

Biblical Theology Core Seminar: Session 11 Workshop # 1: Exodus, 1 Samuel, Psalms

Worldly wisdom will always tempt us as Bible teachers and students to read and teach the Bible as if it's about us, and not about Christ. But the discipline of biblical theology helps us to see that the whole Bible is about Christ.

Think about the whole book of Hebrews. I once Michael Lawrence observe,

- Chapter 1—the Law points to Jesus.
- Chapter 2—angels point to Jesus.
- Chapter 3—Moses points to Jesus.
- Chapter 4—The Promised Land points to Jesus and the Sabbath points to Jesus.
- Chapter 5—The high priest points to Jesus.
- Chapter 7—Melchizedek points to Jesus. The entire priesthood points to Jesus.
- Chapter 8—The Tabernacle points to Jesus.
- Chapter 9—The sacrifices point to Jesus.
- And by the time you're done with chapter 11's hall of faith, you realize the entire history of Israel points to Jesus!

In the same way, we've been discussing in this course is that we should always consider how a text points us to Christ, or at least some aspect of the gospel.

This is what Jesus tells us in Luke 24:

Luke 24:44–47 (ESV)

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

We tried to do that last week with passages from Exodus, 1 Samuel and the Psalms. We're going to try that again today with three more passages from the Old Testament, but different genres this time. We'll try something from Proverbs, something from Isaiah, and something from Nehemiah.

If you recall from last week, with each text, we're going to ask several questions:

1. *What is the point of the text?*
2. *Where does this text fall in the biblical storyline?* We look backward in the story and we look forward. We want to figure out what covenantal administration we're under, because the answer to that helps us figure out what continuities and discontinuities exist between the text and our own time.
3. *How does this text point to Christ?*
 - a. Typology: David, temple, sacrifice. These are divinely ordained persons, institutions, or events which God intends to point us to Christ (need NT warrant to designate a type)
 - b. Theme: God's mercy, God's love, our sin, call to praise
 - c. Storyline: for example, if telling the story of exile, I'll just trace it to the return from exile, the insufficiency of that return, and then the promise of Christ.
 - d. God/man/Christ/response: suppose you're reading the condemnation of Israel in Jeremiah. Use these as reflections to teach us about our own sin, which we can do because we know that, aside from being God's special covenant people, Israel stands in for humanity. They are a parable for us.
 - e. New Testament makes the link
4. How do I read this text *through* Christ? In other words, what does it mean for us? How do we apply it?

And let me take just a moment to plug the ESV Gospel Transformation Bible. It offers study notes that help you to do this throughout the Bible.

TEST DRIVE

1. *Proverbs 2:1-6* [read]

- **What's the point?** If you diligently seek wisdom, God will give it.
 - *What does our passage say wisdom is?* The parallelism is helpful. Look at verse 6 again: "The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." So wisdom involves knowledge and understanding. Move back one verse to verse 5: "Then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God." Wisdom seems to be paralleled with the fear of the Lord. Chapter 1, verse 7 famously tells us the same

thing. Looking at verses 1 to 3 of our chapter, we see the wisdom is found in listening to the father's "words," "commandments," and "insight."

- **Where does it fall in the biblical storyline?** Chapter 1, verse 1 tells us that Solomon wrote at least the opening sections of the Proverbs. Looking back, we know that Solomon is the king of Israel and anointed son of David. God had promised Solomon wisdom. And God had promised Solomon's father David that he would establish David and David's son as a kind of special son of God, who would specially mediate God's rule to the nation, and through the nation to the nations. So in Proverbs we have God using his specially designated son the king to lead sons in the way of wisdom. Look at Proverbs 1:8: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching." And then notice how our passage starts: "My son..."
- **How does it point to Christ?** Our passage points to him in a couple of ways. First it points to him by virtue of its authorship. Solomon, as the son of David, pointed to the true Son of David to come. Second, consider the theme of wisdom. Solomon was known for his great wisdom.
 - Look at our passage again: Verse 1: "My son, if you receive my words...verse 3: "if you call out for insight"...verse 5: then you will understand the fear of the Lord.
 - Turn to Isaiah 11:1: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [David's father...so someone in the line of David]...Verse 2: And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."
 - Turn to Isaiah 50. The first few verses concern Israel's disobedience, but then it turns to a servant's obedience: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught...Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious."
 - Turn to Luke 3:40: "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom." And verse 49: "And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'"
 - Turn to Matthew 12:24: Jesus observes that that the Queen of Sheba might have sought to hear Solomon's wisdom, but now one greater than Solomon was here.
 - And Matthew 13:54: When Jesus taught in the synagogue people responded, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"
 - Paul of course tells us that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

Really, the whole book of Proverbs needs to be read with the understanding that Jesus fulfills both Solomon's sonship and Solomon's wisdom. It comes through acutely in our passage because we see this pictures of the boy Jesus seeking out such wisdom.

