**GOSPEL AND KINGDOM SERIES**

**Part 2 BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION**

The first study introduced three characteristics in our search for unity and structure in the Bible: literary forms, the historical framework and the theological structures. Each must be taken into account in the process of interpreting the biblical text.

**Christian doctrine and biblical theology**

There is a distinction between Christian doctrine and biblical theology. Christian doctrine (systematic) involves a systematic gathering of the doctrines of the Bible under topics to form a body of definitive Christian teaching about God, man, sin, grace, the church and other areas. But the structure and contents of the Bible are not systematic. There is no one section that sets out the doctrine of sin and another of salvation. The formulation of Christian doctrine requires that we transform the material which is set within the framework of the dynamic processes of biblical history into a form which is both true to the Bible and applicable to the present time. The theologian wants to avoid the pitfall of ‘proof-texting’ where it is assumed that all biblical texts have equal value in establishing doctrine, irrespective of the context in which they occur. The propositions of Christian doctrine depend for their validity on the correct handling of the dynamic revelation which the Bible records in the very different form of an historical progression of God dealing with humanity.

As understood here, biblical theology is dynamic and not static. It follows the movement and process of God’s revelation in the Scripture. It is closely related to systematic theology but there is a difference in emphasis. Biblical theology is not concerned to state the final doctrines which go to make up the content of Christian belief, but rather to describe the process by which the revelation unfolds and moves toward the goal (God’s final revelation of His purposes in Christ). In this sense biblical theology seeks to understand the relationship between the various eras in God’s revealing activity in the Bible, while the systematic theologian is interested in the finished article – the statement of doctrine. The biblical theologian is concerned with the progressive unfolding of truth.

**The history of redemption and the Kingdom of God**

The Old Testament is far more than a textbook of the earliest history of Israel. It is a history of redemption. The key to the Old Testament is not the part Israel plays but the part God plays in redeeming a people from slavery and making them His own. Israel’s history is part of God’s redeeming activity to humanity.

Redemption is not the only theological idea that provides structure to the Old Testament. Redemption is a process that leads to a goal. The redeemed people of God are the people of God’s kingdom. Ultimately, the kingdom of God is a more central issue in the Old Testament than is the redemptive process of bringing people into the kingdom. The two are inter-dependant. The process needs a goal but the goal has to have a process that brings the goal about.

**Some features of the history of redemption**

First, the history of redemption is *progressive*. Compare the light which the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) had on God’s purposes with the understanding a post-exilic Jew, who could draw on Moses and all the prophets, would have had. When we look at the New Testament, we find the full light of the gospel and all its implications. Central to this gospel is God’s kingdom.

But to say that truth was only dimly understood at the start and gradually became brighter misses the important peaks within the process. Looking more closely, we find a series of stages, each self-contained, and each coming to a climax, leading in turn to a new stage. The emphasis given to certain events and people, historically and theologically, directs the reader to these climaxes.

Secondly, the history of redemption is *incomplete without the New Testament*. The kingdom forecast by the prophets is never fulfilled in the Old Testament. Judaism also recognises the future hope of prophecy which remained unfulfilled in Old Testament times. Judaism looked forward to a future Messianic fulfilment. Without that emphasis, the Old Testament is too easily seen as a moral code encased within ancient Israel’s history. The essential difference between Judaism and Christianity is how the completion of the hope of Israel is brought about. The New Testament presents the Christ event bringing this hope to its appointed goal. Judaism rejects Jesus of Nazareth as the awaited Messiah.

Thirdly, the history of redemption is to be interpreted:

(a) we begin with the New Testament and its central figure, Jesus Christ, through whom by faith we become children of God

(b) the New Testament drives us back to the Old Testament because it presupposes the Old Testament as the basis for the gospel

(c) the New Testament establishes that the Old Testament involves promise and hope of a goal which is fulfilled in Christ. It directs us to take account of the dynamic, the living process and movement of the Old Testament which leads us Christ and the gospels. Because the New Testament declares the Old Testament incomplete without Christ, we must understand the Old Testament in the light of its goal, which is Christ. Jesus is indispensable to a true understanding of the Old Testament a well as the New.

**Applying the text to today**

Biblical theology shows us the kind of bridge needed to overcome the gap between the Old Testament text and us today

We begin with *exegesis*. This is finding out what the text originally meant. What was the author trying to convey to his listeners?

Our next step is *hermeneutics*. This is where the text fits in to biblical theology.

The final step is *application*. This brings the meaning of the text from its original meaning (exegesis) through its interpretive relevance (hermeneutics) to its specific application to us.

This study is essentially a summary of ‘Biblical Theology and the History of Redemption’ by Graeme Goldsworthy in ‘*Gospel and Kingdom’* (The Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1987)