

Treasure New and Old: An Introduction to the *Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview*

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At the end of a string of kingdom parables Jesus inquires if his disciples understand his teaching. The answer reported by the Evangelist is a simple affirmative, “Yes” (Mt 13:51). What exactly the disciples comprehended is uncertain, though the remainder of the Gospels indicates that their confidence outdistanced their knowledge. But Matthew does not record any parsing of their answer. Instead, our Lord states a necessary consequence (Διὰ τοῦτο): “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt 13:52).² A scribe of the kingdom knows where the treasure is, has been profoundly changed by this truth himself, and delights to display it.

This parable instructs us that NT teachers possess the incalculable privilege and responsibility of presenting revealed truth. The essence of biblical teaching is not to figure everything out but to receive and draw out divine revelation. Such teaching is a great commission, as Jesus announces before ascending to his Father’s right hand (Mt 28:18–20). The scribe who has become a disciple proclaims the wonder of God’s verbal self-disclosure in its interconnected splendor and with whole-life application. His calling is not that of inventor but rather curator, treasuring and transferring “the good deposit entrusted” to him (2 Tm 1:14 ESV). Curating requires careful study, interpretation, and applications that are faithful to the text.

Implicit in Jesus’ words in Matthew 13:52 is the complementary relationship between the Testaments. The message of the kingdom is new, yet not-new as well (Mt 13:35). It is *old*, as in the Law and the Prophets. It is *new*, as in the Master’s opening of disciples’ “minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45) and giving additional revelation “by [his] apostles” (2 Pt 3:2). At the macrolevel, unearthing the treasure entails demonstrating God’s progressive revelation and employing hermeneutics that show how to read all of Scripture as a Christian. Consequently, a Bible teacher knows that “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tm 2:15) necessitates learning how to think in scriptural categories, letting God’s Word dictate the terms of understanding.

What a kingdom scribe teaches reaches beyond intriguing information, both for himself and for those whom he serves as curator. This divine truth disciples giver and receiver alike. Its impact forms beliefs, the kind that shape aspirations and undergird uncertainties and work themselves out in

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everyday choices that glorify the Lord. God's kingdom and righteousness unmistakably matter most; they elicit the heart's deepest loyalty because they are where the treasure truly lies (Mt 6:21, 33).

What Is in a Name?

The *Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview* aims to serve ministers and students of the Bible by displaying and applying Scripture's treasures through theological writing. To aid the church in commending and defending the faith in our late modern context, the journal's articles intend to exemplify rigorous study that is faithful to Scripture, consistent with our theological heritage, alert to current scholarship, and directed toward contemporary application. While authors will demonstrate a variety of methodological approaches, the ministry of the teacher described in Matthew 13:52 serves as our template. Scripture alone stands as the touchstone of theology and worldview. The ensuing paragraphs settle into the journal's title by exploring our understanding of biblical theology, its history at BJU Seminary, and its connection to biblical worldview.

Biblical Theology

Theologians employ the adjective *biblical* in different ways to qualify their study of God and his revelation. By practicing *biblical theology*, many intend to clarify that Scripture is the normative source and basis of their work, as opposed to theology anchored in human reasoning or experience. Historically, some groups have started with this necessary understanding of theology but then digressed into an extreme version known as *biblicism*, the presumption that theology can be truest to the Bible by setting aside the doctrinal deliberations of the church in previous centuries.³ Others use the designation *biblical theology* more specifically to refer to the theology presented in the biblical writings themselves.⁴ Those who believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word regard this theology as unified truth that the diverse books communicate, while others less persuaded of the orthodox doctrine of divine inspiration accept the possibility of conflicting viewpoints. In fact, the modern discipline of biblical theology originated with Johann P. Gabler, whose rationalist presuppositions chafed against Lutheran confessionalism. Consequently, Gabler did not circumscribe his descriptive, historical study of the biblical writers' teaching by the unity and divine authority of Scripture.⁵

In his 1981 *Biblical Viewpoint* article on biblical theology, Robert Bell notes that conservatives commonly distinguish biblical theology from systematic theology in terms of *method*. Whereas the latter arranges biblical truth in logical categories, the former works with the same content and "presents it in its historical order so that the student can view God's truths as they unfolded through the ages of

³ For example, devotional German Pietists, such as Jacob Spener (1635–1705), exemplified a conservative antipathy toward dogmatics. See C. H. H. Scobie, "History of Biblical Theology," *NDBT*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 13. Michael S. Horton describes *biblicism* as "the tendency to identify one's own interpretation of Scripture with Scripture itself." "Historical Theology," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 294.

