

Lecture 1: The Kingdom, the Garden, and the First Promise

Introduction to Biblical Theology · Dr. Thomas Schreiner · The Master's Seminary · 35 minutes

Watch the lecture at medinacommunitychurch.org/biblical-theology-1

Before you watch

Dr. Schreiner sets the course's one big idea, the kingdom of God, then walks the story's opening scenes: creation by the triune God, man made to rule as God's image bearer, Eden as the first sanctuary, the fall, and the first promise of the gospel. Listen for how often the beginning of the story already points to its end.

The lecture, section by section

1. Why this matters for a church

Dr. Schreiner opens with Graeme Goldsworthy's observation that people mostly learn how to use their Bibles from their teachers at church, so no one has a better opportunity to model sound handling of Scripture than the preacher. The greatest theologians in the church's history have been pastors: Augustine, Luther, Calvin. Pastors walk with people through birth, life, and death, constantly applying Scripture.

2. The task of biblical theology

Putting the whole Bible together is hard, and honest differences show up precisely here: the major systems, dispensationalism, covenant theology, and new covenant theology, all grow out of biblical theology. The aim of this course is to trace the Bible's storyline.

3. The central theme: the kingdom of God

Scripture has no single center, Schreiner argues, but its most helpful central theme is the kingdom of God: God's rule over God's people through God's covenants. The covenants are the backbone of the story, a reading he shares substantially with Kingdom through Covenant by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum. The kingdom also involves place, moving from the garden to the land of Canaan to the new creation.

4. First things first: the new creation

Whatever one's view of the millennium, a question he deliberately sets aside for now, the millennium is temporary and the new creation is forever. It is off center, he presses, to be more excited about the millennium than the new creation, just as it is off center to care more about rewards than eternal life itself.

5. God the Creator, and the Trinity at creation

The story opens with God creating all things. Psalm 33:6, the heavens made by the word of the LORD and the stars by the breath of his mouth, read in light of the whole canon, shows the Father creating through the Word, who is the Son (John 1 is meditating on Genesis 1), and the Spirit, the breath of God hovering over the waters. Schreiner is candid that the psalmist himself was not thinking of Jesus; reading canonically, we see the fullness of what was there. He reads the "let us" of Genesis 1:26 the same way, while granting that good men differ, his colleague Peter Gentry among them.

6. No rivals, all glory

The gods of the nations are worthless idols; the LORD made the heavens (Psalm 96:5). Satan is truly in conflict with God, but the dualism is historical, never ontological: Satan is a creature, no equal to God. Creation exists to display God's glory and does so every day (Psalm 19:1); unbelief before that display reflects sin's blindness, not a lack of evidence.

7. The seventh day that keeps going

Genesis calls the day God rested the seventh day, not the Sabbath: a day signifying God's reign, a day of refreshment and joy, and a day that keeps going. It points forward to the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4), found finally in the new creation, where the dead who die in the Lord rest from their labors (Revelation 14:13).

8. Made in his image to rule

Human beings are the crown of creation, made in God's image to rule the world for God as his vice regents, the way a vice president governs for the sake of the president. Ancient kings set up images to mark the reach of their rule; God set his image bearers in the world.

9. Adam: a king and a priest in a garden sanctuary

Adam rules for God, a king, and mediates blessing, a priest. His charge to work and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15) uses the same pair of verbs given to the priests who serve and guard the tabernacle (Numbers 3). The garden is presented as a sanctuary where God dwells with man, a reading Schreiner shares with Greg Beale: God walks in the garden as he dwells in the temple; both are entered from the east; cherubim guard both, from Genesis 3 to the ark to the living creatures around the throne in Revelation 4; the lampstand may recall the tree of life; the river from Eden anticipates the impossible growing river that flows from the temple in Ezekiel 47; and rivers flow downhill, suggesting Eden was a mountain sanctuary as the temple would one day sit on a mountain. Adam and Eve's task was to spread God's blessing and presence over the whole world.

10. The test, the fall, and the exile

Adam was to rule under God's lordship, and he collapsed. When the serpent entered, he should have driven it out; instead he stood passively by while Eve was tempted, then joined the rebellion. The heart of sin is the displacement of God, wanting to be like God (Genesis 3:5); every unbeliever is finally worshiping self. The fall broke the world too: thorns and thistles, a groaning creation awaiting redemption (Romans 8). Adam and Eve were exiled from God's presence, a picture of hell as eternal exile. And so the story's great question is set: who may ascend the hill of the LORD, who may dwell with God (Psalm 15, Psalm 24)? Only, in the end, those forgiven through Christ's death and resurrection.

11. Why a historical Adam matters

Genesis 5 tolls "and he died" over generation after generation, a roll call of death showing Adam's sin reaching the whole race, with Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 still ahead in the story. Doubting the historical Adam is, in Schreiner's word, disastrous; he commends the Crossway volume *Theistic Evolution*, edited by Wayne Grudem, Stephen Meyer, and others, for a serious treatment.

