

# **Building a Framework For Biblical Understanding**

Pastor Roy L. Crane  
Calvary Bible Church, Midway, Arkansas

After almost 20 years as a Pastor, one of the things that I have been asked repeatedly is, “How can I understand the Bible? I read it over and over, but I just can’t seem to get a real handle on it, especially the Old Testament.” This seems to be a very common problem among Christians of all backgrounds. Hopefully, this booklet will help you to build a “framework” of understanding that you can use to bring everything else together into one cohesive whole. Just as in building a house, where you have to have a framework that will hold all of the walls, plumbing, wiring, sheetrock, and siding together; so it is in understanding Scripture. You need a basic “framework” of ideas and concepts to hold everything together. Once you have a solid framework, the ideas, stories, and facts of Scripture will all fit together to form an understandable whole.

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## **The God Who Communicates:**

The first part of our framework for understanding Scripture is to understand the basic **purpose** of the Bible; which is to **communicate**. God intends His Word to speak to us; to transmit to us what He wants us to know about Himself, and about His plan for us. **He did not make it purposefully hard to understand, nor did He seek to confuse us.** The problem is that He is communicating very broad and complex ideas that are beyond our normal comprehension. This cannot be done in short, two or three word sentences, but requires a lot of explanations, definition of terms, examples to illustrate the various points, and so on.

Think of it as a textbook that is trying to teach a subject such as mathematics. In order to begin, you have to define what it is that you are talking about; explain the various formulas and the rules that they function by; show examples of how the formulas are used and what they apply to; and show the progression from simple math (addition and subtraction) to the “higher” maths (algebra, geometry, calculus, trigonometry, physics, and so on). In the same way, the Bible is teaching us (sinful human beings) about: our origins, our nature, our place in the universe, sin, life and death, eternity, holiness, our relationship with our Creator, and our future, among other things.

In order to accomplish these things, He gave us a “book of books” that contains what we need to know about these subjects. However, the Bible is not a book that be easily understood by a casual reader. It must be read, studied, meditated upon, prayed over, and applied. We must examine Scripture with an eye to the definitions and questions that each portions brings up, then learn the definitions and answer the questions. When we do this, we will find that we have gained a far greater understanding of what God is communicating than if we had stopped at a mere “surface” reading.

For example, let’s consider what is probably the most familiar verse in the Bible for most Christians, John 3:16, which says, “***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***” (NKJV) In order to truly understand this verse, we need to understand the following definitions and questions:

Who is GOD? Which god?

Why did He love the world?

How did He give His Son?

Who is His Son?

How was His Son begotten?

What does “believes on Him” mean? How do you do this?

What does He mean by “perish”?

What is everlasting life, and why should I want it?

With these things in mind, let's look at two of the ways that God has provided "resources" for us to use in understanding His Word. The first is...

### **The Old Testament As A Dictionary For The New Testament:**

Although the Gospel of Jesus Christ is written in the New Testament, and was written in Greek (with some manuscripts in Aramaic), the IDEAS upon which the Gospel is based are all found written in the Old Testament, written in Hebrew. These ideas, such as "Why do we need a savior?", "What is sin?", and "How can the Messiah's blood save us, 2,000 years later?" are all defined in the Law, Writings, and the Prophets. In order to truly understand the meaning of the Gospel, you must go back to the foundation laid when God gave the definitions of His Word. As Paul puts it in Romans 7:7, "***What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."***"

It is God, in the Old Testament, that defined the appropriate sacrifice for sin, which is the shedding of blood. It is God who described His intention to give His Son when he stopped Abraham from killing Isaac. All of the great doctrines of the New Testament have their roots in the Old Testament. That is where we must look for understanding of the great power and love of Jesus' death on the Cross.

### **The Use Of Types And Symbols:**

The word "type" is derived from a Greek term [*tupos*], which occurs 16 times in the New Testament. It is clear that the New Testament writers use the word "type" with a degree of looseness; yet one general idea is common to all, namely, "likeness." A person, event or thing is shaped to resemble another; in some ways the one matches the other. The two are called type and antitype; and the link that binds them together is the similarity of the one with the other.

Three other words in the New Testament express the same general idea.

One is "shadow" ([*skia*], Hebrews 10:1), "For the law having a shadow of the good things to come" — as if the substance or reality that was still future cast its shadow backward into the Old Testament. "Shadow" implies dimness and temporariness; but it also implies a resemblance between the one and the other.

