

Midterm Exam:
Biblical Theology

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Biblical Theology: TH620

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1. What is Biblical Theology (BT)? What is the difference between BT and Systematic Theology?

Biblical Theology can be defined in a number of ways pending on the area of interest, focus and also based on what the study and discipline is trying to achieve. In a generalized sense, biblical theology is a multidisciplinary study of the bible from a perspective and lens that all its related parts and context are unified and related to a singular, connected message; it is most concerned with the bible as a whole. The discipline places great emphasis on the theological message of the bible, and how the canonical text from the Old to New Testament are all interconnected, and are centered around Christ. Biblical theology also aids and enables those of Christian faith to understand the implications of the bible and its message, to translate into modern, contemporary applications and context.

On the other hand, Systematic Theology is concerned with the *beliefs* of the Christian faith and what the bible says about these beliefs. It is thematic and topical in nature, and a study that systematically organizes the canonical text into categories and information for theological understanding about the diverse topics covered in the bible. While BT covers the biblical text as a whole, systematic theology is derived from a BT framework, but addresses topics and themes exclusively and in part. Systematic theology engages with the biblical text to engage with culture, with people, and directly respond to an event, issue, a subject or matter. Biblical theology can provide this also, however, BT is far more encompassing and inductive; its aim is to inform rather than prove or engage critically.

2. What does it mean to say that the Bible is Scripture?

The bible can mean something else pending on the reader; “the Bible is everything from ancient artefact to historical testimony to entertaining literature,” but to regard the Bible as

Scripture is more significant.¹ Regarding the Bible as Scripture means to believe it is the very (written) word of God, it is authoritative and holy. The canonical text we consider the Bible today was written by man but inherently God-inspired, thus, it was and is direct communication from God Himself to man. This implies that scripture firstly has a communicator or a speaker (God), and if there is a speaker, then there are those being spoken to and addressed (humans); and because scripture is God-inspired, that means it holds power within the text for the very people He speaks to, to encounter Him. Since the written word of God or Scripture is universally upheld to have this kind of power and authority, preaching and teaching of truth is able to happen.

3. What is the importance of the concept of canon for BT?

Canon is an important concept for BT because it is the universal standard for approaching the bible, and the universally agreed upon standard for the Church. The bible is unique in that it is one of the only books that has a canon, and the language of canon became widespread and recognized at the time of formulating its canon. The origin of and need for biblical canon arose during a time where heresies were becoming more prominent and dangerous to Christian theology; the Church agreed upon a canon for the Bible to ensure that the apostolic teachings would be preserved and passed down.

For BT, the canon, “ provides both boundaries and a basis” most specifically concerned with Scripture (as described above).² For a study that is concerned with the message of the Bible as a *whole*, canon is imperative to the discipline and academic integrity of the study. Without canon, there is no accurate study of biblical theology. The importance of BT for *Christians* is the

¹ T. Desmond Alexander, ed., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (NDBT)*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

² Alexander, NDBT.

understanding and acknowledgement that the Canon in all its diverse literary works, order and historical significance and potential differences across history and time, is *ultimately* ordained by God. If He allowed and chose these specific texts in the order and the way they have been preserved, then BT is ultimately the surrender and trust of this sovereignty; BT will aim to study this sovereign message gifted in the text by the Author that inspired it.

4. Why is BT important for the preaching of the church?

BT is important for preaching because it ultimately prevents the misuse of biblical text in expository preaching. Biblical Theology locates any passage used for preaching in its proper theological context—defaulting to correct historical, literary, and academic context as BT aims to be accurate in its interdisciplinary nature. On the flip side, BT is important for preaching because in its application, it can be misused and can be misleading. Too much of it in a preaching context would be overwhelming and deter from the sermon message. Any attempts to preach BT and *not* the actual text is a disservice and incorrect use of the bible.

BT is also necessary when preaching, as the majority of the commentary provided does not touch upon theology or the theological implications of the actual text. For expository preaching, BT goes hand in hand as both are concerned with the message of the bible in its entirety; for topical preaching, BT is even more integral as the text used must be accurately applied, appropriated, and preached in its accurate context. Effective use and knowledge of BT allows for the preacher to understand the passage preached in its relational context to the biblical message as a whole, and to equip hearers with a biblical worldview that is especially important in the post-modern era we live in today.

5. How can the story in Genesis 1-3 be understood as Ancient Near Eastern cosmology and as a theological polemic against polytheism? What is the importance of creation *ex nihilo* for a theology of creation?

The creation account is one of the most debated and discussed texts in biblical studies.

There are many accounts in Genesis that are similar or bear resemblance to the polytheistic accounts and origin stories; many different religions had their own account for how man and the earth came to be. What sets the story of the Christian God's creation account apart from the rest is that it does not serve to explain the origin of God nor does it explain how things came to be except that things were once not, and then they were. "God had no beginning, but the universe did," this God was, is, and is to come.³

Ex nihilo or "from nothing" is significant in theology of creation because it signifies that when He created or spoke things forth *into* existence, it was entirely His choice, freedom and within His right and power to do so., without external compulsion.⁴ In all the unique ways that this God could've opted to create, He *spoke* and out of nothing existed something; creation came forth from His (spoken) word. What sets this creation account apart is, as He spoke and creation existed, two significant things happened: purpose and relationship. Creation did not exist simply to exist (although He could've designed it to be so), rather creation exists completely and solely in relation to Him, and *Him alone*. Without Him, there is no creation—it ceases to exist.

