

Building Biblical Theology

Lesson Guide

LESSON
ONE

WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY?



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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.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide 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 (0:20)

Biblical theology explores how our faith grew throughout the history of the Bible.

II. Orientation (2:15)

Theologians have used the term “biblical theology” in a variety of ways:

- Broad sense — true to the content of the Bible

- Narrow sense — not only conforms to the content of the Bible, but also to the priorities of Scripture

Definition — Biblical theology is theological reflection drawn from the historical analysis of acts of God reported in Scripture.

A. Historical Analysis (5:24)

To understand historical analysis, we need to review some broad perspectives:

- Literary analysis — a literary portrait designed to influence readers in particular ways.
- Historical analysis — a window to history, exploring historical events lying behind the Bible.
- Thematic analysis — a mirror that reflects our interest and questions.

Systematic theology builds primarily on thematic analysis.

Biblical theology approaches the Scriptures primarily with historical analysis.

B. Acts of God (7:32)

What the Bible teaches about acts of God in history:

- Use of means — God works through various parts of creation.
- Without means — God intervenes directly without using any normal means.
- Above means — God takes something ordinary and makes it greater.
- Against means — God causes things to occur in ways that are contrary to the normal operations of creation.

Biblical theologians focus mainly on extraordinary acts of God.

C. Theological Reflection (11:57)

Theological reflection is based on historical analysis of the acts of God in Scripture.

1. Factual Historical Analysis (12:46)

How the events recorded in Scripture fit within the larger environment of the ancient Near East.

2. Theological Historical Analysis (13:36)

Biblical theologians are interested in the theological significance of the acts of God reported in Scripture.

A theological matter is anything that:

- Refers directly to God (theology proper)
- Describes other subjects in relation to God

III. Developments (15:44)

A. Cultural Changes (16:19)

Biblical Theology is a response to cultural shifts that can be traced back to the Enlightenment of the 17th century.

Biblical theology is a Christian response to *modern historicism*: the belief that history holds the key for understanding ourselves and the world around us.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) proposed that every aspect of reality is caught up in logical patterns of historical progress.

Historicism rose to prominence for many reasons:

- Archaeology
- Geology
- Biology
- Nearly every academic discipline

B. Theological Responses (19:44)

Historicism has had countless effects on modern Christian theology, particularly biblical theology.

Theologians have either:

- Embraced historicism in ways that compromised essential Christian beliefs, or
- Incorporated historicism in ways that upheld and enhanced the Christian faith.

1. Critical Biblical Theology (21:07)

Critical biblical theology: biblical theology that rejects biblical authority

- **Early Stages**

Johann Gabler distinguished two basic theological endeavors:

- *Biblical theology*: describes the teachings of the Bible within its own ancient historical context.
- Dogmatic or systematic theology: determines what Christians should believe in the modern world through rational reflection on science and religion.

Gabler believed that Christians should believe only those parts of the Bible that pass the standards of modern rational and scientific analysis.

- **Recent Developments**

Critical scholars have rejected many portions of the Scriptures as erroneous, pious fiction or even outright fraud.

Critical biblical theologians began to:

- Look at the Scripture as expressions of ancient religious sentiments presented as historical claims.
- Explore how these ancient religious feelings and experiences might be useful to modern Christians.

G. Ernest Wright: “Biblical theology [is] the confessional recital of the acts of God in a particular history, together with the emphasis drawn therefrom.”

German theologians' distinctions:

- **Historia**
 - Events in Scripture that could be validated by modern scientific research.

- **Heilsgeschichte**
 - Salvation history: expression of religious sentiments in the form of history telling.

 - Redemptive history: confessional recital of events found in the Bible.

2. **Evangelical Developments (28:28)**

Evangelical Christians continue to affirm the unquestionable authority of Scripture.

Modern historicism has had significant effects on the ways that evangelicals approach the Scriptures.

a. Early stages

Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

Distinguished biblical theology from systematics in the introduction to his *Systematic Theology*:

- Biblical theology — the study of the facts of Scripture
- Systematic theology — takes the facts discerned in biblical theology and arranges them in relation to each other

Hodge taught that Christians are obligated to base systematic theology on the findings of biblical theology.

Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921)

Made significant contributions to the evangelical concept of biblical theology:

- Systematic theology should not be a concatenation (logical organization) of disconnected theological statements found in the Bible.
- There is not just one way theology is organized in the Scriptures.

- The task of the “truest systematics” was to combine the theological systems of Scripture into a unified whole.

b. Recent Developments

Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)

- built on the work of Hodge and Warfield, but also turned the discipline in new directions
- agreed with Hodge and Warfield that biblical theology:
 - discovers the teaching of Scripture
 - gives authoritative guidance to systematic theology
 - discerns various theologies in the Bible that must be brought together into a unified whole
- differed from his precursors:
 - Argued that various theologies of Scripture had a common focus on the history of redemption.
 - Biblical theology focuses on the ways biblical writers reflect on history.

IV. History and Revelation (38:32)

Biblical theology concentrates on history as the unifying thread of all Scripture.

A. Act and Word (39:40)

Divine revelation is both act and word.

1. Act Revelation (40:11)

The Bible often speaks of God revealing himself in his actions.

- Psalm 98:2-3

- Act revelation appears throughout the Bible.

The shift toward act revelation has important effects on Christian theology:

Theology proper (concept of God himself)

- Systematic theology (traditional) — defines God abstractly in terms of his eternal, abiding attributes

- Biblical theology — concerned with concrete actions of God in history

2. **Word Revelation (45:04)**

Biblical theologians affirm the need for “word revelation”— verbal revelation from God.

