

## Biblical Theology

"Though a man has a precious and rare jewel, yet if he know not the value thereof, nor whereof it serves, he were neither the better nor richer of a straw. Even so though we read the scripture, and babble of it ever so much, yet if we know not the use of it, and whereof it was given, and what is therein to be sought, it profits us nothing at all. It is not enough, therefore to read and talk of it only, but we must also desire God, day and night, instantly, to open our eyes, and to make us understand and feel wherefore the scripture was given, that we may apply the medicine of the scripture, every man to his own sores. Unless we intend to be idle disputers, and brawlers about vain words, ever gnawing upon the bitter bark without, and never attaining unto the sweet pith within; and persecuting one another in defending wicked imaginations, and phantasies of our own invention"

William Tyndale: Preface to the translation of the Pentateuch, 1520

### What is Biblical Theology?

Biblical Theology differs from Systematic Theology in that its organising principle is historical rather than logical. Biblical Theology begins from a recognition of the historical dimension of the Bible; that Genesis is not the same as Leviticus, and that the Old Testament is not the same as the New. A Biblical Theology seeks to understand the Bible message in accordance with the way in which it progressively unfolds, as God reveals more of himself and his purposes towards man. It is the virtue of a Biblical Theology that it recognises both the diversity within the Biblical documents and their under girding unity as the one revelation of God to man.

Here, we ought perhaps to make one or two comments on the Biblical Theology of Geerhardus Vos. Vos describes the difference between Biblical and Systematic as follows:

"Whereas Systematic Theology takes the Bible as a completed whole and endeavours to exhibit its teaching in an orderly, systematic form, Biblical Theology deals with the material from the historical standpoint, seeking to exhibit the organic growth or the development of the truths of Special Revelation from the primitive pre-redemptive Special Revelation given in Eden to the close of the New Testament canon."

*Biblical Theology*, 1975 reprint, pp v, vi.

For Vos, Biblical Theology is the same as the history of Special Revelation. Biblical Theology is therefore

"... the study of the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space which lie back of even the first committal to writing of any Biblical document, and which for a long time continued to run alongside of the inscripturation of the revealed material ...

"Biblical Theology is that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible."

*ibid.*, p.5

I do not believe that Vos has done justice to the nature of Scripture. Vos views the Scriptures not as the revelation of the redemptive work of God but as the record of God's progressive unveiling of truth regarding himself and man's relationship with him. In consequence, Vos does not really provide us with a theology of the Bible but, by his own confession, only a theology of "the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space which lie back of even the first committal to writing of any Biblical document." The source material for the construction of his Biblical Theology is not the entire Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments but only the verbal or doctrinal self-revelations of God to which the Scriptures bear witness. Those parts of Scripture which record no self-disclosure of God *of this sort*, such as the purely narrative material, many of the Psalms, and the greater part of the Wisdom Literature, are not considered by Vos to be important to a Biblical Theology (see the index of Scripture references at the back of his book).

In contrast, we would argue that a Biblical Theology must reflect the character of Scripture as the story of redemption. The source material for a Biblical Theology is not simply the doctrinal self-revelations of God within the scriptural documents but rather the entire Bible. We would suggest that the measure

of a *Biblical* Theology is precisely its ability to handle the whole compass of the varied Biblical testimonies without it becoming a fragmented bag of bits.

### **The Method of Biblical Theology**

Any theology of the Bible - thus any Biblical Theology - must begin with the question of what the Bible is. To state that the Bible is the inerrant word of God is quite right, and this is the presupposition of this study, but this only asserts something about the origin of the Bible and the extent of its trustworthiness, it does not answer the question of what this word from God is nor what claim it has upon us.

It is our contention that the Bible tells a story, a true story to be sure, but a story nevertheless; it is the story of redemption.

We speak of the Bible as story and not simply history in order to emphasise certain features of its construction. History, at least as it is perceived by the human observer, lacks unified structure and at times may appear simply as one thing after another without direction and without unity. It is part of the art of the historian to *impose* some order in the telling of history's story. The Bible, on the other hand, already tells a story: each part of the biblical narrative fits into the fabric of the whole; all the parts of Scripture display a unified, directed structure. As with any other story, the author directs the action according to his own purposes and brings it at last to its goal and conclusion. The human writer can do this with a work of fiction precisely because it is fiction and the characters of the story have no being other than that which he or she gives them. The Bible has the structure of story and the character of history precisely because here, the author of the story is also the Creator of men and Governor of their destiny. The task of the Biblical Theologian is *not* to impose his own structure on the Bible story but to discover and display the inherent structure of the Bible story.