⁴ James Hamilton Jr. defines biblical theology as "the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors." *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

⁵ Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2010), 3–4.

Biblical revelation.”⁶ In that same journal issue, Stewart Custer emphasizes this understanding of biblical theology, describing its method as “the progressive development of Scriptural truth.”⁷

The renowned father of conservative biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos, had advocated this method because it allows “Scripture to set its own agenda” and employs the categories provided by “the divine economy of revelation itself.”⁸ However, Vos had also argued that like systematic theology, biblical theology “transforms the Biblical material.”⁹ Drawing on the work of J. Barton Payne,¹⁰ Bell goes a significant step further in distinguishing the two disciplines by not only their *method* but also their *nature*. Whereas systematic theology asks, “What is true of God?”, biblical theology inquires, “What did God reveal?” This understanding of biblical theology permits various methods, including “trac[ing] the subject through Scripture in chronological order,” comparing Scripture references with one another, grouping verses on the same subject to aid interpretation, and “analyz[ing] and summariz[ing] these truths.”¹¹ Systematic theology takes the analysis and summary of biblical theology, adds in theological reflection on general revelation, and draws inferences in order to answer questions the Bible does not directly address. Systematic theology is vital. However, distinguishing between what the Bible teaches and what theologians have concluded about God is crucial to “ascrib[ing] supreme authority to the Bible.”¹²

Thus, governing theological principles, not methodological rigidity, define biblical theology. The canon’s forward progress and divinely authored unity legitimize the kind of biblical theology that traces themes through Scripture. Individual biblical books also communicate theological messages. Consequently, as D. A. Carson suggests, intertextual theology involves the complementary approaches of synthesizing major biblical themes as they develop organically and harmonizing the theology of canonical books, corpuses, and Testaments.¹³ In summary, Brian Collins states, “Biblical theology is the discipline which seeks to discern the theological emphases of the biblical writers themselves, giving

⁶ “Introduction: What Is Biblical Theology?” *Biblical Viewpoint* 15/2 (1981), 81. See also Bell, *Theological Messages*, 1–7.

⁷ “The Value of Biblical Theology,” *Biblical Viewpoint* 15/2 (1981), 86. Custer recommends studying the progressive development through Scripture of particular topics, as well as the study of the message of particular biblical books and tracing the unfolding meaning of words. *Ibid.*, 84–86.

⁸ In David C. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 208, 140.

⁹ *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 15. Vos famously remarks, “In Biblical Theology the principle is one of historical, in Systematic Theology it is one of logical construction. Biblical Theology draws a *line* of development. Systematic Theology draws a *circle*.” *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962).

¹¹ Bell, 81.

¹² *Ibid.*, 82. This understanding of biblical theology is noticeable in Stewart Custer’s editorial in the inaugural issue of the Seminary’s former journal: “The title, *Biblical Viewpoint*, is not meant to imply an arrogant or presumptuous attitude, but rather a determination to let the meaning of Scripture decide the theological position of the periodical instead of reading into Scripture a preconceived philosophical or theological interpretation. One presupposition which all contributors will confess is a fervent faith in the verbal inspiration and authority of the Bible.” *Biblical Viewpoint* 1/1 (1967), 5.

¹³ D. A. Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 35–36.

careful attention to the particular theological emphases of specific books, the historical development of theological themes throughout the canon, and the relation of these to the salvation-historical storyline.”¹⁴

Although no theologian can hermeneutically seal off his study from the influence of his cultural milieu, those who practice biblical theology endeavor to allow Scripture to speak on its own terms.¹⁵ Biblical theology at its best links the exegesis of individual texts to systematic reflection and application of all truth about God and his world. The methodological progression of exegetical analysis to canonical synthesis to systematic conclusions does not negate the fact that these three disciplines are interdependent and mutually informing. For example, systematic inferences logically succeed but must also inform the other disciplines, lest biblical texts or themes be pitted against one another.

