

INTRODUCTION

Theming The Bible And Theming Bible Books

EXPLANATION

By reading the closing chapter in a novel a person can see where the whole book is going. Thereafter, when the reader goes back through the earlier chapters, he sees why every person or event is important. If a Bible reader sees where the whole book is going, he is able to put all the detailed pieces together. This we call theming the Bible or theming each of its books.

VALUABLE

Without a sense of direction Bible reading can be a rudderless experience. The thousands of Bible facts seem irrelevant and isolated from each other without the cohesion of the central theme. But with the skeleton framework in mind, each tiny part of the whole can be seen in its rightful place where it makes its needed contribution.

BOOK-BY-BOOK

Each Bible book has its own theme which unifies the entire book. For instance, the theme of I Corinthians is Christ crucified versus intellectualism. 2 Timothy's theme is being committed to the Gospel which was committed to you. Romans' message is God's determined mercy. By reading a Bible book in sweeping fashion and listening for the re-occurring theme, a student cannot help but gather the central message. Seeing the overview of the Bible helps us see the need for each book, and seeing the overview of each books helps us see how each book fits the master theme.

BIBLE-WIDE THEMING

Each book's theme contributes to the Bible's theme in an essential way. Knowing the theme of the whole or the theme of the part contributes significantly to understanding the other's theme. It is a revolving cycle, as the whole theme colors the book's theme, and the book's theme is a vital segment in the Bible's theme. So a student must begin to know both kinds of theming and improve both throughout his life-time. Begin with book-wide theming and go to Bible-wide theming.

INSPIRED HELP

Thank God that the Scripture has valuable theme statements which can state for us the completed picture so we can piece together the parts correctly. Luke 24:27 says that Jesus interpreted from Moses and from all the prophets in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. So Jesus Himself is the message of all the Scriptures. In Luke 24:44-49 Jesus further explains that the apostles were witnesses of how Jesus fulfilled all things written in the Law, prophets, and Psalms that the Messiah must suffer, rise, and be preached for remission of sins among all nations beginning from Jerusalem, and that the Father's promise of the Spirit would empower the apostles as witnesses. This summary

from Jesus Himself about Himself is extremely useful to help us see the whole picture. John 5:39 rebuked the Jews because they searched the Scriptures but failed to see that they testified of Him. The Bible's message is Jesus.

ROMANS 1: 2-5

Paul here states that he was *“set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,”* Doesn't that help? (Romans 16:25-27 is similar.) The Bible often summarizes its own vital message.

I PETER 1:10-12

This passage says that the grace that came to Christians because of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them was the Bible-wide theme of the prophets, which theme had formerly been prophesied by the Spirit but now had been fully revealed by the Spirit by those preaching the Gospel, and that angel messengers of the whole scheme, like the prophets, had not seen the full picture until all was fulfilled in the Gospel. God's grace because of Christ's sufferings was God's theme of redemption fully revealed by the Spirit in the Gospel. The Gospel is the theme of the Bible.

THE SEED-PROMISE

Genesis 3:15 promises that the warfare between the woman's seed and the Serpent's seed will result in a death-blow to the Serpent, but only a heel-blow to the woman's seed. Amazingly, in Revelation 12-20 the Bible closes with this same Bible-wide warfare between the Serpent, the woman, and the man-child, who is caught up to heaven, rules the nations, and overcomes the Serpent by His blood and His testimony. The seed-promise is another way to see the Bible's theme from beginning to end. What a thrilling thread this is from Genesis to Revelation, and how comforting that our battle is already won for us, and because of the woman's seed we are on His winning side.

GOD'S WILL OR MYSTERY

Ephesians 1:9-11 says that the mystery of God's will was purposed to sum up all things in Christ and that God works all things after the counsel of His will. I Corinthians 2:6-7 shows that the Gospel was the formerly concealed, but now revealed, purpose of God. So the entire Old Testament period was preparation for the final revelation of God's eternal plan to save believers in Christ and in the church. The mystery, therefore, is another expression for the way God has orchestrated all Bible events into His eternal plan. The Old Testament conceals and the New Testament reveals that mystery.

