

Reaping The Fruits of a Redemptive-Historical Reading of Scripture

by WRF member Paige Britton

The idea that one should read the Bible from beginning to end as if it were a unified whole is not a given in contemporary Christian circles. To be sure, Christians of all stripes are quick to identify the entire Bible as “God’s Word,” naming it “inspired,” “inerrant,” and “infallible,” and claiming it as the bedrock of our faith and practice. These assertions are well and good; in practice, however, a piecemeal approach to study and preaching commonly contradicts any confession of the unity of the thoroughly God-breathed Scriptures. The smorgasbord approach – finding an exemplary narrative here, an inspiring verse there, a handful of favorite themes and imperatives scattered about the text – reduces the Bible to a book of timeless truths and a guide for Christian living. Is it primarily a moral message that binds these diverse biblical books together, so that God’s Word is, essentially, just a giant Book of Proverbs with some theology thrown in for garnish? Or is there more to it?

According to Jesus, there is indeed more to it. Undergirding every moral message one could glean from the biblical text is a grand story, centered on God’s plan of redemption in Christ: “And beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27, ESV, emphasis added). At this point along the road to Emmaus, Jesus opened to his companions the entire Old Testament, showing them in psalm and prophecy, law and narrative, scenes in the drama of redemption. And we, too, at this point along the road to heaven, may read in both testaments the progressive revelation that leads to and past the cross, into resurrection life and the hope of the world to come. These are the riches of what has come to be called the redemptive-historical approach to interpreting God’s Word.

In what follows, I hope to show the difference that such a reading makes to our personal understanding of the Word, as well as to our attempts to teach and preach it to others. Although I will begin with a brief description of redemptive-historical interpretation, readers who are as yet unfamiliar with this approach may also benefit from a companion essay, “Reading Between the Trees,” in which I introduce the topic in more detail. In the present article I will be exploring the “fruits” of this approach, and I will also offer three brief examples of its application.

What It Is (and What It Isn’t)

Reading with an awareness of a canon-spanning[i] storyline is not an alien, artificial scheme that we impose on the text. Rather, it is a theological confession: namely, that the same God who authored the Scriptures also authored the events they describe, as well as the details involved in the recording of his works by human hands in human languages. A confession of God’s sovereignty over history necessarily implies that we believe events have meaning and purpose, and that everything is tending toward a particular goal, which Paul identifies as the time when all things will be “summed up” in Christ (Eph. 1:10-11, NIV). So, too, the Scriptures have a unified meaning and purpose, which is to declare the progressive revelation of God’s gracious plan to reconcile fallen humanity to himself through Christ.

What this means is, first, that wherever we enter the text, we are entering a drama “already in progress”; and, second, that at any given moment we may legitimately point from the text to Jesus, whether directly or indirectly. Sometimes this will involve recognizing how events or people prefigure

the coming and the work of Christ; sometimes this will entail receiving a theological interpretation of past events, or learning the present-day (or future) implications of what Christ has already accomplished. Even those portions of Scripture that seem to have no direct bearing on the overarching storyline (e.g., Proverbs), when viewed with an eye to their context in the canon, enrich our understanding of God's gracious character and redemptive works. No matter where our reading intersects the biblical storyline, we may (and should) orient ourselves by looking forward and backward along the timeline of redemptive history, and direct those we teach to do the same.

Some will object at this point that this kind of reading does impose an alien perspective on the text, particularly when Old Testament passages are read with "New Testament" eyes. Is it fair to read Jesus into events and texts that the original writers and readers (or hearers) would never have known to associate with the Messiah, let alone with a carpenter from Nazareth? While the depth of the knowledge of Old Testament writers is a matter for scholarly dispute,^[ii] surely it is reasonable to say that God's sovereign arrangement of times, people, events, and texts at least allows for the possibility of meaningful connections between the Old and the New – and of course Jesus' own words confirm that this is really the way it is. In addition, because a redemptive-historical approach to the text requires that we consider a passage within its canonical context, we are able to read the passage both with a view to its original setting and with the wider perspective gained through the Spirit, this side of Jesus' resurrection – a flexibility that out-of-context interpretations can never achieve. (In other words, this approach allows us to read stereoscopically, with both OT and NT eyes!)

