

He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

LESSON
EIGHT

MODERN APPLICATION &
OLD TESTAMENT EPOCHS
DISCUSSION FORUM



THIRD MILLENNIUM

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He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

Lesson Eight: Modern Application & Old Testament Epochs

Discussion Forum

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Question 1:

Why is Scripture authoritative?

Christians have long believed that the Bible should have a profound impact on the way we act, think, and feel. Both the Old and New Testaments provide doctrinal insight and practical instruction for believers. But the Bible isn't just another useful book. It actually has authority over our lives. Why is Scripture authoritative?

Dr. Simon Vibert

Christians believe that Scripture is authoritative because God stands as the author over Scripture. Now, for sure, God used human means — men moved along by God — in order to write the Bible. But actually Scripture's authoritative because when the Bible is read we hear God's voice and are supposed to respond submissively and in humble obedience.

Dr. Peter Walker

Christian believers see the Bible as quite different to other books because it's a divine revelation, a revelation from God, and also it's something which has been inspired by him. Concerning revelation, the Bible is seen as something in which God himself is revealing his character and his deeds, his works. So, the Bible contains events in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, which Christian believers see as a sign of God actually at work in his world. It could be the Exodus redemption in the Old Testament. It could, of course, be the resurrection of Jesus in the New. So, at the very least, the Bible is the book which is an account of the acts of God in human history. But more than that, when God does something in the world, it's important that, actually, it should be properly explained. So, what we need is not just an account of the acts of God. We need an authoritative account which has come from God. And the Christian claim is that the Old Testament and the New Testament are, both together, books through which God has been at work to give an account of what he's

done in the world, authoritative revelation about God's words and his works. Going a little bit further, there's a biblical understanding that the God of the Bible is a God who speaks, very powerful, his word. His word brings about creation, his word inspires people through prophetic writings. And so, it's long been taken that the words of Scripture are also words which God himself still speaks. So, here comes the idea that the Bible is actually a word from God — in fact, *the* Word of God. And then it's worth remembering again that the God of the Bible, who is seen as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is a God who has power by his Spirit to inspire men and women, and to inspire people in their task of writing words of Scripture. And so, we have this understanding that the Bible is inspired, or breathed out by God. There's a text in the New Testament that says that all Scripture is inspired, or God-breathed, or breathed out by God, and that is because of this doctrine of the Spirit. God is able, by his Spirit, to bring forth words which really explain who he is. So, the Bible is quite different — revelation from God, and inspired by God.

Dr. John Oswalt

When we look at the Bible, we see a book which the Christian church has regarded as authoritative for its entire history. There are a number of reasons we could give for that, but one — or two really — that I want to lift up here is the remarkable theology of the Scriptures. There are really only two worldviews. One worldview says, "This cosmos is all there is; there is nothing more." The other worldview says, "No, there is something *beyond* this cosmos." There are really only three religions in the world which take that position: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And they all got it from one single source, the Bible. Where did the Jews, the Hebrews, the Israelites, where did they get this bizarre idea that God is not the world? Everybody around them believed that deity is intrinsic to the world. But the Jews, the Hebrews, the Israelites say, "No." We ask them, "Where did you get this idea?" and they say, "Oh, God revealed it." People a hundred and fifty years ago in Europe said, "Oh no, the Jews had a great religious propensity." Ask the Jews: "Religious geniuses? Ha-ha, no, we were religious knuckleheads. God dragged us kicking and screaming into this understanding of him. We didn't want it, but we couldn't escape him." The second thing that marks the uniqueness of the Bible is "iconoclasm." You cannot make God in the shape of anything in this world. The same three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Where did they get it? Same single source: the Bible. So, the Bible is revealed. Obviously, we could offer many other explanations or illustrations of that truth, but those two really catch me and say the only way you can explain this is the one they give us, revelation. And that means if God has revealed himself to us in this book, then this book is authoritative.

Dr. Derek Thomas

What authority does the Word of God have? It has the authority of God himself. The Bible is God's Word. It is God speaking. Every part of it from Genesis to Revelation, all 66 books, 40 different authors in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, 2 million words in nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and so on, all of them, every single one of them, given by God. The Bible is what God intends it to be. All Scripture is given by the out-breathing of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof,

instruction, correction in the way of righteousness. Holy men of God wrote as they were driven along by the Holy Spirit. Now, Calvin in the 16th century introduced, I think, a very, very important term. In book one of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he coined the phrase that the Bible is "*autopistos*," was the term he used. It is self-authenticating; it authenticates itself. If the Bible is God's word, there can be no higher basis of authority. You can't appeal higher up than the Bible because the Bible is God's Word. So you can't have the church corroborating its authority, or tradition corroborating its authority, or some inner peace that as we read the Bible we detect it to be the word of God. Although, that is true. The Holy Spirit does witness to the Bible's self-authenticating nature, and that's an important concept, but ultimately, the Bible authenticates itself. Now, this sounds like a secular argument. The Bible is true because it says it's true. The Bible is authoritative because it says it's authoritative. And that is circular. It sounds circular, and it is circular. But in ultimate issues, one can't avoid circularity. There is no higher corroboration than God himself, and the Bible is God's Word.

Question 2:

How should we understand the Bible's authorship?

The Bible tells us that all Scripture was "breathed out" by God. And yet, we also see clear indication that the human authors of Scripture wrote using their own personalities and abilities. So, how should we understand the Bible's authorship?

