

# **Biblical Theology:**

## **Reading the Bible as One Book**

### **Covenant Life College**

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## **Session 1**

### **What is Biblical Theology?**

1. Begin with a more basic questions:
  - a. What is the Bible?
    - A single, unified book, with one ultimate author and one message.
    - A book about God. A book that “reveals” God.
    - A book about Jesus Christ, God’s fullest revelation of himself.
  - b. What is theology?
    - the study of God
    - We study the Bible in order to make true statements about God which are consistent with each part of the Bible and do not contradict one another.
2. How do we approach the Bible to understand what it teaches us about God?
  - a. We can look at individual passages and seek to understand what the writer meant them to say about God and mankind and how God’s words apply to us.
  - b. We can look at individual biblical books and ask what the inspired author was trying to communicate to his audience in his day about God and his will.
  - c. We can look at topics of God’s nature and God’s thoughts about mankind and creation and summarize them into statements.
    - When we organize these topical summaries, we call the result a “systematic theology.”
    - Or to use another term, “doctrine” is a summary of all the Bible has to say about a particular topic.
    - Examples: God is trinity, We are saved by grace alone.
  - d. We can look at how the Bible’s revelation of God develops over time. What did God’s people know about his nature and his will for mankind during the unfolding periods of the history covered in the Bible?
    - during Moses’ time

- during David’s time
  - during Isaiah’s time
  - during Malachi’s time
  - during Jesus’ time on earth
3. We call this study of the unfolding revelation of God “biblical theology.”
- a. “...the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.” —Geerhardus Vos (5)
  - b. “Biblical theology is not concerned to state the final doctrines which go to make up the content of Christian belief, but rather to describe the *process* by which revelation unfolds and moves toward the goal which is God’s final revelation of his purposes in Jesus Christ.” —Graeme Goldsworthy (*Trilogy*, 45)
  - c. “Biblical theology is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole and, to achieve this, it must work with the mutual interaction of the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the various corpora, and with the inter-relationships with these within the whole canon of Scripture.” —B.S. Rosner (NDBT, 3)
  - d. O. Palmer Robertson compares the process of God’s revelation to an acorn growing into an oak tree. All the genetic material that is found in the mature oak is also found in the acorn, yet there is a clear process to how this acorn matures into a tree. (*The Christ of the Covenants*)
  - e. Is biblical theology...*biblical*?
    - Luke 24: 27 — “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”
    - The book of Hebrews works as a biblical theology: it explicitly shows the connections between the Old Testament revelation and Jesus.
4. Is there an overarching message of the Bible?
- a. The topic of much scholarly debate.
  - b. One way to look at the message of the Bible is as a *revelation of the Lordship of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ*.
    - “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-10).

- c. One way to summarize the storyline of the Bible is: *God creates a people for himself to live with him in peace and fruitfulness in a perfect place.*
  
5. Biblical theology asks the question: How did we get from creation to human fallenness and judgment to the point of all humanity bowing before Jesus Christ, the Lord? What is the process?
  - a. Biblical theology shows that all that happened in the Old Testament and all the Old Testament documents point to Jesus.
  - b. Matthew 5:17—“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
  - c. Each New Testament book carries a deep understanding that Jesus came out of the flow of biblical history and can only be understood in the context of God’s previous revelation through Moses and the prophets.
  
6. Outline of the Biblical Story—see related document
  
7. A Pattern to God’s Dealings with Humanity
  - a. Creation⇒Fall⇒Redemption
    - God’s creates a good world for mankind, a world where mankind can dwell with God in fellowship, work, and rest.
    - Mankind rebels against God, choosing to act like a God and find good and avoid evil independent of God
    - God judges man in his sin, yet even in his judgment extends a means for man to be redeemed from judgment and restored to a relationship of peace and harmony with him.
  - b. While man willfully chose to rebel and experience God’s judgment, he was helpless to undo the consequences of his sin. Jesus Christ becomes the means for redemption. As God-yet-man, he provides a perfect sacrifice for man—he pays the penalty of sin that man owes to God so that God can restore a relationship of unity and harmony between himself and his people.
  - c. Compare Genesis 1-3 with Revelation 21:1-22:5.