



Biblical Theology

*Unlocking the whole Bible
as Christian Scripture, in
the classroom and pulpit*



Biblical Theology as a Distinct Discipline

- ◆ Biblical theology and dogmatic theology
- ◆ Biblical theology and exegetical theology
- ◆ Biblical theology and history
- ◆ Biblical theology and homiletics



Biblical theology and dogmatic theology

- ◆ Early on, 'biblical' was contrasted only with 'un-biblical' not with other *methods* of theology.
- ◆ Gabler (18th century) distinguished *biblical* theology from *dogmatic* theology.
- ◆ How to relate them?
 - Dogmatic synthesis shouldn't hide development through progressive revelation.
 - Biblical theology must not only analyze but also synthesize.



Biblical theology and exegetical theology

- ◆ Reciprocal relationship between ‘telescopic’ and ‘microscopic’ views
- ◆ Reciprocal relationship between unified development and particular expressions
- ◆ Reciprocal relationship between historical progression and particular time-bound expressions.



Biblical theology and history

- ◆ Non-evangelical approaches
 - Classical liberalism
 - Neo-orthodoxy, or ‘neo-liberalism’
- ◆ An evangelical approach (Sailhamer)
 - ‘Text’ or ‘event’?
 - ‘Criticism’ or ‘canon’?
 - ‘Descriptive’ or ‘confessional’?
 - ‘Diachronic’ or ‘synchronic’?



Non-evangelical approaches

(theology & history)

- ◆ Liberal approaches
 - Over-reliance on *positivistic* ‘real’ history, e.g., JEDP, search for historical Jesus, and Bauer’s idealistic synthesis of developing Christianity
 - Dichotomy between what we *believe* (‘faith’) and what we *know* (‘history’)



Non-evangelical approaches

(theology & history)

◆ Neo-orthodoxy

- Abandoning 'dichotomy' for 'dialectic'
- Dialectical relationship between positivistic *Historie* and theological *Geschichte*
- Examples
 - Critically reconstructed history of Israel but with theology built on Israel's 'credo' (von Rad)
 - Demythologized NT history but retaining the existential 'kernel' necessary for faith (Bultmann)



Evangelical approach

(theology & history)


	A	B	C	D
Text (+) or event (-)	+	-	+	+
Criticism (+) or canon (-)	+	-	-	-
Descriptive (+) or confessional (-)	+	+	+	-
Diachronic (+) or synchronic (-)	-	-	-	+



Evangelical approach (cont.)

(theology & history)


- ◆ A – Uses reconstructed text for theology, e.g., JEDP.
- ◆ B – Sees Bible as confessional recital of redemptive acts rather than record of God's word(s) and bases theology on the events behind the text, e.g., G. E. Wright.
- ◆ C – Does descriptive rather than normative theology based on the entire canonical text.
- ◆ D – *Does normative theology based on progressive revelation throughout the entire canon.*



'Text' or 'event'?

(pre-critical view)

<i>Ostensive reference</i>	<i>What the text says</i>	<i>What the text means</i>
<u>A > B > C</u> Events	<u>A > B > C</u> Text	<u>A > B > C</u> Reader
Providence	Special revelation	
History		



'Text' or 'event'?

(critical view of biblical history)

<i>Ostensive reference</i>	<i>What the text says</i>	<i>What the text means</i>
<u>X > Y > Z</u> Events	<u>A > B > C</u> Text	<u>X > Y > Z</u> Reader
History of Criticism		



'Text' and 'event'

(moderately critical view)

<i>Ostensive reference</i>	<i>What the text says</i>	<i>What the text means</i>
A > <u>b</u> > C Events	A > <u>B</u> > C Text	A > <u>b</u> > C Reader
Providence	Special Revelation	
Historical Method		



'Text' or 'event'?

(moderately critical view, example)

<i>Narrative</i>	(A) Moses raised his staff	(B) The water of the Nile turned to blood	(C) Fish died and the Egyptians could not drink the water
<i>Event</i>	(A) Moses raised his staff	(b) The water didn't change actually change into blood but changed so that it looked red like blood	(C) Fish died and the Egyptians could not drink the water




'Criticism' or 'canon'?