The affirmation that the Bible tells a story illuminates the nature of the unity of Scripture. Several of the questions which dominate current studies in the method of Biblical Theology have to do with the nature of Scripture unity. Is there any one centre of coherence to the Old Testament, a central theme about which an Old Testament theology may be organised? What is the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and in particular the relationship of the Old Testament to Christ? It is our conviction that attention to the story-structure of the Bible is of some help in answering these questions.

The unity of a story is complex rather than simple. The unity does not consist in there being the same characters throughout, though there must be some continuity governing the changing subjects of the story. The unity does not necessarily consist in a single theme which dominates the story in all its parts: several themes may be interwoven throughout the story. For these reasons it may be difficult to give a single and unambiguous answer to the question, "What is the story about?" without falling into broad and unhelpful generalisations. Again, the unity of a story does not consist in the sameness of all its parts: one chapter may deal with characters and themes which are different from those of another chapter; in one place the story may appear to move towards a climax and conclusion only then to move off in a second and rather different direction. Very different parts may nevertheless fit together to form a unified and coherent story in which each part makes a significant contribution because it is set within the overall scheme. The unity of a story is seen precisely in the way in which the parts fit together to form one picture. But the overall picture cannot be abstracted from any one of the parts, as though here, in this one section of the story, the whole were comprehended. The unity of a story is thus dynamic rather than static since it becomes evident only when we observe the way in which each section contributes to the moving drama.

Secondly, a story has direction. Put simply, it starts at the beginning and moves forwards in a developing and progressive fashion until it reaches its conclusion. Every part of a story is understood only when it is read in its proper context. Each part is set against the background of what has gone before and (though the reader is unconscious of the fact at the first reading) is preparing the way for what comes after. It is particularly from the vantage point of the story's conclusion that the reader can observe how every part has been directed towards, and has contributed to, this end.

It is our contention that the unity of Scripture is a unity of this sort. The unity of the Bible does not therefore consist in any one theme or element, neither can it be abstracted from the whole; its unity consists in the directed coherence of the Bible story. The Bible tells one story in which each episode is set against the backcloth of what has gone before and is pointing to what will come after, demanding the chapters which follow for its completion. Every part of scriptural revelation, whether it be the detailed laws and commandments or the prophetic material or the Wisdom literature, has to be understood within the narrative framework of the Bible story, namely the story of redemption.

### **An Outline of the Bible Story**

The following pages present one possible outline of the Bible story. We noticed above, the unity of a story is complex and may involve the interweaving of many different themes or story lines. This is particularly true of the Bible. Consequently it is possible that other equally valid analyses might be presented. Nevertheless, I believe that the outline given below does go some way in exhibiting the structure of the Biblical story and may therefore function as the basis for a Biblical Theology.

### **The Primary Major Division: Genesis 3**

The primary major division of the Bible story occurs with Genesis three. The first three chapters of Genesis are the introduction or prolegomena to the remainder of the story. By this we do not simply mean that the remainder of the story can only be properly understood against the background of the first three chapters of Genesis. That is true, but it is equally true that Exodus to Revelation can only properly be understood against the background of the entire book of Genesis, and that the New Testament can only rightly be understood against the background of the Old. What we mean by this assertion is that in Genesis 1-3 we have an opening narrative which sets the scene for the remainder of the story. The rest of the story does not simply follow on from the introduction but corresponds to it as answer to question or as solution to problem. To make the point more clearly we must survey the material itself.

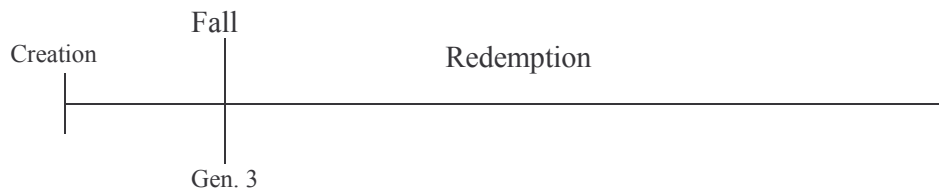
In Genesis 1-3 we have the story of the creation and fall.

