

## A Passion for God's Word

# 4

# The Tapestry of God's Word

Now that we've had a brief survey of the structure of the Bible and its timeline, we are now ready to put some flesh on the skeleton. There are a number of major themes (or "threads") that resonate through the pages of God's Word. These threads are the subject of this lesson.

## Unity in Diversity

There is a marvelous sense of order to the Bible. But this order becomes obvious only as we begin to look at how the individual parts of the Bible are tied together by a common purpose. As with a fine tapestry, it is advisable to take a step back to look at the entire mural before you begin to examine the warp and woof of its individual threads. You will find that if you put too fine a microscope on God's Word, you can miss much of its beauty and meaning.

For what you find as you step back to embrace the entire biblical vista is that the Bible is a work of remarkable unity. Though made up of 66 component books, it is in fact one singular Book. The Bible is a book of unity within diversity.

In the words of William Gladstone in the last century:

"One controlling, guiding, unifying mind must have been operative through all the weary ages to produce out of such composite elements a result so wonderfully unique, uplifting, and unfathomable as the Bible; and that mind in the nature of things could not have been human."<sup>1</sup>

The unity of the Bible is all the more astounding in that it was compiled over a period of some 1,600 years. Imagine a group of 40 craftsmen, scattered over sixteen centuries, weaving a single tapestry that, at its completion, proves to be a thing of both unsurpassed beauty and unmistakable unity. Add to this the fact that the craftsmen who started at the beginning had no idea of what the end picture would look like, and any observer would conclude that there had to be one single mastercraftsman directing the work.

Arthur Pink describes the unity of the Bible in this way:

“The manner in which the Bible has been produced argues against its unity. The Bible was penned on two continents, written in three languages, and its composition and compilation extended through the slow progress of sixteen centuries. The various parts of the bible were written at different times and under the most varying circumstances. Parts of it were written in tents, deserts, cities, palaces and dungeons, some parts in times of imminent danger and others in seasons of ecstatic joy. Among its writers were judges, kings, priests, prophets, patriarchs, prime ministers, herdsmen, scribes, soldiers, physicians, and fishermen. Yet despite these varying circumstances, conditions, and workmen, the Bible is *one* Book; behind its many parts there is an unmistakable organic unity. It contains *one* system of doctrine, *one* code of ethics, *one* plan of salvation, and *one* rule of faith.”<sup>2</sup>

There is an undeniable harmony woven through Scripture, from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation. Where one craftsman leaves off a thread, another takes it up, embellishing it and adding further to the emerging picture.

The Bible begins with the creation of the world (**Genesis 1**), and ends in a new order of creation (**Revelation 21:1**). The Bible begins in a Garden (**Genesis 2:8-15**) and ends in a City (**Revelation 21:2-27**). It starts with the fall of man (**Genesis 3:1-7**) and finishes with the total restoration of mankind (**Revelation 21:3-5**). It begins with a lamb sacrificed (**Genesis 4:2-4**) and ends with the Lamb sacrificed for all (**Revelation 5**). It opens with a promise (**Genesis 3:15**) and closes with the promise fulfilled (**Revelation 12:9-10; 20:1-3,7-10**).

## The Major Threads of God’s Word

Let’s take a look at the major threads that interweave God’s Word. The Bible often uses allegories to illustrate spiritual truths. In order to help us understand the Bible, we’re going to have a look at an allegory drawn from the Old Testament, from the instructions that God gave for the weaving of the material for the tabernacle and the priestly garments.

### Read Exodus 26:1,7; 28:5; 39:3

These verses describe the threads used in the tapestries of the tabernacle and the priestly garments. Fine white linen was used, together with threads of blue, purple, scarlet and pure gold. Black goats’ hair was also used for certain parts of the tabernacle. These six colors also symbolize the essential threads of God’s Word:

<p><b>White</b> - the holiness of God <b>Blue</b> - the sovereignty of God <b>Purple</b> - the supremacy of Christ <b>Black</b> - the frailty of man <b>Scarlet</b> - the unfolding plan of redemption <b>Gold</b> - the ultimate purpose of God</p>
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So let's take a brief look at these six themes:

### ***The white background***

White in Scripture invariably represents holiness (read **Revelation 19:8**). The holiness of God is not so much a thread that runs through scripture as much as it is a backdrop against which the whole drama of Scripture is played.