THE MESSIAH

In Genesis 15 God foretells the oppression of the Jews in Egypt so that He can deliver them by Moses as a type of the Messiah, God's anointed deliverer, who will be anointed by the Spirit to deliver believers from the slavery of sin. All Old Testament anointed

priests, prophets, judges, and kings thus typify the Christ who becomes all these positions at the same time and who delivers through the word of the anointed apostles those obedient believers willing to be free. The Messiah theme is, therefore, another way of theming the Bible. The word Christ is a major theme-word of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit can be understood only in relation to the Bible-wide anointed Messiah concept.

THE MESSIAH'S KINGDOM

As Moses delivered Israel from Egypt, God promised in Exodus 19:6 that they would be unto Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This begins a Bible-wide prediction of the kingdom or rule of the Messiah. Repeated to Judah in Genesis 49 and especially to David in 2 Samuel 7, this concept of David's descendent establishing an eternal reign which brings security, prosperity, and peace (as no Jewish king had done) becomes a major expression of the Bible's unfolding message. The kingdom of the Messiah is made up of those delivered from sin's slavery into His holy nation of priests, the church. (cf- I Pet. 2:9)

LAW AND GRACE

The New Testament explains that one of man's greatest needs is to learn to trust God's righteousness given in Christ, instead of trusting his own righteousness in man's own works. Accordingly, Israel was imprisoned under the Law for 1500 years so that they would want the freedom that comes in Christ as God's gift of grace. To show the vital difference between trusting oneself and trusting Jesus' death for sinners is the reason the Bible is so full of God's contrast between law and grace. From our privileged vantage point where we can see Judaism's reversal of the Law's purpose (in which the Jews trusted it instead of the One it was given to point to), we can fit the Law's purpose into God's grand scheme to convince us to trust His mercy and not ourselves. Grace and faith, as distinct from law and works, is the essence of the Bible message. Law is God's Bible-wide contrast with grace.

BEGIN BY BEGINNING

These concurrent expressions of the Bible's basic theme will constantly surface throughout Scripture. The way to get started in unfolding them is to jump in. By being aware of what to expect, a student ties the threads together as he travels from book to book. Each new discovery of the theme in progress contributes to the clarity of the theme itself, and the theme itself helps to clarify each newly discovered detail. Once the process is begun, its completion is a lifetime of rewarding embellishment of the basic structure. But it all begins by beginning. Try it, you'll like it.

HOW WE HAVE TRIED TO HELP

The following pages of this section will trace the above-mentioned variations of the Bible's theme from beginning to end. These theme-studies will not be exhaustive, but will be bare skeletons slicing through the many untouched details to be added later. Their purpose is to get the ball rolling so that the student's momentum will follow. Some sections are mere verse lists, while others are questions with answer-sections following. Several pages of charts are also interspersed to show the theme at one glance in summary

form. Use these pages and improve them to get for yourself the feel of the thrilling skill of Bible theming.

SEEING THE VALUE OF BIBLE THEMING

If you will see how theming opens up the Bible for you in a way not enjoyed before, you will practice its value for life. When you see how you can do it yourself and can benefit greatly from it, you will make it a part of your own study skills forever. The usefulness of viewing everything in the Bible from the standpoint of its over-all theme will increase every time you read the Bible and see for yourself how its many parts fit together beautifully to teach one message. The Bible's theme deepens every time you see how totally co-ordinated its parts all are. But the only way to see the beauty of the whole picture is to see it for yourself, to taste its value for yourself, to do it yourself, for yourself, by yourself.

NOWHERE-NESS IS RUDDERLESS-NESS

He whose map leads nowhere gets nowhere. Nowhere-ness is studying the Bible in all directions. It is trying to make the Bible agree with all the different things we want it to say, or which we have been told that it says. Rudderless-ness is aimlessly drifting about "*with every wind of doctrine*" (Ephesians 4:14). It is failing to steer our Bible study by its intended rudder - the Bible's theme. All Bible study must be pointed toward its North Star, or it will circle the globe nonsensically. We need to sing, "Chart and compass came from Thee, Jesus Savior, pilot me." Jesus pilots by the Bible's message. Jesus is the Bible's message.

A MILLION-PIECE JIG-SAW PUZZLE

The Bible's million pieces are like trying to put a puzzle together without using the finished picture as a guide. We might get a few pieces to fit, but we could never make all its parts interlock without a pattern to go by. But by using a finished-product pattern to guide us, eventually every piece will fall into its intended space, and every part will perfectly fit on all its sides with all the pieces on all their sides. The result of theme-guided Bible study is a gorgeous mosaic beautifully displaying God and His message, rather than a disengaged heap of distorted and meaningless, broken up parts. To know the Bible's meaning we must "get it all together." That meaning comes together in the Bible's theme.

