

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

12 Themes Woven Through Scripture

Biblical Theology: 12 Themes Woven Through Scripture
by Paul A. Himes

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Acknowledgments

Ever since I took a PhD course under New Testament scholar Andreas Köstenberger, Biblical Theology has been an obsession of mine. I am delighted at the challenge and opportunity to make this discipline accessible to the local church—especially to young people.

Note that Scripture quotations in this study do not come from a specific English translation of the Bible. Where direct quotations were necessary, I have included my own literal translation from the Greek or Hebrew or used wording attested in multiple translations.

I am grateful to my research assistants Matthew Esayenko and Devon Swanson, who helped me especially with proofreading and offering ideas for clarity. Matt, in addition, did a lot of work hunting down some sources for me (though I take full responsibility for the final product). I am also grateful to Matt for suggesting the example of Gideon in Lesson 10. This is my first book to be published after my marriage, and so I would also like to thank my wife Franziska for her great support and encouragement.

Finally, I am grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If there is one lesson to be learned from this curriculum, it is that all Scripture ultimately points to Him!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul A. Nimer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Paul" and "A." on the first line and "Nimer" on the second line.

INTRODUCTION



Imagine meeting with a group of friends at your favorite restaurant. Apart from enjoying good food, all your friends feel free to talk about whatever is on their mind and share what is important to them. In essence, this is biblical theology—examining what topics the individual writers of the Bible, inspired by God, originally wanted to emphasize and discuss.

In addition to teaching students how to study biblical theology on their own, these lessons introduce important themes and storylines woven throughout Scripture. Students will trace the development of important doctrinal themes such as Israel, the Church, God’s love, redemption, and worship.

Studying biblical theology helps us appreciate each author’s unique perspective. Biblical theology also helps us see how the Holy Spirit combines the various threads of theological themes into a magnificent, Christ-centered tapestry of brilliant design.

In This Study

This study contains the Teacher’s Lesson material. Gray boxes highlight discussion questions and additional background information that may be used as time allows. Each lesson also includes a reproducible lesson outline with blanks for students to fill in while listening. An optional Scripture memory list is included in the table on page 9.

Note: You can download printable handouts and a slide presentation of the Teacher’s Lessons for free at positiveaction.org.

Suggestions for Teaching

Typically, one lesson can be covered in one week. However, feel free to adjust the study to your own schedule.

To prepare for the lesson, prayerfully read through the Scripture text for that lesson, and read the lesson itself.

A Scripture memory list is available. Consider having students memorize the passage to recite or write out at the next class gathering.

Study Objectives

- Understand the meaning of biblical theology.
- Recognize the value of biblical theology.
- Integrate biblical theology into personal Bible study.
- Trace the development of significant theological themes throughout Scripture.

Scope and Sequence

Lesson 1: Introducing Biblical Theology

- Biblical theology prioritizes the development of important themes within the individual books of the Bible.
- We can study biblical theology on our own by noting different points of emphasis in the individual books of the Bible.
- Biblical theology should make a practical difference in our lives.

Lesson 2: The Glory of God the Father

- God's glory refers to His supreme value and ultimate greatness.
- God calls His people to recognize His glory.
- Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit share the same glory as God the Father.

Lesson 3: The Triumphant Conquest of God the Son

- Jesus' victory over death and spiritual powers allows us to share in His triumph.
- The conquering Messiah will crush Satan and rule over His people.

Lesson 4: Fellowship through God the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit's activity in the Old Testament includes participation in creation and empowering believers for service.
- The Holy Spirit influences Christians to obey and follow Christ.
- The Holy Spirit unites believers together as the children of God.

Lesson 5: Israel and Her Purpose

- God gave the nation of Israel a mission to be loyal to Him and to be a blessing to the nations.
- The blessing of the Messiah came through Israel.
- Although Israel often failed in her mission, by God's grace, Israel will ultimately complete her mission.

Lesson 6: The Church as the Family of God

- The church functions as the gathering of God's children.
- Believers are spiritual siblings who should seek unity and care for one another.

Lesson 7: God's Love for Us

- Christians should appreciate God's love toward them.
- The cross is the ultimate expression of love.
- God empowers believers to reflect His love toward others.

Lesson 8: Rescue and Redemption

- God rescues and redeems His people from evil and sin.
- Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross was the culmination of God's rescue plan.
- Every believer belongs to God and exists to glorify Him.

Lesson 9: The Resurrection of the Body

- The Old Testament anticipates the physical resurrection of both the Messiah and believers.
- The believer's future resurrection is closely linked to Christ's resurrection.
- Our resurrected bodies will not be troubled by sickness, weakness, or sin.

Lesson 10: Who Am I?

- The Bible equips us to understand our individual identity.
- The questions “Who am I?” and “Do I matter?” find their answers in God as Father and Creator, and Christ as Savior.

Lesson 11: Praising God

- We praise God by proclaiming His greatness.
- The Bible is filled with words of praise for God.
- God wants His people to praise Him.

Lesson 12: The Great Commission

- The Great Commission is Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations.
- The Great Commission has its roots in the Old Testament and Israel’s calling.
- Believers should embrace the Great Commission as God’s master plan of blessing the nations.

Lesson 13: The New Jerusalem

- God intended Jerusalem to be the center for Israel’s worship of Him.
- God will fellowship with redeemed humanity in the New Jerusalem for all eternity.

Scripture Memory

Lesson	Scripture
1	2 Timothy 3:16–17
2	Psalm 19:1
3	Genesis 3:15
4	Romans 8:1–2
5	Genesis 22:18
6	1 Corinthians 1:10
7	1 John 4:16
8	Mark 10:45
9	1 Corinthians 15:20–22
10	1 John 3:2–3
11	Psalm 150:1–2
12	1 Thessalonians 1:7–8
13	Romans 12:1–2

Feedback

As a nonprofit publishing ministry, we consider teachers our co-laborers in the faith. Each curriculum remains a work in progress, and the people who teach these studies have a great impact on the scope and format of every new edition. If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us—we'd love to hear from you.

info@positiveaction.org
(800) 688-3008
positiveaction.org

INTRODUCING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



Content Objectives

- ◆ Biblical theology prioritizes the development of important themes within individual books of the Bible.
 - ◆ We can study biblical theology on our own by noting different points of emphasis in the individual books of the Bible.
 - ◆ Biblical theology should make a practical difference in our lives.
-

Introduction

We bring many questions to Scripture—what does the Bible say about obeying parents? What promises in Scripture apply to me? Does God’s Word offer any practical help on making friends? All this is good and well. We definitely should look to God and His Word for wisdom and guidance on such personal matters.

Yet what if instead of bringing *our* agenda to the Bible, we let the Bible speak for itself? Instead of beginning with the questions most important to us, we should ask the authors of Scripture what questions were most important to *them*. This, in a nutshell, is “biblical theology,” a way of looking at the Bible that every Christian needs to learn to live as God intended.

Imagine you host a dinner party at your home and invite some of your closest friends. As you sit around the table, instead of *you* driving the conversation—talking about your favorite sport, your latest hobby, or whatever—you let your friends bring up what is important to them. That’s how it is with biblical theology: You invite the prophets, apostles, and other biblical authors to share what’s on their hearts, and listen to what they say to each other.¹

The great thing about biblical theology is that Christians of any age can do it. You don’t need to know Hebrew or Greek (though that certainly helps), and you don’t need to be a scholar with a fancy degree in theology. All you need is to listen to the authors, be patient, and put your own questions and agenda on the shelf, allowing the authors and their divine Author to share what’s on their hearts.

¹ This paragraph and the previous one both adapt and modify Caird’s famous “Apostolic Conference” description of biblical theology. See G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, edited and completed by L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 18–22.

These lessons will introduce you to the field of biblical theology, where you are sure to discover life-changing truths you may never have considered before. After this introductory lesson, the remaining lessons will dig into 12 central themes running through all of Scripture. Why did God put them there? What did He inspire each individual author to contribute to the discussion?

By looking at the Bible in this way, you will learn to value both the unity and diversity of Scripture. You will also learn to appreciate each author's unique perspective and how the Holy Spirit wove together the various threads of the Bible into a magnificent tapestry that lets us know Him.