As we have already seen, the Bible can be divided into two clear sections – the Old and New Testaments – and each highlights God's holiness in a different way:

- The Old Testament, where holiness was circumscribed by **law**
- The New Testament, where holiness is circumscribed by **grace**

As we shall see as we continue our studies, law and grace are the two dynamics against which God's plan of salvation is displayed.

### ***The blue thread***

Throughout Scripture, the color blue consistently represents heaven and, in particular, the throne of God (note **Exodus 24:10; Ezekiel 1:26; 10:1**). Through each book of the Bible runs the blue thread of God's overriding sovereign will. God has not left man to his own devices, but has intervened frequently and decisively in human history. The Bible is the story of heaven touching earth. It is the story of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

For examples of the blue thread, read the following passages:

**Read Psalm 47:8**

**Read Psalm 93:1-4**

**Read Revelation 19:6**

### ***The purple thread***

Purple in Scripture represents majesty and royalty (note **Judges 8:26; Esther 8:15; Mark 15:17-20**). One major thread, running through both the Old and the New Testaments, is the supremacy of Christ.

For examples of the purple thread, read the following passages:

**Read Daniel 7:13-14**

**Read Ephesians 1:20-22**

**Read Philippians 2:9-11**

**Read Colossians 1:15-18**

### ***The black thread***

Black in Scripture represents the darkness of sin, death and separation from God (note **Matthew 8:12; Jude 13**). One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Bible, compared with most other literature of the period, is that it doesn't glorify man's deeds nor does it gloss over human frailties. It constantly contrasts the sin and frailty of man's best efforts against the pure standard of God's holiness.

A.W. Tozer describes the purpose of Scripture succinctly:

“The Holy Scriptures tell us what we could never learn any other way: they tell us what we are, who we are, how we got here, why we are here and what we are required to do while we remain here.”<sup>3</sup>

For examples of the black thread, read the following passages:

**Read Psalm 103:13-16**

**Read Isaiah 40:6-8**

**Read Romans 1:18-32**

**Read Romans 3:23**

### ***The scarlet thread***

The scarlet thread that runs through both the Old and the New Testaments is a theme of redemption. From the time of Adam’s fall, right up to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, there has been a requirement for the shedding of blood in order to receiving forgiveness and rightstanding with God (read **Hebrews 9:22**). From the fall of man and the first promise of redemption in Genesis (**Genesis 3:15**) right through to the coming of Christ himself, we find God’s plan of redemption unfolding, building line upon line, revelation upon revelation, until the full picture emerges in the person of Jesus.

For examples of the scarlet thread, read the following passages:

**Read Isaiah 53:3-7**

**Read Ephesians 1:7**

**Read 1 Peter 1:18-19**

**Read Revelation 19:13**

### ***The gold thread***

Just as the craftsmen at the time of the Exodus hammered out fine sheets of gold, then sliced them into threads to be woven into the curtain which isolated the Holiest of All, so woven through Scripture is a thread of pure gold. That gold thread is the defining purpose of God. Even in the book of Genesis we begin to see the thread of God’s ultimate purpose, a thread which sees its consummation in the book of Revelation. That purpose is expressed ultimately in the City of God. This is a city filled with the redeemed of God (**Hebrews 12:22**), through whom God’s glory will be revealed to the whole world.

For examples of the gold thread, read the following passages:

**Read Habakkuk 2:14**

**Read Hebrews 11:8-10,16**

**Read Hebrews 13:14**

As we move through the Bible, observing how these threads are woven together, an image begins to appear upon the tapestry - an image sharp and clear.

## The Emerging Image

### Read John 5:37-40

Jesus spoke boldly when describing his role in God's plan of salvation. In this verse, he describes his relationship with Scripture. He didn't just claim to be a great teacher of Scripture, or even to fulfil the prophecies of Scripture, although both are true. No, Jesus claimed to be the core subject of Scripture itself.

### Read John 5:46-47

### Read Matthew 26:53-54

### Read Luke 24:25-27

### Read Luke 24:44

Like an image that has been there all along but only obvious after someone points the image out to you, so Jesus emerges, once seen, as a bold and clear image embroidered within the rich tapestry of Scripture.

