

Living in God's Story: Tracing the Story and Major Themes of the Bible

Lesson 2

What is the Bible?

I. God's Greater Story of Redemption

Last week Mitchell spoke of how the stories of scripture are truly THE story of God bringing about the redemption of His fallen creation. We trace that story through the consecutive historical events of the Old Testament until we reach the climatic accomplishment of God's story in the New Testament.

Goal: To understand that within the writings of the Old Testament, God etched echoes of the New Testament accomplishment of the gospel. To see those echoes of that Greater Story in the themes which run throughout scripture. And to recognize the tools God used to communicate that Greater Story in the Types, Promises, and Prophecies of the Old Testament.

God's Greater Story

The climax of God's story of the Bible is the accomplishment of the gospel in the death and resurrection of Christ. This act of redemption is, we might say, God's Greater Story that He accomplishes within the story of scripture. And God is concerned about communicating that Greater Story of this climax not simply at the point in the story it happens, but all along the journey of His story.

Where are some of the places we see this foretelling of the Greater Story of our redemption in Christ?

Biblical Theology: The progressive unfolding of God's self-revelation as we travel through the story of the Bible.

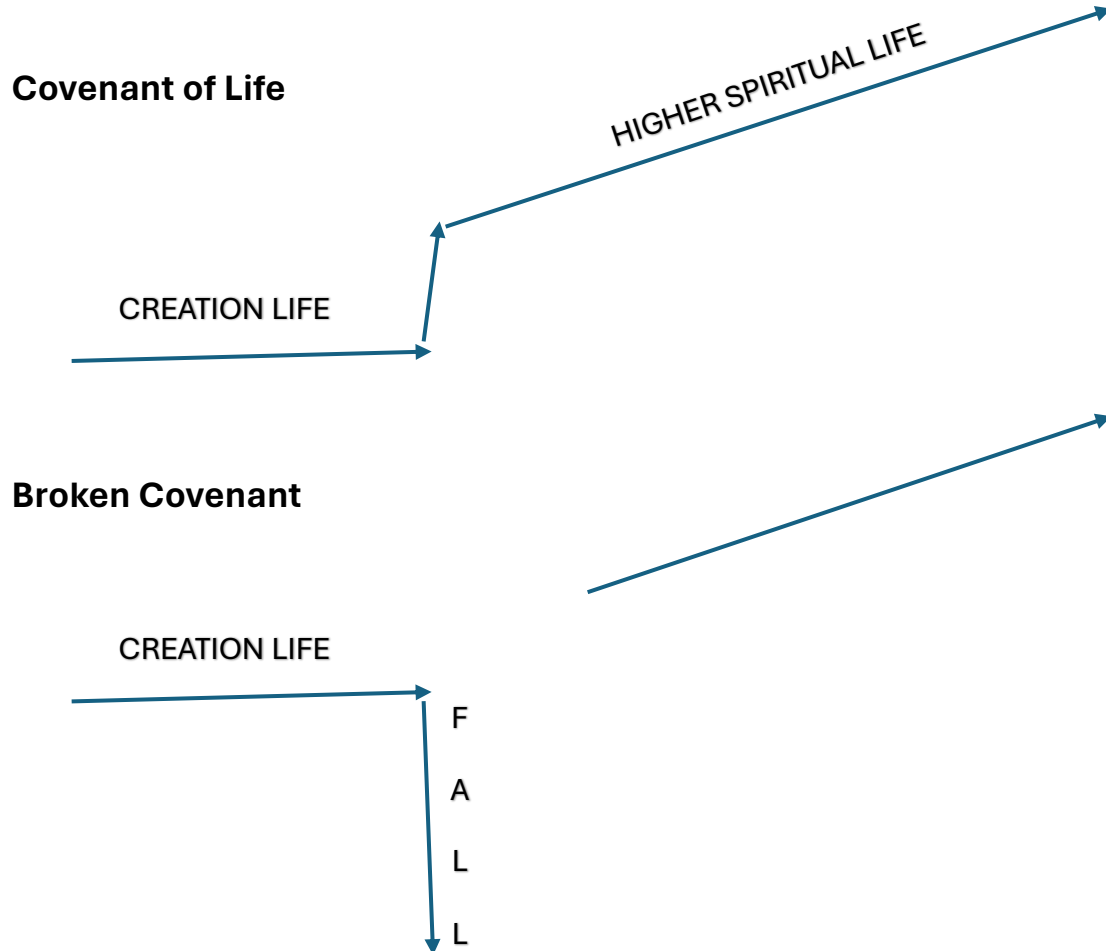
Systematic Theology is similar to a dictionary, giving terms and definitions and relational structure to all theology, unfolding in a circular fashion, showing the connectedness of all the doctrines of scripture in their fully matured understanding. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a Systematic Theology.

