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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND PREACHING

James M. Hamilton Jr.

INTRODUCTION

The time is short. Redemption draws nigh. Urgent tasks call. I am eager to linger on a slow walk with my wife. The children grow fast. Church members are in the hospital. The elderly slip away. Young men need to be raised up and sent out. I need more time in the Bible and prayer. The demands are many, the moments scarce. Sunday comes soon. Time to stand and deliver.

Biblical theology and preaching?

Urgency forces us to ask, do I need this to preach? If so, what is it? How do I do it? How do I preach it? Can God's people handle it? How do I get started?

DO I NEED THIS TO PREACH?

If you intend to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), you need biblical theology.¹ If you believe that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16),² you need biblical theology. Here is a little more on these two points.

Preaching the Whole Counsel of God

Is there one main storyline that runs from Genesis to Revelation? Could you sketch its contours in a paragraph? Here is my attempt.

God made the world as a place where He would be worshiped, served, and known. God is served and worshiped and present in His temple, so this reality, with others, points to God making the world as a cosmic temple.³ God then charged His image-bearers, whom He put in the garden of Eden, to subdue the earth, which seems to mean they were to expand the borders of the place in which God was served, worshiped, and known until God’s glory covered the dry lands as the waters cover the sea. They failed. God judged. But through the judgments He also promised to save.⁴ God made promises to Abraham that directly addressed the curses,⁵ saved Abraham’s descendents through

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1. See the excellent treatment of the subject of this chapter by my mentor, T. R. Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 20–29.
 2. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this chapter come from the ESV.
 3. See esp. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004); and T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God’s Plan for Life on Earth* (Nottingham England: InterVarsity, 2008).
 4. See further J. M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); J. M. Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30–54.
 5. See J. M. Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *TynBul* 58 (2007): 253–73.

the judgment of Egypt at the exodus, and when he planted them in the new Eden of the promised land, their task was the same as Adam's—to expand the boundaries of the place where God was served, worshiped, and known until God's glory covered the dry lands as the waters cover the sea. Like Adam, Israel failed. As Adam was judged and exiled from Eden, God judged Israel and exiled them from the land.⁶ Israel's prophets promised that through the judgment of exile a glorious eschatological future would dawn, but they were really promising a return from two different exiles—Adam's from Eden and Israel's from the land. The return initiated by Cyrus that resulted in the rebuilding of the temple and the city addressed the exile from the land, but it did not address the exile from Eden. To address the exile from Eden, God sent His Son, Jesus, God incarnate, who recapitulated the history of Israel,⁷ fulfilled all righteousness, and then became a curse and died on the cross to propitiate God's wrath and make a way for God to show just mercy. The people of Jesus, the church, which is His body, are now carrying forward the task given to Adam and Israel. By making disciples of all nations, the church seeks to cover the dry land with Yahweh's glory as the waters cover the sea. Once all have heard the gospel, there will be a final fulfillment of the exodus, with seven trumpet and seven bowl plagues, and through the judgment of the world God's people will be saved. Jesus will come as a new and greater conquering Joshua, defeat His enemies, and lead His people into a new and better promised land for a thousand years. After the final rebellion, Jesus will lead His people into the new and better Eden, the new heaven and new earth, and the exile will finally be over. God's glory will cover the dry lands as the waters cover the sea.

6. See S. G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003).

7. See J. Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel: Use of Israel's History in Matthew 1:1–4:11*, vol. 257, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

Does this storyline have a central theme or main point? I believe it does. God is making Himself known, revealing His character, showing His glory. This is the best thing that God can do for the world, because there is nothing better than God.⁸ So at creation God builds a cosmic theater for the display of Himself. And then at every major signpost of the story, God reveals His justice and His mercy, His holiness and His love, His wrath and His kindness. God describes Himself as a just and merciful God when He declares His name to Moses in Exod 34:6–7.⁹ Moses asked to see God’s glory, and God told Moses He would show him his goodness and proclaim his own name (Exod 33:18–19). This event profoundly shaped the theology of the first biblical author, and every biblical author after Moses learned from him that Yahweh is a saving and judging God. God judges so that mercy will have meaning. He upholds justice to highlight the stunning glory of His mercy. So in my view, the center of biblical theology, the main point of the whole story, is that God will be glorified in salvation through judgment.¹⁰ God saves Noah through the judgment of the flood. He saves Israel through the judgment of Egypt at the exodus and again through the judgment of the exile. God then accomplishes salvation from sin through the judgment of Jesus on the cross, and Revelation portrays God saving His people from this broken world through the judgment of all the enemies of God. In addition to these major moments of the display of God’s glory in salvation through judgment, this is the existential experience of those who are born again. People

8. See further J. Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards, with the Complete Text of The End for which God Created the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998).

