
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 1: INTRODUCTION

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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3. Fall
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6. Patriarchs I
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Lecture 1

INTRODUCTION

Lecture Theme:

The *whole* Bible reveals the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of salvation in the gospel of his grace. We trace the unfolding of this revelation of God in Christ throughout the stages of the history of redemption found in the Old and New Testaments.

Text:

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself... And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:27, 44).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 1

How do we interpret and preach the Old Testament? How is the Old Testament related to the New Testament? And more specifically, how is the Old Testament related to Christ and the message of salvation and the gospel? What relevance does the Old Testament have for the contemporary Christian? And what are the primary themes that run through the whole Old Testament and New Testament, and how do they apply to us today? The purpose of this course is to equip you with a deeper understanding of the Bible and with a fuller knowledge of God Himself as He reveals Himself in the Scriptures. So, if you wish to know God better and if you want a better grasp of the message of the Scriptures, these lectures aim to benefit you.

This course is introductory, not exhaustive, but it is intended to furnish you with a foundation that you can build upon in your further studies of the Bible. You can give a man a fish day after day after day, or you can provide the equipment and teach him how to fish for himself. This course provides the tools and training on how to study the theology of the Scriptures for yourself. You’ll need to commit yourself to the priority of this lifelong pursuit. But before we start laying the building blocks, let me begin by providing you with a specific example to illustrate how this course may be of help to you. In I Kings 10, and the parallel passage in II Chronicles 9, we read about a great monarch, the Queen of Sheba, traveling a long distance to interview King Solomon. The details of that interview are fascinating. But what are we to make of this story? What was God’s purpose for including it in the Bible? How do we understand its message, and how does it relate to us today? Well, this class aims at helping with those kinds of questions. I want you to hold on to those questions about I Kings 10 in your mind. We’re going to come back to them and answer them at the end of this first lecture.

We need to begin by defining some of our terms to understand better the purpose and the scope of this course on biblical theology. What exactly does this course cover? Let’s consider, first of all, the word “theology” (What

does that mean?), and then the significance of the word “biblical,” and then what the two words together mean in the context of this course. So first of all, the word “theology.” The word “theology” in its most basic and simple definition is the study of the knowledge of God. It answers: Who is God? and what has He done? You may be wondering to yourself, ‘Is this essential? Is this knowledge essential?’ One writer put it this way: “Whatever comes to mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.” Consider the display of the glory of God. God is chiefly concerned with His own glory, and He’s been pleased to display that glory to mankind. Biblical Christianity is a God-exalting and God-centered religion. God’s glory sits at the very center of everything.

The history of the universe exists for the display of God’s glory, from its creation in the opening chapters of Genesis, about which the psalmist says, “the heavens display the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). So, from the beginning in Genesis to the culmination and conclusion of the history of the universe in Revelation 21:23, where we read, “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” Mankind itself exists for the glory of God.

Westminster Shorter Catechism question one explains man’s primary purpose in life. It says, “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” Throughout the history of redemption in the Bible, God provides an unfolding of His glory to His people, which culminates in the incarnation of Christ, as we shall see in what follows. Knowing God is therefore the greatest priority in the whole world, and God said so Himself. Listen to the words of Jeremiah, “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” Jeremiah 9:23–24. And so, knowing God is the greatest priority in the world. It’s also the greatest longing and desire of every true believer. We see this all the way through the Scriptures.

Let me give you some examples. If you look at Moses, what does Moses say? He says, “Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight” (Exodus 33:13). He goes on, “And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory” (Exodus 33:18). We find the same thing later on in David. In one of the Psalms he says, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.” Why? “To behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4). If you fast-forward to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ says something similar. He says, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” That’s in John 17:3. And then lastly, think further on into the New Testament of the words of the apostle Paul. He tells us about his passion. He says, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8). He goes on, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10). So, knowing God is our priority.