WHERE DOES THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER GO?

A satellite photograph of the Mississippi River reveals its complete symmetry from start to finish. It begins as a small trickle far in the remote north and is gradually joined by its numberless tributaries, large and small, long and short. It gathers size and momentum as it flows with incessant determination toward the sea. But if I see the mighty Mississippi only in the perspective of the few miles I can behold as I cross over one of its bridges, I cannot appreciate its masterful greatness. Viewing the Bible is like that. We cannot appreciate its many streams without the perspective of its over-all course. But when we finally see where it is going and how all its rivulets and creeks contribute to its onward flow, we will then stand amazed at the power and beauty of its determined course.

SUMMARY VERSES TELL WHERE THE BIBLE IS GOING

Paul wrote to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:15): *“from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* This states that being wise unto salvation by trust in Jesus the Christ is where the entire Old Testament was going. He further explains (verses 16-17) that every God-inspired scripture is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”* This is saying that Timothy had a complete view of the Old Testament because he had seen how it made him wise unto salvation through the faith in Christ which the scriptures all pointed to. But without this Bible-wide perspective a person is incomplete and not equipped to see the Bible’s whole message.

IT ALL DEPENDS UPON HOW YOU SEARCH

Jesus in John 5:39-40 told the Jews: *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”* The Old Testament scriptures were given to bear witness of Jesus as the Jews’ deliverer. But because of generations of Jewish prejudice, their scripture-searching never found Jesus. If they had open-mindedly searched their Bible, its clear and forceful theme would have been found to be Jesus. The Bible’s theme makes itself clearly visible to a searcher who wants to find it, but these Jewish searchers instead found that Jesus wasn’t their Messiah because their search was not a true search. An open search would have found their deliverer from sin. We can either give the Bible the theme we want it to have, or we can let the Bible give us the theme which it obviously has. It all depends upon how we search. Searching with our own theme in mind is to miss its self-evident theme which it must reveal for itself. Not all Bible searching is good. Most of it keeps people from eternal life in Jesus.

TWISTING, CORRUPTING, MISHANDLING

2 Peter 3:16 warns that ignorant (untaught) and unstable Bible searchers “distort (or wrestle)” the scriptures to their own destruction, showing that ignorance of the Bible’s self-evident over-all meaning will cause unsteady searchers to twist its meaning in such way as to destroy themselves. 2 Corinthians 2:17 warns that “the many (or most people) corrupt the word of God,” and 2 Corinthians 4:2 shows that the word of God can be “handled deceitfully.” Unless we let the Bible tell us its own meaning, we will do like most people do and corrupt and handle erroneously the word of God to our own spiritual suicide. The Bible clearly and accurately “handles” its own meaning if we let it, but searchers twist, corrupt, and mishandle its meaning deceitfully who do not let the Bible handle for us its own meaning in its own way. Most handling of the Bible is destructive.

WITHOUT THE WHOLE CONTEXT WE SPEAK GOD’S WORD PRESUMPTUOUSLY

Deuteronomy 18:20 warned the Jews: *“But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, ..., that prophet shall die.”* The serious practice of saying that God’s word said something that it actually

did not say is still happening today. It was physically fatal then and is spiritually fatal now. But the only way to avoid misapplying Bible verses is to know what the whole Bible is saying so as to be sure what every part must mean. Every verse's context starts with its own paragraph and extends to the whole Bible's theme. To lift a verse out of its context and to be ignorant of what the whole Bible background is saying is to speak for God "presumptuously" today. The Bible study of the average man would be greatly improved if all such spokesmen would die in our day as they did in Moses' day. We would then be impressed with the serious presumption of saying that the Bible says something that it does not say. We must let it say itself what it says for itself, or we speak God's word presumptuously.