9. For stimulating discussion of Exod 34:6–7, see R. W. L. Moberly, “How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 177–202; and H. Spieckermann, “God’s Steadfast Love: Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” *Bib* 81 (2000): 305–27.

10. I argue for this in my book, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, and in J. M. Hamilton, “The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment: The Centre of Biblical Theology?” *TynBul* 57 (2006): 57–84.

who experience the new birth have realized that they are under God's just wrath. Through that judgment, they feel a need for what Jesus has accomplished on the cross, and when they trust Him they receive the astonishing mercy of God. Believers are saved through judgment—through the judgment that fell on Jesus condemning their sin. Believers see the glory of God's justice and mercy, and they worship God for His goodness, exalting His name. We even boast in affliction in the hope that God's glory will be revealed (Rom 5:3), trusting that all things will work for the greatest good of the display of God's glory. The center of biblical theology is the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

Biblical theology helps us get our arms around the big picture that ties together everything from Leviticus to Esther, and we see how Amos, John, Romans, and Revelation fit, too. Knowing what the forest looks like enables understanding of the individual trees. If we are to preach the whole counsel of God, we need biblical theology.

What sets the agenda in your preaching? Nehemiah really is not about the building program some church wants to initiate, and the Psalms are not in the Bible for amateur psychotherapists to explore their inner depths from the pulpit. Has God communicated His agenda in the Bible's big story—its overarching message? Does the Bible's big story set the agenda for your preaching or does something else drive it? If we are going to understand God's purposes, which are revealed in the Bible, we need biblical theology.

Biblical theology pushes us to understand the contribution individual books of the Bible make to the Bible's big story. We might call the Bible's big story its metanarrative. However we describe it, the point is that the whole Bible fits together to tell us God's revealed story of where the world came from, what is wrong with it, what He is doing to fix it, where we fit in the program, and what we can expect in the near and distant future. But there is a greater end to all this information: God is revealing Himself to us. We need biblical theology to know God. Knowing God fuels worship. Biblical theology is for worship.

Thinking in terms of biblical theology really boils down to reading the Bible in context—not just the near context of the phrase, sentence, paragraph, the wider passage, or the individual book but also the context of the whole canon. If we do not read the Psalms in the context of the canon of Scripture, we can make the Psalter’s abstract statements mean almost anything we want (especially if we foolishly ignore the superscriptions of the Psalms). If we do not read Samuel and Kings in light of Deuteronomy, we will not understand the way the narrator of those books is subtly condemning and commending people by the ways he notes what they did. If we know Deuteronomy, we will know whether God’s law has been kept or broken. Biblical narrators cast characters as negative, positive, or ambiguous as they rehearse a character’s deeds. They relate what the characters did, and they render unspoken judgments, for instance, by showing deeds of disobedience, even if the broken law is not restated as the disobedience is narrated. Moving from the Old Testament to the New, if we do not read the Gospels and the Epistles in light of the Law and the Prophets, we will not understand how what God has accomplished in Jesus is the fulfillment of everything in the Law, Prophets, and Writings (cf. Luke 24:44). We must read each piece of the Scripture in light of the canonical whole, which is to say, we must do biblical theology.

All Scripture Is God Breathed and Profitable

So does your preaching indicate that you believe that *all Scripture* is *profitable*? Or does your preaching indicate that the inspired and profitable parts are the letters of Paul, the four Gospels, Acts, some of the Psalms, maybe some narratives about Joseph, Moses, David, and (when you want to build) Nehemiah?

Be honest: would you preach Ezra? Chronicles? Revelation? Zephaniah? Ezekiel? Ecclesiastes? I am not talking about picking out a favorite verse or passage. I’m talking about preaching the

whole book and explaining it from one end to the other, relating the whole book to the rest of the canon.¹¹ Nor do I have in mind the relegation of these books to the evening Bible study on Sunday or Wednesday night. I am talking about Sunday morning preaching. Answer the question honestly, and you will know whether you agree with Paul that *all Scripture is profitable*.

If we are going to preach the whole counsel of God, and if we are going to preach all Scripture because we believe all of it is inspired and profitable, we need a healthy understanding of biblical theology to do it. After all, we do not want to produce pessimistic fatalists from our exposition of Ecclesiastes. That is not the message of Ecclesiastes, but in order to see what Ecclesiastes does mean, we need to understand the Bible's big story and how this book fits within it.¹² For that, we need a clear understanding of what biblical theology is.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?

