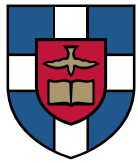
THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 22 · Number 3 Fall 2018



PREACHING CHRIST FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Vol. 22 • Num. 3
Fall 2018

Preaching Christ from The Old Testament

Editorial: Preaching the Glory of Christ from a "Whole Bible"

Stephen J. Wellum

Stephen J. Wellum is is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and editor of Southern Baptist Journal of Theology. He received his PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he is the author of numerous essays and articles and the co-author with Peter Gentry of *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd edition (Crossway, 2012, 2018) and *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2015); the co-editor of *Progressive Covenantalism* (B&H, 2016); the author of *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Crossway, 2016) and *Christ Alone—The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Zondervan, 2017); and the co-author of *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Zondervan, 2018).

In all of Scripture, there is no greater subject matter than our Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture speaks about many crucial issues, but none so important, glorious, and central than the person and work of Christ. Even a cursory reading of the NT reminds us that our Lord Jesus is the heart and center of the Bible's entire story, and thus central to the "whole counsel of God" and a proper understanding of the gospel. In fact, apart from Christ Jesus, we cannot understand the "whole" of Scripture along with its "parts," its promises, and its main point.

The apostle Paul repeatedly underscores this truth in his letters, especially, for example, in Ephesians 1:9-10. In Christ, Paul reminds us, the "mystery," or revelation/self-disclosure of God's eternal plan, is revealed so that we discover that all history is centered and "summed up" in him. This should not surprise us given who our Lord is. As John 1:1 reminds us: Jesus is the divine Son/Word who has been in relation with the Father

and Spirit from all-eternity. Through him, as Colossians 1:16 reminds us, the triune God created *all* things: "things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and *for him*." And it is *this* Son who took on our human nature for our salvation (John 1:14), and in his life, death, and resurrection, and pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost has accomplished our eternal salvation. In fact, apart from him, there is no salvation and no eternal life: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:5).

Scripture is clear: in Christ alone, "all the promises of God find their "Yes" and "Amen" (2 Cor 1:20). In fact, one cannot understand God's promises in the OT apart from him. Jesus himself reminded us of this fact. For example, Abraham not only believed God's Word (Gen 15:6) but he also longed to see Jesus's day (John 8:56; cf. Heb 11:13). Moses too wrote of Christ, and Jesus reminds the religious leaders that in reading the Torah, they should have now recognized him! (John 5:46-47; cf. 5:39). To emphasize the centrality of Christ in all of Scripture does not, as some think, downplay the centrality of the triune God since to be Christocentric is not anti-Trinitarian. Instead, to be Christ-centered reminds us that in God's triune plan and work, there is a centrality to God the Son, and apart from him, we have no gospel *and* we cannot fully grasp the meaning of God's Word.

What these truths entail, then, is that it is not only the NT that teaches us of Christ Jesus our Lord, but also the OT. Our Lord does not come to us in a vacuum. *He* is presented to us in light of the OT and the Bible's entire storyline including the covenantal unfolding of Scripture starting in creation and culminating in the new creation. This is why Jesus reminded the two downcast disciples on the way to Emmaus that the entire OT spoke of him in terms of his death and resurrection (Luke 24:45-46). In the Son's incarnation and work, the word of the prophets is now fulfilled (Heb 1:1-3; 1 Pet 1:10-12). After Pentecost, this truth about Christ is precisely what the apostles preached. All of them preached that "God foretold by the mouth of *all* the prophets that his Christ would suffer" (Acts 3:18; cf. 3:24), and thus demonstrated from the OT that its great subject matter was none other than Christ. In fact, Paul reminded Timothy that it was the Scripture (namely, in this context, the OT) that was able to make him wise

to salvation in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:15-17). From the OT, then, Christ was to be preached and taught. Only in Christ, Paul reminded the Corinthian church, that the veil of the OT could be truly lifted, and that apart from Christ, the OT remained vague and opaque (2 Cor 3:14–15).

But this raises the important question: Given what Scripture teaches, how do we rightly preach Christ from the OT? Scripture assumes that we can, but the answer to the question often leads to a divergence of viewpoint even among evangelicals who affirm a common view of Scripture. Most evangelicals agree that a proper interpretation of Scripture must be true to the Bible's own terms, but it is precisely over the Bible's "own terms" that we disagree. Minimally, evangelicals agree on the following three points about Scripture. First, we agree that Scripture is God's inspired, authoritative Word written through human authors and as such it is a unified, coherent, true revelation of God's plan. Second, we agree that Scripture has come to us over time and thus in our reading of it, we must do justice to the unfolding nature of God's plan, which ultimately reaches its fulfilment in Christ. Third, we further agree that we discover God's intent through Scripture's authors, and that as God's plan is disclosed over time, later revelation helps clarify earlier revelation. This is why most evangelicals agree that the NT's interpretation of the OT is crucial in helping interpret the details of the OT, since later revelation brings with it greater clarity, yet not in such a way that contravenes the earlier revelation. Instead the NT author's develop the OT in ways that are consistent with the OT understanding, yet we do not fully grasp the meaning of the OT texts apart from their fulfilment in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the most part evangelicals agree on these basic points. So why is there still disagreement on how to interpret Scripture, especially regarding how we "find" Christ in the OT? The answer is multifaceted, but it is certainly worth reflecting on, especially its importance. In this issue of *SBJT*, we begin to tackle this question by listening in on the conversation between three well-known and respected evangelical scholars who tell us how they preach Christ from the OT. By listening in, we discover some of the reasons for the differences among us on this issue, thus becoming more aware of where we agree and disagree and why.

Our three main authors are Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson, and Vern Poythress, who all presented a version of their articles at the National

Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in November, 2017. Each author approaches Scripture with a commitment to its full authority, yet each differs on how they "find" Christ in the OT and apply a specific text, namely, Genesis 15:1-6, to us today in light of Christ. Daniel Block and Elliott Johnson both strongly emphasize that faithful Bible readers must interpret OT texts in light of their OT contexts, hence a strong commitment to grammatical-historical exegesis. Both are concerned to read Scripture according to human authorial intent and to avoid the danger of appealing to allegory or typology and thus potentially reading Christ "into" the OT in ways that violate the intent of the OT author. Block contends that we should preach the OT Christotelically instead of Christocentrically. Johnson, similar to Block, reads the OT in light of God's first promise given in Genesis 3:15 which ultimately finds its fulfillment in Christ. Poythress's approach, although similar in some respects to the other authors, is also different. Poythress stresses that OT texts can be appropriated in a multiplicity of ways, an approach he labels as Christocentric.

In addition, to thinking through the three approaches of our main authors to how we preach Christ from the OT, we also invited ten respected scholars to interact and respond to our main authors. When all is said and done, this issue of *SBJT* not only allows the reader to wrestle with the Christocentric vs. Christotelic vs. Christo-promise approach of our main authors, but also to learn from well-respected evangelicals who offer perceptive critiques and evaluations of each of these approaches. Ultimately, our goal and prayer is that this issue of *SBJT* will renew our commitment to rightly preaching Christ from a "whole Bible" for the life and health of the church.

Christotelic Preaching: A Plea for Hermeneutical Integrity and Missional Passion[1]

Daniel I. Block

Daniel I. Block is Gunther H. Knoedler Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Wheaton College. He earned his DPhil in the School of Archaeology and Oriental Studies at the University of Liverpool, United Kingdom. Dr. Block has written numerous articles and books including *The Book of Ezekiel*, vol. 1 and 2 in the New International Commentary of the Old Testament Series (Eerdmans, 1997, 1998); *Judges, Ruth* (B&H, 1999); *Deuteronomy* in the NIV Application Commentary series (Zondervan, 2012); and *For the Glory of God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Baker Academic, 2014).

Introduction

Lest readers misunderstand me in the end, my fundamental concern in conversations about preaching is that we proclaim the truth of God with integrity and with the passion of God's own heart. How to bring these two elements together has been a personal challenge, and as I observe preaching in this country I see this is a crucial issue within evangelicalism today. On the one hand, we have preaching in which the content is true to the word of God, but the divine passion is utterly missing. Sermons are crafted as running commentaries on biblical texts or as lectures on theological topics, and often presented without passion, except perhaps to display the brilliance, wide reading, and rhetorical ingenuity of the preacher. On the

other hand, we have firebrands, whose passion ignites the emotions of the audience, but whose presentation is at best a trivial pursuit of biblical truth, and at worst an exercise in empty demagoguery.

How do we resolve this issue, and in so doing end the famine for the word of God in the land (Amos 8:11) and nourish our people with food that transforms and yields life? In my view the answer is Christotelic reading of Scripture and a Christocentric proclamation—or more accurately a Jesus-centered proclamation. This may appear to some as mere semantics, but to me there is a significant difference between Christocentric activity—whether hermeneutical or homiletical—and Jesus-centered activity.

I have been trying to teach and preach the truth of the whole Bible for more than five decades. But academically I have been primarily engaged in teaching the First Testament (my preferred designation for the Hebrew Bible—what you call something matters; ask the publishers). I grew up in a humble place, Borden, Saskatchewan, the ninth of fifteen children in a humble farm family. My parents were very godly people. I will forever hear the words of my mother ringing in my ears. Knowing that I spent most of my time in the First Testament, my mother would often ask, "But do you love Jesus?" That is a great question, and it has served as a constant reminder to me of what we should be passionate about. Notice, she did not ask, "Do you love Christ?"

The more I have thought about it, the more grateful I am that she put it the way she did, for three reasons. First, in the Scriptures Jesus is much more common as a designation for the second person of the Trinity than the title Christ. The former appears more than 900 times,[2] in comparison with the latter, which occurs only 531 times.[3] Second, Jesus is a personal name, in contrast to Christ (ὁ χριστός), which is a title. By definition, a name invites a personal relationship, as opposed to an official epithet, which acknowledges a formal relationship based on status. Third, in the New Testament (NT), the epithet ὁ χριστός functions as a narrow technical term for the eschatological messianic son of David.[4] If we are honest, and if this is what we mean by "messianic," we could count all the relevant texts in the First Testament on our two hands and two feet. "Christ" is the English rendering of the Greek word that suggests a very narrow role: Jesus, the literal "son of God" (as opposed to the metaphorical use of the phrase for David and his other royal descendants, e.g., Ps 2:7; 89:27–28[26–27]) and

royal son of David. This is the anointed one who fulfills YHWH's promise to David of eternal title to the throne of Israel. David acknowledged the scope of this promise, in that it concerned the distant future (לְמֵרָחוֹק) and represented divine "revelation for humanity" (וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הָאָדָם, 2 Sam 7:10). In Jesus the Christ the universalization of that promise is realized.

The connotations of the personal name "Jesus" are much more comprehensive. Matthew laid the foundations for our understanding of the name in the first chapter of his Gospel. In the opening lines to the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1) and the formal opening to the birth narrative of Jesus (1:18), the evangelist introduced the principal figure as Jesus Messiah (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός). With the note in verse 16 that he was the son of Mary, who was the wife of Joseph, and the name "Jesus," the evangelist had announced his identity. However, by adding, "who is called Christ (Anointed One)," he declared Jesus' status. Interestingly, except for 2:4, where Matthew notes that Herod inquired "where the Messiah was to be born," after this he never uses this epithet for Jesus, either in the birth narrative or in the following ten chapters. The evangelist hereby recognized that this represented a search by one official concerning the affairs of another official, who potentially threatened his own status. By contrast, Matthew forefronts "Jesus" by naming him 34 times in the narrative that runs from 1:19–10:42.

More particularly, in the first scene of this long narrative the angel of YHWH appeared and announced that Mary had conceived this child supernaturally. In prescribing that she name him Jesus, he offered the divine interpretation of the name, thereby declaring the significance of his birth. In the birth of Jesus the prophetic promise that God would one day dwell among his people again ("Immanuel") will be fulfilled (vv. 20–23). I find the explanation of the name the angel passed on to Mary particularly intriguing: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Because "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua," many view Jesus as a second Joshua, or Joshua as a type of Christ. But this illustrates precisely what is wrong with a Christocentric hermeneutic. When we look at the First Testament background to the angel's statement we find that this approach is untenable, for several reasons. First, when Moses assigned the name to the man previously known as Hoshea (Num 13:16), the name

Jesus/Joshua said nothing about the man who bore it. Second, unlike the tribal governors in the book of Judges, the book of Joshua, which is named after him, never presents Joshua as a "savior" (מוֹשִׁיעַ, Judg 3:9, 15; cf. 6:36; 12:3) figure. In the battles against the Canaanites Joshua was the antagonist, the aggressor; if anything, the Canaanites needed salvation from him!

