

# The Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

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## Introduction

There is considerable unease in English evangelicalism about biblical theology, especially among those who have a background in systematic theology. In some ways biblical theology has not penetrated evangelical circles in the U.K. to the same extent that it has in the U.S.A., in Australia, or even South Africa. For this reason there is uncertainty here about its validity and its orthodoxy.

There are many different traditions of biblical theology, some orthodox and many heterodox. On the continent it is practised by men who could hardly be considered submissive to the Bible. America has its own tradition of biblical theology where it was a part of the liberal attempt to reform itself, and it died out as a force in the 1960s. Its weakness was its inability to break free from the historico-critical method that chained it to rationalistic presuppositions and poor historical methods. On the other hand, American evangelicals like Geerhardus Vos pioneered it there at about the beginning of the twentieth century. It is still going strong at the Westminster Theological Colleges, and his books are still required reading.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Diocese of Sydney has produced a number of very good writers on the subject, and in some ways they are the current leaders in the field.<sup>2</sup>

Biblical theology as I understand it is unapologetically evangelical. I will be working on the basis that the Bible is true in everything that it teaches, and that it is the authentic voice of God spoken through the apostles and prophets.

## A Matter of Method

Biblical theology is essentially a different *method* of doing theology. Methods are changed when it is felt that better results can be achieved by a new approach. There was a Puritan who said that there is still much light to break

1 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) and *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

2 Goldsworthy and Dumbrell spring immediately to mind.

forth from God's word, and I believe that this method is a means to that end.

Whereas the systematic theologian arranges the contents of the Bible into headings or topics, like the doctrine of the church, etc., the biblical theologian uses the chronological and historical method to trace out the unfolding history of salvation. The reason is that this is the method used by the Bible writers, and it is felt that we should be guided not only by biblical truths, but also by biblical methods.

Systematic theologians in the past have treated the Bible as a source of raw materials from which a finished product called theology can be made. Abraham Kuyper was dismissive of biblical theology because he could not regard it as real theology. Perhaps there was also an element of reaction against the unbelieving liberalism of his day. Thinkers in his mould do not truly see the biblical authors as theologians in their own right. They study the apostle Paul topically for his insights. The findings must then be neatly arranged and organised, compared with the rest of the Bible, and presented to the church under the heading of 'The Work of Christ' or 'The Atonement'.

Biblical theology on the other hand tries to read Paul entirely on his own terms. It recognises that he is a consummate theologian and thinker of genius, and assumes that his method of presenting the gospel and related matters is just as important as the content. In short, it regards the letter to the Romans as theology in its final form. The work of the exegete is merely to become a voice for it, not to re-arrange it and re-package it.<sup>3</sup>

For example, a preacher trained in the systematic way of doing things might preach from a section of the third chapter of Romans. He might say something like, "Here are three truths that we can discern from this passage", and proceed to deliver a completely orthodox sermon of three points all beginning with the letter R. The points may or may not be presented in the order that they appear in the text and, indeed, according to his method, it is unimportant to do so. He has studied the passage, searching it for eternal truths, boiled it down to its essentials, and produced a polished sermon of the systematic type.

The biblical theologian, on the other hand, will attempt to teach the congregation the single point that the passage is making. There is no attempt

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<sup>3</sup> This, of course, raises many issues of hermeneutics and homiletics, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

to analyse the passage for 'eternal truths', just to communicate what Paul was originally saying to his first hearers by being as faithful to the text as possible, and to apply it to the present time.

Instead of treating the Bible like a tapestry from which all the red threads must be loosened and gathered into a pile, and then all the blue ones, and so on until every colour has its own pile arranged neatly in order and catalogued, the biblical theologian tries to see the historical panorama on its own terms. He steps back and has a good look at the whole picture as the original artist wove it together, without separating out any of the threads. If he does inspect a particular thread it will be by relating to the others.