When we do biblical theology, we are trying to lay hold of the perspective from which the biblical authors have interpreted earlier biblical texts and from which they write. We are looking for the matrix of assumptions and conclusions that necessitate the statements made by the biblical authors. We are trying to get at the world view that gives rise to the assertions the biblical authors make. The only access we have to their beliefs

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11. Expository preaching happens when the main point of a biblical text is the main point of a sermon and when the structure of the biblical text determines the structure of the sermon. If your point is not the text's point, you are not preaching the text.
 12. See esp. A. G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 313–34; A. G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx Revisited: Numerical Patterns in the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 38–51; A. G. Wright, "Additional Numerical Patterns in Qoheleth," *CBQ* 45 (1983): 32–43; and N. Perrin, "Messianism in the Narrative Frame of Ecclesiastes?" *RB* 108 (2001): 37–60.

and assumptions is what they actually wrote, so biblical theology seeks to understand the literary features that the biblical authors used to (1) structure their message, (2) connect it to earlier Biblical passages, (3) locate it in the grand story, and thus (4) encourage their audience by showing them God's glory in His displays of justice, all of which highlight His mercy and love for His people. Biblical theology is the attempt to understand the Bible in its own terms.

Biblical theology is a necessary step in the interpretive process. Exegesis of the Bible cannot stop at the clause, paragraph, book, or even collection of letters. That is to say, we must read Rom 5:1 in light of Romans 1–4, Romans as a whole, then all of Paul's letters can shed light on what he says in that one verse. But if we stop there, we have not completed the hermeneutical spiral. We must move on to the next step: reading that text and how it fits in Paul's argument in light of the whole canon. The same can be said of a book like Proverbs. Thinking in terms of biblical theology will point us to the literary cues Solomon has used in Proverbs to show himself as the king who has obeyed Deuteronomy 17's instructions, where the king is commanded to copy out the law and study it (Deut 17:18–20), along with Deuteronomy 6's instructions to parents to teach the law diligently to their children (Deut 6:6–9; cf. esp. Prov 3:1–8). Solomon is the king who knows the Torah, and he is the father to his people. In Proverbs he teaches them the truths of Torah in practical, memorable, colorful ways.

Biblical theology invites us to ask, is the Bible shaping the way we read the world, or has the world shaped the way we read the Bible? In order for us to be able to read the world through the Bible rather than the Bible through the world, we must understand this *book*, the Bible, which is really a collection of books.¹³ Books have literary features, and authors of books

13. See the discussion of precritical, figural interpretation in J. H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 89–91.

deploy literary features to communicate meaning.¹⁴ Earlier, I enumerated four things authors use literary features to accomplish. This is not an exhaustive list, but we can be helped by further consideration of each of these.

Structural Features

The biblical authors have given us carefully constructed presentations of God's truth. John Sailhamer writes, "The most influential, yet subtlest, feature of an author's rendering of historical narrative is the overall framework with which he or she arranges it."¹⁵ Sailhamer goes on to say, "To a large degree, the structure of biblical narratives determines their meaning."¹⁶ The techniques the biblical authors used to mark turning points in their work are different from the printing conventions used by modern authors, such as chapter titles or section headings. The biblical authors have often marked their turning points in the structure of their books through the use of repeated words or phrases.¹⁷ Using these repeated words, phrases, and themes, the biblical authors have signaled their structure and meaning for careful readers. These signals give information about the meaning of the passage at hand, how it fits in the structure of the whole book, and how it relates to earlier parts of Scripture.

The scope of this presentation permits only a few examples from the book of Revelation.¹⁸ John's vision of Jesus in Rev 1:9–20

14. For the benefits Bible reading has for understanding literature, see Timothy T. Larsen, "Literacy and Biblical Knowledge: The Victorian Age and Our Own," *JETS* 52 (2009): 519–35.

15. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 29.

16. *Ibid.*, 30.

17. See, e.g., George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

18. For elaboration on the points made here, see J. M. Hamilton Jr., *Revelation, Preaching the Word*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming), where I rely heavily on the excellent studies of R. Bauckham, *The Theology*

is very similar to the vision Daniel has in Daniel 10. Daniel was overwhelmed by glorious figures from heaven, who then revealed to him the history of the future in Daniel 11–12. So the vision in Daniel 10 is followed by the revelation of the future in Daniel 11–12. This structure is matched by the events in Revelation, where John first sees Jesus (Rev 1:9–18), then Jesus instructs John to write what he has seen, what is, and what will take place after this (1:19).¹⁹

Table 1. The sequence of events in Daniel 10 and Revelation 1

<i>Daniel 10</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Revelation 1</i>
10:5a	Seer looks	1:12a
10:5b–6	Description of: “a man” in Daniel, “one like a son of man” in Revelation	1:13–16
10:8–9 (cf. “deep sleep” in Gen 2:21; 15:12; 1 Sam 26:12; Dan 8:18)	Seer undone: Daniel—no strength, deep sleep John—fell . . . as though dead	1:17a
10:10–14 10:15–21 note 10:16, “one in the likeness of the chil- dren of man”	The one revealed touches the seer and explains the vision	1:17–20

