meade describes biblical theology with a little more eloquence than I do when he states it this way. "Biblical theology seeks to identify and understand the Bible's theological message and themes. It also seeks to understand how the Bible witnesses to those things and to whom and by whom it declares its message, so that the outcome of such investigation will ultimately lead us to hear what the Bible says about God's being, God's words, and God's actions, about God's relationship to all creation, especially humankind, and about the implications this divine human encounter has for the relationships between us as human beings."

One truth you'll need to embrace early on in this course is that the Bible reveals how we are to relate to God primarily through the medium of written words or written story. Now let's talk about story for just a minute. Do you have a favorite book? A favorite author? Maybe a favorite story? Sure, we all do. I have many favorites. Yet one particular favorite for me is a short story by Leo Tolstoy called "How Much

Land Does One Man Need?” If you look it up in Google, the short description attached to it says this: It’s a story about a man who, in his lust for land, forfeits everything. So let me give you the basic plot. Man makes a deal with the devil. Why? Because he wants to gain ownership of more land. He wants to be a rich farmer. But in trying to hold up his end of the bargain, the man dies before he gets any of his land. What’s the moral? A man only needs enough land to be buried in. For me, a profound, if not chilling, story.

But let me get back to the idea of story. You see, stories stick with us because we understand our own story in light of other stories. Now, some stories are bigger than others. That short story by Leo Tolstoy I shared a moment ago, it was written 130 years ago. And not too many of us are still eager today to find ways to acquire more land. But when it was written, that was an intensely important topic. But what about a bigger story like Lord of the Rings? Most of you watching this have at least heard of that epic saga written by J.R.R. Tolkien. Well, his story takes place in the mythical past. It has themes which, in many ways, seem timeless to us. Faithfulness, friendship, sacrifice, honor. The list goes on. And when we read through the pages of the Bible, what we need to understand is that we discover that the Bible is telling us a story, that the Bible has a metanarrative.

Now, a metanarrative is a term used to describe the belief that one singular, transcendent, all-encompassing story exists which helps us explain our history, our knowledge, and our experience. A metanarrative is simply a big story that helps to explain all the smaller stories contained within it. You see, the Bible tells one singular story that, when understood, better helps both you and I know how to live in relationship with God. Discourse is developed under the idea that a biblical metanarrative exists which helps explain our history, our knowledge, and our experience. A story that helps us understand where we’ve been and where we’re going.

Now, hopefully, if you’re thinking and haven’t fallen asleep yet while watching this video, you’ve formed a critical question in your mind. And hopefully that question is this: Is it truly possible to find a metanarrative threaded throughout the Bible? The Bible is, after all, not simply one book, but a compilation of 66 different books. Those various books were authored by 40 different individuals in three different languages over the course of some 1600 years from when the first was penned until the last, which, by the way, if you’re wondering, is approximately the timespan that exists between when Beowulf was written and when Harry Potter was written. Can we really expect to find a metanarrative housed within all of that? Yes. And here’s why.

The diversity of biblical origins does not endanger the presence of a metanarrative within the Bible. The Bible is an absolutely unique book that represents one author who had many co-authors. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man or woman of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” You see, the Bible is not simply a book written by a handful of human beings. Rather, it is a book that has been co-authored by God the Holy Spirit as well as various human beings. And this point is critical exactly because God was involved in the writing of every word of the Bible.

We can confidently say that the Bible has a single message in metanarrative. This is actually confirmed for us in 2 Peter 1:20. There it states that “no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The Bible is one message written by one author who had many co-authors. Now, maybe you’re wondering how it worked. Well, let’s simply follow the logic. It started when God spoke. So in Hebrews 1:1-2, we read that “Long ago, at many times

and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.” So God spoke by the prophets, and these prophets heard God speaking. So in turn, they communicated. That’s what we read in 2 Peter 1:20. “No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

The speaking of these prophets then was both verbal and written. And as they copied down the words of God with the help of the Holy Spirit, they did so divinely and accurately, so that we can agree with confidence in the words of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, that text we read just a moment ago. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man or woman of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” The Bible is a single accurate message which contains a metanarrative, that single story which helps you and I understand where we’ve been and where we’re going.

Now, as we close this first section dealing with the philosophical underpinnings of our course, let me simply say this. Because the Bible is God’s word to humanity, it represents the divine and only rule of Christian faith and practice, by the divine and only rule of Christian faith. I mean that the Bible defines our relationship with God. The Bible answers the ‘are’ question, who we are in relationship to God. Now, by the divine and only rule of Christian practice, I mean that the Bible defines our obligation to God as well. The Bible answers the ‘ought’ question. Who ought we to be in light of who God is? So in the Bible, we can discover both who we are and we ought to be as God’s created beings.

And by the way, if you’re wondering, here are the four main chapters in the biblical metanarrative. Chapter 1, Creation, the act of God creating all that there is. Chapter 2, The Fall, the act of humanity, God’s special creation, vandalizing God’s creation. Chapter 3, Restoration, the act of God rescuing humanity and the rest of creation from the repercussions of man’s vandalism. And chapter 4, Consummation, the act of God restoring humanity as well as the rest of creation back to its original and intended purposes. Our course together will focus on those first two chapters of God’s big story: Creation and The Fall.

So here’s our course description. This course explores the relationship of God to humanity from the vantage point of creation and fall. Attention is given to the nature, character, and work of God, (trinitarianism) in creating and governing the universe, especially in his relationship to humanity, creatures bearing the image of God (anthropology). Further, attention is given to the issue of sin (hamartiology). So if you were listening there, I used three big words in that description. That means that while we seek to understand both creation and the fall, we’ll also look at these three areas of theology. Trinitarianism, the three in one nature of God. That’s what we’ll cover in the rest of this unit. Then in our second unit, we’ll take a look at God’s act of creation. Next, you heard the word anthropology, which is a word for the study of humanity. So in Units 3 and 4, we’ll look at how God uniquely created us as human beings. Finally, you heard the word hamartiology. This is the theological word for the study of sin. So in Units 5 and 6, we’ll take an in-depth look at the sinister nature of sin and its devastating effect on the world.

As we journey along in this course, I will also seek to ensure that you meet the student learning objectives. In this course, there are three. First, I want you as students in this course to develop a basic knowledge of the creation and fall and the doctrines that are related to these two events. Second, I want you to have an opportunity to interact with the historical development of and contemporary expressions of the creation and fall in theology. Finally, I want you to be able to reflect on how the

doctrines of creation and fall impact your worldview and ministry. So by the end of our time together, I want you to be able to interact intelligently on these important biblical subjects. Makes sense?

As we close this session, let me give you the main teaching point that I've been trying to develop with you today. The Bible presents us with a metanarrative that helps us understand who God is, who we are, and which helps us make sense of the world in which we live. So let me ask you to consider for a moment one thought of reflection. Given that God has gone to such great lengths to communicate with us his story and where we fit into it, are we living each day intentionally and urgently? Intentional in that we seek to know and accomplish all that God wills. Urgently in that we seek to accomplish God's will in the moment. It's something for you and I to consider.