The Bible story begins with an account of how God made the entire created order and placed mankind (male and female) in the midst of it to rule over it to the glory of God. It is in the earth that mankind had fellowship with God and in the earth that they enjoyed the blessing of God. This was the condition for which they were created; it was *life*.

But in Genesis 3 we read of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God and their consequent loss of life - life in the earth and life before God. Their fellowship with God is destroyed (they are cast out of the garden) and God's curse rests on the whole of creation (Gen. 3:16-19). As a consequence of their sin, human life is affected in every aspect: the relationship between mankind and God is marked by enmity; relationships between the man and the woman and within society generally are marked by tension and discord rather than mutual help; relationships with the animal world are marked by exploitation and threat; relationships with the world of earth and plant are marked by sweat, fruitlessness and vanity. The curse of God upon mankind is consummated in the dissolution of the body and thus destruction from the face of the earth and from human society; this is the final visitation of death and is the antithesis of all that God intended that mankind should be as the one created to bear his own image and glory - it is the absolute negation of *life*.

From Genesis 4 to the end of the New Testament we have the story of the redemptive work of God by which he recreates or regenerates both mankind and creation. God's activity is designed to undo everything that was consequent upon Adam's first sin. God's purpose is to restore the broken relationship between mankind and himself and consequently to lift the curse and to restore the disturbed relationship between mankind and the rest of creation. It is to renew mankind's *life* in the earth and before God: to restore men and women to the state for which they were created - this does not, of course, imply that the last state is identical in every respect to the first.

The primary major division of the Bible story at the close of Genesis 3 may therefore be represented by the following diagram:

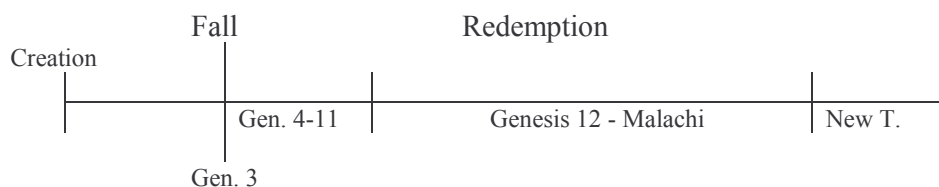


In constructing a Biblical Theology - or even an Old Testament theology - it is vital that we grasp the breadth of the Biblical view of redemption. Just as mankind's sin affects not only their relationship with God but also all of their creatorial relationships, so redemption is not merely a mending of human relationships with God but involves also a liberation of the creation from its bondage under God's curse. The Old Testament (and indeed the whole Bible), cannot rightly be understood until we grasp the creation-wide scope of both sin and redemption.

Before we move on to a closer analysis of the story of redemption we need to recognise again that the divisions in the story are not hard and unambiguous: there is a continuity which links each part to what has gone before and to what will follow. Hence, while we have suggested that the primary major division in the Bible story occurs with Genesis three, yet it should be quite evident that the division is not simple. For instance, we can speak of the story of human rebellion which began with Genesis three but which runs on as one continuing story, only reaching its first climax with Genesis six. This story of rebellion and apostasy runs on throughout the entire Bible, reaching its central climax in the crucifixion and its consummation in the day of judgement. Again, the redemptive promise and act of God begins (so we would argue) with the word of God to Adam in Genesis 3:14,15, and this promise institutes a story which likewise runs on throughout the entire Bible. Thus it is impossible to define the primary major division of the Bible story as an unambiguous mark which divides between two verses.

### First Major division of Redemptive History: Genesis 4-11

The story of redemption may be divided into three main sections. Again, these sections are of distinctly unequal length.



In Genesis 4-11 we have the story of God's dealings with the entire primitive human race. With Genesis 12 the focus narrows and from this point onwards the Old Testament tells the story of God's dealings with one man and the one nation which is descended from him. Nevertheless, this second section is linked with the first (and with the pre-redemptive story of Genesis 1-3) in that God's dealings with this one man and his seed are for the sake of the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3 etc.). In the New Testament, the third section of the redemptive story, the focus is both narrowed and broadened. The focus is narrowed to highlight God's dealings with mankind in the person of one man, Jesus Christ. At the same time the New Testament insists that God's dealings in him are for the sake, not of one nation, but for all mankind and that they will result in nothing less than the redemption of creation.