6. Humans are created in the "image" and "likeness" of God (Gen 1:27). What is the theological significance of that claim?

Humans being made in the image and likeness of God is something uniquely attributed to man and man alone. While the explicit understanding of what "image" signifies is up for debate

³ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 91.; Revelation 1:4.

⁴ Goldsworthy, 91.

and discussion, there are key considerations to be acknowledged. Being made in *imago dei* denotes a special and significant connection or *relationship* between man and God. “Only man is addressed as one who knows God and who is created to live purposefully for God,” man has responsibility, is accountable before God and is actually spoken to by God.⁵

We see the significance of man being made in the image and likeness of God come full circle in Christ. Jesus described as being the walking image of the invisible God, Himself. If Christ represents and is an accurate depiction of the God man was made in the likeness of, there is a recognition that being made in His image is something sacred in nature. In understanding the bible and its message in its entirety, we are able to see and understand the original design God had in mind when He created man and how from the start, creation was designed in the likeness and to become even more like Christ.

7. What is the meaning of covenants in the Bible? What are characteristics of covenant (for example, the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Israel)?

Covenants depict the unique relationship God had with His people and ultimately point to His plan of redemption to be fulfilled in Christ. A covenant in the ancient times were not something new and represented a unique, legal agreement between a lesser and greater party. These agreements generally required fulfillments or conditions from either parties that would be mutually agreed upon initiation of the covenant. Biblical covenants are always initiated by God who undoubtedly is the greater party, and it is to the benefit of the one He makes covenant with. The most important characteristic of covenant, especially in the context of the Bible, more importantly God, is *grace*.

For Noah, God extended grace when He spared Him and His household from destruction by flood; God did not have to, but He made a covenant with Noah to spare Him. In turn, the

⁵ Goldsworthy, 96.

condition of the covenant on part of Noah is to trust and obey: to build an ark. After the flood, God makes another covenant to never destroy the earth by flood ever again. In the context of Abraham, with the understanding of grace, the concept of election must be understood. It is absolute grace that Abram was chosen to be the one God would use to establish a people as *His*; and it is solely the will and to the glory of God to choose Abraham and his line—this being election. In keeping with the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel (Jacob), a direct descendant of Abraham, also receives a covenant to be the chosen one that God will establish a people from. After divinely encountering God, Jacob is forever marked, with a new name—His name being the standard title of God’s people.

8. Consider the Ten Words (Commandments). How is the Decalogue “good news” for Israel? Given the social and cultural contexts of ancient Israel, how do the commandments organize the life of the people of God?

The Ten Commandments or the Decalogue represents good news for Israel because it firstly reminded them of grace. The Ten Commandments officially designated Israel as exclusively God’s people and these laws were to be the means in which they would be able to *be* with Him. It was not the means of salvation or rescue because it was *God* who saved and saves; the Ten Commandments were more of a, “covenant treaty which was well known in the ancient, near eastern world... the privileges of this relationship would be maintained by obedience” often in context of conquest and subjugation.⁶ The saving work was already done, the Decalogue—the law, was how Israel could remain in fellowship with God; this was the instruction for staying close to Him.

The Ten Commandments signified a turning point, they organized the life of the people of God by establishing holiness. The Ten Commandments explained how to have relationship

⁶ Goldsworthy, 142.

with God and relationship with each other; they were concerned with justice, worship and ultimately, love. In any other situation, a treaty or law subjected to a people would signify potential oppression; for this God, it represented relationship.

9. What is the importance of the book of Judges (with its cycles) for the anticipation of future messianic expectations?

The book of Judges represents a time in Israel's history where repeatedly, the Israelites made the same mistake and repeated the same pattern over again. The Israelites would be at peace, they would fall and submit to other religions, God would allow judgment but ultimately allow rescue and redemption by a judge He appointed. The cycle of sin, captivity, judgment occurred due to Israel's failure and failure to keep covenant. The acts of judgment were solely Israel's to blame. Yet, God in His faithfulness and mercy, repeatedly saves and redeems Israel from their captivity and suffering by appointing someone to deliver them. This points to the future, final redemption to come in Christ; a deliverer to come despite the failure and folly solely being on the people He came to save.

10. How does the sacrificial system established in Leviticus function as the foundation for understanding the concept of atonement in the New Testament?

Atonement by definition is the payment that is due for the wrong (sin) that is committed. When the tabernacle and priesthood was established, with it came sacrificial rituals God required for Israel to be in right standing with Him. Fair atonement would require the person who committed sin to pay the price for it (in ancient Israel context, there were some cases where this did happen); however, the sacrificial system gave Israel a means of being right with God, but only by means of, "of an acceptable victim who takes the place of the offerer, the covering or atonement of sins, restitution to people who have been wronged, obedience and dedication to

God, and fellowship (in a meal) with him,” an acceptable sacrifice.⁷ The sacrificial system served to offer, “[total]...reconciliation and restoration of fellowship with God”; in the New Testament, Christ takes the place of all ritual sacrifice as the final “acceptable victim” for the many sins and wrongs of man—the final atonement.⁸

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⁷ Goldsworthy, 145.

⁸ Goldsworthy, 145.

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