

**A BOOK REVIEW OF TWO BOOKS ABOUT BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, AND WHAT IT IS
“A BASIC GUIDE TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY/NINE THEMES THAT UNITE THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS”
AND
“WHAT IS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY/ GUIDE TO THE BIBLE’S STORY, SYMBOLISM, AND PATTERNS”
WITH SOME COMMENTS ABOUT “BIBLE PROJECT” AND ITS PODCASTS**

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TITLES OF BOOKS:

Book 1: *“A Basic Guide to Biblical Theology/Nine Themes That Unite the Old and New Testaments”*

Book 2: *“What is Biblical Theology?/A Guide To the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns”*

AUTHORS:

Book 1: Alan J. Thompson, PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, who is head of New Testament Studies at Sydney Missionary and Bible College of the Australian University of Theology.

Book 2: James M. Petterson Jr., PhD from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who is a professor of Biblical Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and who is author of *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment, a commentary on Revelation and of numerous articles and essays.*

PUBLISHERS AND DATES OF PUBLICATION:

Book 1: Baker Academics, 2025

Book 2: Crossway, 2014.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Authors of these two books, together with Jon Collins and Timothy Mackey in their “Bible Project” Podcasts and Videos (which I strongly recommend to the Reader-recommending that the Reader obtain the App which makes available all of the many podcasts of Bible Project), seek to open the Reader’s or listeners eyes to a methodology for reading and seeking to understand the Bible and all of its 66 varied books (with their over 40 authors and varied genres) by understanding the complete story of, the metanarrative of the Bible as it begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation.

I have, for a number of years, made it a practice, on Saturday and Sunday mornings, to listen to the various podcasts of conversations between Tim Mackey and Jon Collins of “Bible Project”. The Motto of Bible Project is “We Believe that the Bible is a Unified Story that Leads to Jesus”. If the Reader obtains the app for Bible Project it will open a universe of a large number of Series of podcasts in which Tim and Jon have conversations in which they discuss the various books (actually scrolls) of the Bible, and in which they tie these various books/scrolls, into a unified narrative or metanarrative or story for the entire Bible. Frankly, I did not understand that what Tim and Jon were trying to teach the listener, including me, was “Biblical Theology”, a method for reading and understanding the Bible by reading each of its varied books as a part of a unified story, God’s Story, the Story of God’s relationship with mankind, from Adam and Eve to Jesus, and the Story of the manner in which God has, from the Fall forward through the Old Testament to the New Testament, honored God’s Promises, including the Promise of Genesis 3:14-23, the Promise or “curse” of the serpent, the Devil, that there would be enmity between the serpent and its seed and the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent’s head, while the serpent will strike the heel of the seed of the woman. While Tim and Jon present a number of conversations about each of the books/scrolls of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, they, in each series about each book/scroll demonstrate how that book/scroll, through a consistent use of the symbols and patterns of the events of the ongoing story of

the Bible, from creation to Noah and the Flood (and God's promises to Noah), to Abraham (and God's promises to Abraham as renewed in Isaac and Jacob), to David (and God's promises to David), to the Prophets (and God's promises and revelations communicated by the Prophets), all pointed to Jesus, and how Jesus and the teachings of Jesus, as communicated by the New Testament Authors, all point to the ultimate redemption of God's Creation which is revealed in Revelation. In other words, Tim and Jon "Tie the Complete Story of the Bible into a Comprehensive, Unified Whole". I recommend the App for "Bible Project", and the many available series of the various conversations of Tim and Jon on the Bible's books/scrolls (e.g. "The Genesis Scroll", the "Exodus Scroll", the "Leviticus Scroll", etc.) which that app will make available to the Reader. The Reader might start with the 21 part Series on "How to Read the Bible".