Third, as far as we know, Joshua played no role at all in Israel's supreme and paradigmatic moment of salvation—their rescue from the bondage of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 14–15). To the contrary, as YHWH had declared earlier, the point of the signs and wonders in Egypt and the Israelites' escape from slavery, was that God's people, the Egyptians, and the world would know who he (not Moses, or Joshua, or anyone else) was (Exod 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12; cf. Deut 4:32–39). The formula that appears dozens of times in the First Testament memorializes this fact: "I am YHWH your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). By renaming Hoshea, in a parenthetical clause in Numbers 13:16 Moses testified that this goal had been fulfilled:

אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים	These are the names of the men
אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לָתוּר אֶת־הָאָרֶץ	Moses sent to explore the land.

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשֵׁעַ בִּן־נוּן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ׃ (Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.) [NIV]

Why did Moses change Joshua's name, *Hoshea*, which means "He [any god] has saved," to *Yehoshua*, which can only mean "YHWH has saved!"? The name says nothing about Joshua, but it says everything about God. The one who rescued Israel was YHWH himself. By defeating Pharaoh and his armies, he had won a great victory over the gods of Egypt (Exod 12:12; Num 33:4), and in so doing declared that he alone is God—there is no other! (Deut 4:32–40). Neither Moses nor Joshua would have been pleased to hear us link Jesus to Joshua or Joshua to the exodus and then to forget that the One who had rescued them from the Egyptians was YHWH.

Using the language of Israel's rescue from Egypt, the angel announced a salvation far greater than Israel's rescue from slavery to Pharaoh: Jesus came to rescue his people from their sins! But there is more. The One who had been conceived in Mary's womb was the very One who had introduced himself by name to Moses in Exodus 3–4. Just as the events surrounding

Israel's exodus from Egypt had revealed YHWH as God in all his grace and glory, so the birth of Jesus and his saving work would reveal him as God in all his grace and glory (John 1:14).

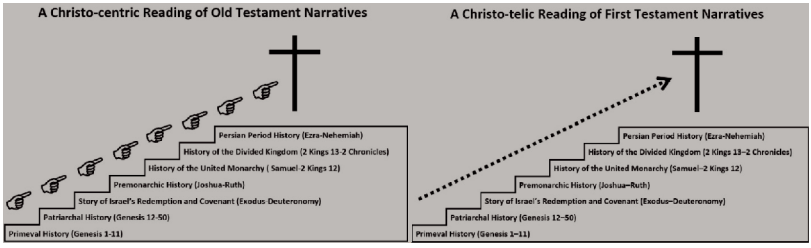
The other title that Matthew 1:23 gives to Jesus confirms this identification of Jesus with God: he is Immanuel, which means, "God is with us!" Jesus was not merely a symbol of God's presence (like prophets and priests); no, he embodied divine presence. This was what the angel of YHWH announced, "Today in the town of David a **Savior** has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord (read YHWH)" (Luke 2:11, NIV modified). I read the last epithet as a reference to YHWH, the Savior and covenant God of Israel, whose name is preserved in "Jesus" (Hebrew, "Yehoshua"), which means "YHWH saves."

Among many other profound Christological themes, the NT makes two fundamental points about Jesus: Yes, he is the Davidic Messiah ("Christ"); but yes, he is also God. The statement by the angel to the shepherds on the hills of Bethlehem reinforces both points (Luke 2:11). Unless we are thoroughly steeped in the First Testament we will not connect these dots (John 1:23; Rom 10:13; etc.).[5] But having connected the dots means that when I preach YHWH, I preach Jesus, for in him the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth (John 1:14, πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινὸς; = Hebrew רַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת; cf. Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Ps 85:15 Greek πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας). There is no need to resort to cheap and trivializing typologizing and Christologizing, which often actually reflects a low view of Scripture and a low Christology.

Christocentric and Christotelic Preaching

Having summarized how I find Jesus in the First Testament, I need to explain how I understand Christocentric vs. Christotelic interpretation. Unless we get this right, we will not get Christocentric and Christotelic preaching right. Diagrams #1 and #2 in Figure 1 illustrate the difference between a Christocentric and Christotelic interpretation of Scripture.

Figure 1
A Comparison of Christo-centric and Christo-telic Readings



Based on a particular reading of Jesus' comments to the Emmaus disciples in Luke 24:27 and 44, the Christocentric hermeneutic assumes that all the Scriptures (i.e., every text) speak of him:

> Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:27)

> Jesus said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything that was written about me in the Torah of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44)

These statements undergird the popular statement often attributed to Charles Haddon Spurgeon: when preaching from the First Testament, "I take my text and make a bee-line to the cross."[6] However, we need to stop attributing this to Spurgeon, since there no evidence that he ever said this.[7] Furthermore, the metaphor itself is absurd, because bees rarely fly in straight lines. Nevertheless, because the metaphor matches Spurgeon's hermeneutical style, it has encouraged all sorts of illegitimate and foolish typologizing and allegorizing, drowning out the voice of God and obscuring the true message of First Testament texts.[9]

The use of Jesus' statements to defend Christocentric interpretation of all First Testament texts violates the grammar of the Greek. In Luke 24:27 (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γραφαῖς τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ) the evangelist did not say that all the Scriptures speak of Christ, but that he explained those texts that spoke of him from all the Scriptures. If we recognize Jesus as the embodiment of YHWH, his comments make perfect sense. However, if we interpret this

statement with a disciplined Christocentric hermeneutic, the explicitly or implicitly royal messianic texts that Jesus might have had in mind are limited—excluding entire books like Leviticus, Judges, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Esther and Jonah. One wonders what First Testament authors would say about the way we force their writings anachronistically to say all sorts of things that they would not and could not have imagined. And we do this in the name of the divine author of all Scripture.

Applying what we have learned from speech act theory, in terms of locution, I agree that what the human author said the divine author said. However, to many there was no connection between the illocutions (intended meanings) of these two authors. This has led to all sorts of bizarre perlocutions, which typically say more about the interpreters' ingenuity than the text itself. Through Ezekiel, who received his pronouncements directly from God, YHWH had a word for modern-day charlatans:

> "Declare to the self-inspired prophets (וְאָמַרְתָּ לִנְבִיאֵי מִלִּבָּם):Hear the message of YHWH! Thus has Adonay YHWH declared: Oy vey[10] to the foolish prophets, who follow their own imagination/impulse (הוֹלְכִים אַחַר רוּחָם), and have seen nothing at all!" (Ezek 13:2–3).

It is no wonder that our Jewish friends are upset with us; we have hijacked their Scriptures, and made every text about Christ, often paying no attention to what the divine and human authors originally intended.[11]

What then is the solution? Certainly not a repudiation of the messianic witness of the First Testament, nor the rejection of Christ as the one who both fulfills specific messianic prophecies and embodies the fulfillment of the whole promise of the Hebrew Bible. Nor is it found in an exclusively grammatical historical interpretation of each text of Scripture in isolation from other Scriptures. No, the Bible (First and New Testaments) tells a single story of God's gracious plan of redeeming the cosmos from sin and the effects of the rebellion of those created as his images and commissioned to govern the world on his behalf. That story climaxes in Jesus, whose work is accomplished in two identifiable phases: first, in the incarnation 2000 years ago, when through his death he dealt sin and all the forces of evil a mortal blow, and through the power of his resurrection was exalted as the Son of God. And now we wait for phase two, when he will return and recreate the heavens and the earth in all their original and this time irrevocable perfection

and glory. This is the story.

Not every text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ as Messiah, but every text presents a vital part of that story of Jesus, "who is also called the Christ." We may often grasp the Christological significance of a First Testament text only with hindsight. Some texts introduce the vocabulary that will be necessary for interpreting later events. I have already alluded to the exodus language of Matthew 1:21: "He shall save his people from their sins." This statement introduces a new notion: salvation from sin. Whereas the First Testament frequently speaks of deliverance (יָשַׁע) from the fury of YHWH, Psalm 130:8 is the only text that associates the root פָּדָה, "to redeem" with sin, as if sin is an enslaving force. Psalm 103:3 speaks of "pardoning" (סָלַח) with reference to (לְ) all your iniquities, which Charles A. Briggs associated with "forgiveness" (סְלִיחָה) in vv. 3–4.[12] Psalm 3:9[8] comes close to using exodus language for YHWH's solution of humans' sin problem:

> Deliver me (הַצִּילֵנִי) from all my transgressions (פְּשָׁעַי).
> Do not make me the scorn of the fool!

Ezekiel also comes close in two statements that employ the root יָשַׁע, "to save":

> "I will save (הוֹשִׁיעַ) you from all your defilements (טֻמְאוֹתֵיכֶם)." (Ezek 36:29)
> "I will save (הוֹשִׁיעַ) them from all their apostasies (מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיהֶם) by which they sinned." (Ezek 37:23)

Remarkably, although references to "being saved from slavery in Egypt" pervade the First Testament, it never talks about "being saved from sin." As H. Wheeler Robinson noted long ago, "It [redemption] always marks deliverance from some tangible and visible menace, which may or may not be regarded as a consequence of the suppliant's sin."[13] Does Matthew's application of the exodus verb of salvation (יָשַׁע) for sin mean that the original exodus looked forward to the work of Christ? No, but in the wise and all-knowing providence of God, it provided the vocabulary with which Jesus and the apostles could later interpret the work of Christ.

We could make similar comments about Israel's sacrificial system. The Pentateuch leaves few if any hints that when Moses or the original Israelites

brought their sin offerings they were looking forward to a coming sacrificial Messiah. Isaiah 53 links the revelatory traditions of Messiah and sacrificial offerings for the first time. If anything, the tabernacle and its rituals pointed up, to a heavenly reality (Exod 25:1–9, 40), which we know from the NT to involve the eternal sacrifice of Jesus, slain before the foundation of the world. The author of Hebrews certainly understood the sacrificial system this way. Despite the lack of First Testament evidence for ancient Israelites seeing their sacrifices as pointing to a future earthly event, trusting in the word of YHWH, the faithful knew that if their lives were in order and if they brought their sacrifices with contrite hearts and according to God's revealed way of forgiveness, they were forgiven (Leviticus 4–6). That is what mattered. Few will have grasped that when the High Priest presented replica sacrifices in a replica sanctuary real forgiveness was theirs because of work of the true sacrificial Savior, who would appear on the scene a millennium later. However, Psalm 32:1 reminds us that real sinners celebrated the grace of real forgiveness.

Before I apply my hermeneutic to Genesis 15:1–6, I must address one additional issue. Sermons have many functions. When we preach evangelistically, we need to follow the paradigm and kerygma of the apostles and preach Jesus Christ crucified and risen again. However, not all sermons serve primarily evangelistic purposes. Preachers proclaim the truths of Scripture to bring about repentance, to reveal God, to encourage and guide believers in a life of godliness, to console those who grieve, and to present hope for the future by effecting transformation in the present. Sometimes the goal of a sermon may be simply to help people read the Scriptures better. Failure to mention Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins and whose resurrection gives us hope in life eternal in a sermon does not mean we have not preached a Christian sermon. When I preach YHWH, I preach the God who was incarnate in Jesus Christ, whether I name him by his NT name or not. What is important for me and for my congregation is that they grasp that every text of Scripture has significance in the light of the climax of the story. This means that rather than reading the Scriptures backwards I read them forwards, interpreting Isaiah in the light of Moses, and Luke and Paul in the light of Moses and Isaiah. If tensions between earlier and later pronouncements arise, I may not force the former to mean what later authors used them for rhetorically, but I must inquire regarding the context of their work how later biblical

authors can do with earlier texts what they appear to be doing. Moses does not need to account to Paul, but Paul needs to account to Moses, and if he contradicts Moses, he is the one under the anathema of Deuteronomy 13 (cf. Gal 1:8–9). Later revelation cannot correct, annul, or contradict earlier revelation. God does not speak out of two sides of his mouth. He never needs to say, "Oops! I was wrong. That plan did not work, so I will replace it with a new one." To resolve the tension, we need to understand the circumstances underlying the NT text and grasp the rhetorical intentions of the author. We make a generic mistake if we imagine Paul and the apostles as seminary students writing exegesis papers on First Testament texts or seminary professors writing theological papers to read at conferences sponsored by the Evangelical Theological Society or the Society of Biblical Literature. They were preachers and pastors eager for transformation in the minds and lives of their hearers through the proclamation of the gospel in all its dimensions and as graciously revealed over time and in history.

