

Rosner, 'Biblical Theology'

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Biblical theology is integral to the whole process of discerning the meaning of the biblical text and of applying this meaning to the contemporary scene. While we distinguish it from other theological disciplines, such as systematics, historical theology, apologetics and practical theology, its relationship to these disciplines is one of interdependence. Because biblical theology is the fruit of exegesis of the texts of the various biblical corpora it has a logical priority over systematics and the other specialized types of theologizing. However, the mutuality of the disciplines can be seen in our coming to the task of exegesis with certain dogmatic presuppositions about the nature and authority of the Bible. Furthermore, the history of theology and of biblical interpretation means that we engage in our task as biblical theologians from within a living tradition of the Christian church. Biblical theology is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole and, to achieve this, it must work with the mutual interaction of the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the various corpora, and with the inter-relationships of these within the whole canon of Scripture. Only in this way do we take proper account of the fact that God has spoken to us in Scripture.

Although arguably the most demanding type of Bible study, ironically biblical theology holds the greatest interest outside the academy, i.e. in the Christian church and for ordinary Christians, promoting as it does a high view not only of the Bible, but also of Jesus and the gospel. Most Christians have a genuine interest in the worlds of the Bible, in its language, thought forms, archaeology, geography and history (the subject matter of a conventional Bible dictionary). Most also like to engage in the interpretation of individual passages (the function of a Bible commentary). However, all Christians have an intensely personal interest, or more accurately stake, in the subject of biblical theology, i.e. what the Bible teaches about God and his dealings with the human race. And biblical theology of one sort or another, whether acknowledged as such or not, is usually what is going on when the Bible is preached effectively, studied rigorously or read intently by Christian believers.

Of course, not everyone has so positive a view of the discipline. There are some who deny its viability, if not its right to exist. They question its presuppositions, arguing that the the canon was a late decision of the church, that 'orthodoxy' was a late and artificial imposition, and that the books of the Bible present manifold and contradictory theologies. They also believe that literary theory and the social sciences introduce factors that make biblical theology disreputable (see Challenges to Biblical Theology).

On the other hand, there are doubtless those who may wonder what other sort of theology there could possibly be for Christians if the Bible is supposed to be the foundation of our faith and practice. However, there is no doubt that many theologies are not biblical, just as many studies of the Bible are not theological (see Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology).

What exactly is biblical theology? It is imperative that we understand what biblical theology is, for the history of biblical theology shows that confusion ensues and distortions arise when practitioners are not clear about what they are doing. There are in fact a number of valid answers to the question of what biblical theology is, just as there are a number of answers to the question of what civil engineering is, for instance, depending on which way we look at the subject.

To make the comparison clear, civil engineering may be defined as the activity which results from the cooperation of various disciplines including metallurgy, physics, mathematics, sociology and town planning with the goal of producing bridges, sewers, roads, canals, etc. It may also be defined as the physical activity of construction in all its vigour and complexity. Similarly, biblical theology may be defined as the cooperation of various disciplines, and with reference to its various processes or methods and its intended product.

The Primacy of Biblical Theology

The Bible is not only the best selling, but also the most studied book of all time. Theologians have pored over its pages for hundreds of years, and most branches of the humanities have brought their expertise to bear on the task of examining it. English departments study it for its aesthetic value, for the way its narratives and poetry enthral and move readers. Sociologists are fascinated by the group dynamics it enshrines, anthropologists by the power of its rites and symbols, and historians by the impact of its movements and ideas on the course of the world at large.

Without questioning the legitimacy of the Bible as an object of academic study for a wide range of disciplines, biblical theology urges that the interpretation of the text cannot be left there. Biblical theology is not just one of a number of ways to read the Bible, as if there is theologically motivated interpretation alongside historically, aesthetically or ideologically motivated interpretation. Not to attend to theological interpretation is to stop short of interpretation, to ignore the interests of the texts themselves. If not to misinterpret, at best it is to engage in incomplete interpretation. Biblical study is incomplete until biblical theology has been done.