Dr. Steve Blakemore

Well, when we think about the Bible as the Word of God, we need to remember that the Bible was written through human authors. But there's another sense in which you could say, the Bible was written *by* human authors, of course, under the inspiration of the Spirit, fully guided by the Holy Spirit. But the question is, what does that mean? Do we think of them as kind of sitting down in some sort of meditative state dictating thoughts that came into their minds? Or do we think about the Spirit working through human language, working in terms of human concepts that were in them and utilizing them as the chosen instruments of God to produce faithfully the Word of God. I think oftentimes we get confused with the concept of the Scripture as the Word of God, and we think of the Scripture as the *words* of God. I don't think Scripture was given in any sort of dictatorial manner. Rather, it seems to me that God used their human cultural concepts to give deep abiding spiritual truth. For instance, when John writes in 1 John — I think chapter 2 — that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world — that's what he says — the concept of an atoning sacrifice, if that had come through an author in the 12th century A.D., would have been incomprehensible to people. The atoning sacrifice was a concept that was very culturally specific. And so that cultural language is used to describe something that is irreplaceably important to us about Jesus. So, the Holy Spirit uses human intellectual concepts. He takes them, and the writers are writing in their own particular context. But the Spirit knew that this same truth expressed in these concepts would be

applicable to the life of every believer who ever came after them and who ever read these truths. So there is a great amount of human involvement in the production of the Scripture, but that doesn't make the Scripture a human document. It simply means that there is something beautiful, and God-givenly beautiful, about the capacity of human beings filled with the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, seeking after God, surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Something beautiful about the capacity of human language to express the truth of God.

Dr. Brian J. Vickers

We know that the Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture. We believe that as Christians. But we have to remember that he inspired human authors. And so it's important, it's obviously important, that we be aware that the Scripture is inspired, "breathed ... by God," as Paul said. But we have to remember that God doesn't inspire the writers of Scripture in a way that sort of overrides them as individuals, as people. So it's very important, we have to remember, these are human authors and they're using human language, and they're communicating with human beings. And so, we need to pay attention to them because they are the messenger, so to speak. You could put it that way. They're God's messengers to us — to the people they were writing to and then also to us. And we have to remember, God accommodates himself to us in every way. And one of the greatest ways that God has accommodated himself to us is by giving us his Word in words that we can understand. I mean, God's not limited to language. God's not limited to any language at any time. God accommodates himself and speaks to us through human beings. And since he's speaking to us through human beings, we have to take those people seriously and see them as the ones who are... they are the ones who are most directly communicating to us what God is saying. And so, if we kind of skip over or dismiss the human authors of Scripture, in many ways, we're dismissing the divine author of Scripture by ignoring the fact that he, in fact, spoke through human beings. So we have to take them seriously and understand when we say Paul is my authority, we shouldn't mean anything other than God is my authority. You know, Paul speaks as the messenger of God. He makes that very clear. And all the biblical writers. I mean, when the prophets say, "Thus says the Lord," we can say legitimately that Isaiah is authoritative on this matter... Just pick your text from Isaiah. But by saying that Isaiah is authoritative, what we're saying is God is authoritative as the one speaking through Isaiah. So it's two things. We shouldn't reject either side but see that's how God has revealed himself through human beings. And we have to take those human beings seriously and understand that what they say is authoritative because it's God speaking through them.

Question 3: **How much were the authors of Scripture influenced by the circumstances of their original audiences?**

Many times biblical authors had specific audiences in mind when they penned their letters or other writings. And knowing who those recipients were is very helpful as we interpret and apply their writings today. But, how much were the authors of Scripture influenced by the circumstances of their original audiences?

Dr. Andrew Davis

The authors of Scripture paid very careful attention to the circumstances of the people they were writing to. They had a message from God, a word from God, for those people at that time. But God had a bigger purpose for those writers. Those writers of Scripture, whether it's Old Testament prophets, Moses, the apostles, did not always fully understand what God would do with their writings. This is stated very clearly in 1 Peter, that it was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but future generations. Daniel was told to seal up his prophecy because it was for a later time. And he didn't understand it. He clearly asked many questions about it, and he was told, "Don't worry about it, you're going to die and you're going to rise again and you'll be fine, and I'll take it from here." And so future generations then would read those Scriptures and understand them far more fully than the original writers did. But they were writing to specific circumstances. And God orchestrated, I think, those circumstances to be universally helpful and beneficial to later generations. So things going on in the church in Corinth or the church in Galatia, etc., are still helpful to us today. So, Paul was addressing specific situations. He sat down that day to write to those situations. I don't know that he was intending to write Scripture like Moses or Isaiah was writing Scripture. He was just desiring, in an apostolic way, to be helpful. He was conscious that everything he said was by the Spirit, etc., but I think he wrote many things that didn't make it into the Bible. And so, my feeling is that God orchestrated those circumstances, the apostle would write into them, address their questions, answer them, but God intended that those questions would be strategically chosen to be helpful for future generations. So, I think that's the best way to understand the immediate circumstance, the author writing, and how it's still useful to us twenty centuries later.

