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TEACHING MEMBERS OF EASTRIDGE BAPTIST
CHURCH IN RED OAK, TEXAS TO DEVELOP A
CHRIST-CENTERED UNDERSTANDING
OF THE BIBLE

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To the members of Eastridge Baptist Church,
and my loving wife, Jennifer, for encouraging me to pursue this area of study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	4
Purpose	7
Goals	7
Research Methodology	8
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	9
Conclusion	11
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR A CHRIST-CENTERED UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE	12
Luke 24:13-49	13
Acts 3	28
Acts 6:8–7:60	32
Conclusion	35
3. PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO A CHRIST-CENTERED UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE	37
A Christ-Centered Understanding of Scripture Ties the Bible Together as One Story	38
A Christ-Centered Understanding of Scripture Shapes One’s Worldview	50

Chapter	Page
A Christ-Centered Understanding of Scripture Points to the Necessity of the Gospel	62
Conclusion	66
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	67
Project Preparation	67
Project Implementation	72
Project Evaluation	76
Conclusion	77
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	78
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose	78
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals	79
Strengths of the Project	82
Weaknesses of the Project	83
What I Would Do Differently	84
Theological Reflections	87
Personal Reflections	89
Conclusion	91
 Appendix	
1. PRE- AND POST-SERIES STORYLINE OF SCRIPTURE INVENTORY	92
2. RUBRIC FOR EVALUATION	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY	97

PREFACE

I am thankful for the opportunity the Lord has afforded me to work on and complete my Doctor of Ministry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Reading the Bible from a Christ-centered perspective has been my passion for over a decade. I am thankful for the opportunity to explore the topic in detail.

I wish to thank Dr. T.J. Betts for supervising the project. His input and guidance were invaluable to completing this work. I am also thankful for the role The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has played in my development. Their dedication to Christ-centered teaching and preaching has helped me grow in my understanding of God's Word. I would not be where I am today without the professors whom I had the opportunity under which to study for the last several years.

I would also like to thank my wife, Jennifer, our two boys, Camden and Bryson, as well as my in-laws, who helped care for my family in my absence. Eastridge Baptist Church also deserves thanks for the part in which they played. I am extremely thankful for the time they provided for me to work on my project and attend classes. As well, I am grateful to those who participated in this project. Without their participation I could not have finished. My hope is that the project will produce much fruit in our church as members begin and continue to read God's Word from a Christ-centered perspective.

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Red Oak, Texas

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Through the Scriptures one encounters the God of the universe, comes to understand how the world was created, who people are, why the world appears broken, and how God plans to fix it. The Bible also tells where everything is headed in the future and reveals man's purpose. To accurately understand how the Bible answers the questions related to the above topics, one needs to know how the Bible is connected together as one book that is centered on Jesus. Understanding the connectedness of Scripture and how it centers on Jesus is a struggle for many, which is why a ministry project with this purpose not only benefited the members of Eastridge Baptist Church but also the church at large.

Context

This ministry project took place in the context of Eastridge Baptist Church (EBC) in Red Oak, Texas. EBC was originally founded in 1933, as Oak Cliff Baptist Church in Oak Cliff, Texas. Through God's providence and direction, the church relocated several times throughout the years. In 2000, the church moved from Sunny Glenn, Texas to Red Oak, Texas, and became Eastridge Baptist Church. While the church has moved several times and many pastors have come and gone, EBC has remained a conservative church where God's Word is faithfully preached and taught. In fact, one of the strengths of EBC is its commitment to biblical faithfulness.

Throughout my tenure as pastor, and even before I came to the church, a concern that God's Word be taught and faithfully preached permeated EBC. When I interviewed to be pastor, one of the main concerns of the search committee was how I viewed Scripture. They wanted to know if I viewed it as a book that provided inspiration,

a collection of stories, a moral guidebook, or if I held a greater view of Scripture. In other words, did I view the Bible as God’s holy, authoritative, and inspired Word that is meant to teach everything needed for life and godliness. Along with my view of Scripture, the pastor search committee also wanted to know if the Bible would be my main text—would God’s Word drive my preaching week in and week out. Inerrancy, the belief that the Word of God exists without error or fault, at least in the original manuscripts, was another topic at the forefront of conversation during the pastor search process.¹ The concerns of the pastoral search committee not only drew me to the church, but prove that a strong commitment to God’s Word has been a mainstay at EBC for years. While the search committee represented the church during the search process, their heart, desire, and commitment to God’s Word were not contrary to that of the entire church body. Upon preaching in view of a call, several church members during an open forum asked similar questions to that of the search committee, which further confirmed a commitment to God’s Word by the church at large.

Since arriving as pastor, EBC has continued to demonstrate a heart and love for God’s Word, evidenced by many members continually reading through the Bible, memorizing Scripture, and willingly receiving the preached Word in a deep and expository manner. While many have demonstrated a love of Scripture, some others have not. Their Bible is another book on the shelf. It is present in their homes but not read. As a result, they have a deficient understanding of God’s Word, especially God’s plan of salvation that courses through the Bible’s pages from beginning to end, which ultimately leads to a decreased desire to obey and worship God.

Another evidence the church has given of its love and heart for God’s Word has been one of silence. The lack of pushback received as the Word has been faithfully expounded reveals the church is either hesitant to express opinions or has a desire to learn

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 90.

and understand the Word, and their desire to be fed God's Word is being met. Based on past interactions with church members regarding other strongly held desires and beliefs, I believe the latter is the case—the church legitimately desires to be fed God's Word.

Further evidence of a strong desire for the Word of God comes in the form of the church Sunday School curriculum and attendance. Many long-term and faithful members attend Sunday School on a weekly basis where they are fed a consistent diet of Bible-centric expositional studies. As a result of consistently using a Bible-based Sunday School curriculum and being fed a consistent diet of biblical preaching, the church has been exposed to the whole counsel of God's Word through the years, which has provided many church members with a deep knowledge and understanding of the Bible's stories, characters, and doctrine.

While many church members have knowledge of and a desire for Scripture, believing it to be God's Word to his people and that which should be used as the primary text in all preaching and Bible study, an understanding of how the Bible is connected as one story was a weakness of the members of EBC. This was evidenced by a lack of knowledge of how the Old Testament text is connected to the New Testament. While not always expressed in this manner, the underlying belief of some EBC members was that the Old Testament is an ancient text that represents God's past dealing with Israel and has little to contribute to the New Testament church. Another evidence was the inability to present the overarching storyline of Scripture even in simple form such as Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Re-creation. There was also a lack of understanding as to how different characters, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David connect to the overarching biblical story. Many members viewed the characters and the stories they inhabit in the Old Testament as moralistic tales meant to teach one to live in a godly manner. Although one should not discount the idea that the characters, stories, and narrative found in the Old Testament serve to tell one how to live in God's world, one should not forget that those

characters, stories, and narratives are connected to a larger story that runs through the entire Bible.²

Along with a deficient understanding of how the Bible as a whole is connected as one story, a deficiency in understanding how the text points to and is centered on Jesus existed as well.³ Through many conversations, it was evident the members of EBC understood the barebones gospel message that Jesus died for sinners so that they might experience a reconciled relationship with the Father and eternal life. However, an understanding of how the entire Bible contributes to the gospel message was unknown, or at best was vaguely understood. Many times, I fielded questions regarding the way Old Testament saints were saved. There was a prevalent idea that Old Testament saints were saved by faithfully adhering to the Law instead of believing in the promise of a future Messiah. That was not to say that the members of EBC who asked those questions believed the Old Testament saints were saved by a works-based form of salvation. Many members, if not all, believed the saints in the Old Testament were saved through belief and not works. The question, however, revealed a lack of understanding of how Jesus provides salvation for both Old and New Testament saints.

Rationale

The above factors indicated a lot of room and opportunity for growth in understanding the biblical narrative, especially as it points to Jesus. Therefore, the church needed to undertake a study that sought to connect the biblical text together as one story that centers on Jesus for several reasons. First, there is a desire by the church to be taught God's Word in a deep and meaningful way. To be sure, some want to understand the Bible at a deeper level than others, but the overall spirit of the church is to learn more about

² Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 16.

³ Edmund Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1988), 11.

God's Word. Since a desire for God's Word exists, embarking on a teaching series that helped the church understand the Bible more fully, specifically a series that showed how the Bible is connected together as one story that centers on Jesus, would be well received by the members of EBC.

Second, as Edmund Clowney says, "it is possible to know Bible stories, yet miss the Bible story. The Bible is much more than William How stated: 'a golden casket where gems of truth are stored.'"⁴ The Bible, as Clowney goes on to argue, "is more than a bewildering collection of oracles, proverbs, poems, architectural directions, annals, and prophecies. The Bible has a storyline."⁵ The Bible's storyline centers on Jesus. Since there was a deficient understanding of how God's Word is connected as one unified story that centers on Jesus at EBC, there was an opportunity, and even a felt burden, to help the church understand their Bible's storyline more fully, which would be accomplished through a six-week sermon series designed to show how the Bible is connected as one book that centers on Jesus.

Third, I hoped to drive a deeper understanding and use of God's Word at EBC by providing a framework for how the Bible connects as one story. As members grow in their understanding of how Scripture is connected, they should grow in their ability to apply the whole counsel of God's Word to their daily lives. As well as, understanding how the biblical text is connected together as a whole should provide a contextual framework for accurate textual interpretation, which would benefit members during both corporate and personal study.

Fourth, there was a need to understand that Jesus permeates the entire biblical text, and he is the one that ties Scripture together as one unified story. The result of such an understanding should be a deeper knowledge of the gospel. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "Our understanding of the gospel is enhanced by our understanding of its Old

⁴ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 11.

⁵ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 11.

Testament roots, and at the same time the gospel shows us the true meaning of the Old Testament.”⁶ When one explores the Old Testament with the gospel in mind, one sees that salvation in Jesus Christ was not an afterthought but has been God’s plan from the beginning. Jesus understood himself to be the Messiah, whose coming was planned before the world began. He finds evidence of such a plan in the Old Testament. Jesus shows his knowledge of God’s plan of salvation as centered on himself through his encounter with a few disciples on the road to Emmaus. In Luke 24, Jesus encountered several disciples who did not immediately recognize him. After learning that they did not understand the plan laid out in Scripture regarding his death and resurrection and how it brings redemption, Jesus chastises them beginning in verse 25 when he says, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”⁷ Then men are told in Luke 24:27 that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” In this episode, Jesus clearly states that Scripture centers on him by showing how it points to his coming, death, resurrection, and redemption. If Jesus, the Savior and God incarnate, views Scripture as that which centers on himself, it behooves mankind to do the best they can to understand the connections as Jesus saw them. Following Jesus’ example, EBC encountered a new sermon series designed to show how Scripture is connected together as a unified story that centers on Jesus.

Fifth, understanding God’s plan as laid out in Scripture should also drive one to see the love, care, and concern God has for mankind. God is not absent or aloof; he is the all-sovereign God of the universe who cares deeply for his creation. He cares so much that he put a plan in place before the beginning of time that ultimately culminates in the coming, death, and resurrection of Jesus so that man could be reconciled to him and

⁶ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 76.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

eventually enjoy the world as he originally designed (Eph 1:3-4). Understanding God’s heart and love as laid out in Scripture should drive one to want to read and understand the Bible more, which in turn should produce a greater understanding of who God is and result in God-glorifying worship and obedience at EBC (Col 1:9-28; Rom 12:1-2).

Moreover, because “Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17), it is worth learning as much about Scripture as humanly possible. Not only because it is God’s Word to man, but also so that one might be able to use it in the way Paul suggests in his letter to Timothy. To accurately use Scripture for its intended purpose, Christians must understand the biblical story and the thread that holds it together. Understanding the biblical storyline keeps one from misusing and misinterpreting Scripture. Reading and interpreting Scripture correctly requires Christians to possess an understanding of the biblical framework to make correct contextual connections, which should lead and/or contribute to a correct interpretation and use of the text.⁸

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to help the members of Eastridge Baptist Church see that the Bible forms one unified story that centers on Jesus.

Goals

Several goals were necessary to accomplish this project’s purpose and help the members of EBC see that the Bible is one connected book that tells one story that centers on Jesus. These goals were numerated as such:

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge of the biblical storyline and its connection to Jesus among the members of Eastridge Baptist Church.

⁸ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 13-16.

2. The second goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series on the storyline of Scripture to show how the Bible forms one unified story that centers on Jesus.
3. The third goal of this project was to teach the six-week sermon series.
4. The fourth goal of this project was to increase knowledge of the unified storyline of Scripture and its relation to Jesus among the members of Eastridge Baptist Church.

Research Methodology

The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge of the biblical storyline and its connection to Jesus among the members of Eastridge Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering the Storyline of Scripture Inventory (SSI) to EBC members.⁹ This pre-sermon series SSI gauged each participant's initial level of knowledge regarding the Bible as one unified story that centers on Jesus. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of five members completed the SSI and the inventory was analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the current knowledge among EBC members.

The second goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series on the storyline of Scripture to show how the Bible forms one unified story that centers on Jesus. The sermon series was developed around key biblical texts that formed major links in the storyline of Scripture and acted as pointers to Jesus. This goal was measured by an expert panel of three persons who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

⁹ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

The third goal of this project was to teach the six-week series. This goal was considered successfully met when the six-week sermon series had been taught to the members of EBC.

The fourth goal of this project was to increase knowledge of the unified storyline of Scripture and its relation to Jesus among the members of Eastridge Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering a post-sermon series SSI after the sermon series had been completed to measure the change in scriptural knowledge. This goal was considered successfully met when the inventory demonstrated a positive and significant difference in the pre- and post-sermon series SSI scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Biblical theology. *Biblical theology* is distinguished from *systematic theology* in that its purpose is to trace the inner unity of Scripture by showing its connection as one story or metanarrative. Craig Bartholomew writes, “The major contribution of biblical theology is to deepen our understanding of the shape, complexity, and unity of Scripture on its own terms.”¹⁰ Grant Osborne adds that *biblical theology* is a “branch of theological inquiry devoted to identifying distinctive themes in various sections of the Bible, tracing them from one section to another, and discovering any overall unifying theme that draws the whole Bible together.”¹¹

Canon. The *canon*, as H. D. McDonald explains, refers to “those books in the Jewish and Christian Bible considered to be Scripture and therefore authoritative in matters of faith and doctrine.”¹² The sixty-six books that constitute the Bible represent the

¹⁰ Craig Bartholomew, “Biblical Theology,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 88.

¹¹ Grant Osborne, “Biblical Theology,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter Elwell and Barry Beitzel (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 339.

¹² H. D. McDonald, “Canon of the Bible,” in Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 300.

canon. The Old Testament is comprised of thirty-nine books, while the New Testament is comprised of the remaining twenty-seven books. I agree with McDonald that “the formation of the canon was a process, rather than an event, which took several hundred years to reach finality in all parts of the Roman empire.”¹³

Meta-narrative. A *meta-narrative* is an overarching story that runs through the biblical canon tying it together as one whole. G. K. Beale points out, “The story of the Bible in this formulation begins with creation and ends with the restoration of creation.”¹⁴

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-series surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to listen and be engaged in the sermon series, as well as review material afterward. If participants were not engaged with the material, then it would be difficult for them to grow in their understanding of the biblical storyline as it centers on Jesus and subsequently improve their score. To mitigate this limitation, study materials, as they relate to the sermon, as well as the opportunity to review past sermons either in manuscript or speech form were provided to the participants. Second, the constancy of attendance would limit the effectiveness of the sermon series. If the participants did not attend all the sermons in the series, then it would be difficult to measure how beneficial the sermon series was in helping them understand the Bible as one story that centers on Jesus. To mitigate this limitation, each week’s sermon was posted online in podcast and video format, as well as notes from each week’s sermon were given to the participants.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project addressed the overarching biblical story as centered on Jesus. Every text in the Old and New Testament was not expounded. Only those texts deemed significant in moving the biblical narrative forward and showing a connection to Jesus were explored. Second, the project was

¹³ McDonald, “Canon of the Bible,” 300.

¹⁴ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 62.

confined to a twenty-week timeframe. This timeframe gave adequate time to prepare and teach a six-week sermon series and conduct a pre- and post-series survey. Finally, this project was limited to the first selected participants and did not include those outside of the first selected group. If someone in the group was not able to continue through the study for reasons of illness or the like, another member was not added in their place due to the time limitations of the study, as well as knowledge limitations that occurred if one was not engaged with the material throughout the entire process.

Conclusion

It is God's desire that his children understand him and his plan, which is evidenced through his giving of Scripture. To better understand God and his plan of salvation, an understanding of the storyline of Scripture, especially as it relates to Jesus needed to be developed. The following chapters serve to advance an understanding of Scripture as it relates to an overarching narrative that centers on Jesus.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR
A CHRIST-CENTERED UNDERSTANDING
OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is not just a collection of stories and precepts to which one could or should turn for guidance or inspiration. Rather, it is a collection of sixty-six books that work together to tell one unified story. To be sure, not all the books that comprise the Bible read like a novel or a historical source. Certainly, there are historical accounts in the canon that faithfully tell the story of the nation of Israel, but the sixty-six books that make up the Bible also consist of wisdom and prophecy, as well as gospels, letters, and apocalyptic literature. Along with the Bible consisting of a vast collection of books from multiple literary genres, many authors wrote the Bible over a period that spans centuries rather than decades. Considering the time span, number of authors, and various literary genres, the Bible is a surprisingly unified book. What is it that binds the biblical story together? Jesus is the unifying center. He binds the biblical story together. More specifically, the witness of Scripture which points to Jesus as the Christ ties together the biblical text.