The books of the Bible are first and foremost religious texts. To ignore this dimension is forgivable, if one's interests lie elsewhere. No one would dispute the legitimacy of studying Shakespeare's plays for their artistry and language, or to consider the evidence they provide of the social mores or political conventions of their day, or to trace their impact on the history of literature and ideas. But to do only this is by no

means to engage in the interpretation of Shakespeare. The same principle applies to the Bible.

Biblical Theology as Multidisciplinary Endeavour

The biblical theologian needs all the help he or she can get from the other areas of biblical and theological study. Indeed, biblical theology must never be thought of as independent of the other disciplines. It presupposes them. In reading the Bible it does not neglect history, for theology is grounded in the revelation of God in history and salvation history is part of real history. Thus biblical theology avoids an atemporal approach and pays close attention to the Bible's overarching 'story'. As well as recognizing the profoundly historical rootedness of the biblical books, it also accepts their occasional nature, literary quality and powerful vitality. And it treats such texts with a due sensitivity to the different genres and literary features represented. Biblical theology is impossible without the contributions of those disciplines which take as their focus the historical and literary dimensions of the Bible.

Strangely enough, within the so-called theological disciplines there has been a neglect of the theological interpretation of Scripture. This is in part due to the explosion of knowledge and the practice of specialization which has led to a compartmentalizing of the disciplines. Biblical scholars, for the purpose of division of labour, divide themselves into OT or NT specialists, and even within these divisions specialize further, in for instance the Pentateuch, wisdom or prophecy, or the Gospels, Paul or Hebrews. Such boundaries become barriers to the extent that no one accepts the responsibility of reading the Bible as a whole. On the contrary, such reading is positively discouraged, as trespassing on someone else's territory and feigning expertise in an area where one is not well versed. Worse still, systematic theologians are discouraged from using Scripture too specifically for the same reason, in order not to seem naive in their exegesis of biblical texts. Without denying the immensity of the intellectual challenge, biblical theology calls for the disciplines to work together towards a common goal. As Francis Watson states, 'biblical theology is an interdisciplinary approach to biblical interpretation which seeks to dismantle the barriers that at present separate biblical scholarship from Christian theology' (*Text and Truth, p. vii).

Biblical Theology as Engaged, Theological Interpretation of Scripture

As noted above, different readers of the Bible treat it differently, depending on the nature of their interest in it. The Bible is everything from ancient artefact to historical testimony to entertaining literature. How the biblical texts are construed distinguishes the different approaches to the Bible. Biblical theology considers the biblical texts to be Christian Scripture and its reading of them is shaped accordingly (see Scripture).

It affirms that Scripture was written not just for historians and literary critics, but for Christian believers, 'for us' (Rom. 4:24; 1 Cor. 9:10; NIV) and 'for our instruction' (1 Cor. 10:11; RSV).

Indeed the primary location for a theological interpretation of Scripture is the church rather than the university (S. Fowl and L. Jones, *Reading in Communion*). Biblical theology is practised by Christian communities and is intricately linked to their determination to shape their faith, life, worship and service in accordance with Scripture under the guidance of the Spirit (see *Preaching and Biblical Theology*). One of the achievements of modern hermeneutics is to lay to rest the fallacy of the dispassionate, disinterested reader. All of us bring to the Bible pre-understandings and pre-dispositions which affect what we make of what we read. Purely objective interpretation is not only a myth but an inappropriate strategy for reading the Bible. For biblical theology, the primary goal of exegesis is not objectivity but to hear Scripture as the word of God.

This is not to say that OT or NT scholars ought not to do biblical theology (contra H. Räisänen). They are in the privileged position of having direct access to the literary and historical study of the Bible upon which biblical theology must build. Rather, it is to say that when Christian biblical scholars read the Bible they ought to read it as Christians, reflecting on their own faith in the light of what they read. Biblical scholars who do not share this faith are of course also able to do biblical theology, in the sense of describing the theology of (say) Paul or even of some theme across the canon. But they do so as outsiders, so to speak, not with sympathy and consent, which is the ideal hermeneutic for biblical theology.