Take a look at the picture below and test your perceptive skills by trying to find the image of Jesus contained within it. Look carefully. Don't worry if you don't see it at first: be persistent. The moment you see his face, your eyes can never miss seeing him again.



There is a story behind this picture. It is said that a photographer was so captivated by the scene of melting snow, with black earth showing through, that he took this picture of it. Deeply troubled spiritually at the time, he was amazed, when he developed the photo, to see in it the face of Jesus, full of tenderness and love, and he became a Christian. It may take you a long time to see his face, but be assured that it is there. It will suddenly become visible, and once seen, it dominates the picture and you'll wonder how it was ever possible to miss him.

This exercise in perception skills reveals extraordinary insight into the nature and process of revelation. A person simply cannot see until suddenly the issue clarifies. Then it is difficult to understand how you couldn't have seen it before.

This is the way that the picture of Christ emerges in the Old Testament. The moment you see him there, he is like the face in the snow, watching with such kindness and patience, waiting for you to discover what's been there all along.

## According to Scripture

### Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

This passage outlines the most fundamental tenets of the Christian faith - the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. But note how Paul does not just allude to the testimonies of the eyewitnesses to these events. He also draws upon the authority of the Old Testament Scripture to prove that what happened to Christ was pre-planned by God.

In verses 3-4, Paul writes:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*...”

This phrase “according to the Scriptures” flavors the whole of New Testament teaching, causing the New Testament to be interwoven with Old Testament quotations. Read the following passages and note how the first century Christians artfully showed how the Old Testament Scripture pointed to Christ:

**Acts 2:22-36**

**Acts 8:32-35**

**Acts 17:2-4**

**Acts 28:23-24**

The depth of Old Testament allusion to Christ cannot be overemphasized. It flavors every section of Old Testament.

### Read Luke 24:13-27

On the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection, Jesus expounded about himself from the Scripture. He used the Old Testament to show how everything that had been predicted revolved around his death, burial and resurrection.

### Read Luke 24:44-47

Even in the gospel accounts, Jesus constantly referred to himself from within the context of Old Testament prophecy.

### Read Luke 4:16-21

Jesus had the audacity to declare that Scripture not only pointed toward himself, but in fact was fulfilled in himself.

### Read Matthew 5:17

The Old Testament Scripture was fulfilled in Jesus because of the close identification between the person of Jesus and the Scripture. Both are called “the Word of God.”

## The Living Word

### Read 1 John 1:1

Jesus is described as “the Word become flesh” (**John 1:14**). That Word is a Person of the Godhead, eternally co-existent with the Father (**John 1:1; Philippians 2:6**). The Bible is the written form of the Word of God, but Jesus is the embodiment of God’s Word - the Word of God lived out. The written Word (the Bible) and the living Word (the Lord Jesus) are in agreement.

Take as an example a wife, separated temporarily from her husband by his business travels. Each few days he writes a letter to her, telling her of his undying love for her and reminding her again of their plans for when he returns. The wife treasures those letters, poring over every word, because they represent the heart of the writer, her beloved. Then comes the wonderful day when her husband returns. She goes to the airport to greet him.

What does she do now with his letters? They are still wonderful. They still fully represent the heart of her husband. But the nature of their value has now changed. Her husband and his letters are in agreement, but she now has her husband with her. Her husband is his letters personified. He is the word become flesh.

When Jesus came into the world, he declared that *all* Scripture (not just some of it) speaks of him. By this he did not mean that every single chapter and verse speaks directly of him, but rather that the sum total of all Scripture - the entire tapestry of God’s Word - is talking of him. He is not always the *subject* of Scripture, but he is forever the *object* of Scripture - the goal toward which all Scripture is moving.

### Read John 14:6

There are many examples of Jesus describing himself using this format, “I am...” This verse is probably the most famous. Here Jesus describes himself as “the way, the truth and the life.” Let’s take a quick look at each of these self-descriptions and see how they apply to the description of Jesus as “the Word of God.”

