

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

- **Biblical theology** is the study of how **God's self-revelation and redemptive plan unfold in history**, through the entire course of the Bible **from Genesis to Revelation**. Instead of organizing doctrines topically in the manner of systematic theology, biblical theology follows the chronological and literary progress of the text itself. It examines what individual authors and books taught in their original contexts and how those themes develop and find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- Foundational for this way of approaching the Bible are the related concepts (a) of **progressive revelation**, which observes that God doesn't reveal his entire plan all at once, but unveils it gradually, moving from promise to fulfillment over the course of many centuries; and (b) of **redemptive history**, which treats the Bible as one grand narrative of God's working in human history to redeem, prepare, and perfect a holy people to live in communion with himself and with one another – with Christ the Redeemer as the center and climax of the whole of it.
- Both of these biblical theological concepts are grounded in turn upon **the twin bedrock convictions** (a) **that God himself is the ultimate author of Scripture**, i.e., that every word of Scripture is "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16) and the very word of God, and that it is therefore infallible in all it affirms; and (b) **that** precisely because it is God's word, **Scripture**, though written by many human authors in a variety of contexts across many centuries, **is nevertheless one great unified, unfolding revelation of Christ and of his people, the church.**

SOTERIOLOGY PRECEDES ESCHATOLOGY

- **Soteriology precedes eschatology**. This phrase was sort of coined by the theologian Geerhardus Vos. I say "sort of" because his original ways of putting it were quite a bit more dense and less catchy! "The eschatological appears as predeterminative for both the substance and the form of the soteriological," is the way he put it in 1930. By 1948, he phrased the same idea with a few less words: "The eschatological is an older strand in revelation than the soteric." But if we can express the same thought in three words, let's do that!
- **Soteriology**: the doctrine of salvation (Greek, *sotería*), i.e., how God rescues us from sin and death and brings us to righteousness and life.
- **Eschatology**: the doctrine of "last things" (Greek, *eschatos*), i.e., the final goal God intends for creation, sometimes referred to as the consummation.
- **Christ is No Plan B!** The point is that we shall approach our study of Scripture with a fundamental conviction that, as God is the author of the whole of it, then Christ and his great work of redemption was no "Plan B" that God came up with somewhere between Malachi and Matthew, but was the goal and substance of the Bible's message from the very beginning, and indeed from *before* the beginning of the world! Simply put: for God, the end was in view before he implemented the framework for bringing that end to be. **The Bible moves from "blessing decreed"** (the consummate end in view) **to "blessing indeed"** (the consummate end accomplished in fullness). From before the foundation of the world, the plan was that God's people would be led into the *eschaton*, eternal life in communion with him, by Christ. (See Eph. 1:3-6; John 1:1-5.)

THE SON OF GOD IS, ALWAYS HAS BEEN, AND ALWAYS WILL BE THE MEDIATOR OF GOD TO US

- **God (Elohim)**: The word that describes the One who is characterized by the attributes of divinity, i.e., being infinite, eternal, unchanging, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and so on.
- **The LORD (YHWH)**: The covenant name for God, revealing his both character (“I AM THAT I AM,” the eternally self-existent one) and his covenant promise (“I will be with you”).
- **The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**: The LORD revealed – as an experiential reality to those who are in Christ – as three persons. “And these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory” (WSC 6).
- Therefore, when we read “**the LORD**” in the Old Testament, we are to remember (a) that **the LORD our God is one God, one Lord**, and that **there is no other**, and (b) that “**the LORD**” is the **Triune God**, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- There is an order in Trinitarian relations: **the Son is sent by the Father, and he reveals and glorifies the Father**; the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and he reveals and glorifies the Son and the Father. (This has significance for us as we consider that the church, as the Spirit-endowed Bride, Body, and Temple of Christ, is sent forth into the world to reveal and glorify the Son who in turn reveals and glorifies the Father!)
- The Son is the Word, who was in the beginning, and was with God, and was God (John 1:1). **The Son has always been the one by, in, and through whom God the Father is revealed to the creation** (John 14:9). Just like the Son didn’t come into being when Jesus, the Christ, was conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit, but had always existed; so the Son’s role as mediator between the otherwise unknowable, invisible, and transcendent God the Father and we his image-bearing creatures didn’t begin with the earthly ministry and subsequent reign in glory of Christ our Redeemer (Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17). While Jesus brings God’s promise of “God with us” (Immanuel) to visible fulfillment, we realize that the Son had been with us all along, revealing God’s person and character and presence by means of his word and through assorted theophanies.
- Christ is our mediator, the God-Man, who intercedes for us even now in the heavenly temple (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). And even after the Messianic Age comes to an end once all his enemies have been restrained and conquered, including even Death itself, even then and into eternity ever after, the Son shall be the visible person of God for us, mediating the presence of the Triune God, the one in and through whom we have access to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-27).
- So when we read of **the LORD God walking in the Garden of Eden** in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8), that is a preincarnate manifestation of the Christ that was to come. God with us! And the various **appearances of the Angel of the LORD** (Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-18; Jdg. 6:22-23; etc.); and **Melchizedek** (Gen. 14:18-20); and the Abraham’s **smoking firepot** (Gen. 15:17); and the appearance of **the “man”** to Abraham (Gen. 18:1-2) and then to Jacob (Gen. 32:24-28) and then to Moses (Ex. 4:24); and Moses’ **burning bush** (Ex. 3:2); and **the glory cloud** in the wilderness and within the tabernacle (Ex. 13:21-22, 40:34-38; 1 Kgs. 8:10-11); and **the word of God**, written by prophets by inspiration of the Spirit of Christ (see 1 Pet. 1:10-12).
- The point? **The Bible is one unfolding revelation of Christ, given to us by Christ himself, concerning his plan to redeem, prepare, and perfect a holy people for himself** – the church, us!
- The end was in view from before the beginning.
- So when we speak of how Adam failed to keep covenant of works, we MUST grasp that this was not an unforeseen wrinkle in God’s plan that necessitated Jesus as a sort of Plan B to fix things. Rather, Adam’s failure is an instructive part of the great unfolding story, whose scope is nothing less than the entire sweep of human and cosmic history, the whole of which culminates and finds its purpose and perfection in Christ. Amen!