Texts assume a certain kind of audience, someone who is best disposed to make sense of what is written, the person or group for whom the texts are intended (M. Bockmuehl, in *SJT* 51, pp. 298–300). In the case of the Bible the implied or model readers are those who care about what the texts assert and affirm. Such readers believe the apostolic witness to God's work in Jesus Christ, even though they 'have not seen' (1 Pet. 1:8). They have undergone a religious, moral and intellectual conversion to the gospel of which the texts speak. They live their lives as part of a local community of faith. Even texts like Luke-Acts and the Pastoral Epistles, though written to individuals, make clear that their ultimate address is the believing communities to which these individuals belong. And those texts addressed to specific churches often give hints that the author's concern is for an even wider audience (*cf. 1 Cor. 1:2, 'to ... all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus'). To do biblical theology, then, is to read the Bible as a Christian, someone who welcomes the witness of Scripture to what God was and is doing in Christ, which is 'according to the Scriptures'. The biblical theologian makes no apology for his or her explicitly theological assumptions about the nature and identity of God.

Peter Stuhlmacher states the matter trenchantly: 'A biblical theology ... must attempt to interpret the Old and New Testament tradition as it wants to be interpreted. For this reason, it cannot read these texts only from a critical distance as historical sources but must, at the same time, take them seriously as testimonies of faith which belong to the Holy Scripture of early Christianity' (*How To Do Biblical Theology, p. 1).

Biblical Theology as Construction Site

The task of biblical theology is to present the teaching of the Bible about God and his relations to the world in a way that lets the biblical texts set the agenda. This goal is achieved by allowing them to serve as the very stuff of inductive study and by reading the books more or less in their historical sequence. In other words, biblical theology subscribes to the primacy of the text; the interpretive interest of biblical theology corresponds as closely as possible to what the text is about. In this sense biblical theology may be distinguished from philosophical theology, which relies more directly upon reason, natural theology, which looks to the natural world and order for knowledge of God, and systematic theology, which concentrates on the contemporary articulation of Christian faith.

Beyond this fundamental point, the biblical theology which this volume attempts to practise includes five other specifications:

1. the tools of the trade are analysis and synthesis;
2. the building materials consist of both biblical concepts and biblical words;
3. the bridge to be constructed is a single span across the whole Bible;
4. the building plans follow the blueprint of the Bible's 'storyline'; and
5. the foundation and pinnacle of the structure is Jesus Christ.

Analysis and synthesis

Biblical theology is characterized by two distinct but related activities which may be broadly described as analysis and synthesis. The first seeks to reconstruct the individual theologies of the writings or collections of writings of the Bible. Exemplary here is G.B. Caird's biblical theology of the NT which hosts an imaginary symposium with the various authors in attendance, such as Luke, Paul, John and the author of Hebrews, a sort of apostolic conference in which each distinctive voice is heard. The accent in such work is on the particular contribution to theology of the book or books in question.

There is a temptation in studying the Bible's theology too quickly to read one part of it in the light of another and thus to miss the individual contours of the terrain and flatten out the whole. In doing biblical theology much is lost if James is read in the light of Paul, or Mark in the light of Matthew. It is more accurate and productive first to let James be James and Mark be Mark and so on, thus appreciating their particular colours and hues, before going on to see how their perspectives look on the larger canonical canvas. Too often one part of the Bible is given undue and oppressive priority over the others (see *Unity and Diversity of Scripture*).

Part Two of the present volume employs this method, analysing the distinctive theologies of the various corpora and books of the Bible in their own right. To analyse the theology of a book of the Bible is to read it as articulating a particular vision of the divine–human relationship, to consider its unique part in the progressive unfolding of God's plan of salvation for humanity.

Part Three focuses on the task of synthesis by presenting the theology of particular themes across the whole Bible. This approach, called 'pan-biblical theology' by James Barr, is concerned ultimately to construct one single theology for the Bible in its entirety. It confronts the question: in what sense can the Old and New Testaments be read as a coherent whole (see *Relationship of the Old Testament and New Testament*)? This question has many facets and lies at the heart of not only the method but also the substance of biblical theology.