If Jesus is the unifying center, it follows that one must read Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective to interpret it correctly. While one could turn to several passages to argue for a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture, this study examines three passages: Luke 24:13-49, Acts 3:11-26, and Acts 7. These three passages demonstrate one story, as well as collectively prove Jesus is not only the Christ, but also the unifying center of the biblical story, and establish a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture.

Luke 24:13-49

This study begins with Luke 24. In this chapter, Jesus not only brings the entire biblical story together, but he centers it on himself. In this way, the end of Luke's gospel serves as a launching point for a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. A passage of this importance must be examined to develop a Christ-centered framework.

Context

Luke's final section in his gospel centers on two encounters Jesus has with his disciples. The first encounter occurs on the road to Emmaus. Two of Jesus' disciples, though not of the twelve, are walking away from Jerusalem when Jesus joins them. Although it is Jesus, the one whom they have been following, they do not immediately recognize him. Joining them, Jesus asks about their conversation. In full disclosure, the two disciples recount the events of the last few days: how the one they believed was the Christ suffered at the hands of the Jewish leaders and was crucified by the Romans. Also, the men on the road reveal how Jesus' crucifixion personally affected them. Watching Jesus' trial, rejection, and death dashed their hopes. They believed Jesus was the Messiah, who would usher in the messianic kingdom and save them from Roman oppression (vv. 17-24).¹ But instead of conquering and establishing his kingdom, Jesus was killed, and his body is now nowhere to be found.

To be sure, the disciples' response to Jesus' crucifixion reveals a misunderstanding of the biblical message concerning the Messiah.² A misunderstanding Jesus challenges with a well-placed and thoughtful question in verse 26 and a response in verse 27 that takes them on a tour of Scripture. Jesus begins his tour with Moses and works

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1913.

² Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 845-46; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 719-20; Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1913.

through the biblical narrative to prove to them that the Christ's suffering was necessary and in accordance with God's plan.

The encounter with the Emmaus road disciples is not the only one Jesus had that day. He has a second encounter with his disciples in Jerusalem. After Jesus leaves the Emmaus road disciples, they hurriedly return to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples about their encounter. While they are recounting their conversation with the risen Messiah to the remaining eleven disciples and those who had gathered with them, Jesus suddenly appears in the room. After calming the frightened gathering, he takes this group on a tour of Scripture, just as he did earlier. He shows them that Scripture predicted the events concerning his ministry, especially the events of the last few days regarding his crucifixion and resurrection. As Jesus walks them through Scripture, they come to understand how a suffering Messiah fits into God's plan. Additionally, Jesus gave them a new hermeneutic with which to read God's Word. The hermeneutic Jesus provides ties to the metanarrative of Scripture and centers on the Christ. Through these two encounters, Jesus proves that the Christ's suffering was not contrary to God's plan but in accordance with it (vv. 36-43, 44).

A Suffering Messiah

As the previous summary made evident, the disciples' hopes were ruined before Jesus gave them a new hermeneutic with which to read Scripture. The disciples' hopelessness was based on a held idea at the time. The Jews did not believe the Messiah would suffer. Rather, they believed the Messiah would usher in a new kingdom after having defeated their oppressive enemies. According to James Edwards, "the thought of a suffering Messiah was foreign to pre-Christian Judaism, including first-century Judaism."³ For many Jews, including the men on the Emmaus road, "suffering and death are the abrogation of hope. They cannot conceive, nor can humanity as a whole conceive, that

³ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 721.

suffering, and death are the necessary means of divine redemption and hope.”⁴ Edwards’ claim makes sense when one realizes that “no canonical OT text, and no pre-Christian Jewish text . . . associates suffering with the Messiah.”⁵ Joel Green agrees with Edwards when he tells that correlating the Messiah with suffering “would be an oxymoron” for a first-century Jew.⁶ I. Howard Marshall, however, does not fully embrace the ideas of Edwards and Green. He is not convinced that “pre-Christian Judaism [did not expect] the Messiah to suffer.” He attributes the lack of clarity to an anti-Christian polemic he believes could have led to a suppression of evidence.⁷ While he seems to believe there is a case for pre-Christian Judaism’s acceptance and teaching of a suffering Messiah, he ultimately concludes from current evidence that “at best the expectation [of a suffering Messiah] can hardly have been a widespread one.”⁸ Certainly some believed Isaiah 53 points to the Messiah as the Servant of the Lord, especially since Jesus believed the Scriptures taught he must suffer. But again, this belief was selective. Many in Jesus’ day viewed the Old Testament through the lens of a conquering Messiah instead of a suffering Servant. Indeed, based on the current evidence one must conclude that first-century Judaism believed the Messiah would be a conquering king who would set up his kingdom while simultaneously judging the rulers of the world.⁹

While Green and Edwards are undoubtedly right when they say first-century Judaism had no category for a suffering Messiah, Jesus still rebukes his disciples in verses 25 and 26 for not seeing in Scripture that a suffering Messiah was a necessary part of God’s

⁴ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 720.

⁵ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 721.

⁶ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 848.

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1978), 896.

⁸ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 896.

⁹ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 721.

plan when he says, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (vv. 25-26). From Jesus’ perspective, the disciples should have been able to discern the necessity of a suffering Messiah from Scripture, even if no text explicitly mentioned the Messiah would suffer.¹⁰ But if there is no explicit evidence, then why should the disciples have been able to discern the need for a suffering Messiah in Scripture?

A Prophet-Like-Moses

The key may lie in their belief that Jesus was a prophet-like-Moses. Green points out that the narrative clearly indicates the Emmaus road disciples believed Jesus was a prophet unlike any prophet who had come before. In verse 19, while relaying their prior conversation to Jesus, the two disciples explicitly refer to Jesus as a prophet when they say, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” The inclusion of the two phrases “mighty in deed and word” and “before God and all the people” reveal that the disciples believe Jesus is more than just another prophet in a long line of prophets. From their comments, they believe Jesus is “the prophet-like-Moses.” In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses predicted the Lord would raise up a prophet like him to whom the people were to listen. David Peterson contends that Deuteronomy 34:10-12 makes clear that while “a succession of prophets was raised up to follow Moses, . . . none was recognized as a prophet specifically like Moses himself.”¹¹ The prophets who came after Moses revealed God’s will and led God’s people, but they did not reveal God’s ultimate revelation, nor did they lead “God’s people

¹⁰ Francois Bovon argues that the disciples should have believed the Messiah was going to suffer, but they did not believe because they were senseless or without intelligence, making them unable to discern the rational argument Scripture made. Francois Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 374.

¹¹ David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 183.

to final salvation.”¹² Peterson explains that, as a result, and over the course of time “Moses’ words were interpreted as referring to one particular prophet who was yet to come and who would function as prophet-king and prophet-lawgiver in the end time. [In this way] Moses’ prophecy came to be regarded as messianic in scope.”¹³ Based on Moses’ prediction, Israel expected a future prophet to lead them in a New Exodus of redemption.¹⁴ Again, this New Exodus was primarily thought to be political and physical, rather than spiritual. The disciples thought Jesus was the prophet-like-Moses who had come to lead God’s people in a New Exodus.

The disciples have warrant to believe Jesus is the prophet-like-Moses since his ministry was accompanied by many signs and wonders that point to him as the prophet-like-Moses who would lead a New Exodus.¹⁵ What the disciples did not take into consideration, however, was the usual pattern of a prophet’s ministry.

A prophet’s ministry was not typically one of acceptance and promotion. Instead, their life and ministry always resulted in “rejection, suffering, and death.”¹⁶ Most prophets in the history of Israel fulfilled the previous prophetic pattern. Since Jesus’ ministry followed the same pattern of rejection, suffering, and death as the prophets who came before, these two disciples should not have been surprised when he was killed. Nor should they have lost hope in him as the Messiah since his works and words convincingly point to him fulfilling portions of the Mosaic prophecy. He did many mighty works, including healing people from disease and even raising the dead. Jesus also performed

¹² Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 184.

¹³ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 183-84.

¹⁴ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 846; J. Knox Chamblin, “Gospel of Matthew,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter Elwell and Barry Beitzel (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1417-18. In his work, Green presents Jesus as the new Moses who leads a New Exodus.

¹⁵ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 200-201.

¹⁶ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 846.

many signs that point to his prophetic office. Additionally, Jesus predicted his future suffering several times throughout his ministry, even revealing to his disciples the men who would spearhead his demise.¹⁷ The disciples should not have been surprised when Jesus died, nor should they have thought his death was the end.

Jesus' Suffering and Death

Along with predicting his suffering, Jesus also predicted his resurrection. In Luke 9:22, Jesus says, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Then in Luke 18:33, Jesus, while foretelling his death for the third time, reveals to his disciples that he will rise on the third day. Not only were these two disciples privileged to these predictions, but on the third day they also heard eyewitness testimony claiming Jesus' grave was empty. While visiting the grave on the third day, some women from their group found the grave empty and an angel present. After telling the women Jesus was not there, the angel reminded them of Jesus' own prediction that he would rise on the third day. Upon returning to the disciples, the women relayed what they had seen and heard (Luke 24:1-9). The women, however, were not the only ones to testify to an empty tomb. After hearing the testimony of the women, several disciples ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Upon arrival, they too found the tomb empty. The two men on the Emmaus road were privileged to these two separate eyewitness accounts. It is evident that they heard these accounts because they relayed them to Jesus in Luke 24:22-24.

Jesus' suffering and death should not have been a shock to these two disciples. He not only fulfilled "the destiny of the prophets," but he also predicted his death and resurrection multiple times throughout his ministry.¹⁸ Furthermore, Jesus' works and teaching pointed to him as the long-awaited prophet-like-Moses. Jesus' life and work, his

¹⁷ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 846-47.

¹⁸ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 846-47. See Luke 9:22,44; 17:25; 18:31-34.

fulfillment of the prophetic pattern, his own prophetic predictions regarding his death and resurrection, and the eyewitness accounts concerning an empty grave should have been enough evidence for the disciples to conclude Jesus was the Messiah. Even though a suffering Messiah was not a commonly held belief in pre-Christian Judaism, the disciples should have been able to connect the dots and discern an argument for a suffering Messiah in Scripture. However, they remained slow of heart, unable to make the necessary connections. Since the disciples are not able to discern such an argument, Jesus must make a case for the “correlation of suffering and messiahship” from Scripture.¹⁹ How does Jesus bridge the gap between the disciples’ current reality and God’s plan for a suffering Messiah?

The Witness of Scripture

Jesus begins erecting a bridge between suffering and messiahship by pointing the two disciples to the Scriptures. Luke 24:27 teaches that beginning with “Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Significant about Jesus’ actions is that he does not turn to extra-biblical sources to prove the Messiah must suffer in order to bring about God’s plan of redemption.²⁰ Instead, as D. Brent Laytham maintains, Jesus turns to Scripture to show how “his passion, death and resurrection . . . conformed to the scriptural pattern of righteous suffering and divine vindication.”²¹

How Does Jesus Open Scripture?

How does Jesus go about opening Scripture for his disciples? Commentators divide on the answer to this question. Darrell Bock believes Jesus either took the disciples

¹⁹ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 847.

²⁰ See Luke 24:46-47

²¹ D. Brent Laytham, “Interpretation on the Way to Emmaus: Jesus Performs His Story,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (2007): 104.

to those texts in the Old Testament that “are directly prophetic [and] refer only to Jesus,”²² or Jesus used what Bock refers to as typico-prophetic texts, which are those “texts [that] reflect patterns that Jesus reenacts and escalates to show their fulfillment or their eschatological inauguration at a new level.”²³ In other words, Bock believes Jesus either used those texts that are prophetic in nature and/or typological to point to himself in all of Scripture.²⁴ Marshall agrees with Bock, believing that Jesus “[chose] out those passages which might be regarded as ‘messianic’ and then proceeded to show how they should be understood” in light of the events surrounding his life, death, and resurrection.²⁵ John Nolland maintains the argument that Jesus selected a few key predictive texts is based on the “OT texts appealed to in Acts, [which are said to] anticipate the shape of Jesus’ career (and in particular his death and resurrection / exaltation).”²⁶ While it is probable Jesus appealed to key texts in the OT, one must remember, based on first-century Judaism’s expectation of the Messiah, knowledge of a suffering Messiah was not, as Nolland argues, an idea “generated inductively from a detailed study of the OT.”²⁷ If it is correct that first-century Judaism did not find evidence for a suffering Messiah through an inductive study of Scripture, then Jesus most likely had to do more than turn to a few key Scriptures, such as Isaiah 52 or Psalm 22, to prove the Messiah must suffer. To show how

²² Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1918.

²³ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1918.

²⁴ Darrel L. Bock, *The Theology of Luke and Acts: God’s Promised Program, Realized for All Nations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 133. To be fair, Bock does not believe Jesus simply used a few key texts out of context to prop up his claim for the necessity of a suffering Messiah, nor does Marshall. As well as Bock does not deny that there is “a strong emphasis on the continuity of God’s plan” for the salvation of the nations through a suffering Messiah in the Scriptures. Even though Bock and Marshall recognize the continuity of God’s plan, one that is centered on a suffering Messiah, it is believed Jesus would have had to point the Emmaus road disciples, and his gathered disciples in Jerusalem, to more than a few predictive texts.

²⁵ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 897.

²⁶ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35c (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1205.

²⁷ Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1205.

these texts and even typological patterns pointed to a suffering Messiah, Jesus would first have had to lay the foundation for why a suffering Messiah was necessary. To overcome his disciples' first-century biases, then, Jesus, according to Horst Balz, most certainly would have had to provide his disciples with "a new Christological interpretation of the OT [in order to open] the possibility [to the disciples] of recognizing and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah sent by God."²⁸ Without a new Christological interpretation of the OT, Jesus' disciples would not have been able to see how the OT points to a suffering Messiah.²⁹ How, then, does Jesus bring his disciples to the point where they are able to see the necessity for a suffering Messiah in all of Scripture?

The Metanarrative Points to Redemption

Jesus began by pointing his disciples to the metanarrative of Scripture to show them that it was God's plan for the Messiah to suffer. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner define a metanarrative as "an overarching, universally valid, global story or schema which serves to explain or organize human knowledge and experience."³⁰ What is the metanarrative of Scripture? According to Beale, the metanarrative of the Bible "begins with creation and ends with the restoration of creation."³¹ Sandwiched in between creation and restoration is fall and redemption. Thus, the four-fold schema of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration serve as the metanarrative or overarching story of

²⁸ Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 54.

²⁹ Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 54. See also Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722.

³⁰ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 49.

³¹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 62.

Scripture.³² Jesus uses the metanarrative to show that the Messiah's suffering is in accordance with God's plan to redeem mankind and bring them back into relationship with him. How does the storyline of Scripture point to the necessity of the Messiah's suffering? To answer that question, one must begin where Jesus began, in the beginning. One must start in the beginning to show why man deserves God's wrath.

Genesis is the first book of the Bible, and it begins with the creation account. Genesis 1 and 2 reveal God as Creator, not only of the world, but of mankind. As Creator, God has the right to rule over his creation.

In the course of time, God created the first humans: Adam and Eve (Gen 1–2). After God created Adam and Eve, he gave them dominion to rule as his royal representatives.³³ While they ruled under God's wisdom and authority for a time, they eventually determined to rule according to their own wisdom, which led them to reject God as their rightful King.³⁴ Their rebellion did not go as planned. Instead of wisdom and autonomy, they experienced shame and judgment.³⁵ In what has become known as the Fall, Adam and Eve experienced a curse and removal from the garden and the tree of life (Gen 3). Their curse not only affected them, but the entire cosmos, including all those who would come after them. Since they serve as the first parents, the sin that affected them also affects mankind. Mankind's sin makes them unholy enemies of the Father, who deserve his wrath.

While the episode of Adam and Eve's rebellion reveals why mankind deserves God's wrath, it also points to the way in which God would deal with his wrath to bring

³² Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 9.

³³ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1a (Nashville: Holman, 1996), 164.

³⁴ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 238.

³⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 241-54.

mankind back into relationship with himself. Before removing Adam and Eve from the garden, God made them coverings from the sacrifice of an animal. These coverings covered their shame and allowed them to remain in relationship with God. Sacrifice, then, becomes the way in which God would deal with mankind's sin and bring them back into relationship with him.