What I did not understand was that Tim and Jon of Bible Project were engaging in **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**, until I read the two books which are the subject of this Review. While I have co-taught a course on Biblical Hermeneutics, and have consistently heard (and even urged) that "You Have to Read the Bible Biblically", and "In Interpreting a Passage of Pericope of the Bible you must place it in its 'Canonical Context'", and that "You Should Read the Bible Canonically", and that "God has Revealed Himself in the Bible 'Progressively' or by way of 'Progressive Revelation'" I don't think that I had an clear or definitive understand of what those admonitions mean until I read the two books which are the subject matter of this Review. In our course on Hermeneutics, we have also tried to teach the various ways in which students should try to "tie together" the Bible's two testaments, the so-called "Old Testament" ("OT") and the so-called "New Testament" ("NT"), which some refer to as the "First Testament" and the "Second Testament", including the theories of "Continuity" and "Discontinuity". We have discussed the Bible Reading Methodologies of "Dispensationalism" and "Covenantalism" (and one of our authors, Alan J. Thompson, clearly appears to be a covenantalist, for whatever that is worth). However, I don't think that I have ever understood a decent methodology for trying to understand each of the Bible's books (or any passage or pericope of any of those books) in light of the whole, overarching story of the Bible until I read these two books.

I am sure that you, Dear Reader, have heard the terms "*exegesis*", "*Systematic Theology*", and "*Biblical Theology*". Perhaps you, like me, have just assumed that we were always engaged in "*Biblical Theology*" because we were trying to understand the Bible, and how a passage or pericope of one of its books should be understood and how it might apply to us, today. I am embarrassed to admit that I didn't know that there are true distinctions between *exegesis*, *Systematic Theology* and *Biblical Theology*, and that, while each is an important theological methodology, they are not the same, and that you, very likely, cannot approach any passage, book or pericope of the Bible as a part of an exercise in exegesis or Systematic Theology if you do not understand where it sits in the overall narrative of the Bible as a part of that narrative's story of God's Plan, and the fulfillment (in stages) of that Plan for the redemption of God's good, marvelous Creation (including mankind and the entire cosmos) from the devastating effects on such Creation of the Fall and of its injection into that Creation of Sin and the resulting cosmic battle between the goodness of God and the evil of the devil who wants to take from God what is rightfully God's, that Creation.

Now that I have read and meditated upon these two books (and thereby better understand what Tim and Jon of Bible Project have been trying to teach me) I have a much better understanding of **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY** and of its proper place in my Bible Reading Method, my "Theological Method" if you will. If you read these two books (and, as I urge, listen to Tim and Jon) you will also find the place in your Theological Method for Biblical Theology. You will find the way to enter the world of the grand narrative of the Biblical story of God's relationship with mankind and of His ongoing plan and work to redeem his Creation.

WHAT ARE THE AUTHORS DOING WITH WHAT THE AUTHORS ARE SAYING?

While the two authors of our books, Book 1 and Book 2, take somewhat different approaches to the way in which they introduce you to the field of Biblical Theology, they accomplish the same goal, which is to provide the reader with a succinct, easily understood introduction to (and, actually, a somewhat in-depth treatment of) Biblical Theology. So, it is difficult for me, your Reviewer, to separate the two books in describing their contents and the respective goals and conclusions of each author. So, this section of this Review will be something of a compilation of the contents of both of the books. I urge that you, Dear Reader, read each of the books. They are short, and easily read, and if you read both books then I think that you will have in mind a good concept of Biblical Theology, and of how to try to implement Biblical Theology into your reading of, and work with the Bible.

In each of our two books, their authors state (in my words, not theirs) as follows:

1) "Biblical Theology" refers to the need to interpret any given book, pericope, passage or text of the Bible in the setting of the timeline of the overall narrative of the Bible where it lands, by taking into account what came before and what came after in this timeline.

2) In looking at each given verse, chapter or Biblical book, we must think of that chapter, verse or book or any other Biblical pericope a part of an unfolding plan (God's plan) in which more and more is progressively revealed as time goes on. Thus, with any such chapter, verse, book or pericope you must ask where you are in the timeline of events of the Bible, and what came before it, and what came after it, and where does it point or lead. This is a "recognition that these are all connected and a part of the gradual unfolding of God's saving plan." (Book 1, p. 3)

3) "So, basically, Biblical Theology is about 'how to put your Bible together'." (Book 1, p.