Dr. Brian J. Vickers

I think to a large extent, the circumstances of the audience to whom the writers of the Bible were writing play a major role in the content of those books. Now, that's not true in every case, because sometimes we don't know the original circumstances. But just take the epistles, for example. They're often called "occasional letters." And what that simply means is that they were letters written at a particular time, by a particular person, to particular people in particular circumstances. And so, they're written to address certain issues. I mean, 1 Corinthians is a great example. Right? We know they had questions for Paul, and we know that there were lots of issues. And Paul addresses those large sin issues among the Corinthians and then goes on to address

some things that they have asked him. We know, for instance, like in Philippians, that they're being hounded by these sort of Judaizers who are coming in and promoting circumcision. And Paul addresses that in chapter 3. Or the Galatians, again, similar kind of situation, probably a little more intense even than Philippians. And we know what Paul has to say both to the Galatians about their tendency to sort of tilt away from the gospel, but also very strong words for those who are coming and leading them away by a false gospel. And so, the original circumstances are very important for us for understanding the content of the books of the Bible. But at the same time we have to remember we only know as much about those circumstances as the author of the letter tells us, or the gospel, or what have you, any book of the Bible. So, when we come to Colossians, just to give another example, we know that there is something called "the Colossian heresy." Well, we only know about that through what Paul reveals. And there's a good reason why, if you read commentaries on Colossians, that there's a lot of different opinions about what the Colossian heresy was, because we don't know exactly what it was. But we know enough about the problems there that we don't have to know exactly what the Colossian heresy was to know the kind of issues that Paul's addressing. So, we need to be aware of it insofar as the authors make us aware of it. But it's not as though if we don't have a clear understanding of the original circumstances that we can't understand the books of the Bible.

Dr. Howard Eyrich

I think if you consider the Scriptures overall, you will find that the authors consistently had their audience in view. You can look at Moses; you can look at Joshua; you can look at Isaiah, Jeremiah; it follows through. But the two best examples, I think that we can relate to the best, are 1 Corinthians and 1 Peter. I always find it fascinating that God sent Paul to plant a church in Corinth, the most immoral city in the world. And he goes there to plant a church, and God establishes that church. And then Paul leaves. He knows the people, he knows the culture, and now he gets this letter from them that says, "We've got some problems over here in Corinth. Can you help us?" And so, as a result, Paul writes the book of Corinthians in which he addresses these six or seven problems, depending on how you want to construe them. And they are problems that we face in the church today. So, the context became very important, the actual people became very important. They were people that Paul knew, but he was writing to them about common issues that God in turn set it up so we would all have access to how to think about those common issues ... So, the people, the circumstances, the culture, all were important to the author of the books of the Bible.

Question 4:

How can we tell which characters in the Bible are positive examples for us to follow and which are negative examples we should reject?

The Bible's original audiences would have been familiar with most of the individual characters found in Scripture. But audiences today sometimes have difficulty

pinning down Scripture's view of a particular person. We want to know whether Scripture views a character's actions and words as praiseworthy, and whether or not we should follow their example. How can we tell which characters in the Bible are positive examples for us to follow and which are negative examples we should reject?

Dr. Jimmy Agan

The Bible doesn't immediately tell us in every setting which characters are to be imitated and which ones are bad examples to be avoided. So we have to have some principles in place. The first one is to make a distinction between prescription and description. Sometimes the Bible prescribes certain behaviors to engage in or to avoid. It directly tells us what to do or not do. Other times the Bible encourages certain behaviors and discourages others by describing, showing us a picture of what faithful human life before God looks like. And so that's a good place to start, is with that general distinction. Another question to ask is: does another part of the Bible shed light on the conduct of this character? An example here would be maybe Abraham's polygamy in the book of Genesis. Well, if we've read Genesis 1 and 2, we know that God's intention is for one man and one wife to cleave to one another and become one flesh, and Genesis 1 and 2 says nothing about polygamy being part of God's design. So if we're reading carefully, we know, "This part of the Bible tells us how to evaluate Abraham's conduct in this respect." We could ask a question of whether a narrative, a description of a character, leaves us any clues of how to evaluate that character's conduct. A great example of this is in the book of Ruth where Ruth has a nearer kinsman redeemer than Boaz. And Boaz goes to him and asks if he will do what Scripture requires in terms of caring for Ruth, and he refuses. And Scripture sends us a signal by not even bothering to record the name of that nearer redeemer. That's the Scripture's way of saying, this guys a scoundrel, don't behave like this, don't ignore God's law when it calls you to redeem someone who's in need. We can move on from those kind of general principles to some specifics that have to do with the Gospels and the book of Acts where things get even a little more crazy in terms of evaluating behaviors and characters. Who's good? Who's bad? One thing we do when we look at the Gospels is we ask, "Is this character embodying something that Jesus has taught?" And so we come, say, to the book of Acts, and we see Barnabas selling land and giving the money to the apostles to take care of those in need in the church. Well, Jesus has taught on that. Jesus has taught about giving possessions to those who are in need. Jesus has taught about generosity. And so that sets us up when we get to the book of Acts to say, "He's living out what Jesus has taught. He's an example of what faithful discipleship to Christ ought to look like." Another question we could ask when we're looking at the Gospels and the book of Acts is: Is there any conflict here between this approach and the approach that Jesus has embodied himself? We see a lot of conflict between Jesus and other leaders whether those leaders are Pharisees, scribes or even his own disciples. So, when we start to see certain models of leadership that look like they're intentioned with what Jesus has modeled for us, that's a dead giveaway that we're not supposed to practice that kind of model of leadership.

Dr. Ghassan Khalaf (translation)

If we ask, "Why does the Bible speak to the depths of our hearts more than any other book," what would our answer be? Our answer would be that the Bible doesn't consider the matter of God's existence or non-existence, but rather, it talks to us about the experience of the people that have lived with God. And the Bible recorded their lives according to their relationships with God. Therefore, when we read the Bible, we read about people like us. And when we read about people like us, we find extraordinary spiritual things in them. But we also find mistakes, shortcomings and despicable things. All of this is to teach us to learn from them when they lived out spiritual heroism and showed virtues in their lives. And to learn *not* to do what they did if they sinned, stayed away from God, languished spiritually, or left the faith. Therefore, we always have these two issues in the Bible: At times, people live a good life and sometimes they fail and make mistakes. And other times we find very bad examples of people who, at the end, rarely repent. So there is a lesson for us to learn. We learn to follow those who lived a good life of faith. But we don't follow the footsteps of those who make mistakes. This is a great moral challenge. But our morality grows when we see people live morally before us. And in the Bible there are virtuous men and women who lived truly heroic lives of faith, and they are examples to follow if we are going to mature in our faith and live spiritually courageous lives.