. . . At BJU Seminary

Even an appreciation of its method and nature does not fully explain why biblical theology found a permanent home at BJU Seminary.¹⁶ Three interrelated factors provide additional context for this longstanding emphasis: the seminary’s theological premise, nondenominational posture, and faculty lineage. First, while historic fundamentalism has gained notoriety for what it opposes, its first principle is affirmative. However imperfect its application may be from time to time, the premise is that God’s inspired Word constitutes our utmost allegiance.¹⁷ This theological commitment produces a necessary, negative corollary, as demonstrated in the psalmist’s confession, “I esteem right all Your precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way” (Ps 119:128). What the Bible teaches about itself and other central doctrines requires unalterable opposition to alternatives. At its core fundamentalism insists that there are certain beliefs necessary to the gospel and, therefore, that Christian fellowship should not be extended to those who deny these fundamentals. Christianity is a faith for which to “contend earnestly” (Jude 3). Furthermore, because there is one way to stay on the straight path and a myriad of avenues to diverge from it, a foundational commitment to Scripture requires ongoing vigilance to align ourselves to God’s words, generation after generation. Hence the

¹⁴ Brian C. Collins, “Scripture, Hermeneutics, and Theology: Evaluating Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2011), 205.

¹⁵ John Owen, the towering Puritan theologian who predated modern biblical theology by over a century, speaks decisively for the priority of not only what Scripture says but also how Scripture says it: “Truths have their power and efficacy upon our minds, not only from themselves, but from their posture in the Scripture. There are they placed in such aspects towards, in such conjunctions one with another, as that their influences on our minds do greatly depend thereon.” *The causes, waies & means of understanding the mind of God* (1678), 166; cf. *The Works of John Owen* (1850–53; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 4:189.

¹⁶ In 2001 the Graduate School of Religion became Bob Jones University Seminary and Graduate School of Religion. In 2018 the name was simplified to BJU Seminary.

¹⁷ George Marsden suggests, “The crucial issue [for fundamentalists] seems rather to have been perceived as that of the authority of God in Scripture in relation to the authority of modern science, particularly science in the form of higher criticism of Scripture itself.” George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2006), 120.

question, “What does the Bible teach?” Ministry trends come and go. Theological emphases rise and fall. But what does God himself accentuate in the timeless self-revelation preserved in our Bibles?¹⁸

Second, since its inception BJU has maintained a nondenominational posture.¹⁹ Consequently, the unity has never been around denominational distinctives but rather around the core doctrines of the Christian faith. For understandable reasons, not many Methodist presidents (as was Bob Jones, Sr.) would hire a Presbyterian (as was Charles Brokenshire) to lead a Christian college’s graduate religion program and teach systematic theology.²⁰ Because of this intentional focus on non-negotiables, BJU Seminary has deemed liberty appropriate when discussing historically debated theological positions that are within the bounds of orthodoxy.

Third, as is so often the case, an institution and its emphases are shaped by its leaders. Early and longtime professors made a firm imprint on the theological character of the institution. Charles Brokenshire, a graduate of Princeton Seminary where Geerhardus Vos served as chair of biblical theology, brought a masterful grasp of languages to his roles as faculty member (1943–54) and first-ever dean of BJU’s graduate school of religion.²¹ Brokenshire supervised Marshall Neal’s 1947 dissertation, “An Examination of the NT Concept of the Kingdom of God,” in which the future dean of BJU’s school of religion (1965–78) traced the Bible’s doctrine of the kingdom from the OT through the intertestamental times to the Gospels. Alongside Neal, Timothy Lin influenced many early students, including Robert Reymond. Though later known for his systematic theology, Reymond wrote his dissertation on OT covenants, explaining, “The procedure, or approach, in the study was the progressive method of Biblical Theology.”²² Reymond taught in the BJU graduate school of religion from 1961–68, during which time he passed on to Eugene Merrill, among others, the emphasis of tracing progressive revelation.²³

The development of biblical theology at BJU Seminary continued with Stewart Custer (NT faculty member, 1960–2002) and Robert Bell (OT faculty member, 1968–2014). Custer edited

¹⁸ One pastoral precursor to the biblical-theological heritage of BJU Seminary is the Bible study common among conservatives in the early twentieth century and epitomized in the teaching of G. Campbell Morgan. Morgan’s method of studying books of the Bible, while not directly connected to the academic discipline of biblical theology, shares common ground with its nature and method. Morgan attempted to provide “a bird’s-eye view of the contents of the Divine Library” as he taught a different book of the Bible each week. Jill Morgan, *A Man of the Word: Life of G. Campbell Morgan* (1951; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 86. This approach to studying Scripture was diffused in the ministerial training at BJU through homiletics courses taught by Richard Rupp and then Mark Minnick and Stephen Hankins during the final decades of the twentieth century. Stephen J. Hankins, interview by author, September 11, 2020.