Not only is there this match between the order of events in Daniel 10 and Revelation 1, but there are also significant correspondences in the descriptions of the heavenly beings, as can be seen in Table 2.

of the Book of Revelation, New Testament Theology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

19. For further discussion, see G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984).

Table 2. The descriptions of the ones revealed in Daniel 10 and Revelation 1

<i>Daniel 10</i>	<i>Revelation 1</i>
10:5, “clothed in linen, with a belt of gold”	1:13, “clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest”
[7:9, “the hair of his head like pure wool”]	1:14a, “hairs of his head were white like wool”
10:6c, “his eyes like flaming torches”	1:14b, “His eyes were like a flame of fire” (description also found in 2:18)
10:6d, “his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze”	1:15a, “his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace” (description also found in 2:18)
10:6e, “and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude”	1:15b, “and his voice was like the roar of many waters”
10:6b, “his face like the appearance of lightning”	1:16c, “and his face was like the sun shining in full strength”

I am not suggesting that the correspondence between Revelation 1 and Daniel 10 is merely a literary contrivance. Rather, I would suggest that texts such as Daniel and Ezekiel shaped John’s perception of what he saw in his vision. The categories for his perceptions were provided by earlier biblical texts, and then when he described what he saw in terms of those earlier biblical texts John was intentionally signaling to his audience that his vision was fulfilling earlier prophecies.

Along these lines, in Revelation 10 John has an experience that matches Ezekiel’s. In Revelation 10:8–11 John is told to take a scroll from an angel, eat it, and prophesy, just as Ezekiel was told to take a scroll from a hand stretched out to him, eat it, and speak to Israel (Ezek 2:8–3:4).

Table 3. Ezekiel and John eat the scroll

<i>Ezekiel 2:9–3:4</i>	<i>Revelation 5:1; 10:2,9–10</i>
2:9, “And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it.”	10:2, “He had a little scroll open in his hand . . .”
2:10, “And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.”	5:1, “Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.”
3:1, “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.’”	10:9, “So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.’”
3:2, “So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat.”	10:10a, “And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it.”
3:3, “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.’ Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.”	10:10b, “It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.”
3:4, “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them.’”	10:11, “And I was told, ‘You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.’”

Ezekiel then prophesies of judgment (Ezek 3–32) followed by salvation (Ezek 33–48). John has an experience like Ezekiel’s, which designates him as a true prophet of God, then John prophesies of judgment (Rev 11–19) followed by salvation (Rev 20–22). The matching structure presents John as a true prophet and his vision as the fulfillment and culmination of all the biblical prophecies that preceded his.

That John is presenting his apocalyptic prophecy as the culmination of all preceding prophecy is marked in the way

he has structured his book, not only in the two instances just mentioned, but also in wider terms. If we were to summarize the overarching message of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve, it would be this: Israel has broken the covenant, so God will judge her by sending her into exile. Through judgment God will save for His glory: God is preparing a magnificent eschatological salvation that will come through the judgment after exile. Further, that future salvation is often likened to the exodus from Egypt (e.g., Jer 16:13–16). Thus, the prophets speak of a future mighty act of salvation that will be a new exodus and that will open the way to a return from exile, putting the people of God back in the promised land. In part, this will involve God bringing judgment on those He used to judge Israel (see esp. Nahum and Habakkuk).

What does this have to do with Revelation? It is widely recognized that the judgments of the trumpets (Rev 8–9) and the bowls (Rev 15–16) are reminiscent of the plagues on Egypt. I would suggest that John presents these final judgments as the new plagues that will liberate the people at the new and final exodus. Just as Israel was delivered from Egypt through the judgments of the 10 plagues and just as the judgment of Nineveh and Babylon restored the people to the land, so also the people of God will be delivered from the wicked powers of this world through the seven trumpet and seven bowl judgments. Little wonder that the culmination of God's judgment is announced with the cry that Babylon has fallen (e.g., Rev 14:8). It was the fall of Babylon in 539 BC that brought Cyrus into power (cf. Isa 44:28–45:1), and it was this Cyrus who decreed the return to the land (e.g., Ezra 1:1–4). Just as Israel entered the promised land after the exodus from Egypt, so also after the fulfillment of the exodus in Revelation the people of God will enter into the fulfillment of the promised land, the millennial kingdom followed by the new heaven and new earth.