Preaching Genesis 15:1–6 Christotelically

There is much more to say on the theory of Christotelic, as opposed to Christocentric reading of Scripture, but part of our assignment for this essay is to show how this might be done with a specific text, Genesis 15:1–6. How might a Christotelic reading of this passage determine the goals of and shape a sermon on this text? Of course, that depends on the function of the sermon. I am sure I could find a way to base an evangelistic sermon on this passage, but for this moment I shall assume the sermon is part of a regular worship service. As I have argued in my book on worship, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship*, I view the regular gathering of God's people to worship as their response to a gracious invitation to an audience with God. This means that the primary participants are the divine King and believers. In an audience with a superior, by definition, what the superior has to say is always more important that what the subordinates say. This means above all that when I preach, people need to hear me only to the extent that I speak as the mouthpiece of God. Preaching is not about cleverly crafted presentations displaying my rhetorical skills, but about getting out of the way and letting the Scriptures speak, for in the Scriptures we have the only reliable and normative divine word for the people of God.

This means that my goal in preaching Genesis 15:1–6 is not to "make a bee-line for the cross," unless of course the text sends me there—which it does not—but to stand before this passage with reverence and awe and listen to what God is telling us all about himself, the world, the condition of humanity, and if possible, the world to come. But this calls for clarity in our minds whether we preach a passage, or we preach the message of a passage. Strictly speaking, the former would require we preach the Hebrew text, since of necessity all translation involves interpretation, hence a significant step removed from the original inspired text. However, as I understand it, the latter actually involves expository preaching.

Many Christocentric sermons I have heard are anything but expository. The problem with a Christocentric hermeneutic surfaces early in the history of the church. Here is an excerpt from a sermon on our passage by the fourth century CE preacher Ambrose:

> And how did Abraham's progeny spread? Only through the inheritance he transmitted in virtue of faith. On this basis the faithful are assimilated to heaven, made comparable to the angels, equal to the stars. That is why he said, so will your descendants be. And "Abraham," the text says, "believed in God." What exactly did he believe? Prefiguratively that Christ through the incarnation would become his heir. In order that you may know that this was what he believed, the Lord says, "Abraham saw my day and rejoiced." For this reason, "he reckoned it to him as righteousness," because he did not seek the rational explanation but believed with great promptness of spirit.[14]

Really? The text offers no hint whatsoever that this was either what Abram was thinking or what the author of this text (human or divine) had in mind. But this hijacking of the Scriptures was of a piece, not only with Ambrose's virulent anti-Semitism,[15] but later also of Luther's repugnant disposition toward and treatment of the Jews of his day.[16] On the subject of Christocentric preaching from the First Testament, Luther commented disparagingly:

> "Here [in the OT] you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds [Luke 2:12]. Simple and lowly are these swaddling clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them" (*Word and Sacrament I,* 236).

Next to allegorical exegesis this has been the greatest cause for the veiling of the message of First Testament narratives. Jesus is indeed the *telos* of the Torah, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, but as F. W. Farrar declared 150 years ago,

> It is an exegetical fraud to read developed Christian dogmas between the lines of Jewish narratives. It may be morally edifying, but it is historically false to give to Genesis the meaning of the Apocalypse, and to the Song of Songs that of the first epistle of John.[17]

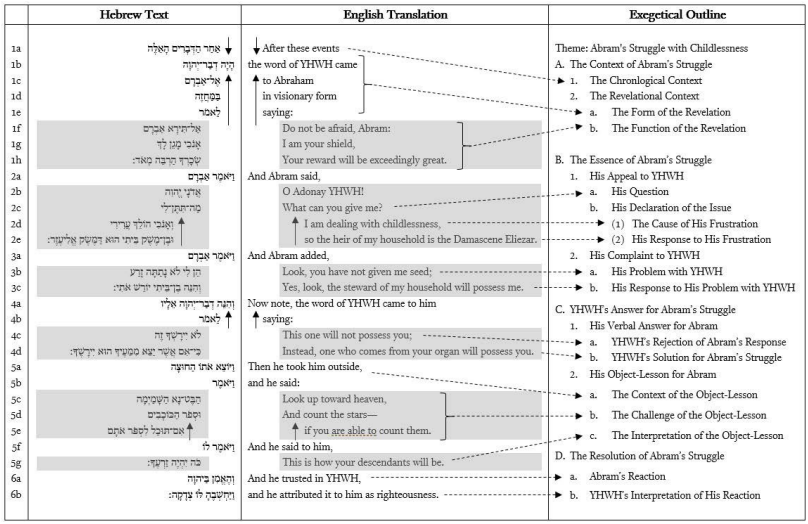
This hermeneutic continues to undermine evangelicals' credibility in our time: we are dishonest, fraudulent interpreters. We read into a text something it never intended to say. For this reason, the real First Testament has become a dead book and our preaching lacks authority. We have veiled the message of the inspired authors with four or five layers of trivia and speculation. From the perspective of the divine author of Scripture, Jesus Christ is the heart and goal of all revelation (cf. Luke 24:25–35). This is an underlying assumption of Christian exegesis, but it is not the starting point of biblical analysis. How Jesus fits into the message of Genesis 15:1–6 is an important question, but I cannot answer it until I have dealt with the other issues.

In preparing to preach this or any other narrative passage, first I need to attend carefully to *how* a passage speaks (see Table 1) and then ask *what* it says about ultimate realities.

Here the narrator paints his portrait of God and Abram with a several different kinds of brush strokes. To grasp his point concerning these characters in the drama I need to pay close attention several features: (1) how the narrator refers to the characters; (2) explicit assessments of the disposition of the characters; (3) his description of the characters' actions; (3) his recollection of the characters' speeches; (4) his recollection of what others say about the characters.[18] With reference to God, of these, only (2) is missing in Gen 15:1–6, but it is there with reference to Abram.

The Portrayal of YHWH in Genesis 15:1–6

Table 1: ***A Discourse/Syntactical Diagram of Genesis 15:1–6***



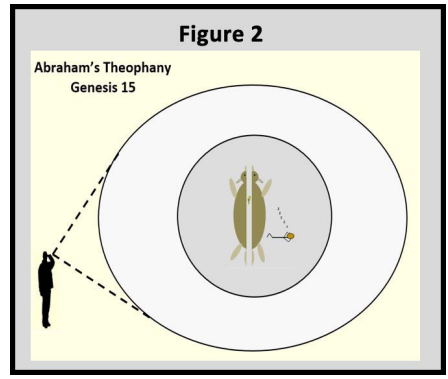
The Narrator's Designations for God

The patriarchal narratives of Genesis 11:26–35:29 refer to God by several different epithets, each with its own significance: אֱלֹהִים ("God," 100+), אֵל (El, 15x), עֶלְיוֹן ("Most High," Gen 14:18, 19, 20, 22), שַׁדַּי ("Shadday," 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25), קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ ("Creator/Possessor of Heaven and Earth," 14:19, 22), שֹׁפֵט כָּל־הָאָרֶץ ("the Judge of the whole earth," Gen 18:25), and of course, יהוה ("YHWH," 100+). Remarkably, although characters in the narrative will address YHWH as אֲדֹנָי ("Lord, Sovereign") seven times (15:2, 8; 18:3, 27, 31; 19:18; 20:4), the narrator never does. Here the narrator identifies God only by his personal and covenant name, YHWH, which he does three times (vv. 1, 4, 6). Apparently the patriarchs were not aware of the significance of the name (Exod 6:3). However, through the events associated with the exodus (Exod 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46; Deut 4:35, 39) and Israel's experience of divine mercy in the wake of the golden calf affair (Exod 34:6–7), whatever the etymology of the name, their descendants would learn that the name signified "YHWH as Savior" (Exod 2:17; 14:30; Deut 33:29; cf. Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6).[19] And with hindsight, this provides the first clue to this text's Christotelic significance.

The angel's commentary on the name Jesus in Matthew 1:21 invites Mary and Matthew's hearers to interpret "Jesus" (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) as the NT equivalent of the First Testament YHWH, an interpretation that repeated explicit identifications of Jesus with YHWH confirms (John 1:23; Rom 10:13; 1 Cor 8:6; Phil 2:11). This means that the person who encounters Abram in this text is none other than Jesus, who later in time and space embodied divine glory, grace, and fidelity (John 1:14, 17).

The Narrator's Description of Divine Actions

YHWH's most notable actions here involve communication. Four times the narrator notes that YHWH spoke (אָמַר, vv. 1e, 4b, 5b, 5d). He adds drama to the image by (1) twice using what we refer to as the prophetic "word event formula, "The word of YHWH came to Abram" (אֶל־אַבְרָם/אֵלָיו דְּבַר־יְהוָה, vv. 1b–c, 4a–b), as if Abram encountered some tangible object; (2) noting that the speech act transpired in visionary form (מַחֲזֶה); and (3) using the optic deictic particle, הִנֵּה, "See, look!" (4a). If we consider the entire chapter, which this episode introduces, this visionary event was extremely complex: Abram was both inside and outside the vision, and God appeared within another revelation of himself (Fig. 2). That YHWH appeared to Abram at all, and that he spoke with him "face to face" is remarkable. But YHWH did more than merely appear or speak. He also took him outside, and given his comment in verse 5, he drew his attention to the heavens.



The conceptual and lexical linkage between the prophetic word event formula and the incarnation, as described by John is striking, though we may debate its precise significance. In the Latter Prophets and elsewhere where Hebrew דָּבָר, "word, declaration, matter, thing, event" occurs, LXX usually rendered the expression as *logos*. However, the frequency with which the present ῥῆμα appears in the Greek rendering of this formula suggests the alternation is stylistic, depending on the preference of the

translator. Conceptually John 1:14 and 17 clearly echo and adapt the formula for new purposes:

> The Word (λόγος = דָּבָר) became flesh and dwelt (ἐγένετο = הָיָה) among us, and we have seen his glory (v. 14)

> For the Torah was given through (διὰ) Moses; grace and truth happened (ἐγένετο= הָיָה) through Jesus Christ (v. 17).

Going beyond the revelation that Abram received, Jesus Christ represented not merely divine verbal communication, but the embodiment of God, bringing the light of God's grace to the world (John 1:1–6).

The narrator concretizes YHWH's action in relation to Abram by specifying the context: "after these events" (אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, v. 1), that is, after the patriarch's gallant rescue of Lot from an alliance of Mesopotamian invaders (13:1–16), and his refusal to capitalize on the gratitude of the Canaanite beneficiaries (vv. 21–24). The narrator strengthens the linkage between chapters 14 and 15 with a series of lexical and conceptual allusions: the verb יצא, "to go out," "to bring out" in hiphil (14:8, 17, 18; 15:4, 5, 7, 14); "possessions" (רְכוּשׁ, 14:11–12, 14, 21; 15:14); the root שׁלם ("king of Salem," 14:8; שָׁלֵם, "complete" (15:16); the root צדק, "righteousness" (Melchizedek, "king of righteousness," 14:18; צְדָקָה, "righteousness," 15:6); the root מגן (מְגַן, "to hand over," 14:20; מָגֵן, "shield," 15:1g); the notion of recompense for effort (14:22–24; 15:1h).[20]

YHWH's final action was mental and judicial: he recognized Abram's faith, and credited his response as "righteousness" (1:6c). I leave a discussion of the meaning of צְדָקָה for later, but for now we observe that YHWH not only observes human actions and is aware of their mental acts, but that he also assesses them properly.

The Narrator's Recollections of Divine Speech.

As is typical of biblical Hebrew narrative,[21] speeches dominate this text—four by YHWH and two by Abram. The first address is thoroughly ambiguous (v. 1): "Do not be afraid, Abram: I am your shield; your reward will be exceedingly great." Of what was Abram afraid, that YHWH needed to assure him of his protection? Did he fear the enemies whom he has just

defeated will return? Or was he fearful of his own future in an alien land, having been severed from all the bases of security in ancient times: his homeland (אַרְצְךָ), his relatives (מוֹלַדְתְּךָ), and his domestic economic unit (בֵּית אָבִיךָ, 12:1).