Genesis 3:21 is not the last time one encounters the idea of redemption from God's wrath through sacrifice. The theme of sacrificial redemption runs throughout Scripture. The sacrificial system instituted in the OT by God after the Exodus from Egypt is further evidence that substitutionary sacrifice is the way God plans to redeem mankind from his wrath. While the OT sacrificial system provided mankind redemption from God's wrath, it had one major flaw. The sacrifices offered on behalf of mankind did not provide permanent redemption.³⁶ Instead, the redemption they offered was temporary. The temporary nature of these sacrifices continues to drive the metanarrative forward. One must look for another sacrifice that would provide permanent forgiveness and release from the wrath of God. The author of Hebrews reveals that the search for a once and for all sacrifice continued until Jesus came on the scene. Functioning as the Messiah, he provides a once and for all sacrifice for the sin of mankind, which was something the blood of bulls and goats could not accomplish.³⁷ Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by a single offering he [referring to Jesus] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

The inadequacy of the sacrificial system and the author of Hebrews point to the idea that the Messiah must suffer to pay the penalty for man's sin. As well as, another episode found in Genesis 3:15 points to a suffering Messiah.³⁸ At the end of the Fall narrative, God not only provides a covering for Adam and Eve, but he also promises to

³⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 255. However, as the writer of Hebrews makes clear, the sacrifices offered at the Temple were temporary (Heb 8–10). They had to occur daily so that an unholy people could exist in community with a holy God.

³⁷ Bovon, *Luke 3*, 374.

³⁸ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 733.

deal with evil once and for all. In the midst of pronouncing a curse on mankind and the serpent, God promises that a future offspring from the women would crush the head of the serpent, while simultaneously experiencing a blow from the serpent himself.³⁹ In other words, the serpent would be crushed through the sacrifice of another. Who is the sacrificial serpent crusher?

Paul's argument in Galatians 3 is helpful in determining the identity of the sacrificial serpent crusher. According to Kenneth Matthews, "Paul clearly identified Christ as the 'seed'" in Galatians 3:16.⁴⁰ If Matthews is correct, Genesis 3:15 points to a future selfless act where the Christ will endure a fatal bite on his heel to crush the head of Satan. Thus, a suffering Messiah was not contrary to God's plan, but was God's plan.⁴¹

By pointing his disciples to the metanarrative of Scripture, Jesus is not only able to connect the Scriptures together as one story, but he is also able to show his disciples their greatest need: redemption from God's wrath because of their sin. Additionally, Jesus shows them why the Messiah must suffer, namely because the sacrifices of the OT were inadequate to bring about full and final atonement, as pointed out in Hebrews. Furthermore, pointing his disciples to the metanarrative would have given Jesus the ability to show how a suffering Messiah fulfilled the promise of Genesis 3:15.⁴² His death and subsequent resurrection deal a death blow to Satan and make a way for evil to be eradicated once and for all. These ideas are what led Edwards to conclude that the "plenary witness of Scripture . . . is a metanarrative of the Christ-event."⁴³

³⁹ Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 245. See also Gen 3:15 for God's promise made in Scripture.

⁴⁰ Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 247. In his commentary on Genesis, Matthews continues to trace the seed through the New Testament, as well, he circles back to the ancient serpent.

⁴¹ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 733.

⁴² Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 721.

⁴³ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 721. See also Num 21:4-9; Deut 18:15, 34:10-12; Ps 2, 24, 118:19-24; Dan 7:13-14, 9:25-26; Isa 2:1-4; 25; 53-56; Ezek 34-36; Jer 31:31-34; Zech 13:7; Amos 9:11-15; 1 Cor 15:3; Heb 5:1-3, 9:28; 1 Pe 1:11, 2:24.

A New Hermeneutic

After establishing that God’s plan has always been for a suffering Messiah to die for the sins of mankind, Jesus is able to show how the events surrounding his life, death, and resurrection point to him as the fulfillment of that strategy.⁴⁴ Once one understands a suffering Messiah is God’s design and that Jesus is the fulfillment of that plan, one is able to work through Scripture to see how the text points to him. Green concurs when he says, “Jesus can be understood only in light of the Scriptures, yet the Scriptures themselves can be understood only in light of what has happened with Jesus. These two are mutually informing.”⁴⁵ In other words, without Scripture’s witness to a suffering Messiah one cannot understand how Jesus can be the Messiah. Yet without Jesus’ person and work, one cannot fully understand Scripture. In this way, Jesus acts as an interpretive key that unlocks the text, allowing one to see Jesus in all of Scripture.⁴⁶

With the interpretive key in hand, one should be able to unlock an understanding of Scripture not previously possible. Timothy Keller comments, “The disciples knew the stories of each prophet, each priest, each king, each deliverer from Gideon to David. They knew about the Temple and the sacrifices. But while they knew all the substories, they couldn’t—until he showed them—see the story, about the ultimate prophet, priest, king, deliverer, the final temple and sacrifice.”⁴⁷ Using a Christo-centric hermeneutic, then, Jesus reveals to his disciples how individual Scriptures in the OT point to him.⁴⁸ Isaiah 53 is a one example. The Jews have historically read the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 as representative of Israel’s suffering. However, by employing a Christo-centric hermeneutic, one should be able to see that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 does not

⁴⁴ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 897.

⁴⁵ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 844.

⁴⁶ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722.

⁴⁷ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 59.

⁴⁸ Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1205.

represent Israel—he is representative of the Messiah. The same holds true of Psalm 22. Reading the Psalm through a Christo-centric lens, one should now view it as a prediction of Jesus’ death. Reading the OT through the lens of Jesus, then, allows one to clearly see the prophetic predictions and typological patterns that point to and find their fulfillment in Jesus.

Since all Scripture points to and climaxes in Jesus, according to Sidney Greidanus, one must read Scripture from the “perspective of the reality of Christ.”⁴⁹ One must employ a Christo-centric hermeneutic when reading the text to understand its message, and experience hope and a restored relationship with the Father (Rom 4:25).⁵⁰

Jesus’ Right to Provide a Christ-Centered Hermeneutic

Jesus can make these declarations and one should believe him for several reasons. First, Jesus is the resurrected Lord whom the Father has exalted. The two angels at the tomb testify to Jesus as the resurrected Lord when they ask the women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen” (Luke 24:5b-6a). Additionally, there is evidence that the Father exalts Jesus when he is “carried up into heaven” to be with the Father (Luke 24:51). Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation make him, as Edwards points out, the “authoritative interpreter of the history of Israel that anticipates his messianic appearance.”⁵¹ Green agrees: “By means of the resurrection, Jesus’ perspective on and use of the Scriptures are shown to be authorized by God over against the interpretations of his opponents among the Jerusalem leadership.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 199.

⁵⁰ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 735.

⁵¹ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722.

⁵² Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 835.

Not only is Jesus the resurrected Lord whom the Father has exalted, but he is also the “Word made flesh.”⁵³ John 1:1 reads, “The Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then, in verse 14, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Edwards explains that, as the living Word of God, Jesus “is the mediator between God and the believer, between the believer and all other human relationships, and between the believer and the scriptural testimony to him in Israel.”⁵⁴ Thus, as the resurrected Lord and the living Word, it is his ability alone to “enlighten and interpret the written word.”⁵⁵

Lastly, according to Green, what Jesus “predicted would happen to him in his role as Son of Man” happened.⁵⁶ Jesus is God’s regal prophet.⁵⁷ Edwards explains that while he used the “enigmatic figure of the Son of Man” (Luke 9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:31-34) to predict his own suffering,⁵⁸ he explicitly claims, in conversation with the Emmaus road disciples, that the suffering of the Son of Man “is the suffering of Messiah”⁵⁹ when he tells them that the “summary testimony of Scripture concerns himself.”⁶⁰ Since Jesus’ predictions concerning the Son of Man came true, he is warranted in pointing to himself as the interpretive key of Scripture.⁶¹ This leads Green to conclude that “Jesus’ own words

⁵³ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722. see John 1:1; 14

⁵⁴ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 734.

⁵⁵ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722.

⁵⁶ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 834.

⁵⁷ Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1205.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722.

⁵⁹ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722.

⁶⁰ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 722.

⁶¹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 834.

as God’s regal prophet are thus key to discerning the unfolding of God’s purpose.”⁶² For these three reasons, Jesus is warranted in positioning himself as the interpretive key of Scripture. One should, then, employ a Christo-centric hermeneutic when reading Scripture.

Acts 3

Peter’s speech in Acts 3 is an important marker in the flow of biblical history. It shows that the apostles accepted Jesus’ interpretation of Scripture and taught Jesus’ interpretation in Jerusalem and beyond, fulfilling Jesus’ mandate to proclaim, “forgiveness of sins . . . in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

Context

Acts 3 begins with Peter and John “going up to the temple at the hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1). As they walk through the temple gate, a lame man from birth, sitting at his daily post, asked them for alms. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and emboldened by God’s work through them on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stops and calls the lame beggar to fix his gaze on him. Instead of giving the beggar the money for which he asked, because he had none, he gives something better—healing in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:1-47; 3:1-7).

As the former lame man walks into the temple with Peter and John praising God, a crowd gathers around the men. Amazed at the sight of the former lame man walking, the crowd wonders how he was healed (Acts 3:8-10). The crowd’s wonder and amazement provide Peter an opportunity to preach Jesus as Messiah.

Peter’s Christ-Centered Reading of the Old Testament

After pointing to the resurrection as God’s seal of approval on Jesus’ ministry, Peter turns to Scripture to prove Jesus is the Messiah. To prove Jesus is the Messiah, Peter must use Scripture to advocate for a suffering Messiah, just as Jesus did in Luke 24. But as argued earlier, the necessity for a suffering Messiah was not the accepted norm in

⁶² Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 834.

Peter's day.⁶³ How does Peter convince the crowd that a suffering Messiah was necessary? Peter uses the Christo-centric hermeneutic Jesus provided in Luke 24.

Jesus Is the Suffering Servant

A Christo-centric hermeneutic is at work in verse 13. There, Peter refers to Jesus as God's servant when attributing the healing of the lame man to Jesus' glorification by the Father.⁶⁴ The title, as David Peterson points out, "is more than a formal, honorific way of describing Jesus as a faithful follower or child of God."⁶⁵ As well, it appears to be more than a mere suggestion to a "regal-messianic dimension," which Bock attributes to the text.⁶⁶ Instead, Peter specifically and purposefully uses the modifier "servant" to make a connection to the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. How can one be sure Peter had Isaiah's Suffering Servant passage in mind? Eckhard Schnabel points out that Jesus' "suffering and death mentioned in the subsequent statement of Peter's speech (vv. 13-15, 18) corresponds to the suffering and death of the Servant in Isa 53:2-10."⁶⁷ Not only does Jesus' suffering and death correspond to that of the suffering Servant, but "the forgiveness that God grants in connection with the suffering and death of Jesus the Messiah (vv. 19-20) corresponds to the substitutionary atonement for sins that the Servant achieves in Isa 53:5."⁶⁸ Schnabel also finds a correspondence between the Servant's glorification and Jesus' glorification in his resurrection.⁶⁹ Apart from the

⁶³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 169.

⁶⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New international commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 80.

⁶⁵ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 174.

⁶⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 169.

⁶⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 209.

⁶⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, 209.

⁶⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 209.

connections Schnabel sees, John Polhill points out that “when one considers the possible allusions to the servant psalms that run throughout vv. 13-14, in references to ‘glorification’ (Isa 52:13), the ‘righteous one’ (Isa 53:11), and being ‘handed over’ or ‘delivered up’ (*paraddidomi*, twice in LXX of Isa 53:12)” it is likely Peter has Isaiah in mind when delivering his speech.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Polhill believes Luke’s connection to the Suffering Servant passage through Philip’s speech in Acts 8:32-33 provides warrant for believing the connection is also being made in Peter’s speech.⁷¹ Peter’s connection to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, then, is one line of evidence for his acceptance and usage of a Christo-centric hermeneutic in the early church.

Jesus Is the One Prophesied about by the Prophets

Peter also shows he embraces a Christo-centric hermeneutic in verse 18 when he claims, as John Polhill makes clear, “God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer.” In doing so, he shows that “a Messiah who suffers . . . is something God planned and Scripture declared.”⁷² Peter’s perception of a Messiah who suffers as prophesied by the prophets is not a conclusion he would have come to if he were not operating from a Christo-centric hermeneutic.⁷³ In other words, as Schnabel explains, without embracing Jesus’ teaching and looking through the lens of the cross, Peter would not have seen God’s plan for a suffering Messiah “revealed in the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 131.

⁷¹ Polhill, *Acts*, 131.

⁷² Bock, *Acts*, 174.

⁷³ Bock, *Acts*, 174.

⁷⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 223.

To what prophets does Peter point? Peter first points to Moses. According to Peterson, Peter attributes Moses' prophecy to "Jesus as the eschatological prophet because he brings the ultimate revelation of God's will and leads God's people to final salvation."⁷⁵ While Peter first points to Moses' prophecy of a coming Messiah, he is not the only prophet to whom Peter refers.⁷⁶ Peter extends the scope of prophetic predictions beyond Moses to "all the prophets from Samuel on."⁷⁷ In verse 24, Peter reveals that from Samuel onward, not some, but all the prophets prophesied about a coming Messiah.⁷⁸ How did all the prophet's prophesy about the coming Messiah? Peterson is helpful in his assessment of the prophet's prophetic message: "The focus of their revelations was not simply the suffering of the Messiah (as in v. 18), but the events and blessings of the Messianic era in general (as in vv. 19–21)."⁷⁹ The promises are centered on the nation experiencing God's "saving purposes for Israel and the nations (e.g., Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-22; 22:15-18; 26:1-6; 28:10-15)."⁸⁰ Peterson argues that these prophetic promises eventually will lead to "the blessings of the nations and the restoration of the whole created order," which will occur when Jesus returns.⁸¹ In this way, all the prophets can prophecy about Jesus because, in one way or another, they refer to the Messianic era⁸²; an era that "fulfilled God's plan of salvation," as shown by the metanarrative of Scripture. If the Jews want to experience God's covenant blessing and "enjoy the times of refreshing that he has brought about through Jesus," then they would need to repent of

⁷⁵ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 184.

⁷⁶ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 87.

⁷⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 136.

⁷⁸ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 87.

⁷⁹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 184.

⁸⁰ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 173.

⁸¹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 172.

⁸² Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 184.

their sins and believe in the suffering Messiah, since he is the one who restores their relationship with the Father.⁸³

Again, what is significant for this study is that Peter, working from a Christo-centric hermeneutic, argues that a suffering Messiah, according to Schnabel, has always been a part of “God’s plan of salvation since time immemorial, since the beginning of history (v. 21),” and argues that Jesus is the Messiah who has suffered on behalf of mankind.⁸⁴ Peter’s advocacy for a suffering Messiah shows he fully embraced Jesus’ teaching in Luke 24.

Acts 6:8–7:60

Stephen is another one of the early church leaders that adopted a Christo-centric hermeneutic. His speech serves as another important marker in the flow of biblical history since it proves a Christo-centric hermeneutic had not only taken root with the apostles, but also with other leaders in the church. Like Peter, Stephen shows a Christo-centric hermeneutic is needed in order to understand the trajectory of Scripture as it relates to the Messiah, specifically the necessity of a suffering Messiah. A brief look at the context is in order before turning to a few ways in which Stephen’s speech links the biblical text together as one story that centers on Jesus.

Context

Stephen, a recently chosen deacon, “full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8). Some of the leaders in the Synagogue, however, did not like Stephen’s work, so they “rose up and disputed with” him, but they did not prevail (Acts 6:9). His “wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” was too strong for them (Acts 6:10). Even so, the leaders were determined to rid themselves of Stephen and his witness to Jesus as Messiah. Since they were not able to defeat his

⁸³ Schnabel, *Acts*, 223.

⁸⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, 222.

arguments, they hired witnesses to bear false testimony. Stephen was accused of speaking against God, Moses, and the Temple. The charges levied against him were serious and would result in severe punishment or even death.

When given opportunity to respond to the accusations, Stephen does not face them head on. Instead, he chooses to trace the storyline of Scripture, specifically looking at Israel's history to make his defense. Several themes emerge as he works through the metanarrative. The faithfulness of God throughout the ages, as well as the consistent rebellion of Israel and the rejection of God's prophets, are a few major themes that emerge. As Stephen traces Israel's sinful past, he shows his accusers their need for a sacrificial Savior. He points to Jesus as the Sacrificial Savior. Instead of believing in the Righteous One whom God the Father sent as a sacrifice for their sins, the Jews rejected and killed him just like their forefathers killed the prophets. Ironically, Stephen labels the Jews the very ones "who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One" (Acts 7:52). Stephen's speech outraged the crowd and the officials, so much so that they forcefully carried him out of the city and stoned him to death (Acts 7:56-58). What is significant about Stephen's speech is that he shows in several different ways that he has embraced a Christo-centric hermeneutic.

Metanarrative

According to Bock, Stephen's "speech is one of Acts' two historical overviews of [Israel's] . . . history as it relates to the messianic promise."⁸⁵ As Stephen works through the metanarrative of Scripture, he not only reveals a pattern of "rejecting God and his messengers . . . [which] characterizes Israel's history,"⁸⁶ but he also shows how the text applies to Jesus.⁸⁷ Without tracing all the ways that the OT is connected to Jesus, let it

⁸⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 276.

⁸⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, 363.

⁸⁷ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 293.

suffice to say that it is only possible for Stephen to see Jesus in the OT if he was employing a Christo-centric hermeneutic.