Reading canonically ultimately allows later parts of the Bible to inform and explain earlier pieces. Jesus' interpretive example on the road to Emmaus is spelled out in more detail by the witnesses in Acts and the writers of the Epistles, all of whom provide us with a guide – and checks and balances – for reading the Old Testament from a post-resurrection perspective. Their claim is that the story of Israel is fulfilled and then continued in the story of the church; and they highlight the "types,"^[iii] the prophecies, and the promises in the Hebrew Scriptures that point the way forward. Jesus' own teaching prior to his death and resurrection was necessarily brief, often cryptic, and insufficiently understood at the time, requiring later events and the communication of the Spirit to make his meanings plain; thus there is between the Gospels and Acts another wave of the progress of God's revelation, all of which is deepened and explained further in the Epistles and Revelation.

So it is that from the Garden at the start of the book to the City at the Bible's end, the text of Scripture traces a pathway of revelation upon revelation, interpretation upon interpretation, advancing progressively out of Exile and into Home. Readers who are trained by such a perspective find themselves reaping a harvest of scriptural fruit that would otherwise have been out of reach. Beyond the gleanings specific to individual passages and books, these readers also carry away bushels of insight, wisdom, and sound interpretive habits, as they allow the text to instruct them rather than demanding that it say whatever they expect it to. It is to these general benefits of the redemptive-historical approach that we now turn.

The Fruits of Redemptive-Historical Reading

The English word orthodoxy derives from the Greek words for right and opinion. To hold an orthodox view of God, then, means holding a right opinion of him, based not on our own imaginings but on his gracious communication of himself through the Scriptures and his Son. Because we are dependent on God's revelation of himself to know anything at all about him, the best interpretive approach to Scripture will call us to slow down, focus our attention, listen to what God has to say, and

then go and live in light of what we have heard. Rather than rushing to “apply a text to our lives,” we should be sitting at Jesus’ feet like Mary, taking time to allow God’s version of reality to penetrate our minds and transform our thinking.

But slowing down is not a commonly practiced discipline in our high-speed-internet world, and Christians are often as adept as other techno-savvy denizens at snatching sound bites from our news sources, be they sermons or Bible studies or our morning devotionals. We want a tightly packed “take-home” message, a Happy Meal that gives us the energy and direction to immediately go and do something for God. Where these culturally driven expectations are prominent, the idea that the fruits that we reap from Bible study would enable us instead to go and think something may sound less than exciting. Thinking, after all, is often harder work than doing! And at least when we do something, we have something to show for it – if only a checked-off box on our list of Things to Do Today. Thinking, on the other hand, is a never-ending task with ambiguous benefits. (And we often forget to do it!)

For this reason, choosing to preach or teach from the Scriptures using a redemptive-historical approach may in fact require a bit of re-teaching of the flock regarding expectations. The “take-home” part of a lesson or a sermon need not always be a list of things to do (or imperatives). We should also emphasize the indicatives, the things that are true even before we lift a finger to act. We should emphasize these things not because it is virtuous to cram our heads with facts, but because we need to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds.” God’s reality must penetrate and replace our default assumptions about the world until we perceive (i.e., see and understand) things rightly.[iv]

Below I offer three specific ways in which a redemptive-historical approach to Scripture can contribute to the transforming of our minds and the forming of right opinions about God, the gospel, and all of life.

