

THE CENTER OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY:  
THE GLORY OF GOD IN SALVATION THROUGH JUDGMENT

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**Introduction**

The suggestion that the Bible contains a theology within itself, and that its theology has a center, assumes that the Bible presents a coherent message. David Noel Freedman has presented stimulating evidence, which, in his view, points to the conclusion that the whole of the Hebrew Bible was shaped by Ezra and Nehemiah and argues a coherent thesis.<sup>1</sup> The evidence that Freedman provides for the OT is paralleled by what David Trobisch argues for the NT, namely, that the 27 books of the NT canon were presented as one unified book very early.<sup>2</sup> Further, Trobisch provides good grounds for doing “pan-biblical theology” rather than merely OT or NT theology by noting that the editors of the first edition of the NT presented it as “the second part of the Canonical Edition”<sup>3</sup>—the Greek translation of the OT being the first part.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>See David Noel Freedman, “The Symmetry of the Hebrew Bible,” *Studia Theologica* 46 (1992): 83–108; and idem, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991). Freedman offers his assessment of “the purpose of the author/editor” and the OT’s “pervasive unity” in *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible*, 39, 98. The evidence that Freedman presents excludes the book of Daniel from consideration, but Roger Beckwith presents evidence for an early date for Daniel in “Early Traces of the Book of Daniel,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 75–82. Stephen Dempster has used Freedman’s analysis constructively in “An ‘Extraordinary Fact’: *Torah and Temple* and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon: Parts 1 and 2,” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 23–56; 191–218.

<sup>2</sup>David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Trobisch does not hazard a specific date for the publication of the first edition of the NT, but he agrees that none of the NT books were written after AD 150, and he dates the publication of all 27 documents as one book in the second century (*First Edition*, 7, 43).

<sup>3</sup>Trobisch, *First Edition*, 62; cf. also 62–77.

<sup>4</sup>Because of the way the NT appropriates both the MT and the LXX, Spieckermann’s words are relevant: “Any Old Testament theologian who conceives his discipline as a part of the theology of the Christian Bible will have to consider the Greek version of the Old Testament at

historical arguments of Freedman and Trobisch complement the informed presuppositional statement of Paul House, with which I agree, that “a biblical theologian must be committed to interpreting the Bible as a coherent whole because it is the word of an inherently coherent God.”<sup>5</sup>

Building on the conclusions of Freedman, Trobisch, and others,<sup>6</sup> and in general methodological agreement with recent approaches to a “canonical biblical theology,”<sup>7</sup> I am proposing that there is indeed a center of biblical theology, a main theme of the Bible. This center of the Bible’s theology acts as the center of gravity for all of its other themes, it undergirds biblical wisdom, and it presents itself as the apex of the purposes of the God<sup>8</sup> who speaks and acts<sup>9</sup> from creation and redemption to judgment and consummation. The center of biblical theology, I contend, is the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

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least as carefully as the Hebrew version” (Hermann Spieckermann “God’s Steadfast Love: Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” *Biblica* 81 [2000]: 308).

<sup>5</sup>Paul House, “Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 270.

<sup>6</sup>E. Earle Ellis, for instance, presents evidence that points to the coherence of the NT’s perspective in his *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Boston: Brill, 2002).

<sup>7</sup>B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 70–79, 91–94; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 15–43; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 54–57; John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 197–252; C. H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 49–76. I recognize that there are variations among these authors, but they all agree on working with the final form of the canon rather than with a critically reconstructed account of what happened.

<sup>8</sup>In his article, “Torah (Pentateuch),” in *ABD*, 6:621, Richard Elliott Friedman writes when commenting on the “Theological Qualities” of the Torah, “Yahweh’s essence remains unknown, as do his ultimate purposes.” But a considerable number of texts attribute to Yahweh the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to himself.

<sup>9</sup>See Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 276: “Theology is the church’s reflection on God’s performative action in word and deed and its own participation in the drama of redemption.”

### A Brief Apology for a Center

James Barr writes, “The idea of a theological ‘centre’ is an easy target for mockery, and in much Christian biblical theology it is regarded with scepticism too . . .”<sup>10</sup> Rather than spurn the search for a center, Barr offers helpful comments as to how these suggestions should be regarded. He writes, “The idea of a ‘centre’ should perhaps be seen as a kind of hypothesis formation. It is agreed that the ‘centre’ is not obvious, is not explicitly put forward by the text. That is exactly why it has to be *proposed* or *suggested*. . . . If existing proposals do not give satisfaction, then one can try another.”<sup>11</sup> Stephen Dempster also points out that “If it is the case that the Hebrew canon is also a Text with a definite beginning, middle, ending and plot, then the task of discovering a fundamental theme becomes not an exercise in futility but an imperative of responsible hermeneutics.”<sup>12</sup>

Reflecting on the history of the discussion of the center, Barr opines,

Looking back, therefore, on the various suggestions for a “centre” that have been made, rather than submit them to ridicule, one should say that more or less all of them have been reasonable proposals and have represented an important element in the theology of the Hebrew Bible. It should not be our aim to arrive at a definitive solution, and perhaps it should be admitted that no definitive solution can be found.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 295.

<sup>11</sup>Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 340.

<sup>12</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 43: Contrast the repeated remark of Scobie: “It is difficult to understand the *obsession* with finding one single theme or ‘centre’ for Old Testament or New Testament theology and still less for an entire Biblical Theology. It is widely held today that the quest for a single centre has failed” (C. H. H. Scobie, “The Structure of Biblical Theology,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 [1991], 178, emphasis added). Scobie also insists on this judgment in his article “New Directions in Biblical Theology,” *Themelios* 17.2 (1992), 7: “It is difficult to understand the obsession with finding one single theme or centre on which to base biblical theology”; and in his massive *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 87: “It is difficult to understand the obsession with finding one single theme or ‘center’ for OT or NT theology, and more so for an entire BT. It is widely held today that the quest for a single center has failed.”

<sup>13</sup>Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 342. Roland E. Murphy’s conclusion is similar: “The paradox is that a search for a unifying center fails, but it has produced a harvest of

In spite of an apparent consensus that the quest for a center of biblical theology has failed,<sup>14</sup> Barr concludes that the discussion of the center of biblical theology “has not been a vain waste of breath.”<sup>15</sup> Even as I acknowledge with Barr that it is doubtful that one proposal is going to gain universal approval (or even wide-spread support), I cannot agree “that no definitive solution can be found.” The theological presupposition that the Bible is the revelation of a coherent and harmonious God keeps us probing for the best triage of themes, and at the center of the sorting will be the center of biblical theology. As audacious as it no doubt sounds, here we are “concerned not with what is *a* center, but with what is *the* center.”<sup>16</sup>

### What Do We Mean by “Center”?

If the search for a center is legitimate, what exactly are we looking for? D. A. Carson poses several important questions: “What does ‘center’ mean, and how might it be discovered? Does it refer to the most common theme, determined by statistical count, or to the controlling theme or to the fundamental theological presuppositions of the NT writers. . . . Precisely how does one determine what a ‘controlling theme’ is?”<sup>17</sup>

In response, we begin with a definition. In this study the center of biblical theology is defined as the concept to which the biblical authors point as the ultimate reason God creates, enters into relationship with his image-bearers, judges them when they do wrong, saves them by

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insights in to the riches of the Bible” (Roland E. Murphy, “Once Again—The ‘Center’ of the Old Testament,” *BTB* 31 [2001], 89).

<sup>14</sup>Elmer A. Martens, *Old Testament Theology*, IBR Bibliographies 13 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 57: “By the end of the twentieth century, a consensus of sorts emerged questioning the viability of a center.” Such statements could be cited almost indefinitely.

<sup>15</sup>Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 343. Similarly, Dennis Olson writes that “biblical-theological monologizations [which he acknowledges to be reductionistic, provisional, and inadequate (174–75)] may be periodically necessary and helpful for a limited time and context” (Dennis T. Olson, “Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization: A Dialogue with Childs, Brueggemann and Bakhtin,” *Biblical Interpretation* 6 [1998], 180.)

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Plevnik, “The Center of Pauline Theology,” *CBQ* 51 (1989), 464 n. 18.

<sup>17</sup>D. A. Carson, “New Testament Theology,” in *DLNTD*, 810.

his mercy, and renews the creation at the consummation of history. Moreover, the center of biblical theology is the theme which all of the Bible's other themes serve to expisit.

How do we determine whether there is such a theme, and if there is, what it is? If one of the Bible's themes is presented as the ultimate reason for all that God does, and if this theme is not only an unstated presupposition of the biblical authors but also the stated explanation they give to justify the ways of God to men, then we would seem to have a plausible center of the Bible's theology.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment**

I will argue that the Bible's justification of God (θεο-δικη) is not only consistent throughout the history presented in the Bible but also the apparent aim of that history. Therefore this concept appears to be not only the Bible's center, it is also presented as the *telos*—the end and the goal and the purpose—to which the Bible points as the reason for God's created world.

Throughout the Bible those who experience God's deliverance experience it through his judgment. Judgment falls on the enemies of God so that God's people are delivered, but the saved often experience judgment before they enjoy the blessings of redemption. Adam and Eve are judged for their wrongdoing, and as the serpent is being cursed they are given the hope for the seed who will come from the woman (Gen 3:15). The salvation brought by the seed of the woman will come through judgment, however, for the woman is promised pain in childbearing (Gen 3:16). Deliverance comes through judgment, and the glory of God is seen in both his verdict and his pardon.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>The perception of the glory of God as "ultimate" keeps me from agreeing with Köstenberger that "the search for a single center of the NT should be abandoned." See A. J. Köstenberger, "Diversity and Unity in the New Testament," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002), 154.

<sup>19</sup>The collocation כבוד יהוה (Glory of Yahweh) occurs in the following OT contexts (note that these contexts have to do with salvation and judgment): Exod 16:7, 10, in response to grumbling. Exod 24:16, 17, when Moses goes up the mountain to meet God (the covenant provides access to the saving presence of God, but the regulations are in themselves a judgment

Noah and his family are saved through the waters of judgment. The children of Israel are delivered from slavery through God's judgment on Egypt. God makes himself both just and the justifier of the ungodly by saving those who understand that they are condemned: their mouths are stopped (Rom 3:19), they understand that they fall short (3:23), and then they trust that God's justice has been met in Jesus (Rom 3:24–26). On the great day when all will be set right, salvation for God's people will come through the triumph of the King in judgment (Rev 19:11–21). The Bible's depictions of the outcome of all history indicate that everything will result in God being glorified for his justice and his mercy. The redeemed will praise God for his mercy as they see his righteous judgment. God's renown is the song of the remnant throughout salvation history (e.g., Isa 26:8), and the texts point to this being their song in the ages to come (Rev 7:9–12). According to the Bible, the purpose of creation, the goal of salvation history, and the outcome of God's dealings with his world, in short, the center of biblical theology, is the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

In this formulation, the glory of God refers not merely to a word study of the occurrences of *kabod* or *doxa*,<sup>20</sup> but to the reputation that God gains for himself (Josh 2:9–13) as he reveals his justice that he might make known the meaning of his mercy (Rom 9:22–23). This

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because without them God cannot be approached). Lev 9:6, 23, at the sacrifice for the consecration of Aaron and his sons (in this sacrifice God's judgment falls). Num 14:21, as God pardons the people through Moses' intercession after their rebellion in response to the bad report of the spies. Num 16:19; 17:7 (ET 16:42), at Korah's rebellion. Num 20:6, when the people grumble at the waters of Meribah. 1 Kgs 8:11; 2 Chr 5:14; 7:2, at the dedication of the temple (here too there is sacrifice). After the apocalyptic judgments of Isa 34, the redeemed shall see the glory of Yahweh in Isa 35:2, and the manifestation of glory Isa 40:5 is similar in that it follows the double payment for sin in 40:2. Isa 58:8 promises the protection of Yahweh's glory after unrighteous piety is denounced in 58:3–5. Ezekiel receives a vision of the glory of Yahweh in 1:28; 3:12, 23 (exiled in judgment), and the glory departs in judgment in 10:4, 18; 11:23, only to return in restoration in 43:5; 44:4. Hab 2:14 announces Yahweh's glory in the context of the coming judgment brought by the Chaldeans. Giving Yahweh glory, Ps 104:31 is a plea that Yahweh's glory would endure forever, and Ps 138:5 states the greatness of his glory.

<sup>20</sup>As in Walther Eichrodt's discussion of the glory (*kabod*) of Yahweh, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. trans. J. A. Baker. OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1967), 2:29–35.

theme is reflected in God’s concern for his *name*, which reveals his character, manifesting his glory (Exod 33:18–19). God intends to be known, thus the common refrain, “And you shall know that I am Yahweh.” This self-revelatory statement is peppered throughout the OT, but Yahweh is presented as making this assertion ten times in Exodus, and he insists on it another sixty eight times in Ezekiel.<sup>21</sup> At several points God is presented as acting on behalf of his name (1 Sam 12:22; Isa 48:9; Ezek 20:9, 14, 22, 44), and synonymously, he acts for his own sake (לְמַעַן cf. 2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6; Isa 37:35; 43:25; 48:11). God emphasizes his own uniqueness asking, “Who is like me?” (Isa 44:7; Jer 49:19; 50:44; cf. Isa 46:5), and declaring “there is none besides me” (Isa 45:6, 21; cf. 46:9).

Thus far in this summation of the expressions that communicate the ubiquitous theme of God’s glory in the Bible, I have only mentioned those texts that present Yahweh asserting his own importance in the OT. There is not space here to delineate all the appeals of God’s people that he act for his own sake (e.g., Exod 32:11–13; Ps 115:1), their praises of the splendor of his majesty (Ps 104:1; 145:5), and—thinking of one aspect of the evidence from the NT—the doxologies to which the authors commonly make recourse when uttering teleological or explanatory statements (e.g., Rom 11:36; Heb 13:20–21; 1 Pet 1:3; Jude 24–25). The people of God consistently join him in his concern for his own glory.

Undergirding the biblical authors’ understanding of the way that the Creator relates to his created world seems to be the understanding that creation is the outworking of God’s intention to reveal himself. As God reveals himself, he shows himself to be not only the almighty Creator but also the righteous Judge and the merciful Savior. But if God’s mercy is to have any

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<sup>21</sup>For texts that declare that people or other things will *know that I am Yahweh* (and related expressions), see Exod. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:18 (ET 22); 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46; 31:13; Deut. 29:5; 1 Ki. 20:13, 28; Isa. 45:3; 49:23, 26; 60:16; Jer. 9:23 (ET 24); 24:7; Ezek. 5:13; 6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 27; 11:10, 12; 12:15, 16, 20; 13:14, 21, 23; 14:8; 15:7; 16:62; 17:21, 24; 20:12, 20, 38, 42, 44; 21:4, 10 (ET 5); 22:16, 22; 24:27; 25:5, 7, 11, 17; 26:6, 14; 28:22, 23, 26; 29:6, 9, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15; 33:29; 34:27, 30; 35:4, 9, 12, 15; 36:11, 23, 36, 38; 37:6, 13, 14, 28; 38:23; 39:6, 7, 22, 28; Joel 4:17 (ET 3:17).

meaning, he must show his justice. So God judges that he might save, and thereby he puts on display the full range of his perfect ways (Dt 32:4; 2 Sam 22:31)—from the righteousness seen in holy wrath to the love seen in tender mercy. In all of this, God’s intention is for the redeemed to glorify him for his mercy (Rom 15:9).

In this paper, having briefly summarized other proposed centers, I will argue that the glory of God in salvation through judgment is the center of biblical theology by examining what the Bible presents as both the goal and the outcome of arguably the three most significant moments of salvation through judgment in the Bible: the exodus from Egypt, the cross, and the awaited consummation of all things. Having seen God’s glory in salvation through judgment at these three critical points of the Bible’s story, I will seek to show that the other themes that have been put forward as the center of biblical theology are held in orbit around this center of gravity.

### **Proposed Centers**

In his recently published theology of the Hebrew Bible, Stephen Dempster writes, “Of the approximately sixty biblical theologies written during the last century, there are almost as many theologies as there are theologians.”<sup>22</sup> Bibliographic summaries and discussions of suggested centers are available,<sup>23</sup> so this review can be cursory. What is most striking to me about this summary of past proposals is the one theme that will not be named—the glory of God.

Having surveyed the various proposals, Scobie identifies four which he considers most prominent: God’s Order, God’s Servant, God’s People, and God’s Way. He then discusses each

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<sup>22</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 15.

<sup>23</sup>G. F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 139–71; Martens, *Old Testament Theology*, 56–62. For summaries of the discussion of the center of NT theology, see P. Balla, *Challenges to New Testament Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 196–99, who basically summarizes G. F. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 140–70. For discussion of the center of Pauline theology, see Plevnik, “The Center of Pauline Theology,” 461–78; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 15–35; and R. P. Martin, “Center of Paul’s Theology,” in *DPL*, 92–95.

of these in relationship to the ways in which they are proclaimed/promised and then fulfilled/consummated.<sup>24</sup> Having concluded that “it is most doubtful whether the diversity and complexity of BT can be subsumed under *one* key theme,”<sup>25</sup> these represent what he sees as the main themes of the Bible.

Some proposed centers for OT theology have focused on the covenant,<sup>26</sup> the holiness of God, God as the Lord, the sovereignty of God, Yahweh’s name and his self-revelation (I am Yahweh/I am who I am),<sup>27</sup> or the rulership of God. Others have put forward God’s presence,<sup>28</sup> his design,<sup>29</sup> his election of Israel,<sup>30</sup> his steadfast love,<sup>31</sup> or his kingdom. Still others have posited a “bipolar”<sup>32</sup> center—the rule of God and the communion between God and man,<sup>33</sup> Yahweh the

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<sup>24</sup>Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 91–99. In this discussion Scobie also provides a summary of the discussion of the center of biblical theology as he identifies proponents of the various proposals and discusses relative merits and demerits.

<sup>25</sup>Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 93.

<sup>26</sup>Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*.

<sup>27</sup>Walther Zimmerli, “Zum Problem der ‘Mitte des Alten Testaments,’” *EvTh* 35 (1975): 97–118.

<sup>28</sup>Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

<sup>29</sup>E. A. Martens, *God’s Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 18–19. Martens describes God’s fourfold purpose resulting in (1) salvation, (2) covenant, community, (3) communion with God, and (4) blessed life (land).

<sup>30</sup>H. D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. L. G. Perdue, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995, 1996), 1:24–25.

<sup>31</sup>Spieckermann “God’s Steadfast Love: Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” 305–27.

<sup>32</sup>The term comes from H. G. Reventlow, “Theology (Biblical), History of,” *ABD*, 6:493.

<sup>33</sup>G. Fohrer, *Theologische Grundstrukturen des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972). Similarly Theodorus C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Newton, MA: Branford, 1970), 160.

God of Israel—Israel the people of Yahweh,<sup>34</sup> or more broadly, promise-fulfillment<sup>35</sup> or covenant and the new creation.<sup>36</sup> Dempster’s proposal of geography and genealogy, dominion and dynasty is along these lines.<sup>37</sup> Deuteronomy has also been put forward.<sup>38</sup> The salvation-history approach to biblical theology focuses on, in the words of Vos, “the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.”<sup>39</sup> I cannot claim to have read everything, but I am unaware of any proposal that explicitly makes the glory of God the center of biblical theology.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Rudolf Smend, *Die Mitte des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 70: “Jahwe der Gott Israels, Israel das Volk Jahwes.” The dash in the phrase in the text above is only to distinguish this phrase as a unit in view of the surrounding commas.

<sup>35</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “New Dimensions in Old Testament Theology,” in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought*, ed. David S. Dockery (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 42–43.

<sup>36</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: An Introductory Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002 [1991]), 76–77.

<sup>37</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, “Geography and Genealogy, Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 66–82; and Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*.

<sup>38</sup>S. Herrmann, “Die konstruktive Restauration: Das Deuteronomium als Mitte biblischer Theologie,” in H. W. Wolff, ed., *Probleme biblischer Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971), 155–70.

<sup>39</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1996), 5. Similarly G. F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1892).

<sup>40</sup>This is not to say, however, that I am the first to claim that the glory of God is the center of biblical theology. Both covenant theologians and dispensationalists have emphasized the glory of God in their understanding of the Bible. One work that seems to present the glory of God as the center of biblical theology, even if it is not explicitly stated as such, and even though the book is not strictly a biblical theology (with chapters on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam) is Daniel P. Fuller’s *The Unity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). The glory of God has been so prominent in much Christian theology that—even though systematic theologians are not engaged in the specific discipline of biblical theology—it is surprising that the glory of God is absent from summaries of the proposed centers of biblical theology. Though John Piper has not written a book that is specifically a biblical theology, in everything he writes he emphasizes the supremacy of God. It is also my understanding that Thomas R. Schreiner is at work on a New Testament theology which will argue for the centrality of God’s glory in Christ. My thinking is heavily indebted to both Schreiner and Piper.

If such a proposal has been made, summaries of the discussion show no awareness of it.<sup>41</sup>

The glory of God in Christ has been put forward as the center of Paul's theology,<sup>42</sup> but this is by no means common.<sup>43</sup> To my knowledge this theme has not been suggested as the center of NT theology. Hasel highlights the following proposed centers of NT Theology: (1) Anthropology (Bultmann); (2) Salvation History (Cullmann, Ladd, Goppelt [we may add Schlatter]); (3) Covenant, Love, and Other Proposals; (4) Christology (Reicke, Hengel, Kümmel, Käsemann).<sup>44</sup> Beale has recently suggested that "the kingdom of the new creation is a plausible and defensible center for NT theology."<sup>45</sup> Many agree that the center of Pauline and NT theology is Jesus Christ,<sup>46</sup> though some object that it is too broad to be useful.<sup>47</sup> Some suggest that Christ

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<sup>41</sup>Unfortunately there is no article on "Glory" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. For undocumented material in this discussion, see the summaries of the discussion in Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 139–71; Werner E. Lemke, "Theology (OT)," in *ABD*, 6:456–67; Martens, *Old Testament Theology*, 56–62; and Reventlow, "Theology (Biblical), History of," 493–94.

<sup>42</sup>Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 15–35.

<sup>43</sup>The glory of God is not mentioned as a possible center of Pauline theology by either Martin, "Center of Paul's Theology," 92–95 or Plevnik, "The Center of Pauline Theology," 461–78.

<sup>44</sup>Hasel, *New Testament Theology*, 140–70.

<sup>45</sup>G. K. Beale, "The New Testament and New Creation," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 159–73.

<sup>46</sup>Denis Farkasfalvy, "Jesus Reveals the Father: The Center of New Testament Theology," *Communio* 26 (1999): 235–57; cf. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 95–96. For Paul, see James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 729–30: "If the imagery of 'centre' is still useful for a subject like theology, then Christ has to be regarded as the centre of Paul's theology – but as a living centre of his theologising, and not just a conceptual centre of a static system." Similarly D. J. Moo, "Paul," in *NIDBT*, 138: "If we are forced to identify a 'centre' of Paul's theology in the true sense of the word, then the only category broad enough to encompass the incredible range of Paul's teaching is 'God's act in Christ.'"

<sup>47</sup>D. A. Carson, "New Testament Theology," in *DLNTD*, 810: "How does one avoid mere generalities? One might say that the center of NT theology is Jesus Christ, but although at one level that is saying everything at another level it is saying almost nothing."

is the center not only of NT but of biblical theology.<sup>48</sup> Barr asks the question, “If one can say that Christ is the ‘centre’ of the New Testament, is it not appropriate to say in the same way that Yahweh is the ‘centre’ of the Old?”<sup>49</sup> Preuss, however, thinks that “the efforts to set forth ‘YHWH’ or ‘YHWH’s self-revelation’ as the center of the Old Testament does [*sic*] not provide much further help . . . , since they are in any case too general.”<sup>50</sup> It could be alleged that any proposed center is too broad, and ironically, Hasel concludes that “any center of the NT (or the Bible) is not broad, deep, and wide enough to do justice to the whole canonical NT.”<sup>51</sup> So all centers will either be too broad or too narrow. As Olson recognizes, we are making provisional overgeneralizations that are nevertheless necessary and helpful.<sup>52</sup>

In concluding this summary of proposed centers, Hasel’s observations on the nature of these suggestions are germane. He writes, “It is highly significant that virtually all proposals for a center have God or an aspect of God and/or his activity for the world and humankind as a common denominator. This points inadvertently to the fact that the OT is *Theocentric*, as the NT is *Christocentric*. In short, God/Yahweh is the dynamic, unifying center of the OT.”<sup>53</sup> Walter Vogels comes to a similar conclusion: “All of these authors who try to find a principle of organization around a center in some way touch on the question of God, the human being, and

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<sup>48</sup>H. J. Hermisson, “Jesus Christus als externe Mitte des Alten Testaments. Ein unzeitgemässes Votum zur Theologie des Alten Testaments,” in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift*, ed. C. Landmesser, H. J. Eckstein, and H. Lichtenberger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 199–233; Lo Zhenfang, “What Is the Center of the Bible?” *Ching Feng* 25 (1982): 102–12. Describing a unitary reading of the whole Bible for a canonical biblical theology, Paul House writes, “Christ will now be the literary and theological center of the book” (“Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture,” 274).

<sup>49</sup>Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 314.

<sup>50</sup>Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:22.

<sup>51</sup>Hasel, *New Testament Theology*, 164.

<sup>52</sup>Olson, “Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization,” 174–75, 180.

<sup>53</sup>Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 168.

salvation.”<sup>54</sup> My proposal that the Glory of God in salvation through judgment is the center of biblical theology is not far from these conclusions.

Perhaps the closest proposals to the one I am suggesting are those that point to God’s self-revelation, for what is God’s self revelation but the manifestation of his glory? I am seeking to sharpen this proposal, however, by specifying that the center of biblical theology is not merely God’s glory, but specifically his glory revealed in salvation that comes through judgment.<sup>55</sup>

Kaiser suggests that a center that will be adequate for biblical theology must (1) arise from the text itself; (2) be broad enough to embrace the whole canon; and (3) connect easily and organically with NT theology.<sup>56</sup> The thesis I will argue below began to be formulated in my mind while translating through Isaiah—arising from the text itself.<sup>57</sup> It seems broad enough to

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<sup>54</sup>Walter Vogels, “Trends in biblical theology,” *Theology Digest* 45 (1998): 125.

<sup>55</sup>Hasel comes very close to articulating the glory of God in salvation through judgment as the center of biblical theology when he writes, “The divine ‘I’ appears again with regard to the world and Israel, to believer and unbeliever, in *both judgment and salvation, as the self-disclosure and revelation of the God* who leads and guides men on their way in history toward a promising future” (*Old Testament Theology*, 170, emphasis added). Cf. also *ibid.*, 169: “Nevertheless a most fundamental OT claim for God is his saving activity;” and *ibid.*, 171: “The NT also witnesses to the centrality of God and His judging *and* saving work for Israel and the world.”

<sup>56</sup>Kaiser, “New Dimensions in Old Testament Theology,” 40. Kaiser lists another criterion, that the formulation of a center must connect a subject to its object with a verb. I do not understand the necessity for this. Perhaps it helps him argue for his proposed center.

<sup>57</sup>John Oswalt all but articulates the glory of God in salvation through judgment as the center of Isaiah’s theology when he writes, “This wholism is found in the book’s complete and thorough investigation of the relationship between judgment and salvation. . . . Isaiah shows that the issue is not a matter of judgment or salvation, but of judgment as a means of salvation, or salvation made possible through judgment. In exploring this theme Isaiah displays the character of God with a depth and a breadth that surpasses almost any other biblical book” (“Isaiah: Theology of,” in *NIDOTTE*, 4:725). Oswalt goes on to state: “The great question of the book is: Whose glory fills the earth?” (*ibid.*, 731). Insofar as Oswalt indicates that the glory of God in salvation through judgment is the center of Isaiah’s theology, I am in agreement with his conclusion that “When the totality of Isaiah’s theology is surveyed, it can be seen that it is not without merit to suggest that Isaiah sums up biblical theology in a better way than does any other single book of the Bible” (*ibid.*, 732).

embrace the whole canon, as it connects God's acts of salvation through judgment in the OT to both the cross and the consummation of the ages.<sup>58</sup> Further, this proposal can be seen to incorporate the wisdom literature, as the reality that God will judge is the implicit impetus for the beginning of biblical wisdom, the fear of Yahweh (Prov 1:7). Job experiences the judging majesty of Yahweh, which leads to his restoration (Job 38–42). In Ecclesiastes the motivation to fear God and keep his commandments is explicitly the fact that God will judge (Eccles 12:13–14). And the Song of Songs intones the beauty of God's purposes (glory) in the reversal of the curses (judgment) and the restoration (salvation) of intimacy and bliss lost after the fall (cf. Gen 2:25).

In what follows I seek to present textual and thematic arguments that the glory of God in salvation through judgment is the center of biblical theology. In this first section on textual considerations, I will argue this position from what the texts put forward as the ultimate reason for the exodus, the cross, and the consummation.

### **Textual Considerations**

The limitations inherent in the nature of this presentation prohibit all but the barest summary of textual indicators.<sup>59</sup> These indicators, however, are consistent not only with these texts that have to do with the exodus, the cross, and the consummation, but throughout the rest of

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<sup>58</sup>Cf. E. Earle Ellis, *Christ and the Future in New Testament History* (Boston: Brill, 2000), xi: "The most likely *core concept* of New Testament thought is eschatology, that is, the kingdom of God and the *two-fold consummation* of the present age in *salvation* and in destructive *judgment*. But this statement must be immediately qualified: The core is eschatology *as defined by the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah*, who is the preeminent eschatological event. On the other hand, *the New Testament's core concept may plausibly be identified as Jesus Christ himself*. If so, it too must immediately be qualified: Jesus Christ as the one in whom the kingdom of God is made present and through whom God will consummate the present age" (italics added).

<sup>59</sup>Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 341: "Selection among the facts, data, interpretations and interests is unavoidable, and is a perfectly correct academic procedure."

the Scriptures as well.<sup>60</sup>

### **Salvation through Judgment at the Exodus**

The canon presents Yahweh predicting Israel's servitude in a foreign land and declaring to Abraham long before the exodus, "And indeed the nation which they serve I will *judge*, and thus afterward they shall go out with great possessions" (Gen 15:14, emphasis added).<sup>61</sup> In the context of the canon, the exodus represents the redemption of Israel which comes through the judgment of Egypt. One of the functions of these OT narratives is to emphasize the greatness of Yahweh in comparison to his rivals. "The gods of the ancient Near Eastern peoples . . . were imagined as of gigantic size and exuded a terrifying splendour, with superhuman powers, although the power of all the gods was by no means equal: some were relatively minor or of restricted influence."<sup>62</sup> These texts proclaim that Yahweh is no tribal deity, rather, he is the high King of heaven and earth.

When we come to the narrative in the book of Exodus, we see Yahweh announcing his intention to Moses in the account of the bush: "And I have come down *to deliver* him from the hand of Egypt" (Exod 3:8, emphasis added). Yahweh goes on to reveal more about himself to Moses (3:14–15) before announcing that the salvation of Israel will come through the striking of Egypt (3:19–20). The narrative even indicates that Yahweh will exacerbate Egypt's rebellion by hardening Pharaoh's heart so that the judgment might be more severe (4:21–23; 7:3–5). Yahweh tells Moses, "I will *deliver* you from slavery to them, and I will *redeem* you with an outstretched arm and with *massive judgments*" (6:6, emphasis added). Yahweh's salvation of Israel comes

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<sup>60</sup>See John Piper, "Appendix 1: The Goal of God in Redemptive History," in *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 255–66, 306.

<sup>61</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>62</sup>Piotr Bienkowski and Alan Millard, eds., *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 131.

through his judgment of Egypt.<sup>63</sup>

As many texts make clear, Yahweh is not presented as saving Israel merely for the sake of Israel. We find several assertions that Yahweh is saving Israel to be faithful to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:15; 4:5; 6:8; cf. 32:13; Deut 7:6–10). By keeping this promise, Yahweh is showing himself to be faithful (cf. Exod 34:6).<sup>64</sup> But faithfulness is not all that Yahweh is revealing about himself.

After Pharaoh's declaration in Exodus 5:2, "Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice . . . I do not know Yahweh," the narrative recounts Yahweh's campaign to remedy Pharaoh's ignorance.<sup>65</sup> Yahweh declares to Moses his identity, his purposes, and his plan to save Israel and judge Egypt in Exodus 6:1–8, punctuating his statements thrice with declarations of "אני יהוה" (I am Yahweh)!" (6:2, 6, 8). Yahweh tells Moses that the Egyptians will know that he is Yahweh when he delivers Israel from their midst (7:5). And he emphasizes that they will know him in his uniqueness. Moses announces to Pharaoh that God will remove the frogs, "In order that you may know that there is none like Yahweh our God" (8:6 [ET 8:10]). This is repeated when Yahweh has Moses declare to Pharaoh: "For this time I am sending all my plagues to your heart and on your servants and on your people, in order that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth" (9:14).<sup>66</sup> He even asserts to Pharaoh that he has authority over his

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<sup>63</sup>Cf. William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 35: "By the tenth plague we are prepared for the Passover . . . , which is both a supreme judgment and a great deliverance."

<sup>64</sup>The narratives also present Moses appealing to Yahweh's faithfulness when he pleads that Yahweh not destroy Israel after their rebellion (Exod 32:13; Num 14:17; Deut 9:27), and Yahweh's faithfulness is emphasized in what R. W. L. Moberly calls "the fullest account of the name and nature of God in the whole Bible," Yahweh's declaration of his name in Exod 34:6–7 (R. W. L. Moberly, "How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology," *TynBul* 53 [2002], 198).

<sup>65</sup>House, *Old Testament Theology*, 98–99.

<sup>66</sup>Israel then exults in Yahweh's uniqueness in Exod 15:11.

existence, claiming, “But indeed on account of this I have caused you to stand,<sup>67</sup> that I might show you my strength, and in order for my name to be proclaimed in all the earth” (9:16).

Yahweh shows Pharaoh his ability to protect his own people from the plagues (8:22; 11:4–7), and he claims that the earth belongs to him (9:29). Yahweh repeatedly states his intention to be known, both by Israel, whom he is saving (6:7), and by Egypt, whom he is judging (7:5, 17; 8:22; 14:4, 18). Not only is Yahweh judging Egypt, he is judging their gods. Here too, the announcement that Yahweh will show his greatness by triumphing in justice over the gods of Egypt is punctuated by the end of Pharaoh’s ignorance: “אני יהוה” (I am Yahweh!)” (12:12). The knowledge of Yahweh that Israel gains is for them to pass on to future generations (10:2; 13:14–16). Egypt, on the other hand, is ruined by the plagues (10:7), devastated by the death of the firstborn (12:29), party to their own plundering (12:35–36), and then thrown into the sea (14:27–28; 15:1).

Terence Fretheim writes, “The Exodus narrative raises the question: Who will be recognized as the sovereign one, Yahweh or Pharaoh?”<sup>68</sup> If the ten plagues had not decisively settled the question, as Yahweh announces his plan to bury the Egyptians in the depths of the sea, he states in Exodus 14:4 and 17, “And I *will* get glory over Pharaoh.” The cohortative verb *ואסכבדה* in both verses shows Yahweh’s resolve.<sup>69</sup> Yahweh is intent upon getting glory for himself by saving Israel through the judgment of Egypt.

In the narrative theology of Exodus, the ways that Yahweh has revealed himself in bringing Israel out of Egypt (and in bearing with their rebellion in the journey to and at Sinai) are encapsulated in Yahweh’s declaration of his name, which is a revelation of his glory (33:18), in Exodus 34:6–7. Having declared his sovereign freedom to distribute grace and mercy to

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<sup>67</sup>HALOT, 841, suggests that an appropriate gloss for the hifil of עמד is “cause to exist.”

<sup>68</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, “Exodus, Book of,” in *DOTP*, 254.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Joüon §114; GKC §108.

whomever he pleases (33:19), Yahweh defines himself for Moses:

“Yahweh, Yahweh! A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, rich in loving-kindness and truth. Keeping loving-kindness to thousands, bearing iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet acquitting he will not acquit, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons and on the sons of the sons to the third and to the fourth generations” (Exod 34:6–7).

Responding to his own question, “Why not solely specify mercy and forgiveness in this context?” Moberly writes, “The words of v. 7b . . . serve to clarify that YHWH’s forgiveness is truly forgiveness, not leniency, still less moral indifference. As such, they preserve a note of moral seriousness of the sort that should keep the mercy of YHWH from being misunderstood—either from . . . mistaken complacency . . . or from the diminishing of the wonder of mercy . . .”<sup>70</sup> Yahweh’s proclamation of his own name, which is his way of showing his glory to Moses (33:18) as he causes all his goodness to pass before him (33:19), is a declaration of his mercy and his justice. The reality of God’s justice highlights the gracious character of his mercy. As Moberly writes, “Unless these attributes of God are both respected with total seriousness then the revelation of God will be more or less misunderstood.”<sup>71</sup>

The significance of the exodus as the foundational redemptive event in Israel’s history is witnessed to by the numerous references to it through the rest of the OT canon. The canon’s explanation as to why the creator of heaven and earth would take the nation of Israel to be his own people is hidden in the mystery of God’s sovereign choice to commit himself by making promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to show himself faithful to those promises (Exod 33:19; Deut 7:7–10). Thus the OT presents the glory of God in sovereign mercy made precious by the demonstration of his holy justice. The glory of Yahweh in steadfast love and relentless justice resonates through OT theology as the echo of Exodus 34:6–7 is heard through the rest of

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<sup>70</sup>Moberly, “How May We Speak of God,” 200.

<sup>71</sup>Moberly, “How May We Speak of God,” 200–201.

the OT canon.<sup>72</sup>

### **Salvation through Judgment at the Cross**

As the OT regards the exodus from Egypt as a community forming expression of the glory of God in salvation through judgment in the OT, so the NT regards the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus.

Johannine scholars are in agreement that in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is glorified at the cross.<sup>73</sup> John repeatedly indicates that Jesus will be glorified at the cross. For instance, he presents Jesus responding to the arrival of Gentiles who wish to see him with the words, “The hour has come that the Son of Man might be glorified” (John 12:23).<sup>74</sup> Jesus’ statement about the grain of wheat dying that it might bear fruit in the next verse (12:24) points the passage firmly in the direction of the cross. His statements that his soul is troubled but that he is nevertheless resolved to accomplish what he came to do (12:27) also orient the passage toward his death. Jesus then prays in 12:28, “‘Father, glorify your name,’ then a voice came from heaven, ‘Indeed, I glorified and again I will glorify.’” The Fourth Gospel shows Jesus returning to this theme during the farewell discourse, where after Judas has gone out, “Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify

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<sup>72</sup>Spieckermann writes, “I hold God’s self-determination towards love to be the origin of an Old Testament theology” (“God’s Steadfast Love: Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” 308). He explains, “The formula of grace occurs in Joel 2,13; Jonah 4,2; Ps 86,15; 103,8; 145,8; Neh 9,17; references of the enlarged formula or references presupposing the enlarged formula are to be found in Exod 34,6-7; 20,5-6=Deut 5,9-10; 7,9-10; allusions to the formula can often be assumed but not always be proved, cf. Deut 4,31; Exod 33,19; Num 14,18; Isa 48,9; 54,7-8; 63,7; Jer 15,15; 32,18; Mic 7,18; Nah 1,2-3; Ps 78,38; 86,5; 99,8; 111,4 belonging together with 112,4; 116,5; Dan 9,4; Neh 1,5; 9,31-32; 2 Chr 30,9; Sir 2,11; 5,4-7 et al.” (311 n. 9).

<sup>73</sup>See, e.g., L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 560–61; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., WBC 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 211.

<sup>74</sup>Previous references in John to Jesus being glorified by his death may be found at 7:39 and 12:16.

himself<sup>75</sup> in him, and immediately he will glorify him” (13:31–32). John next returns to the idea of the cross as the glory of Jesus and the Father in John 17:1, where he shows Jesus praying, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the son might glorify you” (cf. also 17:5).

These statements in John depict the cross as the place where the Father and the Son are glorified. The Gospel never explicitly delineates the logic behind the seemingly paradoxical assertion that the cross is glory, but the best explanation of how Jesus and the Father are glorified at the cross is provided within the canon itself.<sup>76</sup> Canonical biblical theology operates on the historical conclusion that those who bound the books of the Bible together as one book heard the many voices singing harmoniously, and this finds further support from the informed presupposition that God, who does not contradict himself, oversaw the composition and compilation of the Bible. So while we could go to Leviticus, Isaiah 53, Hebrews, and many other texts to gain insight into how the cross glorifies both Father and Son, here we will focus our attention on two verses in Romans.<sup>77</sup>

In Romans 3:25–26 Paul explains,

God put him forward as a propitiation through faith in his blood for the demonstration of

<sup>75</sup>This phrase, καὶ ὁ θεὸς δοξάσει αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῷ, is usually translated “God will also glorify him in himself” (ESV, KJV, NAS, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, RSV). This treats the dative αὐτῷ as the reflexive element, “himself.” As I have translated the phrase, I am treating the accusative αὐτὸν as the reflexive element since John employs αὐτὸν as a reflexive in John 2:24, Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐπίστευεν αὐτὸν αὐτοῖς (“Jesus was not entrusting *himself* to them” [emphasis added]). Cf. E. A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar* (London: Black, 1906), 279 §2374: “Αὐτός . . . John uses it always to mean ‘himself.’”

<sup>76</sup>Here I am following the model of Trobisch, who in his *The First Edition of the New Testament* makes frequent recourse to the ancient hermeneutical practice of explaining details in one passage of the Bible by the light of other passages in the Bible. This assumes coherence between the authors of the NT, on which see Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents*.

<sup>77</sup>Commenting on John 16:10, C. K. Barrett writes, “. . . an event which was at once truly death and truly a glorious exaltation. This compound event is throughout the New Testament regarded as setting the seal upon the righteousness of Jesus, and the righteousness of God; see especially Rom. 3.21–31” (*The Gospel according to St. John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 488).

his righteousness on account of the passing over of sins that had been previously committed in the forbearance of God, for the demonstration of his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the one who justifies the one who by faith belongs to Jesus.

Putting this in chronological order, prior to the cross God passed over sins. Then to demonstrate his righteousness<sup>78</sup>—for passing over sins appears to be unjust—God put Jesus forward to make propitiation by his death on the cross. God did this “*in order that he might be just*” (3:26).

Having thus satisfied his own justice, God can justly justify the ungodly people who trust in Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

This glorifies God because it *demonstrates* (3:25, 26) his perfect justice, his absolute commitment to his own holiness.<sup>80</sup> Further, it glorifies God because at great cost he made a way to preserve his justice and yet show mercy. Jesus is glorified in his ability to propitiate the wrath of God against sin (cf. 1 John 2:1–2) and in his willingness to “lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). As Mark Seifrid writes,

In biblical usage “God’s glory”, like his righteousness, involves not only his vindication against his enemies, but also his bringing salvation. In other words, the biblical understanding of divine glory also involves a tension between God’s vindication over against the world and his bringing salvation to the world. As with God’s righteousness, this tension is resolved not in a concept, but in a deed of God, which simultaneously establishes his right and in unfathomable mercy brings salvation.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>John Piper devotes a chapter to the argument that “the righteousness of God in Rom 3:25,26 refers most basically to the characteristic of God’s nature or the unswerving inclination of his will . . . which precedes and grounds all his acts and gifts. It is his inviolable allegiance to act always for his own name’s sake—to maintain and display his own divine glory” (John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993], 135–50, quote on p. 135).

<sup>79</sup>Cf. the discussion in C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, 1979), 208–18.

<sup>80</sup>This is also reflected in the fact that, according to Paul, God judges people for not glorifying him as God (Rom 1:21). See Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 34–35.

<sup>81</sup>Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification*, NSBT 9 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 45. Seifrid takes issue with Piper at this point because Piper describes God demonstrating his righteousness as “acting for his own glory.” While I know that the two do not agree on every point (imputation, for instance), it seems to me that here they

God is glorified at the cross as he establishes a way to justly be merciful. God is glorified at the cross in salvation through judgment.

### **Salvation through Judgment at the Consummation**

As we turn to consider the consummation of all things, space considerations permit only a survey of the evidence. We will look briefly at the conclusion of the prophecy of Isaiah, one passage from Paul, and one passage in Revelation.

In Isaiah 66:23–24 we read,

“And it shall be from new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me,” says Yahweh.  
 “And they shall go out and look on the carcasses of the men who rebelled against me, for their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched.  
 And they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

In this passage people from all nations will give glory to Yahweh, and their worship will be in part due to their awareness of what Yahweh has done to his enemies. Yahweh will administer an undying worm and an unquenchable flame of justice to those who rebelled against him. Those who worship him will do so because they see the might of Yahweh exercised in the subjugation of those who hate him. They see the unending holiness of Yahweh in his commitment to exact justice—the undying worm and flame—against the rebels. And they realize that they too deserve the fate of the rebels, but that Yahweh has shown them mercy and made them his worshipers though they too were once unclean (“all flesh” means some will not be Israelites) and deserving of punishment because of their sin (cf. Isa 6, where even Isaiah recognizes that he is under God’s wrath and is thereby purified). Yahweh has saved some from all nations who deserved his wrath, and these people praise him as he shows his mercy and his justice. God is glorified in salvation through judgment.<sup>82</sup>

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are saying the same thing with different words. In essence, both are saying that God is glorified by the demonstration of his righteousness in salvation through judgment.

<sup>82</sup>For other instances of salvation coming through judgment to God’s glory in Isaiah, see Isa 4, where the men are all killed so that the male-female ratio is out of balance (3:25–4:1), but this is followed by the cleansing “Spirit of judgment and Spirit of burning” (4:4), which

This same dynamic is at work in 2 Thessalonians 1, where Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy instruct the Thessalonians that

at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his angels of power in a fire of flame, [he will be] giving vengeance to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus; these will pay a penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified among his saints and to be marveled at among all the ones who believe” (2 Thess 1:7b–10a).

In this text too, the end will be marked by both salvation and judgment. Since this passage is set up by the statement that “it is right for God to repay the ones who afflict you with affliction” (2 Thess 1:6), we can conclude that in some measure the salvation of the believing Thessalonians will come through God’s triumph over their enemies. God will save the Thessalonians by judging those who afflict them. God’s justice, through which the Thessalonians will be saved, is part of the reason that they will “glorify” and “marvel at” the Lord when he comes (2 Thess 1:10a).<sup>83</sup>

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results in the glorious presence of Yahweh reconciled to his people (4:5–6). The anger that does not turn away and the hand that is still stretched out in judgment resonates through Isa 5–11 (cf. 5:25; 9:11 [ET 9:12], 16 [ET 17], 20 [ET 21]; 10:4), followed by the praise of Yahweh in Isa 12 because his anger has turned away (12:1) and he has become salvation (12:2), therefore he is praised and thanked (12:4–6). The judgments in Isa 13–23 are summarized in 24:1–13 and followed by the praise of the redeemed in 24:14–16a. Salvation through judgment to the glory of the Holy One of Israel is so thick in Isaiah that all the passages cannot be enumerated, but see esp. the treading of the grapes of wrath in 63:1–6 followed by the recounting of Yahweh’s steadfast love in 63:7–9.

<sup>83</sup>For other examples of salvation through judgment for the glory of God in Paul, see Rom 2:5, where the day of wrath is for God’s glory as it is the revelation of his righteous judgment. Those who have responded rightly to God will experience glory on that day (2:10). Those who are justified by faith hope for the glory of God to be revealed on the last day (5:2), a glory that flows from their salvation and the demonstration of God’s justice (5:9). Paul draws attention to both the kindness and severity of the Lord (11:22), and he responds to God’s purpose of hardening Israel that the gospel might go to the Gentiles before the future salvation of Israel with an exclamation of God’s unsearchable understanding and a declaration that all things are from God, through God, and to God, and that glory should be ascribed to him forever (11:33–36). At the future judgment everyone will do homage to God (14:11). Cf. also 1 Cor 3:13–15; 10:31; 15:28; 2 Cor 3:7–9, 18; 4:6; 5:17–21; 9:13; Eph 1:6, 12, 14, 22; 2:7, 16; 3:21; Phil 1:11; 2:10–11; 3:3, 8–9, 19–21; 4:19–20; Col 1:16, 27; 3:17, 23–25; 1 Thess 5:9–10; 1 Tim 6:14–16; 2 Tim 2:10–13; 4:14, 18; Tit 2:11–14.

What has been seen in Isaiah and in Paul can also be found in Revelation. There seems to be a consistent pattern in John's Apocalypse: the announcement of the justice or the might or the vengeance of God (initiated, for instance, by the opening of a seal), which is followed by a description of the terrors of God's judgment and the praises of those mercied.<sup>84</sup> One example of this pattern, which might be seen as climactic, is found in Revelation 19:1–5,

After these things I heard as a mighty voice of a great crowd in heaven saying, "Halleluiah! The salvation and the glory and the power of our God!  
Because true and just are his judgments;  
Because he judged the great harlot, who corrupted the land with her immorality,  
And he avenged the blood of his servants from her hand."  
And a second time they said, "Halleluiah!  
And her smoke rises to the ages of the ages."  
And the twenty four elders and the four living beings fell down,  
And they worshiped God, who sits on the throne, saying, "Amen, Halleluiah!"  
And a voice came out from the throne saying,  
"Give praise to our God, all his servants and those who fear him, the small and the great!"

Once again, God manifests his justice by judging those who have afflicted his servants (Rev 19:2). Those who are saved respond to the justice and the mercy of God with praise, having been saved through his just judgment (Rev 19:1–5). Their praise includes full awareness of the punishment of God's enemies, and the depiction of smoke going up forever in verse 3 seems to indicate that they praise him for his unending justice. The book of Revelation indicates that the

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<sup>84</sup>Cf. Gaffin, "Glory," 511. For examples of the vindicated offering praise and glory to God immediately following his judgment, see the opening of the seals in Rev 6:1–14, followed by the description of the 144,000 sealed (who will apparently be saved, 7:3) in 7:1–8, and it seems that the praises in 7:9–12 are in response to the salvation (7:10) which comes through judgment. Cf. also the judgment of 11:13–14, followed by the praise of 11:15–19; judgment in 12:7–9, followed by the praises of the saved in 12:10–12; the introduction of the culmination of God's wrath in 15:1 is followed by praise to God's glory in 15:2–4; spliced into the account of the outpouring of the wrath of God in the bowls in 16:1–21 is the praise of God's justice in 16:5–7; as the friends of Babylon mourn her judgment in 18:19, the vindicated are called to rejoice in 18:20; once judgment is finally completed in 20:11–15, the new heavens and the new earth radiate with God's glory (21:23; 22:5) in chapters 21–22. The closing chapters of the Apocalypse are punctuated by the command, "Worship God" (19:10; 22:9), which could be ironically answering Bel 1:24.

goal of history is the glory of God in salvation through judgment.<sup>85</sup>

Many other passages could be explored in support of the assertion that the glory of God in salvation through judgment is the center of biblical theology.<sup>86</sup> We now turn to consider the relationship between the various themes that have been put forward as central in an effort to buttress the thesis of this study.

### **Thematic Considerations**

The central theme of the Bible will be the one out of which all other themes flow. Describing the quest for the center of Paul's theology, Joseph Plevnik writes, "We shall . . . concentrate our search for the center on the primal reality from which he draws his entire theology. What is derived cannot be the center. Effects and contingent applications cannot be the center."<sup>87</sup> The center of biblical theology will be the idea that all other themes exposit. So to assert the centrality of the glory of God in salvation through judgment is not to take anything away from the importance of any other theme in the Bible, though it is to recognize that the

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<sup>85</sup>Indeed, this is a feature of apocalyptic literature, and as such can also be seen in other apocalyptic texts. Cf., e.g., 1 Enoch 1:3–8; 10:12–22; 27:1–5; 50:1–5. See D. S. Russell, *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 297–303; and Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 221.

<sup>86</sup>Cf. R. B. Gaffin Jr., "Glory," in *NDBT*, 508: "God's glorious presence, whether for salvation or destruction, is prominent in the decisive moments and central institutions of Israel's history. . ." See too Donatien Mollat, "Glory," in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Léon-Dufour (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 177: "'The Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with His angels' (Mk 8,38; cf Mt 24,30; 25,31) and will manifest His glory by the consummation of His work, at the same time as judgment and salvation."

<sup>87</sup>Plevnik, "The Center of Pauline Theology," 469. Plevnik's center of Pauline theology is not far from my proposal for biblical theology. He writes, "Yet it is from the all-embracing saving deed of God in Jesus Christ that Paul derives his theology, including participation in Christ" (*ibid.*, 472). Plevnik seems to stop one step short of the "primal reality," the underived center, for the goal of the saving deed in Christ is the subjection of all things to Jesus, after which Jesus will render up the Kingdom to the Father, and God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:24–28).

Bible indicates that all that God does he does for his own glory.<sup>88</sup>

God's creation exists to reveal his glory (Ps 19:1). God created humans for his glory (Isa 43:7; Rom 9:22–23). God delays his wrath for his own glory (Isa 48:8–11; Rom 9:22–23). God makes promises and keeps them (promise-fulfillment) to reveal his faithfulness (Acts 13:32–35). This shows God's unique glory as he can make promises based on his knowledge of and power over the future (cf. Isa 40–48), and then he shows his glory in his unique ability to keep the promises he has made. God also shows his glory in judgment, as he proves himself true to his own word (Num 14:20–23). Thus the display of God's righteousness is the display of one aspect of his glory, just as the display of God's mercy is the display of another aspect of his glory. And so it is with God's holiness, his love, his purity, his election of Israel, and any other theme that could be named. All of these themes appear as manifestations of the intrinsic glory of the God whom the Bible presents revealing himself—making his glory known.

Creation provides the cosmic matrix within which God will display his glory in salvation through judgment. Redemptive history is the story of how God has progressively revealed more and more of himself—saving and judging, showing mercy and justice, from beginning to end. The covenant with Israel is the basis on which the nation is saved and judged—saved if they keep the covenant, judged if they break it.

Justification by faith is the means whereby God justly reckons covenant breakers covenant keepers. Reconciliation is the communion between the believing recipients of God's mercy and the one who is both just and their justifier. In this communion, those reconciled rejoice in God's glory as it is expressed in salvation through judgment. They have been judged

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<sup>88</sup>This notion may strike some as inappropriate, but there is not space here to present a detailed defense of why it is right for God to pursue his own glory. I can merely note that if God were to prioritize anything higher than himself, it seems he would be placing some other god before himself. The God of the Bible, however, is not an idolater. See further Jonathan Edwards, "Dissertation I. Concerning the End for which God Created the World," in *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

by God's holiness, saved through the judgment by faith in his mercy, and they glory in their redeemer. Faith is the belief that God will indeed be true to himself and show his glory by judging and saving on the basis of what he has said and in accordance with the promises he has made. God shows his love by being true to himself, for therein he does what is best for all creation.

The human's love for God is the proper response to the love shown by God. Those who love God rightly love his glory, and they therefore sing his praise. Hope is the eager longing for God to show himself glorious in the ways he has promised. Wisdom is the sane response of fear, which grows out of the recognition that God is majestic in splendor and will indeed save and judge.

The theme of the promise of the Messiah in the OT, and the accounts and expositions of the coming of Jesus as the Messiah in the NT, are also manifestations of the glory of God in salvation through judgment. In Samuel the king of Israel becomes the agent of God's salvation through judgment (1 Sam 9:16–17; 10:1; 15:2–3; 25:28; 2 Sam 3:18 etc.). This finds its ultimate fulfillment in the coming of Jesus, who will save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21). Jesus understands the cross as the place where God will be glorified (John 17:1). Remarkably, as the Messiah, Jesus becomes both the agent of salvation and the object of God's judgment (Rom 3:25–26). One day he will judge those who rebelled against him, those who did not honor him (John 5:22–23).

The messianic King Jesus is the agent of God's salvation, the fulfillment of his promises, and the object of his judgment. The canon promises that Jesus will come again as the agent of God's salvation, and once again, this salvation will come through judgment (Rev 17:14). When he comes again, Jesus will save those waiting for him and judge those opposed to him, and all flesh will glorify God. Every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11). The inaugurated new creation will be consummated, and all will marvel at God's ability to work such beauty. Jesus will render up the Kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:24–28). The smoke of the enemies of God will go up forever and ever, and

the redeemed will glorify God for his mercy (Rom 15:12) crying Hallelujah! (Rev 19:1–8). Even in the new creation God’s glory will be known as the saved will continue to praise God for the mercy they have received and for his triumphant judgment (Rev 19:3).

### **Conclusion**

In summary, in view of the indications in the Bible that God intends to get glory for himself, I cannot see how any theme could be either more primal or more ultimate than the glory of God. If we can discern what God intends to accomplish from what the Bible indicates that he will accomplish, then the conclusion presses itself upon us that God intended to make himself known in all his splendor and in all his capacities—from the kindness of being a merciful savior to the severity of being a holy judge (cf. Rom 11:22).

Textually, this central theme of God manifesting his glory in salvation through judgment weaves its way across both testaments, culminating in the infinite expression of this theme when Jesus Christ is crucified. The Glory of God in salvation through judgment is not only the center of Old Testament Theology, it is also the center of New Testament Theology and thus of Biblical Theology.

Thematically, every theme put forward as a center can be seen to derive from God’s commitment to manifest his own glory by creating a realm in which the full range of his own perfections can be put on display. At one end of the spectrum of God’s perfection is his saving mercy, and at the other end is his perfect justice which manifests itself in his awful wrath. God has revealed himself in the Bible as the creator of a world in which he will both save and judge, and the salvation is wrought through the judgment. To him be the glory, forever and ever, amen.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>This essay was presented on June 28, 2004 at the Biblical Theology study group of the Tyndale Fellowship Conference in Nantwich, England. I. Howard Marshall responded to the paper on that occasion, and I am also grateful for Greg Beale’s interaction at that time. Beale told me that he is in basic agreement with my thesis, and that he sees the other proposed centers as vying for first place among the second order centers, with the glory of God being primary to

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them all. I also wish to express my gratitude to professors T. Desmond Alexander, Dennis R. Burk, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Jay E. Smith, who read earlier drafts of this essay and offered helpful feedback.