The Righteous One

Further evidence Stephen employs a Christo-centric hermeneutic in his speech arises with the use of the title “Righteous One.” Bock argues the title is initially applied to Jesus in the New Testament “in Luke 23:47, when the centurion declared Jesus to be the innocent/righteous” one at the cross after Jesus’ death.⁸⁸ Stephen picks up the Centurion’s thought and also sees a correlation between Jesus and the Righteous One. While the Centurion’s connection was one of amazement, Stephen, no less amazed, has a specific motive in making this link. According to Peterson, a point on which Bock and Bruce agree, “the Righteous One’ (*ho dikaios*) was a messianic designation” in the Old Testament.⁸⁹ If one traces the idea of the Righteous One, one will find oneself in the prophets, specifically, Jeremiah 23:5-6 and Zechariah 6:12,⁹⁰ as well as, and most significantly, Isaiah 53:11.⁹¹ While the other two prophets provide support, it is evident Stephen had Isaiah in mind because he quickly recounts the actions of the fathers who killed the prophets of the past. Howard Marshall lends support for this view when he says, “Isaiah was the prophet who was especially remembered as being murdered by Manasseh, and since his book contained the account of the suffering of the righteous Servant (Isa 53),” Isaiah is the one who is especially in mind when Stephen gives his speech.⁹² The connection to Isaiah 53:11 is significant because it strongly implies the

⁸⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 171.

⁸⁹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 175. See also Bock, *Acts*, 170; Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 141.

⁹⁰ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 175.

⁹¹ Bock, *Acts*, 170.

⁹² I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 569-70.

Messiah must suffer for the people for them “to be accounted righteous” (Isa 53:11b). Thus, Stephen argues Jesus’ death was one of substitution. In other words, Jesus substituted himself to make others righteous.⁹³ Based on what is known of first-century Judaism’s idea of the Messiah, it is evident Stephen must have been operating from a Christo-centric hermeneutic in order to connect Jesus to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 since first-century Judaism did not believe in a suffering Messiah. Instead, they believed in a strong God who would come and conquer.

Christo-Centric Hermeneutic

Stephen not only shows that Scripture connects as one story when he traces the metanarrative of Israel’s history, but he also shows that its trajectory points to the cross and Jesus’ suffering. Stephen, then, plays a significant role in the development of a Christo-centric hermeneutic. His speech is a prime example that Scripture ties together as one story that centers on Jesus as the suffering Messiah who redeems God’s people according to plan.

Conclusion

A suffering Messiah has been a stumbling block to the Jews for centuries. They see no need for a Messiah to suffer. Instead, they are looking for a Savior who can liberate them from oppression and usher in an eternal kingdom. While Jesus will set up his kingdom one day (Rev 21–22), military victory is not why he first came. Instead, he came to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind and bring them back into relationship with the Father so that they might experience everlasting life in his future kingdom to come. Without a Messiah who suffers, man dies in his sin unable to experience a reconciled relationship with the Father. To see the need for a suffering Messiah, one must first look to the metanarrative of Scripture. The metanarrative of Scripture points to God as Creator,

⁹³ Peter Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 136. See also 1 Pet 3:18 where Peter argues that the Christ must suffer as substitute to bring unrighteous sinners to God.

man as sinful, and the deficiency of man himself and the sacrificial system to atone for his sin fully and finally. Thus, for man to experience a relationship with the Father the Righteous One had to suffer. As well, the Messiah had to suffer and die to defeat Satan, sin, and death. Once one understands the reasons the Messiah must suffer, it becomes evident that God's plan has always pointed to a suffering Messiah before pointing to a conquering king. Once one understands that Jesus fulfills the role of the Suffering Servant, one is then able to look back through the lens of the cross, armed with a Christo-centric hermeneutic, and discover Jesus in the OT in ways not previously possible. In this way, Jesus serves as the unifying center of Scripture and its interpretive key.

CHAPTER 3
PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO A CHRIST-
CENTERED UNDERSTANDING
OF THE BIBLE

A Christ-centered understanding of the Bible is the best approach to God’s Word because it is the way Jesus himself understood the text. He understood that all Scripture pointed to his coming and a once and for all sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Followers of Jesus know this was Jesus’ understanding because he interprets the text from a Christ-centered perspective in Luke 24, as well as his disciples interpreted the text in a Christ-centered way. Jesus and his disciples’ interpretation of the text is not a take it or leave it approach to God’s Word. Instead, it is an approach one must adopt to read the text faithfully.

Along with faithfully interpreting the text, reading Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective has several practical implications. Three implications are explored in the pages that follow. First, a Christ-centered reading of the Bible ties the biblical text together as one story. Without a Christ-centered reading of the text, the Bible lacks cohesion and direction. However, when one reads Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective, a unity in the diversity appears. This unity brings the biblical text together as one story with purpose. Second, Scripture tied together as one story by the Christ has worldview implications, which should affect not only how one views the world but also how one interacts with the world. Third, a Christ-centered approach to Scripture has gospel implications. It not only reveals the “how” of salvation—namely, salvation occurs through belief in the Christ’s work on man’s behalf—but a Christ-centered reading of Scripture also reveals the “why” of the gospel. Without reading the Bible as one unified story that centers on the Christ, it is difficult to understand why salvation is necessary and

from what one needs saving. These practical implications will be considered one at a time.

A Christ-Centered Understanding of Scripture Ties the Bible Together as One Story

God's Word, according to Clowney, "is more than a bewildering collection of oracles, proverbs, poems, architectural directions, annals, and prophecies."¹ It is more than a pragmatic manual that offers little more than principles for right living. God's Word exists as a story with a purpose. Michael Lawrence points out, "This narrative of God's activity is not simply a [fictional] story. It's a story that starts at the beginning of history and ends at the end of history."² The purpose of God's story centers on the Christ. The Christ is not a backseat character, he is not plan B, nor does he show up mid-way through the story by happenstance. Instead, all of Scripture points to and radiates out from Christ's work. On this side of the cross, one knows the Christ as Jesus, who is God's Son.³ From beginning to end, the narrative centers on Jesus as the Christ. It is the Christ, then, that ties the biblical story together as one cohesive story.

To be sure, the Christ is not on every page in the sense that every story in the Bible is about Jesus nor does every story or text serve as a prophecy or prediction of the Christ. That is not to say there are not prophecies and predications of the Christ in God's Word; prophecies and predictions occur regularly in Scripture and are important to the overall cohesion of the biblical text. While these prophecies and predictions are important, they are not primarily what hold the text together and make it Christ-centered.

¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1988), 11.

² Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 31.

³ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 11.

The Christ Unifies Scripture

How does the Christ unify Scripture? God's plan of redemption through the Christ brings cohesion to the biblical text. The biblical story drives toward and finds resolution in the Christ character, climaxing initially in his first coming and then again in his second coming. Scripture is Christ-centered because God's promise to rescue his people from their sins through the anointed Savior is the focus of the Bible.⁴ The purpose of God's Word, then, is to tell the story of redemption won by the Christ and how mankind might experience salvation.

The Bible's focus on the Christ is evident through the overarching framework of the biblical text. Just as a novel has chapters that signal movements in the story. The same is true of Scripture. The biblical storyline divides loosely into chapters or movements. The chapters or movements in God's Word serve to provide a framework that ties Scripture together.⁵ What framework does Scripture provide? As one works through the storyline of Scripture from beginning to end, the framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Recreation, or what can also be referred to as Restoration, tie the text together.⁶ This framework includes and is centered around covenants that define God's relationship with mankind and reveal God's plan of redemption, which is accomplished through the Christ.⁷

⁴ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 12.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 32-37.

⁶ Graeme Goldsworthy argues that the Bible contains a "historical timeline that reaches from creation to the new creation." Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 58. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen provide a more detailed overarching structure of the biblical text, including the idea that redemption is spread. They refer to it as the spreading of the King's news or "the mission of the church. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 27.

⁷ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 31.

Creation

When one tells the Christian story, one must begin with the creation narrative because that is where the Bible begins. The Bible begins with creation to establish from the beginning that God created the world and everything in it (Gen 1–2). God did not just create the universe and the earth, he also created all life in the universe, including mankind.⁸

God created man to exist in a different relationship with him than the rest of creation. Mankind bears God’s image. God gives man the task of exercising dominion over the world.⁹ Man is to work it and keep it, to live and thrive in God’s good creation to bring God glory. Clowney agrees when he says, “This first man is the lord of all.”¹⁰ Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen continue to explain man’s lordship when they reveal that God created man to “serve as his ‘under-kings,’ vice-regents, or stewards. [Man is] to rule over the creation so that God’s reputation is enhanced within his cosmic kingdom.”¹¹ Humans, however, are not to rule “as tyrants exploiting the earth, but as stewards ruling *coram deo*, before the presence of God.”¹²

The creation account firmly reveals mankind’s place in the story of God. It dispels the myth that man is in control. God is Creator and King—he has endowed man with authority but not ultimate authority. Man must look to God for direction, submitting to his authority as he stewards God’s good creation.¹³ Thus, as Lawrence points out, the

⁸ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 30.

⁹ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 20.

¹⁰ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 21.

¹¹ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 37.

¹² Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 38.

¹³ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 31-38.

beginning of the biblical story establishes “a relationship between a king and his subjects.”¹⁴

Not only does the creation account reveal the lordship of God, but it reveals God’s care for the world and the scope of redemption for which he is working. Man is the pinnacle of God’s creation. God seeks man’s redemption, but God also cares about the world. It is his creation and he will not allow its destruction.¹⁵ Christopher Wright, author of *The Mission of God’s People*, believes God’s mission includes the redemption of the entire world order: “When I speak of mission, I am thinking of all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose.”¹⁶ Mission, as Wright defines it, “is the global outreach of the global people of a global God.”¹⁷ God’s global mission in its broadest sense is to rid his creation of evil. God’s mission, then, involves more than cross-cultural evangelism. Mission involves God’s care for and redemption of his entire creation as he seeks not only to redeem a people for himself but a land in which his people can live according to his good and original design.¹⁸

Fall

Why must God work to redeem man and the world? The next major episode or chapter in the biblical narrative reveals what went wrong. Adam and Eve were given the role of “under-kings,” but, according to Bartholomew and Goheen, they soon sought to “assert their autonomy: to become a law unto themselves.”¹⁹ Instead of allowing God to

¹⁴ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 31.

¹⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 32-33.

¹⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 25.

¹⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 24.

¹⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 26-41.

¹⁹ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 42-43.

direct their lives, they chose to determine right and wrong for themselves.²⁰ Tempted by the serpent, who represents Satan in the story, Clowney reveals that man believed he “could be his own god, build his own dominion, possess the world not as God’s stewards but as an absolute monarch.”²¹ Believing a lie, Adam and Eve, the first beings God created, defied God’s rule by taking and eating of the fruit he forbid (Gen 3:1-6). Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God and their subsequent plummet into sin is an event known as the Fall.²²

Grudem, in his systematic theology, defines sin as “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”²³ Sin is more than law breaking. Sin is an internal attitude that is contrary to God’s rule. Sin affects the heart, “our very nature, the internal character that is the essence of who we are as persons,” which means sin affects every aspect of man.²⁴ Keller agrees and maintains that the results of the Fall are “spiritual, psychological, social, and physical decay and breakdown.”²⁵ In this way, sin undermines personhood and the understanding that mankind belongs to another. The resulting breakdown of sin not only destroys man’s relationship with God but also hinders man’s relationship with one another and the creation.²⁶

Scripture reveals the corrupting nature of sin as it repeatedly documents its heinous nature, particularly, but not exclusively, through God’s covenant people, Israel. Even though God chose Israel to be his people, making covenants with them, they

²⁰ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 43.

²¹ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 31.

²² Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 43.

²³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004),490.

²⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 490.

²⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 34.

²⁶ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 43.

consistently rebel against God's will for the nation. Israel reveals that even those chosen by God and closest to him, living in his presence, are not immune to sin. The Fall affects everyone, putting the entire human race in opposition to God.²⁷ The Fall narrative, then, is an important part of the storyline of Scripture. It explains the relational breakdowns that occur throughout Scripture, such as Cain's murder of Abel and the active and continued rebellion against God in Noah's day, where men grew so wicked God decided to destroy everyone except Noah, his family, and the animals in the ark with a worldwide flood. The Fall also explains why men immediately spiraled back into sin after the flood episode, resulting in mankind's communal effort to make their name great over against God's by building the Tower of Babel.²⁸ Furthermore, the Fall explains why the nation of Israel, God's chosen and blessed people, continue to rebel against him, his leaders, and prophets. Sin affects man's actions, attitude, and nature. It creates chaos and breakdown—chaos and breakdown that also affect the creation at large.²⁹ Man and the creation must be redeemed from sin and its curse since man and the world have been affected by sin to the core.

Redemption

God's plan does not end with man cursed and doomed to death in the garden. Instead, God's act of redemption begins immediately after Adam and Eve's rebellion. In the garden, God begins to work to set everything right, showing that sin has not derailed his plan.³⁰ Adam and Eve run from God, but God seeks them out.³¹ In the garden, as

²⁷ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 622-23.

²⁸ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 47-53.

²⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 622-23 When I speak of the creation at large, I have in mind the actual created order, including the animals. The fabric of the world, how it operates, has been affected by the Fall, so that it does not operate in the way God initially designed.

³⁰ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 36.

³¹ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 44.

Bartholomew and Goheen point out, God “curses the serpent and promises to put enmity between the serpent’s offspring and that of the woman.”³² He promises the birth of a future seed who will gain victory over sin and ultimately restore creation back to God’s original design. Eventually the “woman’s offspring will crush the serpent’s head” but at great cost.³³ The promised seed will receive a mortal wound in his effort to destroy sin and right every wrong. God’s promised act of redemption through the Christ has begun.

How God will redeem mankind from the curse is not fully known when one leaves the garden and begins to travel with the narrative east of Eden. What is clear, however, is that sin has affected the world and both mankind and the world need redemption—redemption that will come through the promised Christ character.

God does not keep man in the dark for long. Progressively, through the biblical covenants, God reveals his plan of redemption in greater and greater detail. Covenants, as Lawrence points out, “are not merely contracts or promises. Rather, covenants are relationships under authority, with both obligations and rewards.”³⁴ The covenants do more than establish a relationship between the king and his “under-kings.” That is not to say that the establishment of a relationship is not important. The relationship man has with God is crucially important. God created man for relationship. The covenants, however, do more than establish a relationship. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum argue that the “biblical covenants in a step by step fashion reveal and anticipate in instruction, type, and shadow the coming of our Lord.”³⁵ Thus, as one walks through the storyline of Scripture, God’s plan of redemption comes to light as it centers on and anticipates the Christ character.

³² Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 44.

³³ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 44.

³⁴ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 31.

³⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 623.

God's plan of redemption moves forward based on several key covenants. The first covenant one encounters outside of the garden of Eden is the Noahic covenant. Man's wickedness was so great that God decided to destroy every living thing on the earth with a worldwide flood. Noah and his family were the only ones spared. Though God destroys every living thing on the earth except Noah, his family, and those animals on the ark, man's hope of redemption does not drown. God's plan of redemption is still in motion. His covenant with Noah reinforces his promise of redemption. Gentry and Wellum explain that the Noahic covenant reinforces the idea that human beings "will continue to fulfill their role as God's image bearers" as God patiently forbears against the sins of mankind.³⁶ How can and why would a holy God forbear against sinful men who deserve punishment? God forbears because the Christ is coming. He will pay the price for man's sin, satisfying God's wrath. The Noahic covenant is God's promise that redemption will occur no matter how bad sin gets. God will send the serpent crushing Messiah. He will redeem the created order.

The next covenant one encounters in God's Word is the Abrahamic covenant. God's covenant with Abraham comes shortly after the incident at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11). Over against a rebellious people who seek to make a name for themselves, God elects Abraham, deciding he will make a name for him. God intends to work through Abraham and his children to bring about the promised seed. According to Gentry and Wellum, the Abrahamic covenant, then, becomes "the means by which God will fulfill his promise for humanity especially in light of the promise given in Genesis 3:15."³⁷ Abraham represents a narrowing of God's focus to bring redemption to the world, since the promised seed will come through Abraham's family.

The timing of the coming Christ is unknown at this point in the narrative, but with Abraham a distinction between two kingdoms emerge. A kingdom associated with

³⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 629.

³⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 631.

Abraham and his family, and a kingdom associated with the world. Gentry and Wellum point out, “Throughout Scripture these two kingdoms will be contrasted, but it is only through Abraham and his family that God’s saving rule will break into this world and the resolution to sin and death will take place.”³⁸ Thus, if one desires and will receive salvation, he must be a part of God’s kingdom, which God establishes through the line of Abraham.

Eventually, Abraham’s family becomes a nation; a large nation that God redeems from bondage in Egypt. After the Exodus event, God leads the nation in the wilderness, and in the wilderness, at the foot of Mount Sinai, God makes a covenant with the nation. God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai is an important next step in the grand biblical narrative. It highlights further the obedience God requires from those who will live in his kingdom. Through a set of laws, God communicates what it means to be holy and what he requires for man to live in his presence. Since man cannot render absolute obedience to God, God establishes a sacrificial system. While the sacrificial system allows man to live in the presence of God, it only does so temporarily. The atoning effect of each sacrifice is limited in its scope. Each sacrifice atones for the sin or sins committed prior to the sacrifice. However, the sacrifice does not cover sins committed after its offering, which means man must continue to offer sacrifices for sin. The never-ending nature of the sacrificial system proves it is not meant to be a permanent solution. Instead, it is meant to drive the narrative forward as it points to the reality and need for a full and final sacrifice—one that not only covers past sin, but present and future sin as well. Man needs a once and for all sacrifice that will defeat evil and the curse of the law, which is death.

