

Introduction to Biblical Theology, Class 1

Introduction

Does the Bible as a whole present a **unified story**? Or is each book in the Bible—or even sections within a book—like pieces of a puzzle that don't fit together into a meaningful metanarrative?

Let me give examples by asking some questions:

Does the original "**cultural mandate**" in Genesis 1:28, 29 have anything to do with God's commission to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or the Great Commission?

What does God's **covenant** with King David have to do with Jesus and the Church?

Is there a relationship between the Garden of **Eden** and Solomon's **temple**? Is there a relationship between the Garden of Eden and the **New Jerusalem**?

Do the OT scriptures speak about the mission and work of the **Messiah**?

Luke 24:25-27 "And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

Have the writers of the **Gospels** twisted and **misapplied** texts in the OT to the life of Jesus?

John 19:34, 36 "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 36 For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken.'"

Psalms 34:19, 20 "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. 20 He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken."

Exodus 12:46 “It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones.”

Numbers 9:12 “They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it.”

I believe there are spiritual **benefits** to studying Biblical Theology—and I trust one benefit of this class is your faith in the integrity of the message of the Bible will **strengthen** as you see for yourself the many connections of the parts of the Bible to the whole; as you grow in your understanding of how to **interpret** scripture in the way that the writers of scripture interpreted it; as you **trace** out themes from the beginning to the end; as you observe the development of **promises**, fulfillments of types, and consummation of covenants. I hope that your confidence in God’s Word will increase and abound!

This **Biblical Theology class** will trace the development of redemptive themes, types, promises, and prophecies over the arc of the divine covenants from the beginning of history to their fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the New Jerusalem in Him.

Class Rules: Big class and only 11 weeks, so I’ll have to discourage comments and interactions, unless you feel it’s very important for the whole class! Otherwise, I’ll stay after each class to answer questions and interact with your comments.

There are **visitors** and new members in this class who have been taught different ways of understanding the development of redemptive history. Some of what I teach may be new to them. Some things may be **controversial** even among us old-timers in the church but still within the bounds of orthodoxy. Please be kind and respectful if differences arise. Remember we all agree on the things most important and necessary!

I am Scott Weber: members for 20 years. Studied the Bible in undergrad and in a year of Seminary.

1. Biblical Theology and Other Theology Disciplines

When the Biblical authors wrote their material, they were “selective” with a purpose. Can you think of a verse in the NT that proves this?

John 20:30,31 “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

“theology is the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life”¹

Exegetical – Systematic – Historical – Natural – Practical – Biblical

“Biblical theology expounds Scripture as a history of God’s dealings with us. It therefore focuses on Scripture as historical narrative. But if it is theology, it cannot be pure narrative. It must be application, dealing with the meaning that narrative has for its hearers and readers.”² (Frame)

“Biblical theology as a hermeneutical discipline attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the entire Canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God’s plan and carefully think through the relationship between *before* and *after* in that plan, which culminates in Christ.”³

Although there is a lengthy and complicated history of what has been called “Biblical Theology,” the work of the early 20th Century Princeton theologian, Geerhardus Vos, is of special interest to conservative and Reformed Evangelicals as he made outstanding contributions to our understanding of redemptive history. Vos has been called “the father of *Reformed* Biblical Theology”.

Since the 80s, other evangelical scholars have made some outstanding contributions to the project of Biblical theology. You may be familiar with one

¹ Frame, John. Systematic Theology

² Frame, John. Systematic Theology

³ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology](#) (p. 23). Crossway.

or more of the following names: Goldsworthy, Childs, Kline, Clowney, Gaffin, Ridderbos, Desmond Alexander, G.K. Beale, Thomas Schreiner, Peter Gentry, Steve Wellum, and James Hamilton.