### ***I am the way***

Jesus declared that he is the way - not just a teacher of the way, but the way itself. This term - “the way” - was generally applied to the covenant of Moses

(**Deuteronomy 10:12-13**). By declaring himself the way, Jesus was referring to himself as the fulfilment of the Old Covenant and the basis of a New Covenant with the God. The way to God, as prescribed in the Old Testament, was now personified in Jesus.

### ***I am the truth***

Again, Jesus declared himself to be the truth - not just a teacher of the truth, but the truth itself. Throughout Scripture, the term “truth” was reserved for God’s Word (**Psalms 119:43; John 17:17**), yet Jesus applies the term to himself. The truth of God’s Word was now personified in Jesus (**John 1:14,17**).

### ***I am the life***

Once again, Jesus called himself the life - not just the giver of life, but the life itself (**John 11:25**). Jesus described himself as the source of life itself, a term which had previously been used to refer to the Scriptures (note **John 5:39-40**).

### **Read John 6:63,68**

Until we recognize Jesus as the personification of the written Word, the written Word will not become a living thing to us. It will be a story without a plot, a book without a theme. Without Jesus, the written Word is lifeless.

## **A Revelation on the Mountain**

Let’s take a look at just one example of how the threads of Old and New Testament are woven together in a tapestry which reveals the image of Christ.

### **Read Matthew 17:1-5**

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, an extraordinary event, quite separate from the actual transfiguration of Jesus himself, took place. Two famous characters from the Old Testament – Moses and Elijah – appeared in glory on either side of the Lord Jesus.

Unless we understand the Old Testament, however, the significance of this event will be lost on us. Why Moses and Elijah? Why not Abraham and David? Why not Isaiah and Daniel? It takes insight into the Old Testament to fully appreciate the importance of these two characters to the Jews of Jesus’ day.

Firstly, Moses and Elijah represented two of the most dramatic interventions of God’s power in Israel’s history. Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt with great signs and wonders, passing through the Red Sea (**Exodus 14:21-31**) and escaping to the base of Mount Sinai, where God descended in a cloud of glory to confirm his covenant with Israel (**Exodus 19-20**). Many hundreds of years later, Elijah announced a drought against Israel for its violation of its covenant with God (**1 Kings 17**), then later met with the prophets of Baal in a dramatic encounter which resulted in fire coming down from heaven to consume Elijah’s sacrifice as a proof of the reality of God’s covenant with Israel (**1 Kings 18**).

Secondly, both Moses and Elijah had experienced a mountaintop encounter with God. Both encounters were on Mount Sinai, otherwise called Mount Horeb, and both encounters had a corresponding event on the mount of transfiguration.

**Read Exodus 24:15-18**

**Read 1 Kings 19:8-15**

In Moses' encounter with God on the mountain, a cloud of God's glory enveloped him. And in Elijah's encounter with God on the mountain, a quiet commanding voice spoke to him. On the mount of transfiguration, God spoke to the three disciples out of the enveloping cloud of his glorious presence. Coincidence?

More important, however, than any of these Old Testament parallels, is the significance of Moses and Elijah themselves. They were the two most significant players in Old Testament continuity. Moses represented the Law, and Elijah was the greatest of the Prophets. This phrase – “the Law and the Prophets” – was often used as a synonym for Scripture.

**Read Matthew 5:17**

**Read Matthew 7:12**

**Read Matthew 11:13**

**Read Matthew 22:40**

The Law and the Prophets symbolized the Old Testament itself. The Law was the foundation of the covenant that Israel had with God. The Prophets were the mouthpieces of God, speaking into Israel's apostasy and guiding them back onto the right path of the covenant. The words of the Law were the general, categorical instructions of the covenant. The words of the Prophets were the specific, contextualized instructions of the covenant. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mountain, the significance of this event was certainly not lost on Peter, James and John. This was the ultimate confirmation that Jesus was the fulfilment of all that the Old Testament had predicted. It was as if the entire tapestry of God's Word, every thread of the Law and the Prophets, had come to its culmination in the transfiguration of Jesus.

Now note the response of Peter to this event. He knew that the whole of the Old Testament was wrapped up in what was occurring before his very eyes. And so he offered up a quick suggestion:

“Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

Peter was drawing upon Old Testament symbology, when he suggested that they erect shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. The word “shelters” is perhaps a poor translation by the NIV version of the Bible. We could easily think that Peter simply wanted Jesus, Moses and Elijah to have a temporary resting place, perhaps as shelter from the sun or the rain. The Greek word that Peter uses is best translated “tabernacle” or “tent shrine.” Peter, as a Jew, wanted to enshrine the event in Old Testament terms.