In Genesis 4-11, the story of God's dealings with the entire primitive human race, we read of the continuing rebellion of mankind until the whole earth is overrun with wickedness and violence (Gen. 6:5,6; 6:11,12). In consequence God determines to destroy both mankind and the earth with all its

creatures. But in the midst of a world under God's wrath, God saves one man from destruction, Noah, and with that man saves his family and the animal creation. The old world is destroyed under judgement, but from this saved remnant there is to spring a new world; Genesis 9:1-7 repeats God's words to Adam in Genesis 1:28-30 (with certain significant differences). But this remnant of the old world cannot be the source of a new, there needs to be a more radical renewal or regeneration. The history of man's rebellion repeats itself in Noah's drunkenness, Ham's shamelessness, and finally the concerted rebellion of arrogant men at Babel. Once again God's judgement falls upon mankind; their language is confused and they are scattered as separate peoples in the earth.

The story of these chapters has several elements which are particularly important in the light of the ensuing Biblical drama. Firstly, it underlines the character of God's redemptive work as a work which is directed towards mankind and his realm, the created world. (We disagree here with Vos who views the Noah covenant as a *non-redemptive* "nature covenant".) Although the created world is to be destroyed under God's judgement, it does not accord with God's purpose simply to remove redeemed mankind from the place of destruction and take him up to heaven. God's purpose is still to give man life in the earth and life before him. The created order is redeemed along with mankind (just as it had been cursed along with them), and redeemed mankind are reinstated as underlords over the new creation to govern it to the glory of God. Redemption is re-creation, not deification.

Secondly, we see that the story line of human rebellion which calls forth God's judgement is interwoven, and closely connected with the story of God's redemptive acts. The act of judgement by which rebellious mankind are destroyed from the face of the earth is also God's redemptive act by which the earth is purged from sin and given as inheritance to the people of God.

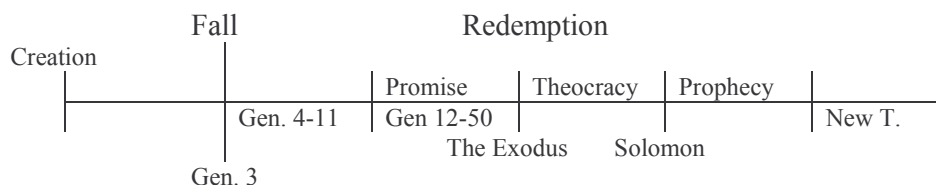
Nevertheless, the redemptive story of Genesis 4-11 ends in failure; not the failure of God's purposes but the failure of mankind. This new world is only a remnant of the old and goes the same way as the old: its history ends in judgement and scattering. But the story of God's redemptive purpose goes on, for out of these scattered peoples God calls Abraham. From his seed God will create a people who will enjoy life before him in the midst of the earth.

The story of Noah points beyond itself to a greater and more perfect redemption - one requiring a better man than Noah.

### Genesis 12 - Malachi: The Central Old Testament Story

In the call to Abraham and the promise to his seed, God continues his redemptive work towards mankind and towards the world which he has made. God's redemptive purpose is now directed towards one man amongst mankind and through him is to be made manifest firstly in one nation among the nations of the earth. The redemption of God is to be seen not in his acts towards mankind but in his acts towards Israel. The state of redemption is to be made manifest not in the conditions of human life on earth but in the life of Israel in Canaan. Redemptive revelation is inherently particular. The redemptive story suffers this temporary narrowing only that it might end in the redemption of mankind and of the entire creation. The redemption which is found in Israel is to extend to all mankind, and God's redemptive work in the earth is to extend from Canaan to encompass the whole world.

The (temporarily) narrower story of redemption which occupies the major part of the Old Testament may be divided into three further sections.



The first of these, which occupies Genesis 12-50, we may call the patriarchal period. This is an age characterised by promise. God speaks of the redemption which he is to accomplish among the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The second section begins with the exodus from Egypt and ends with Israel at peace in the land of Canaan under David and Solomon. This sees the accomplishment of God's redemption in Israel under the theocracy. The third section begins with the reign of Solomon and ends with the close of the Old Testament canon. This period sees the failure of Israel's kings and the collapse of the Israelite theocracy, but it also gives rise to the consequent prophetic hope which points to a greater and more perfect redemption. This, in turn, prepares the way for the New Testament.