Dr. Peter Walker

It's vital to understand that there are things in the Bible, some of which are commended to us, and some things which we're not supposed to do. I often say to my students, "Do not think that everything in the Bible is biblical." And they get worried. And then I say, well, the Bible contains lots of things which it's not mandating or requiring us to do. So it's not actually a biblical thing to go and hang yourself just because Judas happened to hang himself. And that helps people, the students, to understand that the Bible has got things which it's not commending. Not everything in the Bible is biblical. Not everything in the Bible is biblically required of us. There are examples which we're not supposed to follow. It's crucial we understand this. Read the book of Judges or Joshua, especially the book of Judges. It's really quite a low time in God's redemptive purposes. The people of God are nowhere. And it says at the end of the book of Judges, they "had no king, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Now that is a clue from the writer of Judges that everything he's been describing in the previous twenty-plus chapters, you've got to put a big question mark against it. Is this actually what we're supposed to be doing? Is Samson really meant to be a role model for how we're meant to behave today? Now that episode of Jephthah as he ends up sacrificing his daughter because she comes out of the house, the first thing he sees, that is horrendous. And that's why some people have moral problems with the Bible because it seems to be describing these things. But actually the Bible has been very careful. The biblical writers are saying, "No, this is not how God's people are meant to behave." And this is a low time, a dark time in God's purposes. And it's really important to get that distinction. Normally the biblical writer will give us the clue and will give us that steer, that guidance, to say, "Don't do this. No. Do this." And when you come to the New Testament, you've also got issues like in the book of Acts. The disciples, the early apostles, they would do certain things, and is

that actually required that we do exactly the same thing? Should we throw lots, for example, when we're trying to choose our next deacon? Well, because they did that doesn't mean to say that we have to do that. It's biblical, it's permitted, it's allowed. But we've got to realize that not everything in the Bible is actually required of us. And there may be other practices to which we say, "Yes, that's fine." But there are different ways of cutting the cake.

Question 5:

How can we determine from Scripture the major epochs or eras of redemptive history?

When we look at God's redemptive plan throughout history, it's important to see how Scripture divides history. It's also important to see what the Scriptures have to say concerning those divisions. So, how can we determine from Scripture the major epochs or eras of redemptive history?

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

Scripture gives us clear clues as to the major eras or epochs of redemptive history. The first one we can see as we open any English Bible, we see two main divisions: Old Testament and New Testament. That is actually reflective of the way the Bible itself views the whole span of the history of redemption and revelation. Old Testament and New Testament are really reflective of the biblical language of old covenant and new covenant — language that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians. But, of course, new covenant language goes back much earlier to the prophecy of Jeremiah, where God promises a new covenant not like the covenant made at Sinai, but one in which God will forgive all his people's sins, and he will write his law into their hearts. So there we have a basic breakdown of two epochs of redemption. Old covenant: the period of promise, the period of, as Hebrews says, the period of anticipation and shadow. And the new covenant: the period of fulfillment established by Christ and his death and resurrection. Now if we look back at the period that we think of as the period of promise or shadow, certainly the Law of Moses marks a clear point in that the Law is given. Now written Scripture is given for the first time to Israel in the five books of Moses, and the Law governs Israel's life. But we do see references in Genesis to the earlier history, the history of the patriarchs in which there were key covenants that God made with his people. We have the implicit covenant. Hosea 6 calls it a covenant with Adam. It's not labeled as such in Genesis 1 and 2, but it's a covenant that God makes with Adam and Eve. Adam is a covenant head of the human race with obligations, with consequences, a commitment that God makes, that if Adam and Eve obey, if Adam sustains the test of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there will be eternal life and blessing. Adam does not, as we know, and so we are plunged, then, into a new period, a period that begins with a promise, in a sense. It's judgment on the serpent, on Satan. But it's a promise implicitly to us that a seed of the woman will come to crush the head of Satan — the beginning of what theologians call "the covenant of grace" that's then worked its way out in the various

epochs of revelation and redemption. Abraham, a key figure as God makes a covenant commitment to Abraham to grant him a land, but even more, to grant him a seed, a line of descendants, and to be a blessing to all the nations. Christ is that ultimate descendent. And in Christ, all the nations become Abraham's descendants by faith in Christ. So, those covenants are key markers. We've looked at the covenant with Adam before the Fall, a covenant in a sense with Adam and all humanity after the Fall. Abraham. Noah before Abraham, a covenant in which God promises to sustain the world as he works out his redemptive plan. The covenant made with Israel through Moses. And then of course, there is the covenant that God makes with David. And we find more clarity now, more focus, that the seed of the woman who will be the seed of Abraham, who is the seed of Israel. In fact, even in Moses' day and before, we learn will come from Judah. Now he's to come from the line of David. And then we have the fulfillment in the new covenant. And the fullness of things that were shown in types and shadows in the Old Testament, now the reality comes in the person of Christ.