¹⁹ In the opening decades of the twentieth century, an interdenominational network of influential Protestants united their efforts to preserve the Christian gospel and the institutions that had historically proclaimed it. These fundamentalist leaders represented an array of denominational affiliations, including Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians.

²⁰ See Mark Sidwell, “Charles Digory Brokenshire (1885–1954),” *Biblical Viewpoint* 25/1 (1991): 78.

²¹ See Sidwell, 72–74.

²² Robert L. Reymond, “An Investigation of the Covenants of the OT and Their Significance in the Theocratic Program of God” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1962), 11.

²³ Reymond was one of two committee members for Merrill’s dissertation, which unfolded the revelation of a biblical prophet as developed through various OT periods. Eugene Haines Merrill, “An Investigation of the Person and Work of the OT Prophet of God” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1963).

Biblical Viewpoint, which he envisioned as “a journal of simple Bible exposition for busy pastors.”²⁴ First published in April 1967, *Biblical Viewpoint* enjoyed a thirty-eight-year history that entailed more than 750 articles and hundreds of book reviews. Custer left his imprint on multiple generations of students through his meek spirituality, his courses in methods of Bible exposition, and his approach in theology courses of expositing all relevant verses in canonical order rather than grouping truths thematically.²⁵ Bell helped shape students’ theological outlook through courses like Advanced OT Theology and culminated decades of study and research with *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books*.²⁶ A steady stream of biblical-theological dissertations also flowed in the following decades, often supervised by Neal, Custer, or Bell.²⁷ While consistent in their outlook on the nature of the discipline, these theses also evidence development in methodology, such as the wedding of literary analysis to biblical theology.²⁸ And the legacy continues, as recent dissertations suggest.²⁹

. . . shaping a Biblical Worldview

Because biblical theology is not an end in itself, advancing this heritage follows a teleological path through systematic theology toward worldview. There is at least a two-fold connection between biblical theology and biblical worldview. First, while Christian literature, websites, and podcasts attest to abundant discussion about worldview, rightly aligning our desires and thought necessitates careful attention to what the Bible actually says. Never before have so many voices had the technological capabilities to speak so loudly to influence the core assumptions and values by which we navigate life. Confidence that the sixty-six canonical books are divinely inspired and therefore wholly profitable means that Scripture’s own themes and messages and cross references and storyline are the starting

²⁴ Hankins, interview by author, September 11, 2020. Hankins’ oral recounting of Custer’s ministry and impact provided helpful insight. Also, see Stephen J. Hankins, “Man of Grace—Man of God: A Spiritual Tribute to Stewart Custer,” *Biblical Viewpoint* 36/1 (2002): 1–5.

²⁵ The inaugural issue focused on Romans and included articles by Stewart Custer, Charles Woodbridge, Daniel Krusich, Marshall Neal, Robert Reymond, and Edward Panosian. Other contributors to early issues of the journal included Ernest Pickering, R. T. Ketcham, Henry Morris, Dwight Gustafson, Robert Picirilli, Monroe Parker, and Allen Ross.

²⁶ See footnote 4 above.

²⁷ One example is “The Theology of Hosea,” defended by Philip Brown in 1975. Though Wesleyan by upbringing and conviction, Brown primarily drew on biblical theology in his dissertation rather than systematic theology, with stated commitments to biblical inerrancy, progressive revelation, Christological fulfillment, and literary unity. Allan Philip Brown, “The Theology of Hosea” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1975), 16–18.

²⁸ See Bryan Smith, “The Presentation of Judah in Genesis 37–50 and Its Implications for the Narrative’s Structural and Thematic Unity” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2002), 19–21; and Philip A. Brown, II, “A Literary and Theological Analysis of the Book of Ezra” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2002), 12–16.

²⁹ For very recent examples, Kristopher Kenneth Endean, “The Call to Leave Simplicity: A Biblical Theology of Culpable Spiritual Ignorance among the People of God” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2020); and Andrew Minnick, “Bringing Many Sons to Glory: A Biblical-Theological Investigation of the Intersection of Sonship and Resurrection and Its Implications for Filial Christology, Including the Christological Significance of the Πρωτότοκος Title” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2020).

point for our worldview.³⁰ Biblical theology helps orient our everyday lives to God’s categories, rather than conforming God’s revelation to our contemporary outlook.³¹