(1) THE COVENANT OF WORKS (OR, THE COVENANT OF LIFE) (CREATION)

1. **Parties:** God to **'Adam** as federal head, created in the image of God (*imago Dei*):
 - (a) Created in the **image** of the Triune God.
 - (b) Called to represent God, to reflect his character, to fill the earth with his glory.
 - (c) Endowed with capacities (knowledge, righteousness, and holiness).
 - (d) Characterized by dignity, solidarity, communion.
 - (e) Tasked with a **creational commission** (sometimes called the "**cultural mandate**"):
 - (1) To fill the earth (procreation; numerical expansion; **SEED**)
 - (2) To rule the earth (dominion; geographical expansion; **LAND**)In summary, to exercise a just dominion in communion w/ God and one another.
2. **Promise:** Eternal life! Humans to be brought to the eschatological estate (**CONSUMMATION**).
3. **Terms:** Adam's "personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience," consisting in:
 - (a) Living a perfectly holy and righteous life in conformity to God's will.
 - (b) Thus, from the beginning, general revelation to be interpreted by special revelation.
 - (c) Not eating the forbidden fruit.
 - (d) Working and keeping (lit. "serving and guarding") the holy garden temple of Eden.
 - (e) Protecting his Bride and vanquishing the Serpent.
4. **Sanctions:** Death ("you shall surely die").
5. **Sign:** The Tree of Life as the pledge of God's promise of eternal life.

REVIEW:

1. **Image of God:** to exercise dominion-in-communion, with God and with one another.
2. **Blessing:** the creation commission (or: "cultural mandate"), i.e., numerical and geographical expansion (SEED and LAND, respectively).
3. **The Garden of Eden:** the *'adam* placed there to "work and keep it," i.e., to "serve and guard it," which is definitively priestly language. Adam was to serve the LORD God as priest in the garden sanctuary, the original tabernacle, or dwelling place of God with man on earth, serving the LORD God there and protecting the sanctuary, e.g., from the Serpent.
4. **Adam and Eve:** not simply a type of married man and woman, but of Christ and the church.
5. **God's Goal:** To forge, prepare, and perfect a holy people in a holy realm under a federal head. Adam was this federal head and the goal of his probation in Eden was set before him. The key thing to keep in mind is that **Eden was not the end state of perfection, but only a probationary estate**, a threshold condition, with the true goal (consummation, eternal life!) set before him. Had Adam kept the terms of the covenant and been obedient to God's will, he would have led humanity into the *eschaton*, into the consummation, eternal life! Of course, God is sovereign, and so Christ was the plan from the beginning. But this was a real hypothetical (see Jer. 18).
6. Why then did God bother with this covenant of works if Adam was going to fail anyway? Because the larger story is the thing that matters here. God is about revealing to us and teaching us!

The Fall and Its Effects: Adam's Failure to Fulfill the Terms of the Covenant of Works:

1. **Guilt:** The guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of the whole nature, commonly called original sin, has been passed down and inherited by all we who descend from Adam by ordinary generation, who are by nature "entangled" in his sin nature.
2. **Exile:** From the blessed presence of God, alienated from the God who made us to enjoy communion with himself, fallen into an estate of sin and misery.
3. **Curse:** We too live under God's wrath and curse, being subject to his sentence of death and to living lives characterized by **pain and futility** affecting the very things, **SEED** and **LAND**, that were originally to have been a source of our joy and blessing.