This means that the first thing that he tries to achieve is a comprehensive view of the whole Bible seen chronologically from Genesis all the way through to the Revelation. This sounds like the sort of thing that every first-year student does, but it is quite different because of the *method* employed. It is more than becoming familiar with the facts, although that is absolutely vital. The trick is to find the theme that unifies the Bible in all of its literary diversity. This means that the evangelical axiom about the Bible being ultimately one book and authored by one Mind is taken for granted.

There is, indeed, a common theme that runs throughout the whole Bible from beginning to end. It is the 'kingdom of God'. Paul in Rome preached the 'Kingdom of God' and the things concerning Jesus Christ. Most people agree that the synoptic gospels are about the 'kingdom of God'. When Jesus began to preach in Galilee his message was that the 'kingdom of God is at hand'. It will be pointed out that the term 'kingdom of God' *per se* does not occur in the Old Testament, which might imply that it is primarily a New Testament concern. A concept might, however, be present without being named. The doctrine of the Trinity springs to mind as an example.

## Two Ways of Comparing Biblical and Systematic Theology

In one sense biblical theology is an intermediary between the biblical text and systematic theology. Because of its emphasis upon the historical and grammatical exegesis of the text, biblical theology is, in one sense, the

necessary precondition for the proper exercise of systematics. Without sound exegesis on the principles of biblical theology, systematics is invalidated because it has a foundation of sand.

On the other hand, biblical theology is a discipline in its own right and, as such, it can easily be seen as a rival to the throne. In truth there are not a few theologians who regard systematics with suspicion if not outright rejection, and *vice versa*. It is said that systematics is limited by its assumptions and methods. For example, many standard systematic works have no headings on the topics of suffering or joy, which are major biblical themes.

Arrogance is always sinful, even if it sometimes has good arguments behind it. The reality is that neither discipline can truly do without the other. Everyone systematises his theology, and it can be done truly biblically only when the Bible is read on its own terms and by its own method – the explanation of salvation history. The two disciplines should interact as a way of enhancing themselves and each other. It is a part of the hermeneutical and fro necessary for coming to grips with the word of God. Each discipline should be asking the other the hard questions that force people to re-examine unspoken and unrecognised assumptions that may unwittingly be distorting the gospel.

Discussion of theory is never complete without a practical example of the relationship between the two disciplines. In showing how biblical theology affects systematic theology, we must first take a look at the historical big picture, and then compare the results with some issues of systematics.

## The Big Picture

### **The Kingdom Lost**

The entire plot of salvation history can be summarised as the creation of Gods' kingdom, its loss, and its final restoration. The Genesis account is not merely about how the world was made. Rather, it is about how God's Kingdom was made. Any Kingdom must have three elements, namely, a king, a people, and a territory. The Garden of Eden was such a realm. Here were God's subjects living under his rule in his realm. In short, every ingredient of a kingdom is present, even though the word itself is absent.

Adam, as God's vice-regent, was put to a test to see whether he would faithfully serve him. If he succeeded he would become immortal and live forever. If he failed he and his kin would die. He failed the test, and he was expelled from the Garden with the entrance barred. Not only that, but he brought sin and death into the world through his disobedience. The Kingdom had come to nothing because of sin.

The history of the world up to the Flood illustrates what happens to man's autonomous kingdoms when God withdraws his grace. Sin multiplies until there is no alternative but total destruction.

After the deluge God appointed Noah to re-establish the Kingdom, giving him commands to be fruitful and multiply over the earth in terms remarkably similar to those once given to Adam. Noah is God's subject in God's realm living under God's rule. This second start leads to the farcical attempt to build the tower of Babel. Mankind had once again turned from God and sought to establish dominion on his own terms, and ruin and destruction seemed inevitable.

