

Study Outline: *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible* by Bernhard Anderson

Study I: Introducing Bible Study and Prologue- In the Beginning

- P. 9 Two ways to approach the study of the Bible 1.) Academic: looking at the Bible as a spectator to gather information; 2.) As a participant- looking through the window of faith.
- P. 10 The Bible is God's "manifesto" meaning a "statement of intention, motives, and purpose. Scripture is God's self-disclosure and self-giving.
- P. 13 The Bible has a unity like that of a great drama—moving from beginning to end, from creation to new creation. As a whole it reveals God as not only author or source of the narrative but also chief actor.
- P. 14 The Biblical drama unfolds in three acts: from Creation to confirmation...
 - Prologue—In the Beginning
 - Act I: The Formation of the People of God
 - Act II: The Re-formation of God's People
 - Act III: The Transformation of the People of God
 - Epilogue: In the End

- P. 18 Prologue- In the Beginning
 - Genesis 1:1-2:3 (The first strand of oral tradition)
 - God is *transcendent: not limited to or by nature; nature displays the handiwork of the creator. (Ps. 19)*
- P. 19 The central issue of the creation saga is the ultimate meaning of life within the natural sphere. (Not a scientific question but a theological affirmation of faith: not when/how but who/why)
- P. 20 The creation accounts are "word pictures" (worldview) that portray life's deepest dimension (relationship with God is the centerpiece)
- P. 23 (The second strand of oral tradition) Genesis 2:4b-3:24 features paradise given then paradise lost. It is a story of a gracious gift of peace/shalom (well-being) lost in rebellion. (God's gracious initiative, loss of the gift of relationship and the prevailing reality of alienation lie at the heart of the human predicament)

Study II: A Way into the Future

- P. 28 (Exodus 3:1-21) The call of Moses is the first major historical act of the Biblical drama. It represents how God takes the initiative in the relationship with human beings and responds to the human predicament of suffering.
- P. 29 The emergence of Israel: A covenant people/covenant federation of tribes. Covenant is a bond of loyalty. The people of God were called to participate in God's purpose for creation.
- P. 31 God enters human history/the human predicament/struggle: (Exodus 19:3-6)
 - “I have seen the plight of my people”
 - “I have heard their cry”
 - “I know their sorrow”
 - “I have come down to rescue them”

An encounter with the Holy God is manifest in divine word and deed.

- P. 32 God's name is God's nature: “I am who I am; I will be who I will be.” God is self-giving.
- P. 33-35 (Exodus 20:1-17' 24: 3-8) Covenant relationship and Covenant Making- commitment, Trust and loyalty.
 - Benefactor is gracious/giving/saves/sustains.
 - Gratitude is expressed for favor/grace bestowed.
 - An oath of loyalty is made between covenant partners.
 - An invocation of blessings/curses is made for those who keep or break the relationship.
 - Ethical behavior is motivated by gratitude for what the Benefactor has done.

(Exodus 12:1-3 Abraham is representative of an oral tradition of being chosen to serve/bless)

(Genesis chapters 1-3: portrays the universal human predicament as estrangement from God despite humanity's supreme position as God's representative on earth.)

Study III: The Discipline of Disaster

- P. 39 (Jeremiah 1:4-19) The emergence of Jeremiah as a prophetic voice/messenger. (626 BC – 587 BC) The events of Jeremiah portrays ominous historical events, utter calamity, the destruction of God's sacred dwelling place, the temple in Jerusalem.
- P. 41 The progression of the prophets is a call for covenant loyalty to God. (Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel)
Ps. 95:7 “O that today you would harken to (God's) voice.
- P. 42-43 Jeremiah's covenant lawsuit against the people of God; Jeremiah is a legal prosecutor laying out the case against the people of God. (unfaithfulness and disloyalty to God/covenant) God is disciplining the people of God in the midst of historical disaster.

“God is actively confronting the people on the plane of history, leading them through suffering to a new beginning of divine grace. Therefore, even though there was tragedy, it was meaningful tragedy.”

Jeremiah's temple sermon (Jeremiah 7:1-15) is the basis for Jesus' “den of thieves” proclamation against the temple leaders of his day. (Mark 11:17)

- Jeremiah 31:31-34 A vision of hope: a new, internalized covenant relationship with God.

Study IV: A New Exodus

- P. 47-48 II Isaiah (Chapters 40-55) Disciple(s) of the prophet Isaiah who continue his message. In the midst of the historic calamity of the Babylonian Exile (587 BC), the people of God are completely humbled and devastated. (Psalm 137—Babylonians torment those carried off into exile by asking them to sing ‘One of the songs of Zion.’)
- P. 48 The fall of Jerusalem and the resulting Babylonian Exile is a “spiritual blackout” for the people of God, yet, it becomes a time of essential memory, gathering oral history, and sustaining God-given identity.
- P. 49 The rise of the Persian (modern day Iran) benevolent ruler (538 BC marched into Jerusalem and expelled the Babylonians) is a sign of grace/liberation. The theme of “Good News” emerges for the people of God—God is acting as a deliverer, liberator, savior.
- P. 50 (Isaiah 42:5-17; 43:14-21) God again takes the initiative to deliver the people of God from suffering/oppression/a no-exit situation. Isaiah 43: God is doing a “new thing”; do you perceive it?
- P. 52 (Isaiah 41: 8-10; 43:8-13; 44:1-2; 52:12-53:13) Israel is described as a “suffering servant” through whom God is revealed in vulnerability and suffering. (A foreshadowing of Christ)
- P. 53 (Isaiah 55:1-13) Promises of grace and a vision of an everlasting covenant.