What Kind of Book Is the Bible?

The Bible is a CANON.

The Bible's many different parts fit together in a carefully planned whole. Although topical studies can be helpful at times, we shouldn't always run to some man-made list of Bible topics to see what parts of Scripture interest us and skip the rest. Instead, we should assume that God divinely guided the order in which He revealed His thoughts through His writers.

For example, when God first revealed Himself to Moses, He did not discuss the Church's ordinances of baptism and communion. **Read Exodus 3:5–6.** Instead, God told Moses to take off his shoes and then declared that He *is* (present tense!) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Matt. 22:32). Those were Moses' three most well-known ancestors. In introducing Himself to Moses this way, God was revealing that He was the One who had previously revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and now, He was revealing Himself to Moses.

What do we mean by *canon*? The word originally referred to "a straight rod" that builders used as a standard of measurement.² Practically speaking, "the canon of Scripture" simply means what the Holy Spirit led the early church to recognize as His supernaturally inspired texts. God did not send down stone tablets from heaven listing all the biblical books, but Scripture points us to what Jesus and the apostles considered authoritative, both for the Old Testament (Luke 24:25, 27, 44) and for the New Testament (2 Pet. 3:15–16).

Background – Progressive Revelation

We need to understand an important term for this series: *progressive revelation*. This means "later revelation builds on earlier revelation, complementing and supplementing, rather than contradicting it."³ In other words, Scripture builds on Scripture, and God did not reveal everything

2 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 289. This book is an excellent resource for studying how we got our Bible, and why these 66 books are canonical, and not others.

3 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 164.

about Himself—or how He wishes us to live—all at once. Jesus Christ is the ultimate Revelation of God, the “Word” (*Logos*) of God, who helps us more fully understand previous revelation (the Old Testament).

The Bible is a UNITED whole.

Although we recognize that the canon of Scripture consists of 66 distinct books that reflect the unique style of many different authors, there is a perfect unity to these inspired authors. A belief in this point of unity distinguishes Bible believers from liberal theologians. Sadly, these liberal theologians practice “biblical theology” in an unbiblical way because they deny the perfect unity of Scripture’s authors. Instead, they pit one author against another, seeking to find ways they contradict each other. They assume that the human authors each had their own—often contradictory—agendas, working in virtual isolation from the other biblical authors.

Bible believers wholeheartedly reject such perspectives and affirm by faith the essential unity of Scripture as our starting point in all Bible study. **Read 2 Timothy 3:16.** Evangelical theologian Gerhard Maier states it well: “The unity of Scripture finds its most secure basis in the One who ultimately brought it forth. More specifically, it is God the Holy Spirit who permeates it and constitutes it as a unity (2 Tim. 3:16).”⁴

In other words, our approach to Scripture begins with our faith in the character of the triune God who has revealed Himself to us. While we appreciate the unique characteristics, topics, and words of all the authors, we must always remember that the same Spirit inspired them, and He has one mind.

What Is Biblical Theology?

We’ve already defined biblical theology briefly, but let’s try to spell it out a bit more fully, inserting a few terms that may require further study. Biblical theology is a method for “tracing” the theological themes and storylines of Scripture in such a way that we recognize the priorities of the individual inspired writers, valuing and emphasizing what they value and emphasize.⁵ Or, as some scholars have put it more succinctly, biblical theology is “the study of the whole Bible on its own terms.”⁶

⁴ Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. by Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 191.

⁵ This definition comes from the author of this study book, but it was influenced by a variety of voices and perspectives, especially Andreas J. Köstenberger.

⁶ Jeremy M. Kimble and Ched Spellman, *Invitation to Biblical Theology: Exploring the Shape, Storyline, and Themes of Scripture*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 16.

Illustration – Tracing

Some children who are not gifted with the steady hands of creative artists can still produce beautiful pictures by placing a sheet of tracing paper over an image and drawing on top of it. They are not creating anything new, but they are tracing another artist's work. Similarly, while it is okay to bring our own thoughts and questions to Scripture, we must "trace" the ideas of the inspired authors if we truly desire to be faithful to Scripture. This means we should closely follow their train of thought, their choices of key words, the questions they grapple with, and so forth.

Studying the progression of INSPIRED thought

By *progression* here, we do not mean progress in the sense of improvement, as if the Old Testament Scriptures were somehow inferior to the New. Instead, we mean how Scripture progresses, or moves, from point A to point B. We are not content with only knowing what an author says but how and why he says it. To embrace biblical theology is to embrace the fact that the Holy Spirit did not randomly throw together all the ideas, words, and sentences that He inspired. No—He also inspired how the authors strung the words and sentences together, across the scope of each psalm, book, or epistle.

Studying the INTERRELATION of Scripture

If we are committed to the idea of a single divine Author of Scripture, we should not be content to stop with the writings of one human author. The Apostle Paul did not develop the gospel on his own. In his epistles, the Apostle Paul immersed himself in biblical theology, as we can see in his handling of the storyline of Genesis. **Read Romans 4:3.** Paul, quoting Genesis 15:6, declared that Abraham's faith in God justified him. Paul was not content to stop with one isolated verse but went on to explain how, according to the broader narrative of Moses, Abraham expressed faith and was justified many years before he was ever circumcised in Genesis 17 (Rom. 4:9–11).⁷ Paul did not rely on isolated prooftexts—citing individual passages to make his point—but on the whole storyline in its context.

What the biblical authors are saying is not the only thing that matters; *how* and *why* they say it also matters. We can stay focused on the most important matters of Scripture by paying close attention to the authors' methodology across an entire book as well as the divine Author's methodology across the entire canon (Matt. 23:23). We can identify the main points without getting bogged down in some of the Bible's perplexing oddities such as head coverings on women (1 Cor. 11:4–16) or being baptized for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29).

⁷ Stanley E. Porter, *The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary*, NTM 37 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 106.

Illustration – Stephen’s Sermon

Think of Stephen’s lengthy sermon in Acts 7. Stephen could have quoted just a couple prooftexts from Isaiah, told the high priest and his supporters how wicked they were, and left it at that. But he didn’t. Instead, Stephen traced the theme of rebellion across Israel’s entire history and highlighted Israel’s constant rebellion despite God’s gracious redemption. Only once he finished tracing these Old Testament themes did he bring the hammer down and rebuke the religious leaders for how incredibly wicked and hard-hearted they were as they too resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51).

The blind fury that they unleashed on Stephen testifies to the effectiveness of his careful use of biblical theology. Stephen’s powerful sermon even motivated the Pharisee Saul to double down on his persecution of the church, but God later intervened with love resulting in Paul’s conversion.

How Do We Practice Biblical Theology?

Knowing the general principles of biblical theology is useful, but we also must put them into practice in our personal Bible study.

KNOW the Bible.

First, we need to start with an understanding of the general content of the Bible. We shouldn’t keep the different parts of Scripture isolated from each other. Each part supports the rest.

A jigsaw puzzle is not complete until you find that last piece. All the pieces have value, and all are required to complete the picture. Some pieces are more prominent than others, and some pieces may contribute more to the picture, but all are necessary to complete the puzzle. God has inspired 66 pieces of the puzzle, and every piece helps complete the picture that God intends for us to see today.

Consider, for example, the value of two radically different books such as Esther and 1 Peter. Both books are essential to the puzzle of who God is and what He accomplishes. If we focus on 1 Peter alone and neglect Esther, we will miss a key part of the puzzle. When we compare these two different books side by side, we notice that persecution is a shared theological theme. Both Esther and 1 Peter reveal something that God wants us to know about persecution.

So, the first step in biblical theology is to gain a general knowledge of the entirety of Scripture. If you read significant portions of the Bible, you will begin to see how all the parts intertwine.

FOCUS on a particular book.

Second, we need to work through particular books of the Bible. The first time you study a book, you do not need to focus on understanding every individual passage. For example, when you read 1 Peter, you don't need to understand the hotly debated "spirits in prison" phrase in 1 Peter 3:19. Instead, let Peter show you what topics are obviously important to him. For example, you might notice that suffering for Christ shows up frequently. You will start to notice how this theme keeps occurring throughout the epistle, from near the beginning (1 Pet. 1:6) to the closing doxology (1 Pet. 5:10). Once you notice this theme, you should pay attention to how Peter develops it throughout his epistle and how it intersects with other topics such as the person and work of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21).