Not only does the sacrificial system point to the need for a full and final sacrifice, it also points to the need for a changed heart.³⁹ By its nature, the sacrificial system does not have the ability to change man’s heart, it can only atone for man’s sin.

³⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 632.

³⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 636-39.

However, man's heart is wicked continually; rebellion against God and his lordship is ongoing. The only way to change man's consistent rebellion against God is for man's heart to change. Only when the will, wants, and desires of men change will they be able to live in God's kingdom as he desires, bringing him glory by exercising dominion as his faithful "under-kings." Thus, the biblical narrative continues in search of the Christ who can render complete obedience to God and change man's heart.

The next covenant in the biblical story is the Davidic covenant. David is not the nation's first king, but he is God's chosen king because he is a man after God's own heart. God makes a covenant with David, promising to establish his kingdom and throne forever (2 Sam 7:12-16). The Davidic covenant represents a further defining of the Christ character. Through the line of Abraham and David the Messiah, the promised seed in Genesis 3:15, comes. The kingly nature of the Davidic covenant reveals that the Messiah will be a king who rules over a kingdom that will bring blessing to the nations.

The Davidic covenant also reveals that a faithful king must come in whom God brings his promises to pass. A king who does not deserve punishment. One that can act as a mediator between God and man and can crush the head of the serpent and pay mankind's debt, while at the same time exercising dominion over God's kingdom in a way that brings God glory. David falls woefully short. He does not come close to fulfilling the covenant demands as the obedient son. He is not able to act as a perfect king ruling with complete justice, nor is he able to mediate for the people, atoning for their sin, since his sin needs atoning. His son, Solomon, arguable one of the greatest kings in the history of the world, is not able to fulfill the demands of the covenant either. Neither could any of the kings who came after Solomon. One king after another fails to uphold God's law and fulfill his covenant demands. In fact, not one man or king in biblical history is able to completely fulfill the covenants to bring about God's promises.⁴⁰ Gentry and Wellum argue that men in the biblical story "could only typify and anticipate another one to come. A Davidic son

⁴⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 642.

who would fulfill their covenant role specifically through perfect obedience as the true Son.”⁴¹ The biblical story marches forward in search of the true Davidic king, who is the Christ.

Between the Davidic covenant and the arrival of the promised seed is the New Covenant (Jer 31:29-34). Gentry and Wellum write that the New Covenant is important in the gospel story in that it provides “ultimate fulfillment of all God’s promises, the reversal of the effects of sin and death brought about by Adam, and the establishment of the new creation.”⁴² The New Covenant is related to Christ and the church, and it is the covenant that will bring about complete restoration to all creation and mankind as they live in God’s good kingdom for all eternity.⁴³ The New Covenant is the covenant to which all the other covenants point. It is the aim to which all biblical covenants drive. Christ is the covenant head. He is greater than Adam because he reverses the curse brought on creation by Adam’s sin. The result is a new creation. He is also the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Through the death of Christ, the nations can experience true blessing. Furthermore, the Christ serves as the true Israel, fulfilling Israel’s role in the world to be a light to the nations. As a light to the nations, he brings God’s blessing to the world. Lastly, he fulfills the Davidic covenant, serving as the perfect King, whose rule encompasses the entirety of the created order.⁴⁴ Jesus, as Gentry and Wellum argue, is the “great antitype of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, and David. . . . It is only through this obedient Son that God’s long-awaited kingdom is inaugurated in this world through the new covenant.”⁴⁵ The covenants, then, are the backbone of the biblical story. They

⁴¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 642.

⁴² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 645.

⁴³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 645.

⁴⁴ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 253-54.

⁴⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 246.

carry it along, each, according to Gentry and Wellum, playing their “part of the progressive revelation of the one plan of God, and all of which reach their telos, terminus, and fulfillment in Christ.”⁴⁶

Recreation

As one reads the biblical story, it should be evident that God has a plan he is working out that will bring redemption to the entire world. Gentry and Wellum are helpful when they point out that the “biblical covenants in a step by step fashion reveal and anticipate in instruction, type, and shadow” God’s plan.⁴⁷ It is a plan centered on Jesus, who is the Christ, and his sacrifice on the cross. This plan will result in Jesus’ return where he will setup his perfect future kingdom, restoring creation so that the created order operates as God originally designed (Isa 2:2-5; 11:1-16).

It should be evident that God’s Word is not a collection of wise sayings, inspirational quotes, or direct commands. It is not a self-help manual. Instead, it is a story meant to point mankind to the Christ. The Christ character, defined and anticipated by the covenants, moves the story along to its intended climaxes of redemption and recreation. Without Jesus, the biblical text does not make sense. It does not hold together. Its characters, stories, commands, poems, songs, images, and laments remain disconnected from one another and have no purpose. Since the Christ ties the Bible together, infusing it with purpose and meaning, one should read Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 251.

⁴⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 623.

⁴⁸ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 12-21.

A Christ-Centered Understanding of Scripture Shapes One's Worldview

Having seen that the Christ ties the biblical text together as one story, one might ask why God chose to use story to reveal his plan of salvation. God did not reveal the how and why of salvation in story form by accident. God's revelation through story, rather than solely through propositions, is purposeful. Story is how mankind processes the world.⁴⁹ In addition, story ties events together and provides a big picture from which to operate, allowing one to make sense of individual events.⁵⁰

The Biblical Story Is a Basic Story

One might refer to the biblical story as a basic story.⁵¹ Basic stories are also referred to as grand narratives or metanarratives.⁵² According to Bartholomew and Goheen, a basic or foundational story is one that provides "us with an understanding of our whole world and of our own place within it. Such comprehensive stories give us the meaning of universal history."⁵³ Bartholomew and Goheen argue that grand narratives shape one's understanding of the world. By giving his word in story form, God intends for the biblical narrative to shape and provide meaning to life experiences.⁵⁴ He intends the biblical story to reshape man's thinking. Lawrence keenly points out, "It's not just that we interpret the Bible. The Bible interprets us, by declaring what the main events of reality are, and then telling us to read ourselves in light of that story."⁵⁵ According to

⁴⁹ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 44-45.

⁵⁰ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 16.

⁵¹ Robert Reymond argues that the Christian faith "is a world -and-life-view, a Weltanschauung." Robert Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge: An Introductory Study in Christian Apologetic Methodology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 40.

⁵² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 16.

⁵³ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 18.

⁵⁴ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 18-19.

⁵⁵ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 31.

James Anderson, the worldview to which ones subscribes “shapes and informs your experiences of the world around you. Like a pair of spectacles with colored lenses, it affects what you see and how you see it.”⁵⁶

James Eckman maintains that a worldview represents “the core of what we believe. It answers the basic questions of life.”⁵⁷ What are the basic questions of life? According to Eckman, the basic questions a worldview answers are: “How did we get here? Where are we going? What is the nature of reality? What is the nature of God, or transcendent reality? What is the nature of truth? What is the nature of human beings? What happens to human beings when we die?”⁵⁸ A person’s worldview also answers the ethical question: “What guidelines determine human behavior?”⁵⁹ The worldview to which one subscribes makes a difference. It determines how one views and processes the world.

One can only subscribe to one basic or grand narrative. One cannot look through multiple worldview lenses at the same time. Only one story can be the basis for one’s life and thinking. If one attempts to adhere to two basic stories, they he is either being untrue to one or have created an entirely different grand narrative by combining the two stories.⁶⁰

Which Story Should Guide Mankind?

Which basic story should one choose as their guide for life? The best and most comprehensive narrative by which one should seek “to understand all of life and the

⁵⁶ James N. Anderson, *What’s Your Worldview?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 13.

⁵⁷ James P. Eckman, *The Truth about Worldviews* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 13.

⁵⁸ Eckman, *The Truth about Worldviews*, 13.

⁵⁹ Eckman, *The Truth about Worldviews*, 13.

⁶⁰ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 20.

whole of history” is the Christ-centered story of the Bible.⁶¹ How does one know the biblical story is the one to which he should subscribe? How does one know which story he should allow to guide and direct his life?

One can develop a grand narrative from at least four basic starting points. First is atheistic humanism, which asserts there is no God. Men must gain knowledge on their own apart from any special revelation. Thus, God’s Word, whether the Bible or other religious texts, are, according to Goldsworthy, “not revelation from God but rather a record of certain religious ideas.”⁶² The religious ideas found in religious texts may or may not be helpful in creating a grand narrative. They certainly are not authoritative, allowing one to discard them at will.

Second, one might develop a basic story through the many world religions. Christianity stands as one among many religions in the world. Setting Christianity aside for a moment, there are what John Frame in *Christianity Considered* refers to as “religions of fate, self-realization, and law.”⁶³ He goes on to define the three categories. Religions of fate refer to an impersonal principle that stands behind reality such as those in ancient Greece. Religions that fall into the self-realization category include major religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Self-realization religions teach that the gods of the world depend on mankind, just as mankind depends on them. As well, they teach that the ultimate outcome for which men are striving is to become divine themselves. The third category is that of law. Islam would fall into this category. While Islam derives some ideas, teaching, and characters from the biblical text, Islam’s idea of redemption is different from that of Christianity. Allah does not desire a personal relationship with mankind, nor does Allah come to live with his creation. He deals with sin, but not in a

⁶¹ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 21.

⁶² Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 43.

⁶³ John Frame, *Christianity Considered: A Guide for Skeptics and Seekers* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 95.

consistent way. Thus, there is no offer of assurance of salvation or redemption in this life.⁶⁴ Each of these three categories presents a different basic story from which one could operate, if one held to one of these religions.

Third is theistic humanism which, according to Goldsworthy, asserts that “there is a God but, in common with atheistic humanism, asserts that man is in control of gaining knowledge.”⁶⁵ In this view, God’s Word is viewed as beneficial but not authoritative in and of itself. Man has the final say as to what is authoritative or not.

The fourth approach is Christian theism, which asserts that man must depend “upon God for true knowledge.” God’s Word is authoritative whether man grants it authority or not. Goldsworthy argues, “There is no self-evident logic discernible outside the Bible; no naturally discerned rule as to what is possible or impossible. God as creator must interpret every event and every fact in his universe.”⁶⁶

Goldsworthy points out one major problem with a man-centered approach to authority found in the atheistic and theistic humanism approaches is that man “gains true knowledge from nature through his senses, and reasons on this basis what is the correct approach to the study of the Bible” and ultimately what basic story should be adopted.⁶⁷ When one reads Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective, however, one recognizes that man’s ability to reason has been affected by sin. This is what Goldsworthy refers to as the noetic effect of the Fall. The Fall renders mankind’s mind incapable of truly understanding God’s communication. Instead of accepting God’s wisdom, men reject the wisdom of God for their own wisdom. In the book of Romans, Paul points out the effects of sin on the mind of man when he writes, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness

⁶⁴ Frame, *Christianity Considered*, 95-96.

⁶⁵ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 43.

⁶⁶ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 44.

⁶⁷ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 43.

suppress the truth” (Rom 1:18 ESV). Romans 12:1-2 provides further evidence that men must not trust their own mind. There, one learns that salvation includes the renewal of the mind. The renewal of the mind is necessary so that one might think rightly about oneself, God, and the gospel.⁶⁸ Man cannot trust his mind. It suppresses the truth about God, creation, and man.⁶⁹ Suppressing the truth not only deems atheistic and humanistic approaches to the Bible invalid, but also the approach of other world religions since those religions depend on man to determine what is right and wrong, and if man has met that religions standards. Fallen minds cannot accurately make those determinations. Mankind needs someone, then, who can redeem and restore their mind from its fallen state so that they might think rightly about salvation and the world in which they live. The Christ is that someone who not only redeems but stands outside of creation unaffected by the Fall who helps mankind think rightly about their own lives and the world in which they live.

Lest one has an issue with an argument developed from a biblical worldview, one might also consider the idea of final authority. A final authority, as Goldsworthy defines it, is an authority which “cannot be proven as an authority based on some higher authority. The highest authority must be self-attesting.”⁷⁰ Man is not a self-attesting authority. Men cannot declare something true based on their own authority. Instead man must appeal to a higher authority to prove something is true. Goldsworthy agrees when he says, “We cannot go on indefinitely saying, ‘I know this is true because . . .’ In the end we must come to that which we accept as the final authority.”⁷¹ At this point both atheistic and theistic humanism break down—there is no self-attesting final authority to which they can point. Their systems force them to kick the can down the rabbit hole of

⁶⁸ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 60-63.

⁶⁹ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 42.

⁷⁰ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 44.

⁷¹ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 44.

authority; a hole that never ends. Christian theism on the other hand posits that God is a self-attesting final authority, God is the Creator of the universe, and God has established all things to work and operate according to his will. He does not need a higher authority to prove his authority. He is the highest and final authority.

Considering each of these starting points, it should be clear that only one, Christian theism, provides a true basic story from which one should build his life.⁷² Since sin hinders man's judgment and man is not a self-attesting authority, man must turn to God, his Word, and the worldview presented therein.

Centering on the biblical story, however, is the first step in developing an accurate worldview. One can develop several worldviews from the biblical text. One might develop a works-based view of the world that teaches one can earn their way to God through self-effort. One might also develop a liberal view of the world that may push man to work for social justice as the chief end of all things. One might even develop a licentious view of the world that instructs men to live however they like since the Christ has atoned for their sin. Since one can develop several worldviews from God's Word, it is necessary to determine which is accurate. As seen, a Christ-centered reading of God's Word is the most accurate way to read Scripture since God's Word centers on the Christ from the beginning to the end.

When one reads God's Word from a Christ-centered perspective, one quickly realizes that God never intended men to work their way to himself. The deficiency of the sacrificial system to bring ultimate salvation and the ongoing rebellion against God proves man is incapable of self-salvation. Also, God never intended for man to view Scripture and the world solely through the lens of social justice. Yes, God cares about creation and about society operating in a righteous manner. Christians should care about social justice

⁷² Ravi Zacharias provides an excellent argument against atheistic humanism. He shows that it cannot provide a basis for morals, man is not a final authority, and the rights claimed by man do not trump the rights God provides since the moral claims of man are based on man's opinion alone. Ravi Zacharias, *The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

as well. God's care throughout Scripture, as well as Jesus' compassion and commandment to love others as oneself requires one love and work for the good of those around him. Scripture, however, does not center on acts of social justice and world renewal alone. Nor is man capable of bringing about complete social justice and world renewal apart from Christ. Man is desperately wicked. Mankind's hearts are selfish and self-serving. Sin ruins even the best intentions of justice and renewal.

Further, God never intended man to pursue licentious behavior. Man's desire to determine what is good plunged the world into sin. Man needs rescue from sinful desire not a dose of it. Thus, an accurate reading of the biblical text does not lead to a licentious worldview.

Instead, a Christ-centered approach to Scripture provides a worldview that best fits the biblical story. Since Christ is the center of the biblical story, one must adopt a Christ-centered worldview. The Christ is the one to which the narrative drives and revolves around. As well, he is the interpretive key of God's Word. A worldview developed from any other point of view will prove deficient. It will misrepresent God's intentions and lead one to act in ways contrary to God's Word.

How Should a Christ-Centered Worldview Affect Man?

To be Christ-centered is to be gospel-centered. Gospel-centered means one views all of Scripture driving toward the good news that Jesus died to save sinners. Indeed, when one considers the storyline of Scripture, it should be apparent that the Bible itself finds at its center the gospel. Not only does the storyline point to one's need for Jesus, but the storyline also points to man's need to receive God's grace, which is his gift of salvation. To experience God's grace, one must go through Jesus because the Father's grace flows to men through Jesus.⁷³ There is no other way except through Jesus for mankind to receive God's grace.

⁷³ Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 19.

Receiving and experiencing the Father’s grace requires one to trust in, believe in, and rest in Jesus’ work on their behalf. It is not man’s work that provides salvation. Instead Jesus’ work on man’s behalf provides salvation. Trusting in Jesus’ work on one’s behalf not only provides salvation, but it also provides sanctification. J. D. Greear argues, “For many evangelicals the gospel has functioned solely as the entry rite into Christianity; it is the prayer we pray to begin our relationship with Jesus; the diving board off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity.”⁷⁴ Many believe the gospel saves, but the sanctifying nature of the gospel is often misunderstood. Keller agrees when he says, “It is inaccurate to think the gospel is what saves non-Christians, and then Christians mature by trying hard to live according to biblical principles.”⁷⁵ Instead of maturing in faith by trying harder, men are “transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on.”⁷⁶ That is why, as Greear points out, “Growth in Christ is never going beyond the gospel, but going deeper into the gospel.”⁷⁷ Being gospel-centered, then, means trusting in and believing the good news of Jesus for both salvation and sanctification.

The gospel affects everything. The gospel affects everything because it is not solely a set of beliefs. It is also a lens by which one must view the world.⁷⁸ According to Keller, a gospel-centered lens or worldview “creates an entire way of life and affects literally everything about us.”⁷⁹ Looking through the lens of the gospel should drive

⁷⁴ J. D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power That Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 21. See also Keller, *Center Church*, 48.