What sort of reward (שָׂכָר) had YHWH promised Abram? Compensation for the booty that he had just been offered but had rejected (14:21–24)? The opening "after these things" might suggest this. However, Abram's objection in verse 2 points in a different direction. Abram had stepped out in faith and given up his past because YHWH had promised him a new future, making a great nation of his descendants, and giving him a cosmic mission of blessing (12:2–3), and had later specified that his descendants would possess the entire land of Canaan (12:2; 13:14–17). Presumably the compensation of which YHWH spoke represented the reward for his faith previously demonstrated: land and progeny—nothing more, nothing less.

The questions that YHWH's ambiguous promise in the first speech had raised the following three speeches answered with crystal clarity (vv. 4c–d, 5c–e, 5g). Rejecting Abram's proposed solution to his childlessness, with graphic concreteness he answered Abram's charge that YHWH had failed to give him seed. Although usually translated as "offspring" or "descendants," we should interpret the word זֶרַע more crassly. Ancient Hebrews considered offspring and descendants as the fruit of the womb (פְּרִי־בָטֶן).[22] In their prescientific world, conception involved implanting male seed (זֶרַע) in the fertile soil of a female's womb.[23] YHWH's answer to Abram is graphic and earthy: "one who comes out of your organ" (מִמֵּעֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא) a euphemism for the penis.[24] However, not only will Abram have *a* seed (in form יֵצֵא in v. 4d is a collective singular), his progeny will be innumerable like the stars of the sky (v. 5). YHWH's concluding declaration is colophonic: "This is how your descendants will be" (זַרְעֶךָ כֹּה יִהְיֶה, v. 5g). This heavenly analogy, which will be echoed later (22:17; 26:4; Exod 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chr 27:23), finds earthly counterparts in "like the dust of the earth" (הָאָרֶץ עָפָר, 13:16; 28:14), and "like the sand of the sea[shore]" (חוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם/ חוֹל הַיָּם, 33:13 and 22:17 respectively).

The Narrator's Recollection of Another's Speech.

This issue need not detain us long, for Abram's comments in verses 2–3 say more about him than about God. On the one hand, he acknowledged

YHWH as his [divine] Suzerain (אֲדֹנָי יהוה).[25] On the other hand, he accused him of not having carried out his previous promises. This accusation functions as a thesis statement to the conversation, to which YHWH responded in dramatic form with a counter-thesis, though it is cast as a promise whose fulfillment Abram must await. But what does all this say about YHWH?

First and foremost, YHWH's comment reminded Abram and reminds us that YHWH is responsive to the anxieties of his people, and as a divine Shepherd, he tries to calm his sheep. He will keep his word. The plan of making Abram a blessing to the entire world depended upon progeny who could scatter to the ends of the earth and thereby serve as agents of blessing. YHWH's use of the collective "seed" in vv. 4d and 5g suggests the involvement of his descendants as a whole—the fulfillment of which we can see in the incredible contribution Israelites and their successors the Jews have made to the advance of civilization and culture. However, this contrasts with the use of the singular verb and suffix in 22:17c (**אֹיְבָיו וְיִרַשׁ** זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁעַר), which points to a single person in the future who will fulfill the mandate originally given to Adam and Eve to subdue and rule over the earth, and David's later recognition of the irrevocable covenant that YHWH made with him and his descendants with "Now this is the Torah of humanity" (וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הָאָדָם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, 2 Sam 7:19). David's concluding double divine address, "Adonay YHWH!" reinforces this association. Thus, while we may legitimately treat Genesis 22:17 as a Christological text, for this would indeed involve a royal figure, the opposite is true in Genesis 15:1–6. Whereas Abram's response to his frustration over his childlessness was to name an *individual* as his heir, the aim of YHWH's response was to get him to think in terms of an innumerable host of descendants.

The Portrayal of Abram in Genesis 15:1–6

To determine the narrator's disposition toward Abram we need to ask the same questions we had asked of YHWH.

The Narrator's Designations for Abram

As the narrator wrote this account, he understood that YHWH would

eventually change the name Abram, which means "exalted father," to Abraham, "father of a multitude" (17:5). Indeed, later tradition would know him only as Abraham.[26] The use of Abram here is obviously significant, for it identifies a man whose faith was immature—he still doubted YHWH's fidelity to his promise of innumerable progeny—and whose status with YHWH and the world had not yet been formalized through the covenant ritual that followed in verses 7–21, and would be completed thirteen years later in chapter 17.

As was the custom in the ancient world, people of superior rank had the right to change the names of their administrative and social inferiors,[27] and in so doing in effect change their identities. In the Abram-Abraham account, Abram's change of status would transpire in two stages: YHWH's official reception of Abram as his covenant partner in 15:7–21, and Abram's formal acceptance of the role of covenant partner in 17:22–27 and the role of representative of the heavenly court in 17:1 (v. 1, "Walk before me"). To this point YHWH had never spoken of a covenant; Abram had only the verbal promise of divine blessing, which may explain his accusation in 15:3.

The name Abram appears three times here, but only in the first half (vv. 1c, 2a, 3a). The duplication in verses 2a and 3a is odd. Why could the narrator not have cast verses 2b–e and 3b–c as a single speech? Presumably he intended to highlight the intensity of the patriarch's frustration, a disposition expressed by the deictic particle (הֵן/וְהִנֵּה, "Look!/Now look!") that introduces the two lines of the second speech (v. 3b–c).[28] As further evidence of the narrator's strategy, instead of referring to Abram by his name, after verse 3 he only uses the personal pronoun "him" (vv. 4a, 5a, 5f, 6c). This move focuses hearers' attention away from Abram and onto YHWH.

The Narrator's Description of Abram's Actions

The narrator's portrayal of Abram's actions in verses 1–6 is extra-ordinary in that the only actions he attributes to the man are speech acts (vv. 2a, 3a), and a mental/dispositional act (v. 6). We will consider the former in a moment, but for now I shall focus on the latter: Abram trusted in YHWH. Although this was obviously not the first time Abram exhibited faith (cf. 12:4), this is the first occurrence of the verb אמן, which in the

hiphil stem means "to demonstrate confidence in," with the object of that confidence (here YHWH) being introduced by בְּ + personal name. The present comment is striking, because it marks a rare example in biblical narrative of the narrator explicitly declaring the disposition of a character. In this account we might have expected YHWH to offer his own assessment.[29]

The Narrator's Recollection of Abram's Speech

Having noted that Abram's principal actions were speech acts, it remains to examine what Abram's words say about the man. On the surface, Abram's opening invocation, "O Sovereign YHWH," appropriately reflectshis recognition of his status as the vassal *vis-à-vis* YHWH. However, in his statements that follow his frustrations with his superior were on transparent display. First, with his rhetorical question, "What can you give me?" he expressed doubt regarding YHWH's ability to solve the problem of his persistent childlessness.[30] As noted earlier, the question is ambiguous, but the following statement clarifies his issue. The Hebrew וְאָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי, translates literally, "Now I walk/go childless," and connotes life as a journey,[31] perhaps even a pilgrimage. However, here the sense is, "By the way, my childlessness persists!" Because Abram had already designated Eliezar, his household steward, as his legal heir, he had obviously assumed the answer to the question, "What can you give me?" that is, "What can you do for me?" to be "Nothing!"

Abram's second speech was downright accusatory; in exasperation he declared, "Look! You have given not give me seed!" We may assume that in his mind he added "as you promised!" He reiterated emphatically that he had taken matters into his own hands. These are not the words of faith or of righteousness, but the declarations of a doubting and frustrated man.

The Narrator's Recollection of Another's Speech

In his verbal responses, YHWH never addressed Abram by name. Instead he immediately addressed his complaint. The first address (v. 4c–d) creates the impression that the patriarch would indeed have progeny to inherit his estate. He rejected Abram's solution to his childlessness (naming Eliezer as his heir), which reflected a lack of faith, though in that cultural context was perfectly legal. YHWH promised him an heir who would be his physical

progeny. Abram probably concluded that YHWH was speaking of a single son, which explains why God later added an object lesson to his rhetoric. After inviting the Patriarch to look up at the heavens and count the stars—which of course is impossible—he declared in three simple words, זַרְעֲךָ כֹּה יִהְיֶה , "This is how your seed will be."

What do these conversations say about Abram? If Abram's statements reflect a man with a very deficient faith, YHWH's reactions function both as a rebuke for his faithlessness and as an answer to his doubts. But YHWH's speeches offer no hint of how Abram responded. For that we must hear the narrator, who remarkably has the last word on Abram in this short episode.

The Narrator's Assessment of Abram

The narrator's assessment of Abram in verse 6 became the foundation for Paul's watchword in his debates with the Judaizers, and the watchword of the Reformation, particularly in Martin Luther's debates with the Roman Catholic authorities: "The righteous shall live by faith [as opposed to works]" (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; cf. Heb 10:38). However, this statement was not original with Paul, but adapted from the LXX translation of Hab 2:4 (see Table 2).

Habakkuk 2:4 (MT)	**Habakkuk 2:4 (LXX)**	**Romans 1:17**	**Galatians 3:11**
וְצַדִּיק בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה	ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται	ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.	ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται
But the righteous shall live by their faithfulness.	But the righteous shall live by my faith.	But the righteous shall live by faith.	The righteous shall live by faith.

Table 2: ***A Synopsis of "The just shall live by faith" Texts***

In addition to recognizing Habakkuk's modifications of the statement, in assessing later use of earlier texts we must be cautious about imposing alien elements upon the original. While we interpret later texts in the light of earlier texts, we may not force onto earlier texts meanings that were irrelevant to the original situation. Often earlier locutions provided later prophets and apostles convenient verbal instruments for communicating a new and quite different message. However, if we would preach Genesis 15:6, we must preach Genesis 15:6, and not some message that later biblical

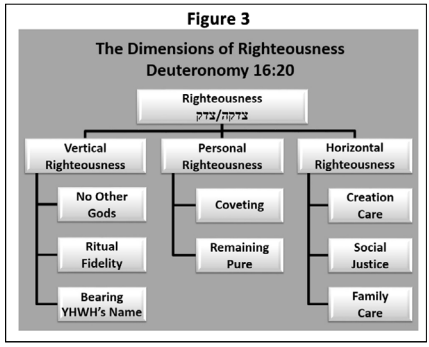
authors adopted and adapted for quite different polemical purposes. What then does this statement mean?

I begin with the context. The issue in Genesis 15:1–6 is not personal salvation from sin, but the sustainability of YHWH's plan of redemption and Abram's role in it. In the end the narrator recognized Abram's faith in YHWH to fulfill his promise to give him progeny. Because ancient Israelites thought little of "an eternal afterlife," but perceived themselves as living on in their children,[32] we might think of this as the key to Abram's eternal life. However, YHWH would not give Abram progeny for Abram's sake; the point of the divine agenda for the chosen ancestor and his descendants was the removal of the curse from the world and its replacement with the blessing. YHWH's primary goal here was missional, not personal.

Second, we must assess carefully what "righteousness" (צְדָקָה) means in this context. In principle, the word and its cognate form צֶדֶק refer not simply to a status or state, but to behavior in accord with an established standard.[33] Correspondingly, a צַדִּיק ("righteous person") lives according to the established standard (Gen 6:9; 7:1; Deut 32:4 [of YHWH]; Ezek 18:5, 9, 24, 26), as opposed to the רָשָׁע ("wicked person," Gen 18:23, 25; Ezek 18:20, 21, 23, 24, 27), who does.[34] In the First Testament, the standard is typically the covenant that governs YHWH's relationship with his vassal Israel, and finds expression in the watchword of Deuteronomy's covenantal ethic (16:20):

צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ

> "Righteousness, only righteousness you shall pursue that you may live and possess the land that YHWH your god is giving you."[35]



Here "righteousness" functions as a comprehensive expression for demonstrated adherence to the covenant in all its dimensions

(see Fig. 3)

Deuteronomy 6:25 provides the closest analogue to Gen 15:6 in the First Testament:

וּצְדָקָה תִּהְיֶה־לָּנוּ כִּי־נִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּנוּ׃

And righteousness will be credited to us [lit. "It will be righteousness for us"] if we keep [the covenant] by doing this entire command before YHWH our God, just as he has charged us.