We also need to understand that the knowledge of God is revealed to us in Christ. Christ is the fullest and the final revelation of God. The Bible describes Christ as the One “Who is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and, elsewhere, “who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,” in Hebrews 1:3. So, our knowledge of God is tied to His revelation of Himself in the person and work of Christ. So, to be God-centered is also to be Christ-centered. “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among you,” John says, “and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). He goes on, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (verse 18). Now we will discuss more about this knowledge of Christ and where it is found in a moment, but let’s also note that the knowledge of God has practical consequences. This knowledge of God in Christ is not merely theoretical or a purely intellectual matter. It has practical consequences. As the 17th century Dutch reformed theologian, Petrus van Mastricht, said, “Theology is the knowledge of living unto God through Christ.” When the Christian looks by faith on the glory of God in Christ, that sight transforms him into the likeness of Christ. Paul says, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the LORD” (II Corinthians 3:18). You’ll see something similar in I John 3:2–3.

So, theology, the knowledge of God, is inherently practical. It produces the fruit of the gospel, the fruit of gospel holiness, in the life of every believer. And most of all, it leads us to worship this God of glory. And to see and to know Him, after all, is to adore Him. So, we learn first of all something about what we mean by theology and why it's important. But then, secondly, let's consider together the word "biblical." The title of our course is "Biblical Theology." The Bible provides this knowledge of God. So, we know that God makes Himself known, but He makes Himself known through the Scriptures. The Bible is the Book by God about God. It's God's Book about Himself. The knowledge of God and of His provision of salvation depends on communication from God to man, what we call "revelation." "Revelation" means unveiling, to unveil something. The Bible gives God's unveiling of the knowledge of Himself to lost mankind. This, of course, includes the gospel, God's plan and path to reconciliation with God.

Consequently, the focus of this course is on the study of the Bible. The Bible has divine authority because its Author is God Himself, the Holy Spirit, as we see in II Timothy 3:16. And so, every word of all 66 books of the Holy Scriptures are fully inspired by God, incapable of a single error in any part, and provide us with a complete reliable record of Who God is and what He has done to secure the salvation of His people. When we read of the unfolding of redemption, we are reading of God's own infallible and inerrant revelation of these historical events, but that means we need to know the whole Bible. We need the whole Bible to have the whole revelation of Who God is. The Bible presents a consistent, a unified, message in one indivisible book from Genesis to Revelation. It presents one God, one way of salvation, one people of God, all in one glorious story about the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ. The whole Bible, therefore, is the Christian Scriptures.

The Bible begins, as you probably know, with the Old Testament. There are some people today [who] think that knowing the New Testament is all that we need to learn about Christ and about salvation. And they may know what the Old Testament says, but they may not know how full it is of Christ and the gospel. We need the whole Bible because without the Old Testament we would have an incomplete knowledge of Christ. For example, it's actually in the book of Psalms that we learn the most about Christ's own internal experience upon the cross. We hear more about that in the Psalms than we do in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. After all, the Old Testament makes up about three quarters of the Bible. No one can survive without three quarters of what God provides in Scripture. The Old Testament is also necessary for understanding the New Testament since the New Testament does not, indeed cannot, repeat all that is already found in the Old Testament. So, rightly understanding the Old Testament prevents us from misunderstanding the New Testament.

In fact, when the New Testament refers to the Scriptures, most of the time it's pointing back to the Old Testament. The Old Testament was the Bible that both Christ and the early Christians read and memorized and studied, with the New Testament books being added by God subsequently. When Paul told Timothy, "and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:15), it was through the Old Testament that Timothy came to know Christ and salvation. The knowledge of the Old Testament is essential to understanding the New Testament. The New Testament presupposes—if you will, it builds upon the Old Testament—all of the themes and the language and the doctrines and the principles, as well as the historic events, that we find in the Old Testament. Thus, in reading the New Testament, it's no surprise we're often reminded of, and indeed pointed to, the Old Testament. But likewise, we need the New Testament to rightly interpret the Old Testament. So, when we read the Old Testament, it is always in light of its fulfillment in the New Testament. The importance of this will become evident in our studies together.