⁷⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 48.

⁷⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 48. Keller’s argument is informed by Rom 12:1-2; Phil 1:6; 3:13-14.

⁷⁷ Greear, *Gospel*, 21.

⁷⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 46.

⁷⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 46.

servanthood, or what Keller refers to as the “upside-down aspect of the gospel.”⁸⁰ The upside-down aspect of the gospel is developed from Jesus’ servant actions. Jesus serves even though he is the king who deserves service. He serves the world instead of taking from the world. In Jesus, a complete reversal of thinking occurs, which should extend to those who are his followers. Keller maintains “The gospel, then, creates a new kind of servant community, with people who live out an entirely alternate way of being human.”⁸¹

“The inside-out aspect of the gospel” will also affect how people live.⁸² The gospel teaches that Jesus took man’s place on the cross. He died on man’s behalf so that they might have a relationship with the Father and experience release from the bondage of sin. Salvation and change do not come by traditional religious actions. Keller explains, “Traditional religion teaches that if we do good deeds and follow the moral rules in our external behavior, God will come into our hearts, bless us, and give us salvation. In other words, if I obey, God will love and accept me.”⁸³ However, the gospel teaches that men are loved and accepted through Jesus’ work on their behalf. Salvation is only through God’s grace. Instead of living to earn salvation or blessings, those operating from a Christ-centered worldview live and obey out of gospel motivations.⁸⁴

Dodson, in *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, offers three gospel motivations for right living. The first motivation is religious affections. He says, “Religious affection is affection for Christ that results in obedience to Christ. To say it another way, religious affection is gospel-generated delight in God.”⁸⁵ Delight refers to one’s pleasure, joy, and

⁸⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 46.

⁸¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

⁸² Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

⁸³ Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

⁸⁴ Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

⁸⁵ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 76.

happiness. The soul thrilling pleasure of Jesus should compel obedience. The result of godly obedience is pleasure, joy, and happiness. Believers obey out of their own pleasure. Pleasure driven obedience is not selfish since it confers honor on God and brings him glory. One is capable of rendering obedience out of religious affection by looking through a Christ-centered lens.⁸⁶

A second gospel motivation is the warnings and promises found in Scripture. To curb sinful behavior and point others to a life of delight, Scripture warns the church to avoid certain behaviors.⁸⁷ The purpose is not to steal one's joy, but to provide joy. As well, the purpose is not to cause one to obey out of fear of punishment or pride. Fear of punishment and pride drive what Keller refers to as "moralistic behavior change," which is the opposite of gospel motivated change.⁸⁸ Moralistic behavior change is not change directed to God's glory, but for one's own sake. It springs from a desire to earn salvation, health, wealth, a good reputation, or even answered prayer. Whereas moralistic behavior change centers on self, gospel motivated change centers on Jesus.⁸⁹ It is change for Jesus' sake, not one's own sake. Change based on God's warnings are not meant to produce fear or pride-based change. Instead, as Dodson writes, "belief in God's holy warnings can be a gospel motivation if we respond to the warnings by turning to Christ" and delighting in him instead of sin.⁹⁰ In other words, God's warning should not cause one to double down on self-effort, instead it should cause one to turn to Jesus, believing his effort is better than their own.

Along with warnings, God also issues thousands of promises to his people. Promises, according to Dodson, that are designed to "offer us joy, hope, strength, glory,

⁸⁶ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 77-79.

⁸⁷ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 80-81.

⁸⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 66.

⁸⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 66-68.

⁹⁰ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 81.

and a place in the kingdom of God.”⁹¹ A person with a gospel-centered worldview will allow the warning and promises of God to color their view of the world and direct their behavior.⁹²

Building on the warnings and promises of God, Dodson provides a third way the gospel should shape one’s ministry of motivation, which is the gift of repentance. Repentance is not turning from sin to right living; instead, repentance is turning from sin to Christ.⁹³ To say it another way, repentance “is turning from belief in a false promise in order to turn in faith to a true, satisfying promise.”⁹⁴ Keller explains, “The root of every sin is idolatry, and idolatry is a failure to look to Jesus for our salvation and justification. . . . The root of every sin is a failure to believe the gospel message that Jesus . . . is our justification, righteousness, and redemption.”⁹⁵ Repentance, then, is turning from belief in a false promise to belief in the promises of God found in Jesus. When one repents, one is turning to Christ. Turning to Christ is possible through God’s grace. Without the grace of God, one would not be able to repent. Instead, one would continue to serve false idols that result in death and destruction rather than delight. Knowing God’s grace makes repentance possible should drive thankfulness or gratitude, which should result in delight driven obedience.⁹⁶

A gospel-centered worldview, particularly the “inside-out” aspect of the gospel, allows for different gospel motivations for right living. Freed from the traditional religious idea that one must earn salvation and God’s favor, one finds different, more hope driven, and sustainable motivations for right living. In sum, a gospel-centered worldview motivates

⁹¹ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 82.

⁹² Keller, *Center Church*, 68-69.

⁹³ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 84.

⁹⁴ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 84.

⁹⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 71.

⁹⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 69-70.

toward obedience through delight rather than duty, rightly focusing on the warnings and promises of God, and a correct understanding of repentance. Repentance is not trading one behavior for another, it is trading unbelief for belief, which should result in Christ exalting worship. The gospel, as Keller maintains, “revolutionizes how we relate to God, to ourselves, and to others on the outside.”⁹⁷

Lastly, Keller articulates “the forward-back aspect of the gospel.”⁹⁸ The “forward-back” aspect of the gospel builds on the idea that the kingdom has already come and will come again in all its fullness in the future. Jesus brought the kingdom when he first came, but he did not bring the kingdom in all its glory. The kingdom will not come in all its glory until Jesus returns. At his return, Jesus will fully consummate the kingdom. Nevertheless, believers are to live today as citizens of an already-not-yet kingdom. Realizing Jesus is reigning and ruling now over this world and will do so in a greater capacity in the future, should change the way one lives. One should reach out to the lost with the hope of the gospel. One should help the poor and do works of social justice since God will eventually create everything anew. According to Keller, one should also work for human flourishing by teaching “Christians to integrate their faith and their work so they can be culture makers.”⁹⁹ The “already but not yet” aspect of the kingdom should also keep “us from utopian, triumphalistic visions of cultural takeover on the one hand, and from pessimism or withdrawal from society on the other.”¹⁰⁰

When one reads Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective, then, change should occur. A renewal of sight takes place so that believers view the world differently. They work for God’s glory instead of their own since new meaning infuses their lives. They rightly understand that they are to operate as God’s “under-kings” instead of their

⁹⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

⁹⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

⁹⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

¹⁰⁰ Keller, *Center Church*, 47.

own ruler because of a renewed understanding of self. As well, they will interact with self and others differently. They should also understand their own and the world's need for a Savior, which should drive gratitude on the one hand and mission on the other. Thus, a Christ-centered reading of Scripture should provide one with a worldview—a worldview informed by the story and its framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Recreation.¹⁰¹

A Christ-Centered Understanding of Scripture Points to the Necessity of the Gospel

It should be evident thus far that a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture is not only the best view of Scripture, since Jesus himself operated from it, but a Christ-centered view of Scripture is also best since it ties the biblical narrative together. As well, a Christ-centered view of Scripture has worldview implications since it shapes the way one thinks and acts. It is now time to explore last implication of a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture; namely, that a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture points to the necessity of the gospel.

God's Story Involves All Peoples

The story of Scripture is not something man can take or leave as if it has no effect on them. God's story involves all mankind. It is a story that presents the true story of human history from beginning to end. God's story, then, involves every person in human history at one time or another. Some are characters in God's story, some are writers of God's story, and some are recipients of God's story.

Some may object to the idea that God's story involves everyone in every time and every place, since God's story primarily "traces an unfolding drama," which involves the nation of Israel.¹⁰² While Scripture does primarily trace Israel's story, it is not a story

¹⁰¹ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 31.

¹⁰² Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 11.

that is exclusive to Israel. Instead, as Lawrence maintains, the story recorded in God's Word is meant to be a "once and future story that encompasses [all people's including] us today."¹⁰³ It is a story for everyone because it describes God's rescue plan for mankind. Clowney agrees when he states that the biblical story explains how God rescues "rebels from their folly, guilt, and ruin."¹⁰⁴ God's purpose in authoring his story, then, is to show the world the necessity of the gospel.

The Bible Is God's Story of Redemption

According to Bartholomew and Goheen, the Bible "narrates the story of God's journey on that long road of redemption. It is a unified and progressively unfolding drama of God's action in history for the salvation of the whole World."¹⁰⁵ God's story stretches millennia, and it is a story shaped by God's hand. Clowney writes, "Human authors may build fiction around a plot they have devised, but only God can shape history to a real and ultimate purpose."¹⁰⁶ God did not inscribe the Scriptures and hand them to man at the gates of Eden. Rather, as Clowney points out, "God showed Himself to be the Lord of times and seasons."¹⁰⁷ He providentially worked in human history to author his story. Goldsworthy concurs, "The biblical account of salvation is given within the framework of historical narrative" by God.¹⁰⁸ The Bible is history. More than history, it is the true narrative of this world written by the Creator through the hand of mankind as the Spirit carried them along (2 Pet 1:19-21).

¹⁰³ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 58.

The Bible is not just another history book, nor is it a how to get to heaven manual that if employed will earn man a place in God's kingdom. It is God's story of redemptive history. Lawrence agrees when he says, "The Bible therefore is not merely a story told by humans about God's salvation of them; it is a story enacted and then explained by God about God."¹⁰⁹ The intent of God's story is not intellectual stimulation, but salvation, which is found in a relationship with Jesus—a relationship God makes possible through his work in redemptive history.¹¹⁰

Jesus' Work Is Good News

The salvation that Jesus Christ provides is the product of an actual event that happened in human history, which is why one can refer to Jesus' work as good news. News is the proclamation of an event that has transpired in space-time history. Goldsworthy says, "The gospel is the event (or proclamation of that event) of Jesus Christ that begins with his incarnation and earthly life, and concludes with his death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father."¹¹¹ Jesus' life and cross work in salvation history provides salvation to the world. Jesus' actual sacrifice redeems mankind. His work on mankind's behalf and their belief in that event allows them to enter into and enjoy the presence of God for all eternity.¹¹² Stated explicitly, then, salvation is the result of an actual event in space-time history whereby Jesus atoned for the sins of mankind through his sacrificial death on mankind's behalf.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 27.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 28.

¹¹¹ Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 58.

¹¹² Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 59.

The Gospel and Metanarrative Are Distinct

At this point, a distinction between the metanarrative and the gospel is necessary. Even though God’s Word comes in story form, the story or metanarrative of Scripture is not the gospel, nor are those things that go hand in hand with the gospel. Those things that go hand in hand with the gospel, as Goldsworthy reveals, are mankind’s need for the gospel since men are sinful, “the means of receiving the benefits of the gospel (faith and repentance), the results . . . of the gospel (regeneration, conversion, sanctification, glorification) and the results of rejecting it (wrath, judgment, hell).”¹¹³ The metanarrative and those things closely associated with the gospel are not the gospel, nor is the gospel about what men must do. Instead, the gospel is about what Jesus has done for mankind. In short, the gospel is the proclamation that Jesus saves sinners through his life and work on mankind’s behalf, which is part of the metanarrative of Scripture.¹¹⁴

The Metanarrative Helps One Understand the Necessity of the Gospel

While the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died for sinners, and is part of the biblical story, one cannot disconnect the gospel from the storyline of Scripture. Jesus’ death does not make sense if isolated from the overarching story of the Bible. Keller agrees when he says, “The more we understand the whole corpus of biblical doctrine, the more we will understand the gospel itself.”¹¹⁵ While biblical knowledge is separate from the gospel, it is necessary to understand the gospel. If one does not understand the Bible in general, how it works together, and its metanarrative, then grasping the gospel will be difficult if not impossible. An understanding of the unfolding storyline of Scripture is

¹¹³ Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 59.

¹¹⁴ Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 59.

¹¹⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 32.

critical to an understanding of why one must believe the gospel because it points to the necessity of the Christ for salvation.¹¹⁶

Among other things, the storyline of Scripture highlights the depravity of man. It helps one understand the extent of sin as the story unfolds. As well, it shows men that they cannot atone for their own sin through their own work. Instead it points to the only one who can provide atonement, Jesus Christ. The Bible, then, is a story about why and how God set out to redeem the world.¹¹⁷ Unless mankind reads the storyline of Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective, they will not understand why Jesus had to come.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

God's Word is not a collection of wise sayings, inspirational quotes, or even direct commands that if followed will lead one to salvation or enlightenment. God's Word is first and foremost a redemptive-historical story shaped by God that ties together as one story by the Christ. A Christ-centered view of Scripture also has worldview implications, coloring one's view of the world. One should adopt a Christ-centered worldview since it accounts for the sinfulness of man, provides purpose, meaning, and hope, and drives one to live in the way God designs, bringing him glory as his "under-kings." Furthermore, a Christ-centered view of Scripture points man to the necessity of the gospel in a way that a pragmatic or disjointed approach to the text cannot. Reading Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective, then, is not an academic exercise; rather, it is one that has real world ramifications.

¹¹⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 32-33.

¹¹⁷ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery of God*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 21.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The ministry research project was a six-week sermon series designed to help members of Eastridge Baptist Church develop a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. The project had three phases designed to meet the project's purpose, which was to help the members of Eastridge Baptist Church see that the Bible forms one unified story that centers on Jesus. The goal of the project is not only to assess but also to improve the congregation's understandings of the storyline of Scripture so that they are better and more accurate Bible readers. Through this project, congregants would begin reading Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective, if they were not doing so already.

The project breaks down into three phases for manageability: project preparation, project implementation, and project evaluation. This chapter records the details for each phase of the project.

Project Preparation

The focus of the project preparation phase was to provide time to study and prepare the six sermons, each of which focused on one aspect of the metanarrative, or overarching storyline of Scripture. The series framework consists of Creation, Fall, Promise, Redemption, Redemption Lived Out, and Restoration. Along with preparing six sermons, I contacted several preachers who are known to preach from a Christ-centered perspective to enlist them to critique my finished sermons. I contacted half a dozen preachers to enlist three. To assist them and standardize their critique I provided a rubric.¹

¹ See appendix 2 for rubric.

During the preparation phase I also recruited volunteers from the congregation to participate in the project. Details about the project and what was required of them was shared through email, messaging apps, and face-to-face conversations to gain interest. I provided the Storyline of Scripture Inventory (SSI) to those interested in participating in the project. The SSI assessed their current understanding of the Bible from a Christ-centered perspective.²

Week 1

Writing the sermons for the project was the primary focus of week 1. Since the sermon series walked participants through the storyline of Scripture in six weeks, I began week 1 at the beginning of the Bible. The focus of the first couple of chapters of God's Word is creation. Message 1 established that God is man's Creator and man lives in God's kingdom as his representatives who administer God's rightful rule as his kingly priests. When man lives according to God's original purpose, he lives a worshipful life.

Week 2

During week 2, I began working on sermon 2, which further explored the biblical storyline. The Fall was the focus of week 2. The purpose of sermon 2 was to show how God's good creation turned into a place of chaos and disorder. Man rejected God's design, rebelling against him in order to be his own ruler. As a result, man and the world experience a curse. Participants should recognize that the results of the curse are fear, shame, death, and a breakdown in relationships, as well as chaos and disorder in God's good creation.

The sermon also addressed the idea of original sin to show why people live in rebellion to God and deserve his just wrath. Sermon 2, however, was not all gloom and doom. A glimmer of hope for future redemption from the curse appears in God's promise of a future serpent crushing seed. Although hope of redemption exists in seed form, God

² See appendix 1 for the Sermon Series Inventory.

has a plan of redemption he is working out, even from the beginning and despite being wounded by man's rebellion.

Additionally, the sermon made a brief connection to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise. To begin teaching members that the Bible centers on Jesus, the message developed a brief but pointed connection to the redemption Jesus provides as the second Adam. His righteousness is imputed to those who believe his death paid the penalty for their sin. The message also presented the idea that Jesus finally and fully redeems the world from the curse brought on the world by the first parents, Adam and Eve.

Week 3

Sermon 3 was written during week 3. Sermon 3, entitled, "Promise," served to narrow the focus of the promised seed discussed in sermon 2. Narrowing the focus further showed that God is working out a purposeful plan to redeem mankind. The sermon began in Genesis 12 with a focus on Abram as an unlikely hero.

In Genesis 12, God promises Abram that a large nation will come from him. Not only will a large nation come from Abram, but eventually the promised seed, who will crush the head of the serpent and redeem mankind from the curse, will come from Abram's family line. There is a problem with God's promise to Abram. Abram's wife, Sarai, is barren. She has not provided Abram a child since they married, making her unfit to produce the beginnings of a nation. God, however, is undeterred by Sarai's barrenness. According to God's purpose and plan, Sarai eventually has a son and the nation begins to grow. The sermon highlights the upside-down nature of God's kingdom. He confounds the mind of man with his choices and actions. The message also highlights God's intention to work with unlikely characters, revealing his power and might, which should drive Christians to trust in and worship him.