Moses could have recast the first clause in Hebrew by using the verb found in Genesis 15:6:. וְחָשְׁבָהּ יהוה לָנוּ צְדָקָה, "and YHWH will attribute righteousness to us." Unlike the assessment of Noah in 6:9 (אִישׁ צַדִּיק; cf. 2 Sam 4:11), in Genesis 15:6 the narrator has not declared that Abram was righteous or blameless in toto, but that the present act of faith was a righteous act, in the same category as that of the hypothetical creditor who returns the garment that a poor man has given him as security for a loan (Deut 24:13):

הָשֵׁב תָּשִׁיב לוֹ אֶת־הַעֲבוֹט כְּבֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְשָׁכַב בְּשַׂלְמָתוֹ וּבֵרַכְךָ וּלְךָ תִּהְיֶה צְדָקָה
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, so he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness for you before YHWH your God.

The structure of the final clause differs from Genesis 15:6 but exhibits significant links with the statement in Deuteronomy 6:25:

Deut 24:13	וּלְךָ תִּהְיֶה צְדָקָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
Deut 6:25	וּצְדָקָה תִּהְיֶה־לָּנוּ . . . לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
Gen 15:6	וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה׃

Some argue that Abram, who lived *ante legem* (before the law), and Moses,

who lived *sub lege* (under the law), represented two dramatically different approaches to faith and godliness. According to John Sailhamer, Abraham embodied the divinely approved pattern of a life of faith, while Moses demonstrated the inevitable failure of a life driven by law.[36] However, based upon an analysis of the conceptual and lexical links between the patriarchal narratives and Deuteronomy, in a recent essay I have argued that the author of the former intentionally casts Abraham as the paragon of faith and righteousness as defined by YHWH's covenant with Israel generally and laid out in detail in Moses' preaching in Deuteronomy (cf. Gen 26:4–5).[37]

This was not the first and would not be the last time that Abram/Abraham proved his righteousness by faith. Although the word הֶאֱמִין is absent elsewhere in Genesis 12–14, obviously his abandonment of his homeland (12:4–7), at the command of YHWH but without any idea what YHWH meant by "the land that I will show you," was an act of faith. So was his courage in rescuing Lot and the Canaanites from the Mesopotamian menace, and his refusal to capitalize on another person's gratitude in chapter 14.

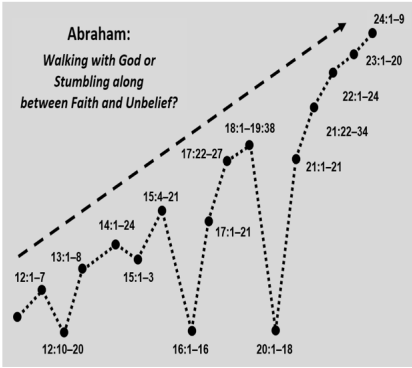
However, the most dramatic moment of faith would come in chapter 22. To Abraham, YHWH's demand that he sacrifice Isaac must have been preposterous, especially since this episode happened immediately after YHWH had reaffirmed Isaac as the key to Abraham's future and to the promise (21:12). The narrator casts the event as a test (נִסָּה), but what was YHWH testing? In the event, YHWH declared his verdict on the patriarch's performance as follows: "Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (Gen 22:12). As is often the case elsewhere, here "fear" (Hebrew יָרֵא) does not mean fright, but "trusting awe" or "awed trust," or even "trusting allegiance."[38] Returning to Genesis 15:1–6, having observed Abram demonstrate faith and in so doing also his righteousness, YHWH could get on with the agenda of covenant ratification, which is what happens in the remainder of the chapter.

Conclusion

How then shall we preach Genesis 15:1–6? I have two responses: First,

interpreting this passage within the context of the broader Patriarchal Narratives, we preach the faithfulness of God who is determined to rescue his world from the ravages of sin, and is determined to use human beings—representatives of the Adamic race that is responsible for the problem—to accomplish that agenda. However, the candidates for the privilege all have feet of clay, and when God calls human beings to serve him, he does not transform them into robots (Fig. 5). Instead, he works patiently in them and with them to accomplish his purposes. He neither glosses over human frailties, nor discards in the trash heap of history those whose faith and performance are less than perfect. In his mercy, he calls flawed people, and installs them as agents of the heavenly court.

Figure 5



Second, we preach both the privilege and the burden of being called to serve as agents of the heavenly court. On the one hand, there is no higher honor than to serve in the Creator of heaven and earth's grand scheme of rescuing the cosmos, and with it the human population, from the effects of sin and the fury of God. But God does not call us according to our gifts; rather he grants us the gifts—even the gift of faith—in accordance with the calling. On the other hand, it is Adonay YHWH, the Sovereign Lord who graciously and sovereignly calls us. We are called to be his vassals, which, as we learn from 17:1, requires us to represent him well, with blameless character and responsible performance of duty. While faith may be discussed as a disposition, it is never perceived in scripture as a mystical quality nor primarily as an interior state. It is a jack-in-the-box that must be demonstrated in action observable to a watching world, and certainly to God.

Where is Christ in all this? I see no hand here pointing to a future eschatological Messiah. On the contrary, this passage obscures the individualized messianic tradition, as it will be played out. YHWH's earthy

description of Abram's progeny, as "that which issues from your organ," stands in sharpest contrast to the angel's announcement to Joseph: "That which has been conceived in her [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit." To be sure, via the lengthy line of descendants listed in Matthew's genealogy, Jesus is the climactic seed of Abram, but in the end, amazingly, the last link in this chain does not "issue from" a man's loins.

And where do we find ourselves in all this? The answer to this question is what excites me about this text. At this moment all Abram had on his mind was physical progeny. But with hindsight we link this text to YHWH's promise to make Abram and his descendants a blessing on a global scale, and we recognize that we are part of the fulfillment of this promise. Through the seed of Abram the curse has been lifted from us gathered here, and God has lavished on us his blessings not only in heavenly places, but here on earth. But there is more. Paul tells us in Romans 9–11 that I, a Gentile, have been grafted into the tree that represents Abram's heritage (Rom 9:4–5), which gives me enough reason to exclaim "God blessed forever! Amen?" (v. 5). But I am not only a beneficiary of this heritage. As a child of Abraham by faith I have also been grafted into the Abrahamic and ultimately the Israelite commission—to be an agent of blessing to the world.

In the kind providence of God, four days after I presented an abbreviated version of this paper to the Evangelical Theological Society in Providence, Rhode Island, it pleased God to send me to Hong Kong for a week of ministry, and three days after my return on November 30, I was off to Moscow for a week of ministry in the land of my father's birth. I was not a tourist on personal self-indulgent vacations (December is not the time to go to Moscow!), but went as a seed of Abraham. In his mercy YHWH had chosen me, not only to be his treasured possession (סְגֻלָּה), but also that just as he had commissioned Israel to do (Exod 19:4–6; Deut 16:19), I might proclaim the excellencies of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9–10). Hallelujah! What a salvation! And what a Savior!

---

[1] This is an expanded version of a paper presented on November 16, 2017, to the Expository Preaching and Hermeneutics section, chaired by Forrest Weiland, at the annual convention of the Evangelical Theological

Society in Providence, RI. The general theme for the session was "Preaching Christ, the Text, or Something Else?"

[2] 917, according to Bibleworks. Remarkably, in 268 of 566 occurrences of the name in the Gospels, the personal name occurs with the article, ὁ Ἰησοῦς. This occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in Acts 1:1, 11; 17:3. The significance of the name—to distinguish Jesus, the Christ, from others who bore the name (Joshua, Acts 7:45; Jesus, son of Eliezer, Luke 3:29; Jesus also called Justus, Col 4:11) is evident in the Acts references (though the article in the last one is textually uncertain): (1) "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into heaven? This Jesus (οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς), who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11, ESV); (2) "[Paul explained and proved] that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and declared, 'This Jesus ([ὁ] Ἰησοῦς), whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'" (Acts 17:3, ESV modified). Unless otherwise identified, all translations of biblical texts in this essay are my own.

[3] In the Gospels, Christ (χριστός) appears only 54 times, compared to 566 occurrences of Jesus.

[4] See Daniel I. Block, "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah," in *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed., R. S. Hess and M. D. Carroll R.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17–56; idem, "The Spiritual and Ethical Foundations of Messianic Kingship: Deuteronomy 17:14–20," in *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 335–48.

[5] On Jesus as YHWH in Rom 10:13, see Daniel I. Block, "Who do Commentators say 'the Lord' is? The Scandalous Rock of Romans 10:13," in *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (S. E. Porter and E. J. Schnabel, ed.; Texts and Editions of New Testament Study 8; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 173–92.

[6] Lewis A. Drummond (*Spurgeon: The Prince of Preachers* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992], 223) popularized the attribution of this statement to Spurgeon.

[7] This is acknowledged by Christian George, the curator of the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City. See http://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/blog-entries/6-quotes-spurgeon-didnt-say.

[8] Notwithstanding the support for the statement found in a supposedly astute institution, the Gospel Coalition. See Jeramie Rinne @ https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/learning-the-art-of-sermon-application (July 23, 2013). Similarly, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 20–21: "The preaching of the apostles always presented the kerygma—the heart of the gospel. The clear presentation of the gospel must be part of the sermon, no matter the text. As Charles Spurgeon expressed this so eloquently, preach the Word, place it in its canonical context, and "make a bee-line to the cross."

[9] Sidney Greidanus' mere two-page critique of Spurgeon's method (*Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 160–162) fails to call out the flaws in his hermeneutic strongly enough.

[10] Yiddish for אַבֿוי אַוי, which occurs only in Prov 23:29: "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? (NIV).

[11] For a helpful survey of the effect of this popular but contemptuous Christian hermeneutic on Jewish people and the anti-Semitism it has spawned, see Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abram: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 96–100.

[12] Charles A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (International Critical Commentary, 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1907), 2.45.

[13] H. Wheeler Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation in the Actuality of History* (New York: Harper, 1942), 223),

[14] *On Abraham* 1.3.21, as cited by Mark Sheridan, ed., in *Genesis 12–50* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 2; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 32.

[15] Responding to Emperor Theodosius the Great's gracious order that at the bishop's expense Christians rebuild the synagogue that they had destroyed in Callinicum on the Euphrates, Ambrose responded, "There is, then, no adequate cause for such a commotion, that the people should be so severely punished for the burning of a building, and much less since it is the burning of a synagogue, a home of unbelief, a house of impiety, a receptacle of folly, which God Himself has condemned. For thus we read, where the Lord our God speaks by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah: "And I will do to this house, which is called by My Name, wherein ye trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh, and I will cast you forth from My sight, as I cast forth your brethren, the whole seed of Ephraim. And do not thou pray for that people, and do not thou ask mercy for them, and do not come near Me on

their behalf, for I will not hear thee. Or seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah?" (Jer 7:14). God forbids intercession to be made for those." Philip Schaff, ed., Ambrose: Select Works and Letters, Letter XL, accessed November 3, 2017 from http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf210.html.

[16] For an exposure of Luther's shameful anti-Semitism, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 246–68.

[17] F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1886), 334.

[18] On characterization in biblical narrative, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 143–63.

[19] For thorough and convincing study of the significance of the tetragrammaton, YHWH, see Austin Surls, *Making Sense of the Divine Name in the Book of Exodus: From Etymology to Literary Onomastics*, BBRSup 17 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017).

[20] Cf. Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2014), 188.

[21] On the significance of dialogue in biblical narrative, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 79–110.

[22] Gen 30:2; Deut 7:13; 28:4, 11, 18, 53; 30:9; Ps 127:3; Isa 13:18; Hos 9:16; Mic 6:7.

[23] Note the references to semen as שִׁכְבַת־זֶרַע, "discharge of seed," in Lev 15:16, 32; 19:20; 22:4; etc., and to a son as זֶרַע אֲנָשִׁים, "the seed of men," in 1 Sam 1:11. Genesis 3:15, a poetic text, contains the only reference to the זֶרַע אִשָּׁה, "seed of a woman."

[24] HALOT, 609, rightly explains: "that part of the body through which people come into existence."