Dr. Miles Van Pelt

When trying to discern or figure out the major eras or epochs in redemptive history, probably the best way to begin is to begin in the New Testament where they start to parse especially the larger history in the Old Testament. And so, for example, in the New Testament they talk about the epoch or era of the first Adam in Romans and the epoch or era of the second Adam in Romans. And so we're talking about big divides there. We can also talk about the patriarchal era, the promises made to the patriarchs, but then, also, the covenant made with Moses at Sinai. And so, the New Testament is a great way to begin to talk about or think about the different epochs in redemptive history. We even have in the New Testament the discussion of the time before the flood and that time after the flood. And so, if we take our cues from the New Testament, we at least have a place from which we can start, where we have a kind of inspired interpretation of redemptive history. You can also study the Old Testament itself and allow it to establish particular redemptive historical epochs based on its covenantal structure. And so, you can talk about that time before the Fall, and therefore, that time after the Fall, which divides all of redemptive history. You can talk next about that time before Noah, the flood, and that time after the flood which, in essence, subdivides the latter part of redemptive history post-Fall. You can talk about the patriarchal or the Abrahamic era — Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the patriarchal era that led up to the Mosaic era. And then the Mosaic era ushers into, or leads up to, the Davidic era which is the highlight of that era. And you've got David and Solomon who become the kings. So that's the era of the kings, if you will, which leads to the era of, or the epoch of the exile. And then the waiting for the final epoch where Jesus comes his first and then second times. And so, there are ways to do it kind of at a presuppositional level where you begin in the New Testament and see what it says about the larger history in the Old Testament. But then if you're in the Old Testament by itself, it also has self-authenticating ways of discerning the epochs, basically by covenant, covenant renewal, and major covenant figures.

Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

People have a lot of different opinions about how many major eras or epochs there are in biblical history, redemptive history. So there's a lot of debate on that. But it seems to me that we can at least recognize three or four. And it seems as if with each new era, God does something new, perhaps creative. Of course, Genesis 1 tells us that he created the world. So that began an era in human history, and there was a need for redemption pretty quickly because the first couple sinned against God and were expelled from the Garden. And then the rest of the biblical story is about how God reclaims humanity and creates the ideal that he had all along for humanity. We certainly had the beginning of a new era when God delivers Israel from Egypt, takes them to Sinai. In fact, there are places in the Old Testament where that is viewed as a new creative event — Isaiah 40 through 55. If you read through that section, you'll see a close association between Exodus and creation. And so there's a sense in which God created Israel when he brought them out of Egypt and gave them a constitution, as it were — the Law — at Sinai. And certainly when you come to the New Testament and you see that God establishes the church, something new happens there. The new covenant community is created with the outpouring of the Spirit. And Peter recognizes that this is the fulfillment in part or in whole of what Joel prophesied, where God would pour out his Spirit on his people. Christians will disagree about what the future holds, and is there going to be a new era? I am a dispensationalist, premillennialist, so I happen to believe that there will be an earthly kingdom. Others may not agree with that. But certainly something new and exciting is going to be happening in the future. And we'll probably disagree a little bit on that, but we can all look forward to it.

Question 6:

What criteria do theologians use to divide Old Testament history into eras or epochs?

Historians can divide history into different sections based on any number of criteria. This is because they all look at history from different perspectives. Theologians do this as well. What criteria do theologians use to divide Old Testament history into eras or epochs?

Dr. Miles Van Pelt

When thinking about Old Testament history, often times scholars will try to divide that history up into discrete blocks for discussion. There are a number of different ways to do it. First, I think it's important to understand that there is one history of God's people and God's kingdom from beginning to end. He's working on this unified plan. In the midst of that unified plan, there are distinct epochs in history when God works with his people, sometimes in ways very similar to what we would experience now in the Christian life, and sometimes in very different ways. And so, knowing what epochs fit into what categories can be helpful. So that's why we do this. In the New Testament, Peter refers to a division at the time of the flood, the world that then

was and the world that now is. And so, it's helpful to use the New Testament to divide the Old Testament into biblical epochs, I think. And so, we can talk about the world before the flood; then we can talk about the world after the flood. And so, that's a type of division that's an "event division." And so, when we think about other major events in the Bible that would be event-type division like the flood, we could think of, well, there's creation, then there's the Fall, and then there's the flood. Then we have the patriarchal era, and then the Mosaic era. And then the Mosaic era can be expanded into the time in which they occupied the land and then their exilic period. So, you can divide the Old Testament into those epochs based on major events. So, creation, Fall, and then, in some sense, the plan of redemption in the Old Testament which includes the patriarchal era, the Mosaic era, the age of occupation in the Land of Promise, and then their exile from it — those epochs. So you could do it by event. You could also talk about biblical epochs associated with the people. And that's another way to do it too. So, when you talk about the patriarchal era, you're really talking about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their family, or Noah and his family. You could also talk about Moses and that generation of people, and then Joshua, and then the generation of the judges. Those will correspond to many of the epochs that are event based. But one would be then the temple era or the Solomonic-Davidic era as well. So, what we're doing is we're grounding our division of the Old Testament into major periods of when God acts through his people. And so that's really the tension there, is do you place emphasis on the action of God or the person through whom God is working? And the answer is, yes, both. And what you'll notice is that when God works through a particular person in Israel's history, the event, the Bible and biblical revelation explodes as well. So, if you think really of the first big major redemptive act in the Old Testament — that's the big Red Sea event in Exodus — that's when we get the Bible exploding with exposition and revelation, and we get that big chunk of Scripture in the Mosaic era. Then in the next one, you have the Davidic era where the kingship and the monarchy are flourishing. And then you get the Judges, the Samuel, the Kings, all that material as well, when they're occupying the land. That's the next big event. So you've got people and events together. And then at the end you have their exile and then all of that material that is stemming from the exile, Ezra, Nehemiah, the exilic books and the exilic prophets. The prophets, as well, come because of the exile. So, sometimes people and events go together. Sometimes they overlap. And so, you have this word event, word pattern that goes throughout the Scriptures. And so, it's keeping those things in mind and just realizing that when you're studying the Bible, some people are going to emphasize the people as you move through the Old Testament. Others are going to emphasize the events. And in some reality, both of those are helpful because God's working through people and God's working in history, and you could stream those together. But at some level, you've got to keep it all together as well and realize that all of this Old Testament history is culminating in the person and the work of Jesus, so, who he was as a person and what he did in history. So, those two streams ultimately will climax in Christ. And if you can see them moving that way, then you're on the right track.