Again, it is necessary to emphasise that we are painting a picture here with a very broad brush. The history from the exodus to Solomon is not one of continuous progress in the establishment of the kingdom, the themes of rebellion and failure are to be found in this history also. There are also, in the history of the Judges, anticipations of the saviour figure which is to find its focus in David, God's anointed king. Furthermore, the history from Solomon to the close of the Old Testament canon is not one of uninterrupted failure: there are good kings such as Josiah and Hezekiah and there is the return to Jerusalem as well as the captivity. The story is far more complex than may be suggested by our rather simple overview, nevertheless, the overview which follows is of value in highlighting the major themes in the story.

The section of the Bible story beginning with the exodus from Egyptian culminating in Israel's possession of the land of Canaan and victory over all their enemies may be considered the paradigmatic redemption of the Old Testament. This unified history is the paradigm of Biblical redemption, illustrating the character of the redemption which God promises his people.

Firstly we should notice that the redemption of the people of God begins with them in bondage to a people who serve other gods: the Israelites are themselves forced to labour for the gods of Egypt. The demand of God is that his people should be set free that they might serve him. Redemption consists in God bringing his people out of bondage to false gods and subjection to a Godless society and into the land of promise where they are established as a redeemed society, serving God in the land.

We notice secondly that the redemption of the people of God and their freedom to serve God in the land is accomplished only with the destruction of those who serve other gods. God's judgement is first visited upon the Egyptians, and later, through the mediation of the Israelites themselves, is visited upon the Canaanites. The Canaanites are to be destroyed from the land in order that this land, purged from sin, may be the inheritance of the people of God - the place where he dwells in their midst and the place where they serve him.

We notice thirdly that this redemption is only completed when God raises up his anointed king as his champion for his people. Only with David are the last enemies of the people of God, the Philistines, defeated and God's dwelling is established in the midst of his people at Jerusalem. This final state, which is ushered in by David and continues under Solomon, is a picture of God's redemption. Here God's kingdom is seen in the earth as God dwells with his people and they serve him.

The third part of the Old Testament story is in sad contrast with the second. The kings, on whom the welfare of the theocracy depends, rebel against God and lead the people into sin. This apostasy begins with Solomon and continues to accelerate under the kings of both the northern and southern kingdoms after the schism in the reign of Rehoboam. The prophets are raised up by God as critics of the apostate theocracy and as preachers of redemption. They speak of the greater redemptive work of God which he will accomplish in the last days. This is not simply the restoration of the theocracy but the accomplishment of the universal redemption of both mankind and creation, a redemption of which the theocracy was only a foreshadowing or type. Thus the prophets prepare the way for the New Testament proclamation of God's final redemptive act in Jesus, the Christ.

### **The New Testament Conclusion to the Redemptive Drama**

With the New Testament the Bible story reaches its conclusion. In Christ the work of redemption is completed and perfected.

The simplicity of this assertion disguises the complexity of the New Testament conclusion. The story becomes complex here precisely because it becomes focused in one person. It is no longer possible to follow one developing story line through the New Testament, but it is possible to show how all the lines converge upon this one person and find their focus in God's acts towards mankind in him.

We have seen that Adam's sin disturbs both his relationship with God and his relationships within the creation. The redeeming acts of God are directed at restoring this twofold relation.

This restoration is manifested in the incarnation and life of the Son of God. He is God become man, the man who reconciles mankind to God. He is the one through whom all things were created and by whom they are upheld, become the man who exercises a sovereign lordship over all of creation. The wind and the waves obey him. Under his hand creation is freed from curse and the relationship between it and mankind is restored: he feeds the multitudes when they lack food - they eat without labour and sweat; he heals their diseases and even raises the dead. His miracles are therefore an intrusion of the final kingdom of redemption, an anticipation of the day when sin and curse will be no more, when creation is regenerated and the body raised from the dust of death.

But the redeeming work of God by which mankind and creation are restored to their proper relationships before God, is effected primarily through Christ's death and resurrection, and is to be manifested fully only at Christ's return. In his death, this world, a world lying under wrath and curse, is brought to judgement. In his death it dies. His resurrection is the beginning or firstfruits not merely of a new humanity but of a new creation (Gal. 6:14,15, compare 1 Cor. 15:20 with Rom. 8:19-23). The new creation, and thus the *life* of God's people, is at present hidden with Christ in God, but it will be made manifest at the last day when this world will be brought to judgement and destroyed in fire, to be succeeded by new heavens and a new earth (Col. 3:1-3; 2 Peter 3:10-13). The new earth is to be the inheritance of the people of God, here they will reign (or rule) with Christ for ever (Matt. 5:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10; 11:15). God will dwell with his people in the earth and they will serve him there (Rev. 21-22, especially 21:1-4; 22:3-5).