4) Our authors would contrast the three methods that are often used in interpreting the Bible, 1) *exegesis*, 2) *biblical theology*, and 3) *systematic theology*. *Exegesis* is performed when we seek to understand the meaning of a particular biblical passage or verse in its *immediate context*, meaning that, rather than plucking a passage or verse out of its setting, we aim to understand what it means in the context of the paragraphs or passages which lead into it, and which follow it, and in the context of the chapter and book in which it appears. We seek to get out of our studied text what its author intended for it to say in this overall literary context. *Biblical theology* is concerned with placing the text, passage or pericope of Scripture in the timeline of the Bible, what came before it and what comes after it. While in *exegesis* we are focusing on identifying what that text, passage or pericope says, in its literary context, in *biblical theology* we are seeking to locate the meaning of that text, passage or pericope "in the unfolding plan of God". *Systematic theology* focuses on the logical (or systematic) relationships between all the biblical texts on the same subject across the Bible. The primary focus of *systematic theology* is not on where the text fits in the timeline but how the text relates to and integrates logically with other biblical texts on the same subject. "That is, systematic theology is *primarily* focused on not where the text fits in the timeline but how the text relates to and integrates logically with the other texts on that topic." While each of these three approaches to the Bible differ, one from the others, "We need all of these approaches when we interpret the Bible: *exegesis* placing the text in its immediate context, *biblical theology* (placing the text in the timeline of God's unfolding plan), and *systematic theology* (logically connecting the text to others on that topic). 'Many say, therefore, that whereas *biblical theology* is related primarily to temporal connections, *systematic theology* is related primarily to logical or atemporal connections'."

5) All of these approaches, *exegesis*, *biblical theology*, and *systematic theology* are needed in order to properly use, interpret and apply the Bible.

6) We should also avail ourselves of *historical theology*, a subset of *systematic theology*, which recognizes that we are not the first persons seeking to understand and put together the texts of

the Bible, and that all of the various questions and doctrines involving such texts have been discussed for over 2,000 years of church history.

7) Our author of Book 2 states that the Bible has a grand metanarrative, with it, like any other “narrative’s” being made up of “setting”, “characterization” and “plot”, and with a narrative’s plot, including that of the Bible, being built out of “episodes”, and “conflict”, which, if successful “communicate themes.” In that author’s view, the “setting” of set for the Bible’s narrative is the world, a place which He built “so that there would be a place where he is known, served, worshiped and present”. “God built the earth as his temple, and in it he put his image and likeness...to represent himself, mankind”. Everything God made as His temple was “good” and worthy of His presence, but “the characters in the drama rebelled against God and defiled his temple”, causing him to remove his presence from mankind. “In response to the sin of Adam, God subjected creation to bondage, offering hope, however, that there would be restoration through the seed of the woman”, who would crush the head of the serpent (the devil), while the serpent would strike the heel of the seed of the woman. “One of the best things that can happen to us is discovering our role in the real story of the world” (note: this echoes Kevin VanHoozer’s view that the Bible provides a seven Act drama). “Humans are either seed of the woman or seed of the serpent.” “When God made the setting, the cosmic temple, he gave dominion over it to the man and the woman (Gen. 1:28). When they sinned, Satan took control as ‘the prince of the power of the air’, and with him are the ‘sons of disobedience’, the ‘children of the wrath’ (Eph. 2:2-3). God has promised, however, that the son of David will rule (Ps. 110). He will receive dominion over God’s restored cosmic temple. (Rev. 11:15-19). “WHAT PART DO YOU PLAY IN THIS DRAMA?” (emphasis added). “IN BROADEST TERMS, THE BIBLE’S PLOT CAN BE SUMMARIZED IN FOUR WORDS: *CREATION, FALL, REDEMPTION, AND RESTORATION.*”

8) The author of book 1 ties the story of the Bible together into a unified whole by citing and describing some events, or themes which provide unity and direction to the biblical story, those being: *Creation and Rebellion, Covenant(s) (Promises and Fulfillment), The Exodus and the Tabernacle, Law (and Wisdom), Sacrifice, Kingship, the Prophetic Hope (meaning the Hope for the Redemption from Exile spoken of by the Prophets), The Kingdom of God (as announced and initiated by Jesus): “Now” and “Not Yet” (meaning initiated but not consummated), and “The Holy City”: Complete Transformation At Last.* This author, the author of book 1, demonstrates how these themes, based upon events and stories of Israel’s past (as they pointed to the fulfillment of God’s promises in Jesus), and the initiation of the Kingdom of God by Jesus (such Kingdom still to be fulfilled in this Now but Not Yet Time) help us to “put our Bible together”.