Dr. Bruce Baugus

Different theologians divide the Old Testament along different lines, into different eras and epochs, which raises the question of criteria. What criteria are they using? This much is clear. If there's going to be a criterion, it has to be something that the Bible itself presents as the structural device of God's revelation to us through time. And Reformed thinkers have consistently maintained that that structure is covenant. And so it's in terms of covenant and the particulars of each covenant administration through the Old Testament that we develop criteria for how we think about what's going on in each epoch of the Old Testament.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Those who read the Bible often divide them into different epochs or eras. So, often speaking covenantally of the covenant made with Adam, with Abraham, with Moses, with David, for example, helps us to understand how God dealt with his people in certain eras and times in the Bible. And understanding the context in which you're reading the text in those different epochs and eras helps you to understand it applied to the original audience and on to us. And, I suppose the most significant thing for us as readers of the Bible is to appreciate that we live in an age in which those epochs and eras have passed. And understanding the context in which the various slices of the biblical text are to be read and interpreted, according to age in which they occurred, gives us insight as to how it had been read by original audiences. And as with most of the reading of the Bible, we recognize that there's a sense in which we still live in the same world that they live in. We're creatures who are made by God perfectly but who fell into sin. Nevertheless, Christ has entered into our world and he has redeemed us, but that that work is not yet completed until he returns. And finding ourself positioned as it were, reading the Bible today helps us to understand how earlier readers of the biblical text positioned themselves in their time and epoch as well.

Question 7:**How does God function as the protagonist and Satan as the antagonist in the storyline of Old Testament history?**

Like every good story, biblical history involves conflict. And this conflict most often takes the form of tension between the protagonist, or the main character, and the antagonist, his enemy. In Scripture, God is depicted as our protagonist and Satan is the antagonist. How does God function as the protagonist and Satan as the antagonist in the storyline of Old Testament history?

Dr. Luis Orteza

If you look at the history of redemption, writers would speak about the history of redemption as a drama. And God is the protagonist who tries to accomplish his purposes. And Satan is the antagonist in that he tries to oppose the fulfillment of God's purposes in redemptive history. And so, you see the conflict between the two.

A good example of that to start with is the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. Here he receives the promise, or he receives the dream, that someday he would rise to power only to find out he would end up in prison. And at that moment, it looked like everything was lost. And yet, in time God showed him that God was sovereign, that God was in control. And the story gives us an example of how God in his sovereignty fulfills his purposes even though Satan sometimes would try to prevent it from happening.

Dr. Andrew Davis

First of all, I love to think of the Scripture as an unfolding story of redemptive history, and it's true. It's not a fable or myth, it's a true story. But it is a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and the End." So there's a beginning to this story and an end to this story. God is the protagonist, the initiator, because he's the Creator. There was a time when there was nothing but God. And I believe that he thought out and planned out this story before the world began, before he said, "Let there be light." He was and is the initiator of everything, the Creator, the King, the Ruler. Satan is a created being. We understand him to be perhaps the most powerful created being, but there's an infinite gap between God the Creator and Satan as a created being. They're not in any way equal and opposites. Satan is opposite to God. He does oppose him, but he's a created being. And God uses Satan to accomplish his purposes. A very good example of that is in the crucifixion of Christ. I think about that, how in Caesarea Philippi, Satan in some way filled Peter to tempt Jesus not to go to the cross. Jesus said to him, "Get behind me Satan." When Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him concerning going to the cross. Jesus called him Satan. But then later in John's gospel, Satan entered into Judas to bring about Jesus' arrest and his betrayal. So what is Satan doing? He doesn't know what to do with Jesus. And so, I think in the end he just reverted to his nature. He's a murderer and he wanted to kill the Son of God, and in so doing destroyed himself. By killing Jesus, it says in Hebrews 2, Jesus was able, by dying, to destroy him who holds the power of death, that is Satan, and free us from Satan's dark kingdom. And so that's a beautiful thing how God figured all that out — God infinitely smarter than Satan, more powerful than Satan, moving around like a pawn on a chess board and Satan responding. Now Satan's vastly more powerful than we are, but we should understand how much more powerful God is. And there's nothing Satan can do to divert God's story, God's plan. It's going to go just as he planned to his own glory forever.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

You could really look at the whole storyline of the Old Testament as God as the protagonist and Satan as the antagonist. This, of course, begins prior to the Fall when Satan tests, or tempts, Adam and Eve and they disobey God. They break covenant with him. But it's made into a very focused, ongoing axis of Old Testament history in Genesis 3:15 where the curse upon the serpent is that there would be a seed of the woman whose heel he will bruise, but that seed of the woman would also crush the serpent's head. And so, you see this really playing out in the remainder of the Old Testament. You see it prior to Abraham in that the people of God are these wandering