Jesus is the second Adam. The consequences of Adam's sin are undone through Christ's work (Rom. 5:12ff). In his death he atones for the sins of men and satisfies God's justice by bearing their curse. In his resurrection he undoes the consequences of Adam's rebellion, overcoming death and becoming the firstfruits of the new creation which lives before the face of God (Rom. 6:10).

Jesus is the Messiah. It is through his mighty act as champion of his people that the Kingdom of God is established. Christ gains the victory over every last enemy of the people of God. He rules over the nations until all are subject to him. Through his agency, all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God (1 Cor. 15:25-28; Rev. 11:15).

In Christ's death and resurrection the two themes which we have seen interwoven throughout the Bible story intersect and are brought to their central focus. God's judgement upon sin and his visitation of death upon the sinner, along with the destruction of sinful society and a world under curse, is also the means by which mankind, society and the world are redeemed. The old passes away under judgement in order to give way to the new creation.

Christ fulfils the Scriptures, for in him the story of redemption reaches its predestined conclusion.

Before we leave the New Testament story we need to say something of the place of the Christian and of the church in this story. The perfection of redemption remains a future reality and will only be accomplished at the return of Christ when there will be the resurrection of the body and the regeneration of creation. This will be the institution of the new world - new humanity, new society, new creation. But the kingdom is by no means a wholly future reality; it is not to spring up at the last day without any former history. The parables of the kingdom (Matt. 13:24-33) warn us against such a view and remind us that the coming of the kingdom is also a process.

In Christ's death and resurrection the life of the new creation has already begun, and in the church it continues and grows. The church consists of those who are "in Christ", who have died to the old world and who *already* live the life of the new creation (Rom. 6; Gal. 6:14,15; 2 Cor. 5:17). The church is a foretaste of the kingdom, and the extension of the church is part of the coming of the

kingdom. The life of the church in the midst of the world, as with the life of Israel among the nations in the Old Testament age, is an anticipation of the final and perfect kingdom of God in the earth. Here are a people who live before God in the earth and who, as far as it is possible in this age, live the life of the age to come. In their relationships one with another they manifest something of the new humanity, and in their relationships with and service in the earth they manifest something of the new creation.

## Doing Biblical Theology

It is our contention that Biblical Theology must begin from the recognition of the fundamental story-structure of the Bible. It is not necessary to agree with every detail of the particular story structure that we have suggested above, only to recognise that the Bible must be viewed as story - true story. The task of Biblical Theology is therefore to demonstrate how each part or theme of the Bible story fits within, and contributes to the ongoing drama of the redemptive work of God. Each part is to be seen within its own historical context and not treated as a piece of timeless or historically disconnected doctrine. Equally, no part of Scripture may be viewed in historical isolation, as though it had no relationship with, or dependence upon the other parts.

Since the Bible tells a story, each part can properly be understood only when it is viewed against the background of what has gone before. Consequently, the New Testament can only be understood in the light of the Old. The New Testament cannot stand on its own as if it alone defined the content of the Christian message; it is only the conclusion of a larger story. There is a sense in which the Old Testament must retain theological priority over the New. This is particularly important when we come to interpret 'messianic' passages of the Old Testament. All too often the evangelical adopts a kind of hermeneutical short-circuiting so that he interprets these Old Testament passages simply by importing the New Testament teaching about Christ back into the Old Testament. The fact that Jesus, in his life and his work, is the fulfilment of all of the Old Testament Scriptures, does not make such 'reading back' proper hermeneutical practice. If our assertion that Christ is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets is not to rely on an entirely artificial construction, the hermeneutical priority must remain with the Old Testament: the Old Testament must be left free to define what it is that Christ fulfils. In other words, the Old Testament gives the content of the hope of redemption to which Christ is the answer. As with any other story the Bible must be read forwards and not back. When hermeneutical priority is given to the New Testament, the nature of redemption is obscured and its breadth narrowed.

However, it is equally true that the Christian should not look at the Old Testament except from the perspective of the New. At a surface level this may seem to contradict what we have said above, but, in truth, it follows directly from the story character of the Bible and from the Christian's place in that story. The Christian reads and understands the story in full knowledge of its focus and conclusion in Christ. He cannot read the Old Testament story as if he were a Jew, or even as if he were an Old Testament saint; he must read every part of the story in the light of its known fulfilment.