Second, regarding method, recent biblical theology has prioritized the Christian metanarrative, the big story of creation–fall–redemption–glory unfolded in the historical narratives, theocratic legislation, worshipful poetry, proverbial instruction, prophetic pronouncements, Gospel testimony, and apostolic letters that comprise the Bible. In other words, many current ways of doing biblical theology accentuate the continuity and progressive unfolding of the Bible’s message. The Bible’s theology coheres in its divine Author’s storyline. Because Scripture exhibits an organic development in its narrative, a biblical theologian must be “commit[ted] to unpacking the texts of Scripture along the historical axis of the Bible’s plot-line.”³²

Significantly, Christian teaching of worldview also makes common use of this metanarrative framework for explaining the coherence and significance of the Christian faith.³³ What we love and how we think arise out of beliefs embedded in a narrative by which we make sense of life. These expressions of biblical worldview look in the same direction as a significant strand of biblical theology. Both express propositional truth within a redemptive-historical framework. Therefore, when systematic theology rightly seeks to answer contemporary questions, “the theological emphases of the biblical writers themselves . . . and the relation of these to the salvation-historical storyline”³⁴ constitute a crucial framework for worldview application. This is not to suggest a methodological straitjacket but rather to reaffirm the priority of divine revelation—both *what* is communicated and *how* it is communicated—over human systems and reflections, however sensible and insightful.

What Is in This Issue?

With this legacy in view, the inaugural issue consists of four essays dealing with biblical interpretation and ministerial application. In the first article, “Old Testament Foundations for Justice in Society,” Ken Casillas takes up a much-discussed contemporary issue from the standpoint of OT revelation. While the phrase *social justice* carries significant ideological baggage and encompasses a

³⁰ The connection to worldview is evident in Brian Rosner’s definition: “biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible’s teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible’s overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.” B. S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” *NDBT*, 10.

³¹ BJU Seminary faculty exhibit this approach in a series of books entitled *Biblical Discernment for Difficult Issues*. For example, see Ken Casillas, *The Law and the Christian: God’s Light Within God’s Limits* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2007); Brian Hand, *Upright Downtime: Making Wise Choices About Entertainment* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2008); and Alan Patterson, *Handling Earthly Treasure: Biblical Certainties about Money* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2011).

³² Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” *NDBT*, 95.

³³ Various approaches to structuring Christian apologetics and worldview along the lines of Scripture’s unfolding story include D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God’s Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student’s Guide*, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013); Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality: How the World Began, How It Ends, and Everything Important that Happens in Between* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); and Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

³⁴ Collins, 205.

diverse array of issues, the Scriptures clearly teach that God is very concerned about societal obligations, and not just among Abraham's descendants. Casillas's study traces this focus along the historical trajectory of the OT, giving particular attention to two key terms, *justice* and *righteousness*. In spite of the significant differences between Israel and the church, NT believers have much to learn from OT ethics.

The second essay accentuates the importance of grammatical-historical exegesis within the parameters of particular books of Scripture. In "Should the Minister Get a Job? A Case Study on Normativity in 1 and 2 Thessalonians," Neal Cushman demonstrates a context-sensitive hermeneutic that seeks to understand Paul's tentmaking in Thessalonica in light of his stated epistolary aims and concerns. This exegesis provides a way forward for moving from general commitments to the authority of Scripture to discerning whether Paul's practice constitutes a normative precedent for pastors today.

Next, Brian Hand tackles the interpretive conundrum of an oft-applied text in "'The Prayer of Faith Will Save the Sick': Revisiting a Complex Passage in Light of Biblical Context—James 5:13–18." What does James mean when he says, "the prayer of faith shall save the sick" (KJV)? Hand employs exegetical and biblical theology by exploring the meanings of key words, considering the wider context of James, comparing relevant NT passages, and developing an intertextual understanding of James's reference to Elijah. These analyses provide a multifaceted grid to examine evidence for the physical illness and spiritual weakness views and conclude with thoughtful application.

As stated above, systematic theology necessarily complements and builds on biblical theology. This issue's final article features a biblical narrative focused on systematic theology. In "Jesus, the Sadducees, and the Resurrection: A Case Study of Systematic Theology in the Bible—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," Layton Talbert demonstrates how exegetical and biblical theology supply important tools for systematic conclusions. Not only does the Sadducees' response to Jesus' teaching feature errant theology, but Jesus' critique provides an inspired example of sound method that draws necessary inferences from a central biblical-theological theme.

The issue concludes with six reviews of recent books on significant theological and worldview topics. May these contents display God's truth in a way that helps equip God's people for God's glory.