At this point, you don't want to focus on individual words so much as the ideas behind them. For example, if you are studying the theme of God's love in the Gospel of John but focus only on the English word *love* (or the Greek word *agape*), you will miss out on a lot about love. John teaches some of the most important truths about the concept of love in his account of Jesus' death on the cross (John 19:17–30). In fact, this is the single greatest expression of God's love in history, but the word *love* never appears in this passage.

Something else important to look for is the variety of words and phrases that could touch on the same concept. For example, "soda," "pop," "soda-pop," "soft drink," and "Coke" can all refer to the same broad category of carbonated, non-alcoholic drinks.⁸

So, it's not enough just to look for the word *suffering* in 1 Peter. You also want to look for related words or phrases and any discussion about the broader concept of suffering where the words *suffering* or *suffer* may not appear. For example, when 1 Peter 4:4 talks about unbelievers slandering us, it certainly is a form of suffering even if it doesn't use that word. After all, slander hurts!

After working through the entire Book of 1 Peter, section by section, you can now step back and look at the book as a whole. You've identified key points about suffering, and now you can meditate on how this all fits together. Jot down some simple observations about God and the way He works. You may write, "The Apostle Peter wants us to know that suffering for Christ helps Christians develop Christ-like character." It's okay if your answers sound simple or obvious.

LOOK at the big picture.

Now it's time to take another look at this theme in the Bible as a whole, the entire canon. At this stage, you don't need to perform a deep analysis of every book in the Bible. But you do need to place your particular book and theme within the context of the whole canon. This will result in two things: (1) You will see and appreciate the interrelatedness of Scripture, and (2) you will correct any mistaken observations that you drew from your initial study of just one book.

⁸ For more on the difference between words and concepts, see Paul Himes, "The Meaning of Words (Part 1): Words & Concepts," *Word by Word*, March 10, 2017, <https://www.logos.com/grow/the-meaning-of-words-part-1-words-concepts>.

Regarding the interrelatedness of Scripture, you will start noticing new connections, such as how Joseph's story in Genesis 37–47 illustrates many truths that Peter teaches about suffering. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul also provides further examples of rejoicing in suffering for Christ, as he realized that it is a privilege for believers to be identified with the suffering Messiah (2 Cor. 4:1–11).

Also, if we study one book in isolation, we might misunderstand its point because we overlook alternative explanations. If you focus just on Hebrews, you might leave with the mistaken impression that born-again believers can lose their salvation (see for example Heb. 6:4–6).

Yet if we trace two related themes through Scripture—the eternal security of true believers and the apostasy of mere professing believers—we will notice clear teaching that a truly born-again Christian's eternal destiny is secure in the hands of God (John 10:28–29; 1 Pet. 1:4–5). Also, we see that those who leave the Christian faith permanently were not truly born-again to begin with (1 John 2:19). This means we must go back to the drawing board with Hebrews and explore other interpretations that fit better with the rest of Scripture.

Similarly, if passages like Revelation 3:5 make us wonder if good works or personal effort might be essential to salvation, we just need to study the theme of *overcoming* in John's epistles. This study will show us that the one who overcomes is the very same as the one who has put his or her faith in Jesus Christ (1 John 5:4–5). If you are born again, you will be an overcomer, and the believer who overcomes has been born again. So, what might John mean in Revelation 3:5? He can't mean that we need to work hard to earn our salvation and become overcomers. His words imply, instead, that some of the people at Sardis could attend church without being truly born again because Revelation 3:4–5 seems to indicate that some people in the church were not true overcomers.

Make it PRACTICAL.

After studying a theme within the context of the rest of the canon, we must ask ourselves this question: "So what?" In other words, what difference does this make in our lives?

If we study suffering in 1 Peter, several practical points jump out. On the one hand, Peter has a positive perspective on suffering in his epistle. We can rejoice in times of suffering because eternal salvation awaits us (1 Pet. 1:6, 3:14, 4:13–14). Any struggles we face in this life are nothing compared to eternal future joy. Come to think of it, doesn't the Apostle Paul make the exact same point in Romans 8:18? Our motto should not be, "You only go through life once, so grab all the personal satisfaction you can get," but rather, "The cost of living for Jesus in this life is nothing compared to the rewards I will reap in the next life."

In fact, we can go a step further and realize that suffering for Christ brings us closer to Him even in the present life (1 Pet. 2:21, 3:17–18, 4:13–14). **Read 1 Peter 4:13–14.** Verse 13 seems to correlate the degree of our suffering with the joy that we will experience at His coming. In the end, the winner is not the person with the most toys. The winner is the person with the most scars.

A third, more sobering point also becomes clear. God promises to bless those Christians who suffer only for the name of Christ. Those who suffer for the wrong reasons should not expect to experience God's blessing (1 Pet. 2:19–20, 3:12–17; 4:15–19). **Read 1 Peter 4:15.** Peter even includes a busybody as a reason Christians must not suffer! In other words, not all suffering is good suffering. Let's not whine about being "persecuted" when our own sin brought us scorn.

These practical applications fit well with the teachings about suffering in the rest of Scripture. Studying a theme like this throughout the rest of the canon will provide further insights into practical living. Acts' account of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail shows how suffering with the right attitude can lead to opportunities to share the gospel (Acts 16: 25–34; see also 1 Peter 3:14–16).

The Difference Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

Another valuable way to study the Bible is systematic theology, the systematic study of the Bible's doctrines or teachings. This approach is an extremely important part of Christian education. First, we must understand what each biblical author says before we can put it all together into a systematic whole. In other words, biblical theology comes before systematic theology.

Systematic theology asks the questions FIRST and looks to Scripture for the answers.

Remember the dinner party analogy at the beginning of this lesson? This can help illustrate the difference.⁹ With systematic theology, you bring your questions to the table: What is God like? What is sin? How do angels and humans differ? You then ask the entire Bible to address that question.

Biblical theology looks to Scripture FIRST to see what topics it discusses.

Biblical theology, on the other hand, begins with asking the authors what they want to talk about, and then we see if any other Bible author has something else to add.

Using biblical theology to study a short book like Jude, you would ask, "What doctrine was important to Jude?" **Read Jude 1:1–4.** Jude yearned to protect the church from false teachers. Do Paul or Peter have something to add to what Jude said?

⁹ Again, this is an adaptation of Caird's excellent analogy. See Caird, *New Testament Theology*, 18–22.

Discussion: The theme most important to Jude was warning the church about false teachers. What other books of the Bible grapple with that topic? What are some good themes that Jude says he would not discuss but are discussed elsewhere in the canon?

Conclusion

Biblical theology increases our understanding of both a particular author's inspired train of thought and the Holy Spirit's grand orchestration of these thoughts throughout the entire canon.

Another strength of biblical theology is that it does not require any special training in the biblical languages or modern theologians' specialized study methods. All it takes is a willingness to read Scripture meditatively and to connect the dots.

LESSON ONE

INTRODUCING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

What Kind of Book Is the Bible?

The Bible is a CANON.

The Bible is a UNITED whole.

What Is Biblical Theology?

Studying the PROGRESSION of inspired thought

Studying the INTERRELATION of Scripture

How Do We Practice Biblical Theology?

KNOW the Bible.

FOCUS on a particular book.

LOOK at the big picture.

Make it PRACTICAL.

The Difference Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

Systematic theology asks the questions FIRST and looks to Scripture for the answers.

Biblical theology looks to Scripture FIRST to see what topics it discusses.

NOTES:

THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER



Content Objectives

- ◆ God's glory refers to His supreme value and ultimate greatness.
- ◆ God calls His people to recognize His glory.
- ◆ Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit share the same glory as God the Father.

Introduction

“All the events of the created world are designed to *manifest the glory of God*.”¹

“Man’s chief end is to *glorify God*, and to enjoy him for ever.”²

These two statements come from two radically different systematic theologies, written by Christians in two different eras of history to instruct two very different audiences. Yet both emphasize the same thing: The glory of God is the ultimate purpose of life. This theme seems like a good place to start our journey through biblical theology.