To return to our analogy with civil engineering, if analysis involves the individual tradespeople working from their own plans on different parts of the project, synthesis recalls the work of the site architect or foreman who is responsible for the overall structure. Both have a necessary function to perform.

Concepts, not just words

A further question of method concerns the extent to which the study of the Bible's theology should be based on word studies. Such an approach admittedly has its attractions; how better to do theology on the Bible's own terms than by undertaking exhaustive investigations of its key terms? A number of major reference works have taken this approach in the past. However, it has been rightly criticized. Word studies alone are a shaky foundation upon which to base theology. A study of the biblical words for love, for example, does not fairly represent the Bible's teaching on love, since it ignores numerous narratives and parables, such as the Good Samaritan, which do not mention the word 'love' but are nonetheless highly relevant. The word for 'church' is rarely used in the Gospels, but they contain much significant material for a treatment of the topic of the church, including the notion of the kingdom as embodied in the lives of people on earth, the calling of the twelve disciples to be with Jesus, and the frequent use of communal language such as family, fraternity, little flock and city. Sometimes a biblical author will pursue the same concept as another

author but with his own vocabulary. Concepts rather than words are a surer footing on which to base thematic study such as that involved in biblical-theological synthesis.

In most cases the concept is in fact far bigger than the words normally used to refer to it, even when the words in question appear frequently. Three examples suffice to make the point, namely, grace, exclusion and gentleness.

A number of biblical words are relevant to an understanding of grace, including mercy, love, kindness and beneficence. The vocabulary of grace denotes spontaneous kindness and acts of generosity grounded in a disposition of compassion towards those in need. However, the biblical concept includes the notions of loyalty and constancy, often in connection with the covenant. Grace as a characteristic of God grounds divine–human relations in his generous initiative and sustaining faithfulness. Of course, the concept of grace can be present, and often is, even when the related words are absent, especially when God visits people for the purposes of blessing and salvation.

The notion of exclusion from the believing community (excommunication or church discipline) is captured in a host of terms. In one key passage alone, 1 Corinthians 5, it is expressed in five different ways, using the verbs 'to remove', 'to drive out', '(not) to eat with', 'to deliver (to Satan)' and 'to purge away'. However, the topic raises questions about the motivations for such drastic action which are not communicated simply by the appearance of such words. The fact that people are to be disciplined is less instructive than the reasons for the judgment. In the Bible serious offenders are excluded from the community because of the solidarity of the community, in order to maintain the holiness of the group, due to a breach of covenant, in the hope of restoration and because of the prospect of salvation. Such teaching can be gleaned only from a range of material including both laws and historical examples of exclusion.

Gentleness is a somewhat ambiguous concept, for it can denote both strength and vulnerability. Usually in the Bible it is a positive quality, a characteristic of peaceable and controlled kindness, the opposite of arrogance or domination. The concept can be expressed using any of the following terms: 'gentleness'; 'graciousness'; 'clemency'; 'kindness'; 'humility'; 'consideration'; 'courtesy'; 'loving-kindness'; and 'meekness'. However, it deserves a coherent treatment which a series of individual word studies does not accomplish, since it is both a defining attribute of God and Jesus and constitutive of Christian character.

If concepts are generally bigger than words, some concepts have a relatively slim lexical base and yet can lay no less a claim to be of central importance. There are many examples, including hospitality, providence, vanity, testimony and revelation.

There is no specific word for hospitality in the OT, and yet the practice is evident in the welcome, food, shelter and protection-asylum that guests received in OT times. Commands in the Pentateuch and exhortations in the prophets to care for strangers attest to the importance of hospitality in the OT. Narratives demonstrate that hospitality was closely connected to the recognition of Yahweh's lordship and to covenant loyalty. Stories provide evidence of God's presence and provision in the context of hospitality. And hospitality is at the heart of the gospel and practice of the early church.