people who trust in God's protection. And yet there are those who use their power and authority in ways that are inimical or at enmity toward God's people. People like Cain as he persecuted Abel, or Lamech who bragged about killing a man for wounding him. And even the sons of God, these powerful earthly rulers who oppressed the daughters of men such that, in the end, God brings a flood upon the earth. Noah was mocked in his day as a righteous man. You see it in the juxtaposition of the builders of the tower of Babel who say, "We'll make ourselves a name by building a tower up to the heavens," and then immediately following that we have Abraham who is promised a name by God. Israel and Egypt continues this theme. One of the great symbols of Pharaoh and his power was the serpent. And in the plagues of Egypt — you see it especially in chapter 12, the final plague, the plague on the firstborn — God says, "I will execute judgment tonight on all the gods of Egypt." So through Moses and Aaron, God is showing himself more powerful than Pharaoh, the epitome of an idolatrous and arrogant and prideful emperor. You even see this in the wilderness as Israel looks back and thinks about the food they had and the graves that they could be buried in in Egypt. And God tells Moses in Numbers 21 to make a bronze serpent, to lift it up on a pole and the plague of snakes that Israel had been subject to would be abated. They would be healed by looking to that serpent on the pole. That serpent on the pole is really a symbol of Pharaoh and his broken power. He is the serpentine deity who has been spike impaled on this pole. And so, God is telling Israel, "You can't go back to Egypt; you mustn't desire to go back to Egypt because the serpentine god, Pharaoh, is a dead god; he's an impotent god." So, Jesus draws upon this in John 12 — that the lifting up of the Son of Man on the cross will be like the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. That God will fight ultimate war against Satan and his forces by going to the cross. Jesus will defeat death by diving into death. And so, as it would disempower Satan, as Jesus said there in John 12: "So will the ruler of this world be cast out." And so, by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus frees us, as Hebrews 2 says, from him who has the power of death and who has subjected us to the fear of death all our lives long. Because he was made like us in our humanity as well as in his deity, Jesus defeats Satan ultimately. The strongman is bound. As Jesus said in Luke 11, that if you cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God had come. The strongman has been plundered so that all who belong to Satan's household have been stolen away from him. God has done, as it were, a home invasion on Satan by kicking down his door and plundering what was once his. So the gospel, among all the things that it accomplishes, one of the principal ones is the overthrow and the ultimate defeat of Satan, which is a story that begins back in the Garden with the promise of God. That there would be a seed of the woman who would bruise and crush Satan's head.

Question 8: **How should we apply the Bible's depictions of divine and national warfare to our lives today?**

The Old Testament has a number of occasions where it depicts divine and national warfare. And this theme is something the New Testament writers used to instruct their audiences. But what does this mean for modern audiences? How should we apply the Bible's depictions of divine and national warfare to our lives today?

Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

The theme of warfare is important in Scripture, but it's often controversial in our day. You have to very carefully think through how the Bible applies warfare imagery both in the Old Testament era and the New Testament era. As we think of the whole counsel of God — and as specifically how the New Testament authors look back on the Old Testament — and think through how the warfare now applies to us as believers, it does so in light of the fulfillment that has come in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, under the old covenant, it's important to see that Israel is a theocracy. They're given a specific land, a specific role to play in the nations. As they go into the Promised Land, God commands them to engage in warfare, to execute God's judgment, to remove the nations from the land. That is for a specific purpose — to create a holy people, to allow for the coming of Messiah, to execute God's judgment upon sin. I mean, a whole variety of purposes that are given to us. As we come to fulfillment in the New Testament, the church isn't exactly the same as Israel. It doesn't function like a theocracy in exactly the same way. We don't have a certain geography and a piece of real estate that we are controlling and having geographical borders and this type of thing. We are a spiritual people. We're part of God's kingdom that is international. His kingdom has broken into this world in Jesus Christ. We are people of that kingdom, yet we don't engage in the warfare in exactly the same way that it is under the old covenant. Yet, the Old Testament does apply warfare imagery to us. It first applies warfare imagery in Christ. Christ is the one who is "true Israel." He is the one who takes Israel's role and fulfills that. He is the one, in his coming, that defeats the powers. He engages in warfare against Satan. You see that in his life and ministry. On the cross he defeats the power of Satan, sin, death — a number of ways that the warfare imagery is applied. It then comes over to us in and through to him. We are to engage against the principalities and powers with spiritual weaponry, not, you know, arms and this type of thing that you would, say, as tied to Israel of old. We are to put on the whole armor of God — Ephesians 6. We are to engage in warfare under the role of our king, our Lord Jesus Christ. Warfare imagery will be picked up when Christ comes again. He will execute judgment. We aren't to do that. He will do that for us. But we then live as his people in between the times waiting for that second coming. So, that as you think of warfare imagery from the Old Testament to us, it has to be very, very carefully applied. For the most part, it's Christologically defined. He is the one who takes up that war. He is the one that defeats our enemies. He, on his cross, wins victory, and we then live in light of that victory. We put Satan under our feet. We engage in spiritual warfare. We do not pick up the weapons of this world —

2 Corinthians 10 where Paul says we don't engage in that kind of warfare — but we fight against Satan and all of his sinful and evil deeds as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus who will finally, in judgment, put sin and death down, defeat Satan, as he has done. It will be consummated and we will then have the victory with him.

Dr. William Edgar

I think contemporary people are a bit skittish about the idea of a God who goes to war or justifies war. There is plenty of war on our planet, but we generally don't like it, especially if we follow Christ who told us to turn the other cheek and to be peacemakers. But of course, war is very much a part of bringing justice to a world that's already in chaos. And so, Christians reading the Bible have developed the idea that some wars are "just." They're "just" because they're fighting off aggression and they're fighting off injustice. This is the kind of warrior that God is. He goes to battle for his people, he rescues them from their enemies. In the Old Testament, much of this was physically real. Think of the Exodus, think of the angel of the Lord battling for the people of Israel. But as the people were disobedient and sent into exile, a higher level of warfare was introduced, if I can call it that, and that is a spiritual warfare. So Jesus comes, and he still is the warrior. And there are times when he acts like one. He threw over the moneychangers' tables in the temple. But until the end of time, he will be mostly leading us in the battle against sin, and the flesh, and the Devil, telling us to put on the whole armor of God, and leading his people in what really is a war against all the forces of evil. And as we've said, the book of the Revelation tells us that Jesus is this warrior, and he wins. The victory is his, and now we're waiting for that victory to unfold.