1. A redemptive-historical reading prioritizes God’s story over our own.

By first seeking to understand where a passage or book fits into the history of God’s plan of redemption, along a timeline that stretches from Creation to Cross to New Creation, we show due humility before the divine Author and the story he means to tell. If instead we move too quickly to apply a text to our present situation, we betray by our impatience the self-centeredness of our hearts. Alternately, if we dwell only on a passage’s immediate context but neglect the part it plays in the big picture of the entire canon, our interpretation and teaching will be true but narrow, missing the rich interconnection of past, present, and future that the biblical story demonstrates.

Prioritizing God’s story ultimately reinforces a confession of his sovereignty, a perspective that is continually confused and obscured for us by life in this fallen world. That God, before the creation of the world, would have imagined and decreed that he would redeem a people of his own through Christ; and that he would faultlessly carry out this plan through real players in human history; and that he would arrange the details of language, writers, and writing so that you and I can know about his intentions and mighty deeds, should repeatedly stun us and prompt our praise. I know of no approach to Scriptural teaching that better sets our hearts on heavenly things than a redemptive-historical reading, simply because it calls attention to the progressive “storyness” of the Bible, and thereby to the self-revealing God who has deliberately acted and spoken in history. Since this same God holds our lives in his hands, the better we know him, the more inclined we will be to trust him.

2. A redemptive-historical reading focuses our eyes on Christ as the subject and object of Scripture.

Reading the Hebrew Scriptures with a view to the way they anticipate Jesus helps us resist the temptation to imagine a deep divide between the Testaments, with the Old being “the time of the Law” and the New being “the time of the Gospel.” Reformed theologians speak of one unbroken “Covenant of Grace” that extends from the Fall through Revelation, by which God has continuously saved his people, not by their works, but through their faith in his provision for their salvation. As New Testament believers, we realize that God’s provision is nothing less than his own Son. Old Testament believers had less clarity about the identity of their Savior; but through promises, types, and events that foreshadowed a Coming One – and through their knowledge and experience of God’s covenant-keeping character – they could, like Abraham, believe God and rest in Christ’s righteousness (cf. Gen. 15:9). Reading their stories now with the benefit of Spirit-illuminated hindsight, we can experience both the original hearers’ hope and our own post-resurrection joy in the fulfillment of what was promised.

Then, too, a redemptive-historical reading reminds us that the Savior who was promised and who finally came will one day come again! Christ is the object or the goal of the biblical story, even as he is its subject. Learning to live in this world as the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church” is thus not to be an end in itself for New Testament believers, as if getting along with one another, determining how to pursue the cultural mandate,^[v] and even evangelizing non-Christians were all we now need to think about. Rather, we are to do all that we do in the name, by the Spirit, and conscious of the lively presence of the One who may at any moment return for his Bride. We are ourselves on the timeline of God’s story of redemption, and our personal salvation and participation in the church on earth do not yet comprise the end of the tale. We, too, have something to anticipate, as our Old Testament brothers and sisters did: the righting of the world around and within us, and the coming of our King.

3. A redemptive-historical reading allows us to enlarge our idea of “applying the Bible to our lives.”

As suggested earlier, “applying the Bible to our lives” need not always entail coming up with a list of things to do. In fact, those who hope to harvest clear marching orders from every study or sermon will likely be frustrated by the large sections of Scripture that do not seem at all eager to oblige! Though of course we can learn many moral messages by implication, the primary purpose of biblical narratives (such as Genesis, Ruth, Mark, and Acts), much recorded praise and prophecy (such as Psalms and Isaiah), and theological reflection (such as Job, Romans 1-11, and Ephesians 1-3) is simply to tell the story of how things really are, here in God’s world under God’s sovereign care. Much of the Bible is descriptive rather than prescriptive, and with good reason: by ourselves we could not come up with God’s version of reality, so we must depend on his words to enlighten the eyes of our hearts. Reading with the expectation of discovering God’s story means that we set aside our desire for a list of imperatives, and humbly accept that there are changes to be made in our thinking as well as our acting.