One concept which raises issues about the character of God and divine government but does not correspond to one particular term is providence; the idea is expressed by a cluster of biblical terms. A precise linguistic basis is difficult to identify. The notion of providence, which encapsulates the conviction that God sustains the world that he has created and directs it to its appointed destiny, is scattered throughout and at many points taken for granted in the Bible. Belief in God's providence evokes not only humility and wonder, but also gratitude and trust, for believers know God as Father. The subject simply cannot be treated adequately by doing a few word studies.

The word for vanity occurs only here and there in the Bible. However, the concept captures much of the human predicament of sin under God's wrath. The whole of salvation history, from creation to the ultimate consummation of all things, illustrates the tension which arises between the wilful desires of human folly and the benevolent purposes of a loving God. The earliest biblical example of this tension is the divine curse on the ground (Gen. 3:17–19), which resulted from the attempt of disobedient humanity to become autonomous, like God. The mutual harmony between God, humanity and the created order was disrupted, and working the land became a toil and burdensome. The removal of vanity, at the other end of salvation history, is a picture of ultimate redemption. The subject is noteworthy in the Bible for both its poignancy and its scant explicit mention.

The technical terms 'witness' and 'testimony', given their infrequent appearance, might seem incidental to the message of the Bible. However, the concept of testimony is found throughout the canon. Because of the cardinal role played by the law in the formation and life of ancient Israel, the roots of testimony are juridical. But because that life was not divided into discrete legal and religious compartments, those juridical roots blossom throughout the biblical narrative into religious proclamation, confession and martyrdom. This intermingling of legal and religious testimony is entirely natural, for the law was given in order that Israel, by obeying the law, might be a living testimony to its author, the Lord their God (Deut. 4:5–8; 26:16–19). In Scripture heaven, earth, John the Baptist, the apostles and in fact all God's people give testimony. Indeed, the pinnacle of biblical testimony is its proclamation of God's unfolding purpose to bring salvation to the ends of the earth, whereby every

tongue will testify that there is but one true God, and that this one true God has made Jesus Christ Lord of all.

The word 'revelation' and its cognates occur fewer than one hundred times in the whole Bible, according to the NIV. However, the ubiquity and centrality of revelation, as the disclosure by God of truths at which people could not arrive without divine initiative and enabling, is considerably more impressive than this statistic implies. The study of revelation must extend beyond the mere use of the word. The Bible does not so much discuss or reflect on revelation as assume, embody and convey it in a hundred different ways. Revelation is as universal as creation itself, is accomplished by God both speaking and acting, and involves both the miraculous, like dreams, visions and prophecy, and the mundane.

A whole-Bible biblical theology

Over the last couple of centuries there has been a division in the practice of biblical theology into virtually separate consideration of OT and NT theology. Until a few notable exceptions in recent times no one wrote biblical theologies of the whole Bible. The present volume aims to contribute to a whole-Bible biblical theology (see The Canon of Scripture) in a number of ways. Part Two articles, for instance, are not deaf to such concerns in that while concentrating on analysis, they give some consideration to the place of the distinctive ideas under discussion in the canon, both in terms of OT antecedents (for the NT articles) and NT developments (for the OT articles).

Whereas it might be convenient to treat a book like Proverbs in isolation, a responsible biblical theological approach goes beyond a summary of its many practical themes and addresses its place in the Bible as a whole. Proverbs displays little interest in the main biblical themes of covenant and salvation-history. How then can it be related to the rest of the Bible when its content seems peripheral? The article in Part Two suggests that the answer may lie partly in the Solomonic narrative, where Solomon's wisdom is connected with the account of the building and dedication of the temple. With Solomon and the temple, God is in the midst of his people in Zion, and rules through his anointed king who is the son of David. In short, the revelation of God's wisdom in his plan of salvation is the only framework within which authentic human wisdom can flourish. The consideration of such questions has a profound effect on how Proverbs is read and distinguishes a whole-Bible biblical theology.

