

What is biblical theology and why is it important?

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What is biblical theology?

“that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with *the process of the self-revelation of God*” (Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 5).

Vos prefers the name “History of Special Revelation” (another similar term is the “*salvation-historical* interpretation of the Bible”).

“[It is] theology understood from the perspective of the biblical writers within their own historical context biblical theology is concerned with how the revelation of God was understood in its time, and what the total picture is that was built up over the whole historical process” (Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 26).

Perhaps a contrast might help ...

Biblical Theology
vs
Systematic Theology

What prior assumptions help us to do biblical theology?

(Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 26-34)

- God

- The Bible

“progressive revelation”

- Us

How does this help us approach the Bible?

On the one hand ...

On the other hand ...

Might there be a unifying and unfolding plan?

(Mark 1:14-15; Luke 18:17; Psalm 103:19)

Jesus announces the arrival of ...?

What does this tell us about the unfolding of God's saving rule?

(Romans 1:1-4; 3:21; 16:25-26; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:16; 5:39)

Stages ...

Jesus ...

So what?

Are there any specific 'discernable stages' in this plan?

(Matt 1:17; Acts 7:2, 45-47; 13:17-23)

A fairly full outline of the stages:

(Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 21-25, 149)

"God's people in God's place under God's rule"

Old Testament

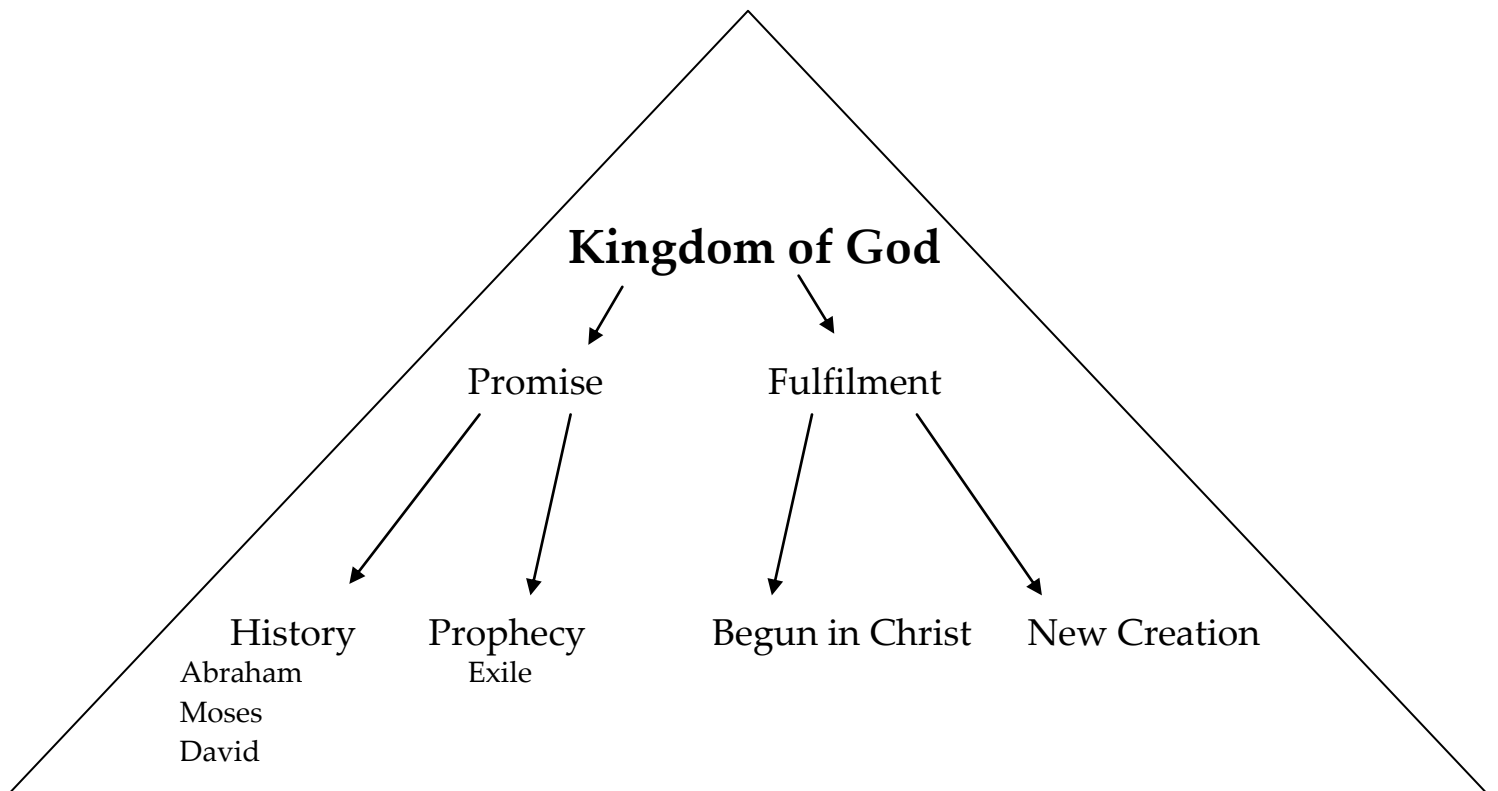
- The pattern of the kingdom (the garden)
- The perished kingdom (the fall)
- The promised kingdom (promises to Abraham)
- The partial kingdom (Israel's history)
- The prophesied kingdom (the prophets)