SPEAK AS GOD'S ORACLES

I Peter 4:11 warns inspired Christians to speak "*as one who is speaking the utterances of God.*" Acts 7:38 shows that the Old Testament scriptures were "living oracles" given to the prophets by God. The combination of these two verses indicates that Peter is warning his readers to speak according to the message God gave in the Old Testament, and warning that to speak out of harmony with the Old Testament's oracular meaning would not be speaking as God's oracles. Peter's point is to speak the message as it has been given from God. They had to know the true perspective meaning of the Old Testament oracles in order to obey what Peter commanded. Likewise we today must know the Bible's whole message in order to "speak as God's oracles," or we will miss and distort the contributing meaning which every Bible verse has. Let us be sure to speak as God's oracles speak in the whole Bible's message. The Old Testament oracles have given us the background theme meaning, and any other meaning is not speaking as the oracles of God.

SEARCH THE OLD TESTAMENT

Acts 17:11 says that the Jews of Berea were more noble than those of Thessalonica by receiving the Gospel for they received the word "*with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.*" The Scriptures which they examined daily (upon hearing the Gospel) were the Old Testament Scriptures, and because of their proper over-all view of these Scriptures, "*therefore many of them believed.*" (verse 12) But without knowing the proper meaning of the Scriptures, these Jews could not have known whether it was true that Jesus was the Christ predicted in the Old Testament. Here are Jews unlike those in John 5:39-40 who missed the theme meaning of their own Scriptures and made their Old Testament say what they wanted it to mean. This workbook seeks to search the entire Bible with "*with great eagerness*" by allowing the whole Bible to tell us what its meaning is. To do this requires that the whole Bible theme be seen together as supported by all the parts. When we open-mindedly search daily the Old Testament, its whole message will be that Jesus Is the Christ as fulfilled in the message of the New Testament.

Review Questions :

PREFACE

1. What is this workbook's purpose?
2. List three reasons why the Bible's theme is never seen by some.
3. What results when the total picture is seen as a whole?
4. How is the Bible's theme like seeing a long river from space?
5. How is the view from Acts 2 backward like seeing a woven rug?
6. List three methods this workbook uses to better see the whole?

INTRODUCTION

1. What two things must be themed?
2. How can a reader of a novel grasp the importance of details?
3. List three words describing a view of Bible details without direction.
4. What word describes each part when the skeleton theme is seen?
5. What unifies each Bible book?
6. List two steps in gathering a book's theme.
7. What are the two kinds of themes like in relation to each other?
8. What does inspiration give us which greatly help?
9. What did Luke and John say the Bible's theme is?
10. What does Romans 1:2-5 state as the theme and for what purpose?
11. Give four words in Peter's theme statement?
12. Name four who had their part in revealing this theme.
13. Name two kinds of blows in the seed promise.
14. Name two kinds of seeds to be at war.
15. Name three Genesis 3:15 characters in Revelation 12.
16. What is comforting about the seed-promise?
17. In what did God purpose to sum up everything?
18. What word means "formerly unrevealed," but now "revealed"?
19. What theme begins in foretelling Jewish slavery?
20. What does the Holy Spirit do for the Messiah?

21. What word means the Messiah's rule?
22. The Messiah's kingdom is made up of what two kinds of people?
23. Between what two words is there a Bible-wide contrast?
24. State this contrast as between two Bible-wide concepts.
25. How did the Jews reverse God's purpose for the Law?
26. List four pairs of words clearly distinct from each other.
27. What does "concurrent" mean?
28. State in another way "begin by beginning."
29. What does this workbook try to do to cause student momentum?
30. Instead of being exhaustive these chapters will be _____ .
31. The Bible's parts are totally _____ .
32. What will make Bible theming practiced for life?
33. What key word is repeated many times in the paragraph on seeing value?
34. What word describes the practice of studying Scripture in all directions?
35. Rudderless-ness is described in Ephesians how?
36. What four things is Jesus like as to how His is the Bible's theme?
35. Name four ways the Bible is like a puzzle?
38. Name five ways the Bible is like the Mississippi River.
39. What is the Bible's theme in II Timothy 3:15?
40. Without knowing the Scriptures' over-all message a person has what two disadvantages?
41. In what two ways can one search the Bible?
42. What result did Jewish prejudiced searching have?
43. List three Bible expressions for mishandling Scripture.
44. Describe proper "handling" of Scripture.
45. What would greatly improve the average man's Bible study?
46. What is the opposite of speaking Scripture presumptuously?
47. What did Peter mean by speaking as God's oracles?
48. What is necessary to be able to speak as God's oracles?
49. What two commendable things did the Bereans do?
50. What does the word "so" mean in Acts 17:11?