9) The author of book 2 urges that, in order to properly understand the writings of the Biblical authors, we have to do our best to live in their world, and to understand the world as they would have seen it. They would have seen, from the writings or pronouncements of earlier (earlier to them) authors or authorities, how God had acted in the past. They would have observed “patterns” (some say “design patterning”) in the ways God had responded and acted in the past. Therefore, they would have believed that God would act, in similar fashion, in the future. They would, therefore, have been cognizant of certain repeated “Patterns”, “Symbols”, and “Images” which would have caused them to view current (for them) events as being something of a repetition of (or comparable to) such Patterns, Symbols or Images. Therefore, in order to better understand what a given author, who was writing at a point in the history of the biblical narrative, was saying, we need to understand the timeline of Israel and of God’s Redemptive Plan, and where that author was writing or speaking in that timeline, and we need to understand that author’s point of reference which rested in the past events of, and the patterns of God’s actions with respect to how God had responded in the past. These authors were schooled in the repeated Patterns, Symbols of the stories of earlier events. These authors did not write or speak in a vacuum. They wrote and spoke with an historical knowledge which caused them to see (with God’s Inspiration) an ongoing story of God’s Plan. To understand what these authors were saying, and why they said what they

said, we need to understand “What Had Happened Before the author Wrote or Spoke and what occurred After he Wrote or Spoke”.

10) I am doing a poor job of trying to describe, in summary or outline form, what our authors, the authors of the two books, book 1 and book 2, were trying to say. Suffice it to say, that while they approached the subject of Biblical Theology in somewhat different ways, their thesis is, their conclusions are, that the Bible does, in fact, provide a Unified Story, and that each and all of its parts, its 66 books, tie together and tell a Unified Story. They each describe a way to identify, and understand this story. Each of them would agree that “You Cannot Understand any Single Part of the Bible, Without Understanding the Whole Bible, and Where that Part Rests in the Whole Bible-what went before and what went after.” The Bible contains a Unified Story of God’s Plan for the redemption of His creation from the bondage of Sin, including Sin’s resulting bondage of creation to satan. Each of the Bible’s constituent parts, tells a part of that Story. I think that each of our authors of these two books would agree, and certainly Tim and Jon of Bible Project would agree that, for the Jewish people of Israel, and for the Prophets, and for the authors of the New Testament, two of the most important events in this story were/are the Passover and the Exodus. By these events, God demonstrated that God Keeps His Promises. God made His Promise that He would redeem His Creation at the conclusion of the Genesis Story of the Fall (i.e. the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent who will strike the heel of the seed of the woman). God advanced this promise through Abraham and made His promises to Abraham (as renewed in Issac and Jacob) to make the seed of Abraham a Great Nation which would serve as a light to all nations. God’s people were in bondage in Egypt. God kept His promises by rescuing His people from this bondage through the Passover and following Exodus and the stories of the Exodus. As described in the Exodus Scroll, while God had removed His presence from the people at the Fall, He symbolically restored that presence through the Tabernacle with its symbolism of Eden. He saved His people. This symbolism of the presence of God among His people was later embodied in the Temple. Then, when the people again rebelled by failing to keep their part of God’ Covenant, what we know as the Mosaic Covenant, God again removed his presence from among the people, and caused exile of the people and the destruction of the Temple by a foreign power. So, the prophets were confronting the exile. They announced another fulfillment of God’s Promise to redeem His people by way of their announcements of hope for the redemption and restoration of the people in a manner akin to the Exodus (a Pattern of the way in which God had responded in the past by rescuing His people from an earlier bondage). However, this Exodus and restoration would result in a New Covenant where God’s Law would be written, engraved, embodied in the people. It would almost be a part of their very being, all pointing forward to Jesus. Then, eventually, Jesus at the Transfiguration, pointed to what He was to do as being an Exodus. Later, Paul, most certainly in Romans, referred to the saving acts of Jesus as a New Exodus. So, if you just look at the Biblical Patterning based upon the Exodus, and listen to Tim and Jon’s multi part series on the Exodus Scroll, you will see how the biblical authors did, in fact, engage in a form of Design Patterning which ties together the metanarrative of the Bible. Such Design Patterning is sometimes referred to by the authors of our books as Biblical Typology.