Additionally, “applying the Bible to our lives” properly involves understanding where we ourselves fit in the unfolding story. We should hear again and again that we were “chosen in him before the creation of the world,” “predestined to be adopted,” “once dead in our sins and our transgressions,” “made alive with Christ” by God’s grace alone, and even “seated with Christ” in the heavens!^[vi] If we are Gentiles, we should be reminded that we are grafted into the Jewish “tree,” having been adopted as children of Abraham, and are now heirs of the promises given to Israel.^[vii] As believers in the age of the church, we should know that we are living in the “not-yet” time, sealed by the Spirit for an inheritance, but subject to persecution and the fallenness of the world around and within us, while we wait for our Redeemer and “the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” The Christian’s story is

connected to every part of Scripture, from creation and fall to patriarchs and promises, from the Gospels and Acts to the Epistles and Revelation. To paraphrase Paul, “all of God’s story is also your story, for you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (cf. 1 Cor. 3:21-23).

Reading for Redemptive-Historical Fruits

We turn now to three practical examples of reaping the fruits of redemptive-historical reading. The examples below are only meant to be suggestions; more could be said in each case, and every point mentioned here need not be included in a lesson or sermon.[viii] (In addition, I won’t exegete the passages themselves, but will only place them in their smaller and larger contexts. The tasks of reading the passages and walking listeners through them are left to you.) I offer these examples as illustrations, intending to answer the questions:

1. What is the immediate context of this passage or section of Scripture?
2. What is the larger context of this part of Scripture (i.e., What precedes this part of Scripture? What does this part of God’s story anticipate in the future?)?
3. Application, or, “How does this part of Scripture relate to me?”[ix]

In a sense, we can imagine ourselves standing at a certain point beside a road as we begin to engage a portion of the Bible, and part of our task will be to look both ways (i.e., to past and future) before we move on.

1. A Redemptive-Historical Reading of the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19)

The story of the “binding of Isaac” (so called because Isaac is not finally sacrificed, but is only prepared as a sacrifice) allows for a profound, but also a relatively accessible, connection with the unfolding story of redemptive history. Here the immediate context is the covenant God has made with Abraham in previous encounters, a promise that has included land, a direct biological heir, numerous descendants in Isaac’s line, and the blessing of the nations.[x] This is why God’s command to Abraham comes as such a shock: ““Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about” (Gen. 22:2). Were Abraham to follow through with this order, he would ultimately be killing the promise itself!

But another aspect of the passage’s immediate context is Abraham’s faith in his covenant-keeping God. Not only has God spoken promises, but he has sealed his word with a graphic, unilateral “covenant-cutting” ceremony, essentially swearing by his own character that he will follow through on Abraham’s behalf, and maintain the line of his descendants through Isaac (see Gen. 15:17-21 and the commentary on it in Heb. 6:13-15). In his reply to Isaac’s query about a lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham’s trust in the character of his God is evident: “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Gen. 22:8). The writer to the Hebrews offers an inspired footnote to the story, writing that “he considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Heb. 11:19).

Looking to the larger context of this passage, we see that the need for a sacrificial lamb at all refers back to the death-reaping decision of our first parents in the Garden, and then forward to both

the Mosaic covenant and the cross. After the Fall, God's gracious provision of skins to cover a new-found nakedness required the death of an animal; at Mount Sinai, terms for sacrifices were spelled out for Israel so they could understand and graphically picture the need for both atonement and substitution.[xi] Obviously the strongest link between this story and Jesus' cross is the substitutionary nature of the ram caught in the thicket – an offering provided by God and sacrificed by Abraham "instead of his son Isaac" (Gen. 22:13).