My point in this section is that at the levels of the structure and content of his material, John is alerting his readers to his position as a true prophet who is taking up all the threads of

prophecy that preceded him and weaving them together. Moreover, the events prophesied by the earlier prophets will find their fulfillment in the events that John describes.

Intertextual Connections

The previous section highlighted some of the ways that John signals the fulfillment of earlier prophecy in his own book by structuring his vision in ways that draw attention to such connections. These structural features are one way John establishes intertextual connections, but what usually comes to mind when we think of intertextuality is established at the level of individual words and phrases. Similarities in language between the trumpets and bowls in Revelation and the plagues on Egypt in the book of Exodus can be seen in these two tables:

Table 4. The exodus plagues and Revelation's trumpets

<i>Trumpet in Revelation</i>	<i>Plague in Exodus</i>
1. Rev 8:7, hail, fire	7th, Exod 9:23–25, hail, fire
2. Rev 8:8–9, sea to blood, one-third of living creatures die	1st, Exod 7:20–21, Nile to blood, fish died
3. Rev 8:10–11, rivers and springs made bitter	1st, Exod 7:19, rivers, canals
4. Rev 8:12, one-third of sun, moon, and stars darkened	9th, Exod 10:21–29, three days of darkness
5. Rev 9:1–11, darkness, locust-like scorpions	9th and 8th, Exod 10:21–29, darkness; Exod 10:12–20, locusts
6. Rev 9:12–19, angels released, mounted troops, fire, smoke, and sulfur kill one-third of humanity	10th, Exod 11:1–10; 12:29–32, death angel?
Rev 10:1, angel wrapped in a cloud with legs like pillars of fire	Israel led out of Egypt by the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night

Table 5. The exodus plagues and Revelation's bowls

<i>Bowl in Revelation</i>	<i>Plague in Exodus</i>
1. Rev 16:2, sores	6th, Exod 9:10, boils/sores
2. Rev 16:3, sea to blood, all living things die	1st, Exod 7:17–21, Nile to blood, fish die
3. Rev 16:4–7, rivers and springs to blood	1st, Exod 7:17–21, rivers and springs to blood
4. Rev 16:8–9, sun burns people	
5. Rev 16:10–11, darkness	9th, Exod 10:21–29, darkness
6. Rev 16:12–15, Euphrates dried up and the demons prepared for battle	10th, Exod 11:1–10; 12:29–32, death angel? Exod 14, Red Sea parted
7. Rev 16:17–21, air, earthquake, hail	7th, Exod 9:13–35, hail

The Bible is laced with this kind of intertextuality. The biblical authors learned key patterns from earlier texts, noticed repetitions of those patterns, and highlighted the repetition of such patterns in their accounts. I would suggest that John's thinking was profoundly shaped by the account of the plagues on Egypt in the book of Exodus, and this was in turn reinforced and developed by the many references to a new exodus in the Old Testament Prophets. Thus, when John beheld the judgments that accompanied the trumpets and the bowls in his vision, he naturally "read" his vision as the fulfillment of earlier prophecies. He described the judgments of the trumpets and bowls in terms that are reminiscent of the exodus plagues because the past exodus plagues built the framework for his future expectation.

In precisely these ways, the biblical authors have connected later events and accounts to earlier ones by means of the reuse of key terms and phrases, which in turn create strong connections between sequences of events. These connections between words and phrases that highlight similarities in event sequences

in turn point to the ways that key figures play similar roles in the outworking of the history of redemption. Often these connections establish points of historical correspondence, and as the story unfolds, the significance of events increases. Where we have *historical correspondence* and *escalation* in significance, we have typology.²⁰ Typology involves key patterns seen in persons, events, or institutions in the outworking of the salvation historical drama unfolded in the Old and New Testaments. Again, the biblical authors establish these connections by the reuse of key terms and phrases, the repetition of key sequences of events, and the growing significance of these events in the progress of revelation.²¹

Hans Frei has suggested that the discipline of biblical theology only arose once the worldview in which typology made sense had been discarded.²² Rather than interpreting the world with the categories given by the Bible, conservatives adopted the categories used to undermine the Bible in an attempt to defend it. The business of using the world's categories to defend the Bible has distracted many conservative interpreters of the Bible from the task of discerning the Bible's categories and using them to interpret the world.

20. For reasons that are unclear to me, Sailhamer distinguishes between typology and figural interpretation. See Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 91. I use the term typology to refer to what he describes as figural interpretation, and it seems to me that the terms are used as synonyms in the wider discussion. For one example of the term "typology" being used interchangeably with figuration, see H. W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 6. Remarkably, Sailhamer summarizes Frei's discussion in his description of figural interpretation.