[25] This form of the double address of YHWH occurs elsewhere in the Pentateuch only in v. 8; Deut 3:24; and 9:26, always within an impassioned conversation with YHWH.

[26] Outside of Gen 11:26–17:5, the name Abram appears only twice in the First Testament, but in both cases the authors note that this was the original name of a man everyone knew as Abraham. The genealogy of 1 Chr 1 names Abraham after Nahor and Terah, but the author adds, "that is Abram" (אַבְרָם הוּא אַבְרָהָם, v. 27). In the poetic ode to YHWH's faithfulness in Israel's history in Neh 9:7, the Levites declared, "You are YHWH, the God who chose Abram, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham."

[27] Cf. Pharaoh's renaming of Joseph as Zaphenath-paneah in Gen 41:44, the renaming of Daniel and his fellow Jews in Babylon in Dan 1:7, and the reference to Esther, as the alternate name for Hadassah, in Esth 2:7.

[28] This interpretation is preferable to Kuruvilla's (*Genesis*, 189), that YHWH reflected his disapproval "of Abraham's rather uncomprehending faithlessness."

[29] As in 22:12. Similarly, Walter Moberly, "Abraham's Righteousness (Genesis XV 6)," in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (VTSup 41; ed., J. A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 103–4.

[30] Hebrew וְאָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי (2d) . Compare the Australian question, "How are you going?" which functions as the equivalent for North American, "How are you doing?"

[31] Thus Bruce K. Waltke, with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 241.

[32] Cf. Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (ed., K. M. Campbell; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 81–82.

[33] It is also used in this sense in Imperial Aramaic, as in the eighth century BCE Samalian Aramaic inscription of Panamuwa II (KAI 215), where צדק /צדקה occurs three times (ll. 1, 11, 19) with this meaning. Note especially line 19: "Because of the loyalty [צדק] of my father and because of my loyalty [צדק], my lord [Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria] has caused me to reign [on the throne] of my father." For the translation, see COS, 2:159–60.

[34] For full development of this behavioral contrast between a righteous man (אִישׁ צַדִּיק) and a wicked man (אִישׁ רָשָׁע), see Ezek 18:3–20. For discussion of this text, see Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 561–80.

[35] English translations persistently mistranslate צֶדֶק here as "justice." Although צֶדֶק/צְדָקָה includes "social justice," the root צדק is much more comprehensive.

[36] John Sailhamer, "Appendix B: Compositional Strategies in the Pentateuch," in *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 272–89.

[37] Daniel I. Block, "In the Tradition of Moses: The Conceptual and Stylistic Imprint of Deuteronomy on the Patriarchal Narratives," in *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 120–22.

[38] For full discussion of the notion of fear in Deuteronomy and its relation to fear elsewhere, see Daniel I.

Block, "The Fear of YHWH: The Theological Tie that Binds Deuteronomy and Proverbs," in *The Triumph of Grace*, 283–311; idem, "The Fear of YHWH as Allegiance to YHWH Alone: "The First Principle of Wisdom in Deuteronomy," in *Interpreting the Old Testament Theologically: Essays in Honor of Willem A. VanGemeren* (ed., Andrew T. Abernethy; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 150–64.

Expository Preaching and Christo-Promise

Elliott E. Johnson

Elliott E. Johnson is Senior Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. He earned his ThD from Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Johnson is the founder of the Asian Theological Seminary and has taught extensively overseas. Dr. Johnson joined the Dallas Theological Seminary as a faculty member in 1972 and as a pastor of a Dallas-area church the same year. He has written numerous articles and a number of books as author such as *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Zondervan, 1990) and *A Dispensational Biblical Theology* (Bold Grace Ministries, 2017); and co-author of *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism* (Kregel, 1999). Dr. Johnson is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society.

Introduction

A preacher committed to expository preaching while also convicted to preach Christ may expect to find problems in preaching Old Testament (OT) texts. With a grammatical-historical hermeneutic guiding the exposition, the problem emerges when the presence of Christ in the text is difficult to substantiate. Charles Ryrie vigorously defended one Gospel present in all Scripture, yet concluded that the object of faith in salvation in every age is God.[1] While that is true, is not Christ also necessary to be included as the object of faith in the Gospel (Gal 3:8, 9)?

Yet the apparent absence of the mention of Christ in the OT is not the clear testimony of the New Testament (NT):

- Revelation 19:10: "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit (or concern) of prophecy."
- Luke 24:27: "beginning in Moses and all the prophets He (Jesus) expounded to them in all the Scripture things concerning himself"

(HCSB).

- 2 Corinthians 1:20: "For everyone of God's promises is 'yes' in Him. Therefore, the 'Amen' is also spoken through him by us for God's glory" (NIV).

Thus prophecy, OT Scripture, and promise, find a central and essential place for Jesus Christ according to the NT.

Willis Beecher recognized the compatibility of the revelation between the testaments when he wrote: "God gave a promise to Abraham, and through him to mankind; a promise eternally fulfilled, and fulfilled in the history of Israel; chiefly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, he being that which is principle in the history of Israel."[2]

Dispensational theology also has recognized the centrality of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12-22). The dispensation of promise introduces promise, which extends throughout the history of the OT until it is fulfilled in the two advents of Jesus Christ in the NT. The addition of law does not revoke the Abrahamic covenant, nor does it cancel the promise (Gal 3:17).

It is the intent of this essay to demonstrate that a *grammatical* interpretation of various OT mentions of promise includes the presence of Christ. It is included as the promise is expressed as progressively unfolding in *history*. The presence of Christ is the result of the author's intent as the promise is expressed in the text and is capable of being understood at that time in history; whether or not we have indication in the text that characters did understand. This thesis is then the basis of expository preaching.

The essay will demonstrate this thesis by developing four ideas:

1. the definition of promise, the definition of Christo-Promise in the Bible,
2. NT texts that interpret OT passages expressing Chris to-Promise, and
3. an expository study of Genesis 15:1-6, giving expression to Christo-Promise.

Promise: A Hermeneutical Consideration

While grammatical-historical are principles guiding an expository treatment of a text, they aren't sufficient to define verbal meaning. E. D.

Hirsch, in *Validity in Interpretation*, proposed a definition: verbal meaning is "a willed-type, which the author expressed (historical) by linguistic symbols (grammatical) and which can be understood by another through symbols (communication)."[3] The focus in communication of verbal meaning does not rest on words alone, separately considered, but on a pattern of words considered together as a type of meaning. This pattern can appear in sentences, or in a paragraph, or in complete compositions. In literature, the distinctive pattern is understood as genre.

In biblical types of meaning, promise, and law are related types of God's communication with Israel. While they are related, they are also distinct types of meaning. A promise is an author's commitment to act in the future on behalf of the stated recipient.[4] A promise is fulfilled when the commitment is fully kept with the stated recipient. On the other hand, a law expresses an author's demand, calling the recipient to commit to act in obedience to the stated obligations. Both are commissive statements, but by distinction, the author or the recipient makes the commitment. We will wait to examine how they are related in biblical revelation.

The definition of promise consists of three traits[5] of the type of promise:

1. the author's commitment to act,
2. the recipient with whom the author desires to keep his commitment, and
3. an assurance[6] that the commitment will be kept as stated.

Christo-Promise: A Biblical Theological Consideration

Creation

In creation, God spoke in fiat statements and the creation came into existence. None of the intervening acts of creation were included between what God said and what appeared in creation. When God spoke concerning Adam, God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule … all the earth … So God created man … He created them male and female. God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth…' (Gen 1:26-28). So in God's stated resolve to create man, he assigned him the role to partner with God and to mediate his rule over creation. Further, God blessed them with the capacity to reproduce and populate the earth; their life would be mankind's life.

Fall

In Adam's disobedience to God's word (Gen 2:17 and 3:6), he accepted the serpent's word. As a result, Adam found himself ruled by the serpent as the serpent assumed the role of the "ruler of this world" (John 11:31). No longer did Adam mediate God's rule, and the curse of death passed through Adam to the human race.

History

From all appearances, God faced an impossible dilemma: would he incorporate fallen mankind to partner with him to restore his original creation plan? Or would God act independent of his creation to restore the creation?

In God's pronouncement of the judgment on the serpent, God incorporated Eve and selected offspring to partner with him (3:15). While judgment of the enemy is a necessary beginning to address the problem of evil, but it will not provide for restoration. So there is a selected line of offspring in the genealogies of Genesis 5:1-42 and 11:10-32 that link the choice of Abram to Adam and Eve. As a descendant of Eve, he is called to partner with the LORD (Gen 12:1a-c), and to receive promises of blessings (Gen 12:1d-3a), and a promise to partner with the LORD in mediating blessings to all the nations (Gen 12:3b). The scope of the promises indicates that God's plan would necessarily extend to include Abram's descendants (Gen 12:7, etc.).

The definition of God's Christo-Promise would also include three traits in this type of promise:

1. In particular, God commits himself to bless all the nations—the future tense of this promised commitment has the force of a prophetic future.
2. The partner chosen to mediate these blessings is Abram. He accepted the role when he began to keep the commands and left the Ur of Chaldees (Heb 11:12) by faith.
3. The assurance that God would keep his promise contained both a certainty and a question bringing uncertainty. The certainty rested in God who made the commitment. He is God who created the heavens and the earth by his word. No obstacle had appeared in creation to indicate that his word would not be effectual in completing

his will. That was certain. But in history, his word is challenged by the serpent's word. Further, God included human partners who had fallen under the serpent's rule. Thus the question to be addressed was: would Abram be willing to believe God's word and be able to obey? That question is answered for Abraham in God's test of his love for God (Gen 22:1-18). His willingness to sacrifice Isaac, in spite of his love for him, was answered with God's enhanced promise: "*because* you have done this thing, and not withheld your only son, I will indeed bless you … all nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring *because* you have obeyed my command" (22:16, 18). God's word included Abraham as a causal link in God's promised commitment.

The question is answered for that generation; but the question remains open to the future. While Abraham was a causal link to future generations, his obedience did not fulfill God's promise. Thus, the certainty of God's promise *necessarily implies* that there will be an ultimate descendent through whom the promise will be fulfilled. Thus the name, Christo-Promise, is chosen from our NT perspective. At the time of its composition by Moses, the promised one is defined as "the descendent through whom all the nations would be blessed."

However, the relationship between *promise* and *law* is also introduced. The *promise* of God assured what in the commitment would be fulfilled. The *law* of God was added to identify the descendant who would be willing and able to obey and thus the one chosen by God to use as the partner (Gal 3:23-24).

The blessing that God promised was progressively unfolded in the life of Abraham's descendants. This may be illustrated in Joshua 10:1-8 as the promise of the land (Gen 12:7) was initially being fulfilled.

1. The LORD promised Joshua: "I have handed them (the five kings) over to you. Not one of them will be able to stand against you (10:8). Then "the LORD fought for Israel" and he caused "the sun to stand still" (10:12-14). "There was no day like it before or after … because the LORD fought for Israel" (10:14).
2. Yet "the LORD listened to the voice of man" (10:14). Joshua and his men fought as partners in the battle. They pursued the enemies and

executed the five kings (10:16-27). This dual causation is consistent with what G. B. Caird described: "In the Bible, predestination is never confused with determinism, God's appointments have absolute performative force, but this causal power never dispenses with human response."[7]

3. The assurance of the promised conquest appeared to Joshua when "the commander of the LORD's army" (Joshua 5:14, 15) met Joshua before any of the battles began. This brief encounter with the armed man suggested that he was none other than the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.[8] This was God's assurance plan to Joshua that the promise would be accomplished.

A NT Consideration of Jesus Christ as Present in OT Promise Texts

The investigation we want to pursue is based on an exposition of OT texts but read from the perspective of the completed revelation. However, the investigation wants to avoid unwarranted reading in NT meaning into OT texts. Such warrant involves grammatical and historical features found in the OT texts.

Two passages anticipate a Coming One following the creation and the fall of Adam from his role as partner and mediator.

First, the creation was formed to be largely self-sustained. Plants were seed-bearing so as to reproduce for the next season. Likewise, birds, fish, animals, and Adam and Eve were promised with the blessing to reproduce offspring in kind (Gen 1:26-28). However, when they transgressed, the offspring received a fallen life of sin, destined to die. Paul drew the following implications based on God's promises in creation: "Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression. He is a *type* of the Coming One" (cf. Rom 5:14 CSB).