While applications of this passage (including, to be sure, Hebrews 11:17-19!) usually emphasize Abraham's exemplary faith, a lesson that lands on the message that "we should now go and flex our faith-muscles!" misses the mark. Abraham's faith was exemplary because it was fixed on the only One worthy of trust, his gracious covenant-keeping God. The ram provided by Grace on Mount Moriah foreshadows the graciously given Lamb of Calvary, on whose body was laid "the iniquity of us all" (cf. Is. 53). Like Abraham, in our own times of testing, the faith that we will need in order to face failure and loss, or in order to follow God's pathway when we are tempted to swerve off of it, or in order to "attempt great things for God," will only be as strong as our knowledge of God's character, expressed in his faithfulness over the course of redemptive history. Teaching the story of the binding of Isaac and the testing of Abraham, then, gives opportunity to show the grand sweep of God's plan, and reinforce that this same good God has swept the believer up in his drama as well. As Paul writes,

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32, ESV[xii])

2. A Redemptive-Historical Reading of the Book of Proverbs

If the binding of Isaac offered an easy entry into the redemptive-historical approach, the Book of Proverbs seems to defy it! Resembling nothing so much as a great treasure chest whose contents have been tumbled out onto the floor, this collection of pithy, practical sayings appears to have no obvious connection with the patriarchs or the Mosaic law, let alone with the cross of Christ. Is it even worth looking for any unity in all this diversity? And can we speak of a redemptive-historical reading of a book that is so apparently removed from the biblical conversation about redemption in history?

In fact, the Book of Proverbs is not so far removed from the biblical storyline as it at first appears. Like the Castle Beautiful, where Christian is rested and refreshed on his journey in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the Proverbs offer a way-station beside the narrative road, but they are in every aspect reflective of their Maker. Every verse or chapter in the book is guided by its immediate context, the principle that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10; cf. 1:7). Here and throughout the book, the use of the covenant-keeping name of God (indicated in English translations by the capitalized word LORD) assumes a connection with the larger context of Israel's history, as it has been recorded in the Pentateuch. It is this Lord – Creator, Deliverer, Lawgiver, Mighty King – whose character is known by his words and his actions, who stands behind and validates every saying of the wise. In turn, the specific, situational wisdom offered in Proverbs points ever back to the moral law of God, expressed in the Ten Commandments.

But what about connections with Christ? Surely the Book of Proverbs is an exception to the claim that the whole Old Testament points to Jesus? It is tempting to think so; after all, messianic typology and prophecy are not prominent features of the genre of aphorisms. However, a new and stunning perspective is offered when we consider Paul's description of Jesus himself as the one "whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30, emphasis added).

He who “increased in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:52) from his boyhood embodied the wisdom of God.[xiii] Thus it should not surprise us to encounter general and specific reflections of the teachings of the Book of Proverbs in the life, words, and works of Christ. Consider two brief examples:

1. Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back later; I’ll give it tomorrow”— when you now have it with you. (Prov. 3:27-28)

This simple principle of unhesitating, effortful love for one’s neighbor in a time of need is profoundly illustrated by Jesus’ healings on the Sabbath (see especially Mark 3:1-5), is a subject of his teaching (cf. Matt. 5:40-42), and is really the burden of his mission (cf. Mt. 20:28; John 3:16; Philippians 2:6-8).

2. Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – the Lord detests them both. (Prov. 17:15)

What is on a first reading merely a stern rejection of the corruption of earthly courts suddenly becomes a breathtaking witness to the substitutionary atonement of Jesus when we add Paul’s words:

“And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” (Rom. 4:5; cf. Rom. 3:26); and:

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:21)

Without trying to press Jesus into every verse in the collection, it is yet possible to read the Book of Proverbs with an eye to the way these expressions of practical wisdom are expanded and enlivened in the life of the Savior.

Application of the Proverbs is a straightforward (if often rueful!) affair, of course, since marriages and markets, neighbors and enemies, and the pitfalls of communication are common to us all. But a wise teacher will also lift up the themes that remind us of something bigger than our little local worlds: the sovereignty of God, his call for justice for the oppressed, his actions and character, and the ultimacy of divine judgment, to name a few. Again, rather than focusing only on a list of things to do (which the Proverbs so helpfully provide!), we can be gleaning the fruits of the wider biblical perspective and increasing in our love and trust of the only wise God.