Note that it was “as the men (Moses and Elijah) were leaving Jesus” (**Luke 9:33**) that Peter put forward his suggestion. He wanted to keep them there. Tabernacles were built in the Old Testament to contain the glory of God. Thus Peter’s intent was to “house” the glory of Moses, the glory of Elijah and the glory of Jesus so that the transfiguration glory he was witnessing could be contained and preserved for others to see. Peter probably envisioned streams of Jewish pilgrims scaling the mountain to see Jesus, together with Moses and Elijah. Or at the very least, he would tell the crowd gathered at the base of the mountain what had happened and they would make the pilgrimage to the mountain peak. Imagine Peter’s shock when Jesus ordered the three disciples not to tell anyone about the transfiguration event until after he had been raised from the dead (**Matthew 17:9**).

But God’s response to this half-baked plan (Luke’s account says that Peter “did not know what he was saying” – see **Luke 9:33**) was very revealing. The cloud of God’s glory surrounded them and they heard the voice of God give them very explicit instructions:

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

So powerful was this encounter with God that when Peter later recalled it, he makes no mention of the appearance of Moses and Elijah. He mentions only with great awe the “majesty” of Jesus and the voice that spoke to them from “the Majestic Glory.”

### Read 2 Peter 1:16-18

The voice of God made three clear statements, which form the basis of the whole of the New Testament:

- ☞ **“This is my Son, whom I love”** - The New Testament is founded upon a revelation of the person and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as God’s Son.
- ☞ **“With him I am well pleased”** - There are two times where God declares that he is pleased with his Son: at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:17) and here on the mount of transfiguration. The essence of the new covenant is that we are accepted by God *in Christ*. In other words, 1) since God is pleased with his Son and 2) since we are, in covenant terms, now totally identified with his Son (the meaning of “in Christ”), therefore 3) God’s pleasure toward Christ now overflows to us. The New Testament describes how this covenantal premise works.
- ☞ **“Listen to him”** - Right throughout the Old Testament, God spoke through many different people. But now, his voice is found in Christ.

### Read Hebrews 1:1-3

These three verses summarize the entire Old Testament and New Testament in one broad sweep which culminates in the person of Christ. Note that this passage

says that now God “has spoken to us by his Son” and that this same Son is now “sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

## Getting the Point

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### Read again John 5:37-40

The religious people of Jesus’ day were renowned for their intensive study of God’s Word. They pored over every verse and debated the meaning of a single word. Yet they ended up missing the point. What a shame it would be for us to fall into the same trap of studying the Scripture but missing the point of Scripture. Concerning the Pharisees’ meticulous study Jesus said:

“These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

The purpose of studying Scripture, therefore, must be to “come to [Jesus] to have life.” As we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit breathes upon the Word he originally inspired and through that Word reveals the person and character of Jesus Christ.

### Read John 16:13-15

This passage describes the Holy Spirit’s principal ministry. The Spirit of God and the Word of God are in partnership to reveal Christ to you. Their combined purpose is to cause you to “fix [your] eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of [your] faith” (**Hebrews 12:2**).

## In Summary

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The study of God’s Word reveals a rich tapestry of interwoven themes. These themes all ultimately point toward the coming of Christ himself, who is the focal point of the Word of God. Like a compass needle pointing toward true north, the Scripture unerringly points toward the Lord Jesus. The Old Testament looks forward to him and the New Testament testifies to him. He is the one around whom the entire Word of God is woven. Every theme in Scripture finds its culmination in him. Every hope finds its fulfillment in him.

Throughout the Online Bible College course, we will be exploring the threads of God’s Word, tracing them to their origin and following them through to their culmination in Christ. We hope that you have begun to realize, like never before, just how much more there is to be discovered about the Lord in his Word - the unsearchable riches of Christ that are locked within its pages.

<sup>1</sup> William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898), quoted in *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from Compton’s Interactive Bible NIV.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> A.W. Tozer (1897-1963), quoted in *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from Compton’s Interactive Bible NIV.