

# Building Biblical Theology

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## Lesson Guide

LESSON  
TWO

SYNCHRONIC SYNTHESIS  
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



THIRD MILLENNIUM  
MINISTRIES

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

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## HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

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- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
  - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
  - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
  - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
  - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
  - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

## Notes

### I. Introduction (0:22)

If we break the Bible's history into separate steps as we put the whole thing together, the task is much more manageable.

Biblical theologians explore what God has revealed to his people step by step at particular times in Old Testament history.

Review:

- Literary analysis (literary portrait)
- Thematic analysis (mirror)
- Historical analysis (window to historical events—focus of biblical theology)

Biblical Theology: Theological reflection drawn from historical analysis of acts of God reported in Scripture.

## **II. Orientation (3:40)**

### **A. Synchronic (4:08)**

Definition: occurrences that took place together in time or at the same time

In synchronic synthesis, biblical theologians concentrate their attention on particular periods of time in the Old Testament.

- Brief moments
  
- Long periods

Synchronic approaches concentrate on the theological perspectives established by the end of the time in view.

### **B. Synthesis (8:23)**

Definition: combining different components of something into a whole

Synchronic synthesis describes the ways different components of a particular period of history fit together in a coherent, logical structure.

**1. Denial (9:55)**

Many critical scholars distinguished biblical theology from systematic theology by pointing out the role of logic in each.

Critical theologians believed that logic was a primary feature of the “Greek mindset,” but was relatively foreign to the “Hebrew mindset.”

**2. Affirmation (11:23)**

Studies have largely discredited the contrasts between Greek and Hebrew mindsets.

Old Testament theology displays substantial concern for logic and rational thought.

Old Testament theology does not employ the standards of formal western philosophical traditions:

- Few technical terms
- Variety of genres
- Different emphases
- No all-encompassing system

Even so, God's revelations in Scripture were:

- Not random
- Not disconnected
- Not contradictory

**C. Example (13:24)**

Romans 5:12-14

Paul treated the time from Adam's fall to the giving of the law as one synchronic unit.

- Paul's main concern: to prove how the far-reaching effects of Adam's sin foreshadowed the far-reaching effects of Christ's obedience.

- Paul synthesized several theological features of the time between Adam and Moses:
  - Alluded to Genesis 3:14-19
  
  
  - A time before the law was given

Paul synchronized:

- From the Fall to the giving of the Law
- From Christ through the present

Paul synthesized each period by tying some of its different features together in a logical fashion.

### **III. Historical Information (17:23)**

Before biblical theologians can synthesize the theology of a period in the Old Testament, they must first gather information about the historical events.

Biblical theologians have to find ways to gather historical information from each type of biblical literature.





**b) Their World:** the world of their readers

Old Testament writers designed their texts to influence their original readers in particular ways.

- Exodus 15
- Psalm 1
- Isaiah 40

**2. Discerning Information (23:31)**

Old Testament poets were inspired by God, who only speaks truth.

To know what poets actually intended, we have to understand the literary conventions of Old Testament poetry:

- Vocabulary and syntax
- Figures of speech
- Imaginative reflections
- Emotional expressions

Example: Exodus 15:6-7

When we acknowledge the poetical features of Scripture, we can discern its historical information with relative ease.

**B. Narratives (28:52)**

True stories about historical people, places and events that reveal many details about history through:

- Words and speeches
- Characters
- Places
- Connections

**1. Two Worlds (30:08)**

**a) That World:** the subject of their text

**b) Their World:** the world in which their readers lived

Old Testament narratives were:

- Doxological – leading readers to praise and worship God.
- Theological – explaining truths about God
- Political – Focusing on current national events
- Polemical – opposing false teaching
- Moral – explaining how God’s people should live
- Motivational – encouraging every kind of faithful response
- Didactic – designed to teach readers about their lives

## 2. **Discerning Information (32:36)**

Modern evangelicals often make the mistake of expecting Old Testament narratives to be like modern journalistic historical writings.

Modern historical standards:

- Comprehensive
- Precise
- Objective

Authors of Old Testament narratives wrote in ways that were determined largely by their didactic purposes:

**a) Comprehensive**

Old Testament stories were only as comprehensive as suited their writers' didactic purposes.

Example: 2 Chronicles 1–9 (Solomon's life)

**b) Precise**

Old Testament authors were only as precise as their didactic purposes required.

Example: Genesis 1:7 (Earth's atmosphere)

Example: 1 Kings 9:5; 2 Chronicles 7:18 (God's words and thoughts)

Responsible interpretation distills what God said with levels of precision that match the biblical records.

**c) Objective**

Objectivity is a matter of degree.

Example: Genesis 13:13 (Moses' report of Sodom)

**IV. Synthetic Structures (45:43)**

God's revelations in Old Testament history formed synthetic, logically coherent theological structures.