Study V: Victory Through Defeat

- P. 66 The New Testament message: Acts 10:34-43 (Peter’s sermon) The New Testament emerges with an exuberant announcement (of good news/gospel) that God’s promises to Israel are being fulfilled in and through Jesus.
- P. 67 Jesus represents the dawn of a “new aeon/age” of God’s long awaited redemptive rule.
- P. 67 The written gospel documents (Mark, Matthew, Luke and John) are not biographies but are primarily ‘confessions of faith, each with a different accent and perspective.’ A central issue is the identity and role of Jesus (Mark 8:27-9:13 Who do you say I am?) The gospels are written portrayals of oral histories of confessions of faith in Jesus in various communities of faith.
- P. 71 (I Corinthians 1:17-2:9) The Apostle Paul’s central proclamation of the paradox of the Christian gospel: God uses apparent defeat, even a horrible, humiliating death on a Roman cross) as the divine sign of victory over sin, evil and death. The ‘word of the cross’ is counter-intuitive, ironic, paradoxical good news in cultures focused on ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge.’ It was scandalous in popular culture. So, the cross is the “distinctive Christian symbol of God’s victory in apparent defeat.”
- P. 72 (II Corinthians 5:14-6:2) The Apostle Paul’s theological terminology of Christ’s work: reconciliation; bringing those things or relations that are separate back together again. The church is entrusted with the divine mission in Christ of reconciliation.

Study VI: The Church in the World Part I

- P. 74 (Romans, ch. 9-11) The emergence of the church in the world represents the re-constitution of the people of God (esprit de corp- the Body of Christ) and the transformation of the people of God in Christ.
- P. 75 The church is represented in the NT as “the new Israel,” the people of God bearing the purposes of God in the world. The church is picking up Israel’s role as a ‘light to the nations’ for the benefit of all humankind. In the midst of the Roman/Jewish war (AD 66-70 as an echo of the Babylonian calamity/exile when the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed) is the historic moment when the church as the People of God emerges as God’s sustainable covenant community and instrument in history.
- P. 76 The church is a “remnant chosen by grace.” (I Peter 2:4-10) The new Israel/church is the ‘well-tested stone’ God uses to recreate his covenant people, with Christ as the cornerstone of a new dwelling place: a ‘priestly’ community (Latin=pontifex: bridge to God)

Study VII: The Church in the World Part II

- P. 77 (Ephesians 1:1-14; 3:8-12) The church emerges as the People of God, playing a crucial divine role in God’s cosmic drama. (Ephesians 2:1-22) Themes of peace/shalom and unity represent how the emergence of the church as the People of God in Christ represent God’s renewed divine purpose in the world. (Shalom= mutual well-being, wholeness, harmony)
- P. 78-79 (John 17) God’s high priestly prayer: Jesus prays for the unity of his future covenant community. “Ekklesia” is the Greek word for church as those called “out” of the world and the way of the world (division) and sent “into” the world to manifest God’s character/purpose.
- P. 79 The church is God’s “task force” to complete God’s mission in the world. “May they be one as we are one.” (Divine connection/original “koinonia” fellowship recaptured)

Study VIII: Epilogue- In the End

- P. 81 The grand unfolding drama of the Bible moves from creation to consummation. “The Bible moves in the direction of a goal. The beginning words of the Bible, “in the beginning, God...” are matched by the expectation that in the end God’s purpose will be realized. All things, in history and nature, heaven and earth, are caught up in the purpose of God—the first and last, the Alpha and the Omega.) Theological theme: God’s sovereignty.
- P. 84 (Revelation 21:1-8; 21:22-22:5) A reversal of the curse of Eden; paradise lost and regained.
- P. 88 (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) The vision of rapture/up/exaltation is the theological affirmation that God ultimately triumphs over evil and vindicates the faithful. (It is not a statement of physical union with Christ as much as an exaltation of Christ as ultimate) Until the ultimate unfolding of the divine drama, discipleship means serving God’s reign/rule on earth in our daily relationships and patterns of living.
- P. 88 The church is the community of hope, expressed as Jesus ultimately triumphing over sin, violence and death, offering vindication to the faithful in the midst of historical struggle, oppression and suffering. The NT/gospels point clearly that God’s redemptive rule has already begun. We, as the church, are called to be “Ambassadors for Christ.” (II Corinthians 5:20)