3. A Redemptive-Historical Reading of Stephen’s Speech (Acts 7)

Stephen’s speech just prior to his martyrdom provides us with an intriguing opportunity to practice reading an entire redemptive-historical passage in a redemptive-historical manner. For his own rhetorical purposes, Stephen gives a lengthy summary of Jewish history, intending by this approach to more pointedly skewer his antagonistic audience at his climactic conclusion. To a modern-day Gentile reader, however, the impact of the sermon is largely lost without a conscious effort to pay attention to both the larger and the immediate contexts of this speech.

First, the larger context, painted by Stephen himself as he rolls through his historical overview, is the history of Israel from Abraham to the coming of the Righteous One, even Christ. However, rather than

reviewing a series of prophetic texts that lead up to the revelation of the Messiah and establish his identity (an approach that Peter and Paul follow elsewhere), Stephen chooses to concentrate on a recurring pattern which he has perceived in this history: Israel's stubborn rejection of God's messengers, coupled with the inexorable advance of God's plan. From the election of Abraham out of a godless nation, to the long years of slavery in Egypt, to the construction of Solomon's temple, God's purposes have never been thwarted – not even by the rebelliousness of his own people, illustrated by the figures of Joseph's brothers, the Hebrew slaves who reject Moses' intervention, and the idolatrous Israelites in the desert.

Zeroing in on the immediate context of the speech, Stephen then concludes with a ringing rebuke of his present-day listeners, the members of the Sanhedrin, whom he names as the betrayers and murderers of the Righteous One who had been announced beforehand, even by Moses (Acts 7:37; 51-53). The accusation is inescapable: like their fathers, these Jewish leaders are pronounced guilty of treason against God in the persecution of his messenger and the rejection of his Law. And even as this latest Messenger was the greatest of all, so the sin of his executioners is the most severe in the nation's history.

Stephen's brave words spell his own earthly doom, of course, as the pattern of hard-hearted persecution of God's spokesmen continues. But moving on from his speech into the narratives that follow, we read with wonder how, as before, God's plan is still not thwarted. Extending now into a larger context of time and place, with implications even for the 21st century reader, the pace of Acts increases as the apostles are flung far and wide by the subsequent persecution, witnessing to Jesus "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). A breathtaking application for today's Gentile readers is thus the spread of the gospel into the territories of our ancestors, a missional wildfire that was initially sparked by the stern words of Stephen. Much of our New Testament, too, can be considered a gift from that violent time: for Saul, who witnessed the stoning of Stephen and gained his rabid persecuting fervor from it, was at that moment not far from experiencing his own astonishing entry into the Kingdom of Light, to be the great apostle to the Gentiles and the writer of many epistles!

Conclusion

Hopefully these practical examples of redemptive-historical reading have reinforced the idea that the Bible is a unified whole, and that every piece of it fits into both smaller and larger contexts, including the context of the whole canon. As we look both ways along the timeline of redemptive history – remembering that it extends even past our own day to the time of Christ's Second Coming and the inauguration of the New Heavens and New Earth – we may fairly ask how each passage we encounter relates to what has come before in the biblical story and anticipates what has yet to happen. We also remember that God's story is the story of Christ, from Creation to Cross to New Creation. Finally, if we are in Christ, then our "personal application" of these biblical elements can involve more than those coveted lists of Things to Do, even to the renewal of our minds and the strengthening of our faith in the One who called us to take part in his story. He will faithfully complete what he has set out to do, and he orders all things according to his good pleasure.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Paige Britton is a member of the World Reformed Fellowship and a graduate of Haverford College. She attends Faith Reformed Presbyterian Church in Quarryville, PA

[i] We speak of the “canon” of biblical books, that is, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments that have been recognized since the earliest centuries of the church to be God’s inspired Word. To place a book or passage in its “canonical context” means that we acknowledge its setting in the unfolding drama of biblical history, taking into account both what has already occurred in salvation history, and what the text points to or anticipates.

