

Why You Should Read James Jordan's 'Through New Eyes'

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. I'm frequently asked to recommend books for people to read and particularly on specific subjects that I've spoken or given some thoughts upon.

Now often I find this very hard. I read a lot of books and the things that I take away from the books that I read are seldom the things that other people will take away from them. Furthermore, most of the books that I read are by people with whose position I find myself in significant disagreement. I learn a lot from them, but yet find that I could not recommend the book to someone else, nor could I be certain that they would take something helpful from it. There are a few books that have been particularly significant in my life, though.

Books that have helped me to rethink concepts in a very significant way. And perhaps one of the books that has been most significant in my life has been the book *Through New Eyes* by Jim Jordan.

Now this book is a book that I first encountered in my very late teens. I picked up the book and found it in my dad's library and looked through it and read a little bit into it.

[1 : 13] It was on the subject of a biblical way of viewing the world. And I thought, I'm into worldview. I'm into Christian worldview. This is a book that looks like it's made for me. And so I started to read the book and I realised this is a very strange book.

This does not read like the typical Christian worldview books that I've encountered. The typical Christian worldview books that I'd encountered were all about ideology, about ideas, about systems of thought and that sort of thing.

Whereas this book was about typology and symbolism and things like what animals meant within the world, where sun, moon and stars found their significance, or what trees and thorns were about, about the sacrificial system, about the ordering of the people around the tabernacle, or the meaning of the tabernacle and its different parts and instruments.

That's not what I think of when I think of biblical worldview. But yet, when I read the Bible, that's what I see. I see all these strange things, this focus particularly upon concrete things, upon things like the construction of the tabernacle, what the different parts should be made of, why you should sacrifice a particular animal for a particular person.

I mean, why should that animal be a goat for the ruler of the people? Why should it be a male goat? Why wouldn't a female sheep do? A ewe?

[2 : 42] Why wouldn't the tabernacle be left up for the people of Israel to decide and design? Why does it have to be designed according to the pattern on the mountain? Why is the significance of the different parts within it?

Why are certain things stipulated that they have to be made from a particular material? Or why is there so much emphasis on things like skin diseases in the book of Leviticus?

Or why do we find such an emphasis upon geographical features within the Bible? Or why do we have reference to all these different types of trees? Specific trees and trees being associated with different things.

What's all that about? And these are questions that many of us, when we first encounter our Bibles, feel a bit perplexed by. We think, this is a very strange book.

We come to this book with all sorts of questions about ideas and systems and about the right concepts that we should hold. And then we find ourselves reading about nocturnal emissions and the cutting off of foreskins.

[3 : 50] And it seems also very odd. And I read this first chapter of the book and at a certain point I just put it down. This isn't for me.

This isn't the sort of book that's answering the questions that are most pressing for me. And it seems also very strange. So unlike the sort of reading of scripture that I'm accustomed to. A reading of scripture that's focused very much upon straightforward narrative and upon the reading of the epistles in particular. And yet this is a book that has all this weird stuff on symbolism. A few years later I came back to the book. The book is, through new eyes, developing a biblical view of the world. I came back to the book and I found that it held my attention in ways that it hadn't before.

I've been studying the Bible in depth in the intervening period and it started to ring true to me. Lots of things still seem strange and unconvincing.

[4 : 53] But yet there were things within it that started to make sense. This is actually wrestling with the text of scripture in ways that so much that I'm reading on biblical worldview and Christian worldview is not.

This is a book that's actually trying to get under the skin of what scripture itself is saying. Trying to be attentive to scripture on its own terms. And so as I read the book I discovered that there was just so much within it that helped me to read the Bible better.

It gave me frameworks for thinking about things more clearly. It taught me, for instance, for the first time the concept of the Exodus pattern which eventually I went on to write a book on with Andrew Wilson.

So this is a book that was a very significant one within my thinking. It's about learning how to see the Bible in terms of patterns, in terms of development and maturation, about learning to understand symbols, about learning to understand themes.

Why is it that we see certain themes repeated? Why is it that men meet their wives at wells? What is the significance of that type scene that you have, described by someone like Robert Alter as well?

[6 : 02] This book also drew my attention to the connection between theology and literature. The need to read the Bible in a literary fashion in order to see its theological significance.

Now, I'd read a lot about the Bible as literature, but never seen anyone take that as seriously theologically as I did when I read James Jordan.

And so that was my first exposure to a way of reading the Bible that has revolutionised the way that I approach the text, that has shaped it in very deep and significant ways.

I've learnt so much from James Jordan. He's got a simplified introduction to the reading of the Bible that's available online from Word MP3, but also I think most of them are available on the Theopolis podcast, if you take a look at that.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough. For someone who wants an introduction to biblical symbolism, to understand how to read the Bible in a deeper and more thorough way, it is a sort of book you'll find yourself disagreeing with on many occasions.