But! There Were Two Reasons to Hope:

1. **GOD'S PROMISE OF SEED** (Gen. 3:15): One among Eve's offspring would arise who would crush the head of the deceiving Serpent that had usurped our dominion – one who would thus succeed where Adam had failed, removing the curse (“far as the curse is found”) and restoring humanity to its original consummation trajectory. There would still be children! Despite the fall, there was still a future and a hope – hope in the promised **SEED** to come.
2. **COMMON GRACE**: By his common grace, God delayed (and delays) final judgment so as to allow for the unfolding of his plan of redemption through the course of human history. We'll see more about Common Grace in a moment, but first let's note with regard to this delayed judgment:
 - (a) We are still created in God's image, though that image is marred by sin.
 - (b) The cultural mandate is still in effect:
 - (1) Fill the earth (**the labor of SEED**), though in pain and w/ a certain futility.
 - (2) Till the earth (**the labor of LAND**), though in pain and w/ a certain futility.
 - (c) Adam was taught by the LORD God how to continue worshipping him, even in his estate of sin and misery, under God's wrath and curse and in exile (see below)

(2) THE COVENANT OF GRACE (REDEMPTION)

1. **Parties**: God to a series of mediators culminating in Christ, “the image of the invisible God,” our federal head. (Thus, the real dividing line between the key covenants in Scripture is not between Malachi and Matthew, but at Genesis 3:15!)
2. **Promise**: Eternal Life (**CONSUMMATION**)
3. **Terms**: Faith in the person and work of the promised SEED, the Redeemer of God's elect.
 - (a) **What the Redeemer Was To Do**:

Live a perfectly holy and righteous life.
Die the death due for Adam's original sin and all our transgressions flowing from it.
Protect the Bride and vanquish the Serpent.
 - (b) **What the Redeemed Are To Do**:

Trust in the **SEED**, the Redeemer, so as to be brought from the estate of sin and misery into an estate of salvation by this Promised One, the Redeemer of God's elect. In other words, God's people will be saved by the works of another, a second Adam, the federal head and mediator, who would live the life that Adam (and we) ought to have lived and died the death that Adam (and we) ought to have died. By faith in him, we are brought from being “in Adam” (in the house of Adam, as it were, still under the sentence of death for our sin) to being “in Christ,” united to him (in the house of Christ, as it were – his church), enjoying the benefits of the redemption he purchased for us:

 - (1) Justification: An act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone. (No more guilt!)
 - (2) Sanctification: The work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. (The gradual removal of corruption.)

The Covenant of Grace has unfolded through the course of history in a series of what are referred to as “administrations,” characterized by God's working with a particular mediator or federal head for that phase of the covenant, emphasizing a particular aspect of the covenant of grace. So then:

(2a) THE COVENANT OF GRACE (REDEMPTION): ADAMIC ADMINISTRATION:

1. **Parties:** God to Adam, as still being God's image though in exile.
2. **Promise:** SEED through the Woman, who would:
 - (a) Vanquish the Serpent and thus succeed where Adam had failed.
 - (b) Remove the curse and deliver God's people from sin and misery to salvation.
 - (c) Restore communion with God and one another and end the exile.
 - (d) Lead God's people into the eschatological estate of eternal life. (**CONSUMMATION**)
3. **Terms:** No terms or sanctions! Just the promise of SEED.
4. **Sign:** Skins (substitutionary death, substitutionary atonement).

Here we are introduced – subtly at first, but quite clearly – to the foundational principle of God's plan of redemption: that of **substitution** and **substitutionary atonement**. Because of the Fall, 'Adam, who had been created to enjoy communion with God could no longer even enter into God's presence – indeed, could no longer even see God – without dying on account of his sin and corruption. But in God's plan of redemption, fallen humans are given access to God's presence and blessing, enjoying communion in **worship**, but only at the cost of the death of another in our place.

So **the Adamic Administration entails not simply a promise of the SEED** to come who would vanquish the Serpent, remove the curse, and restore humanity to communion with God and to its original trajectory of consummation; but **it also gives us a picture of how that** removal and restoration — in a word, that **redemption** — **will come to pass: the sentence of death** which was the penalty of sin, extending to all in Adam without exception, **would be borne by another**, in our place.