The links between the Testaments in the form of direct quotation of or allusion to the earlier by the later are obvious to every reader familiar with the OT and are of vital importance to biblical theology (see New Testament use of the Old Testament). Virtually every major doctrine in the NT is supported with some reference to Scripture. The search for the unity of the Bible, however, cannot limit itself to such

quotations and even allusions, for even where these explicit links are rare the NT texts can scarcely be understood without reference to the way in which they relate to the OT. In twenty-one chapters the Gospel of John, for example, quotes the OT only some fifteen times. Yet John's opening phrase, 'in the beginning', recalls the beginning of Genesis, and the Gospel's teaching about Jesus throughout is firmly grounded in OT antecedents, from Jesus as the son sent by the father and the bread descending from heaven, to Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish feasts (Tabernacles and Passover) and institutions (the Temple), to the seven 'I am' sayings.

Particular biblical themes are investigated in Part Three in a manner which attempts to synthesize the message of the Bible. Obviously the choice of topics in itself has an impact on the results which emerge from the various investigations. As well as subjects which have a basis in a wide range of biblical texts, themes were chosen which span the Testaments and clearly call for some attempt at synthesis. Instead of one article on Passover and another on the Lord's Supper, there is an entry on Sacred Meals which treats the Passover and the Lord's Supper, along with the peace offering, the last supper and the marriage supper of the Lamb, as part of the one vibrant and purposeful tradition. Similarly, rather than an article on the ascension of Jesus, there is one on exaltation which sets Jesus' ascension in the context of the frequent presentation of God in the OT as the great king over all the earth, proud humanity's urge to lift itself up in self-sufficiency and disobedience, and Jesus' enthronement in heaven and second coming.

Furthermore, in articles on what might normally be considered specifically NT themes due consideration is given to OT roots. The term 'kingdom of God/heaven', for instance, does not occur in the OT. Nonetheless, the idea of the rule of God over creation, all creatures, the kingdoms of the world and, in a unique and special way, over his chosen and redeemed people, is the very heart of the message of the OT. The 'kingdom' in the NT can be understood only against the backdrop of this rule and dominion, which is characteristically rejected by the human race, and whose final stage is anticipated in the prophets in terms of radical renewal and completion.

The storyline of the Bible

Even though the Bible is strictly speaking a collection of books written over hundreds of years with widely varying contents, it does tell a unified story; the tale of creation, fall, judgment and redemption culminates with the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, which the apostles regarded as attested to by all Scripture (see Biblical History). As with any other book, a legitimate question to ask when reading the Bible is: what is it about? Even if the Bible's storyline contains numerous sub-plots, its main story can be told, and often is with reference to major themes of systematic theology such as sin, salvation and worship. Such topics act as centres around which the Bible's basic plot and message can be organized. Thus the Bible is about humankind falling into sin, and God's determination to put things right. It is about salvation, God's rescue

plan for human beings under judgment. It is about the worship of the one true God and the rejection of gods that fail.

One goal of biblical theology, however, is, in the words of a famous hymn, to 'tell the old, old story', in fresh and unexpected ways. 'Sin', 'salvation' and 'worship' are not the only one-word answers to the question: what is the Bible about? Others include 'violence', 'peace', 'victory', 'glory' and even 'clothes' and 'cities', to name but a few of the many subjects appearing in part three.

The Bible is about violence, brutal but sometimes ambiguous. It begins with the foundational premise that the fallen world, and humanity in particular, is violent. An entire episode of human history is sealed with the narrator's judgment that the earth was filled with violence. We first encounter God's own violence in the flood, a divine judgment that destroys the greater part of human and animal life. But God's violence is different in that it is a function of his governance that is ultimately aimed towards the redemption of his creation. The prophets foresaw in Jesus a new and powerful vision of this redemption in which violence is absorbed and transformed.

The Bible is about peace, the bringing together of warring parties. The OT is full of the language of peace, with which one person wishes peace upon another, or wishes to be and live in peace, free from enemies or other dangers. However, peaceful relations between humans, as important as they might be, are not nearly so important as peace with God, which is achieved through sacrifice, in the end that of Jesus Christ.