The whole Bible is necessary, and the whole Bible provides the knowledge of salvation in Christ, Old Testament and New Testament, Genesis to Revelation. The gospel, of course, is the message of good news about Christ and what He did to reconcile His people to God. We see this summarized, for example, in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1 and Question 2, which says, "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?" The answer is: "Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance." The gospel is central to the whole Bible, Old and New Testament. Paul asserted, "But we preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." The apostle Paul preached both the person and the work of Christ from the whole Bible.

This is important because in John 14, 15, and 16, we learn that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to take the things of Christ and to show them to us. The role of the Spirit is to magnify the Son, and so we have to be in dead earnest, we have to be concerned about preaching the person and work of Christ through the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. The New Testament itself teaches us that the Old Testament Scriptures are the Word of God about Christ and the gospel. Listen to Christ's testimony to the Old Testament Scriptures. He says, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which speak of me" (John 5:39). But in the same passage, Jesus challenges the Pharisees and says, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (verses 46–47). After Christ's resurrection, we find Him walking on the road to Emmaus and talking to two of his disciples, and we read of Jesus's encounter with them. It says this, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he," that is Christ, "expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Later on, in that same passage (Luke 24), it says, "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (verse 44). So, if you love the Lord Jesus Christ, then you should love the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is not just a compilation of interesting stories, nor can it be confined simply to a list of moral lessons. Its grand message proclaims Christ and the salvation which He provides, which demonstrates the relevance of the Old Testament to every Christian today. For example, see how Paul draws the connection between the Old Testament and Christ and the New Testament Gentile believer. He says to the church in Galatia, in Galatians 3:29, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." We will explore this further in a future lecture. Think of what Peter says along this line. He says, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (I Peter 11:10–12).

Think about that for a second. If the Old Testament prophets themselves searched and studied diligently their own predictions to learn about the salvation that is provided in Christ, then how much more should we search and study the Old Testament to learn about salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, especially since we can now read them in light of their full New Testament fulfillment? The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, concluded rightly. He said this: "Therefore, he that would correctly and profitably read Scripture should see to it that he finds Christ in it. Then, he finds life eternal without fail. On the other hand, if I do not so study and understand Moses and the prophets so as to find that Christ came from heaven for the sake of my salvation, became man, suffered, died, was buried, rose and ascended to heaven, so that through Him I enjoy reconciliation with God, forgiveness of all my sins, grace, righteousness, and life eternal, then my reading in Scripture is of no help whatsoever to my salvation." And that brings us then to the last major point under this topic of what we mean by "biblical," and this is important for the scope of this course.

We need to think for a moment about the biblical history of redemption. God did not provide the final product of His revelation all at once. He revealed that in consecutive periods throughout the history of the Bible from Genesis to the Gospels to Revelation. God chose to redeem His people through a history of redemption, not simply in one large act. The history of redemption, or what we could call salvation history, is the gradual unfolding of God's plan to save His people in Christ, beginning in Genesis and, through a progression of historical acts, leading to the full light of Christ's coming and the New Testament exposition of His person and of His work. Just as God is the Author of Scripture, God is also the Sovereign Who decreed and directed the history that is recorded in the Bible. History is His story. We have an inspired record of real and true events in which God revealed Himself.

God's redemptive revelation chronologically unfolded with greater and greater clarity, with greater fullness over a period of time recorded throughout the Bible. What does that mean for us? Well, it means that we have to relate any given passage or any given Bible story to the message of Scripture as a whole. We must see the relationship of all of the parts of the Old Testament to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby, of course, to the Christian. So, this course pursues the study of the biblical history of redemption, the unfolding of the revelation of God in Christ and of His salvation through the whole Bible. We learn about God, about God revealed in Christ, and about what Christ did to save His people from their sins.

But now, let's return to our questions about the interview between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon in I Kings 10 and in II Chronicles 9 because this will help us illustrate how all that we've said about theology and about the Bible and about the history of redemption applies in this particular instance. What are we to make of this story, the story of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon? What was God's purpose for including it in the Bible? How do we understand its message? How does it relate to us? How do the Queen of Sheba and Solomon relate to us? Well, applying what we've learned in this lecture, other Scriptures help open this up and show how it relates to Christ and, therefore, to the Christian. This example demonstrates how this course will be of help to you in studying your Bible.

