

Reading the Bible in Light of the Whole Story

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After his resurrection Jesus made it clear to his followers that we should read all of Scripture as in some way related to his death/resurrection, the call to repentance and the offer of forgiveness through Jesus' name to all the nations (Luke 24:13-27, 44-49). But do we practically do this? Reading each passage of Scripture in light of its place within the unfolding storyline of the Bible can seem like a daunting task. After all, it is easy to see how certain OT passages relate to the gospel of Jesus Christ because the NT authors specifically quote or allude to them. But what do we do when faced with the many OT passages to which the NT authors do not refer? While it is tempting to throw up one's hands in exasperation and pursue the familiar paths of moralizing, there are ways that are more faithful to Scripture itself.

Given the richness of the Bible, it should not be surprising that there are a number of different ways that we can see the points of connection between whatever passage we are reading and the larger biblical storyline. Two of the more significant are what we will call macro-typology and redemptive themes.

Macro-Typology

Typology refers to the study of correspondences between persons, events, and institutions within the historical framework of God's acts. It rests upon the conviction that God has sovereignly ordered history such that God's past actions serve as a pattern for his future actions. The first event/person/institution is referred to as a "type," while the latter is the "antitype."

Although typology has been abused by some, its use in the NT demonstrates that it is a legitimate way of seeing connections between the Old and the New Testaments. Typology is not about finding obscure connections between OT events and NT realities, such as arguing that the scarlet thread hung in Rahab's window points to the blood of Christ (Joshua 2:21). Instead, typology tends to work on the macro-level. In other words, it is connected with major events, people and institutions in the unfolding story of God. A helpful guideline in testing whether a possible type is in fact legitimate is to ask how closely that type is related to the central message of the passage. If it is a small detail that is not very closely related to the main point of the passage, it is unlikely to be a legitimate or significant type.

The chart that begins on the next page lays out some of the most significant "macro-types" that occur in the biblical storyline.¹ The first column ("OT Salvation History") lists the event, person or institution from the storyline of the Old Testament. The second column ("Prophetic Eschatology?") indicates the way the OT looks forward to the greater realization of the original reality. In the third column ("Fulfillment in Christ") describes the fulfillment of the Old Testament reality in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It should be noted that this list is not comprehensive, but rather representative.

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 253-57.

OT Salvation History	Prophetic Eschatology	Fulfillment in Christ
God and his creation	<i>God will bring in a new creation</i>	Jesus is God the Creator. He is the firstborn of all creation. All things were created by him, through him, in him and for him. He is the new creation, and brings the new creation as the goal of all God's redemptive purpose.
Human beings are made from the earth; the breath of God is breathed into them.	<i>God will raise a renewed people for himself and give them his Spirit.</i>	Jesus is fully human, and in that sense is part of the created order. He is the perfectly Spirit-endowed human.
Eden is the focus of man's dominion over the beasts and the rest of creation.	<i>The kingdom will be a new Eden. The people of God will have dominion over creation and the beasts.</i>	Jesus is the place where God and man meet. He has dominion as the last Adam: nature miracles, being with the wild beasts.
Fall and judgment.	<i>Final judgment will come on those who do not receive the grace of God.</i>	Jesus was made to be sin for us. He suffered the wrath of God and the curse of the covenant for us on the cross.
<p>Redemption; which includes the following dimensions</p> <p>Covenant & calling</p> <p>Promises of land, people, great name, blessings to the nations</p> <p>Captivity and release in the exodus</p> <p>Prophetic word.</p>	<p><i>God will redeem Israel and restore creation.</i></p> <p><i>A new covenant will take the place of the old.</i></p> <p><i>The people of God will return to the promised land and be great. The nations will come to share in the kingdom of Zion.</i></p> <p><i>The captivity will lead to a redemptive release that amounts to a second exodus.</i></p> <p><i>God will raise up a new prophet.</i></p>	<p>Jesus redeems the whole of creation, not merely souls.</p> <p>Jesus is the true partner of God; the faithful Son of God, the Seed of Abraham, Son of David.</p> <p>The land is to be the new Eden, the dwelling of the people with God. Jesus is that place as well as being God and the people. He is the light to the nations.</p> <p>Jesus comes to a race captive to sin, Satan and death. He concludes the true exodus by his death and resurrection.</p> <p>Jesus is the true prophet who speaks the word of God. He is the embodiment of that word. He gives true and faithful obedience to that word.</p>