Another purpose of the sermon was to move the narrative forward, setting the listener up for the coming redeemer in the next message. At the end of the message, participants would have a better understanding of the unconditional aspect of God's

covenant with Abram, his patience with mankind despite their sinfulness, and man's need for the Christ.

Week 4

Week 4 focused on sermon 4. Sermon 4 represented the climax of the biblical narrative. The focus was on Jesus Christ who provides redemption from the curse through his substitutionary death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Sermon 4 highlighted Jesus as the center of the biblical story. At this point, congregants should recognize that the biblical narrative centers on Jesus. It does not center on him in that every passage in Scripture is about Jesus; rather, the metanarrative serves to highlight man's need for and points to Jesus as redeemer. Jesus, and the redemption he provides, is the only hope for mankind since he alone frees believers from the curse.

Week 5

During week 5, I wrote sermon 5, which focused on the New Covenant community. The sermon's goal was not only to further emphasize that Jesus is the center of the biblical narrative, but also to help participants understand the salvation Jesus provides should affect the everyday lives of those who experience Christ's redemption. The outworking of the New Covenant is a changed heart. Instead of living in rebellion to God and his ways, followers of Jesus should recognize their rightful place in the universe as God's representatives and kingly priests. Those who experience Jesus' redemption by repenting and believing receive the promised Holy Spirit who empowers them to live as God's redeemed New Covenant community. In addition, the Holy Spirit empowers the church to accomplish its mission. The mission of the church is to make disciples for Jesus.

Week 6

During week 6, I wrote the final sermon in the series. The last message in the series focused on the final framework of Restoration. The idea was to show participants that God's restoration project ends with his people living in a perfect world. As citizens

of a new kingdom, God's people have complete access to him. They are also able to fulfill their purpose as his representatives and kingly priests. Those who live in God's perfect kingdom experience God's perfect reign as he rules over them for all eternity.

During this week I worked to enlist three pastors who preach from a Christ-centered perspective to review and critique my sermon series. Once I finished sermon 6, I sent the sermons and the rubrics to these pastors in both a Word and PDF formats.³ I asked them to review and return them within a week.

Week 7

During week 7, I received feedback from the pastors who reviewed the sermons. I spent most of the week reviewing and reworking the sermons based on the feedback provided from two of the three pastors. Based on schedule, one pastor was not able to review and return my messages as quickly as others. As a result, I was able to rework my sermons based on the feedback of two pastors and then send those revised messages to the third pastor. While the process was unintentional, I found value in receiving critique on the revised sermons from the third pastor. His insights produced another round of revisions that served to improve the messages.

I also enlisted participants for the project and sent them the pre-sermon series SSI.⁴ I enlisted participants from the congregation to participate in the project. Details about the project and what was required of them was shared through email and messaging apps, as well as personal invitation. Those who agreed to participate received the pre-sermon series SSI with detailed instructions. The instructions focused on how to fill out and return the inventory, as well as the deadline for returning it. I also communicated the start date of the sermon series. In addition, I shared information about the upcoming

³ See appendix 2 for rubric.

⁴ See appendix 1 for Storyline of Scripture Inventory.

sermon series with the congregation at large through the church's social media platform. During the week, I reminded the participants several times to return the inventory.

Project Implementation

The focus of the project implementation phase was to preach the six-week sermon series I had prepared to the congregation. During the implementation phase, I not only preached the sermon series, but also maintained a webpage I built specifically for the participants. The page contained instructions regarding their participation in the project and a video of each sermon, as well as my sermon notes. Along with maintaining the webpage, I reached out to each participant to help guide them to the process, make sure they had the resources they needed to complete the project, and answer any questions they might have about the messages I preached. Additionally, I kept the church at large informed about the series by reiterating the main idea of the message I recently preached and by providing information about the upcoming message in the series through the church's social media and messaging channels. I also informed the congregation through a weekly video update posted to the church's website and emailed to church members.

Week 8

During week 8, I began preaching the six-week sermon series. I began with the first of the six sermons. As I began, I introduced the sermon series and the plan for the next six weeks. I made sure to tell the congregation what they could expect as we traveled through the biblical meta-narrative together. After introducing the series, I began sermon 1, which centered on the creation narrative.

After the sermon, I uploaded both the audio and the video to our church's website, YouTube, and a podcast platform. I created a private webpage on the church's website with instructions for the participants and a link to a PDF of the post-sermon series SSI that they could download and complete once the series was over. I also embedded the sermon video in case they missed the service or the livestream.

Additionally, I linked to a PDF version of my notes in case they wanted to review a portion of my sermon without having to watch or listen to the message in its entirety. I then sent a link to the participants via email and shared with them the purpose of the page and what they could expect it to include over the next six weeks.

Week 9

During week 9, I preached the second of the six sermons from the series, which centered on the Fall narrative in Genesis 3 and the continued effects the Fall has on mankind. I stressed that man and the world in which we live need redemption because sin has polluted us all. Mankind, however, is not the answer. Since the Fall has corrupted mankind, man cannot redeem themselves. To show man's inability to save themselves, I walked through Genesis 4–11 after expositing the Fall narrative in Genesis 3.

After the sermon, I edited and posted the video and audio of the message along with my notes. I also emailed the participants the link to the webpage I created for them. I also checked in with the participants to see if they had any questions or needed further explanation of the sermon or series content.

Furthermore, I posted a video on the church's social media accounts explaining the series idea. I also reiterated the main idea of the message in that video and provided a short introduction to next week's message regarding Abram and God's covenant with him.

Week 10

During week 10, I preached the third of the six sermons from the series, which centered on God's promise to Abram. The message focused on God's use of an unlikely couple to build a nation. Abram and Sarai were childless and elderly. While it seems the Lord made a bad choice, he did not. God chose this childless and elderly couple to highlight his power and might, which should drive Christians to trust in and worship him. The sermon also focused on the inability of the nation, which eventually comes from Abram, to render complete obedience and usher in God's perfect kingdom.

Along with preaching the message, I checked in with participants to make sure they had attended service physically, watched the livestream, or viewed the edited sermon I placed on the project webpage. I also checked to see if they had any questions from this week's message since it covered a large portion of the biblical narrative.

Week 11

During week 11, I preached the fourth of the six sermons from the series. The fourth sermon was the climax of the series, as all the previous messages had been building to the point of redemption. The sermon focused on the redemption Jesus provides those who believe in him. The message highlighted Jesus' perfect life, his substitutionary death, and resurrection from the grave. Jesus' perfection is necessary for him to offer a sacrifice on man's behalf. His death satisfied the wrath of the Father. His resurrection proved his sacrifice was effective. Since Jesus defeated death and experienced new life, those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will experience a future resurrection and entrance into his restored kingdom.

As I had done in previous weeks, I uploaded the sermon, notes, and a brief explanation to the project webpage. I also emailed the participants to remind them to watch the sermon if they did not attend in person or watch it on the church's livestream. I also checked in with participants to make sure they had everything they needed to continue through the project.

Week 12

During week 12, I preached the fifth of the six sermons. The message centered on how those who believe in Jesus are to live. Specifically, it highlighted how the New Covenant community, won by the blood of Christ, should live in the world. Using Acts 2:42-47, I urged members to devote themselves to several practices. They should devote themselves to receive the teaching of God Word. They should allow God's Word to teach them more about God, Jesus, and how they are to live as a New Covenant community.

They should also devote themselves to fellowshiping with one another in real authentic community. As well, they should break bread together, which symbolizes a consistent participation in the Lord's Supper. Additionally, they should devote themselves to praying for one another.

Along with focusing on believers' devotion, I also drove home the idea that they should be on mission for Jesus, seeking to win disciple-making disciples for God's glory. Lest members feel a sense of despair given the task at hand, I concluded the sermon with a focus on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

After receiving the recorded message, I edited and uploaded the message to the church's website, YouTube account, and podcast platform. I also embedded the video on the page I created for participants along with a description of the message and my sermon notes. I once again emailed participants to check in and share the new information. I also reminded them that next week was the last week of the series. I encouraged them to begin preparing to complete the post-sermon series SSI after the next Sunday's message.

Week 13

Week 13 was the last week of the sermon series. I reminded the congregation where we started and how far we had come at the beginning of the message. After a brief summary of the series, I launched into the sixth and final message, which centered on restoration. I highlighted the believer's hope as God's redeemed people throughout the message. Renewed in heart and covered by the blood of Jesus, Christians have access to God's perfect eternal kingdom—a kingdom with no sickness, disease, injustice, or corruption, a kingdom free from the effects of sin. To tie to the series theme, I highlighted the fact that believers will perfectly accomplish their God given vocation as kingly priests. I rounded out the message talking about believers' unhindered access to God, as well as the joys of the kingdom.

Like I had done in previous weeks, I placed the sermon content on the webpage I created for the participants. I also sent participants an email, as well as a

message, reminding them that this was the last sermon in the series, and that they should prepare to take the post-sermon series SSI.

Project Evaluation

During the project evaluation phase I continued to communicate with the participants both in person and through email. I reminded them to complete the post-sermon series SSI once they heard or watched the last message and to return it to me as soon as possible. After I received the post-sermon series SSI, I tallied the scores and began to run a statistical analysis of the project.

Week 14

While I posted the post-sermon series SSI on the participant webpage during week 14, I also emailed them the inventory with detailed instructions on how to complete the inventory and when I would like for them to return it to me. I asked that they return it by mid-week. On Wednesday I sent another email to the participants who had not turned in the inventory, reminding them to complete it as soon as possible. By the end of the week, I had received all the post-sermon series SSIs. I was then prepared to run an analysis on the project to evaluate its success.

Week 15

During week 15 I compared all the participants' pre-sermon series SSI with their post-sermon series SSI to determine if the project was a success. To run a comparison I created a spreadsheet with the participants' unique three-digit numbers. I entered their answers to the ten-question inventory into a table. One table represented answers from the pre-sermon series SSI and the other table represented answers from the post-sermon series SSI. After entering the answers, I evaluated the difference between the pre- and post-sermon series SSI scores.

Conclusion

This ministry research project set out to help members of Eastridge Baptist Church develop a Christ-Centered understanding of the Bible. The project, which was a six-week sermon series, was prepared, implemented, and evaluated in fifteen weeks. During this time, six sermons were developed and evaluated by three Christ-centered preachers. Upon receiving feedback, I revised the messages. I then enlisted volunteer participants for the project. I conducted a survey to determine participants' knowledge of the storyline of the Bible, particularly in relation to a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture. After preaching the series, I conducted the same survey to see if there was an increase in participants' knowledge in relation to a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. The project analysis as well as a complete evaluation of the project can be found in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The project sought to help members of Eastridge Baptist Church develop a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. Church members learned that the Bible centers on Jesus through a metanarrative approach to Scripture. Members encountered the overarching storyline of Scripture through a six-week sermon series entitled: “A View of the Bible from 30,000 ft.” The series unfolded according to the framework of Creation, Fall, Promise, Redemption, Redemption Lived Out, and Restoration. Walking through the storyline of Scripture, participants not only developed an understanding of the metanarrative of Scripture, but they also came to understand that the Bible centers on the Christ character who provides redemption from God’s wrath due mankind’s sin.

This chapter provides an analysis and evaluation of the ministry project at EBC. The chapter begins with an evaluation of the project’s purpose, followed by an evaluation of the project’s goals. Next is an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the project, followed by a section highlighting what I would do differently if I were to run the project in the future. The chapter concludes with a theological and a personal reflection.

Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose

The purpose of the project was to help members of Eastridge Baptist Church see that the Bible forms one unified story that centers on Jesus. The desire was for the church to understand that Scripture forms one unified story that centers on Jesus. While many members have been long-term attenders of EBC and have received faithful teaching and preaching for many years, an understanding of the metanarrative of Scripture is deficient. The realization that an overarching story connects the Bible together as one book was not fully known or understood by most congregants. As well, there is a lack of

understanding as to how different biblical characters, particularly those in the Old Testament and those with whom God made covenants, carry the biblical story forward to its climax in the Christ character. As a result, congregants viewed the Bible as a collection of different stories centered on different characters. They viewed biblical characters as heroes of the text, whom they are to emulate. They also viewed the stories developed from the life of these characters as good moral tales upon which their lives should be based. As a result, congregants tended to treat the Bible as a moral guidebook rather than a unified story that centers on the Christ.

While the pre-series Storyline of Scripture Survey (SSI) results were positive, showing a greater understanding of the storyline of Scripture than expected from the population sampled, room for improvement among participants remained. Apart from analyzing participants' initial inventory scores, I also received verbal feedback from participants and congregants who did not participate in the project, that the sermon series was helpful in explaining how the Bible ties together as one story that centers on Jesus. Many found the messages interesting, informative, convicting, and encouraging. As well, many relayed that they had not considered the Bible as a single story that centers on Jesus before the series began. Based on the state of the congregation, the survey results, and the individual unsolicited feedback, the project's purpose was warranted, and it served EBC well in developing a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Four goals were established to assist in accomplishing the project's purpose. Specifically, the idea of the project was to help EBC congregants understand the Bible as one unified story that centers on Jesus. The analysis in this section examines each of the project's goals.

Goal 1

The first goal of the project was to assess the current knowledge of the biblical storyline and its connection to Jesus among the members of Eastridge Baptist Church. I administered the SSI prior to the sermon series beginning.¹ The initial survey assessed the participants' prior knowledge of the unified storyline of Scripture, as well as assessed their knowledge of how the Bible centers on Jesus. The survey results provided a clearer picture of the knowledge and understanding of EBC. The goal was considered successful since thirteen members participated in the survey, which exceeded the five needed for the project.

A surprising observation from the initial survey was that many participants agreed the Bible was a unified story that centers on Jesus. In addition, many agreed that connections to Jesus could be found in the Old Testament. Many also agreed that one could preach Jesus from the Old Testament. Overall, many participants scored higher on the initial survey than expected.

Participants may have scored higher than initially expected due to the cursory and not detailed nature of the questions, as well as the multiple choice and true or false nature of the questions. While participants scored higher than expected, I still believed that they would not have been able to provide concrete ways in which the Bible constitutes one story that centers on Jesus, even though they responded correctly to multiple choice and true or false questions.

Goal 2

The second goal of the project was to develop a six-week sermon series on the storyline of Scripture. The series intended to show how the Bible forms one unified story that centers on Jesus. I developed the series around several key texts in the storyline of Scripture. The sermons were topical exposition. Each message centered on one topic from the major framework of Creation, Fall, Promise, Redemption, Redemption Lived

¹ See appendix 1 for the SSI.

Out, and Restoration. The sermons primarily consisted of an exposition of one passage. In some cases, I examined multiple passages. Overall, I preached each passage from an expositional and Christ-centered perspective.

To examine the faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the series regarding a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible, I enlisted three Christ-centered preachers to critique the individual messages that comprised the series and provided each critic a rubric.² A 90 percent benchmark was set for each sermon. The three critics provided helpful feedback and I incorporated their suggestions into each of the six sermons. Each sermon in the series received a 90 percent or higher score. As a result, goal 2 was considered successful.

Goal 3

The third goal of the project was to teach a six-week sermon series. After the series was developed, reviewed, and reworked in accordance with the feedback provided by the three Christ-centered preachers, the messages were preached to the congregation at EBC. Upon completion of the six-week series, the goal was considered successful.

Goal 4

The fourth goal of the project was to increase the knowledge of the unified storyline of Scripture and its relation to Jesus among the members of EBC. To measure this goal, participants who completed the SSI before the sermon series began, also completed the post-series SSI after the series ended. The project required participants to either attend, listen to, or watch all the sermons before taking the post-series SSI. Participants who did not attend, listen to, or watch all the sermons were not included in the results, per the limitations set upon the project.

I compared the two inventories for significant changes in scoring. Unfortunately, there was not a positive and significant change in either the individual or corporate scores.

² See appendix 2 for rubric.

In some instances, a few individuals scored lower on the post-series SSI than on the pre-series SSI. As a group, the overall difference between the inventories was just one point. Participants made a step in the right direction in that the post-series SSI overall average score was higher than the pre-series SSI average score. While the post-series SSI resulted in a step in the right direction, a one-point change in overall scoring does not demonstrate a positive and significant difference. Thus, goal 4 was not successfully met.

Strengths of the Project

The project had several strengths. The first strength of the project was that the content was sound. Those who critiqued the messages did not recommend any substantive content changes. Rather, they recommended minor revisions centered on the flow of the message. The individual sermons also received high marks regarding biblical support and theological soundness.

Another strength of the project is the consistent theme that runs through the messages. The theme of kingly priests who are to exercise dominion and serve as little “k” kings under the authority and direction of the big “K” king serves as the main theme that runs throughout the series. The critiques of the three Christ-centered preachers helped in the development of the kingly priest theme that spans the six messages.

A third strength of the project was that it met a need in the congregation. The church was deficient in its understanding of how the Bible ties together as one story, how the two testaments connect, and how the biblical storyline progresses forward. The project met all these needs by showing that the Bible ties together as a story of redemption. Redemption is something man desperately needs, but man cannot redeem himself from the curse of death because of the fall into sin. Redemption man needs due their fall into sin. Redemption man cannot provide on their own. Jesus, who is the Christ, is the only one who can provide the redemption man desperately needs to re-enter God’s kingdom. The search for the Christ character ties the two testaments together and moves the biblical storyline forward.