### **The Kingdom Promised**

It is in this context that God calls Abram to leave his country and go to Canaan. The promises that God made to him are a blueprint for the new Kingdom. God promises to give him many descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey, to be his God and the God of his children after him – his divine King in other words – and that eventually a boy child springing from his line would bring salvation to all the other nations of the earth. In short, Abraham was promised a kingdom under God that would eventually include the whole world.

The New Testament tells us that the gospel was preached to Abraham in advance. Now, justification by faith is certainly a part of that, but it is not the whole story. Neither must we think that Abraham saw Jesus in some kind of ecstatic vision. The gospel that was preached to him is contained entirely in the promises. What was preached or proclaimed to Abraham was the Gospel of the Kingdom. God would restore the lost paradise in Canaan for Abraham's children. In the land of promise God the King would rule over his forgiven people in his realm.

Jumping ahead by almost five hundred years we come to the Exodus. According to plan and exactly on schedule, God delivers Abraham's children from Egyptian bondage. In effect, he declares war on Pharaoh on behalf of his people Israel. He destroys the Egyptian economy, leads his people out in triumph, and utterly annihilates their enemies in the waters of the Red Sea. He is doing what every great king is expected to do for his people. He saves them from their enemies and rules them in peace in their own land.

What we have here is salvation pure and simple. Systematic theologians often have great difficulty in understanding this, even though that is what the Bible says it is. To a mind trained to conceive of salvation exclusively in terms of justification, regeneration, adoption, and glorification, this very literal, earthly and political salvation seems to be no salvation at all. I know how I struggled with it. The exegetical secret is to think in terms of the 'gospel of the kingdom'. In terms of this framework the Exodus makes total sense. Without it, it is just an allegory.

The writer to the Hebrews is clear that a generation of Israelites died in the wilderness for lack of faith in the gospel. What was it that they failed to believe? The *ordo salutis* or that Jesus would one day be raised from the dead? No. Instead they failed to believe God's promise of a kingdom. They turned back from the land in terror of its mighty inhabitants, refusing to believe that God would destroy those giants just as he had annihilated Pharaoh's army. They were unable to believe the gospel of the kingdom of God in Canaan, and they died for it.

### **The Kingdom Comes**

Eventually a believing generation is born and they take possession of the Rest, as the land of Canaan was called. There, by faith and obedience, they would rest from their enemies and live out their days in peace under God's benevolent rule.

In spite of continuing rebellion against Israel's King, the promises slowly but surely come to fruition. Eventually David controls the whole territory promised to Abraham and, as an anointed king of God's choosing, conquers all his enemies. Under his successor, Solomon, the Israelites live in peace in

the land with God and man.<sup>4</sup>

The fulfilment of the promises is attained with the inauguration of the Temple, when the glory of God so fills it that the priests are compelled to stop ministering. God is literally seen to be living in the midst of his people in his land. The Gospel of the Kingdom has come to fulfilment. God has fulfilled his promises to Abraham. God is king in the midst of his numberless people, there is a faithful human vice-regent, and the land is there to enjoy. This is the Old Testament ideal and model of salvation within which the New Testament must be understood.

All that remains is for the promised seed, who will bring salvation to the Gentiles as well, to be revealed. David had been promised that God would regard a descendant coming from his body as his own son.<sup>5</sup> This Son of God and of David would one day inherit the throne and his kingdom would have no end. It is now clear that Abraham's seed is also David's seed, a king in the royal line of Israel. From this point on the title Son of God would be reserved for the coming Jewish King. It is a messianic title, and was understood this way by the Jews. Of course, no-one guessed that it would eventually be fulfilled literally by the virgin birth. To the Jews it was only a human title belonging to the Messiah.