[ii] Walter Kaiser, for example, asserts confidently that OT writers knew of Whom they wrote; other scholars are not so sure. See ***Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament***, Stanley N. Gundry, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

[iii] In this use, the word “types” refers to the events, persons, and objects that prefigure Christ.

[iv] Note that this renewal of our minds is not a one-time deal: since we are constantly being rubbed raw by the world, we need to be regularly healed and comforted by God’s perspective. Hence the Reformed emphasis on a regular experience of the sacraments (i.e., participating in the Lord’s Supper and recalling our baptism), as well as preaching, as “means of grace” in the believer’s life.

[v] This is a reference to Gen. 1:28, God’s command to “subdue and rule over” creation, which some Reformed writers have understood to be the church’s call to live redemptively in all spheres of life in the fallen world.

[vi] See Ephesians 1-2.

[vii] See Romans 11:11-24; Galatians 3.

[viii] When pursuing a redemptive-historical reading of a passage, it is not unusual for the teacher or preacher to be selective about what will be taught at a given time, given the limits of that given time! Still, a class or congregation that has been trained to think along God’s storyline will gradually be able to make some connections for themselves, based on familiar biblical themes and figures (e.g., substitutionary sacrifices; Abraham and the child of promise; etc.).

[ix] For the sake of brevity, I am assuming that the “me” in this question is a believer. Relating a passage to an unbeliever’s life would involve identifying the boundaries of the Covenant of Grace – one is included in the promises only on God’s terms – and being clear about both God’s kingly right to demand obedience and the rebellious state of fallen humankind. It is not impossible that an unbeliever would recognize herself in the story, as being a stranger to the covenant and without God in the world; but it is perhaps more likely that a believer will recognize herself in the history of God’s redemption as it unfolded for her. Teachers and pastors will need to choose which aspect of the story (the state of the outsiders or the joys and responsibilities of the covenant children) ought to be emphasized in a given setting.

[x] For God's promises to Abraham, see Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 18:10, 13-14.

[xi] Interestingly, with only one exception, the animal sacrifices offered by God's people prior to Sinai do not seem to have been associated with atonement for sin. Abel's and Cain's offerings were made in thanks for harvest and flock, directing attention to God's ownership of their firstfruits. (The Hebrew word for "offering" is used in Gen. 4:3-5, rather than the word for "sacrifice.") Animal sacrifices made by Noah and the other patriarchs were not apparently intended to atone for sin; they may have been made as thank offerings, or as tithes or gifts to the Sovereign God. The same is true of the sacrifice planned by Abraham and Isaac: but the obvious substitutionary theme that arises with the appearance of the ram in the thicket foreshadows the atoning sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant, and the final atonement provided by Jesus. The earliest biblical record of an animal sacrifice offered for sin seems to have been that of Job, first for his children (Job 1:5) and later for his interlocutors (Job 42.8). (Job is considered by many scholars to be the oldest book of the Bible, and Job himself is thought to have been a chronological contemporary of Abraham. Even if, as some believe, Moses penned the book of Job, the story is an ancient one that predates Sinai. See the commentary on Job by Elmer B. Smick in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 4, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988], p.853.)

[xii] Note how Paul's words echo the Lord's words to Abraham in Gen. 22:16: "...because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son..."

[xiii] An obvious jumping-off point for a discussion of the connection between Jesus and the Proverbs is the figure of Woman Wisdom (Prov. 1:20-33; 8:1-9:6), a metaphorical representation of God's character through whom he made the world (cf. Col. 1:15-17). Here I have chosen to suggest the less obvious idea that Jesus' life, words and works, in reflecting God's wisdom, find connections within the largely disordered jumble of wise sayings collected in this book. An excellent resource for teaching the Proverbs with an eye to NT connections is Tremper Longman III's commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), a condensed version of which is found in *How to Read Proverbs* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).