REVIEW:

1. Promise of Seed to redeem and restore fallen humanity and to crush the head of the Serpent
 2. Provision of principle of substitutionary atonement, so that we might still worship the LORD
 3. Adam's goal, therefore, and ours: **rest in the promise, trust in the provision!**
- In the generations following Adam, we trace two lines – the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, hurtling toward judgment.
 - All humanity is either "in Adam" and still liable for the covenant of works or "in Christ" and resting in God's promise and provision for redemption, restoration, and life.

(2b) THE COVENANT OF GRACE (REDEMPTION): NOAHIC ADMINISTRATION

1. **Flood:** **a type of the universal judgment that is coming** (though the eschatological judgment will be not by water, but by fire); when the operation of God's common grace comes to an end. If Noah is like a new Adam, one important difference is that, rather than being under a covenant of works, Noah himself was under the covenant of grace, and **the flood itself was preceded by God's promise of ultimate salvation**. That is to say, even beyond the flood, there is a future and a hope for God's people.
2. **Ark:** the means of deliverance, and **a type of the church** and of the special grace by which alone **those who trust in God's word and rest in his promises will be saved**.
3. **Rainbow:** **the sign of God's promise to preserve the world until the end**, and to never flood the whole of it again. The rainbow is also a sign that drives us to Christ, as we think of the fact that no one on the ark – not even Noah – merited salvation, and the tension of that reality is only met in the death and life of Christ in our place and on our behalf.

4. **The Blessing: the creation blessing** that was spoken to Adam **is reaffirmed**, albeit in a darker context which envisions the spilling of blood, the eating of animals, and the administration of justice. The creation commission (**LAND** and **SEED**) is still in effect!
5. **Worship**: immediately upon disembarking from the ark, Noah offers burnt offerings to the LORD. Our access to God's presence and blessing may be had and enjoyed, but only (as with Adam before) by means of **substitutionary atonement**, i.e., by the blood of innocent animals, itself a type of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.
6. **Noah was not the Seed** (he was a sinner, per what happened after the flood); **but he was a type of the Seed**, a type of second Adam, by whose righteousness the others were given access to the ark and survived the flood. (We might note in this regard that the ark gives us a picture of the significance of **baptism**, by which God extends his grace and favor to Noah's entire household on the basis of his righteousness; the other seven members of his family are brought safely through the flood.)
7. And for us, we see that Noah relied in the same way as Adam and we as well: **rest in the promise, trust in the provision!**

After Noah, things spiral away from God again, culminating in the disaster of the **Tower of Babel**, where the nations are scattered into different and mutually incomprehensible languages. We would note that until this point, the focus has been universal, encompassing the whole of humanity. From this point forward (Gen. 12), the focus narrows, first, to Abraham and his family, then to the nation of Israel; and it retains this narrower focus until the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when suddenly, the power of the gospel- and Spirit-equipped church launches forth back into the global setting, which is still operating under the Noahic principles. We might think of this as **the great chiasm of Scripture**, moving us from the global focus of Genesis 1-11, then narrowing to Israel, narrowing all the way to one, to Christ, then blasting out from there to all the ends of the earth and the consummation, the new heavens and the new earth.

REVIEW:

- Adam:** 1. The promise of **SEED** = a 2d Adam, who would remove the curse and restore fallen humanity.
 2. The lesson of the **SKINS** = substitutionary atonement, the death of another in my place).
- Noah:** 1. A picture of God's **JUDGMENT** against sin and of God's **DELIVERANCE** of his own people.
 2. The lesson of the **RAINBOW** = the promise of **PRESERVATION** by God's **COMMON GRACE**.

THE COVENANT OF GRACE (REDEMPTION): ABRAHAMIC ADMINISTRATION

1. **God's Call to Abram and the Promise of Blessing (Gen. 12:1-4)**: SEED and LAND!
2. **Melchizedek, King of Righteousness, King of Peace (Gen. 14:17-20)**: a picture of the eschaton!
3. **Justification by Faith (Gen. 15:1-6)**: the way of salvation for all us in the covenant of grace!
4. **The Ratification of the Covenant (Gen. 15:7ff.)**: God himself will do it, i.e., will die the death required by covenant breach!
5. **The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision (Gen. 17:1-2, 9-11)**: pointing to the Promised Male Seed and to his blood that will be shed.
6. **The Sacrifice of the Monogenes (Gen. 22:1-2, 11-13; Heb. 11:17-19)**: a provision of a substitute; the seed of Abraham would die as the sinless Lamb of God, but that seed was not Isaac.
7. **The Promise of Blessing Reaffirmed (Gen. 26:4-5; 28:13-14)**: to Isaac and to Jacob.

We see Christ in Melchizedek, the smoking firepot, the sign of circumcision, and the Monogenes!
 For us, we are to be like Abraham, the man of faith (and we, children of the promise), justified by faith!
 Amen.