### **The Kingdom Forfeited**

It all falls to pieces. Solomon permits idolatry, the kingdom is divided in judgement and, in time, both fragments of the once mighty realm are destroyed because of unbelief and disobedience. The exile is a major catastrophe and a very important key to understanding what Jesus is talking about when he begins to proclaim that the Kingdom is at hand.<sup>6</sup>

Even before the exile the prophets had begun to speak of another kingdom that would rise from the ashes of David's realm. There are hints of a coming

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4 Saul is the first Messiah in Israel, David the second, and Jesus the last. A Messiah is one who has been anointed by God, as that was the manner of their consecration to the throne. They were known as the 'Lord's Anointed', or 'Messiah'. In the NT the Greek equivalent is Christ, and it is a synonym in that context for the King of Israel.

5 2 Samuel 7:14.

6 N.T. Wright has written a great deal on the exile as a key to the NT gospel that deserves attention. His heterodoxy on justification by faith does not nullify the very good work that he has done in this area.

Israelite king from the house of David whose kingdom would never be destroyed as his had. Instead it would endure unto the ages of ages. God would restore his people again to the promised Rest and live among them again. Then all sin and suffering would be at an end, salvation would come to the Gentiles by incorporation into the Kingdom of the Son of David, and the Garden of Eden would cover the whole face of the earth.

For the sake of clarity let us call this salvation the Kingdom of Prophecy.

The return to the land in the days of Cyrus by the remnant is not the restored kingdom of prophecy. The people endure great suffering, the royal House of David is not restored, and they are under the heel of pagan oppressors for over four hundred years. Although they are back in the land the kingdom is just a dream. They have not returned to God and neither has God returned to them. They know from their political condition that nationally they are still under God's curse.

Indeed, the prophet Daniel had been told in visions that four great pagan empires would hold sway over the earth and over the Israelites until a Son of Man appeared who would restore the Kingdom of God. His kingdom is one not hewn out by human hands and it will fill the earth, and his power and dominion will have no end. Until then the exile from God would continue in spite of the return, until the appointed time for the restoration.

### **The Beginning of the Final Restoration**

The Gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus began his preaching ministry by saying: 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.'<sup>7</sup>

It is highly significant that no Israelite asked him what he meant, and that Mark makes no effort to explain. The reason is, of course, that Jesus is speaking to a people who are awaiting a kingdom. Mark assumes that his readers are familiar with the Old Testament hope and, according to his abbreviated literary style, he feels no need to repeat himself unnecessarily.<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:17.

<sup>8</sup> I am assuming that Mark was writing for a biblically literate group, whether in Rome or in Judea.



is taken for granted that Jesus is proclaiming the gospel of the restoration of David's fallen house. The true ending of the exile of the people from God's favour is being proclaimed. God's blessing is about to return to Israel as he promised to Abraham and his seed.<sup>9</sup>

The gospels confirm that this is indeed what the disciples expected Jesus to do. The surprise for them is that he does not do it as they had hoped – by military conquest as David did – but dies instead. The wretched disciples on the road to Emmaus had hoped that Jesus of Nazareth was the one appointed by Yahweh to restore Israel's glory days, but the Sanhedrin and the Romans had put a brutal and unanswerable stop to that by nailing him to a tree! Dead kings save no-one, and Jesus is just another failed claimant to the throne.<sup>10</sup>

However, God vindicated Jesus of Nazareth by raising him from among the dead on the third day. In doing so he appointed him as both Lord and Christ over all Israel and over all the nations of the earth.<sup>11</sup> All of this was written in the Scriptures, but no-one could see it until Jesus had died and risen. Only then were their minds opened to believe what the Bible had said.<sup>12</sup> The unmistakable biblical identifying mark of the true Messiah was his death and restoration to bodily immortality on the third day!

When the disciples grasped it their hearts soared. So it was all true after all! God had identified Jesus as the Messiah by many signs and wonders, not least by the resurrection. Now there was no more doubt and, after forty days instruction in the kingdom of God prior to the ascension, they asked the question that they were craving to have answered: 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'<sup>13</sup>

Jesus does not respond with disappointment and contradict their understanding of the kingdom. He does not reply that the kingdom is not a political entity but an other-worldly immaterial dimension for the post-mortem benefit of disembodied souls. Instead he affirms the validity of their question and its assumptions by saying, in effect, that it is not yet to be, and

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9 'Magnificat', or 'Song of Mary'.