12. Genesis 3:15, the programmatic promise

God puts hostility between the serpent and the woman, between his offspring and hers; her offspring will crush the serpent's head. Revelation identifies the serpent as Satan (Revelation 12), so this is the Bible's first gospel promise, and the rest of the story will trace it. Schreiner commends Jim Hamilton's article following Genesis 3:15 through Scripture.

Scripture in this lecture

Genesis 1, 2, 3, 5; Numbers 3; Psalm 15, 19, 24, 33, 96; Ezekiel 47; John 1; Romans 5, 8; 1 Corinthians 15; Hebrews 4; Revelation 4, 12, 14

Key terms

Biblical theology

The discipline of putting the whole Bible together by tracing its unfolding storyline.

The kingdom of God

In this course's working definition, God's rule over God's people through God's covenants, moving from the garden to Canaan to the new creation.

Canonical reading

Reading a passage in its own historical setting and in light of the whole Bible, so the word by which the heavens were made is seen, finally, in the Son.

Vice regent

One who rules on behalf of the true ruler; what God's image bearers are made to be.

Garden sanctuary

Eden presented as the first temple, the place where God dwells with man, guarded by cherubim.

Historical, not ontological, dualism

God and Satan are truly at war in history, but Satan is a creature, never God's equal in being.

Programmatic text

A passage that sets the program for all that follows; Genesis 3:15 is the storyline's first promise.

Comprehension check

Circle your answers, then check them against the key on the last page.

1. Where do most people learn how to use their Bibles?
 - A. Personal study
 - B. From their teachers at church
 - C. Books
 - D. Online
2. What does Dr. Schreiner propose as the Bible's most helpful central theme?
 - A. Covenant
 - B. The glory of God
 - C. The kingdom of God
 - D. The church
3. In this course's definition, the kingdom of God is God's rule over his people through his what?
 - A. Prophets
 - B. Covenants
 - C. Law
 - D. Angels
4. Which does the lecture insist lasts forever?
 - A. The millennium
 - B. The present creation
 - C. The new creation
 - D. The temple
5. Read canonically, the word by which the heavens were made (Psalm 33) points finally to whom?
 - A. Moses
 - B. The angels
 - C. The Scriptures alone
 - D. The Son
6. The image of God in this lecture centers on humanity's role as what?
 - A. God's vice regents, ruling for him
 - B. A physical resemblance to God
 - C. The ability to reason
 - D. The capacity for emotion
7. Adam's charge to work and keep the garden matches the duties of whom?
 - A. Israel's kings
 - B. The priests serving the tabernacle
 - C. Farmers under the law
 - D. The prophets

8. Which is NOT a garden and temple parallel given in the lecture?
 - A. Entered from the east
 - B. Guarded by cherubim
 - C. A river flows from each
 - D. An altar of sacrifice stands in each
9. When the serpent entered the garden, Adam should have done what?
 - A. Asked God for a ruling
 - B. Driven it out
 - C. Questioned it
 - D. Left the garden
10. What is the heart of sin, as this lecture puts it?
 - A. Breaking rules
 - B. The displacement of God, wanting to be like God
 - C. Ignorance
 - D. Weakness
11. Genesis calls the day God rested what?
 - A. The Sabbath
 - B. The seventh day
 - C. The day of rest
 - D. The holy day
12. Why is Genesis 3:15 programmatic?
 - A. It gives Israel its law
 - B. It sets the promise the whole story traces: her offspring will crush the serpent
 - C. It only explains why people dislike snakes
 - D. It establishes the priesthood

Talk it over

1. Schreiner says some Christians are more excited about the millennium than the new creation, and more about rewards than eternal life itself. Where does that pull show up in your own thinking, and what re-centers you?
2. Adam was a king who would not rule and a priest who would not guard his charge. Where are we tempted to the same passivity in our own households and callings?
3. Psalm 15 and Psalm 24 ask who may dwell with God. How would you answer that question for a child at your table this week, using this lecture?

One verse to carry

Genesis 3:15, the Bible's first promise: the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

Go further

The lecture's own recommendations: *The King in His Beauty* by Thomas Schreiner, the book behind this course. *Kingdom through Covenant* by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum. *Theistic Evolution*, the Crossway volume on the historical Adam. And Jim Hamilton's article tracing Genesis 3:15 through Scripture.

ANSWER KEY

Lecture I Comprehension Check

1. B. From their teachers at church (*outline section 1*)
2. C. The kingdom of God (*outline section 3*)
3. B. Covenants (*outline section 3*)
4. C. The new creation (*outline section 4*)
5. D. The Son (*outline section 5*)
6. A. God's vice regents, ruling for him (*outline section 8*)
7. B. The priests serving the tabernacle (*outline section 9*)
8. D. An altar of sacrifice stands in each (*outline section 9*)
9. B. Driven it out (*outline section 10*)
10. B. The displacement of God, wanting to be like God (*outline section 10*)
11. B. The seventh day (*outline section 7*)
12. B. It sets the promise the whole story traces: her offspring will crush the serpent (*outline section 12*)