



Wednesday Bible Education

Biblical Theology

Lesson 1: Introduction to Biblical Theology/Old Testament

Introduction

What is the difference between systematic theology and biblical theology? Are the two disciplines at odds somehow? Why is the study of theology important? What is the Old Testament about? These are big picture type questions and questions we want to answer in this introduction to our biblical theology series.

Systematic theology refers to the summation and orderly arrangement of the Bible's teaching on a particular topic. The study of soteriology, or the study of salvation, is an example. The doctrine of salvation may be systematized into various parts, e.g., regeneration, conversion, faith, repentance, perseverance, etc. Within each topic, systematic theology compiles and summarizes what the Bible says about that topic. Biblical theology is a way of reading the Bible as one whole, unified book revealing the redemptive purpose of God through history. Biblical theology focuses particularly on Jesus Christ in two great time epochs.

1. From Creation to the incarnation, the promise of his coming (Old Testament)
2. From the incarnation to his return, the promise of his second coming (New Testament)

Biblical theology is reading the flow of history in the Bible as a flow of revelation concerning Christ and a reading of the smaller parts of the Bible in terms of where it is in the timeline of his coming and what it contributes to the progress of revelation. The chronology of the Bible is not only an order of events historically, but a pre-ordained order and unfolding of events leading to these two great events--the incarnation of Christ and the return of Christ.

Both disciplines are important and necessary. They are not in conflict with each other, for both should ultimately be a study of the Bible. Each method has its strengths and place. It is possible that an over-emphasis, or unbalanced preference of one to the other could be problematic, but a proper study of both will yield a fuller and deeper understanding of the whole Bible.

Since the Bible doesn't use the word *theology*, why should we be concerned with it? While the word is not used in the bible, the word *doctrine* is used and it simply means teaching

and implies orderly instruction. The study of theology is important for at least three reasons.

1. Studying theology is the difference between reading and reading with understanding. Imagine you are handed a textbook on physics or chemistry, or some subject you have no knowledge of. The textbook is written in your native language, and while there may be some terms you're unfamiliar with, you can read it. So you read the first chapter and read all the words correctly, but you don't understand what you read. Studying theology helps us read and understand the meaning of the Bible.
2. Studying theology increases our knowledge of God through his Word and guards us from error. Theology is one of the tools used to understand the meaning of a passage. Consider the letter to the Ephesians. It was written to the church at Ephesus by Paul in the mid first century. There was a time, place, author, and audience for the letter, as well as a purpose for writing it. To interpret the letter correctly, we have to account for those things. In studying theology, we also recognize the letter as a part of Scripture as a whole. Therefore, the small letter must be harmonized with what Scripture elsewhere teaches on the various topics mentioned in the letter.
3. Studying theology equips us for living the Christian life. It gives us a better understanding of God, ourselves, the world around us, the past, the present, and the future through studying what the Bible teaches and applying it to our lives.

Introduction to the Old Testament

What is the Old Testament about as a whole? The Old Testament is about the promise of the coming Messiah who will be God's anointed Servant to take away the sins of his people and establish his everlasting kingdom of peace where he will dwell with his people. The foremost message of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah. Jesus viewed the Old Testament this way when talking to the Pharisees in John 5:39 and the two on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:25-27.

The Old Testament consists of 39 books grouped in four categories.

1. The law--Genesis to Deuteronomy
2. History--Joshua to Esther
3. Poetry/Wisdom--Job to Song of Solomon
4. Prophets--Isaiah to Malachi

The Old Testament is about Christ in three primary ways.

1. The Old Testament speaks of Christ directly in specific prophecies about him. Old Testament prophecies include the promise of a savior born of a woman (Genesis 3:15), a son would be given (Isaiah 9:6), born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), descended

from Jesse (Isaiah 11:1-5), born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), etc. Prophecies about his life, death, and resurrection are also given in the Old Testament, including prophecies concerning his future return, yet to be fulfilled.

2. The Old Testament speaks of Christ historically through the events recorded there. For instance, Paul wrote the church at Corinth and referred to Israel in the wilderness drinking water from the rock and wrote, "that rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). While the Old Testament gives us objective, literal events of history, those events also have meaning in terms of God's redemptive plan in Christ.
3. The Old Testament also speaks of Christ through themes and the use of symbols. Consider the account of Abraham taking Isaac up on the mount to offer him as a sacrifice in Genesis 22:1-19. That was an event that happened in history, but that event was about Christ and the ram in the thicket was a symbol of God's only son sacrificed in the place of Abraham's only son Isaac.

When we study the Old Testament, we must study the events and prophecies in their immediate historical context. We must also pursue the meaning of the Old Testament and especially in reference to what is revealed about Christ.

Conclusion

We have begun a biblical theology series where we are going to go through the entire Bible. Biblical theology is the study of Christ through redemptive history in Scripture. We naturally tend to read and teach the Bible as though it's about us. Biblical theology helps us understand that the Bible is about Jesus Christ. Each week we will look at a book to consider what it teaches about Christ, what major themes are in the book, and how it is tied to the other books in presenting a unified message.

For Next Week:

Biblical theology overview of Genesis

About This Study

This series is a study in biblical theology going book by book through the entire Bible. Each lesson typically covers one book of the Bible, though occasionally covers more than one book when the books are short. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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