

# The Story of the New Testament

## A Biblical Theology of the New Testament

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### Why Story?

*Why title this class Story?*

*Why is the concept of story important to us?*

*Why does the Bible as story matter at all?*

History is one big story. Stories are powerful. Stories fill our minds and energize our hearts.

*Stories have the power to captivate.* A good story captivates us. It pulls the shoes of the main characters onto our feet and laces them up for an adventure. A good story illumines our imaginations and holds our attention. Once we're caught up in a good story, it's hard to step out of it. Whether it's a good book, or an epic film or series or play, we love being caught up in something that seems and feels bigger than ourselves.

*Stories have the power to clarify.* Stories also have the power to bring clarity to life. Often times we'll read a good story and regardless of whether it's fictional or true, it will help us makes sense of our world. It will help reframe reality for us. It helps us gain needed perspective in our own lives.

*Stories have the power to compel.* Whether we recognize it or not, stories change and shape us. They have the ability to move us to do things we wouldn't normally do. They motivate people to act when they would have stayed put. For example, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

The reason we titled this class *The Story of the New Testament* is because we are all caught up in a story that is being hand-written by the Creator, the God of the universe. And this story has been going on for thousands of years.

So as God's people today, we want to learn from where we've already been in order to understand how to move forward in faithful obedience to our God.

### Presuppositions for this Class

I want to talk briefly about our assumptions or presuppositions as we enter into serious study of God's Word together. The assumptions we carry into a conversation are especially important.

*Revelation.* First, God's Word. As we approach God's Word together, I want to make sure we're all on the same page regarding two things. You don't have to hold to these things, but these are the presuppositions I'm working under.

*Biblical Revelation.* We believe that the Word of God is revealed to us. So instead of atheistic humanism, where there is no God and therefore the Bible is just a collection of wisdom and stories, or even theistic humanism, where there is a God, but the only way to ascertain knowledge is through our own senses, we

believe in Christian theism, which means we believe that we are sinners, we can't know truth, unless God reveals it to us through His Word (Heb 1:1-4).<sup>1</sup>

*Inerrancy.* God's Word is inerrant. At Park Church, we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16–17). And because it is inspired, it is inerrant. So because the perfect Holy Spirit inspired it's writing, it is completely perfect, without error in its original manuscripts. Fundamentally, this means that it is true.

*Perspicuity.* God's Word is clear. At Park Church, we believe that the Bible is clear. God has not left us in the dark about who He is and what He has done. Instead, He has revealed Himself in glory and splendor and for us, most notably, in clarity.

*Sufficiency.* God's Word is sufficient. At Park Church, we believe that the Bible is sufficient for understanding who God is and what He has done. God's Word accomplishes what it is purposed to accomplish (Isaiah 55:11).

*Epistemology.* This brings me to my second big presupposition which is based on the first. Because we believe that the Bible is God's Word and all that entails — inerrancy, perspicuity, sufficiency — we believe that *we can know Him*. Because He has revealed Himself, we are able to know Him. We live in a world where knowing anything truly is held in contention. The ability to know something with some degree of certainty is under constant attack. But the Bible assumes or presupposes that we are able to know this God who has revealed Himself in His Word and through His Son Jesus.

## Genre

Next, let's talk about issues of genre. Genre is a term used to describe categories of literature, or other artistic endeavors, by their form, style, or content. When some people use the term genre they are talking about groupings or corpuses of books in the Bible. So some will say that the Pentateuch is one genre. The prophets another.

But we will be using the word genre to talk about literary categories defined by their form, style, and/or content matter.

So what are some genres we find in Scripture?

- 1) Poetry. Poetry is illustrative and evocative in style. It can take many forms from chiasm, to parallelism, and acrostic.
- 2) Prophecy. Prophecy can often be formulaic in style, with judgment pronounced and a call to repentance being frequent.
- 3) Narrative. Narrative takes many forms and styles.
- 4) Discourse. Discourse is when a person or people talk.
- 5) Letters or epistles. Letters from one or more persons to another will take certain styles and forms.
- 6) Apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is symbol laden, often futuristic, and hyperbolic.

Many of these can be found in a single book of the Bible. Overlap abounds. Authors use a literary smorgasbord of forms to communicate truth. There's apocalyptic discourse and poetic narrative.

Genesis 1 for example is narrative, but it also falls under the category of poetry as its language is highly poetic.

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<sup>1</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 42.

These aren't rigid categories that the authors were necessarily saying, "oops, I can't put that *selah* there because this isn't poetry." Instead, these categories are used to describe what's happening in the text.