21. For my explorations in typology, see J. M. Hamilton, "The Virgin Will Conceive: Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–23," in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. John Nolland and Dan Gurtner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 228–47; and J. M. Hamilton, "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus," *SBJT* 12 (2008): 52–77.

22. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 1–16.

Believers must embrace the worldview in which typology makes sense—a worldview that includes God sovereignly directing the events recorded in the Bible and the way the biblical authors recorded them. Building on this, believers must interpret the world through the Bible rather than the Bible through the world. This involves seeing the web of meaning created by the Bible’s own intertextual connections. We learn this web of meaning from the Bible, and then we use what we have learned in the Bible to understand what we see in the world around us.

So when we see Abel murdered by Cain, Isaac mocked by Ishmael, Jacob threatened by Esau, Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers, Moses opposed by Israel, David persecuted by Saul, and the same story repeated in the experience of prophets from Elijah to Jeremiah, we gather that in the Bible the righteous are opposed by the wicked. Then we hear Jesus say that “this generation”²³ will be held accountable for the blood of all the righteous from Abel to Zechariah (Matt 23:35), and we realize that this pattern will be fulfilled in Jesus. Nor are we surprised to see that Jesus promises the same treatment to those who follow Him (John 15:18–20). This is the age-old conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15; cf. Rom 16:17–20; Rev 12). These intertextual connections in the Bible teach us what to expect if we follow Jesus, and they teach us to trust God through the tribulation that will inevitably come upon us.

Placement in the Big Story

Seeing the big story of the Bible and understanding how it works and where it is going enables us to understand what

23. On the typological significance of references to “this generation,” see E. Lövestam, *Jesus and “This Generation”: A New Testament Study*, trans. M. Linnarud, *Coniectanea Biblica* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1995).

might otherwise be obscure parts of the Bible. Once we understand the big scheme of God's desire to cover the dry lands with His glory, the failure of His people that results in exile, and His promise to restore them after exile and accomplish His purpose of filling the earth with the knowledge of His glory,²⁴ we are in position to understand a text like Deut 4:25–31. There Moses begins by warning Israel about what not to do when they enter the land (Deut 4:25–26) and ends by telling them what will happen when they do exactly that (4:27–31). Israel will go into the land, break the covenant, be exiled, and then God will restore them when they seek Him with all their hearts from exile. We see the evocation of this big story from the way that Jeremiah, for instance, refers explicitly to Deut 4:29 in Jer 29:12–14. Nehemiah quotes the same passage, Deut 4:29–31, after exile (Neh 1:9).

Knowing that this is the big story of Israel also helps us to understand what the prophets, Isaiah through the Twelve, are saying, and they are all talking about the same thing! They are indicting sinful Israel for breaking the covenant, declaring that the exile is coming, and pointing to the glorious eschatological future that God is preparing through judgment. Those who prophesy after the exile (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) are applying this message to the survivors of Israel. The eschatological future is going to be like resurrection from the dead (Ezek 37). Yahweh the lion will tear Israel (Hos 5:14), but after three days He will raise them up (6:2). Like Jeremiah, Hosea refers to God's promise that in exile Israel would seek him and find him (Hos 5:15–6:3; cf. Deut 4:29). Exiled from God's presence, Israel will be dead as a nation, outside the realm of life, exiled to the realm of death. They will be like a valley of dry bones. But God will breathe life into them, raise them from the dead, and

24. On this, see R. E. Ciampa, "The History of Redemption," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. S. J. Hafemann and P. R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 254–308.

restore them to their land, the realm of life (Ezek 37:1–14, esp. 37:14). This life-giving moment of resurrection, again, will be like a new exodus (cf., e.g., “as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt” in Hos 2:15).

These are the terms and categories that the New Testament authors use to describe what God has done in Jesus, and they learned this way of interpreting the Bible from Jesus Himself,²⁵ who in turn interprets the Old Testament the same way later Old Testament authors interpreted earlier Old Testament passages. The death of Jesus is the lowest point of the exile, the moment when the temple is destroyed (John 2:19–21), when the curse of the covenant was poured out in full (Gal 3:13). At the same time, the death of Jesus is the moment when the new exodus begins (Luke 9:31), and He dies as the new and better Passover lamb (John 1:29,36; 19:36; 1 Cor 5:7).

The new exodus has happened in the death of Jesus, and the return from exile has been inaugurated in His resurrection. The final fulfillment of the new exodus and return from exile await the final judgments and the millennial kingdom, giving way to the new heaven and new earth. In the present, the authors of the New Testament deploy the history of Israel as a kind of paradigm through which the present experience of the church is interpreted (cf. 1 Cor 10:1–13).

