Section: Doctrine of the Word of God

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q25. What is the Bible primarily about?**

The Bible is primarily about God: who He is and how He works. It tells us of His work in creation and the redemption of His chosen people within fallen man.

**Luke 24:27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

**John 5:39** You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me

**Deuteronomy 29:29** “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

**Jeremiah 9:24** (NKJV) “But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord.

**Mark 13:31** “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

**Intro**

Tonight, I have the privilege of delivering a lesson that is very important for all of us in the church. So often we approach scripture with concepts that we’ve formed from our own ideas and thoughts; all too often we come to the bible without really taking the time to ask the foundational questions.

Tonight, we will ask one of those foundational questions, “What is the Bible primarily about?”

Is it about you? Is it about God? Is it about Israel? Is it about heaven?

Let’s start tonight by looking at a few statistics. There are 66 books between the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Of these 66 books, there are 40 authors. These authors wrote over a time span of roughly 1500 years. Just by statistics alone, this is a staggering reality. There exists no other work that has such a pedigree. It’s safe to say that if there were no connection between the various books of the Bible, then we could say it’s a loose collection of religious texts that really don’t communicate a narrative.

As we will see tonight, it’s not just a loose collection of religious texts, but a unified work that is communicating grand and vast truths.

**Catechism Question & Answer**

So, what is the Bible primarily about?

Our Catechism answer says, “The Bible is primarily about God: who He is and how He works. It tells us of His work in creation and the redemption of His chosen people within fallen man.”

When speaking of the over-arching theme and story of Scripture, it’s helpful to think about the main themes in scripture. There are 4 main themes that are helpful for our task: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration.

My goal tonight is to tell you the story of the Bible while using each of these themes as a guide.

Let’s first look at Creation.

***Creation***

Right from the start in one of the oldest books of the Bible, we have a declaration: In the beginning – God. It was not, in the beginning, man, or angel, or fill in the blank. No, it was God. And so, from the start of the Bible, we are faced with something that exists that is not us. This being is not entirely like us. Genesis declares that He has existed without any help from us. He just is. He is self-existent.

Immediately the Bible starts to declare the works of this being. It tells us that He is a creator. And, He isn’t the sort of creator that we are familiar with, He is a creator ex-nihilo. He creates from nothing. He takes that which is not and makes it into something.

The very first chapter of the Bible also tells us that He is a plurality and yet one; we see the first verses of scripture testify to the Holy Spirit of God hovering over the waters! And a few verses later the text states that God himself says, “Let ***us*** make man in ***our*** image” and in the very next verse it says that “***God*** created man in his ***own*** image”. We’re face to face with this being who is singular in one sense, and more than that in another. The beginning Genesis quickly orients us to a self-existent, loving, just and gracious creator God.

God does something unique in the beginning of the Bible, He creates a special creature who is uniquely made in His image. He calls this being man and from this man he creates woman. Again, we see the plurality and relational nature of God as mirrored in His creation of man and woman. He names this man Adam and gives him a command. God, being the sovereign one and the only self-existing being, isn’t just the creator of mankind, but God is also the Sustainer and Ruler of all.

That truth we know right?...remember our first Word of Truth Catechism answer? “God is the almighty Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of everything.” This is what we are considering…this is what Scripture is about—God and His work. So, as Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of everything God tells Adam in Genesis 2:16-17 “You may surely eat from every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

From the beginning of scripture, we have this command upon Adam and Eve. They are given a garden to keep and tend, but they cannot eat of one particular tree.

Things don’t stay that way for long, look with me at Genesis 3:1-7.

***Fall***

Genesis 3:1-7 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Indeed, our historic confession speaks of it this way: 2LBCF Ch 6:1. God created humanity upright and perfect. He gave them a righteous law that would have led to life if they had kept it but threatened death if they broke it. Yet they did not remain for long in this position of honor. Satan used the craftiness of the serpent to seduce Eve, who then seduced Adam. Adam acted without any outside compulsion and deliberately transgressed the law of their creation and the command given to them by eating the forbidden fruit. God was pleased, in keeping with his wise and holy counsel, to permit this act, because he had purposed to direct it for his own glory.

God creates the world and everything in it. He gives the two humans made in His image a covenant of works to keep, and they fail. This is the most cataclysmic event in all of the Old Testament. Adam and Eve fail to keep God’s command.

This is known as the fall.

Again the 2LBCF says: 2. By this sin our first parents fell from their original righteousness and communion with God. We fell in them, and through this, death came upon all. All became dead in sin and completely defiled in all the capabilities and parts of soul and body.

Immediately following their failure something is different. They feel shame. They see their nakedness and they have this newfound desire to hide from God.

But, the most important prophetic declaration to the worst possible outcome is made by God in the following verses.