#### *All Genres Communicate Truth*

All that being said, all of these forms communicate truth. The Psalms communicate truth just as much as Paul's letters, they just do it in a different way. Jesus says in John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

*All of God's Word is truth.* All of it corresponds to reality. So there's no more truth to what Jesus says in John 17 than there is in Proverbs or Revelation.

### **Systematic Theology vs. Biblical Theology**

Let's shift gears a bit now and talk about Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology, the similarities and differences between the two. The Story of the New Testament is functionally a biblical theology of the New Testament

#### *Systematic Theology*

Many of us, probably most of us who have been brought up in the Church or in Christian homes have probably learned or done theology in a systematic way. Most of the theology books we've read before are a systematic theology

If you've ever read or seen John Frame's big white book — the book that the Beauty of God is going through — or some might be familiar with Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, those are good examples of what I'm talking about.

Systematic theology tries to deal with different doctrines from a 30,000' view. The governing question for Systematic Theology is "What does the Bible say about \_\_\_\_\_?"

What does the Bible say about God? God is creator, redeemer, king, savior, etc. That's what doing Systematic theology looks like. Integrating what the entire Bible says about a particular topic or doctrine.

#### *Biblical Theology*

Many of us are probably less familiar with Biblical Theology than we are with Systematic. Biblical Theology has grown in popularity because it is bound up with story and the post-modern movement has rightly brought us back to a desire for story to inform our worldview. That being said, good biblical theology is centered on truth.

Biblical theology is concerned with how different doctrines are developed over time, through different books and authors.

The governing question of Biblical Theology is "How is this doctrine developed progressively over the history of redemption?"

#### *A Mental Roadmap*

Think about a trip you and your friends are taking to the mountains. If you flew in a plane, you'd be able to see the entire route, the story of that trip, in one big picture or maybe a few small ones. This is akin to Systematic Theology, where the story is all in one big picture or tapestry.

But if you took a car for the same trip, you'd stop along the way. You'd gather in the scenes along the route. You wouldn't necessarily know what's next until you actually get there. This is like Biblical Theology, where the story or drama unfolds before you.

## **Progressive Revelation, Longitudinal Development, and Typology**

*Progressive Revelation.* Biblical theology is rooted in the concept of progressive revelation. Progressive revelation simply means that instead of revealing Himself, His purposes, etc., all at once, God revealed Himself progressively “by stages until the full light of the truth was revealed in Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

*Longitudinal Development.* Many Christians might be familiar with the concept of prediction and fulfillment in the New and New Testaments respectively. And these are biblical categories for different passages. However, these are much more the exception rather than the norm.

The norm we see throughout Scripture that Biblical Theology utilizes at great length is the concept of longitudinal development. Longitudinal development is when a theme is traced, developed, and revealed progressively over time. Instead of a formulaic, here’s what will happen and then it happens, light is shed on a particular doctrine or theme as it is developed over time.

*Typology.* Within this framework, typology recognizes that all major themes find their true fulfillment and their true end in Christ.

*Typology, then, takes account of the fact that God used a particular part of human history to reveal himself and his purposes to mankind. But it was a process, so that the historical types are incomplete revelations and depend on their antitype for their real meaning. ... Typology assumes that all history is God’s history and that God has used a particular part of history along with his word to reveal himself to mankind.*<sup>3</sup>

## **Quote, Allusion, Echo: A framework for the NT’s use of the Old**

Richard Hays is supposedly attributed to having created a framework for understanding how the New Testament authors utilize passages of Scripture in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> He proposes three sequential categories. The first is a quotation.

A *quotation* is when a New Testament author directly writes an Old Testament verse or passage. Quotes are relatively concrete and clearly from the Old Testament. Quotations in the New Testament are frequently introduced formulaically with something akin to “it is written” (e.g. Matt 4:7).

An *allusion* is less concrete than a quote. An author utilizes allusion when he references a topic or theme or language used in the Old Testament. For example, in the Old Testament, God’s presence comes to dwell amongst His people in the tabernacle or tent of meeting. In John’s gospel account we find the beloved author talking about the presence of God in the person of Jesus. John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” But the greek word for “dwelt” means to pitch or dwell in a tent. John isn’t simply saying that the incarnate Word of God became flesh and dwelled with us — though he’s at least saying that — but that the presence of God in the Old Testament that dwelt with God’s people and led them through the wilderness is now embodied in the person of Jesus.

An *echo* is even less concrete than both a quote or an allusion. An echo might not even be carrying a reference per se to an Old Testament passage. Instead, an author uses phraseology from the Old Testament because they’re so steeped in the biblical text that they can’t help themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 64.

<sup>3</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 68.

<sup>4</sup> Richard B. Hayes, source unknown.

Select Resources

- 1) [The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.](#)
- 2) [The Gospel Coalition Foundational Documents](#)
- 3) [Don Carson Intro on Biblical Theology](#)