In this lesson, we will focus specifically on the glory of God the Father. We will see that we cannot speak of His glory without discussing how He manifests His glory through the Son and the Spirit. That’s the beauty of biblical theology: Many different brushstrokes combine in a glorious way to paint a full picture of God and His glory.

Illustration – Wedding Vows

Wedding vows traditionally include the phrase “forsaking all others” and for good reason. When a man marries a woman, nobody else is supposed to compete for his adoration. Imagine what would happen if he told his new wife that she was beautiful and then pointed to another woman and said, “But she is just as beautiful as you are.” How insulting! That man’s wife would have every right to be jealous. You wouldn’t even want to say that to a girlfriend or boyfriend, unless you wanted the relationship to end right then and there!



1 John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1959), 92; emphasis added.

2 *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 2nd ed. (New York: 1856), 19; emphasis added.

So it is with our relationship with God. It is not enough to acknowledge His glory. The only acceptable response to His unique glory is to praise how it is unparalleled in all of creation. God cannot share His glory with others (Isa. 42:8).

But what exactly do we mean by *glory*? This is one case where knowing the original languages can help. The Hebrew verb *kavad* is often used to describe the act of giving glory to God (e.g., Ps. 22:23, 86:9; Prov. 3:9; Ezek. 39:13). Interestingly, this verb meaning “to give glory” and its related adjective *kōved* meaning “glorious” both have the idea of something being heavy in a literal or metaphorical sense. (See Judg. 1:35 for a literal sense; Prov. 27:3 for the metaphorical sense.) *Glory* also alludes to the act of assigning value or honor to something (Mal. 1:6).

From one perspective, then, to glorify God means to assign Him value. Yet this is not just any value, as if God were only one of many valuable things. After all, God is a jealous God who refuses to share His glory with other lesser beings (Exo. 20:5). To glorify God properly means to assign Him supreme value over anybody and anything else.

To trace the theme of God’s glory, we must find out how Scripture points us to God’s supreme value—His ultimate greatness. It may be helpful to start with the Hebrew verb *kavad* or to do a word search for the English word *glory*. Yet we can’t stop there. We must look for events in the Bible and any biblical statements about the way God reveals His supreme greatness in the universe He created.

God’s Glory in the Books of Genesis and Exodus

God’s glory is on display at the beginning of GENESIS.

The theme of God’s glory can be found in the first verses of the Bible about His creation of the universe. He was under no compulsion to create anything, and when He finished creating the world in six days, He declared it good. God’s creation derives its goodness from its Creator. In fact, one of the universe’s most basic functions is to point to God’s glory (Ps. 19:1).

Read Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7. Theologian Paul David Tripp described Adam and Eve as “glory thieves” in their rebellion against the Creator.³

Discussion: What does Tripp mean by “glory thieves”? How were Adam and Eve trying to take for themselves the glory that properly belongs only to God?

³ Quoted in Kimble and Spellman, *Invitation to Biblical Theology*, 254.

God's glory was on display in EGYPT.

The theme of God's glory appears right away in Genesis, but the focus on His glory shifts into high gear in Exodus. God heard the cries of the Israelites suffering under Egyptian oppression, so He took the initiative in Exodus 3 to reveal Himself to Moses. Moses spoke with God through a burning bush about his new role as His emissary, and Moses asked for a name to give to the children of Israel to validate his role.

God responded with a self-declaration that He is Yahweh, a name related to the Hebrew verb for *being* and *existing*. **Read Exodus 3:14–15.** Notice that God revealed this special name to highlight His ability to rescue the Israelites from the Egyptians (Exo. 3:14–18).

In Exodus 6, God made it clear to Moses that He based His rescue of Israel on the covenant that He had made with Abraham and the other patriarchs. Furthermore, God wanted to bring Israel out from bondage, not because of anything they had done or anything intrinsically good within them, but so that they may know Him and become a nation special to Him (Exo. 6:6–8). In fact, at the very end of verse 8, explaining why He would give Canaan to the Israelites, God said, “I am Yahweh!”

No other explanation is needed. God rescued Israel and led them into the Promised Land simply because He is who He is!

Then God rained plagues on Egypt and made an incredible statement to Moses. **Read Exodus 11:9–10.** Because Pharaoh did not listen to Moses, God's mighty deeds increased in the land of Egypt. Verse 10 says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart so Pharaoh would refuse to let Israel leave Egypt. Pharaoh's refusal resulted in Israel's miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, followed by the same waters dramatically drowning the entire Egyptian army.

But wait a minute! Didn't God intend to bring the children out of Egypt? If so, why did He harden Pharaoh's heart, thereby delaying the Exodus?

Discussion: How could Pharaoh be responsible for his choices if God hardened His heart? This raises difficult theological questions that many Bible readers want to rush to answer. Before we ask such hard questions, we need to remember the difference between biblical theology and systematic theology. Our first question should be to search what Moses, the author of the book, wanted to emphasize. Our own questions come later.

God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart does not imply that Pharaoh had not already rejected God's message. Moses' account repeatedly says Pharaoh hardened his own heart. We also know from the New Testament that God does not cause anybody to sin (James 1:13–14). Moses' emphasis is on God's power to direct circumstances to bring Himself glory, not the ongoing mystery of divine sovereignty and human freedom.

The bottom line is this: God engineered the whole confrontation with Pharaoh to maximize the glory He would receive. If there is any doubt about that, then Romans 9:17, which comments on Exodus 9:16, clarifies the matter. **Read Romans 9:17.** Though Pharaoh bears the guilt for his own stubbornness, the Lord clearly declares that the only reason Pharaoh was brought to his lofty position, his brief moment of glory, was so that God would be glorified by his downfall.

In fact, the old expression “The bigger they are, the harder they fall” has never been truer than the fall of mighty Pharaoh at the end of Exodus 14. As a result of the supernatural destruction of Pharaoh’s army, Israel saw what God did, they feared God, and they believed Him (Exo. 14:30–31). The entirety of Exodus 15 focuses on God and His mighty deliverance. Verse 11 explains that none of the gods of the world compare to the one true God, because He is unique in His awesomeness!

God’s glory was on display after the EXODUS.

The rest of the book of Exodus continues to develop this theme. God does not put up with the Israelites for their sake, as if they could offer Him anything, but for His sake (Exo. 19:4–6). God is too awesome for Israel to approach (Exo. 19:12, 21). At the ratification of His new legal covenant with the nation, God manifested His glory as a devouring fire (Exo. 24:17). The various regulations for the Tabernacle and the priests in the subsequent chapters were designed to draw attention to how awesome God is (e.g., Exo. 29:45–46).

In fact, when God expressed His readiness to destroy Israel for its apostasy with the golden calf, Moses’ appeal to God’s glory essentially prevented the nation from being annihilated (see Exo. 32:11–14). But even after Moses’ intervention, God’s holiness necessitated a deadly plague (Exo. 32:35). The book ends on a positive note, however. God’s glory fills the Tabernacle, and He dwells with Israel throughout its journeys. Israel could only persevere with the presence of their incredible, majestic God who is unique in His awesomeness (Exo. 40:34–38).

The Glory Departs

Despite the optimistic note on which Exodus ends, we later see that God’s presence was conditional to a degree. The nation’s wickedness consistently rendered them unworthy of God’s fellowship in the later stages of the nation’s history.

Ichabod and David are lessons on the importance of taking God’s glory SERIOUSLY.

When the Philistines later took the ark of the covenant in battle, the prophet Samuel’s daughter-in-law gave birth and died. Her son was named “Ichabod,” which means “Where [is the] glory?” This name refers to the tragic loss of God’s ark—a symbol of His glorious presence in Israel (1 Sam. 4:19–22). Significantly, this corresponds to a time of failure in leadership (1 Sam. 3:11–14).

