

The Big Picture of Scripture

Lesson 1: Is the Old Testament a Christian book?

“One could easily feel that reading the Old Testament is rather like hitting your head against a brick wall; it feels good only when you stop. Bearing in mind that it takes up about the first three-quarters of our Bible, dismissing it as irrelevant would save us a lot of time and effort,” *Goldsworthy*.

- I. There are a lot of problematic passages in the OT, e.g., Ex 23.19; Lev 26; Dt 33.22; 2Kgs 2.23-24; Ps 137.8-9; Pr 30.15; Song 7.4; Isa 65.20. Sometimes the problem is what the text actually means, and sometimes it’s discerning how it applies to us. The nature of the Bible is such that the way through these problems is to look at how the Bible holds together as one book with one message, *which is the work of biblical theology*.
 - A. Biblical theology is, in effect, the study of the unity of the message of the Bible, the study of the big picture of Scripture. It’s a verbal map of the overall message of the Bible, giving us a bird’s-eye view of the whole landscape from creation to new creation.
 - B. In this way, biblical theology gives us the means of dealing with problematic passages in the Bible by relating them to the one message of the Bible.
 - C. And since the big picture includes *us and where we are now*, between the ascension of Jesus and His return at the end of the age, biblical theology enables us to see ourselves in relation to the far-off events in the Bible narratives so that we can uncover its meaning for us here and now.
- II. What can we make of the Old Testament?
 - A. It’s more than a lot of stories, but the historical narrative of Israel is the framework into which everything else fits, whether the wisdom literature or the prophets, as a chronological Bible would show. This presents numerous problems when reading Christians read the OT.
 1. The OT is pre-Christian and never mentions the distinctives of the Christian faith. The people of Israel are not Christians and can’t be said to live “Christian” lives.
 2. The OT contains a lot of ceremonial and judicial laws that we as Christians don’t observe.
 3. The prophetic view of the final saving work of God makes no mention of Jesus Christ and speaks of a national destiny for Israel in temporal terms that anticipate a return to a restored temple in a rebuilt Jerusalem under a Davidic king. Furthermore, it doesn’t offer any hope for those who have already died by the time the kingdom of God arrives.
 4. And if the OT somehow prepares for the NT, as most Christians believe, then why is the religion of the one so very different from the other? Should we just discard the OT altogether?
 - B. Biblical theology examines the development of the biblical story from the OT to the New and seeks to uncover the interrelationships between the two parts.
 1. It studies the progressive nature of God’s revelation in order to see what God’s saying in each part. The narratives, laws, wisdom sayings, prophecies, and apocalyptic visions found in the OT are all related to *the coming of Jesus Christ* in some discernible way and biblical theology is a methodical approach to showing these relationships so that the OT can be understood and applied as Christian Scripture.
 2. Biblical theology shows the relationship of all the parts of the OT to the person and work of Jesus Christ and, therefore, to the Christian, because Christ, as the Word of God, mediates the Word of God to us. Because it speaks of Him, it speaks to all those who are in Him.
- III. What does the NT say about the OT? The most compelling reason for Christians to read and study the OT lies in the NT.

- A. The NT witnesses to the fact that Jesus is the One in whom and through whom all the promises of God find their fulfillment, 2Cor 1.20, and these promises are only to be understood from the OT.
- B. The NT gospel of Christ presupposes a knowledge of the OT.
 - 1. Matthew introduces Jesus as descended from David and Abraham, two of the most important characters in the OT narrative, Mt 1.1.
 - 2. Mark says the gospel of Jesus Christ begins with the OT prophets, Mk 1.1-2.
 - 3. Luke links Jesus with a key aspect of the history of Israel, the throne of David, and even with Adam in the Garden, Lk 1.32-33; 3.38.
 - 4. John recalls the Genesis account of creation but asserts that Jesus, the Word, was the Creator of all things and that He now tabernacles among men in the flesh, Jn 1.1-3, 14; cf. Ex 40.34-38.
- C. Everything that's a concern to the NT writers is part of one redemptive history to which the OT witnesses and which begins with the OT narrative, cf. Lk 3.4; 1Cor 15.3-4.
- D. Jesus Himself declared that the OT Scriptures were all about Him, Jn 5.39, 45-46; Lk 24.25-27, 44-47.
- E. The NT bears witness to the fact that the OT is all about Jesus, who He is and what He came to do, Acts 2.22-36; 13.32-33; Rom 1.1-3; 3.21-22.
- F. One estimate is that there are at least 1600 quotes from the OT, to which could be added thousands of more allusions to its teachings and ideas.
- G. The OT was the only Bible the first Christians had and when the NT was written it was added to it as being a part of it and on par with it as the Word of God to men.
- H. *The manner in which the OT testifies to Christ is a question that can only be resolved on the basis of the NT, which provides the Christian with an authoritative interpretation of the Old.
- IV. The significant point to take away, then, is that Jesus Christ is proclaimed in the NT as the answer to *all* the expectations, prophetic predictions, and divine promises of the OT, Mk 1.14-15; 2Cor 1.20; 1Pet 1.10-11; Rev 19.10. And if this is the case, then there's a real sense in which Jesus is *present* in those promises and expectations.
 - A. There's a real sense in which Jesus is *present* in every OT type and shadow that leads to Him. Somehow, they all point to Him, they all prefigure Him, they all prepare for Him. Jesus is the Fulfiller of it all. Knowing that at the outset will help us greatly to understand exactly what it is that He fulfills.
 - B. Paul's words in Col 1.16 are *significant*. He's saying that the meaning of the universe is found in the gospel. God created all things with a view to their redemption in Christ, Eph 1.10. The gospel is God's forethought, His blueprint to creation, not a mere afterthought because of sin.
 - 1. When God created Adam in the Garden in fellowship with Himself, He was declaring the End from the beginning. He was
 - C. That means the main character in the OT narrative is not some Israelite hero (or anti-hero), but *God Himself*. All Scripture is God's *self-revelation*.
 - 1. He's creating a Kingdom in which He will rule over His people in His Paradise—and after the fall, He's restoring and recreating that Kingdom to bring it to its intended consummation.
 - 2. He's revealing the nature of His Kingdom progressively in history, using people's lives and experiences as redemptive or salvation history.
 - 3. This redemptive history finds its goal, focus, and fulfillment in the person and work of Christ, and it's the work of biblical theology to discern *how* this is the case.