Thus Peter can address the members of the churches to which he writes as “elect exiles” who are “sojourners” on the way to the promised land (1 Pet 1:1; 2:11). The new exodus has happened in the death of the spotless lamb, Christ (1:19). Therefore, just as Israel was called to holiness at Sinai after the first exodus, so the church is called to holiness after the second (1:15–16). At Sinai, Israel was given instructions for the building of the tabernacle (Exod 25–40), and likewise the church is

25. See further E. E. Ellis, “Jesus’ Use of the Old Testament and the Genesis of New Testament Theology,” in *Christ and the Future in New Testament History* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 20–37.

being built into a dwelling place of God (1 Pet 2:4–5). At Sinai, Israel was called a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6), and now that the second exodus has taken place, that becomes the church’s role (1 Pet 2:9). Sojourning toward the land of promise (2:11; 5:10), the church is to follow Christ’s example and suffer for doing good, mistreated by the wicked just as He was (2:19–21).

This is the big story into which believers have been incorporated. The church has been redeemed at the “new exodus” when Jesus the Passover lamb died on the cross, and the church is being built into a new temple, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ As churches indwelt by the Holy Spirit follow in the footsteps of Jesus, God’s glory is made known in their proclamation of the great salvation God has accomplished through judgment, in their love for one another, and in their faithfulness to God through all manner of affliction and persecution. The great commission (Matt 28:16–20) is nothing less than the call to cover the dry lands with the glory of God by making disciples of all nations.

Encouragement

It is not difficult to see how the biblical authors mean to encourage their audience by means of the structural features and intertextual connections they use to describe and interpret God’s big story, showing their audiences how they fit into that grand metanarrative that stretches from Eden to the new Jerusalem. The biblical authors encourage their audiences with the knowledge of where the world came from, what went wrong, how God is addressing the wrongs justly and at the same time lavishing mercy, and how He will make known His goodness and

26. J. M. Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006).

glory. They show us where we fit in the story and assure us that the plot will be resolved. We need only to endure in faith, not loving our lives even unto death (Rev 12:11).

HOW DO I DO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?

The kind of biblical theology advocated here has been described as reflection upon the results of the exegesis of particular passages in light of the whole canon.²⁷ Another way to say it is that biblical theology is exegesis of a particular passage in its canonical context. This means that, in order to do biblical theology, we must know the Bible and meditate on it. The only way to do biblical theology is to read the Bible, a lot, in the original languages. We must know the texts so well—words, phrases, sequences—that we notice when later authors reuse words, phrases, and sequences from earlier texts. There is no substitute for knowing the texts in the original languages, for only this will enable us to see the subtlest of allusions, parallels, echoes, and partial quotations.

If one is handicapped by an inability to access the original languages, the best solution is a literal translation. The major problem with translations that are more interpretive is that dynamic equivalent renderings do not preserve intertextual connections.²⁸ Even the more literal translations cannot reproduce every intertextual connection and allusion. One must be able to read the texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek if one wants to do biblical theology.

27. G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 401.

28. See also E. E. Ellis, "Dynamic Equivalence Theory, Feminist Ideology and Three Recent Bible Translations," *ExpTim* 115 (2003): 7–12.

So the prescription for doing biblical theology is really simple: know the Bible in the original languages backward and forward. Read it a lot. Ask God for insight. Memorize the Bible and meditate on it day and night. And read books that will help you put the whole Bible together.

HOW DO I PREACH BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?

I was taught that an introduction to a sermon should do five things: (1) grab the audience's attention; (2) raise the audience's awareness of their real need for what the passage being preached provides; (3) state the main point of the passage, which is also the main point of the sermon; (4) preview the structure of the passage, which is also the structure of the sermon; and (5) give the wider context of the passage. In addition to the context of the passage in the placement of the biblical book, we who preach should strive to address the canonical context of the passage we are preaching. Doing this will model biblical theology for the people of God Sunday by Sunday, text by text, book by book.

In addition to placing a passage in its biblical-theological context in the introduction, wider biblical themes are often essential to understanding the particulars of individual passages. Consider, for instance, what Jesus said to Peter and Andrew: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19). The meaning of this is clear enough, but if we put it in the broader biblical-theological context, a deeper and richer meaning arises from the text. I have referred to the many pointers to a "new exodus" and "return from exile" in the Old Testament Prophets, and I have alluded to Jer 16:13–16 as an example of a place where that theme can be found. Consider what that text says:

"Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall

serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.” [exile; cf. Deut 4:28] “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ [first exodus] but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. [second exodus; cf. Deut 4:29–31] “Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks.” (Jer 16:13–16)

This text promises exile, and then it promises a new act of salvation after exile that will be so definitive that it will eclipse the exodus from Egypt. That great act of salvation will be followed by the Lord “sending for many fishers” (Jer 16:16), who will find the exiles and bring them home. I submit that Jesus is alluding to this passage and this motif when He tells Peter and Andrew He will make them “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). Jesus is telling them that God’s new act of salvation that will eclipse the exodus from Egypt is about to happen, and Jesus is telling them that they will be the “fishers” who will bring the exiles home.