In closing, it is helpful to note something further concerning the peculiar relationship between the Bible story and ourselves. The Christian and the Christian church are part of the story which the Bible narrates. The story which the Scriptures tell is our story. In reading the Bible we cannot be spectators of its redemptive drama, those who observe it with a kind of detached interest, for we are intimately bound up with the story and are borne along in its stream.

We have argued that each part of the Bible story must be understood in the light of what has gone before and as directed towards what shall come after. Since we are part of the story, we must understand ourselves, individually and corporately, in the redemptive historical context of the Bible. We live in the light of our past, not our private history and experience but the Bible story of our past, and we live towards our future, again not some private destiny but the declared goal of the Bible story. This is certainly evident of the focal point of the redemptive drama, the death and resurrection of Christ. The Christian lives in the light of his past, his death with Christ and resurrection with him to new life, and he lives towards his future, looking for the return of Christ and the coming of the kingdom. But this peculiar relationship between the Christian and the Bible story - that it is his story - is true of every part. Every passage speaks to him as one "on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11). We are children of Abraham (Rom. 4:16-18) and Israel's story is our story, their promises are our promises and their inheritance our inheritance (Eph. 2:11-14).



We believe that this must be the starting point in establishing the regulative or normative function of Scripture. Christians, both individually and corporately as the church, are called out from a world marked by sin and are called to live the life of the age to come. In the midst of the earth the story of God's redemption continues in them. It is here that the kingdom is made visible among mankind. This at least is how the Christian and the Christian church are described in the story of redemption which is Scripture. The Scriptures act regulatively and normatively as they call us to be what we are, a new humanity in Christ, a new society, those upon whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.

### **The Value of Biblical Theology**

In conclusion, I wish to suggest several reasons why we should give ourselves to the study of Biblical theology.

1. Our belief in the inerrancy of Scripture counts for nothing unless we are students of the Scriptures, subject to the Word of God and being transformed by it. The first motive for the study of Biblical theology is that it is no more nor less than the study of the Bible and its message.
2. Biblical Theology displays the unity of Scripture as the revelation of the unified redemptive work of God, a story which begins with the tale of a Garden, ends with a city of gold, and which is centred in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Biblical Theology is therefore the best answer to liberal views of Scripture which fragment the Bible and destroy the unity of its redemptive message.
3. Biblical Theology respects the diversity which exists within the overall unity of Scripture. It is not embarrassed by the very real differences between Exodus and Ecclesiastes, the Book of Job and the Gospel of John. It recognises that each part of the Biblical literature has its own peculiar place within the redemptive revelation. Each book of the Bible is viewed within its own historical and redemptive context as is not treated as a piece of timeless doctrine. Indeed, it is precisely because each part is viewed in its own Biblical context that it is not isolated from the rest of Scripture.
4. Biblical Theology enables us to view Bible themes from a Biblical perspective. Many Bible themes, such as those of the Sabbath, the promise of the land, tithes, food laws etc. have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by the Christian Church because they have been fitted into a static doctrinal framework rather than being viewed according to their place within the developing redemptive work of God.
5. Biblical Theology presents us with a consistent, controlled, and above all Biblical method of interpreting the Scriptures. While displaying the unity of the Scriptures and the focus of all the Bible, Old Testament and New, in Christ, it enables us to avoid the arbitrary spiritualising which so often passes for an evangelical understanding of the Old Testament. Biblical Theology answers to the contemporary misuse of Scripture by both Evangelical and liberal: it allows the Bible to speak for itself.
6. Biblical Theology displays the full breadth of the purposes of God. It is a fine antidote to the emaciated gospel so often preached at 'gospel services'. Here we see that the purpose of God is nothing less than the recreation or regeneration of mankind in every aspect of his being and relationships: reconciliation with God and also the transformation of man's life in society and in the earth - the establishment of the Kingdom of God.
7. Finally, Biblical Theology displays the Bible as a message to be preached, and makes the preaching of any part of the Bible a possibility and a joy. The Bible is not a book of abstract doctrine but the revelation of the redemptive work of God in which we, as Christians, are intimately and presently involved. The application of the Biblical message is not left to the artifice, ingenuity and whim of the preacher or interpreter but springs directly from the relationship between the redemptive story of the Bible and those to whom that redemption is proclaimed.

### **History**

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