- **Ambiguous Significance**

The ambiguity of events in Scripture makes “word revelation” necessary.

Examples:

- Ezra 3: 10-12

- Mark 3:22-23

- **Radial Significance**

Events in Scripture are radial in their significance, like a stone dropped into a pond.

God revealed through “word revelation” the most important significances he wanted his people to understand.

3. Interconnections (51:30)

- **Prospective:** words that precede the events they explain

- Exodus 3:7-8 (proximate)

- Isaiah 9:6-7 (distant)

- **Simultaneous:** words that are given the same time as the events they explain

- Exodus 19:18-21

- **Retrospective:** words that come after the events they explain

- Exodus 20:2-3 (proximate)

- Genesis 1:27 (distant)

B. Contours (59:54)

One task of biblical theology is to discern patterns and contours among numerous events.

1. Goal (1:00:42)

God moved history toward many immediate goals.

The ultimate goal: to bring God immeasurable glory (Romans 11:36)

The goal of all history: the establishment of God's kingdom on earth

The Scriptures focus especially on events that are at the center of God's ultimate purpose.

2. **Rising and Falling (1:06:15)**

God has moved history toward the goal of his glorious kingdom in waves of act and word revelation.

- “Low” points — times of diminished divine act and word revelation
 - 1 Samuel 3:1

 - Between the Testaments

- High points — when God’s act and word revelation surged forward
 - The ministry of Samuel

 - John the Baptist and Christ’s first coming

Surges of divine actions and words are particularly important in biblical theology.

3. **Organic (1:10:45)**

Biblical theology has stressed the organic nature of history in Scripture.

- *Organic*: the history of the Bible is like a growing organism whose growth cannot be broken into separate pieces.

Biblical theologians see the seeds of New Testament revelation in the initial stages of the Bible and then trace how these seeds grew.

Illustration: Christ

- Became incarnate and lived as the only perfectly righteous human being
- Death, resurrection and ascension secured redemption for his people
- Will return and rule victoriously

What God accomplished in Christ was actually initiated as a small seed in the opening chapters of Genesis:

- Image of God (Genesis 1) — Incarnation and life (Christ)
- Fall into sin (Genesis 2) — Death and resurrection (Christ)
- Victory over evil (Genesis 3) — Victorious return (Christ)

There are many stages of growth between the opening chapters of Genesis and the New Testament.

V. Conclusion (1:21:45)

3. How do the different theological reflection tendencies of factual historical analysis and theological historical analysis go hand in hand, and how are their main concerns different?

4. What cultural changes took place in the 17th century that led to the formal discipline of biblical theology?

Application Questions

1. How can understanding Biblical theology help us write a sermon or teach a Bible study?
2. What type of analysis (historical, literary, or thematic) do you do most often?
3. How can your study of Scripture improve if you develop abilities in other types of analysis?
4. This lesson argues that Scripture does not just report God's acts in history but gives theological significance to those acts. To what extent can we give theological significance to events that happen in everyday lives?
5. What challenges to the reliability of biblical history do you face in your own ministry? How can you respond to those challenges?
6. How can understanding the difference between act and word revelation help us interpret the Bible better?
7. How should the ultimate goal of "bringing God immeasurable glory" by "establishing God's kingdom on earth" affect the way we live our lives and do ministry?
8. How can we learn from the low points and high points of biblical history?
9. How can understanding the organic growth of revelation help us in applying the Bible to our own ministries?
10. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

Glossary

Aquinas, Thomas – (ca. 1225-1274) Italian theologian and Dominican friar who wrote *Summa Theologica*

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

dialectic – Name of the philosophical concept that proposes that reality can be seen best when viewed through logical patterns of history

divine interventions – God's actions without, above and even against created forces; miracles

Gabler, Johann Philipp – (1753-1826) German theologian and professor who is considered the father of modern biblical theology

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich – (1770-1831) German philosopher who proposed that every aspect of reality is best understood when seen in light of logical patterns of historical progress

heilsgeschichte – German expression for "redemptive history" or "salvation history"; pious history-telling as distinguished from "historia" or events in Scripture that can be validated by modern scientific research

historia – Latin term for the events in Scripture that can be validated by modern scientific research

historical analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a window to history

Hodge, Charles – (1797-1878) Well-known theologian from Princeton Theological Seminary who wrote numerous commentaries, articles and books, including his three-volume *Systematic Theology*

literary analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a literary portrait designed to influence readers in a particular way

miracles – When God works without, above and even against created forces

Sola Scriptura – Latin phrase meaning "Scripture alone"; the belief that the Scriptures stand as the supreme and final judge of all theological questions; one of the basic principles of the Reformation

Summa Theologica – The most famous work of Thomas Aquinas; written from approx. 1265-1274 as an instructional manual for beginning students of theology

thematic analysis – An exegetical approach to the Bible that views Scripture as a mirror that reflects the readers' interests and questions

Vos, Geerhardus – (1862-1949) Theologian and Chair of Biblical Theology at Princeton Seminary for 39 years; sometimes called the father of Reformed Biblical Theology

Warfield, Benjamin B. – (1851-1921) Professor of theology at Princeton Seminary from 1887-1921 whose primary work was on the authority of Scripture, particularly its inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility

Westminster Confession of Faith – An ecumenical doctrinal summary composed by the Westminster Assembly of Divines and published in 1647

Westminster Shorter Catechism – A traditional Protestant summary of Christian teaching, originally published in 1647

Wright, G. Ernest – (1909-1974) Theologian and archaeologist who believed that most of the history recorded in Scripture is fictional, but that the stories still communicate theological truth