- ◆ 'Criticism' or 'canon' and '+ text'
- ◆ 'Criticism' or 'canon' and '- text'
 - Radical historical criticism
 - Moderate historical criticism
 - Canonical approach



'Criticism' or 'canon'? '+ text'


- ◆ Older critical method: literary, source, and form critical methodology to get at earlier forms of the 'text'
- ◆ Canonical text-based approach, e.g., Childs, Waltke, Sailhamer



'Criticism' or 'canon' '- text'

(radical historical criticism)


<i>What actually happened</i>	<i>What the text narrates</i>	<i>What the theologian studies</i>
<u>X > Y > Z</u> Events	<u>A > B > C</u> Text	<u>X > Y > Z</u> Reader
Historical Criticism		



'Criticism' or 'canon' '- text'

(moderate historical criticism)

<i>What actually happened</i>	<i>What the text narrates</i>	<i>What the theologian studies</i>
<u>a > b > c</u> Events	<u>A > B > C</u> Text	<u>a > b > c</u> Reader
Historical Criticism		



'Criticism' or 'canon' '- text'

(Sailhamer's canonical approach)

<i>What actually happened</i>	<i>What the text narrates</i>	<i>What the theologian studies</i>
<u>A > B > C</u> Events	<u>A > B > C</u> Text	<u>A > B > C</u> Reader
Biblical History		



'Descriptive' or 'confessional'?

- ◆ Factors inspiring distinctive method:
 - belief in verbal inspiration
 - adoption of dogmatic biblicism, 'no creed but the Bible'
 - Reformation's focus on *sensus literalis*
 - new focus on relation between Old and New Testaments
 - new focus on authorial intent
 - opposition to dogmatism, whether Roman tradition or Protestant 'scholasticism'
- ◆ This raised the issue of whether a truly biblical theology could be 'confessional' or only 'descriptive'.



'Descriptive' or 'confessional'?

(descriptive)

- ◆ Biblical theology describes what it *meant*, systematic theology prescribes what it *means*.
- ◆ Terretini's principles:
 - Interpret the Bible like any other book.
 - Follow the Greek and Hebrew grammar.
 - Read in context.
 - Interpret a text in terms of its central focus.
 - Follow the dictates of 'natural reason'.
 - Understand the biblical writers in terms of their own historical background.
 - Compare the OT with other ANE texts, not just with the NT; and compare the NT with other Greco-Roman



'Descriptive' (cont.)

- ◆ The 'grammatical-historical' sense
- ◆ Gabler (1787) the father of the 'descriptive' approach, opposing...
 - Lutheran imposition of their creeds on exegesis
 - Pietist naïve insistence on 'no creed but the Bible'
 - Rationalist identification with 'the truths of reason'
- ◆ Biblical theology classed as a *historical* (scientific, descriptive) discipline, and dogmatic theology as a *theological* (church, confessional) discipline



'Descriptive' (cont.)

- ◆ + Allowed the Bible to speak for itself
- ◆ – Assumed an unrealistic objectivity
- ◆ – Pretending to be 'descriptive' didn't take the texts' own 'confessional' claims seriously
- ◆ – Too sharp a distinction between what it *meant* and what it *means*
- ◆ – Identified too readily with ANE culture of OT and Greco-Roman culture of NT
- ◆ – Conflicting relations to Jewish background
 - Either too close of identification with rabbinic Judaism
 - Or too much a gulf between Christianity and Judaism



'Descriptive' or 'confessional'?

(confessional)

- ◆ Can't depend on the 'assured results' of modern critical studies for faith or knowledge
- ◆ Can't sharply divide faith from knowledge
- ◆ Can approach relation of biblical theology of creeds in harmful or helpful way.



'Confessional' (cont.)

