

Day 3: The difference Biblical Theology makes

Remembering our goals in Bible interpretation so far

Read in a Christotelic manner

Read as converted people, recognising our Christian presuppositions.

Read the Bible as the word of God, recognising its unity, seeking to understand how the parts fit into the whole, and depending upon God for enlightenment.

Read the Bible remembering that it was written by humans and that we will therefore need to use all the normal tools of literary interpretation.

Thinking through Mark 1

The following article was published last year on a website devoted to issues related to preaching in a manner that is sensitive to Biblical Theology. This website is a great resource for thinking through matters related to Biblical Theology (www.beginningwithmoses.org). The article is simply an examination of how I have approached Mark 1 in order to preach on it and it gives an example of how I would approach a New Testament text keeping in mind the things we have talked about over the past few days.

[Work through the BT Briefing on Mark 1:1-15.]

Thinking through how to interpret Psalm 22

Conclusion

What is Biblical Theology?

What I want to do now is to tie together the various sections of what we've learnt over the past couple of days.

First, let's try and define Biblical Theology.

At its most fundamental level, Biblical Theology is a task engaged in by Christians to read the Bible as a whole as Christian scripture.

Biblical theology is therefore committed to two key facts.

- There is no such thing as a presuppositionless, dispassionate, or disinterested reader. When we approach Scripture we unashamedly do it as Christian readers. We acknowledge our own faith and understand that as we study the Bible we are reflecting on our own faith in the light of what we read. Biblical Theology is therefore a profoundly spiritual task.
- Despite the difficulties in understanding how the Old and New Testaments relate to each other, they belong together and should be interpreted together and in the light of each other.

Once we have defined these two key facts, various other commitments or tasks emerge.

- Our study of the Bible must pre-eminently take into account that the plain witness of the scriptures is that the purposes of God find their goal and centre in Jesus Christ.
- Because the Bible tells us that God is a God of history and purpose, our study of the Bible must reflect this. This means that we will be concerned with historical context and with the progress of God's plan of salvation within history. At a practical level, this means that we will seek to trace theological ideas and themes through the various stages of biblical history.

- ❑ Biblical theology is fundamentally concerned with theology. This means that when we study the Bible we seek to reflect on it theologically and to consciously synthesise what we find about the nature, will and plan of God in creation and redemption.
- ❑ Biblical theology seeks to be 'biblical'. This means that consciously seeks to draw its theology inductively from the biblical text, not from a predetermined systematic framework. Biblical theology should lead to and inform systematic theology but must not be formed by systematic theology.
- ❑ Because the Old and New Testaments are part of one story, we ought to expect that the main elements of that story can be traced and clearly described. However, as with systematic theology, our synthesis of the story must not become a grid through which we pass the whole.
- ❑ Biblical theology allows each of the elements of the Bible to speak for themselves. This will mean incorporating the diversity of the biblical writings within the unity of its theology and story.
- ❑ Biblical theology has as its goal the building up of God's people. It therefore clearly has proclamation of God's purposes in mind as it seeks to understand the scriptures.

Where to from here?

Biblical theology depends on knowing your Bible. If you don't already have a program of reading the whole Bible through regularly, then get one started. There are various ways to do this (and the best way probably depends a fair bit on your personality). If you need some help with developing a program or Bible reading, come and see me and I'll happily give you some suggestions.

Listen to or read good Biblical Theology preaching. There are some good websites available now with good examples (e.g. www.beginningwithmoses.org). I'm gradually putting my own preaching online at www.treasurenewandold.org.

Read some books on Biblical Theology. A graded reading approach would be...

Roberts, Vaughan. *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Story-Line of the Bible*. Leicester: IVP, 2002.

Strom, M. *Days Are Coming: Exploring Biblical Patterns*. Rydalmere: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989.

Reid, A. *Postcard From Palestine*. Second ed. Kingsford: Matthias Media, 1997.

Goldsworthy, Graeme L. *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000.

VanGemeren, Willem A. *The Progress of Redemption: From Creation to the New Jerusalem*, Biblical and Theological Classics Library. Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995.

Dumbrell, W. J. *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*. Second ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Bright, John. *The Authority of the Old Testament*: Baker Book House Company, 1967.

Vos, G. *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1948.

Enns, Peter. 'Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving Beyond a Modernist Impasse'. *WJT* 65, no. 2 (2003): 263-87.

Alexander, T. Desmond, and Brian S. Rosner, eds. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000.

Watson, Francis. *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997.

Seminar

- Must do question:

Read Psalm 46 again. How do you think you might interpret this Psalm in a larger, Biblical Theology context? How might you apply this passage to a group of Christians in the 21st century in a way that takes your previous research into account?

Extra question if time:

Endnotes

¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. London: SPCK, 1984, page 166.

² For the argument that Scripture should be viewed as 'Christotelic' in focus, see Peter Enns, 'Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving Beyond a Modernist Impasse'. *WJT* 65, no. 2 (2003): pp. 263-87.

³ Note that within the Old Testament itself this is true. For example, in Daniel 9 Daniel is waiting for the end to the exile. In effect, God tells him that there will be 'an' end. However, 'the' end will have to wait (and is eventually fulfilled in Christ).

⁴ Possible because of hardness of heart (cf. 2 Corinthians 3).

⁵ Note that a similar point could be made from 2 Corinthians 3, which also seems to raise issues of Israel's hardness of heart. The difference appears to be that Luke 24 talks about Jesus rather the ministry of the Spirit, which appears to be Paul's focus. For more on this, see Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument From Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995, and *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

⁶ A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Understanding the Old Testament*. London: SCM, 1978, translated from *Vom Verstehen des Alten Testaments. Eine Hermeneutik*. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977, page 2.

⁷ See John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967.

⁸ The diagram in this section is dependent upon that given in Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991. The diagram reflects the approach outlined in Andrew Reid's *Postcard From Palestine*. Second ed. Kingsford: Matthias Media, 1997.