3:14-16 The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Again the 2LBCF Chapter 20:1 says, Because the covenant of works was broken by sin and was unable to confer life, God was pleased to proclaim the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect and producing in them faith and repentance. In this promise the gospel in its substance was revealed and made effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

God makes a promise! He declares that Eve’s offspring will bruise the serpents head. This is the first prophetic declaration of the gospel! This Being, who is self-existent, good and gracious and just, will make things right as He sees fit. He will avenge His precious image bearers, but because of their rebellion against a wholly pure and righteous creator-God, He must enact justice toward them and their offspring.

God says to Adam, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

From this account, we see God’s promise of death enacted for Adam and Eve as well as for their offspring. We see in the very beginning, the serpent is a liar and deceiver, and Adam and Eve are removed from Eden to live out their days until physical death would consume them.

Following the creation and fall narrative, readers may be wondering, how can this fallen people redeem themselves? We see many foundations in Genesis, most notably that sin abounds, it is devastating, and humanity lives in rebellion against God. Sin fractures relationships and even the creation itself. Man is given over to his desire to fruitlessly attempt to usurp God’s position as king. An idea of man being able to redeem himself should be overwhelmingly proven impossible by a reading of the text, for the sin in man proves he is hopeless and undeserving of redemption.

The book of Genesis continues by following Adam and Eve’s offspring through the turmoil of living in a world outside of Eden. There is hardship, strife and murder. Mankind continues to multiply and fill the earth, but sin abounds.

God calls Noah, a righteous man, to build an ark. God will judge the earth by flooding it and save a remnant of mankind through Noah and his immediate family.

From this remnant would arise a man named Abraham. God calls Abraham to a land that is not his own (Gen 12). In this we see his obedience. Abraham is one of the most notable Old Testament figures because God makes a significant covenant with him. (Gen 17:1-8)

In this covenant, God makes known to Abraham that he will make him the ‘father of a multitude.’ He tells him that all nations are to be blessed through him. But Abraham has an issue, he is old, and his wife is barren. Through much personal sin and doubt, Abraham is given a baby boy, whose name is Isaac. God is shown to be a God of His unbreakable promises.

Abraham loved Isaac, but God seeks to test him greatly:

Gen 22:1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”2 He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

This is Abraham’s heir, this is His only son. This is the heir by which God promised He would multiply his seed unto the nations. And now he must walk by faith to sacrifice His only son on an alter to the most-high God.

You see, in this glimpse we see the overarching story of scripture. God is working in and through man to accomplish something amazing, something that would bring Him the most possibly glory and fame! Scripture is not really about us, it’s about something far greater than us. It’s about the object of Abraham’s devotion. It’s about God. Abraham believed God, and it was counted as righteousness!

Abraham did not sacrifice Isaac, as God provided an animal sacrifice at the last moment, but Abraham’s faith was tested.

Isaac begot Jacob and Jacob had twelve sons. These twelve sons would become the twelve tribes of Israel. One of Jacob’s sons was named Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt and through many trying events he would eventually rise to prominence within Egypt.

At the end of Genesis, in the midst of an amazing story, we’re left with a reminder of who God is by the words of Joseph to his brothers: Gen 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

This truth sets the stage for all of scripture, man in his wickedness and evil is being used by God to bring about favor and love for God’s chosen people.

When we get to the start of the book of Exodus, we see that the King of Egypt has forgotten Joseph and his God and has enslaved the Israelites.

In response to the Israelites crying out to God in Egypt, God raises up a man named Moses. Moses would eventually lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land.

What is compelling about the story of Moses is what is known as the Exodus account. In the Exodus account we see God command Moses to confront Pharaoh multiple times. In this confrontation, Moses requests that Pharaoh let the Israelites leave Egypt. Pharaoh continues to reject Moses’ pleas. As a response, God sends a plague to punish Pharaoh’s sin. These plagues serve to highlight the grievousness of sin against the holy God and God’s supremacy over all things. The final and most devastating plague is the tenth plague.

Exod 11:4 So Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt,5 and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle.6 There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again.

But God, in his mercy, provides a way:

Exod 12:13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.14 “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

In the Exodus account God provides the Israelites a way, through faith, to spare their firstborn children from the death. Pharaoh eventually relents and lets the Israelites go.

The Israelites leave Egypt and travel to Mount Sinai where God makes a covenant with Israel. At Sinai, God gives the Israelites the Law—commands now more fully expressed. The Law gives the Israelites the standard of who they are to be. They are to honor God with all of their lives, they are to be a holy, set apart people. During this time God manifests himself “as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night” to lead Israel in the wilderness.

One of the important concepts to understand in the Old Testament is that God commands Israel how they should build temples that would host the earthly manifestation of God. In Exodus, God gives Moses detailed instructions on how to build the Tabernacle where God would dwell. This allows the High Priest of Israel to have direct interaction with God in the Holy of Holies.