Question 9:

How should Jesus' office of king influence the way we apply the Bible to modern life?

As the protagonist and final victor of the biblical narrative, Jesus now reigns as king. Because of this, Jesus has authority over our world and over our lives today. So, how should Jesus' office of king influence the way we apply the Bible to modern life?

Dr. Peter Kuzmič

I think the most crucial question that we have to ask is, how do the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world intersect? Where and why do they collide? Where do they partner? How does the gospel of the kingdom relate to the conditions of humanity in the world in which we live? You know, we evangelical Christians claim to be the "Great Commission Christians." I hear the Great Commission called out all the time, and I tell my American friends, "Wait a moment, you are not really faithful to the Great Commission when you call the Great Commission Matthew 28 and you say, 'Go and make disciples of all nations.'" You know, "nations" again. I say, "That's not where the Great Commission begins." It doesn't begin with our going. It begins

with his being. And so, it really begins a verse earlier, where the risen Lord gathers his disciples and says, "All power," depending on the translation. I think New International Version says, "All authority." The Greek word "*exousia*" is not easy to translate. It could be translated "dominion," relating to the rule of the kingdom, kingdom of God. "All power," all *exousia*, "in heaven and on earth is given to me. Therefore," — I will translate — "as you go, make disciples of all nations." This is a very important linkage. Now, when Jesus says, "All power in heaven and on earth is given to me," for somebody out in the world who doesn't understand biblical language that sounds scary ... History's full of tyrants and dictators who claim to accumulate all power, and became very destructive, killing millions, if not hundreds of millions, of innocent people. Now, Jesus is the only one who can claim all dominion, all power, with legitimacy. And by the way, his power is not destructive because it is power and love. Power motivated by love. Power moderated by love. See, if you have love alone, you have a nice sentiment, but maybe you are helpless because you don't have power to change anything. If you have power alone without love you destroy, you kill, you hate. It's the divine genius that brings love and power together. "God so *loved* the world that he sent his Son." Now, Jesus, who is the incarnated of love, and who claims all power — and remember it's after his resurrection — that is central to his kingdom. Kingdom is Jesus's master-thought. In the first three gospels alone, 121 times you have the kingdom mentioned. We don't understand who Jesus was, why he came, what he taught, and what happened on the cross and what happened on the third day. We don't understand what he means when he says, "The kingdom of God is at hand." He is the only one that can legitimately claim all power because he is the only one that walked on this planet earth and never sinned, never lied, never deceived. He's also the only one who, after he was killed, dead, buried, came back. So, he's the risen Lord. It is the inauguration of a new era of human history. He's bringing hope to the nations. And so, the kingdom of God is at work in very powerful ways. And that's where world evangelization and discipling the nations then is based on this, what I call, "the great foundation." You don't have a great commission without the great foundation. And then he caps it with a great promise, "And I will be with you to the very end of the ages." So Jesus the Lord, Jesus the King, is the ruler who has all power. And so we go, we disciple, we teach, we proclaim his rule in his power.

Dr. Gideon Umukoro

The kingship of Jesus is an issue that the American church is not really too familiar with, except the missionaries that have gone out overseas to countries where kings are still in power. The country I come from, Nigeria, is a democratic nation, but the kings also are there, playing vital roles alongside democracy. And not that it looks like, the kings have higher power than the governors who oversee the states, because if — take for example, if the governor of my state wants me in the government house, I can send his envoy back to him that "I'm busy; when I have the time, I will come." But when the king sends for me, I don't have any say. I don't have any excuse. I must be there right away. And even if I am indisposed, I will have to be put on a wheelchair or a stretcher and be brought before him. Because when he sends his envoy, the envoy comes with the scepter of the king and they put it in the front of your house. And

that's to show to you that the king needs you immediately, and you have to move with the envoy back to the palace. So that is how the kings reign and wield power in my country Nigeria. And when we see Christ as the king, as the Sovereign, from the point of how I just described the African king, then the kingdom we are praying for will come very soon. You see, most of us don't really understand the power of a king. The king owns everything, including you, your wife, and your children. The king has the right to accept you in his domain. He has the right to banish you out of his domain, and the governor has nothing to say about it, because the king's word is final. And I'm really glad that Jesus is the King Jesus. And if he actually is the king, then he owns every one of us. He has the right to summons us, and we don't have any excuse to give to him. He has a right to everything that we have worked and labored for on earth here because he's the king. If we accept him as the king, then when he says, "go," you go. When he says, "come," you come. When he says, "stay," you stay ... We lift up our hands in worship and say that we give all to Jesus. But because of our little or myopic understanding of who a king is, even when Jesus is summoning us, or is sending us, is asking us to give, we don't really understand his sovereign authority and power ... Jesus is King. And because of that, I own nothing on earth here, including myself, my wife, or my baby. We don't own anything. He is the owner of all. So that is how I see Jesus as King practically in my life.

The Old Testament is divided into different epochs. And these divisions provide a solid foundation for applying biblical material to modern life. Epochal divisions help us account for the differences between today and the times when the authors and audiences of the Old Testament lived. If we keep this information in mind, we'll be in a better position to apply the Old Testament to our own situations. And we'll grow in our ability to live under the authority and reign of our victorious Savior, Jesus Christ.

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