On the other hand, when David brought the ark to the new capital at Jerusalem, this marked a spiritual revival and the unifying of the Israelites in seeking after God (2 Samuel 6). When David failed to show proper respect to the way the ark was transported, a man named Uzzah died. His death was a sobering reminder that God's glory is not to be treated lightly, and it caused David to fear (2 Sam. 6:6–7). Later, David's obedience in following the Law's rules for transporting the ark and his desire to build a temple for the ark led the nation to glorify God as the focus of their existence. In this prayer, David focused on both humanity's insignificance and God's unique greatness. In fact, David's words constitute some of the greatest expressions of God's glory in the entire Old Testament.

Discussion: Read 2 Samuel 7:22, 26. In David's prayer, what does he say he believes about God? What does David emphasize about God? Think of some ways David's observations appear later in the New Testament.

God's glory filled Solomon's TEMPLE.

This revival of Israel's respect for God's glory—as symbolized by the presence of the ark in Jerusalem—culminated in the high point of Old Testament Israelite history: the completion of Solomon's Temple and the king's intercessory prayer. When the priests placed the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies, the glory (*kavōd*) of Yahweh filled the entire Temple to the point that even the priests could not stand in His presence (1 Kings 8:8–11). This glory led to Solomon's prayer, where he affirmed both God's unique awesomeness (vv. 23–24) and His mercy toward His people. This thankfulness led to Solomon's further challenge to the people to be loyal to Yahweh with both feasting and sacrifice (vv. 59–61).

God's glorious presence among His people was real. It was observable. It was significant enough that foreigners took notice, which was God's plan all along (Deut. 4:6). When the Queen of Sheba came for a visit, the Scriptures state that she came due to Solomon's reputation. Yet the author does not stop there. He states specifically that she came because of Solomon's reputation regarding the name of Yahweh (1 Kings 10:1).

What was the result? The queen left glorifying the true God, declaring His unique greatness (1 Kings 10:9). If you have any doubt about the genuineness of her praise, Jesus Himself made it clear that in the final judgment, she would be in a position to rebuke Jesus' own generation because she responded in faith to the light that was given to her through Solomon's testimony (see Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31). On the other hand, Jesus' own generation rejected Him, even though He is infinitely greater than Solomon.

Discussion: Read the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1–14. How could Gentiles experience God's glory before the coming of the Messiah, even without becoming Israelites?

God's glory left Israel because of her FAILURE and apostasy.

Sadly, Israel continually abused God's glory, treating it as a profane or common thing. Isaiah 6 demonstrates the tension between God's perfect and pure glory and the corrupt, unclean people He dwelt among. Ezekiel, a book which focuses on God's glory, details how God's own Temple, which housed His own glory, was filled with pagan idolatry and wickedness (Ezek. 8:14–18, 11:1–2).

Ezekiel 10:18–22, one of the most sad Bible passages, describes how God's glory goes out of the Temple area, shortly before Babylon destroys the Temple due to the nation's iniquity. In fact, Daniel Block says, "The departure of the glory signals the end of a relationship that had existed for almost four centuries. The divine king has abandoned his residence."⁴

The Glory Returns

God's glory appears in the Synoptic Gospels—especially in connection with Christ's incarnation (Luke 2:8–9). However, this theme really flowers in the Gospel of John.

God's glory is displayed in the eternal LOGOS.

In the Gospel of John, the theme of glory takes on new dimensions. As one New Testament scholar, Richard Bauckham, points out, "Glory is a theme that John uses, very distinctively among the New Testament writers to highlight, by paradox, the extraordinary nature of the love of God for the world in going to the lengths of Jesus's abject dying in the pain and shame of crucifixion."⁵

John's prologue sets the stage. **Read John 1:1–18.** Here, we learn that the "Word" (*Logos*) is in fact God, that this Word has always existed, that the Word had a role in creation, and that the Word is "the Light" of which John the Baptist testified. Up to this point in the Gospel of John, a Hellenistic Jew or even a pagan Platonic Greek might find much to appreciate.

Background – Philo and Logos

The great first-century Jewish philosopher Philo was heavily influenced by the Greek philosopher Plato, and Philo often talked about the divine Logos. At one point, Philo states concepts that sound remarkably similar to John's words (but sprinkled with a few philosophical terms like *reason*, *perceptible*, and *intellect*): "And the invisible divine reason [Logos], perceptible



4 Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 326–327.

5 Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 43.

only by intellect, he [Moses] calls the image of God. And the image of this image is that light, perceptible only by the intellect, which is the image of the divine reason, which has explained its generation.”⁶

We can almost picture Philo nodding in agreement with John’s Gospel for the first 13 verses. He would have been shocked, though, by what came next.⁷

God’s glory is displayed in “the Word became FLESH.”

Having piqued his audience’s interest by speaking of this transcendent Logos, John yanks the rug out from under them. The Word, this transcendent, divine Logos, became human (John 1:14).

Not only that, but John also declares that the divine Logos “tabernacled” amongst humans—His dwelling was among us. The Greek word John uses there (*skēnoō*), is the verb form of the word used in the Greek translation to refer to the Tabernacle of the Old Testament. This tabernacle is where the glory of God dwelt among His people all throughout Exodus. In fact, Exodus 40:34 specifically says that the glory of God filled the tabernacle.

Immediately after his statement in John 1:14, John declares “we” (that is, he and the other eyewitnesses) observed the glory of the divine Word and that the Logos came from the Father Himself.

Consider, then, how Jesus manifested the glory of God throughout the Gospel of John. Jesus’ transformation of the water at the wedding demonstrates his unique power over the elements (John 2). Also, He zealously cleansed Herod’s Temple of what was polluting it, but He alluded to an even greater temple (John 2:12–25). His many acts of power, healing, exorcism, and even resurrection all demonstrated His supreme authority over demonic powers and the curse in Genesis (see John 11:4). All the while, Jesus consistently alluded to His relationship with the Father, the One whose glory left the Temple so many centuries ago. Oh, the irony! So many pious Jews, who longed for the “good old days” when God’s glory dwelt among them, could not recognize the glorious Logos when He stared them in the face.

Yet as we learned from Bauckham’s statement earlier, the Father’s glory is mingled with His love, and nowhere else does this love shine forth as clearly as in the crucifixion account. Beyond comprehension, the One who manifested God’s glory more than anyone or anything else suffered the ultimate human shame on the violent, dehumanizing cross that was designed for the worst criminals.

⁶ Philo, *On the Creation of the World* 31, trans. C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 6.

⁷ Indeed, John’s “contention that deity assumed human nature in Jesus would have been anathema for Greeks who held to a spirit/matter dualism and could hardly have imagined immaterial Reason becoming a physical being.” Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 41.

Background - The Septuagint

The Septuagint, often abbreviated by the Roman numeral LXX (70), refers to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament centuries before the time of Christ. While only the original Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament were supernaturally inspired, the LXX is important in helping us understand what the New Testament authors are telling us in our exploration of biblical theology. Why is it so important? Because the New Testament authors often quoted from the Septuagint or used key Greek terms from the Septuagint to explain their theology.

Contrary to those who claim that the LXX was a later creation after the apostles, we can confirm the existence of the LXX before the New Testament by three facts. First, manuscripts of the LXX predate the birth of Christ. Second, the apostles' quotes from Scripture occasionally match the Greek text of the LXX more precisely than they do the Hebrew text. (Rom. 15:12 is one of many examples.) Third, extra-biblical authors (such as Philo) referenced the LXX in books written before the New Testament.

God's Glory in the Church Age and Beyond

Now that we have seen that God revealed His glory to us in Jesus Christ, we can forge ahead in Acts, the New Testament epistles, and Revelation to see what God's glory means to us practically in the church age.

In Acts, God's glory is put on display to the WORLD.

In a sense, the Book of Acts focuses on what it means to show forth God's glory to the world. The coming of the Holy Spirit means that the disciples received power, and then they proclaimed the great works of God to attentive audiences (Acts 1:8, 2:11). Peter, quoting from the prophet Joel, directly linked the miraculous arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to the great and mighty acts that will occur at the end of history (Acts 2:14–21). Stephen, in his sermon against the Jewish authorities' lack of faith in the Messiah, specifically spoke of the glorious God who appeared to Abraham (Acts 7:2). As he was speaking, Stephen saw the Father's glory, as well as that of the Son, just before the mob killed him (Acts 7:55–56). A major high point of Acts comes when Saul experienced the overwhelming glory of God on the Damascus road (Acts 9; note also 22:11). This climax lays the foundation for spreading the gospel—God's glory revealed in Christ to save sinners—to the Gentile world.