Eventually, after 40 years in the wilderness, Israel reaches the promised land, Canaan. This land is where they establish the nation of Israel. Joshua leads the Israelites into the land, but after his death we see Israel enter into a pattern of sin, bondage, crying out to the Lord and rescue. It is during this time that Israel begins to covet other nations who are ruled by kings and desire that Samuel appoint a king for them. He warns them that they will regret this decision, but they persist and the Lord grants Israel’s request.

During this period of Kings, God makes a covenant with King David. This covenant is remarkable in that God promises David that through his lineage the messiah will come. This is the messiah that was prophesied of way back in Genesis! David’s son and heir, Solomon, would build the first temple in Jerusalem. This would be the earthly dwelling place of God for the Israelites.

Eventually, due to the disobedience of Israel, the kingdom splits into two nations. Judah and Israel. During this time the Northern Kingdom (Israel) is handed over to the Assyrians because of their worship of false gods. It is during this time that God departs from the temple, signifying the withdrawal of His protection from Jerusalem, His judgment on the people, and the coming fall of the city to Babylon. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) is eventually handed over to Babylon.

Although Israel is in exile during this time, God does not leave them without prophets and promises. God comforts Israel with the fact that their deportation is to be temporary, and that God’s people will still be redeemed by the messiah from David’s seed.

Toward the end of the exile, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah lead people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city. It’s important to note that the spiritual state of Israel doesn’t become any more sanctified at this point. In many ways, the Old Testament ends on a very unresolved note. God did not restore Israel and He no longer dwells with them in the temple.

***Redemption***

Fast forward 400 years to the New Testament and it opens with the lineage of David. Remember that Israel was still waiting to be redeemed by the messiah and so it’s fitting that the New Testament would start by looking to connect Jesus to David.

The New Testament, even more clearly, testifies about Jesus, (the Messiah), and what life in Him by grace through faith is to look like. Christ Jesus is born in a lowly manger, the son of a carpenter. He starts his ministry at around 30 years old by teaching, preaching, healing and discipling. He is the messianic fulfillment, through David, from Eve’s seed, reaching all the way back to the original prophecy in Genesis. Jesus is the offspring who would bruise the head of serpent. What’s significant about Jesus is that he isn’t just a man, he is the God-man. He is the second person of our triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Upon His incarnation, He is God dwelling among man. Fully God and Fully man.

Throughout His entire life, Christ Jesus lives perfect—totally sinless, perfectly righteous. He satisfies all that is required of Him. During the ministry of Christ Jesus, his disciples walk with Him and interact with Him. He declares God’s truth and performs many miracles that have many layers of significance. Eventually, he is arrested, mocked, falsely accused and put on trial.

He is crucified on a roman cross with lowly criminals at his side. He is given a public execution, ordered by the Jews and carried out by the Romans. This is the apex of the entire Bible. The God-man is the unblemished lamb (think back to the Exodus) that God has provided for the atonement of sin on behalf of God’s elect!

Christ dies a sacrificial, substitutional death—in this, He takes on himself the penalty for sin due His people, the full wrath of God. Upon his death he is laid in a tomb and, on the third day rises from the dead. In His death, he pays for the sins of all of God’s elect and purchases their salvation. In His resurrection He proves His victory and proves the promise that God made in Genesis 3:16 to be true. All of this is tied together, all of Scripture testifies about God: who He is and how He works. It tells us of His work in creation and the redemption of His chosen people within fallen man.

Post-resurrection, Jesus appears to the Disciples and Apostles to order to encourage them and give them a command:

Matt 28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

As the canonical gospels close, we’re given a look into the expansion of the church after Christ ascends to heaven. The book of Acts is marked by an explosion of the gospel unto the nations through various missionary ventures and church expansion.

Many of these missionary ventures are carried out by Saul, also known as Paul. Paul is a Jewish pharisee & murderer of Christians turned, by God’s power and will, to be a Christian Apostle and missionary. His conversion is unique in that Jesus appears to him personally on the Damascus road.

We see in this testimony the amazing transforming grace of God. Paul a murderer of Christians, now a Christian discipler unto the nations! Paul becomes one of the fellow Apostles and spends the remainder of his years preaching the gospel and ministering to churches throughout the Greco-Roman world.

***Restoration***

The New Testament explains that those who are bought by the blood of Christ have the God of the universe dwelling in them. God is no longer dwelling in the temple or the tabernacle, but because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, He dwells within us.

God takes his elect from living as slaves to sin to living as sons and daughters. This happens at conversion, when we are given a new heart.

This is restoration!

The Bible ends with a glimpse into the future to when Christ will return to the Earth to enact judgement upon the earth. We see the Earth renewed by fire and a new Eden where there will be no more sin and strife.