The Bible is about victory, which ultimately belongs to the Lord and is entirely within his gift. Yahweh's military victories, which mark the high points of the national experience of pre- and early monarchical Israel, come about only when the people seek and obey him. Thus it is no surprise when their disobedience leads to ignominious defeat and exile. Confidence that victory still belonged to Yahweh is maintained in some of the Psalms, where it is asserted that Yahweh had conquered the cosmological forces of chaos, and in the prophets, who focus not on a decisive victory in the past, but on the coming decisive demonstration of the victory of God in the future. In the NT, this victory of God is demonstrated supremely in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though the victory has been decisively achieved, its final celebration and realization awaits the day of the Lord which is yet to come.

The Bible is about glory, radiant and ineffable, lost and regained. God's glorious presence, whether for salvation or destruction, is prominent in the key moments and central institutions of Israel's history and is decisively revealed in Jesus Christ. Through their sinful rebellion, human beings have forfeited the privilege, as image-bearers of God, of reflecting his glory. Yet through Christ believers are restored to glory.

The Bible is about clothes, used not only to denote community identity, signal social status and enact legal agreements, but also and more significantly to illustrate God's redemptive activity. From the first act of mercy extended to fallen humanity, the covering of Adam and Eve with clothes, to the end of the age, when the community of the redeemed will be clothed with an imperishable, immortal, heavenly dwelling, the exchange and provision of garments portray God's gracious and redemptive provision.

The Bible is about cities, in particular Jerusalem and Babylon and their fates and associations. Jerusalem as the religious centre of the holy land, both originally and in its final restoration, represents the people of God. The word of God issues forth from Jerusalem, peoples gather in Jerusalem to honour God, and the messianic king will appear there victoriously. Conversely, Babylon serves as a symbol of wickedness. Babylon is the proud and wicked city that will be left uninhabited and in ruins, whose name will be cut off for all time. Christians are citizens of the Jerusalem above. The clash between the city of God and the city of Satan will come to a head in the eschaton, with the fall of Babylon and the arrival of the new Jerusalem.

Thus biblical theology explores the Bible's rich and many-sided presentation of its unified message. It is committed to declaring 'the whole counsel of God ... [in order] to feed the church of God' (Acts 20:27–28).

A Christ-centred structure

Finally, biblical theology maintains a conscious focus on Jesus Christ, not in some naive and implausible sense, where Christ is found in the most unlikely places, but in noting God's faithfulness, wisdom and purpose in the progress of salvation history. It reads not only the NT, but also the OT, as a book about Jesus. Even if in the OT religion was focused on present relationship with God, based on his dealings with and for his people in the past, there is a firm and growing belief in the future coming of God on the day of the Lord for judgment and salvation. Christians believe that this hope culminates in Jesus and read the OT as a book which prepares for and prophesies his coming and the people of God he would renew and call into existence. The books of the NT connect Jesus with the OT in a variety of ways, seeing Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy, the ideal to which individuals and institutions aspired, or the climax of God's dealings revealed in various types.

Virtually every theme in biblical theology, as may be seen from the examples noted in the previous two sections, leads to Christ as the final and definitive instalment. Not only do we see Christ and his work in a different light by considering themes such as victory, peace and glory; the momentous nature of his appearance means that the reverse is also true. A host of topics, such as death and resurrection and sacrifice, and less obviously, but no less profoundly, humanity, Israel and obedience, are seen differently in light of the advent of Christ. The article on Jesus Christ could be cross-

referenced to every article in Part Three, for all the subjects are relevant to him as God's final word and decisive act, and he to them. Even the articles on biblical people, such as Abraham, Moses, David, Elisha and Jonah, refer to Christ, in a typological sense and/or as the fulfilment of the promises made to these people. Indeed, the Messiah is the theme which unites the Old and New Testaments (T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King*). If biblical theology seeks to connect text and truth (to use Watson's phrase), it never forgets that Jesus is the truth.

Conclusion

What is biblical theology? To sum up, biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.

Further clarification of the nature and promise of biblical theology is presented in the other articles in Part One. However, in the end, like civil engineering, biblical theology is best judged and understood by examining what it produces. The purists will always want more exact definition. Ultimately the proof that civil engineering and biblical theology are well conceived is in the quality of the things they build. For the latter, this can be inspected in Parts Two and Three.