In the epistles, God's glory is put on display in BELIEVERS.

The theme of glory also appears repeatedly in the epistles. For example, Philippians 2:5–11 powerfully describes both Christ's extreme humility and His final glorification. **Read Philippians 2:5–8.** He was willing to set aside His right to dwell in glory with God the Father to redeem humanity.

Yet when we think specifically of the connection between *glory* and *temple* in the Old Testament, we might notice a fascinating contrast or progression from Old to New Testament theology.

In the Old Testament, God's "Shekinah" (Hebrew for *dwelling*) glory resided in a physical temple. To his credit, Solomon was quick to point out how incredibly difficult it is to grasp that the eternal, invisible God could dwell in a building made with hands (1 Kings 8:27). That dwelling was not permanent, however. Sadly, as we saw in Ezekiel, God's glory departed from the Temple.

Yet, something radical has happened in the church age. We have become the temple for God's glory! The indwelling Holy Spirit proves that we are God's children (Rom. 8:16). The Apostle Paul goes a step further and declares that our bodies function as temples for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 2 Cor. 6:16).

Consequently, if our physical bodies are the temple for God's glory, then what we do with our bodies matters. **Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17.** Rather than doing evil with our bodies, which essentially disrespects God's glory, we must use our bodies as pure vessels to glorify God (1 Cor. 6:20).

In Revelation, God's glory is put on display for all ETERNITY.

We all realize that our current bodies are imperfect. We should also realize that the Church—made up of people—is also imperfect. We still struggle to understand how God, in His glory, could ever wish to dwell with us. In Revelation, however, we see the final triumph of God's glory over the curse's corrupting influence. On the one hand, the New Jerusalem is twice declared to contain God's glory (Rev. 21:11, 23). On the other hand, nothing that would tarnish His glory will be allowed inside the city or in God's new creation (Rev. 21:4, 8; 22:15). In Revelation 21:3, John hears a voice declaring that God's tabernacle (*skēnē*) will be with humankind, and that God will tabernacle (*skēnoō*) with humanity.

In the end, we will come full circle—God's glory will return to His creation permanently, and nothing will be allowed to tarnish it. The Father and the Son will reign together forever, and for the first time in history, all the redeemed will be able to dwell peacefully in the immediate presence of the infinitely glorious God (Rev. 22:3–5).

Discussion: Listen to the following description of Jesus.
Read Revelation 1:12–16. Explain how this powerful—though striking—imagery of the Son manifests God's glory.

Conclusion

God's glory dwelt with the Israelites, later departed, but returned in the form of God's incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. While we do not yet have the privilege of physically walking and talking with Jesus, we have God's Spirit dwelling within us in the church age. Our bodies, especially when we join other believers in group worship, mimic the role of the Temple where Old Testament believers worshiped God so many centuries ago (1 Pet. 2:5). Yet we still anticipate a time when God's glory will permanently settle in the New Jerusalem, wiping out the curse and its consequences. When that happens, we will bask in God's glorious presence forever.

Yet the present reality is a sobering reminder of our duties. How should we live in our individual bodies, especially when we serve together as a local church? We are the vessels of God's glory! Though God will not permanently remove His presence from a true believer, God will not tolerate abusing our bodies for sinful purposes or compromises with the unbelieving world (1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Cor. 6:14–18). We must never take God's glory lightly. Instead, we should make the most of our privilege to shine God's glory to a needy world lost in darkness.

HANDOUT ANSWER KEY

LESSON
TWO

THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER

God's Glory in the Books of Genesis and Exodus

God's glory is on display at the beginning of GENESIS.

God's glory was on display in EGYPT.

God's glory was on display after the EXODUS.

The Glory Departs

Ichabod and David are lessons on the importance of taking God's glory SERIOUSLY.

God's glory filled Solomon's TEMPLE.

God's glory left Israel because of her FAILURE and apostasy.

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God's glory is displayed in the eternal LOGOS.

God's glory is displayed in "the Word became FLESH."

God's Glory in the Church Age and Beyond

In Acts, God's glory is put on display to the WORLD.

In the epistles, God's glory is put on display in BELIEVERS.

In Revelation, God's glory is put on display for all ETERNITY.

NOTES:

THE TRIUMPHANT CONQUEST OF GOD THE SON



Content Objectives

- ◆ Jesus' victory over death and spiritual powers allows us to share in His triumph.
 - ◆ The conquering Messiah will rule over His people and crush Satan.
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Introduction

On June 6, 1944, Allied forces stormed the beaches at Normandy, France. Eventually, they forced the Germans to retreat and secured an irrevocable foothold on mainland Europe. Although many battles remained to be fought, after D-Day the fate of the German Reich was sealed. It was only a matter of time before France and other nations would be liberated from the Nazi regime. But the final surrender was nearly a year away on what is known as V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day), when Germany surrendered to the Allies.

New Testament theologian Oscar Cullmann brilliantly compares that point to the apostles' perspective of time: "The hope of the final victory [Jesus' second coming] is so much the more vivid because of the unshakably firm conviction that the battle that decides the victory [Jesus' resurrection] has already taken place."¹

The Conquering Messiah in Genesis

The protoevangelium is a PROPHECY about the conquering Messiah.

Read Genesis 3:15. This verse records a prophecy that Jesus would briefly suffer at the hands of Satan. God declares that the serpent would bruise the woman's offspring, the Messiah.

But that is only half the story. The serpent would bruise the Messiah's heel, but the Messiah would bruise the serpent's head, signifying overwhelming victory. In other words, although Jesus the Messiah did indeed suffer for us, He is not a perpetual victim. Having suffered once for our sins, He became a conqueror. Jesus was in a cosmic boxing match with the

¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Conception of Time and History*, 3rd ed., trans. Floyd V. Filson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1962), 87. Pages 84–87 support this point well.

devil and death. He even got knocked down once, but He got back on His feet and will never fall again. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus threw the decisive punch that staggered the devil and sealed his fate; it is now only a matter of time before Jesus delivers the knockout blow.

JACOB prophesied about the conquering Messiah.

Yet it is not just Satan and sin that Jesus conquered. Sadly, Satan has deceived this world and turned it against the Messiah and His people. At the end of Genesis, when Jacob prophesies blessing and cursing for his sons, he describes Judah as a conqueror who will overcome his enemies (Gen. 49:8). He continues by describing Judah both as a lion and as one whose offspring would reign as king over the nations, not just Israel. Clearly, Jacob is speaking about the coming Messiah, describing Him as a king, conqueror, and ruler.

Jesus, then, is both a spiritual conqueror—defeating Satan and sin and reigning in our hearts—and a political conqueror who will rule over the nations and bring everlasting peace on earth.

Illustration – Cyrus the Great

We often think of conquerors as villains—arrogant men bent on expanding their kingdom at the expense of the weak. Yet this is not always the case. Cyrus the Great took over the Babylonian empire and set free its subjugated exiles, liberating many of them to go home to their native lands. The famous Cyrus Cylinder records King Cyrus' boast that he rescued Babylon and allowed foreigners to return to their homes. While Cyrus was far from a perfect man, and certainly the Cyrus Cylinder is not without its own propaganda, Cyrus' actions still benefited many conquered ethnic groups, including the Jews. God thought highly enough of Cyrus that He called him His shepherd (Isa. 44:28) and anointed one (Isa. 45:1). Though he was imperfect, Cyrus still painted a picture, fuzzy though it was, of the sort of conqueror-shepherd Jesus Christ would be. Jesus conquers in order to liberate!

The Conquering Messiah in the Psalms

The poetic books of the Bible express great theological truths in a poetic style designed to move our emotions toward praising God. Not every poetic description is meant to be taken literally. For instance, rivers and mountains do not literally clap their hands and sing (Ps. 98:8). Yet the psalms still teach real truths about God and about His Son. One of those key themes is the ultimate victory of God's Son, our Messiah.

Psalm 2 foretells the "ANOINTED one."