Biblical Theology, on the other hand, is like a novel, giving all the same information but unfolded in a linear progression as we follow the story of Scripture.

What are some of the implications of this difference?

God's story, even from its beginning in the Garden, was always moving toward a higher, confirmed state of glory. The state which we see at the close of Revelation. Biblical Theology always has its eye on that state of Glory. Biblical Theology, Geerhardus Vos

At creation, Adam and Eve were initially given life, with the promise of entering the fullness of eternal life with God by fulfilling their covenant.



The knowledge of Adam and Eve's redemption from this fall was given to them in a way that they could comprehend it. It was sufficient for them to receive the promise that one day, Eve's Seed would crush the head of the serpent, and in that promise, they could rest in faith.

God Repeats His Greater Story

As God progresses through the Old Testament history of His people, He tells that Greater Story of redemption over and over again. We are to witness to the faith. But God is the greater and perfect Witness of all that He has done in Christ. And He has faithfully borne witness to this grace in every age.

II. Themes God uses to Communicate His Greater Story

The methods God uses to communicate His Greater Story in the history of His people's lives is found in the repeating themes which run through scripture. Themes which we readily pick up on Christ fulfilling.

What are some of those themes?

Snapshot of the Major Themes of Scripture

- **IMAGE**

God desired mankind to share in a likeness of His being, thereby having the capacity to know God and enter into a blessed relationship of life with God. It is only by mankind possessing that likeness that he can possess that higher life.

Where do we see Image as a major theme in scripture?

Man created as the Image of God

Gen 1:26&27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Christ as the Image of the Father

Heb 1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,

Col 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God,

2 Cor 4:3-6 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The restoration of God's Image through Christ

Rom 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

2 Cor 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Col 3: 9&10 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

1 Cor 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

- **SEED**

God reproduced His image in this physical realm. And Adam and Eve were charged with multiplying that image through the reproduction of their seed, so that God's image would be reproduced over the entire creation. But with God's image shattered in man, the reproduction was also shattered. Yet scripture never loses the idea of the coming of that seed which would restore that image.

Where do we see Seed as a major theme in scripture?

The promise of Seed

Gen 15:1-5 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." 4 And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him

outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

The fulfillment of Seed in Christ

Is 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder,

Gal 3:16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

The restoration of God’s Seed and sonship in those who are in Christ

Jn 12:23&24 “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

1 Pt 1:22&23 love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

1 Jn 3:9&10 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

- **KINGDOM**

Of all the themes used to communicate God’s Greater Story, the Kingdom theme towers over the rest. It is, in a sense, the meta-narrative of scripture. Above all else, God is the king of heaven who reigns over all. And creation’s design was for God to bring that heavenly reign into this earthly realm, *that God may be all in all.*

Where do we see Kingdom as a major theme in scripture?