Although my material in this class has been informed from a variety of sources, a few works cast long shadows across the material:

- T. Desmond Alexander’s “From Eden to New Jerusalem”
- James Hamilton’s “What is Biblical Theology?”
- G.K. Beale’s “A New Testament Biblical Theology”
- Peter Gentry and Steven Wellum’s “God’s Kingdom Through God’s Covenants”

2. Redemptive History and the biblical Covenants.

Is there a **central topic** or theme in the Bible? Whether it’s the “central” theme or not, the **kingdom of God** is certainly primary, and a primary aspect of God’s kingdom is summarized in his oft repeated promise, “**I will be your God, and you will be my people.**” We’ll unpack “kingdom of God” in later classes.

“It is **primarily through the biblical covenants** viewed across time that we learn how God’s *kingdom* arrives. This is why **grasping the progression** of the covenants is at the heart of grasping how God’s kingdom **dawns in Jesus**; how God’s redemptive promise is realized; and how the **entire metanarrative** of the Bible hangs together, since the biblical covenants constitute the framework and **backbone** for the entire storyline of Scripture.”⁴

2.1. Covenant Defined

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for covenant is *bĕrît*. The same word is used in Scripture for a wide **diversity** of **oath-bound commitments** in various relationships. It is used to refer to international treaties (Josh. 9:6; 1 Kings 15:19), clan alliances (Gen. 14:13), personal agreements (Gen.

⁴ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 251). Crossway.

31:44), national agreements (Jer. 34:8–10), and loyalty agreements (1 Sam. 20:14–17), including marriage (Mal. 2:14).⁵

“*covenant* ... means a solemn commitment of oneself to undertake an obligation.”⁶ (Waltke)

“A *berith* is an enduring agreement which establishes a defined relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation to specified stipulations on the part of at least one of the parties toward the other, which is taken by oath under threat of divine curse, and ratified by a visual ritual”⁷

2.2. Types of Covenants

Covenants or treaties either identical or similar to those mentioned in the Old Testament were common all across the ancient Near East, in lands and regions known today as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Two types of treaties in the ancient Near East are especially noteworthy: (1) the suzerain-vassal treaty and (2) the royal charter or land grant. The first type is a diplomatic treaty between a great king or suzerain and client kings or vassals. The focus of these treaties was to reinforce the interests of the suzerain by arguments from history and oath-bound affirmations of loyalty on the part of the vassal states, backed up by divine sanctions. The second type of treaty involves a grant of property or even a privileged position of a priestly or royal office given as a favor by a god or king. The focus of these treaties is on honor and the interpersonal relationship.⁸

2.3. Backbone of Redemptive History

We do not assert that the covenants are *the* central theme of Scripture. Instead, we assert that the covenants form the backbone of the Bible’s

⁵ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 47). Crossway.

⁶ Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 287.

⁷ Daniel C. Lane, “The Meaning and Use of the Old Testament Term for ‘Covenant’ (*b^erîṯ*): with Some Implications for Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology” (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2000). P.314

⁸ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (pp. 49–50). Crossway.

metanarrative and thus it is essential to “put them together” correctly in order to discern accurately the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).⁹

2.4. Methods of Interpretation

(Hamilton) “What I’m suggesting is that the Bible teaches Christians how the Bible should be read. Studying biblical theology is the best way to learn from the Bible how to read the Bible as a Christian should. By the same token, studying the Bible is the best way to learn biblical theology.

How should a follower of Jesus read the Bible? The way Jesus did. Jesus of Nazareth did not write any of the books in the Bible, but he taught the writers of the New Testament how to interpret earlier Scripture, redemptive history, and the events they were narrating and addressing.

“The world they [the Bible’s authors] lived in wasn’t Darwin’s.”¹⁰

Before we summarize our understanding of how the covenants fit together, let us briefly highlight five important hermeneutical points that are crucial in “putting together” the biblical covenants.