The people of Israel may have returned from the exile from the land in 586 BC, but they had not returned from the exile from Eden. Jesus will take the people of God all the way home. The people of God are no longer those whom God brought “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exod 20:2). The people of God today are those who were bought with the price of the blood of Jesus. The cross of Christ is God’s great act of salvation by which God redeemed His people and by which they are identified. Jesus died as the Passover lamb, inaugurating the new exodus and return from exile. Those whom Jesus called “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19) are the very “fishers” God promised to use to fish out His people (Jer 16:16). The more biblical theology we know—which is to say, the more thoroughly

we know the Old and New Testaments (especially in the original languages)—the easier it will be for us to understand and explain the Old and New Testaments.

How do we preach biblical theology? By explaining texts in canonical context. By highlighting the literary structures the authors have built into their texts, through which they make their points. By drawing attention to the reuse of words, phrases, and sequences from earlier biblical texts. By locating particular texts in the context of the Bible's big story. By showing how the biblical authors sought to encourage their audiences and connecting that encouragement to the members of their audience to whom we preach.

CAN GOD'S PEOPLE HANDLE THIS?

Can God's people operate those complicated remote controls that come with everything from their new flat-screen TVs to their new cars? Can God's people use computers; navigate grocery stores; hold down jobs; and acquire homes, cars, toys, and all the stuff they jam into the garage?

Let me be frank: I have no patience for suggestions that preachers need to dumb it down. Preachers need to be clear, and they need to be able to explain things in understandable ways. But human beings do not need the Bible to be dumbed down. If you think that, what you really think is that God the Holy Spirit did not know what He was doing when He inspired the Bible to be the way it is. Not only does the suggestion that the Bible is more than God's people can handle blaspheme God's wisdom; it also blasphemes His image bearers. People are made in the image of God. Human beings are endowed with brains and sensibilities of astonishing capacity.

Do you want people to think that everything that is interesting or artistic or brilliant comes from the world? Dumb down the Bible.

Do you want them to see the complexity and simplicity of God? The sheer genius of the Spirit-inspired biblical authors? The beauty of a world-encompassing metanarrative of cosmic scope? Teach them biblical theology.

Do not discount the capacities of God's people. They may be stupid and uninformed when their hearts are awakened, but do not punish them by leaving them there. Show them literary artistry. Show them the subtle power of carefully constructed narratives. Show them the force of truth in arguments that unfold with inexorable logic. If they are genuine believers, they will want to understand the Bible. Show them the shouts and songs, the clamor and the clarity, the book of books. Let their hearts sing with the psalmist, weep with Lamentations, and ponder Proverbs. Give them the messianic wisdom of the beautiful mind that wrote Ecclesiastes. Preach the word!

Unleash it in all its fullness and fury. Let it go. Tie it together. Show connections that are there in the texts from end to end. Tell them the whole story. Give them the whole picture. Paint the whole landscape for them, not just the blade of grass.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Go back to the Bible, and go back to the Lord. Repent of the false theology that called God's wisdom into question and denigrated His image bearers. Ask the Lord for forgiveness, and then ask for insight into the text. Then start reading the Bible. One of my teachers at Dallas Theological Seminary, John Hannah, once recounted a conversation he had with S. Lewis Johnson. Late in his life, Johnson told Hannah that looking back he wished he had spent a lot more time reading the Bible instead of reading so many other things.

When we look back on our lives, we want to have read more of the Bible than of blogs. We want to have spent more time in the text than on Twitter. We do not want to regret that we know

so many batting averages, so many Hall of Famers, and so little biblical theology. We do not want to recognize that we wasted our time on politics when we could have been studying the Scriptures.

So let me encourage you to take a guided tour of the Old Testament with Paul House. Get House's *Old Testament Theology*²⁹ and read through the Old Testament with it. House goes book by book through the Old Testament. Read his discussion of a portion of an Old Testament book, then go read that portion of the book itself. With this I would highly recommend Stephen Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty* and Thomas Schreiner's *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*³⁰ and his *New Testament Theology*.³¹ If you have read this far, you might be interested in my own attempt to go book by book through the whole Bible.³²

May God bless your study of the Bible, and may He do so for the good of His people, that His glory might cover the dry lands as the waters cover the sea.

29. P. R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998).

30. T. R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

31. T. R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

32. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*.