	<i>Negative/Neutral</i>	<i>Positive</i>
<i>External (creedal)</i>	My creed affects my understanding of the Bible; however, I must work to eliminate this bias.	My creed enables me to understand the Bible in a certain way, which might provide a useful perspective that I would lack without my creed.
<i>Internal (Spirit)</i>	The work of the Holy Spirit is to enable me to read what is in the text by neutralizing my own sinful opposition to the text's meaning.	The work of the Holy Spirit enables me to understand the text.



'Diachronic' or 'synchronic'?

◆ Diachronic

- Temporal diachronic: Following historical progressive revelation (e.g., Vos & Goppelt)
- Logical diachronic: Following logical progression, e.g., Pre-fall > post-fall... consummation, whether in OT or even in NT.
- Accumulative diachronic: Noting not only *progression*, but also addition of new themes (e.g., Law 'added').



'Diachronic' or 'synchronic'?

(cont.)

◆ Synchronic

- Systematic
 - Comprehensive arrangement around limited set of ideas
 - Tends to base on some philosophical system (e.g., Aquinas on Aristotelianism)
- Synthetic
 - Searches for framework to unify the discussion
 - May still topics of systematic theology
- Scriptural: Tries to get its organization from biblical text itself:
 - Thematically: E.g., 'Covenant', 'kingdom of God'
 - Structurally: E.g., 'Law', 'Prophets', and 'Writings'



Biblical theology and homiletics

◆ Answer to the homiletical crisis

- An answer to the bondage to 'relevance'
- An answer to trite 'moralizing'
- An answer to 'proof-texting'

◆ The way forward for the pulpit

- 'Preach the Word' (2 Tim 4:2)
- 'Preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Cor 1:23), and 'from all the Scriptures' (Luke 24:27)



History of Biblical Theology

- ◆ Jewish biblical theology?
- ◆ Patristic period to the medieval period
- ◆ Renaissance and Reformation to the Enlightenment
- ◆ The Enlightenment
- ◆ Enlightenment to Neo-Orthodoxy
- ◆ Modern approaches



Jewish biblical theology?

- ◆ General Jewish disinterest in biblical theology
 - Judaism appropriates Scripture differently from Christianity
 - ‘Biblical’ implies Christian Bible (OT & NT)
- ◆ Jewish appeal to develop biblical theology (Goshen-Gottstein)
- ◆ Some Jewish ‘biblical theology’
 - Martin Buber
 - Abraham Heschel
 - Jacob Neusner
 - Moshe Greenberg



Patristic to medieval period

- ◆ Irenaeus
- ◆ Origen
- ◆ Augustine
- ◆ Aquinas



Patristic to medieval period

(cont.)

◆ Irenaeus (130-202 AD)

- Recapitulation
 - Unity of God and of God's redemptive plan
 - Opposition to Gnostic scheme of salvation
 - Single order of salvation from creation to new creation fulfilled in Christ ('recapitulation')
- *Regula Fidei* (rule of faith)
 - Order and continuity of Scripture
 - Publically revealed and available to the church, not a mystery reserved for a Gnostic elite



Patristic to medieval period

(cont.)

◆ Origen (180-255 AD)

- Figurative senses
 - Outlined three theoretically: *literal* (body), *moral* (soul), and *spiritual* (spirit)
 - Appeared to use only the *literal* and *spiritual* in general practice
- Theology and exegesis
 - Neo-Platonistic denial of historical meaning?
 - He actually worked to understand historical sense



Patristic to medieval period

(Origen, cont.)

◆ Summary of Origen's approach

- Read entire Bible as Christian Scripture
 - A word from God about its subject matter the Logos
 - A word from God to lead us toward life in God
- Read entire Bible 'according to its earthly forms', which led from the human to the divine
- Related the OT & NT as testimonies to the a single divine reality
 - This reality was not a Gnostic mystery
 - It was identified with Jesus Christ



Patristic to medieval period

(cont.)

◆ Augustine

- Neo-Platonism and his theory of knowledge
 - Neo-Platonism said human knowledge was limited to the sensible, temporal world, which gave no access to the invisible, eternal world.
 - Augustine made a 'christological break' with Neo-Platonism:
 - Mind can be healed from effects of sin
 - His exegesis escapes from Neo-Platonism, e.g., his treatment of the Incarnation (John 1)
 - In Jesus both knowledge (human) and wisdom (divine) coexist and are revealed to us



Patristic to medieval

(Augustine, cont.)