1. Progressive revelation and its significance for grasping the unfolding of the covenants.¹¹

2. The three horizons of biblical interpretation and their importance for the covenants.

Intimately related to a diachronic reading of the biblical covenants are the three horizons of interpretation..... First, the covenant in question was interpreted within its own immediate redemptive-historical context (i.e., textual horizon). Second, to understand properly how that covenant fit in God’s unfolding plan, it was placed in relation to what preceded it (i.e., epochal horizon), and intertextual connections were developed so that we

⁹ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology](#) (p. 17). Crossway.

¹⁰ Hamilton Jr., James M.. What Is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns . Crossway. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology](#) (pp. 251–252). Crossway.

could understand better the interrelations between earlier and later revelation. **Third**, the covenant was then placed **in relation to later covenants** and, ultimately, in relation to the coming of **Jesus** and the inauguration of the **new covenant**.¹²

3. The typological patterns of Scripture are developed through the covenants¹³

In Scripture, typology and covenants are intimately related. **Try to think** of any biblical types and patterns that are *not* tied to the biblical covenants! In fact, to reflect upon typological patterns and their development is simultaneously to walk through the biblical covenants.¹⁴

4. The new covenant is the telos, terminus, and fulfillment of the biblical covenants.

5. Categorizing the biblical covenants as either unconditional or conditional is inadequate.¹⁵

3. Divine Plan, Promises, Prophecies, and Types

For every one of God's **promises** is **"Yes"** in him. Therefore, through him we also say "Amen" to the glory of God (2 Cor 1:20).

Romans 5:14	Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a type of the Coming One.
1 Cor. 10:6,11	6. Now these things took place as examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did. / 11. These things

¹² Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 252). Crossway.

¹³ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 253). Crossway.

¹⁴ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 42). Crossway.

¹⁵ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 253, 254). Crossway.

	happened to them as examples , and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages' have come.
Hebrews 8:5	These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain
Hebrews 9:24	For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us.
1 Peter 3:21	Baptism, which corresponds to [anti-type] this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Typology ought to be viewed as a **subset** of predictive prophecy, not in the sense of verbal predictions but in the sense of **predictions built on models/patterns** that God himself has established, that become known gradually as later texts reinforce those patterns, with the goal of anticipating what comes later in Christ.¹⁶

Typology is the study of the Old Testament salvation-historical realities or “types” (**persons, events, institutions**) which God has specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their **intensified antitypical** fulfillment aspects (inaugurated and consummated) in New Testament salvation history¹⁷

When the antitype arrives in history, or better, when it is inaugurated, not only are the previous types brought to their *telos* but the entire era introduced entails massive changes. This is why the era of fulfillment inaugurated by Christ (the “already”), even though it still awaits the consummation (the “not

¹⁶ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 39). Crossway.

¹⁷ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*](#) (p. 39). Crossway.

yet”), has introduced greater realities—realities that are directly linked to the inauguration of the new covenant era and the dawning of the new creation¹⁸

What is true of Adam is also true of other typological patterns, whether they be various persons (e.g., Moses, Israel, David, prophets, priests, and kings), events (e.g., the exodus), or institutions (e.g., sacrificial system, tabernacle/temple). It is by this means that Scripture moves from lesser to greater, and grounds the newness of the new covenant fulfilled in Christ.¹⁹

4. Overview of the Covenants: I will be their God, and they will be my people

Table 2.1: The Major Covenants²⁰

Covenant	Main Scripture Texts
1. The Covenant with Creation	Genesis 1–3
2. The Covenant with Noah	Genesis 6–9
3. The Covenant with Abraham	Genesis 12/15/17/22
4. The Covenant at Sinai	Exodus 19–24
5. The Covenant with David	2 Samuel 7/Psalm 89
6. The New Covenant	Jeremiah 31–34/Isaiah 54/ Ezekiel 33–39

¹⁸ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology](#) (p. 42). Crossway.

¹⁹ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology](#) (p. 253). Crossway.

²⁰ Gentry, P. J., & Wellum, S. J. (2015). [God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology](#) (pp. 50–51). Crossway.

Conclusion

Please read Genesis chapters 1-3 for our next class.