10 Messiah and Christ are synonyms in this context for the King of Israel.

11 Acts 2:36; Isaiah 49:6.

12 Luke 24:27-31.

13 Acts 1:6.

that they must return to Jerusalem to await the gift of the Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

There they received the promised gift, and immediately began boldly to proclaim that the man whom the Jews had killed by the hands of the Romans is indeed the promised king, or Messiah, and that by raising him from the dead God had given him the throne promised a thousand years before to David's offspring.<sup>15</sup> 'Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'<sup>16</sup>

The kingdom is real because one man, Jesus the chosen Messiah, has entered it by resurrection from the dead.<sup>17</sup> God has done for Jesus what he is going to do for all of faithful Israel on the Day of the Lord, when King Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. The Jewish royal line has been re-established because the King of Israel is ruling from the throne of David at the right hand of power, and he will one day return to judge and to save the earth.

This gospel of the kingdom and its king must be proclaimed among all nations, for it is by hearing with faith that people are made citizens. When the full number of the elect from among the Gentiles as well as the Jews has been brought in, he will come again in power to claim his right – the entire earth and everything in it. At that time all things will be made new. The creation will be liberated from its bondage to death and futility, and all who have trusted in Christ for the remission of sins and bodily resurrection will be restored to life, never again to taste corruption or the curse.

When that happens Eden will be restored, but with a difference. This time it will cover the whole earth and there will be no possibility of failure. The New Jerusalem will descend to the earth and find here its final resting-place. The Father will return with his Son to the earth to dwell amongst the children of men once again, just as he did in the Garden, in the wilderness, and in the Temple.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus, the second Adam, has succeeded where the first Adam could not.

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14 Acts 1:8.

15 2 Samuel 7:12-17.

16 Acts 2:36.

17 Jesus did not enter the kingdom on Good Friday, but on Easter Day. He had said that he would not drink wine again until he drank it with them in the kingdom. One of his first acts after the resurrection was to eat and drink with his disciples.

18 Rev. 21:3.

Where Adam brought sin, death, and the loss of the kingdom, Jesus the King has brought righteousness, life never-ending, and the sure and certain coming restoration of the kingdom of God.

## Some Implications for Systematic Theology

### **The Rediscovery of the Resurrection**

Western theology has, from the time of Anselm, tended to focus upon the cross and the atonement. This means that the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ has been at centre stage. Evangelical theology in particular is profoundly cross-centred. There is a great indispensable truth in the centrality of the cross, but it must be joined to the centrality of the resurrection or the gospel is distorted.

If the cross is about the priesthood of Christ and his atonement for us, then the resurrection is about his kingship and the attainment of the kingdom for us. It is also about the future of those who are called by grace to be citizens of this never-ending realm. What biblical theology has given us is a more balanced understanding of the gospel. Many of us can preach the cross, but how many can preach the resurrection? Not very many I suspect. The apostles preached the resurrection for all that it is worth, and we should do the same.

Polemics about the empty tomb do not answer the question, because there is no trace of that kind of reasoning in the Bible. The resurrection is treated as a given fact of revelation. Neither is it sufficient to talk merely of the resurrection vindicating the cross. That is a fact, but it is not its primary or only meaning. The resurrection is much more than a post-script to the cross.