So, if you go back to I Kings 10, the Queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon from far, far, far away. She came to Jerusalem. She saw his wisdom. She heard him answer her questions. She saw his house and his food and all of the prosperity. She saw the blessing that came to his servants, and she saw the house of the Lord. But notice in I Kings 10, her response. If you look at the end of verse 5, it says, "there was no more spirit in her." Now, in the Hebrew language, that word "spirit" can also be translated "breath," like the breath that comes out of our lungs. In other words, in I Kings 10:5, what is being said is that all that she saw of Solomon, all that she heard from Solomon, took her breath away. If you go on, in verse 7, we read these words, "Howbeit" (these are the words of the Queen) "Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard," she says. Therefore, in verse 8, "happy are thy servants." And then in verse 9, "Blessed be the LORD thy God which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever."

You see, this is not simply an isolated story. It sits within a broader context of God's plan of redemption in history. And so, we must connect some dots in order to be informed by the Bible as a whole. So, we start with God's promise to David that his seed would sit upon his throne forever. We'll discuss this more later in the course, but you must realize that this promise is fulfilled in Christ. In Isaiah 11, for example, in verse 1, we see something prophesied of Christ. It says, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." You turn to the New Testament, and Christ said of Himself at the end of the Bible, Revelation 22, "I am the root and the offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16). Think back to when the angel appeared to Mary. We're told, "And the Lord God shall give unto him," that is Christ, "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). Later on, Peter preaching at Pentecost said, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, . . . being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne" (Acts 2:29-30). We'll see this over and over in the New Testament.

Paul wrote about it to the Romans in Romans chapter 1. And so, Solomon was David's son and heir to the throne, but Solomon pointed forward to David's greater Son to come: the Lord Jesus Christ Who would be the King of Kings and Whose eternal kingdom would surpass all others. Solomon's reign of peace would be surpassed by the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. You compare this to Psalm 72. The title to that Psalm is "A Psalm for Solomon." You'll notice that it includes references to Sheba in verses 10 and 15, but we need to recognize that this Psalm points to Christ's glorious reign and its fulfillment in Christ's coming kingdom, which shall, in the words of that song, "have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (verse 8). Read the thrilling description of Christ at the end in verses 17-19, which conclude with these words, "And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen."

And now, turning to back to the New Testament, all of this is brought together. Christ Himself says these words, "The Queen of the South," that's the Queen of Sheba, "the Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them." Why? "For she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31), speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, this is looking at the history of redemption. The whole Bible is the revelation of God in Christ and of the message of salvation and the gospel. So, having drawn from our knowledge of the rest of Scripture and the big picture of God's purpose in biblical history, we return to I Kings 10. And when we return to I Kings 10, we do so with expectations of learning about Christ and His kingdom. We must read that text, I Kings 10, and ministers of the gospel must preach that text in light of the spiritual realities.

God has given us the greatest King of Peace, Christ Jesus, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge far beyond Solomon. And we, as His creatures, must come as it were from afar to hear His wisdom as it is found in His Word, and to see and know the glory of His person and of His kingdom. If we do so, it will truly take our breath away. In the end, when the Christian arrives in heaven to behold this King, to behold the Savior, we will then say with the Queen of Sheba that the half was not told us, as He, Christ, will exceed all our expectations. So, for the Christian, to be servants of this King is the most blessed and happiest position and occupation of all. We should bless God for setting Christ upon His throne and so manifesting His love toward His redeemed people. Do you see this? Do you see that I Kings is all about Christ? All about His redemption? All about His kingdom and the blessings that flow to His people? Thus, it is exceptionally relevant for today's Christian. As I said at the beginning of this lecture, this is an example to illustrate what this course offers in helping us in our study of the Bible. In the remainder of these lectures, we will explore the theology of the Bible by proceeding through the history of redemption, beginning with the first chapters of Genesis and concluding with the coming consummation of history in Revelation chapters 21 and 22.