OT Salvation History	Prophetic Eschatology	Fulfillment in Christ
Law structures the life of the redeemed.	<i>The law will be written on the hearts of God's people.</i>	Jesus fulfills the law and establishes the structure of the life of the community of the redeemed.
Redemptive worship, priests and tabernacles.	<i>A new temple will be the focus of worship and fellowship with God.</i>	Jesus fulfills the worship of Israel, above all by being the new temple and the true priest who offers himself as the one true sacrifice for sin.
Entry and possession of the land.	<i>The people of God will return from the nations to the land of promise.</i>	Jesus gains entry through his resurrection and ascension into the inheritance of the people of God. He conquers all the powers that resist the coming of the kingdom of God. By being the place where God meets his people, he fulfills the meaning of the land.
Nationhood involving judges, prophets, kings, wise men.	<i>A new nation will emerge with all the offices of rule and worship.</i>	A new nation of the people of God is established in Christ. He is the true prophet, priest, king and wise man.
Kingship and temple; Davidic throne	<i>There will be a new David and a new temple.</i>	Jesus, the King and true Son of David, is also the new temple where God and mankind meet.
Solomon and national decline.	<i>The Davidic line that failed under Solomon will be reinstated.</i>	Jesus takes the consequences of all the failures of his people by fulfilling in himself all that God requires of them.
Destruction of Israel and exile.	<i>The exile into Babylon will lead to a redemptive act.</i>	Jesus goes into exile for his people so that he can lead them out of captivity.
Prophetic ministries: indictment, judgment, promises of restoration	<i>Prophetic ministries: indictment, judgment, promises of restoration.</i>	Jesus is the true prophet who judges the world, yet at the same time he brings the words of grace and redemption for all who put their trust in him. He defines the fulfillment of the prophetic promises.
Return and continued rebellion.	<i>Post-exilic prophets interpret the continued rebellion of Israel</i>	The failures of Israel's return from exile are all dealt with in the true return of the true Israel. The consummation shows that all rebellion is finally to be dealt with.

Tracing Key Redemptive Themes

Another way of reading each passage of Scripture in light of the whole biblical story is finding and tracing key redemptive themes. These themes are like threads that run throughout the Bible, showing up at pivotal moments.

Below you will find a list of key redemptive themes. It is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive; nevertheless, it does highlight some of the more prominent redemptive themes that run throughout Scripture, along with a very brief description of each one. But be sure to remember as you trace it to and through the person and work of Jesus Christ, since in him all the promises of God are yes (2 Cor. 1:20). These are not intended to as strict “formulas” but are provided to jumpstart your thinking.

- **Character/Names of God** – The various attributes of God can often provide you with links that reveal the significance of how God reveals himself throughout the Biblical story. Pay attention to the names of God used, since they may shed light on a particular aspect of his character that is particularly important for that passage (see, for example, Genesis 16:1-16).
- **Creation & new creation** – The Bible is a story that runs from creation in Genesis to new creation in Revelation. And in between God promises to make things new in connection with his promise of redemption (see, e.g., Isa 46:8-10; 65:17-19; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Related to this theme would also be the themes of new life and resurrection.
- **Covenants** – God’s relationship to his people can be understood as a series of covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, etc). Something to consider when you read a passage of Scripture is which of the covenants have already been given and which have not. Does this passage give evidence of fulfilling (even if partially) something promised in a covenant? Keep in mind too that all of the covenants in some way point forward to Christ, who in his person and work fulfills the covenants.
- **Promises to Abraham** – In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised to Abraham land (Geography) and descendants (Genealogy). From this promise God forms the nation of Israel and eventually brings forth Christ, THE descendant of Abraham (cf. Gal 3:16). Does this passage in some fashion “move this promise along” towards its fulfillment in Christ?
- **Israel/Church/People of God** – Regardless of how you understand the relationship between the nation of Israel and the church, it is legitimate to look for connections between how Israel as the people of God responds (or fails to respond) to God and how the church is to do so (see, e.g., 1 Cor 10:1-13, where Paul draws key lessons from Israel’s wilderness experiences).
- **Israel the son of God / Jesus the Son of God** – Israel is referred to as God’s first-born son (Exod 4:22-23), but a son that proves disobedient. The Gospels present Jesus as God’s eternal Son who obeys where Israel failed (cf. Matt 3:13–4:9).
- **Exodus/New Exodus** – In the Exodus, God redeemed for himself a people to serve and worship him (Exod 12–15). But when Israel rebelled against God, he warned of judgment. But through the prophets God promised a new and greater Exodus in which he would

redeem his people from their sin (Isa 51:1-16). The NT indicates that Jesus accomplished that New Exodus in his work on the cross (Gal 4:1-7).