**A. Variety of Sources (47:12)**

**1. Biblical Revelations (47:43)**

The Scriptures are a central concern when we discern theological structures in any period of Old Testament history.

**a) Synchronic Passages**

Passages that describe the same period of time.

**b) Antecedent Passages**

Passages that focus on earlier periods of Old Testament history.

Example: Genesis 12:1–3 built on Genesis 1:28.

**c) Subsequent Passages**

Scriptures that deal with later periods of history.

Example: Genesis 12:3 can be understood through subsequent biblical revelation such as Psalm 72:17.

**2. Extra-Biblical Sources (55:48)**

Old Testament authors wrote their texts within a context of shared beliefs and theological structures.

**a) General Revelation**

The revelation of God in all things

- Psalm 19
- Romans 1:18-21

God has clearly revealed his nature, his moral requirements and the consequences of sin to all people through all of creation.

Old Testament authors felt no need to explain certain things because basic theological structures were already in place.

**b) Special Revelation**

God gave special revelations to particular people in dreams, visions, auditions, and the like.

Example: Genesis 7:2 (Noah)



**B. Variety of Levels (1:02:32)****1. Basic-Level Structures (1:03:29)****a) Logical Intersections**

- Acts and Words
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Acts and Acts
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Words and Words

**b) Example**

Genesis 2:15-22 (Eve's creation)

- Acts and Words
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Acts and Acts
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Words and Words

## 2. Middle-Level Structures (1:11:49)

### a) Divine Covenants

Covenants in the Old Testament help us understand the coherence of particular divine revelations.

Old Testament covenants all exhibited a logical way of understanding three main elements:

- Divine benevolence
- Human loyalty
- Consequences of blessings and curses

Covenant structures form a template that helps us see the underlying organization of all of God's act and word revelations.

**b) Example**

Eve's creation in Genesis 2

- Divine benevolence (Genesis 2:8, 18)
- Human loyalty (Genesis 2: 19-20)
- Consequences of blessings and curses (Genesis 2: 21-22)

**3. Complex-Level Structures (1:16:57)**

Frameworks or systems of theology that:

- incorporate many basic and middle-level structures
- combine structures with other ideas

**a) Kingdom of God**

God's all-encompassing plan for his creation

God ordained human beings to prepare the earth for his glorious kingdom.

After the Fall, human beings needed to be redeemed and empowered by God.

God's plan was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus who:

- became a human being
- lived a perfectly holy life
- paid for the sins of God's people
- rose from the dead
- ascended into heaven
- now reigns over all
- will return in glory
- will eliminate evil and form the new heavens and new earth

Prior to the consummation of all things God has called his redeemed people to take up the cause of spreading his kingdom.

The biblical vision of God's kingdom coming to earth forms an all-embracing synthetic theological structure.

**b) Example**

Eve's creation in Genesis 2

- Humanity was called to be the righteous instrument by which God's kingdom would spread throughout the world.
  
- Eve's creation was an important step toward turning the whole world into the kingdom of God.

**V. Conclusion (1:24:51)**











## Application Questions

1. How can synchronic synthesis help us understand the nature of the time of redemptive history for a biblical passage?
2. What role should logic play in the interpretation of Scripture as you seek to apply the Bible today?
3. This lesson distinguishes the style of Old Testament theology from the standards of western philosophical traditions. How will these differences impact the way you interpret Scripture?
4. How can distinguishing between “that world” and “their world” help us in doing a synchronic synthesis of a time in redemptive history?
5. How can the understanding that the biblical writers were only as precise as required by their didactic purposes help us overcome challenges to the truthfulness of Scripture?
6. To what extent should we seek to be objective as we interpret biblical history?
7. What is the importance of studying earlier and later revelation as we seek to do biblical theology?
8. How can general revelation help us in the task of biblical theology?
9. How do the three main elements of all covenants impact the way we ought to obey Scripture today?
10. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

## Glossary

**antecedent** – Earlier in time or order; preceding something

**biblical theology** – Theological reflection drawn from the historical analysis of acts of God reported in Scripture

**didactic** – Designed to teach something

**extra-biblical revelation** – God's revelation outside of Scripture

**general revelation** – God's use of the natural world and its workings to make his existence, nature, presence, actions and will known to all humanity

**special revelation** – God's disclosures of himself and his will to a select number of people through dreams, visions, prophets, the Scriptures, and other similar means

**subsequent** – Later in time or order; after something

**synchronic** – Occurring at the same point in time

**synchronic synthesis** – The ways different components of theology revealed in a particular period of history fit together in a coherent, logical structure

**synthesis** – The process of combining different components of something into a whole

**synthetic structures** – Divine revelations fitted together to form coherent or logical perspectives on theological issues

**that world** – The world that biblical authors wrote about

**their world** – The world of Scripture's original audience