[7 : 16] And that's okay. The point is to learn the patterns and the symbols and to learn a way of reading the Bible that you can take to any text.

This isn't just about a particular reading here and a particular reading there, as you'll find in most books in the Bible. This is about a way of approaching and attuning yourself to the text that will help you to read any text, wherever you go.

Even if you've not given that text significant thought before, you will find this book helps you to do the sort of reading that will reveal insight. Now, reading the Bible well is not something you do by yourself.

It's something that you do in fellowship with others and in conversation with others as they challenge and push back against your proposed readings and as you hone your reading in conversation with them.

Now, I found that this form of reading the Bible is one that will lead me to arrive at very similar readings to other people who follow a similar approach.

[8 : 19] It's not just an arbitrary thing. You see things that are actually there. And the confirmation of other people throughout church history and other people who are attuned to the text in this way helps to confirm that it's not just in one's imagination.

These things are actually within the text itself. And that's an important thing. When we read the New Testament, again, we'll often see the New Testament writers read the Bible in this way.

They are attentive to symbolism and to details. So, for instance, when Jesus talks to his disciples about being aware of the number of baskets that they gathered when there were the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000, they're obviously supposed to be paying attention to the symbolism of numbers.

Now, we don't do that very well, but we're supposed to. And the more that you pay attention to those things, the more you'll find yourself rewarded. Now, there are certain points in Scripture where these things are foregrounded, but much of the time it's just a matter of being alert.

On other occasions, we see the New Testament writers reading the Old Testament in a way that suggests that they were seeing things that most modern readers don't. So, for instance, in a recent video, I discussed the writer of Hebrews and his reading of the story of Melchizedek.

[9 : 45] Now, that's a strange story. But when you read Hebrews, it's clear that the writer was seeing something within that story that most modern readers would not see.

So, how was he seeing this thing? What was he recognising within the text that we don't? And I found the work of James Jordan perhaps more helpful than any others in helping me to recognise those things within the text that helped me to understand why the New Testament writers wrote in the way that they do, in the way that they did.

So, for instance, if you read Paul talking about the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, that's a very odd passage again. I mean, what does the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac, Sarah and Hagar, have to do with the relationship between unbelieving Jews and the church?

But if you go back to the story of Abraham and read it carefully, pay attention to the literary structure of the narrative, pay attention to the patterns of the narrative, the parallels within the narrative, you will notice things that help you to interpret that text, help you to see within that text that Paul was engaged in a reading of the Old Testament, not just taking some image from the Old Testament and appropriating it for his own purposes without regard for the actual meaning and significance of that text within its context.

And so I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to read their Bible in a more thorough way. Another book I'd recommend alongside it is Peter Lighthouse's *A House for My Name*, which is a reading of the Old Testament and briefly into the New, which goes through the themes and shows you some of the literary patterns of the text that teaches you some of the principles that will enable you to read a text and to be alert to the details that will clue you in to some of the deeper things that are going on, how it relates to other texts and that sort of thing.

[11 : 57] It's a training in the art of being attentive and of being attentive well. The book that Andrew and I wrote on the subject of Exodus, *Echoes of Exodus*, is also an attempt to popularise this way of reading Scripture.

It's a way of reading Scripture that reveals, among other things, and this is what we're really trying to show within our book, the integrity of the whole story of Scripture.

This is one unified narrative and also it's something that connects with the life of the Church. This is not a story back then and back there, a story that is merely a sequence of different events and narratives that are fairly disconnected and which we may search for parallels with our experience, but without any deep connection.

No, this is a unified narrative into which we have been brought by Christ in the Spirit and in which we participate and in which, in whose, in the rhythms of which, we are caught up and propelled into God's future that he has prepared for us.

And so this way of reading Scripture is not just a literary thing, nor is it just a matter of understanding the weight of Scripture as divinely inspired and its depth and its majesty and its intricacy.

[13 : 20] It's also a book, a way of reading the Scripture that helps us to see its relevance and significance for our lives and how this book is not just a book out there, but a book that has direct and immediate relevance to our situation here and now.

And so, if you are looking for an introduction to the reading of the Bible, I'd recommend one of those books and also James Jordan's series on reading the Bible.

All of these are really, really helpful without wanting to plug my book too much, but I would highly recommend the work of James Jordan as an introduction to this.

Disagree with him on certain issues. There's plenty to disagree with, but you will learn principles that you may not learn elsewhere. And as you follow these principles, you will find yourself rewarded with much discovery.

You'll also find that you see things that others have seen before, but you, which you could not have seen had you not been attuned to the text in this way.

[14 : 26] And so, this is a book that it is worth getting. I've plugged it enough already, so just go out there and get it.

You won't be disappointed. If you have any questions or things that you want me to raise within the podcast, please leave them in the Curious Cat comments that I have.

I'll leave the link for that below, along with the link to the books that I've recommended. Thank you, and I'll hopefully see you again in the next couple of days. Thank you.