The Book of Psalms is as diverse as a bustling crowd at a major airport. The collection contains all sorts of poetry: hymns of gladness, laments, history lessons, rebukes, and sometimes prophecy. To make matters more complicated, we don't really know who grouped the psalms into their current order, but it isn't chronological.

Read Psalm 2. This psalm establishes one of the main themes of the book. It focuses on the fate of anyone who opposes God's rule. Such people think that they can successfully rebel and get away from God's control, but in reality, God laughs at them.

Fascinatingly, Psalm 2 focuses not only on God but also on His Messiah, the "anointed one" (v. 2b). When the rebel nations of the earth oppose God, they are not opposing just Him but also His Son. God has put His Son upon the throne at Zion (Jerusalem) to rule as His divine representative (vv. 6-7); so, to oppose the Son is to oppose the Father as well.

In fact, God does not really give the nations a choice about serving the Son. He promises the Anointed One that He will inherit the entire earth (v. 8) and that He has the right to enforce His will on all nations (v. 9).

Yet God makes it clear in the psalm that He did not create the nations to destroy them. He offers a choice: rebel or serve. If they are willing to kiss the Son, or offer respect to Him as to royalty, they will survive. In fact, if they take refuge in the Son—put their faith in Him—they will be blessed (vv. 11-12). Those once-hostile nations will, if they choose, flourish under the care of the One who conquers them. This key theological point in this psalm forms the backbone of the conquering king's reign in Revelation, which we will return to later.

Background – Begotten

Hebrews 5:5 directly quotes Psalm 2:7 as a reference to Jesus Christ, and many translations describe Him as "begotten" or something similar. The word *begotten* is a fairly literal translation of the Greek verb in Hebrews 5:5. This word is not, however, referring to giving birth or a biological fathering of a king. Rather, when it comes to kings, the word refers to an appointment, so the book of Hebrews depicts the Son as "appointed by God to a new and unique high priesthood."²

Discussion: According to this lesson, "poetic books of the Bible express great theological truths in a poetic style that is designed to move our emotions toward praise of God." How does Psalm 2 stir your emotions? (Consider surprising images such as God's laughter at sinners.) How does it force you to weigh your own response to God's demands in this psalm?

² George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1998), 189.

Psalm 45 foretells the conquering Messiah's TRIUMPH.

Read Psalm 45. This is a love song, but it is not a mushy, romantic love song. Instead, Psalm 45 is a loyal subject's celebration of his or her king (v. 1).

This beloved king is, indeed, very special. He displays perfect justice and fairness (v. 6–7). God Himself has blessed him and given him victory over his enemies (v. 5). The king also has chosen a new bride, who is encouraged to reverence him as her lord (v. 11). At the wedding, foreigners will come with expensive gifts (v. 12). The children of this union will rule the world.

At first glance, this seems to be an over-the-top description of one of Israel's imperfect kings. Take a closer look, though, and you will do a double take. This king is called "God" (v. 6), yet simultaneously He is said to be blessed by "God" (v. 7). How is this possible?

Suddenly, Psalm 45 takes on greater significance. Yes, it was probably originally a wedding song composed for a Jewish king. Yet the Holy Spirit intended it to be a type for something deeper—a glorious description of the triumphant Messiah.³ In fact, Hebrews 1:8–9 directly quotes Psalm 45:6–7 as referring to Jesus' superiority over all, including the exalted angels of heaven.

In Psalm 45:3–4, this King is described in military terms: He is a warrior. In verse 5, He conquers His enemies. In verse 6, His kingdom lasts forever. In verse 12, a rich foreign nation will pay tribute to Him. In verse 17, all nations or peoples will praise Him eternally.

The picture that emerges is that of a divine King who battles wickedness and subdues all nations under His authority. Yet, He is also a benevolent monarch who will receive eternal praise from throngs of admirers from all sorts of ethnic and national backgrounds.

Psalm 68 foretells the conquering Messiah's coming down to EARTH.

Read Psalm 68. This chapter begins with a whirlwind of activity and a plea for God to act decisively and aggressively against the wicked (vv. 1–3). As we move on, we see that the Lord does not choose His targets randomly. To the contrary, He goes to war for the benefit of the orphans, widows, homeless, prisoners, and His oppressed people Israel (vv. 5–7, 21–23).

The language in this psalm is some of the most warlike in the entire book. Yet notice the result of God's conquest: God inaugurates peace and eliminates war, resulting in a glorious kingdom centered on Jerusalem (vv. 29–31). The nations will not live in terror of God; instead, they will praise Him willingly (v. 32).

3 For a helpful exploration of Psalm 45, both in its original setting and as a signpost to the Messiah, see Richard D. Patterson, "A Multiplex Approach to Psalm 45," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 29–48.

But wait a minute, weren't we talking about the Son in this chapter? Yes, indeed! **Read Psalm 68:18.** The psalmist directly addresses the Lord God as One who goes up to the heavens, takes prisoners, and receives tribute. But when did that happen? When did God come down to earth in the first place?

The apostle Paul gives us the answer: Jesus Christ came down at the incarnation, triumphed over all opposition, and now gives gifts to His followers (Eph. 4:8–10).

We will return to this passage later. For now, it's worth noting that Psalm 68 is not only about God's conquest but also His generosity and kindness (Ps. 68:6, 9, 11–13, 18–19, 35).

Discussion: Read Psalm 72. Although most likely written in honor of a Jewish king, perhaps Solomon, no mere human king could live up to this high standard! This psalm ultimately points to Jesus Christ, the one true King. How does this psalm describe the ideal King as a conqueror, to whom everybody will be subject? In what ways does this psalm describe the ideal King as gracious and compassionate?

The Conquering Messiah in Ephesians and Colossians

Much of the New Testament describes Jesus as coming with authority over all humanity (see Matt. 25:32, among many examples). Here, we will look at two epistles where the Apostle Paul shows how this Conqueror theme is relevant to the church.

In Ephesians, the conquering Messiah gives GIFTS.

In Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul begins by speaking about the church's need to be unified in heart and mind for the glory of God. In verse 7, Paul emphasizes that Christ has graced each Christian with gifts, not just the Church in general.

Read Ephesians 4:8–10. In verse 8, the Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, clearly referencing Jesus Christ, the victorious conqueror who blesses the church with gracious gifts so that God's work can march onward in the church age (Eph. 4:11–14).

But hold on, something strange is going on here! Psalm 68:18 says that Christ gets gifts, but Paul says in Ephesians 4:8 that Christ gives gifts. Which is it? Did the Apostle Paul, through some sleight of hand, change a word or two of Scripture and hope nobody noticed? Far from it! The apostle knew what he was doing, and he was not trying to trick anybody.

Many scholars have written about this fascinating oddity, and we could waste a lot of time listing the various views on how to solve the conundrum. Yet here's where a closer look at Psalm 68 helps. Although the psalm does say that the Messiah will receive gifts,

it is actually all about God graciously giving gifts. In a sense, then, Paul quotes the first part of Psalm 68:18 word for word, but then he reworks the second part of verse 18 to retain the main emphasis of the psalm.⁴

Now look back at Ephesians 4:8. As we saw in Psalm 68, this is conquest language. A conqueror is someone who takes captives. Paul does not give many details about what Jesus conquered or whom He captured, but one point is clear: Precisely because Jesus is a conqueror—as depicted in Psalm 68—He can give us gifts!

What do we do with God’s gracious gifts, then? Are they for our own benefit, to fulfill our ambitions, or to jumpstart our careers? Absolutely not! The whole point of Jesus’ gifts is to help the church so that Jesus’ kingdom on earth may advance until He returns in person (Eph. 4:11–12).

In Colossians, the conquering Messiah defeated spiritual POWERS.

In his epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul emphasizes Jesus’ superiority as the One to whom all things in the universe are subject. Colossians 1:13 says that God the Father will rescue us from the dominion of darkness and relocate us to the dominion of light, where His Son reigns. This Son is the one who offers redemption to us (v. 14), but He is also identified as the Creator (v. 16) and Sustainer (v. 17) of all things. The entire universe revolves around the Son!