Rev 22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

***Conclusion***

Let’s take a look at our catechism question again: **What is the Bible primarily about?** The Bible is primarily about God: who He is and how He works. It tells us of His work in creation and the redemption of His chosen people within fallen man.

As we saw in the creation portion of our lesson tonight, the story of scripture shows us how our God works. He is the creator God who creates from nothing. He is a plurality in persons and yet one being, eternally existing as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is love, as evidenced by creating man and woman and placing them in the garden.

In the fall we learn about the justice of God. He cannot simply let us sin without recourse. Sin must be punished. We see this clearly through the winding history of Israel.

The Bible testifies in many different areas of the different attributes of God. It shows us that he is omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, etc.

The Bible, overwhelmingly, is about God.

The New Testament helps us look back on the Old Testament and understand that it’s pointing us to something. Jesus tells us in Luke 24:27 that he is the focal point to all of scripture. Think about that for a moment. It all points to Him—God in flesh—Immanuel!

Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Earlier Jesus said:

**John 5:39** You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me

He’s declaring the Bible to be about God! People were looking to the Bible for steps to have eternal life, and they missed that it was telling them about God—the only redeemer!

Consider this also, the fall was ordained to bring God glory, it’s about Him! The fall of man is ordained by God in order to bring about the redemption of sinners through the blood of Christ—unto the praise of God! Jesus is God. It’s all about God!

Consider a few passages in which God tells us why He acts:

In consideration of Israel, as we saw earlier (and foreshowing His eternal salvation for spiritual Israel):

**Ezekiel 36:22** … Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name …

Similarly, in:

**Isaiah 48:9-11** “For my name's sake I defer my anger;

 for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you,

 that I may not cut you off.

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;

 I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.

For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it,

 for how should my name be profaned?

 My glory I will not give to another.

And the bold claims about God ordaining the fall for His name and His purposes, consider the rhetorical claim in:

**Romans 9:22-23** What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory

And to the beautiful description of God’s work to save sinners in Ephesians 1, consider:

**Ephesians 1:5-6** [God] predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

(Again, in verse 12: to the praise of his glory & 14 to the praise of his glory.)

OVER AND OVER again, its about God. For His name. For His purposes. For His glory. Church, please get this.

When you realize that Jesus is the focal point of the Bible, you start to see Him all over the place! In Gen 22, where God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son, this story is meant to point us to the coming redemption narrative of a loving father who would sacrifice his one and only son for the salvation of many! God’s covenant promise to Abraham is to make him a father to a multitude of nations, which comes to fruition in the great commission in the New Testament. We are to take the gospel news to the ends of the earth in order that God would draw all His elect to Himself! These things point us toward Christ and His glory for the nations!

In the Exodus story, we see the lamb’s blood as a clear indicator of the coming messiah and the blood that he would shed for God’s elect! From Genesis to Revelation, the story of the bible is that God, for the glory of His name, is reconciling and reclaiming all things to himself.

If we read the bible thinking that it’s simply a guide to how we should live our lives, we will read it incorrectly. The commands in it certainly tell us how to live, yes. And we should want to know what it says about how we should live. For Jesus said,

**John 14:15** If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

But the temptation is to look at the stories in Scripture and personalize them. We want to place ourselves in the place of David and make ourselves the hero of scripture. But the narrative is not about us, it’s about David (a type of Christ) who is defeating sin and death for Israel (God’s elect people). We are Israel cowering in the corner! We are not the hero, Jesus is!

We must understand that Biblical men and women were not without blemish, they were fallen in sin just as you and I are. David was an adulterer and murderer, Solomon had 700 wives, Abraham slept with his servant girl, the disciples abandoned Jesus when He needed them the most, Noah became a drunkard after the flood, and I could go on and on. These aren’t men to be imitated in every way, no, these are stories that are reminding us of the very real sin that dominates our lives and the God that is working to bring His name grander through the gospel. If we put ourselves in these stories and turn these stories into moral epithets then we’re missing the forest for the trees. We must read the bible in the context provided, fully understanding that it is pointing us toward the eventual redemption of God’s people through Christ for the Glory of God.

If the Bible is about us and what we must do to make ourselves right before God or to live our “best life now”, then we miss that we can’t do what’s required in ourselves. Rather the Bible declares to us the doctrine of God and salvation found in God alone—it’s about Christ and what he has done. The gospel, the news which we are to take to all of the nations, is a declaration of something that God has done. We go and tell people that Jesus Christ has died in the place of sinners and provided the only means of salvation, which comes to those who trust in Him by faith alone.

There is much application and instruction given to us by God in scripture, but the book is not about us primarily. No, it’s primarily about God, the triune God, the Father, Son. and Holy Spirit.

Let’s Pray.