Second, the word of creation has also directed man to rule over creation on behalf of God (Gen 1:26-28). Following Adam's fall, Adam was ruled by the serpent and lost the mediated rule entrusted to him. As already indicated, God promised to Eve and entrusted to the chosen ones of her offspring a position of conflict with the serpent which would ultimately be resolved by one offspring (he, him) with the serpent (Gen 3:15c).

Paul identified that ultimate offspring with Jesus Christ. "When the time came for completion, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4). It seems unnecessary to identify the offspring as "born of a woman," since every offspring is born of a woman. So Paul's point is to allude to Genesis 3:15c. He was born to be struck in conflict with the serpent, "to redeem those under the law so that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal 4:5).

In the fallen world that followed, in time God's word of *promise* addressed a chosen partner, and was the principle means by which God would restore the creation and bring it to fulfillment according to the creation design. That plan of restoration began with the word of promise addressed to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. This initial passage will be considered when we exposit Genesis 15:1-6. However, the *promise* to Abraham as originally spoken continued until Abraham's faith is tested in Genesis 22:1-18, which Hebrews 11:19 comments on. F. F. Bruce interprets the verse in Hebrews: "And in fact, so far as Abraham's resolution is concerned, Isaac was as good as dead, and it was practically from the dead that he received him back when his hand was arrested in mid-air and the heavenly voice forbade him to proceed further. He received him back from the dead, says our author, 'in a figure' meaning, probably, in a manner that prefigured the resurrection of Christ."[9]

On the *promise* to David that the LORD would build his house (2 Sam 7:11b-16), the promise of a hope of an eternal house was referred to by David in Psalm 16:10. While there is debate about the interpretation, Peter interprets the verse as talking about a soon resurrection, before the body would see decay (Acts 2:31). David had died; he had not been resurrected yet, since his grave remained to that day. The promise in Psalm 16:10b referred ultimately to Jesus and his resurrection, since the apostles were witnesses of the fact (2:32). While David spoke of *Messiah*, in the progress of revelation, Peter preached *Jesus*, whom God intended to refer to, his anointed heir. Through the resurrection of Jesus, David's house would be established forever, as promised.

In addition to *promise*, God added *law*. It was not to replace promise but to direct Israel to One coming who would partner with God in *promise*. This Coming One would enable God to keep his commitment to bless all nations through his partner. The Coming One would also resolve the intention of

the *law*. Caird focused on the issue: "Many performatives depend for their effectiveness (but not for their validity) on a response. An order does not produce the intended results unless it is obeyed; otherwise it will only have the unintended, though possibly foreseen, effect of rendering its recipient disobedient" (Rom 5:20).[10] In revealing the law to Israel, God had the right to hold her accountable under law and it was valid for God to judge Israel for her transgressions. Yet the Mosaic Law would only be effective in the intended purpose (Exod 19:5, 6), if some partner were willing and able to obey fully. So the law was effectively realized as Jesus shared that intended promise: "Don't assume that I've come to destroy the law and the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matt 5:17 HCSB). The law was never expected to be fulfilled through a fallen people. Rather, the law was expected to be a schoolmaster to reveal Israel's Messiah (Gal 3:24). Thus, Jesus Christ did not *replace* Israel, but *represented* Israel in her partnership with God. So Israel was the covenant partner (Rom 9:4-5), a partnership which was intended to be fulfilled through a coming Offspring.

Exposition of Genesis 15:1-6

Genesis 12:1-3 introduces the call of Abram to become God's partner in the initial promise of restoration. Abram's response and journeys from Ur are traced and reach an initial climax in Genesis 15:1-6.

The set of promises (12:1d-3) are introduced by three commands: "Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house" (12:1a-c). At first appearance, it might seem like the realization of the promises that follow are contingent upon obedience to these commands. However, there are two reasons why fulfillment of the promises is not contingent on obedience.

First, the scope of what God committed to do in the promises far exceeds what obedience would accomplish. So obedience is related to receiving what God promised but only God who made the commitment could bring about all that was promised.

Second, he left his land and many in his extended family by faith (Heb 11:8-9); but brought his father, Terah, and his relative, Lot. So at best, it can be said that he obeyed *some* of what God had commanded. Stephen described what God did: "God had him move to the land you now live in"

(Acts 7:4b, HCSB). Included in "God had him move" was the taking of Terah in death and the orchestrating of Lot to be separated from Abram.

At issue in Abram's obedience is his acceptance of partnership with God. So after Abram left the Ur of Chaldees, he began a journey in developing faith as God effectually drew him through experiences that he faced by faith in the journey.

Following Abram's bringing blessing on Lot and the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah by delivering them from Chedorlaomer and his allies, the Lord addressed Abram with promise. "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield and your reward will be very great" (Gen 15:1). Abram immediately focused on reward since he and Sarah still had no descendants after some twenty-five years. While he believed God to deliver his nephew, he wavered in unbelief that they would ever have an heir. In fact, he had a plan worked out in his own mind that Eliezer of Damascus, a chosen servant in his household, would be his heir. And yet that hope was not as satisfying as having a son who would be his heir (15:2-3). Thus he raised a question about the promise of reward.

Then "the word of the Lord came to him: 'This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir'" (15:4). The word took Abram from confidence in his plan to place the focus of his faith on what God explicitly promised, developed from what had formerly been implied. And Abram believed God in spite of his advanced age and the deadness of Sarah's body. He believed in the Lord to resurrect from the dead. This offspring would be the one through whom the promise of blessing all nations would be fulfilled. That's what God had promised. Moses then summarized the conclusion: "Abram believed God and he credited (the faith) to him as righteousness" (15:6). Paul commented on this passage twice. In Romans 4:3-5, he uses Abraham as an example of justification by faith. In Galatians 3:8, he quotes the promise in Genesis 12:3b as the Gospel. In both cases, the promise includes an implied reference to Christ, which is the object of faith, since that is what God promised. Thus, this is a *Christo-Promise*, a promise of "the offspring through whom all nations would be blessed."

Conclusion

The title *Christo-Promise* seeks to represent the *intention-directed revelation* of the OT. *Promise*, having the force of a prophetic-future, speaks to God's intent to restore and bless the fallen creation. That restoration includes both the restoration of mankind's relationship to God and the restoration of mankind's mediating role of rule in God's will in the creation. It is God's stated commitment in promise that certifies the believer's hope.

Christo speaks to the ultimate One through whom fulfillment of the promise would appear, since God has entrusted the outworking of his plan to chosen ones from the human race. That partnership had been introduced in creation and then was continued after the fall. But this raised a question: how could chosen men that were also fallen adequately partner with God? A restoration that is certain because it is based on God's promise, would necessarily *imply* a Coming One from God who is identified as human and divine—*Christo*.[11] His partnership with God would not replace those called from the human race, Israel, but would represent them that they might realize the role to which they were called.

With this understanding of OT revelation, expository preaching guided by a historical-grammatical hermeneutic ought to be pursued. In this pursuit, many texts will naturally speak of historical figures, who anticipate what only Christ will accomplish. And the anticipation is fashioned by a context of promise or of promissory covenants.

Further, *Christo-Promise* necessarily includes Christ in the one Gospel. So the Gospel message is one, calling for faith in God who made the promise and in Christ who assured that it would be realized. In the progress of revelation, what is known of Christ is always true but is more fully understood as more is revealed.

---

[1] Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 134.
[2] Willis J. Beecher, *Prophets and Promise* (reprint ed., 1905; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 178.
[3] E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 49 (clarification added).
[4] G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 7-36.
[5] Hirsch, when a "person has learned the characteristics of the type, he can 'generate' those characteristics…" These characteristics are traits of the type meaning: "An implication belongs to a meaning as a trait belongs to a type … there is only one way the interpreters can know the characteristics of the type; he must learn them," 66.
[6] "Promise n. a declaration assuring what one will promise – tr. To pledge or offer assurance one will or will

not do something, vow." *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2nd ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985), 991.

[7] Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 24.

[8] Joshua bowed down before Him with his face to the ground to worship Him. He then spoke as the One who appeared in the burning bush: "Put off your shoe from your foot for the place where you are standing is holy" (5:15).

[9] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 312.

[10] Caird, *Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 20.

[11] The NT reveals that the expectation of an ultimate realization of the partnership is not between two persons, one divine and the other human. Rather, the partnership is realized with One Person with two natures, one fully divine and the other fully human; that is Jesus Christ.

Christocentric Preaching[1]

Vern S. Poythress

Vern S. Poythress is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he has taught for nearly four decades. He earned his PhD from Harvard University and ThD from the University of Stellenbosch. Dr. Poythress has written numerous articles and books such as *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (P&R, 1999); *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Crossway, 2009); *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Crossway, 2012); *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Crossway, 2012); *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God* (Crossway, 2016); and *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing* (Crossway, 2018).

Abstract

The principle of *sola scriptura*, when applied to church officers and to preaching, implies that preachers are given authority by Christ to proclaim and teach the content of Scripture, but not to add to or subtract from that content. This limitation constrains the content of preaching and teaching, but leaves much freedom with respect to form and selection of texts and topics at any particular time and place. As part of the total process of teaching, we can affirm the value of grammatical and historical study, study of human spiritual and moral examples, study of the process of redemption leading to Christ, study of types and analogies with Christ, study of the nature of God, and more.

When we apply these principles to Genesis 15:1-6, it follows that we can have many kinds of study of the passage. We take into account its literary place in Genesis 15 and in the whole of Genesis; we take into account the historical setting of patriarchal times. We take into account themes that link the work of God in Genesis 15:1-6 to the climactic work of Christ—themes like promise and fulfillment, blessing, offspring, inheritance, fear,

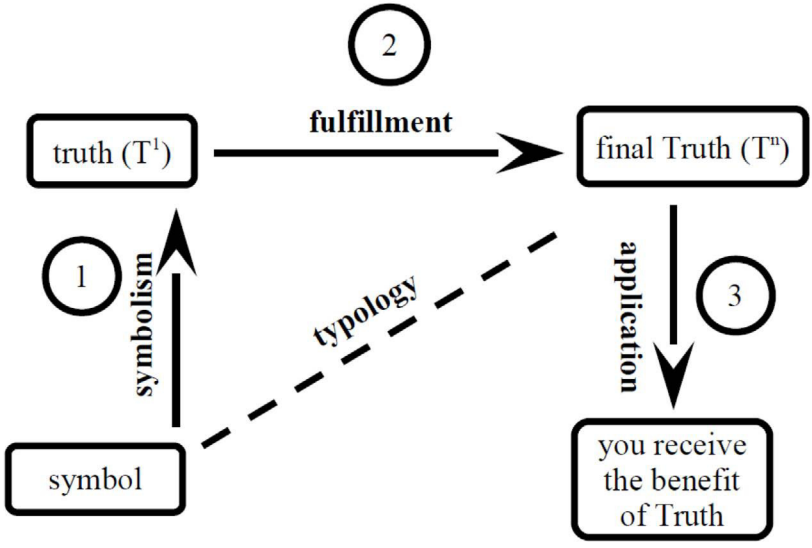
and protection. All these are linked together by their coherent, mutually reinforcing presence in Genesis 15:1-6. The centrality of Christ in the life of the NT church implies his centrality in the preaching and teaching of the church. But there may be a spectrum of ways through which this centrality is wisely expressed and maintained.

I appreciate being invited to contribute to a discussion of expository preaching, using Genesis 15:1-6 as an example.

A Homily Using Edmund Clowney's Triangle

Let us begin with a short homily on Genesis 15:1-6. This homily illustrates the use of Clowney's triangle of typology, which represents a two-step process: finding the meaning of a symbol (S) in its own time (truth T^1), and then discerning how the truth is fulfilled in Christ (truth Tn).[2] Application is best worked out as a third step, after discerning the role of Christ. (See fig. 1.1.)

Fig. 1.1: Edmund Clowney's Triangle, Summarizing Steps for Typological Reasoning[3]



Proclaiming the Word

> [1] After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." [2] But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" [3] And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." [4] And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." [5] And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." [6] And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:1-6)[4]

In this life, what grips you? What grabs your attention and energy? Abraham was concerned to have a son who would be his heir. That concern does not necessarily strike us as gripping. So what grips you? What grips me? The desire for happiness? Family? Achievement at work? Increase in knowledge? Many of us know that the right answer should be something like "God himself" or "the glory of God." But that might not be the same as what *actually* grips our attention and desire. Whatever good things we may experience in this world are gifts from God. They are tokens and expressions of his blessing. At their best, they express personal communion with God, and we experience the presence of God through them. But in sin we are tempted to seize the gifts apart from the Giver.