◆ Levels of Meaning

- Obscure texts must be interpreted by the clear texts.
- Individual texts must be interpreted in the light of the goal of all of Scripture.
 - *Goal*: the love of God and love for one's neighbor.
 - *Method*: if literal interpretation doesn't lead to the goal, then use allegory.

◆ Ascertaining and communicating the message of Scripture

- No *sensus trivialis*
- Truth must be learned in order to be practiced.



Patristic to medieval period

(cont.)

◆ Aquinas

- *Summa Theologica*
 - Dogmatic theology
 - Three major sections of biblical interpretation
 - Creation I. 65-74
 - Decalogue I-II. 98-105
 - Life of Jesus III. 27-59
- Hermeneutics
 - Word can mean only one thing.
 - But that thing may signify a second thing (typology?)
 - Dealt with relationship between the testaments (e.g., law, covenant, grace, faith)



Patristic to medieval period

(Aquinas, cont.)

- ◆ Relation between biblical and philosophical categories
 - Commonly dismissed as a biblical theologian because of his consistent use of Aristotelian categories
 - Modern scholars unlikely to continue that; however,
 - ... modern search for only internal biblical categories is naive.
 - So the question, is how well did those categories serve to shed light on the biblical text?
 - Greek 'virtues' useful for shedding light on the Decalogue?
 - Aristotelian 'unmoved mover' useful analogy for absolute the LORD's sovereign creation and providence?
 - Greek notion of *telos* a useful analogy for biblical eschatology?



Renaissance and Reformation to the Enlightenment

- ◆ Renaissance: Return to original texts
- ◆ Reformation
 - *Sola scriptura*
 - Scripture interprets itself
 - Proof-texts for dogmatics
- ◆ Pietist opposition to Protestant scholastics' dogmatics



Enlightenment

- ◆ Enlightenment principles
 - Ascendancy of 'the rational' over the supernatural
 - Historical-critical method
 - Radical literary criticism (e.g., Astruc)
- ◆ Pietist reassertion of 'heart' religion over against rationalism
- ◆ Gabler's response to rationalism and pietism
 - Study what the humans said, not the divine word.
 - Study the parts rather than the whole.
 - Determine which religious concepts are eternal and which are no longer applicable for today's rational religion.



Enlightenment to Neo-Orthodoxy

- ◆ Biblical theology...
 - freed from dogmatic theology
 - tied to philosophical systems, e.g., Idealism, Kantianism
- ◆ Methodological results
 - Pre-WW I *Religionsgeschichte* approach
 - Post-WW I dialectical theology
 - Mid-nineteenth century conservative reaction
 - Some adopted explicit christological approach (e.g., Hengstenberg)
 - Some adapted the historical critical method (e.g., Oehler)
 - Some adopted salvation-history approach (e.g., von Hofmann)



Enlightenment to Neo-Orthodoxy

(cont.)

- ◆ Eventual rise of *Religionsgeschichte* approach
 - ‘history of ideas’ (e.g., Hitzig)
 - ‘history of revelation’ (e.g., Dillmann)
 - Evolutionary ‘scientific’ models for biblical theology (i.e., JEDP)
- ◆ Emphasis on development and diversity rather than on the eternal and on unity



Modern Approaches

- ◆ Loss of faith in evolutionary models
 - Loss of faith in evolutionary naturalism (e.g., Koenig’s reject of Wellhausen’s evolution)
 - Loss of faith in objective truth (e.g., Eissfeldt challenging distinction between faith and knowledge)
 - Move away from ‘scientific’ positivism to existential dialectical analysis
- ◆ 1930s as ‘golden age’ of OT theology (e.g., Eichrodt, von Rad, Vos, Young), and NT theology (e.g.,).
- ◆ Contemporary biblical theologies (e.g., Childs)