The 2nd term is "parable" ([*parabole*], Hebrews 9:9); the tabernacle with its services was an acted parable for the time then present, pre-figuring the blessed reality that was to come.

The 3rd term is “copy.” or “pattern” ([*hupodeigma*]), a word that denotes a sketch or draft of something future and (at that point) invisible (Hebrews 9:23); the tabernacle and its furniture and services were copies, outlines of heavenly things.

**Types are pictures, object lessons, by which God taught His people concerning His grace and saving power.**

#### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES:

What are the distinctive features of a type? A type, to be such in reality, must possess three well-defined qualities.

(1) It must be a true picture of the person or the thing it represents or prefigures. A type is a draft or sketch of some feature of redemption, and therefore it must in some way resemble its antitype, e.g. Aaron as high priest is a rough figure of Christ the Great High Priest, and the Day of Atonement in Israel (Leviticus 16) must be a true picture of the atoning work of Christ.

(2) The type must be of DIVINE appointment. Only God can make types.

(3) A type always prefigures something that is yet to come in the future. A Scriptural type and predictive prophecy are basically the same, differing only in form.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF TYPES:

- (1) Personal types, such as those people of Scripture whose lives and experiences illustrate some principle or truth of redemption. Such are Adam, who is expressly described as the “figure of him that was to come” (Romans 5:14), Melchizedek, Abraham, Aaron, Joseph, Jonah, etc.
- (2) Historical types, in which are included the great historical events that became striking foreshadowings of good things to come, e.g. the Deliverance from the Bondage of Egypt; the Wilderness Journey; the Conquest of Canaan; the Call of Abraham; Deliverances by the Judges, etc.
- (3) Ritual or Physical types, such as the Altar, the Offerings, the Priesthood, the Tabernacle and its furniture, etc.

## **The Centrality Of Jesus Christ In All Of Scripture**

The second primary part of our framework is that we understand that *everything* in Scripture revolves around Jesus, both in the Old Testament as well as in the New. He is the focal point of all of Scripture. One way to understand this is to imagine how you would adequately document a sculpture if you could only use a regular 35mm camera. Since you couldn't take one picture of all of the sides at one time, you would have to take a series of shots, from a variety of different angles, to produce a clear understanding of the statue as a whole. This series of photos would have to be examined as a group in order to get a grasp of the detail of all aspects of the statue, from all directions. This is the same way that we have to look at Scripture. Jesus Christ is so awesome, in so many ways, that no one written story can encompass the whole. So God gave us a series of written stories, told from a variety of viewpoints, so that we could gain a clearer picture of Jesus. These stories range from Genesis (Jesus as creator and covenant-maker), through the rest of the Law (Jesus as Righteousness), the historical writings (Jesus as One who guides His People, and Who controls the World), the Prophets (Jesus as Judge and Savior, the ultimate victor), into the New Testament Gospels (Jesus as Savior, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world), the Epistle's (Jesus working in the lives of the saved), and finally to the Revelation (Jesus as King of Kings, who returns the earth (and the saved) to their originally intended perfection).

## **The Centrality Of Jesus In The Old Testament**

Once we learn to see Jesus in the Old Testament, we discover that He was the one who is seen in every major event of God's interaction with mankind. These *theophanies* (pre-incarnate appearances of Christ) make for fascinating studies. As you pursue this trail of appearances, you find that it was Jesus Christ (referred to as "The Angel Of The Lord" in some cases) who:

Created the universe, and everything in it

Walked with Adam in the Garden

Sacrificed the first animal to make the coverings for Adam and Eve

Ate "lunch" with Abraham prior to the destruction of Sodom and

Gomorrah

Spoke to Abraham, to stop the sacrifice of Isaac

Wrestled with Jacob

Spoke to Moses from the Burning Bush

Feasted with the elders of the tribes on the mountain to ratify The Law

Appeared to Gideon, to call him to lead the people of Israel as judge

Appeared to Samson's parents to prophecy his birth

And many, many more...