Biblical theology has given us a new understanding of the kingship of Christ. No longer will it do to portray the kingdom of God as an abstract relationship that finds its fulfilment in the sky when we die. The bodily resurrection has shown us that salvation is according to the biblical pattern of God's people living on God's earth under his rule. The kingdom of Israel in Canaan is the type that points to the final anti-type, the literal earthly rule of David's son over his resurrected subjects in God's land forever.<sup>19</sup>

19 This model has no hint of pre millennial thinking.

### **The Rediscovery of Eschatology**

A look at the standard works of systematic theology reveals that eschatology is limited to the second coming and the final judgement. Thanks to the work done by Gerhardus Vos<sup>20</sup> and others, it is now clear that eschatology and soteriology are so closely identified that it is impossible to separate them. The New Testament is the eschatology of the Old Testament. The events of Jesus' life and its consequences are eschatological because they inaugurated the age to come. The Spirit has been poured out in the last days, said Peter, and we are living in the culmination of the ages.

It is, of course, true that there is more to come. We are living in the overlap of the present wicked age and the fulfilled age to come. We are in the future and we are not. The future is now and not yet.

I think that it is true to say that the popular model of salvation outside of time and space has resulted in the destruction of eschatology. Eschatology must have an historical outworking and realisation to have any meaning. When it is abstracted into a timeless zone outside of creation it becomes irrelevant to the promises of Abraham and their fulfilment. It becomes detached from the Bible, the world, and hence from reality.

### **The Rediscovery of the Old Testament**

The big picture of the kingdom completely integrates the Old Testament and the New Testament. Far from being a source of children's stories and a collection of prophecies about the Christ, the Old Testament becomes the framework within which to understand the events and teaching of the New Testament. It also invalidates the separation of the study of the Bible into two separate disciplines – Old Testament and New Testament. The kingdom paradigm as set forth in promise, reality, and restoration in the Old Testament makes sense of everything that Jesus came to do as recorded in the New Testament.

The preaching of Jesus makes no historical sense without the understanding that the exile had destroyed the Israelite kingdom promised to Abraham, and that the faithful Jews were awaiting its promised consolation in the renewed kingdom. The Magnificat of Mary, the words of Gabriel to the astonished

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20 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology and The Pauline Eschatology*.

virgin, the prophecies of Elizabeth and Zechariah, the ‘Song’ of Simeon, all testify to the New Testament fulfilment of this long awaited hope.<sup>21</sup>

Biblical theology makes the preaching of the Old Testament into an exiting adventure. The Exodus can either be illegitimately used as a springboard to go straight into the New Testament, or it can be preached by relating it to the overarching theme of biblical theology, the kingdom of God, and thus to the person and work of Jesus for us. The Old Testament used in this way becomes a journey of discovery for both the preacher and the congregation.<sup>22</sup>

### Typology

Too often typology degenerates into allegory in the hands of unskilled exegetes. In the past, most notably within the Dutch tradition of Reformed theology, biblical theology was written off and discredited precisely for this reason.<sup>23</sup> Allegory is still a real and present danger.

The thing is to recognise that a type is not merely a pale imitation of the real thing, but a prototype and a reality in itself. Take the kingdom for example. The kingdom of Israel is a type of Christ’s never-ending realm. This does not mean that it was not a real kingdom in every sense of the word. Indeed, it provided us with a working model of what Christ’s kingdom will be. There is a human king of the line of David, ruling God’s people under him according to his law, and living in the land of promise. It is shadowy not because it is not real, but because it did not last. Shadows come and go, but when the reality is here to stay the temporary expression is made redundant.

The danger is to see the Old Testament type as a literal expression of an abstract New Testament antitype! What I mean is that the Israelite kingdom can be seen as a grossly earthly prototype of a non-material and abstract reality – heaven. The usual word used to describe such an abstraction is ‘spiritual’. This is a misuse of the term. Jesus has a material and physical body

21 Morning and Evening Prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer* is a masterpiece of liturgical biblical theology, with clear links made between Jesus, Abraham, and the kingdom.

22 Graeme Goldsworthy’s *Preaching the whole Bible as Christian Scripture* is excellent.

23 Johann Koch (Cocceius) worked out a biblical theological treatment of covenant theology, but marginalised himself by using allegory, and attacking the contemporary systematic theology of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century as wrong-headed. See J.I. Packer, “On Covenant Theology,” *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, 4 vols., (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998-9), p. 21.

of flesh and bone as Thomas discovered, and yet it is called spiritual by Paul. The kingdom is not spiritual because it is immaterial, but because it is of God. These are semi-Platonic categories of thought that should have no place in Christian theology.