11) In effect, in dealing with the Exodus, our authors are engaging in Biblical Typology. A “Type” is a person, thing, institution or event, who or which appears or occurs in earlier biblical history and who or which foreshadows a pattern (or in many respects mirrors) a person, thing, institution or event who or which appears or occurs at a later point in the Biblical Narrative, the Biblical Timeline or Storyline, and which fulfills the pattern or advances the pattern established by the Type (and which is referred to as the “Archetype”). In other words, the Archetype (which appears at a later stage of the Biblical Timeline, the Biblical Narrative) follows and accelerates or improves or fulfills the pattern of the Type, which pointed forward to its fulfillment or advancement at a later stage of the Biblical Timeline. In order to find a true Typological reading of Scripture, as opposed to engaging in what is referred to as engaging in an “analogical” reading of Scripture (e.g. finding Jesus in references in the OT which clearly had no such

reference, or finding fanciful or whimsical or extremely imaginative analogies which are in no way reflected in the text and which truly stretch any realistic imagination (e.g. every tent post refers to Jesus)), two features or requirements must be satisfied. These are: 1) Historical Correspondence (e.g. the way in which real people, real events or real institutions along the Biblical Narrative match one another (meaning those between the Type and its pattern as we move through the Biblical Timeline), and 2) Escalation (which has to do with the way, as we move from the initial instance, the Type, through the installments of its pattern which appear in Biblical History, that pattern established Type is advanced, enhanced or fulfilled.)

I think that, if you read and study each of these two rather short books, you will have a good grasp of “Biblical Theology”, and of where Biblical Theology rests among the various Methods for reading and seeking to understand the Bible and each of its constituent parts.

A PERSONAL NOTE: I am not sure that I am going to express his idea in a satisfactory manner, but, at least to me, it seems that each of the methods of biblical interpretation, *exegesis*, *Biblical Theology* and *Systematic Theology* has to be applied if I am going to properly seek to interpret and understand any given pericope of Scripture, and then seek to understand how what I have derived as my understanding of that pericope applies or can be applied in daily Christian Life, if it has such an application in daily Christian Life. Obviously, I need to properly *exegete* that pericope, meaning that I have to properly understand what the author was saying, in the author’s words, in their literary context, meaning how those words appear in their immediate context (i.e. the sentence and paragraph in which they appear) and in the context of the paragraphs which lead into and which follow those words, and how those words appear in the book in which those words appear. In other words, I have to try to understand what the author was actually saying. I would then need to engage in *Biblical Theology*, by seeking to understand where the pericope in question rests in the overall timeline of the biblical story, the timeline of God’s Plan for God’s Creation (what went before and what came after, and how might this have affected the author’s point of view and why he might have said what he in fact said). I would also need to understand what was going on at the time the author wrote or spoke, and whether or not that author was seeking to deal with a given issue or situation. Then, having done all of this it would likely behoove me to engage in some *Systematic Theology*, by seeking to determine whether there are other pericopes of Scripture which seem to deal with the same issue or matter dealt with in this particular pericope. Since my understanding of *Biblical Theology*, what it is and how it is to be used, has been limited, I appreciate our authors’ (and Tim and Jon of Bible Project) for introducing me to the Theological Method of Biblical Theology, a Method of which I had only a very sketchy understanding before reading these books.

HOW SHOULD ONE READ THESE BOOKS?

Hey, these books are short books. They are not huge tomes. They are easily read. So, in answer to his question, I would day “Read The Books”. These are not Reference Books, although they should be retained for future reference. They are more in the nature of “Instruction Books”. They are meant to teach/instruct the reader in the field of Biblical Theology, and they do an excellent job of providing at least a strong introduction into that field. So, I would urge the reader to read both of these books. I think that he or she will find that his or her efforts in so reading the books are very worthwhile efforts. I also urge the reader to become familiar with Bible Project and to avail himself or herself of the various podcast series which it provides. The App is easily obtainable. The App and Podcasts are Free to the Reader, although donations are appreciated.

SHOULD THESE BOOKS BE RETAINED IN THE TEI LIBRARY, AND ARE THEY BOOKS WHICH WILL BE USEFUL IN ANY TEI/ECLI CLASS

These books should be retained in the TEI library, and should be made available to any student or patron who is interested in, or has questions about the various Theological Methods which are available for seeking to understand the Bible and the biblical story. I am not certain how these books might be used in any TEI or ECLI class, but they can certainly be referred to in the class on Hermeneutics when the subject of Theological Method is being discussed. They can be referred to in any class where a subject related to "How to Read the Bible" or "How to Try to Understand the Bible" is being discussed. Students or others can be referred to these books so that, if they want to pursue further study of the areas of Theological Method or Bible Interpretation or Hermeneutics they can read these books.

Thank You

Dan Simon