A fourth strength of the project was the ability for participants to access both edited audio and video of the preached messages. Participants were also able to access my notes for each individual sermon. Not only was access to this material provided in an email each week, but it was also consolidated and posted in an organized manner on a webpage the participants were able to access anytime. Centralizing the information on one easily accessed webpage decreased the barrier for review. Participants did not need to dig through multiple webpages on the church website or find past emails to review information.

Weaknesses of the Project

While all projects begin with the best intentions and plans, no project is perfect. Every project has at least one weakness. There is always one area in which one can improve. The current project exhibits a few weaknesses, which serve as areas of improvement.

The first weakness of the project is the participation base. While EBC is not culturally diverse, it is generationally diverse. Even though the church is generationally diverse, the project's participants did not fully represent each generational group. Though the life stage of participants were diverse, most were in a similar age range. The age most reflected in the study was 38-50 years old. Surveying a more diverse generational population would have provided a better understanding of the overall knowledge of the church regarding a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible.

The second weakness of the project was the number of participants. While the number of participants exceeded the required 5-10 participants, more participants would have provided greater insight into the church's Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. EBC has a regular Sunday service attendance around two hundred, so the survey failed to represent close to 95 percent of the membership, which weakened the project's ability to analyze the overall knowledge of the congregation.

A third weakness of the project was the inventory questions. The scores were higher than initially expected on the pre-series SSI. The high initial scores lead me to believe I should have provided more difficult questions. In retrospect, the multiple-choice questions should have been worded more carefully. I also should have provided less obvious answer choices. Since true or false questions give participants a 50 percent chance of answering correctly, they tend to skew the participants' true knowledge or improvement. Nor do true or false questions afford an opportunity for participants to reveal their motive in answering. Did they guess? Were they sure of their answer? Did teaching during the sermon series change their answer? True or false questions do not allow one to discern a change in knowledge, thus skewing the survey results. Rewriting some of the questions, particularly the answer options, might have eliminated the ability for participants to guess the answer, providing greater clarity to the benefit of the project overall.

A fourth weakness of the project was that not all recruited participants completed either the initial survey or both surveys. Fifteen participants were recruited for the project and 13 participants returned the initial SSI, but only 11 returned the final post-series SSI. I believe 4 participants dropped out of the project due to the digital nature of providing the surveys. Participants received a PDF version of the survey through email and were asked to return the surveys by email, instead of being handed a survey and asked to complete and return immediately. If participants received a physical copy and were provided time to complete and return it immediately, I believe there would have been a greater chance to receive all 15 surveys at the beginning and end of the sermon series.

What I Would Do Differently

Learning is a process that requires reflection. Every project provides an opportunity for reflection and course correction. If given the opportunity to run this project again, I would make the following changes.

First, I would include a wider age group base. EBC is comprised of members from different generations. Reflecting on the project and reviewing the results, the project should have included different generations. A generationally-diverse project would have provided a greater understanding of the current and increased knowledge of EBC. It would have been interesting and helpful to determine if different generations had more or less of an understanding of how the Bible ties together as one story that centers on Jesus. If a difference exists between the generations, then one might be able to probe deeper after the project to determine the reason for the differences. Could the difference in understanding relate to how various generations process information? Do the differences relate to how different generations have been taught God's Word? Do the differences relate to how long someone has studied the Scriptures? While the scope of the project did not include these questions, if more care were given to recruiting volunteers from different generations, these questions could have been explored in greater depth after the project was over. An exploration of these questions could have resulted in more focused teaching and future resource recommendations. Since the project failed to include an adequate number of participants from different generations at EBC, asking and answering the questions above is not an option at this time.

Second, including participants from various Sunday school classes would have been helpful. The main method of recruitment involved contacting members who attend Sunday school on a regular basis. These members are more involved in the life of the church than members who do not attend a Sunday school, which means they were more likely to attend or watch all six sermons in the series. To make recruitment easier, I contacted members of one Sunday school class. Even though the Sunday school class is large and provides a diverse age range, a diversity of teaching was not represented. Many of those who volunteered for the project have sat under the same teacher for most of their time at EBC. If a larger portion of project volunteers had been from other classes, the project could have assessed the teaching in other Sunday school classes as it relates to a

Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. If one or more classes scored higher than the other classes, there could have been an opportunity to look more deeply at the teaching congregants are receiving in the lower scoring classes. Since I failed to enlist volunteers from each adult Sunday school class, I cannot use the data to assess a Sunday school teacher's teaching as it relates to a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture. While assessing a Sunday school teacher's Christ-centered teaching was not the main purpose of the project, it could have contributed to future coaching and training for Sunday school teachers.

Third, I would change the survey. After reviewing the participants' answers, I would modify the survey if I did the project again. A few of the multiple-choice answers were too obvious. I would also remove the true and false questions. In place of true and false questions, I would add short answer or fill in the blank questions, even though there is a higher likelihood a participant might misunderstand or not be able to provide an answer to the question on the original inventory. Fill in the blank or short answer questions require more knowledge of a subject and would have provided a better understanding of the base knowledge of participants regarding the project's subject matter.

Fourth, I would develop the series around a theme from the beginning. The lack of a cohesive theme that tied the sermons together was one of the main critiques I received from the three Christ-centered preachers who reviewed my project sermons. Developing the project around a theme from the beginning would have saved time in the writing phase of the project.

Fifth, while I would still use digital means to communicate with participants and provide additional information, I would have participants take both the pre- and post-series inventories in person. Several participants did not complete the project because of the digital nature of taking and returning the surveys. Also, a lot of time was spent reminding participants to return their inventories both before the sermon series began and after the sermon series ended.

Sixth, I would include several small group reflection meetings throughout the series. These meetings would provide an opportunity to check-in with participants, as well as provide a means to ask questions about the material. Though additional materials, sermon summaries, and sermon videos were emailed to participants every week, an in-person forum would have served to facilitate a better learning environment. In these small groups I would provide additional teaching and ask questions related to the sermons. The addition of the small group time could help facilitate deeper knowledge of the material, as well as provide a focused time to both clarify and apply the information delivered during the message. While the sermon's message was clear, additional teaching and conversations that would occur in these meetings could have served to improve the overall survey score of the project.

Theological Reflections

The totality of this project centered on God; specifically, his plan and purpose to provide redemption through the Christ. Viewing the project through a theological lens provides several points of reflection.

First, the study and series impressed further upon me that Scripture primarily highlights the glory of God in redemption. The storyline of Scripture is primarily about how God will redeem a people for himself. Scripture faithfully records the story of redemption as worked out by God the Father's sovereign hand. Scripture reveals how the Father secures a bride for his Son and a place in which they might live for all eternity. The place God secures for his New Covenant people is the restored and redeemed creation, which was subjected to corruption in the Fall (Gen 3; Rev 21–22). God's marvelous plan of redemption brings him glory as his sovereign hand not only promises but sends his Son who redeems and will restore the broken world (John 17:1-26). Scripture, then, is not primarily man-centered but God-centered. Its design shines forth God's glory. Reading Scripture from a Christ-centered perspective has driven a greater appreciation and

understanding of God's plan of redemption. In turn, the biblical story has driven greater worship and obedience into my heart.

Next, reading the text as a connected whole has helped me interpret the text more faithfully. Scripture is God's story, revealing his nature and character. As well as Scripture reveals God's plan and purpose for mankind and this world. The unfolding of the storyline of Scripture reveals God's nature and character, along with his plan to redeem the world. The Bible, then, should be read as one unified story. Reading Scripture as a unified whole has caused me to avoid the interpretative error of taking verses in isolation from the overall storyline. It has also pushed me further away from reading Scripture as a book of inspirational quotes, or a "how-to" manual to a better life. Through this project, the idea of reading with the storyline of Scripture in mind has gained greater traction in my mind as I have grown in my knowledge that the Bible is God's story of redemption that centers on the Christ.

Working through the storyline of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation reminds me of God's care and love for his people despite their sinful actions and attitudes toward him. Instead of submitting to God's reign and rule, man seeks to reign and rule himself (Gen 2–3). Though man's actions wound God, he provides a way for man to live. He promises a future redeemer who eventually died in man's place to rescue him from the wrath of God (Gen 3:15). Not only is a redeemer promised, but God continues to forebear with his people despite their sin; sin that eventually leads to discipline but not desertion. God's promises continue despite man's actions against him (Ezek 36). Reading about God's faithfulness throughout the story helped me develop a deeper appreciation for God's care and love for his people. Verses such as John 3:16 become more meaningful and majestic. God's loving sacrifice of his only Son for a wicked and sinful people who have repeatedly sought his throne for themselves should captivate mankind.

Studying Jesus as the climax of God's plan of redemption has helped me to connect the church's mission to make disciples to the entire storyline of Scripture (Matt

28:18-20). It is tempting to view Jesus' disciple making mandate as a New Testament command, but the storyline of Scripture proves that God's heart has always been for the nations. Even though he chose to work through a specific people, the Israelites, his purpose in doing so was always to provide redemption to the entire world. Also, understanding the disciple making commission's connection to the storyline of Scripture helps to teach and spur the church on to a greater emphasis in mission work. If God's main purpose is to redeem people so that they might fulfill their purpose, then the church's job should primarily be to help them fulfill this God given purpose. The project has further deepened my conviction that churches should not function as a country club or social network, but as disciple making entities for the glory of God.

The project further evidenced God's plan for this world. Scriptures such as Ephesians 1:1-10 highlight the idea that God has a plan. Luke 24 teaches that God's plan centers on the life, death, and resurrection of the Christ. It is one thing to read those scriptures and believe God has a plan, but it is another thing to see that plan worked out over millennia. As I have read, studied, written about, and preached the metanarrative of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, I have seen firsthand that God has a plan of redemption that he will accomplish. The project has given me greater hope that God's plan will be realized one day. Creation will be restored, and those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will experience a perfect and unhindered relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity.

Personal Reflections

Understanding the Bible as one story that centers on the Christ drives me to worship God for his plan of redemption in a way that I had not in the past. Salvation is not an afterthought in God's mind. The Christ sacrificing himself for the sins of mankind was not "plan b." Jesus' substitutionary death did not occur because Adam or the Law failed. Jesus' death on our behalf was God's plan before the foundations of the world. He was always going to redeem a people for himself (Eph 1-2). Knowing God chose me before

the foundations of the world and seeing him work out his plan of redemption in salvation history as recorded in the pages of Scripture drives greater gratitude for my salvation and in turn greater worship of God in my soul. Admittedly, I do not understand why God's plan included the Fall, man's continued rebellion, and God's Son dying in our place, not to mention the effects the world experiences because of man's rebellion. I do not fully understand the "why" of God's plan, but I do see God faithfully working his plan out, and his plan does not negate his righteousness and justice. Overall, understanding God's plan more fully makes me eternally grateful that he included me in his plan of salvation. Knowing the lengths to which God has gone to save me from eternal destruction drives gratitude and greater worship in my soul.

I have always thought of myself as a good writer. Over the last eight years I have written hundreds of sermons, Bible studies, and blog posts. I have also drafted numerous position papers and other informational documents for my church. Throughout my seminary career I have authored numerous research papers and book reviews. Though I have written thousands of pages, I learned that authoring a book, even a short book, is a difficult and laborious task that takes months and even years instead of days or weeks. Working on this project has humbled me in ways other writing projects have not. At the same time, my project has taught me the necessity of perseverance in research and writing. Additionally, I have developed the ability to break down and sustain an argument over many pages instead of a few paragraphs. Though tempted to throw in the towel at times, I am grateful for the lessons I have learned. Overall, this project has equipped me to serve the church better through a writing ministry.

Lastly, my project was birthed out of a love for biblical theology, as well as a desire to understand how the biblical text centers on Jesus. Jesus' claim in Luke 24 that the text is all about him has always fascinated me. Before I began my project, I did not know how the text was all about Jesus. I was familiar with typology, specifically the typological connections in the text to Jesus. I was also familiar with different textual

themes as they relate to Jesus and the ways in which Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. However, I did not have a comprehensive understanding of how the biblical text moved toward and found its fulfillment in Jesus. This project helped to provide an answer to the questions I had been asking in this area. After completing this project, I am now better equipped to explain to others how the Bible centers on Jesus, particularly how the covenants move the story forward to its fulfillment in Jesus.

Conclusion

This project set out to teach congregants of Eastridge Baptist Church how to read the Bible from a Christ-centered perspective. Researching and arguing for a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture has provided me invaluable tools for future ministry. Not only have I gained a greater understanding of the Bible as a whole, how it connects together and pushes toward Christ, but I have also developed skills in the areas of writing and sermon preparation that I would not have grown in apart from this project. In addition, the congregants of EBC have grown in their understanding of Scripture, especially as it relates to the storyline of Scripture and its Christ-centered nature. While the project was laborious and difficult at times, the work to complete the project was worthwhile. The understanding and skills developed through the project will benefit my ministry and the church for years to come.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-SERIES STORYLINE OF SCRIPTURE INVENTORY

The following instrument is the Storyline of Scripture Inventory (SSI). It is comprised of general questions related to the storyline of Scripture. The instrument's purpose was to assess each members' present level of understanding and knowledge in relation to the storyline of Scripture.

STORYLINE OF SCRIPTURE INVENTORY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of the storyline of Scripture. The research is being conducted by James C. Lewis for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Please choose and record a three-digit number. Your three-digit number will be used to identify your results on the post project survey, so please choose one that is easy to remember.

Please record your unique three-digit number here _____.

Questions

1. The sixty-six books of the Bible are unified around one story that is centered on Jesus.
True OR False
2. Which of the following words are not a part of the pattern of the big picture of the Bible?
 - a. Fall
 - b. Creation
 - c. Redemption
 - d. Recreation
 - e. Regeneration
3. Adam and Eve's sin caused them to be removed from the garden, but it did not affect the rest of the world.
True OR False
4. Which one of the following best represents what John pictures in Revelation 21 and 22?
 - a. Redemption
 - b. Creation
 - c. Fall
 - d. Recreation
5. What is the climax in the meta-narrative or overarching story of the Bible?
 - a. Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden of Eden.
 - b. God's creation of the world including mankind.
 - c. Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.
 - d. Jesus' second coming at the end of the age.

6. One cannot preach Christ from the Old Testament Scriptures.
True OR False
7. The Old Testament is valuable and useful for a modern-day Christian's life and practice.
True OR False
8. Which one of the following best describes how Old Testament believers were saved?
 - a. By living a good life according to the law.
 - b. By faith and trust in God's promised Messiah.
 - c. By bringing a sacrifice to the priest when they sinned.
 - d. None of the above
9. Which of the following best represents the covenant God made with Abraham?
 - a. It is an unconditional covenant, meaning God would remain faithful to His promise to Abraham regardless of Abraham's faithfulness to Him.
 - b. It is a conditional covenant, meaning God would only remain faithful to His promise to Abraham if Abraham remained faithful to Him.
 - c. It is a temporary covenant, which ended when Abraham died.
 - d. None of the above
10. Which one of the following best represents the mission of the church based on the flow of the biblical storyline?
 - a. To gather together and fellowship with one another.
 - b. To make disciples of all nations.
 - c. To work to change oppressive social structures.
 - d. To include any and every one in church membership regardless of their profession that Jesus is their Savior.

APPENDIX 2

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATION

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of three persons. This panel evaluated the sermon material to ensure it was biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Directions: Please respond to the following statements. The questions require you to give your opinion using the following scale: 1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary. A comment section is provided for additional feedback.

Name of evaluator: _____ **Date:** _____

The Storyline of Scripture Sermon Series Evaluation					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon's content is biblically supported.					
The sermon's content is theologically sound.					
The sermon's content sufficiently contributes to its part of the storyline of scripture as defined as Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Recreation and will further help teach the storyline of Scripture.					
The sermon's content is organized in a logical manner and is easy to follow.					
The points of the sermon clearly support the thesis.					
The sermon contains clear application.					

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING MEMBERS OF EASTRIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH IN RED OAK, TX TO DEVELOP A CHRIST-CENTERED UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
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The purpose of the project was to teach members of Eastridge Baptist Church in Red Oak, Texas, to develop a Christ-Centered understanding of the Bible. Chapter 1 defines the ministry context at EBC, as well as presents the rationale, purpose, goals, definitions, and limitation of the project.

Chapter 2 discusses the biblical and theological support for a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. The chapter specifically explores the Christ-centered lens Jesus provides his disciples, which enables them to view the Bible as one unified story that centers on a crucified Christ.

Chapter 3 explores practical issues related to a Christ-centered understanding of the Bible. Three issues were prominent in the chapter. The first dealt with the necessity of a Christ-centered reading of Scripture. The last two explore both the worldview and gospel implications of a Christ-centered reading of Scripture.

Chapter 4 details the development and implementation of the project, which was a six-week sermon series through the metanarrative of the Bible.

Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project's purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. As well, it highlights what I would do differently if I were to run the project in the future. It concludes with both a theological and personal reflection over the project.

VITA

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