A little bit later in the book, the Apostle Paul warns the Colossian believers not to be fooled by idiotic philosophies, any so-called wisdom which claims to be able to match or improve on what Jesus Christ can accomplish by Himself (Col. 2:8–23). If Jesus Christ is the goal of everything that was created, why would anybody think that following man-made regulations would help us become spiritual?

Read Colossians 2:14–15. These verses are key. Paul describes Jesus as the One who destroyed what separated us from God when He was crucified (v. 14). Jesus triumphed over spiritual powers, humiliating them. Paul deliberately uses a Greek term that describes the triumphal procession of a Roman general through the city, exalting his victory and publicly shaming his enemies who are now his prisoners.⁵

When Jesus Christ was crucified and rose again, He utterly conquered and humiliated all spiritual powers that kept us from access to God the Father. Jesus Christ’s victory through the cross and empty tomb wins us access to the heavenly throne. We are no longer bound by our human limitations and sinful flesh—we can triumph with Christ and parade alongside Him as friends and allies (Col. 3:1–4).

4 See the discussion in Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 529.

5 David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 173.

Background – Roman Triumphs

A Roman triumph involved both the celebration of the conqueror and the humiliation of his enemies. Historian Adrian Goldsworthy vividly describes the triumph of Roman general Pompey in late September 61 BC:

Triumphs were never occasions for restraint or modesty. . . . Pompey took care to quantify his success and the processions included placards declaring that he had killed, captured or defeated 12,183,000 people, taken or sunk 846 warships, and accepted the surrender of 1,538 towns or fortified places. Each kingdom, people or place he had overcome was listed in turn on the great floats carrying the spoils he had taken from them. Then there were paintings showing famous episodes from the wars. . . . At the end of the processing was an enormous float presented as a trophy of victory over the known world. . . . Ahead of Pompey walked over 300 senior hostages, including kings, queens, princesses, chieftains and generals, all wearing their national costume. The general himself rode in a chariot decorated with gemstones and wore a cloak captured from Mithridates, which he claimed had once been owned and worn by Alexander the Great.⁶

The Conquering Messiah in Revelation

As we saw in Colossians, Jesus Christ broke the back of all spiritual powers that would keep us from coming to God. Yet Colossians 3:4 briefly mentions that Jesus Christ will appear someday in the future and that we will appear with Him. The Son's appearing in Revelation will not be a peace mission to persuade people to obey Christ. Nor will it be a hard-fought, nail-biting, back-and-forth epic battle that keeps you on the edge of your seat, like battles in action movies. On the contrary, it will be swift, decisive, and harsh. Up until then, God will have delayed Jesus' coming precisely because He loved humanity and wished to give the world's inhabitants an opportunity to repent (2 Pet. 3:9–10). Even God's merciful patience has its limits.

The conquering Messiah unleashes His JUDGMENT.

Revelation 4 opens with a scene in the heavenly throne room and focuses on His uniqueness and power. In chapter 5, a scroll appears, and a search is made for who can open it. The search culminates in the appearance of a Lamb—clearly representing Jesus Christ. **Read Revelation 5:6–10.** Because the Lamb was killed, and He purchased our redemption through His blood, the beings around the throne declare Him worthy to break the seals of the scroll (Rev. 5:8–10).

⁶ Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 184–185.

This scroll initiates judgment. Reading Revelation from this point on is not an easy feat. Large segments of the earth suffer devastation, and millions of people die. Even more sad, many people suffer while still shaking their fists at God in defiance (Rev. 9:20–21; 16:9–11). At this point in history, no atheists remain. The supernatural judgments show that the lines are clearly drawn—God and His Son against the dragon and his beast. Nobody can claim ignorance of the cosmic conflict. Everyone must choose either to side with the beast in a satanic bid for freedom (remember Ps. 2:1–3) or to side with the Lamb who has rightfully purchased believers with His blood (Rev. 5:6, 9–10).

The conquering Messiah RETURNS.

When Jesus finally returns, His conquest will be swift and decisive. He will destroy the armies that oppose Him in the blink of an eye (Rev. 19:11–21; 2 Thess. 1:8). Jesus, however, is not coming to annihilate the nations, even though they have angrily rebelled against Him (Rev. 11:18, Ps. 2:1). When He returns, Jesus will conquer to redeem the nations and to free them from the chains of their rebellion and the devil's delusion (Rev. 20:3).

John makes the incredible statement that the nations of saved people and the kings of the earth will enjoy that glorious city and the presence of God for all eternity (Rev. 21:24–26). John did not say, "The saved out of the nations," but rather he said, "The nations of those who are saved." Jesus didn't just come to save individuals, like you and me, but to save our countries, too.

Conclusion

To borrow again from Oscar Cullmann's analogy of D-Day, Jesus has already won two great victories. First, on the cross and through His resurrection, Jesus Christ defeated sin and death, purchasing our salvation. This is His "D-Day." Christ's first victory resides in the heart of everybody who accepts Him as Savior.

But something is still wrong with the world. Drunk drivers still kill innocent people. Abusive parents still harm their children. Angry crowds continue to riot, warmongers invade weaker neighbors, and religious and anti-religious bigots spread venom and death. Nations and powerful leaders pursue personal glory, power, and honor without a single thought about the King of the universe. In the meantime, people laugh at God and mock His Son Jesus Christ, thinking that they are breaking free from the chains of religion to live their lives as they choose.

All that will change on V-E Day, when Jesus Christ will appear in the sky as a world conqueror. Only when God's Son sits as the rightful ruler on His throne in Jerusalem will peace and justice reign over the earth.

HANDOUT ANSWER KEY

LESSON
THREE

THE TRIUMPHANT CONQUEST OF GOD THE SON

The Conquering Messiah in Genesis

The protoevangelium is a PROPHECY about the conquering Messiah.

JACOB prophesied about the conquering Messiah.

The Conquering Messiah in the Psalms

Psalm 2 foretells the “ANOINTED one.”

Psalm 45 foretells the conquering Messiah’s TRIUMPH.

Psalm 68 foretells the conquering Messiah’s coming down to EARTH.

The Conquering Messiah in Ephesians and Colossians

In Ephesians, the conquering Messiah gives GIFTS.

In Colossians, the conquering Messiah defeated spiritual POWERS.

The Conquering Messiah in Revelation

The conquering Messiah unleashes His JUDGMENT.

The conquering Messiah RETURNS.

NOTES:

HANDOUTS



INTRODUCING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

What Kind of Book Is the Bible?

The Bible is a _____.

The Bible is a _____ whole.

What Is Biblical Theology?

Studying the _____ of inspired thought

Studying the _____ of Scripture

How Do We Practice Biblical Theology?

_____ the Bible.

_____ on a particular book.

_____ at the big picture.

Make it _____.

The Difference Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

Systematic theology asks the questions _____ and looks to Scripture for the answers.

Biblical theology looks to Scripture _____ to see what topics it discusses.

NOTES:

THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER

God's Glory in the Books of Genesis and Exodus

God's glory is on display at the beginning of _____.

God's glory was on display in _____.

God's glory was on display after the _____.

The Glory Departs

Ichabod and David are lessons on the importance of taking God's glory _____.

God's glory filled Solomon's _____.

God's glory left Israel because of her _____ and apostasy.

The Glory Returns

God's glory is displayed in the eternal _____.

God's glory is displayed in "the Word became _____."

God's Glory in the Church Age and Beyond

In Acts, God's glory is put on display to the _____.

In the epistles, God's glory is put on display in _____.

In Revelation, God's glory is put on display for all _____.

NOTES:

THE TRIUMPHANT CONQUEST OF GOD THE SON

The Conquering Messiah in Genesis

The protoevangelium is a _____ about the conquering Messiah.
_____ prophesied about the conquering Messiah.

The Conquering Messiah in the Psalms

Psalm 2 foretells the “ _____ one.”
Psalm 45 foretells the conquering Messiah’s _____.
Psalm 68 foretells the conquering Messiah’s coming down to _____.

The Conquering Messiah in Ephesians and Colossians

In Ephesians, the conquering Messiah gives _____.
In Colossians, the conquering Messiah defeated spiritual _____.

The Conquering Messiah in Revelation

The conquering Messiah unleashes His _____.
The conquering Messiah _____.

NOTES:
