This is a course in basic introduction to the Bible. We call the interpretation of the Bible hermeneutics and so this is a course in introductory hermeneutics. God’s Word, the Bible, came to us in human language and in human culture and human contexts and we understand God’s Word by reading it within that particular culture and context in which it was given. We are going to divide the course up into beginning with introductory issues and the first issue we are going to cover today are some of our presuppositions, the presuppositions we bring to the table to interpret the Bible.

I. Presuppositions for Interpretation

A. The Bible Is God’s Word
The first presupposition I want to talk about is the presupposition that we hold that the Bible is God’s Word. This is not something we are seeking to prove, this is something we take as a given as Evangelicals, as those who believe the Bible is God’s Word, we take it as a given that the Bible is God’s Word. What does that mean that the Bible is God’s Word? I want to look at two aspects of that.

1. The Bible is Inspired by God
The first is the inspiration of Scripture, that the Bible is inspired by God; that is claimed implicitly throughout Scripture, the Old Testament carries a sense, a constant sense throughout that this is the Lord’s word, “the Lord says,” the prophets frequently say that. The New Testament has the stamp of apostolic authority. Compare these various Old Testament citations in the New. Acts 2:16 citing Joel 2:28-32 says, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. In the last days,” God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” So, in Acts 2 Peter cites Joel 2 and he cites it as something spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament as given by the prophet. But then if we look at Hebrews 3:7 citing Psalm 95 the writer of Hebrews says, “So as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.” Who spoke in the Old Testament? It was the Holy Spirit speaking. We get maybe an overall clear view of inspiration in Acts 4:25 citing Psalm 2:1 it says, “So, the Lord said, by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant our father David.” Who spoke in this case? It was the Lord speaking by means of the Holy Spirit through the mouth or through the spokesperson, that is, David. So, we can see that Scripture is God's Word given by his Holy Spirit spoken by the human author. So, inspiration, the inspiration of God’s Word, is claimed implicitly throughout Scripture.

It is also claimed explicitly, one of the key texts for the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where it says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” That word inspired by God is a Greek word theopneustos which seems to have been coined by Paul himself, he seems to have made it up by combining two words. It means God exhaled or God breathed out his word. How did God do that? Scripture does not tell us exactly how God did it, but we do know that this is God’s Word by virtue of his divine inspiration. 2 Peter 1:21 gives us a little bit of a hint of how God did it. It says, “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but people moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” So God moved individuals to speak the message that he wished to deliver. Now one clarification is very important here; this does not mean dictation. In other words, for the most part God did not dictate Scripture word by word to these human authors. How do we know that? How do we know that God’s Word was not given, for the most part, through dictation? Well, the answer to that question is that the different writers of the Old Testament and the New Testament have different styles, their
personalities come out, their style of writing comes out and so we see that there is a human
dimension in inspiration. If all of Scripture was simply dictated by the Holy Spirit to human authors
we would expect it to have a uniform style, but since we see the human authors’ personalities and
the vocabulary they use and the grammar that they use coming through in the Scripture that they
write we see that this is not simply dictated. That is the first thing we mean by the Bible is God’s Word.

2. The Authority of Scripture
The second thing we mean by the Bible is God’s Word is not just its inspiration as Scripture but its
authority as Scripture. And what do we mean by authority? We mean that Scripture has claim to our
life and that we submit ourselves to Scripture’s authority. Three aspects of authority – we can see
that Scripture is authoritative over personal experience. We don’t allow our human experience to
determine what we believe or the behaviors we practice, we submit to Scripture’s commands,
Scripture’s authoritative statements. Not just authoritative over our experience, Scripture is also
authoritative over reason. What do I mean by that? It does not mean that we leave our brains at the
door when we read Scripture. We mean by that, that it’s authoritative over rationalism or over
naturalism. We assume the supernatural, we assume the existence of God and the fact that God
engages in human history and God intervenes in human history. Another thing we mean by the
authority of Scripture over reason is that unresolved issues or apparent contradictions that we find
in Scripture do not negate Scripture’s authority, instead we accept a wait and see attitude if we
cannot resolve a particular issue in Scripture. I believe that God is a God of reason and that his
Scripture will stand up under historical and scientific scrutiny. So, authoritative over experience,
authoritative over reason, and third, authoritative over tradition or dogma. Church traditions are
good. The ancient creeds of the church are good. They help us to understand who God is and what
his word means but ultimately all church tradition must be subordinated to the authority of
Scripture. So, Scripture is authoritative over all church tradition or dogma. The rallying cry of the
Protestant reformation was *Sola Scriptura*, that is that ultimately Scripture has the final authority. Now
sometimes we think of certain groups as placing tradition over Scripture. Maybe we think of the
Roman Catholic Church, for example, as placing tradition over Scripture, but, in fact, we all have a
tendency to do that, because all of us, whether Baptist, whether Methodist, whether Presbyterians,
have church traditions that in many ways govern the way we think and the way we believe and so
ultimately we are to submit those traditions to the authority of Scripture. So, our first given, our first
presupposition for our biblical interpretation is that the Bible is God’s Word.

B. The Interpreter Must Be Born Again
Here is a second major presupposition, something we take as a given, something we are not going to
try to prove but simply to acknowledge in this class is that the interpreter must be born again. The
interpreter must be in a relationship with Jesus Christ in order to comprehend, fully comprehend
God’s Word. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, “The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so
that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of
God.” 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come
from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they
are discerned only through the Spirit.” So ultimately it is the Spirit who enlightens and illuminates
Scripture so that we can understand it. Now that raises a significant question and that question is can
non-Christians understand the Bible. I raise that question because we have got many great Bible
scholars who do not have faith in Jesus Christ, who are not believers and yet they know the historical
culture, they know the background, they apparently interpret God's Word very well. So, how can I
say then that the interpreter must be born again? I think the answer to that question is that someone
can interpret Scripture but if they do not apply it to their lives they are mishandling God's Word.
Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” God’s Word is meant not just to be read and understood, it is intended to be applied to our lives. Like a double-edged sword, it is meant to cut us, to challenge us, to change us, to shape us, to guide us, and if God’s Word does not guide us, if we do not allow it to guide us then we are mishandling God’s Word. So in order to do proper biblical interpretation we have to know God, we have to be born again, we have to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. To read the Bible without letting it transform you is to mishandle the word and so to shortcut the process of biblical interpretation.

C. The Interpreter Must Be Filled with the Spirit

Here is a third major presupposition and it is directly related to the second and that is that the interpreter must be filled with the Spirit. Not only must they be born, again but they must actually be empowered to understand God’s Word and be guided in their understanding of God’s Word through the Holy Spirit. John 16:13 says, “But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, he will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come,” that is John 16:13. Now that passage was given by Jesus to his twelve disciples in the Upper Room discourse on the last night of his life here on earth before his crucifixion. So it was given specifically to them, it was not given to all believers. But the truth that it teaches certainly applies to all believers because we like the twelve disciples have the Spirit living in us and he is our guide and he is our direction. So in order to properly hear God speak, to properly understand God’s Word we have to be filled and empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Theologians sometimes speak about the Spirit’s role in two dimensions, they speak about inspiration by the Holy Spirit and they speak about illumination by the Holy Spirit and I just want to mention those. These are not clear distinctions given in Scripture but I think they are reliable and accurate descriptions of what actually happens, how the Spirit actually works. Inspiration in this case would be a product of the author, the human author and the divine author. Inspiration means receiving new revelation, so the authors of the Bible were inspired to write God’s Word. Illumination, our second word, relates not to the author but to the reader and that is interpreting and applying previously given revelation. So the Holy Spirit does both. The Holy Spirit was the one who inspired the original authors to write, to record God’s Word, but the Holy Spirit also illuminates us as we read and interpret God’s Word, he guides us into all truth.

So those are just three basic presuppositions that we are approaching Scripture with in this class. The presupposition that the Bible is God’s Word; by that we mean it is both inspired by God but also authoritative, the Bible is God’s Word. Secondly, that the interpreter must be born again, second presupposition, that only believers can accomplish the full process of interpretation, not only understanding what the text means but also applying it to their lives. The third presupposition is that the interpreter must be filled with the Spirit, that we cannot properly hear and understand God’s Word unless God’s Spirit is guiding us.

II. The Nature of the Bible: Unity and Diversity

As we begin the process of interpreting God’s Word the first thing we have to ask is what is the Bible. We can only read and understand the Bible if we understand its nature and so this lecture is entitled The Nature of the Bible and I would subtitle it Unity and Diversity. It seems to me the best way to comprehend, the best way to understand the nature of the Bible is with the terms unity and diversity. Together these two terms really help us to understand what the Bible is and how we ought to approach it. So we will start with the term diversity and speak about various aspects of diversity.
A. Diversity of the Bible
1. Kinds of Diversity
By diversity we mean that the Bible is a diverse collection of literary works. Various kinds of diversity; we have diversity of time for example. By diversity of time we mean that the Bible is written over a long period of time, something like 1500 years. Diversity of authors; we have authors from all walks of life in the Bible. As authors of the Bible we have fisherman, we have tent makers, we have prophets, we have priests, we have kings, we have a whole range of different occupations, different backgrounds from different cultures and contexts. Diversity of languages; the Bible is written in two main languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek, there is a smattering of Aramaic, both in the Old Testament and then a few Aramaic words in the New Testament. So we have diversity of authors, diversity of times, diversity of cultures, diversity of languages. Perhaps most significantly and important we have diversity of genres. A genre refers to a different literary form. What kinds of genres are in the Bible? Well the two main genres are prose and poetry, but there are many, many subgenres. There are psalms, there are parables, there are letters, there are historical narratives, there are laws, there are proverbs, there are prophecies. So we have got this extraordinary diversity of Scripture.

2. Implications of Diversity
How does that diversity affect the way we read Scripture? Let me just give you three key implications or perhaps I should first ask the question what are the implications associated with this great diversity of Scripture, that it was written by many different authors in many different times and places, representing various theological perspectives, what are some of the implications of that diversity? Well, here are three implications of the diversity of the Bible.

a. We must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature.
The first implication is that we must adapt our methods for various kinds of literature. As we just mentioned one of the aspects of diversity is diversity of genre and different genres require different methods of interpretation, different approaches.

Let me just give you some illustrations of this from the Bible. Here is Daniel 7:6, it says in Daniel 7:6, “After that I looked and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard, and on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads and it was given authority to rule.” Well, that is a strange passage for many people. You have got this image of a beast that is a cross between various animals. In order to understand this passage we have to identify the literary form, the genre. We cannot possibly understand it unless we identify and recognize that this is what is called apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature often uses symbolic, sometimes bazaar imagery in order to communicate spiritual truth or in order to communicate some historical event or some historical person. And so in order to understand this passage we have to first acknowledge and identify what literary form it is.

Here is another passage, Ecclesiastes 1:1-4, “Meaningless meaningless says the teacher, utterly meaningless; everything is meaningless. What does anyone gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go but the earth remains forever.” If we read that passage and ask is that true, is everything ultimately meaningless? In order to understand this passage in God’s Word we have to first identify its literary form. Is this meant to be God’s wisdom, is this meant to be absolute truth, that everything is meaningless, or is this truth given from a human perspective apart from God? Identifying the genre of the Book of Ecclesiastes is essential before we can understand it. So we are speaking about the diversity of different genres and depending on the genre we have to adopt an appropriate strategy of interpretation.
Here is another example of that, Psalm 137:9, “Happy is the one who takes your babies and smashes them against the rocks.” Well, that is not a very pretty picture nor does it sound like the loving God who cares about all people. How do we understand that passage? Well we have to recognize its genre, its literary form. It is not just a psalm; it is actually what we call an imprecatory psalm. An imprecatory psalm is the psalmist crying out in agony and suffering against his enemies. So we recognize this is not necessarily something we should be saying about our enemies, this is someone’s human emotion expressed towards God. Identifying that literary form or that genre is essential if we are going to understand that passage.

Here is another example, Isaiah 55:12. Isaiah 55:12 says, “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” We might ask, is that true? Will the mountains one day burst into song? Will the trees of the field clap their hands? Well, in order to understand this passage you have to acknowledge and recognize that the genre is poetry, it is poetic and it is eschatological poetry or focusing on God’s end-time salvation and so it is using symbols, it is using metaphors to describe the restoration of creation at the end of time. So, is it to be taken literally? The answer to that question is no, it is not to be taken literally. Why? Because it is figurative poetry, it is meant to be taken figuratively. So identifying that literary form is essential if we are going to understand God’s Word. So, that was our first implication of the diversity of Scripture is that we must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature.

b. We must recognize the progress of revelation.

Here is a second implication of the diversity of the Bible. It reminds us, that diversity, that we must recognize the progress of revelation. There is a development of doctrine in Scripture. Later stages of the Bible do not replace the earlier stages, but they clarify the earlier passages and they develop a gradual developing understanding of the people of God.

Hebrews 1:1 illustrates what we mean by the progress of revelation. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe.” That verse points out that the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, was given at various times and in various places in a somewhat scattered way through the prophets. The New Covenant, the New Testament, is God’s final revelation, complete revelation, through his Son. So we see progress from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

Let me give you some examples of the progress of revelation, the way we see the development of doctrine between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Take the doctrine of the Trinity for example, the truth that God is three persons, one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, perhaps the most foundational truth of Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity. But if you read your Old Testament the doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly taught. We get some hints of it, some suggestions of it in the Old Testament when God says, “Let us make man in our own image.” The “us” there may perhaps refer to the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, but it is certainly not clear. We see the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at the time of creation, but in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is not clearly identified as a distinct person within the Trinity, the Spirit of God is the vitality of God, the presence of God in the world, the power and presence of God. So the Old Testament we do not see the Trinity clearly taught. We get to the New Testament, of course, we see God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We could point to many, many passages in the New Testament that confirm the doctrine of the Trinity. So we see this progressive revelation from
the Old Testament to the New. The diversity of Scripture reminds us that we have to read an Old Testament writer within that writer’s original context. We must not force New Testament meanings, for example, on the Old Testament; we must allow each writer to speak for themselves. Why did God not reveal himself as Trinity in the Old Covenant or more clearly, maybe we should say, as Trinity in the Old Covenant? Well, one possible answer to that is that the nation of Israel was living in a context of polygamy where there were many, many gods and the nations around had competing gods and perhaps the rallying cry of Judaism, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord he is one”; one as opposed to the many gods of the nations. So perhaps God revealed himself in the unity alone in the Old Covenant in order to keep Israel from adopting a polytheistic view of God or that there were many gods competing. The demonstration of the one true God was essential for Israel’s religion under the Old Covenant. So there is one example of the progress of revelation.

Let me give you another example of the progress of revelation. How about the practice of sacrificing animals? The Old Covenant commanded animal sacrifices to be made and those sacrifices were meant to pay the penalty for sins and we get many Old Testament passages that refer to the sacrifice of an animal paying the penalty for sins. We get to the New Covenant, however, the New Testament, and it becomes clear that Jesus Christ is the only true and ultimate sacrifice and that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant never really did pay for sin. Hebrews 10:4 says, “For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” That is Hebrews 10:4. Well, the Old Covenant seemed to suggest that the blood of bulls and goats did take away sins; the New Covenant confirms that the blood of bulls and goats, the sacrifices of animals, never did actually take away sins. So how do we bring these two together? Well, the answer is the progress of revelation. God progressively revealed his plan to human beings. Alright, those are two implications of the diversity of the Bible. The first is we must adapt methodology for various kinds of literature or various genres. The second is we must recognize the progress of revelation.

c. We must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves.

Here is our third implication of diversity. The third implication is we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. Then we can seek an internal unity behind their diverse expressions of faith. So we must first allow them to speak for themselves, then we must seek an internal unity behind the diverse expressions of faith. Too often we have a tendency to interpret one author exclusively by another author instead of first listening to that particular author. We must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves.

Let me give you a few examples of this. Compare two New Testament writers, James and Paul, on the issue of faith and works. At first reading these two seem to contradict each other. Paul says a person is justified by faith alone apart from works. A person is justified, or declared righteous by God by faith alone apart from works. James on the other hand says faith without works is dead. He also says you see a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. These two writers at first seem to be contradicting each other. Well, this point about diversity, we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. We must listen to James in the context of James’ letter. We must listen to Paul in the context of his life and letters and overall theology. So we must first of all allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. Once we understand James and once we understand Paul we can be confident that these two will ultimately agree, they will complement each other rather than contradict each other.

Here is another example of how we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. Compare the writer to the Hebrews on the issue of eternal security with the Apostle Paul on the same issue. Paul, for example, in a great passage in Romans 8 says, “For those God foreknew he also
predestined.” It goes on to say, “Those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified.” So Paul makes it clear that those that God foreknew, those he saved he will glorify. That once you are saved you can be certain that you will retain that salvation forever. The writer to the Hebrews, on the other hand, says in Hebrews 10:26-27, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” Now, at first reading it sounds as though the writer to the Hebrews is saying that you can lose the salvation you have gained. So how do you bring Paul and the writer to the Hebrews together on an issue like this, an issue of eternal security, an issue of whether we are once saved and always saved? Well, the diversity of Scripture reminds us that we need to first and foremost listen to each author in their original context. We have to understand what Paul is saying in his context and we have to understand what the writer to the Hebrews is saying in his context. And ultimately we know that these two will be brought together, they will be complementary rather than contradictory.

This issue of the diverse theologies of various New Testament writers, the study of each diverse theology is known as biblical theology and I want to introduce that topic right now briefly because it is very important in terms of our interpretation of the Bible. Let me first of all define for you the word biblical theology. Biblical theology deals with God’s progressive revelation through the distinct theological emphases of persons and periods. So, if I am speaking about Paul's theology, that is the distinct theological emphases, a particular person I can talk about John's theology, the Johannine theology, John's theology of the New Testament, or I can talk about Isaiah's theology or I can talk even broadly, maybe about prophetic theology, the theology in general of the Old Testament prophets.

Doing theology as we apply God's Word to life is always a three-step process and biblical theology is the center point of those three steps. We will be talking more about this in future lectures. But essentially the first step is what we call exegesis. Exegesis is seeking to determine the author’s original meaning in a particular passage. So, that is our first step, to look at a passage and understand what it means. But the second step then is to relate that particular passage to an author’s overall perspective. Let me give you an illustration. Suppose we are reading Paul's letter to the Philippians. Well, we try to read that passage, that letter in its original context and we read it trying to discern what Paul intends to say in that passage. But then we take that message and we look at it from the perspective, from the context of Paul's theology as revealed in his other letters. That is biblical theology. Biblical theology is examining this distinct theological emphases of a particular person or of a particular period. So every biblical author has a distinct theological perspective, a theological perspective that is not contradictory of other perspectives but is complementary of other perspectives. I said doing theology is a three-step process. The first step is exegesis, the second step is biblical theology, and the third step we could call then systematic theology or taking those various distinct theological perspectives; Paul’s theology, John’s theology, Isaiah’s theology, and bringing them together into a system of truth or a systematic theology, statements of absolute or statements of God’s truth that we call systematic theology.

The whole point of this discussion is that before we can identify systematic truth, or God’s truth, we have to first read God's Word in context. Doing biblical theology is just reading Paul’s letter within the context of Paul's thought world and John’s letter within the context of John's theology. So we have examined three implications of the diversity of Scripture. We must adapt a methodology for various kinds of literature was our first one. Secondly, we must recognize the progress of revelation, that later doctrine does not replace earlier but explains it, develops it, gives us a greater understanding of who God is and what his purpose for the world is. An our third implication is that
we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves and then seek an internal unity behind their diverse expressions of faith. Alright, so that is diversity. Very important. We might call the diversity of Scripture the human side of the Bible because we recognize it was written by human beings in different cultures, in different languages at different times. So that is the human side of Scripture but there is also a divine side of Scripture related to the inspiration by God. And so diversity was our first point under the nature of the Bible.

B. Unity of the Bible
1. Unity of Theme
Our second point is unity. Despite this diversity of authors, despite this diversity of times and places and language, we have an ultimate unity in Scripture and it is a unity of theme. That theme could be stated in a variety of ways. Let me give you one statement of theme, in other words, what the whole Bible is about from beginning to end. Here is a statement of theme that would describe the entire biblical revelation and that is: the actions of God in bringing salvation to humanity through Jesus Christ, it is the story of God's redemption. So, the actions of God in bringing redemption to creation through Jesus Christ, through Jesus the Messiah, this theme can summarize the whole of Scripture, from beginning to end. The Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Jesus Christ and the salvation he will accomplish. The New Testament looks back at the salvation achieved through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and then it looks forward to the final salvation which will be accomplished when he comes.

I would like to look at one passage that really summarizes this whole issue of the unity of theme in Scripture. It is in Luke 24. It is the resurrection appearance by Jesus to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. These two disciples are walking along when Jesus joins them. He has just risen from the dead but they are prevented, God prevents them from being able to recognize him, and as they walk along he asked them, “What were you discussing together along the way?” And it says they stood still, their faces downcast. One of them said, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” Jesus plays along and says, “What things are you talking about?” And they describe, they say, “About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. This Jesus was this powerful prophet and we thought that he might be the one to redeem Israel. We thought he might be the Messiah, the Savior of the world, but he has been crucified, he died and so he can't possibly be the one we thought he was.” Jesus responds to them with this, he said to them, “How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” Jesus says, “You've missed it haven't you? You don't understand. Isn't this all along what the prophet said, that the Messiah would have to suffer and die before entering into his glory?” And then verse 27, this is Luke 24:27, “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Beginning with Moses and all the prophets; Moses refers to the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy; the prophets are the books that follow that. Moses and the prophets is a shorthand way of summarizing the whole of the Old Testament. So Luke, the author, tells us beginning with Genesis and moving all the way through the Old Testament revelation he explained to them what was said in all Scriptures concerning himself. What an incredible sermon that must have been as Jesus took those two disciples through essentially the whole revelation of the Old Testament.

Because all Scripture ultimately points to Jesus Christ so the unifying theme, once again, of all of Scripture is the actions of God in bringing redemption to creation through Jesus the Messiah. Genesis describes how God created a perfect world. How he placed Adam and Eve within the Garden to tend it, to keep it, but then Adam and Eve rebelled against him and they were judged by
God and all of creation entered a fallen state. The whole rest of the revelation of Scripture is God’s purpose and plan to redeem that creation. His purpose and plan through the Messiah through Jesus Christ who is the center point of history. So, the unity of Scripture tells us that we have one central theme and that central theme, according to Luke 24, is Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant looks forward to Jesus Christ; the New Covenant looks back to what he accomplished on the cross. So we have seen the diversity of Scripture written by human authors in diverse situations and contexts. Now we see the unity of Scripture.

2. Implications of Unity
   a. The Bible is one story.
   
   Now here are two key implications of unity. The first implication of the unity of Scripture is that the Bible is one story from beginning to end, though made up of diverse literature, though made up of many, many short stories, in one sense every book of the Bible relates to God’s ultimate redemption.

   Let me just give you an example of what we mean by the Bible as one story. Take the Old Testament story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis. It is a great narrative, a great story in its own right. The story of Joseph who is favored by his father Jacob over his brothers, his brothers hate him and so at one point they seize him and sell him as a slave into Egypt, a story of sibling rivalry, but also a story of Joseph's faithfulness as he perseveres and remains faithful to God. And God takes him and blesses him in Egypt, he becomes second in command only second to Pharaoh in all of Egypt. Eventually his brothers, because of a famine in the land of Israel, come to him, they are reunited with Joseph. Just a wonderful story; we can understand that on the level of story, we can talk about moral lessons and so forth that are taught by that story, but ultimately that story fits into the larger picture of God's overall story, the grand narrative, what we might call the metanarrative of Scripture that begins in Genesis and comes to conclusion in revelation. The Joseph story is part of a larger story; that larger story is the story of Israel. Because the Joseph story shows us how God preserved his people, the nation Israel, during a great time of famine by sending Joseph ahead of his family into Egypt he prepared the way for them and so the children of Israel were saved, were delivered from that famine. So it is part of Israel's story, the story of their redemption. But Israel’s story is part of God’s grand narrative, God’s story of redemption that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. The story of God’s plan to save and redeem his people, because through the nation Israel the Messiah would come, Jesus Christ, who would suffer and die for the sins of the world, who would reverse the results of Adam and Eve’s sins. So the Joseph story fits into the larger perspective of Scripture confirming the Bible is one story.

   Let me just give you one more example of that, another Old Testament book, the Book of Esther. The Book of Esther is unique in many ways and one way it is unique is the fact that the name God never appears in Esther, not once is God mentioned in Esther. Some have wondered why this book is even part of the Bible if God is not even mentioned. But the story of Esther is part of a greater story, just like the Joseph story, it is part of two greater stories actually, it is part of the story of Israel because Esther is once again a story of how God’s people are rescued, are delivered when someone attempts to destroy them. Esther becomes queen and through that story she accomplishes Israel's deliverance. The story of Israel's deliverance is once again part of the larger story of God's redemptive plan for all of humanity. So, every small narrative in the Old Testament fits into the larger narrative of Israel, and every larger narrative of Israel fits into the grand or metanarrative of all of Scripture beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation. So we can place each story into its context of God’s ultimate purpose and plan for all humanity. So there is our first implication of unity is that the Bible is one story.
b. A systematic theology becomes a possibility.
Here is a second implication of unity and that is that a systematic theology becomes a possibility. What do I mean by that? I mean we can ask the question what is truth and by examining Scripture we can come up with answers, with propositions, with statements that are complete, that are cohesive and that are complimentary not contradictory. Let me go through those three C’s for you. We can come up with statements that are complete. We recognize that we have the whole story. Genesis through Revelation forms a complete narrative of God’s purpose and plan covering all topics that we need for faith and practice. So the unity of the Bible reminds us that God’s story is complete. Secondly, it is cohesive. It is a story that makes sense, that begins at one point, that ends at another, that describes God’s actions in human history. Not only is it complete and cohesive ultimately it is complementary, not contradictory. We can read one author and understand them within their context and then read another and understand them within their context and those two authors will be complementary, they will not contradict one another because of the unity of God’s Word.

Alright, so what have we seen? We have seen two aspects of the nature of the Bible. We have seen the diversity of Scripture written by many authors at many times at many places. We have seen the unity of Scripture. Ultimately it is one story, it is God’s Word. One analogy we can draw here, the Bible is God’s Word, it is the written word. Jesus is identified in John 1:1 as the Living Word, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Jesus as the Word means that Jesus is God’s self-revelation. When we talk about Jesus’ nature, we talk about him being fully human and yet fully divine. By being fully human he could pay the penalty for our sins. By being fully divine he could die for all the sins of the world. So Jesus is the Living Word of God, God’s living revelation as fully human and fully divine. But the written Word, the Bible, is also fully human and fully divine and these two aspects of the nature of the Bible, diversity and unity, point to the humanity of the Bible written in real-life situations by real authors in real time in real place. That is the human side. But it is not only fully human it is also fully divine; it is God’s Word and that gives the Bible this unity from beginning to end. We can ask the question what is truth and we can recognize that the Bible’s answer will be trustworthy and will be true.

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