### **The Centrality Of Jesus In The Christian Life**

We need to understand that Christianity is NOT and RELIGION, it is a RELATIONSHIP. Religion is the outward things; that is to say, the things that we believe and/or do ourselves. The reading of certain books (Bible, Koran, whatever), the things we do (going to church/synagogue/Mecca), the people we obey (pastor/rabbi/mullah/guru) are all RELIGION. These things will NOT get us into heaven. According to God's Word, the only way to be in a relationship with God is to be "born again" by having the blood of Jesus Christ applied to your life by faith, making Him your Lord and Savior. If you are NOT in relationship with Jesus, and through Him with God, then you are NOT a Christian, no matter how many times you have gone to church in your life. This is the key to Christianity, **and to understanding the Bible**. The Bible is designed to lead us into right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In Scripture, we are taught what sin is, and why we need to be saved from it; who Jesus is, and why He is the ONLY Savior; How to be "born again"; how to live a life of growth in holiness; and so on. If we are approaching it from any other standpoint, then we are in the same position as the man who tries to use a "Betty Crocker" cookbook to learn how to program his VCR. It's good reading, but it won't accomplish a thing.

### **The Covenants Of God**

The basis of our understanding of our relationship with God is an understanding of what a covenant is, how it works, and what God intends by entering into covenant with us. The word "covenant" in the Hebrew is "beréÆth" which means "a cutting," with reference to the custom of cutting or dividing animals in two and passing between the parts in ratifying a covenant. **It is more than a contract, although to look at it that way is fairly correct.** The fact that God, who is infinite, perfect, and all-powerful, would condescend to enter into covenants with humanity is a mark of His love for us, and His desire to have fellowship with us.

**A series of key divine covenants forms the backbone of God's dealings with human beings.** Because of our inability to secure our own prosperity—spiritual and physical—on the earth, a gracious God has committed Himself to providing what we cannot.

**The main biblical covenants are a unifying factor for all events described in the Bible involving God and human beings.** Some of them provide the guarantee that yet—future predicted events will occur. For example, the Abrahamic covenant is the basis for all of God's subsequent dealings with Israel, and is expanded in the Palestinian, Davidic, and New covenants, which, respectively, provide for Israel's eternal possession of the land, an eternal kingship, and the conversion of a remnant.

The major biblical covenants, along with the location of their occurrence, are:

1. Edenic; Gen. 2:16
2. Adamic; Gen. 3:15
3. Noahic; Gen. 9:16
4. Abrahamic; Gen. 12:2
5. Mosaic; Ex. 19:5
6. Palestinian; Dt. 30:3
7. Davidic; 2 Sam. 7:16
8. New; Heb. 8:8

### **The Initiator Of The Covenants**

In every case, it is GOD who is the initiator of the various Scriptural covenants with mankind. This is an important point, because it demonstrates God's desire to deal with man, rather than just "forcing" us to "be good" by changing our nature from people who have the ability to make conscious choices to mindless automatons. God not only loves us, He desires a relationship with us that is based on our free will. He initiates the action of bringing grace and mercy to us, but He does so in a way that respects us as the part of Creation that was created to have open, loving fellowship with Him.

### **The Permanence Of The Covenants**

All of the covenants that God has made with us are PERMANENT covenants. This is important because it shows the nature of the relationship that God desires to have with us. He desires a permanent relationship; one that will last for eternity.

### **The Goal**

With all of the above items kept in mind, we can now see the goal of Scripture. The Bible is not a book of philosophy, science, ethics, or politics. It is not a "self-help" book, or a book of religious "mantras". It is a message from our Creator, who desires to communicate with us regarding His Son whom He has given to be a sacrifice for our sin, so that He may enter into a permanent, loving relationship with us. The ultimate purpose for all of this is as follows:

### **God's Goal For Your Life**

It is God's goal for your life that you be saved (Biblically born again), growing and maturing in faith and knowledge of God and His Word, bearing fruit not only in evangelism, but in demonstrating the change of nature and character that is a result of the fruit of the Spirit.

### **God's Goal For Humanity**

As a whole, God's goal for humanity is to create a holy "Bride" of Christ to share in joy and fellowship with Him for eternity. All that is sinful will be removed, and the saved shall dwell with Him forever.

In its' final conclusion, the Bible is a message written to YOU, for the express purpose of bringing you closer to God, who created you, loves you, and died for you. It is the most important message that you will ever read, and is truly worth the time and effort you can put into gaining a fuller understanding of it. May God richly bless the time that you spend with Him in His Word.