The promise of a kingdom and one to reign

Gen 17:1-6 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” 3 Then Abram fell on

his face. And God said to him, 4 “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram,² but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

2 Sam 7:12-16 *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.⁴ Your throne shall be established forever.’”*

The fulfillment of Kingdom in Christ

Acts 15:15-18 *And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, 16 “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.’*

Mt 4:23 *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom*

Jn 18:36 *Jesus says “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”*

1 Cor 15:20-26 *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

- **COVENANT**

God's covenant is the constitution of His kingdom. Just as our constitution is the covenant between our government and its people, God's covenant is His compact of care which He wraps around the subjects of His kingdom. It enlists all the blessings He bestows on His citizens, and the obligations of our citizenship. And so, the whole of scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is structured by this covenant of God's kingdom.

Where do we see Covenant as a major theme in scripture?

God is the faithful Covenant God

Deut 7:9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

Covenant of Christ

*Lk 22:19&20 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

Heb 8:6 & 13 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises... In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Heb 9:15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

- **DWELLING**

Just as the theme of covenant is the King's care for his people, the theme of dwelling is the King's communion with His people. Man was created to enjoy God's presence. Being near to God fulfills our deepest human desires. We may attempt to fill that hole

with other things, but nothing else satisfies. Dwelling in perfect communion with God feeds our soul with His glory.

Where do we see Dwelling as a major theme in scripture?

Dwelling pictured in the Old Testament

Ex 40:34-35 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Dwelling fulfilled by Christ

Jn 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,

Christ reconciles us to bring us back to God

Eph 2:11-13 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ prepares a home with God for us

Jn 14:2&3 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Christ lives in us by the Spirit

1 Cor 6:19 do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Our eternal Dwelling with God

Rev 21:3&4 “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

- **SACRIFICE**

God performs one final act of kindness toward Adam and Eve as He exiles them from the garden. The clothing of fig leaves they had prepared for themselves was insufficient to cover their nakedness. And so, He clothes them with animal skins. Skins which can only exist as a result of the death of those animals. And unlike the fig leaves, those skins are sufficient to cover their sin. This theme of covering sin by sacrifice continues through the Old Testament.

Ps 32 :1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Where do we see Sacrifice as a major theme in scripture?

Sacrifice pictured in the Old Testament

Lev 4:32-35 If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish 33 and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. 34 Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. 35 And all its fat he shall remove as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the Lord’s food offerings. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

Christ, the true Sacrifice for sin

Jn 1:29 “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Mt 20:28 “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mt 26:28 this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

1Jn 1:9- 2:2 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Heb 9:11&12 when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

III. Tools God uses to Communicate His Greater Story

From the point of the fall, God has been intent, even in the Old Testament, on telling His Greater Story of redemption in Christ over and over again. But the Old Testament can do this only by reaching forward and bringing Christ and His accomplished work into that previous age. Because of this, the Old Testament always has an eye on the eschatological fulfillment which is found in the New Testament.

And so, throughout the Old Testament, God uses a set of tools to bring that New Testament fulfillment into the lives of the Old Testament saints.

God's covenant of grace, while it was under the law, was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come, WCF7:5

Typology

Types were real events, objects, or people which had their own historical significance, (such as Moses or David or the tabernacle) yet acted as a shadow or pattern of a future higher reality of Christ, the antitype.

We cannot forget that the types and prophetic promises and ceremonies were just as much for those who lived in the Old Testament as they are for us. Maybe even more so. For God used these devices to reach forward and communicate His Greater Story of

Christ to His people. It was how they could see Christ, as He cast the shadow of Himself back into that previous age. We are privileged to see the reality of the One who cast the shadow. All they had was the shadow. But those shadows were sufficient for them to see Christ.

...Which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation; WCF 7:5

Exercise

Read the story of the Passover in Exodus 12. List the pictures of Christ you find in the journey of the Israelites out of bondage to Egypt.

1. Where do we see the Greater Story pattern of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation in this story of Israel's bondage and deliverance?
2. What things about Christ did living in this story of God's deliverance communicate to those who were in Egyptian bondage?
3. As we think of currently living in God's story, what application do they have for us?