- **How do we read this passage through Christ? What does it mean for us?** Think again about how our passage starts: "My son..." Friends, Romans tells us that, if we're Christians, we're adopted sons. The whole book therefore guides us in the way of sanctification, the way of walking like our elder brother (remember, Jesus was called the first born of many brothers). Proverbs doesn't just give us practical tips for living. It helps us to know what it means to posture our entire lives in the fear of the Lord, as Christ did, and then to walk in his way, so that we might grow in wisdom and stature and blessing. Verse 1 to 6 teach us how valuable and precious the wisdom of God is, and how we must seek it. I think it means *both* work really hard in school (whether you're studying math, literature, science, or Bible) *and* work out your salvation in fear and trembling, because all knowledge and wisdom are God's. And to possess the heavenly Father's knowledge and wisdom are life and blessings, particularly if you know it all points to him.

2. *Isaiah 13* [Read vv. 1-11, 13, 17, 19-22; read also 14:1-2]

- **What's the point?** Looking just at chapter 13, the point seems to be that the day of God's judgment is coming, and he will bring judgment upon Babylon as well as all who oppose him. Verse 6: "Wail, for the day of the LORD IS near; as destruction from the Almighty will come! Verse 11: "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity." But if we expand our view just slightly, we recall that Isaiah is written to Judah, at a time when Assyria is threatening its borders, and Judah was tempted to look to make alliances with other kings for its safety? And then you see the promise of God's compassion in the first verses of chapter 14, and the promise that they will rule over those who oppressed them. What might we say the point is with this slightly broader view? Don't look to Babylon or any nation of this world for your hope. They will all be judged!
- **Where does chapter 13 fall in the biblical storyline?** As we already said, we're sitting in the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the late eighth century, BC. Assyria is the threat. The Assyrians will eventually exile Israel to the North, through Babylon is a threat that looms on the horizon as well.
 - Babylon is powerfully symbolic if we look backwards how? It stretches all the way back to the first chapters of the Bible, where the pomp and arrogance of humankind appears at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. God's judgement is to scatter them, and in that sense you can almost say all nations issue forth from Babylon.

- And if we strain our eyes all the way forward in history to its conclusion, in the book of Revelation, what do we find? We find rebellious humanity's judgment pictured as Babylon's judgment. [**Read Revelation 18:1-2**] You notice this picture of desolation in verse 2 is drawing on the conclusion of our chapter. The story of Babylon is the story of the nations that defy God. Eventually God does punish and destroy Babylon through the Persians.¹
- **How does it point to Christ?** The first thing to notice in our text is that phrase "the day of the LORD" in verses 6 and 9: the day of the Lord "is near" and "comes."
 - Turn to Isaiah 61, and we find this prophesy: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me...to bring good news to the poor...to bind up the broken hearted...to proclaim liberty to the captives...[verse 2] to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor, and the day of vengeance of our God." *When is this fulfilled?*
 - Turn to Luke 4:16: We see that Jesus "went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him." Then he reads this bit from chapter 61 that we just read. But notice where it stops—verse 19: "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Where does it stop? Right before "and the day of vengeance of our God. Christ came the first time to proclaim God's salvation. But he will come a second time for judgment.
 - Look at verse 10 again in our passage: "For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light." Then verse 13: "I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place. Now turn to Matthew 24:29: [Read verses 29-30.]
 - Christ will usher in the day of the Lord, the book of Revelation also tells us. Revelation 19 describes the heavens opening and Christ coming on a white horse with the armies of heaven behind him. "From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winpress of the fury for the wrath of God the Almighty" (v. 15). Jesus will be the judge over all nations, and if I'm teaching Isaiah 13, I will make this point.
- **How do we read this through Christ?** If Jesus is coming as Judge, then we know we must turn to Jesus as Savior. Only the Judge can Save, as the first couple of verses of Isaiah 4 tell us. There is no salvation outside of Christ. As we watch these presidential debates during this election cycle, yes, we should care about who becomes president, but Isaiah 13 tells us not to put our trust in any president, in America, or in any nation. We know that the nations will finally be judged, and our only hope is Christ.