### **The Reformation of the Redefinition of Salvation**

There can be little doubt that biblical theology presents us with a different model of salvation from the one that has entered popular religion. The popular model sees disembodied souls enjoying post-mortem bliss in a dimension outside of time and space called heaven. There they remain forever. Some people would insist upon a bodily resurrection at the end of the world, but only to resume life in this abstract paradise. This view is so entrenched that it is an absolute non-negotiable given for many preachers and congregations.

The Bible, however, offers very little support for this view. The Scriptures depict salvation in an entirely different framework. Salvation is the reversal of the curse of sin and bodily death that Adam brought into the world through his disobedience. This involves the redemption of a people of God from among the Jews and the Gentiles. Redemption is accomplished by the death and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. By his death he atones for the sins of those who trust in him, and by his resurrection the Davidic kingdom is re-established. He has begun to rule the earth from the right hand of God the Father, and he will return one day to save from the grave those who have died in his faith and fear.

Those who are raised to eternal bodily existence will live on the renewed and reborn earth, above which will be a new heavens, as it was in the beginning. The creation in the meantime groans in eager expectation as it awaits the revelation of the sons of God, for then it will be restored to its original and pristine condition to provide a context and an environment for the redeemed race.<sup>24</sup>

This is the eternal kingdom of Israel with its international citizenry that was promised to Abraham, David, and their seed Jesus. God the Father will live with us and among us once more just as he did in the garden, in the wilderness, and in the Temple.<sup>25</sup> His Son Jesus will rule and reign over us in a

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<sup>24</sup> Romans 8: 19-25.

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 21: 3.

world of perfect righteousness, world without end. Amen.

The focus is most emphatically not upon post-mortem disembodied bliss, but upon the resurrected people and kingdom of God on the renewed earth. Systematic theology has fallen prey in this area to semi-Platonistic and rationalistic assumptions without recognising them. These ideas are brought unwittingly to the biblical text, which is then re-interpreted in terms of an alien model.

It is here that biblical theology helps us to recognise some of our blind spots and unspoken pre-understandings by comparing them with the big picture of creation, fall, and recreation.

## Conclusion

There is much else to add, but these are a few areas where biblical theology and systematics have interacted, resulting in a more faithfully biblical understanding.

Biblical theology differs from the topical method of systematic theology by emphasising the chronological and historical method employed by the Bible itself. In one sense it is an intermediate discipline between the text and systematics, and in another it can be seen as a competing discipline. Whereas systematic theology re-arranges the data of the Bible under topical headings, biblical theology tries to treat the Bible as completed theology in its own right. Not just the biblical *data*, but also the biblical *method* of presentation must be seen as normative.

Romans, for example, is not a source of raw materials but a finished product, and it must be treated as such. More than that, it must be located historically in its proper place within the big picture of the kingdom of God. The work of the preacher, then, is merely to become a voice in the present time for Paul.

I have looked at how the overarching theme of the Kingdom has brought out the centrality of the resurrection, the rediscovery of a biblical eschatology, the total integration of the Old Testament with the New Testament, the proper use of typology, and most importantly, the redefinition of the model of salvation from one of post-mortem disembodied bliss to one of salvation by

the redemption and re-creation of God's kingdom on earth.

Both disciplines have a rightful place in theology, and the differences and tensions are useful tools for sharpening one another like iron. Everyone organises what he has learned into some kind of system, but if it can be done by giving the finished Scripture its due as completed theology, by utilising the historical and chronological method, and by seeing the individual text's place within the big picture, our congregations will feel that they are learning their Bibles for the very first time, and we will rediscover the joy of teaching.

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