New Testament

- The present kingdom (Jesus' life/death/resurrection)
- The proclaimed kingdom (the church)
- The perfected kingdom (new creation)

A slightly more simplified outline of these stages:

(Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 232; *Gospel and Kingdom*, 100, 103)



How do these broad stages unfold?

(Carson, *The God Who Is There*; Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*)

Israel's history

Creation/Fall → Covenant → Exodus → Tabernacle/Temple → Kingship
→ Law/Sacrifice
→ Land/People

Israel's prophets look forward to ...

In Christ there is ...

How is God's saving rule administered?

(Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*)

Covenants in the saving plan of God

(2 Cor 1:20; Eph 2:12-13)

- The "Covenant Formula"
(e.g., Exod 6:7; Jer 31:33; Rev 21:3)
- Abrahamic covenant
(Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-16 → Luke 1:55, 72-73; Gal 3:7, 8, 14, 16, 29)
- Mosaic covenant
(Exodus 19-24 → Matt 5:17; Gal 3:13; 4:4; Rom 5:19; 8:4; Heb 8:6-13; 9:15)
- Davidic covenant
(2 Samuel 7:12-17; Psalm 89:3, 4, 26-37 → Matt 1:1; 15:22; Luke 1:69-70; Acts 2:29-35)
"all nations will be blessed through him" (Psalm 72:17)
- New covenant
(Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 34, 36-37 → Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:6-13; 9:15)

What kind of questions should we be asking when we come to any passage in the Bible?

(Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 53-83)

- the immediate context
- the larger story
- the stage/epoch/era
- covenant
- continuity or discontinuity
- connection to main themes/patterns
- God's saving rule through Christ (our sin and need of grace, God and his character, Jesus and his rescue, our response of trust and conformity to Christ's character)

What difference might this make in church life and ministry?

(e.g. Sunday school, preaching, worship)

Further reading

Biblical theology in general

- Alexander, T. D., B. S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and G. Goldsworthy. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Leicester/Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Carson, D. A. *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.
- Carson, "Worship under the Word" in *Worship by the Book*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Dempster, S. G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. NSBT 15. Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003.
- Gentry, P. J. and S. J. Wellum. *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012.
- Goldsworthy, G. *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible: An Introductory Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991.
- Lawrence, Michael. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.
- Roberts, V. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-line of the Bible*. Leicester: InterVarsity, 2003.

Biblical theology for children

- Helm, David. *The Big Picture Story Bible*. Illus. Gail Schoonmaker. Wheaton, Ill.: Good News/Crossway, 2004.
- Lloyd-Jones, Sally. *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name*. Grand Rapids: Zonderkids, 2007.
- Meade, Starr. *Grandpa's Box: Retelling the Biblical Story of Redemption*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2005.
- _____. *Mighty Acts of God: A Family Bible Story Book*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.

Some helpful websites

- www.beginningwithmoses.org
- www.biblicaltheology.ca
- www.credomag.com/the-magazine/archives/whats-the-big-story/
- www.9marks.org
- www.thegospelcoalition.org/preaching-Christ