¹ He doesn't destroy them with the Medes, who are instrumental in the destruction of the Assyrians; during Isaiah's time the Medes loomed on the edge of Babylon and were a constant threat to them.

3. *Nehemiah and the wall* [Read 1:1-4, 8-9; 2:4-5; the wall is rebuilt in chapters 3-6; 12:27, 30]

- **What's the point?** Nehemiah want to rebuild the wall so that God's covenant people might be restored to God the blessings of his presence, and in the ancient world a strong wall was crucial to the survival of its inhabitants. Otherwise, people would have been subject to every traveling band of robbers, every passing marauder, even every far-off king with imperial ambitions.
- **Where does it fall in the biblical storyline?** Babylon, who had originally exiled Judah, has now fallen and been replaced by Persia. The last verse of chapter 1 tells us that Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Ezra and a wave of exiles have already returned. Ezra and Nehemiah are these two in-between historical books: in between the return from exile and the coming of Christ. In general, they reaffirm some of the earlier lessons from Israel's history, but more importantly they set Israel's history up for the coming of the Messiah. Nehemiah invokes the prayer of Moses from Deuteronomy 28 (when Moses laid out the covenant blessings and curses) about a return from exile. Verse 9 again: "but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them...from there I will gather them and bring them to the place I have chosen, to make my name dwell there."
- **How does it point to Christ?** To answer that, let's stop and think first about the failure of Nehemiah's wall.
 - Look at 13:10: "I also found that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them." No one was paying the priests.
 - Verse 15, 17: "In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath..." Verse 17: I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day?"
 - Verse 23: "In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people...Verse 26: "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women."

Based on these closing remarks in Nehemiah, what would you say is the problem with Nehemiah's wall? Maybe it will keep a few "bad guys" out, but it does nothing to prevent the evil from growing within. Israel's historical decline after David began with Solomon's heart being led astray by foreign wives, and now the history of the Old Testament is closing with the very same thing. It doesn't seem we've made a whole lot of progress does it. Also, the Lord's temple, where God is said to dwell, is being neglected.

So what do we do with Nehemiah's Mosaic prayer, "but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them...from there I will gather them and bring them to the place I have chosen, to make my name dwell there"?

Apparently the solution was not a piece of geography with a wall around it. And sure enough we know that God would make his dwelling through Christ:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath. Christ is the one who would be set apart from the nations and cause a people to be set apart, surrounded by a wall, as it were. 1 Peter 2 tells us that we “like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house,” with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone (vv. 5-7; see also Eph. 19-22). We also anticipate the day described in the book of Revelation when the holy city, the New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2). Then we read, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3).

There’s a sense in which we’re given Nehemiah’s wall to show us the inadequacy of the wall. What’s really needed is what Jeremiah promises: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33b). In that sense, Nehemiah indirectly points us not just to Christ, but to his Spirit.

- **What do I read this through Christ? What does it mean for us?** The lesson here is a bit like the lesson of Isaiah 13. There God’s people are told not to look to the nations for redemption. Here we’re told not to look to all the things in this world that we might use to protect ourselves. We can only look to Christ and his Spirit. Walls won’t do it. Gated communities won’t do it. Bank accounts won’t do it. Military might won’t do it. Christ alone is our wall and our dwelling place. In fact, we read in Ephesians 2,

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [between Jew and Gentile] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (vv. 14-16).

Nehemiah’s book concludes ominously with the children of Jews speaking these foreign languages because the holiness and distinctness of God’s people was tied to their land and their ethnicity. But not Christ has smashed that ethnic wall, he’s commissioned us to go to all nations, and in Acts 8 he even sent a persecution within Jerusalem by the Jews to spread his people far and wide.

So here we are as a church this morning, a multi-ethnic people, speaking English, not Hebrew, but God in Christ dwells with us. And what form does the “wall” around our city take? It takes the form of church membership, as represented in baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And we maintain that wall through church discipline. We are not a people set apart geographically and militarily, but by our reliance on Christ.

Now stop and think: how have you often heard Nehemiah taught? It's usually taught as good moral lessons about leadership. And certainly there are lessons about leadership that we can find in Nehemiah. But if we stop there, what have we turned Nehemiah into? Something moralistic. Something all about us and not about Christ.

What Nehemiah teaches, ironically, is the utter inadequacy of any human leadership apart from Christ. Be the more powerful king or priest or governor or president or pastor and, at best, you will only accomplish something for a few short moments. Then it will pass. Christ alone can rescue us, set us apart, and keep us.