- **Redemption/Salvation** – All throughout the OT God redeems (rescues) or saves his people from their enemies, often through a divinely appointed leader (Ps 18). These various events point forward to God redeeming/saving his people from their greatest enemies sin and death through Christ (Luke 1:68-79).
- **Tabernacle/Temple** – God created Adam and Eve to dwell with him in the garden, but sin brought separation. Eventually God dwelled with his people through the tabernacle and then the temple. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God dwelling with us (Matt 1:23; John 1:14) and that we will experience the fullness of this promise in the new creation (Rev 21:3)
- **Sacrifices/Atonement** – From as early as Gen 3, sacrifices were offered in connection with sin. God eventually gave the sacrificial system to Israel. As the book of Hebrews makes clear, these sacrifices were pointing forward to the one great sacrifice of Christ on the cross.
- **Feasts/Festivals** – The various feasts and festivals were given to mark specific occasions in the life of Israel. As such they are often indicators to larger redemptive themes. Several times in the gospels Jesus links his own actions to the celebration of particular Jewish feasts such as Passover, the Feast of Booths, etc. (e.g., John 7:1-44).
- **Promised Land/Inheritance** – The promise of land to Israel from the OT is connected by NT authors to the spiritual inheritance of believers won through the death of Christ (cf. Heb 3-4).
- **Prophet/Priest/King** – Throughout the OT God raised up prophets, priests and kings to forward his redemptive plan in their activities. The NT presents Jesus as the fulfillment of these roles. Jesus is the long-awaited King (Heb 1:5-14), the great High Priest (Heb 8:1-13), and the prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22-26). So when you see the actions of prophets, priests, or kings, ask whether they in some way point forward to the Christ as the fulfillment of those roles. Here to you may note that sometimes the connection to Christ is the *opposite* of what the OT prophet/priest/king; in other words, where they fail, Christ obeys and embodies perfectly.
- **Idolatry** – When you recognize that idolatry is placing anyone or anything in the rightful place of God in our lives, it is evident that idolatry begins in Gen 3 and runs throughout the Bible, including thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, relationships, etc. By contrast, Jesus is the perfect worshiper of God who never gave in to the temptation to place anyone or anything above the Father (cf. Matt 4:8-10).
- **Day of the Lord** – From the beginning God warned that disobedience to him would result in judgment. As the OT develops this concept of judgment was linked to the phrase “Day of the Lord,” which referred to the day on which God would bring judgment for sin (Joel 2:1-32). Throughout the OT God would pour out measured judgment on Israel for its sin (destruction of the northern and southern kingdoms), but these were only partial anticipations of the great and final Day of the Lord. At the cross, Jesus experiences the “Day of the Lord” on our behalf (Matt 27:45-54) so that when the final Day of the Lord comes at his return (Rev 19:6-21), believers will be rescued but unbelievers judged.

- **Exile/Return from Exile** – As punishment for Adam and Eve’s rebellion, they were exiled from the Garden (Gen 3:24). Because Israel broke their covenant with God they were exiled from the Promised Land (2 Chr 36:17-21). These experiences of exile point to the greater reality of humanity’s exile from God because of our sin (Isa 52:1–53:12). In his death Jesus experienced the exile of separation from God so that he might bring us out of our exile caused by sinful rebellion into God’s presence as full heirs (Gal 4:1-7).
- **Remnant** – As early as Adam and Eve’s sons, God chooses some and not others (e.g. Abel not Cain; Isaac not Ishmael; Jacob not Esau; etc.). Even within the nation of Israel God makes it clear that not every single Israelite is in a right relationship with him. As the rebellion of Israel grew, God made it progressively clearer that his purposes would be accomplished through a remnant of the nation from which Messiah would come (Isa 10:22). This concept is picked up in the NT when Jesus chooses the 12 apostles to represent the restoration of Israel through a remnant identified with him (Matt 10:1-4).
- **Key Figures** – God works through key individuals (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Servant of the Lord, etc.) to move his plan of redemption forward. Our inclination when reading their stories is to identify ourselves with them to see how we should live. But the exemplary actions of these characters more directly point forward to Jesus himself, who perfectly embodied these exemplary actions and characteristics. When we see these characters fail, it reveals our need for a greater and better Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, etc.
- **Kingdom of God** – One of the major themes spanning both testaments is the “kingdom of God.” Vaughn Roberts book *God’s Big Picture* is built around the unfolding of this theme. He talks about the pattern of the kingdom, the perished kingdom, the promised kingdom, the partial kingdom, the present kingdom and the perfected kingdom.