

# 1. The Unifying Threads of Scripture

We are about to embark on a whirlwind tour of the Bible. Our purpose is not to study every single book in exhaustive detail, nor even to gain an overview of each book. Rather, we will be following the development of certain Biblical *themes*. Because the Bible is the Word of God, it has one Author. We should expect it to demonstrate a certain consistency from *Genesis* to *Revelation*. We should expect the Holy Spirit, Who is the ultimate Author of the Bible (2 Peter 1:21), to use similar themes, ideas, and concepts to communicate the message of God to His people. And we should be able both to identify those themes and to trace their development throughout the individual books and sections of the Bible. In this lesson, after we examine the uniqueness and diversity of the Bible, we will take a look at some consistent Biblical themes that serve as unifying threads of revelation to hold the Bible together throughout the development of its various parts. This will give us a starting-point for beginning to gain a better overall understanding of the purpose of the Bible as God's written revelation to men.

1.1 First, let's consider the *uniqueness* of the Bible. The Bible came into being over a period of some 2,000 years. It was written by perhaps 40 different people, in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), and on three different continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe). This makes for great diversity in the Scriptures.

1.11 For example, consider the various *literary genre* in which the Scriptures were written. What seems to be the predominant literary genre of each of the following:

1 Kings	
Psalms	
Matthew	
Ephesians	
1 Timothy	
Revelation	

1.12 The Bible also demonstrates uniqueness and diversity in the wide variety of *subjects* that it addresses. Where, for example, would you look in the Bible to find discussion of each of the following subjects?

The meaning of life and man's purpose:	
What is love:	
How to have a happy family	
Good government/ Bad government:	
Ethics and values:	
Why do people act the way they do:	

1.2 The Bible consists of two "Testaments", the Old and the New. While in many ways these two Testaments are alike, in other ways they differ. Use the categories below to see if you can identify some of the ways in which the Old and New Testaments differ.

	Old Testament	New Testament
<i>How God reveals Himself</i>		
<i>Focus of God's saving activity</i>		
<i>Literary Genre</i>		
<i>Ways of expressing man's relationship with God</i>		
<i>Relationship of God's people to the nations</i>		

1.3 Thus, there are certain *discontinuities* between the Old and New Testaments, certain things that either change from one Testament to the other or that are left off altogether in the NT. But there are also many areas of *continuity* between the two Testaments. That is, certain ideas, themes, and ways of God's revealing Himself (among other things) are the same in the Old and New Testaments. Can you think of some of these areas of *continuity*?

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1.4 The Scriptures testify to having been given by God Himself. For example, think how many times throughout the OT, we read such things as "Thus God spoke" or "The Word of the Lord came to me," and so forth. In the NT, two powerful passages testify to the fact that God is the final Author of the Bible. How does each of the following make this remarkable claim?

-2 Timothy 3:15-17	
-2 Peter 1:20-21	

Because of this, the diversity of Scripture, as well as its various areas of continuity and discontinuity, are held together by the *intentions of the Author*. Just as in the literary corpus of a great writer you can expect to find certain basic ideas, certain recurrent themes that, together, express the deep-seated concerns of the author and provide a certain consistency for all his or her works (think of your favorite writer), so with the Bible we should expect to find certain ideas or themes that God uses to hold His revelation together and communicate His purposes in bringing the Bible into being. We should expect to find certain "unifying threads" of revelation that will be discernible in every section of the Bible, carrying the revelation of God forward as He makes His will known to His people. The challenge to us is to try to discern those unifying threads so that we can use them to make sense out of the whole of Scripture, helping us to weave together its great diversity and its various continuities and discontinuities to understand the message of the Word of God as a whole.

One place that we might expect to see those unifying threads of revelation brought into sharp focus is John 17, the great "high priestly" prayer of Jesus. Here on the eve of the great climactic event of His earthly ministry - indeed, of all human history - we find God the Son in prayer with God the Father in the power of God the Holy Spirit. What we find revealed about the heart of

God in this passage should provide some guidance to discerning the heart of God - the unifying threads of revelation - in every other place in the Bible as well.

So what do we find?

1.41 **Foremost among the concerns of Jesus Christ as He talks with His Father in this passage is the *glory of God*.** Read through John 17 carefully. In which verses does the theme of the glory of God occur?

1.411 Summarize what John 17 tells us about the glory of God.

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1.412 But what is the glory of God? What does this idea mean? The following passages show how the writers of the OT thought of the glory of God. What do you learn about this idea in each passage?

-Exodus 24:16-17	
-Exodus 40:34-35	
-2 Chronicles 7:1-3	

1.413 Think about these ideas in the light of your answer to 1.411 above. What seems to have been on the heart of God with respect to His glory in John 17?

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1.42 **A second primary concern** that comes out in Jesus' prayer is that of the *people God has given to Him*. What do we learn about these people in each of the following verses from John 17?

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6 - 8	
10	
13	
14 - 19	
20 - 23	
26	

1.43 **The final unifying thread** of revelation that appears in John 17 relates to what Jesus refers to as His "hour". Jesus is anticipating the work that He is about to do in accomplishing *God's plan of redemption of His people*. In which verses of John 17 do you see this concern being expressed?

1.5 **These three unifying threads - the glory of God, the creation of a people for God, and the redemptive plan of God for His people** - weave together throughout the Bible to provide a strong central cord of revelation. Reflect for a few moments on the interaction and

interdependency of these three threads. What to you appears to be the relationship between these three unifying threads of revelation?

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1.6 One final idea: Through the Bible, God carries His unifying threads of revelation along by a unique vehicle, His Covenant. The Covenant of God is like the shuttle of a loom. It holds the threads together and combines them in such a way as to accomplish the overall design of the weaver. This Covenant was present in God's Word from the beginning, although it was given its first formal statement only at Genesis 12:1-3. The Covenant was developed throughout the OT, as we shall see, until it realized its fulfillment in the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:67-75). In the readings and discussions that follow, we shall be tracing the unfolding and development of the unifying threads of revelation and the Covenantal relationship between God and His people. For now, spend some time reflecting in writing on the following questions:

1.61 What new thoughts about the Bible has this lesson stirred in you?

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1.62 What do you hope to learn from this study of the unifying threads of Scripture?

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1.63 Since you will be doing quite a bit of reading and answering questions in the lessons that follow, when will be your best time to study? How much time will you need to set aside?

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1.64 The lessons that follow will require your being prepared for each session and coming to participate actively in the discussion. Do you anticipate any problem in doing this?

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1.65 What are some items for prayer that come to mind as you being this study?