Abraham belongs to a culture different from our own, but at a fundamental level his desires are the same. A son who is an heir is a blessing from God. It betokens *the* fundamental blessing, communion with God: "I will be your God" (see Gen 17:7-8). A line of descent offers a shadowy symbol of ongoing life. The ongoing life represents Abraham's life blood, extending from generation to generation. It is a shadow of eternal life, in communion with the living God, the God who is the fountain of life. Moreover, in Abraham's case his offspring is special. God's promises in Genesis 12:2 and 13:15-16 already suggest that Abraham's offspring is also the offspring of the woman. Through this line definitive, climactic salvation will come.

How will you have communion with God, the God of all life? How will Abraham? How could God bring it about for you and me? How—when

we, like Abraham, are doomed to die because of our sin? It is by God speaking and promising: God says, "Your very own son shall be your heir" (15:4). God who knows the inmost heart knows the question behind Abram's question. He understands the feeling of impossibility. It is as if he says, "Come outside, Abraham. I want to show you something."

"Come outside, Christian, I want to show you something." "Look toward heaven." In the silence of the night, in the countryside, what do you see? Stars. Many of them. It is magnificent. They testify from age to age about the power and beauty and magnificence of the one whom made them (Ps 19:1-2). Theirs numbers testify to abundance of God's power, his power to multiply and make fruitful. The stars of heaven link us symbolically to the reality of heaven and the one who dwells there. Each star links us to the beauty and brightness and purity and abundant power of God. The stars thereby represent communion with God. God says to Abraham, I grant you blessing, beyond the bounds of earth. Blessing that signifies the reality of communion with God. The blessing of a son. But not one son only. A multitude. A multitude testifying to the fruitfulness of God, analogous to the multiplication of stars. The blessing of communion with God is such that it multiples and deepens beyond calculation.

The name of "Isaac" means "he laughs" (Gen 21:3, 6). Envision laughter, the laughter of joy from God, multiplying beyond Isaac up to the stars of heaven, to uncountable joy, joy "inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Pet 1:8). "So—" says God, "so shall your offspring be" (15:5). God promises fullness of joy, overflowing life, life forevermore (Ps 16:11).

The promise of God is as if God took a star, a star symbolizing heavenly presence, and brought it down for us. He brought it down by putting words of promise in our ear, so that we could absorb it, as if to eat it with our own mouth. The promise expresses the light of God. He brought down light in the form of a son to Abraham.

And so he did in the climax of history. God, the eternal light (1 John 1:5), sent God of God, light of light, down to the earth, and he became man, "which we looked upon and touched with our hands" (1 John 1:1). The Son and heir is our Lord Jesus Christ. "We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). The morning star (Rev 22:16) has come to us, the Son and "the heir of all things" (Heb 1:2), "the radiance of the glory of God."

Here is fullness of life, fullness of joy—in him. Believe what God has said, as Abraham did. Reject the folly of the world. Believe, in order that you may participate in eternal life, the life in communion with God through this Son. In him you inherit communion with God, and with that communion all that is God's. Abandon the grip of this world, to lay hold of God and his life in his Son.

Exploration of Significance

We could use the whole article to give an expository sermon on Genesis 15:1-6. But in the context of a larger discussion of expository preaching, a choice like that would leave many questions. So we are going to discuss the principles guiding interpretation and preaching, with Genesis 15:1-6 as an example. Given the space limitations, we must be sketchy; we cannot explore full justifications.

Qualifications and clarifications

At the outset, let me include two qualifications.

First, I believe in Christocentric preaching in a certain sense. But I do not consider myself a typical representative of that approach,[5] for reasons that will appear. I may disappoint those who expect a robust defense of a classical understanding of Christocentric preaching.

Second, I do not endorse Christomonism, under which I include two defective approaches: (1) the strategy of preaching *only* on Christ incarnate, and (2) the strategy of preaching Christ apart from the context of the Father and the Spirit. A restriction to the incarnate Christ is in tension with the NT teaching about his pre-existence. What about the issue of the Trinity? The work of Christ takes place as the execution of the plan of the Father, by his anointing, in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). Accordingly, Christ-centered interpretation and Trinity-centered interpretation should be seen as two sides of the same coin.

Let us expand a bit on the complementary relation between being Christ-centered and being Trinity-centered. We know Christ in the context of knowing the Father and the Spirit, through the power and illumination of the Spirit of Christ, who proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). Proper

understanding of Christ naturally includes the Trinity. So the approach we are considering might be called Trinity-centered preaching. Rightly understood, Christocentric preaching is also necessarily Trinity-centered preaching.

Conversely, Trinity-centered preaching is Christ-centered. Trinity-centered preaching ought to acknowledge the centrality and pre-eminence of Christ and his work in the redemptive reconciliation to God, who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Knowledge of the Father and the Spirit is mediated by the words and work of the Son.[6]

This mutuality involving Christ as center and the Trinity as center is confirmed by the examples of apostolic preaching in Acts. Pre-eminently, the apostles expound Christ and his work. But their exposition includes attention to God in his trinitarian work, as illustrated by the reference to the Father and the Spirit in Acts 2:33:

> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

The same holds for the instruction found in the NT letters (e.g., 1 Cor 2:2; Ephesians 1; 2 Tim 3:15; 1 Peter 1; 1 John 1).

Freedom in Preaching, within Limits

To provide a framework for assessing preaching, let us now briefly take up the topic of freedom and constraint in preaching. The only constraints should be scriptural.

We should hold to a principle of sola scriptura for ethics. No extra ethical principles have to be added to the canon of Scripture in order for Christian living to be complete. One can see this principle of sufficiency of

Scripture in Psalm 119:1:

> Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
> who walk in the law of the LORD!

Does someone want to be blameless? The only thing that he needs to do is

to "walk in the law of the LORD." Nothing else needs to be added.

The principle also applies to officers of the church, as can be seen from 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The famous passage about the breathing out of Scripture by God ends with the goal: "that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (v. 17). The phrase "man of God" focuses on those responsible for ministry of the word. Scripture is sufficient to make them "competent."

Attempts to add to Scriptural commands most often end up in the long run unintentionally undermining Scripture, as Jesus observes in his critique of tradition in Mark 7:6-9:

> And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,
>
> 'This people honors me with their lips,
> but their heart is far from me;
> in vain do they worship me,
> teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'
>
> You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!"

The basic principle governing church officers, including preachers, is that they have no genuine *legislative* authority, but only *executive* authority. They cannot rightly legislate; that is, they cannot invent extra ethical principles and bind the people of God to them; neither can they annul the rules of Scripture or implications deducible from Scripture. Rather, they are given the responsibility of carrying out what God has already said (executive authority).

Now this principle of sufficiency has implications for expository preaching. The preacher or teacher must teach the teaching of Scripture. He is not authorized to add or subtract. When he speaks the word of God, which it is his duty to do, his words have authority derivative from God. But only then. In sum, this means that he is authorized to teach "the whole counsel of God" in a sense similar to Acts 20:27. That is the main constraint on preaching.

There is also freedom in preaching, as an implication of the Reformation doctrine of the freedom of the Christian man. How so? The principle of *sola scriptura* also governs *how* the preacher does his preaching. Scripture does not command us to use just one style. So in fact there is vast freedom for the teacher to use his God-given wisdom as to just how he expresses and conveys teaching. He may use verbal illustrations; he may use blackboard or slides. At a particular time or place, he may expound the teaching of the whole Bible by topic; he may expound the meaning and implications while focusing on a single passage like Genesis 15:1-6. He may focus on explaining the relations of one or two passages in Genesis to the whole of Genesis. He may explain how, in the context of the whole canon, an OT passage has links forward to the work of Christ on earth. All of these approaches and more may operate within the general task of teaching the whole counsel of God.

Of course in the long run, in the case of a person who preaches or teaches regularly, he should consider also whether his teaching is balanced and avoids always returning to a few pet topics or pet verses.

The Place of Expository Preaching

Now, within this framework, what about expository preaching? What is it? To some extent, people may operate with different definitions and different conceptions. At the very broadest, it might mean only that the content of teaching is orthodox and is built on canonical content. This constraint is the one already mentioned, concerning "the whole counsel of God." But often expository preaching is considered more narrowly. It often means focusing on expounding one verse or one passage from the Bible. This latter sense is one way, but only one, of carrying out the task of teaching.

If we were to say that it is the only way or the best way, that would be a matter of human tradition. We may indeed affirm that it is a tradition with wisdom and it can serve to instruct aspiring preachers. The principal people who advocate expository preaching do not themselves claim that single-text preaching is absolutely the only way to preach—only that it is generally preferable. In particular, they offer it as wise counsel for young men who are still gaining their feet with the practice of preaching. With that understanding we may agree. But we should nevertheless remember

the principle of *sola scriptura*. It implies that the tradition as such has no exclusive claim on us, as the only proper way to teach the word of God. No passage in Scripture restricts preachers to this method. And a restriction of this sort is contradicted by the sermons in Acts and by the NT letters, none of which is exclusively focused on expounding one OT verse or passage.

Our focus on exposition is useful. But it produces a danger that we would bring in expectations from tradition about how it ought to be done. The principle of sola scriptura for ethics and for the "how," the method of teaching the word of God, leads to the conclusion that there is not only one way or one method or one technique for having "the word of Christ dwell in you" (Col 3:16), but many. Many ways of teaching may be faithful to the teaching found in Scripture itself. All of these good ways necessarily contrast with heretical and false teaching, as well as with teaching done by people whose lives do not commend their words. [7]

Centrality of Christ for Spiritual Life

Though there is vast freedom, the Bible shows us the importance of Christ for the long-range spiritual health of the church. There are several motivations for keeping Christ central in the whole life of the church, preaching included.

First, as we have seen, preaching in Acts and the letters in the NT provide examples of the centrality of Christ.

Second, Christ is central in the gospel, which is the central proclamation of the NT. The gospel is both the gospel that Christ proclaimed (Mark 1:15) and the gospel about Christ that the apostles and other early preachers proclaimed (Rom 1:1-3; 1 Cor 15:1-8; Col 1:28). The gospel needs to be central in the church, which is the body of Christ, whose members are those who follow Christ.

Third, the NT indicates that union and communion with Christ is central in salvation and in Christian growth (e.g., 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 1; Col 2:3). Neglecting the centrality of Christ is not responsible and leads to spiritual unhealthiness when the sheep of Christ's flock are not wisely fed. The centrality of Christ should therefore be continually considered, and should be a regular focus for people who feed the sheep.

Fourth, the NT indicates at various points that the OT is centrally about

Christ. Most prominent is Luke 24:25-27, 44-49, but we may add John 5:39, 45-46; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews; and 1 Peter 1:10-12. These passages certainly need to be taken into account in our interpretation of the OT. But we do not have time to consider them at length.

The upshot is that Christ should be central in preaching as well. But how? That question returns us to an affirmation of freedom within the boundaries of the whole counsel of God. The interpreter who respects the word of God must respect the many thematic and rhetorical unities that belong to each individual passage. He must also respect the unity that belongs to the whole biblical canon, unity in doctrine, unity in accomplishment of redemption in Christ, and unity in the history of redemption, as progressing through time.[8] Those unities give unity to preaching. But still there is diversity—diversity of passages, and diversity of various aspects of each passage.

Affirmation of Variety

The unities are perhaps more attended to. So let us take the time to affirm a variety in the ways that we study Scripture. Variety need not be understood as opposed to the centrality of Christ. We can affirm in principle the positive value of a focus on grammatical and historical study of the communication of God through human authors to an ancient audience. That kind of study contributes as one aspect of the whole, that is, the total process of teaching Scripture.

We can affirm the value of a focus on redemptive-historical movement, leading forward to the once-for-all appearing of Christ on earth at the proper historical moment ("the fullness of time," Gal 4:4). This focus, properly executed, would be a valid form of "Christotelic" exposition. The focus on grammar and language, the focus on history and the immediate historical and social environment, and the focus on redemptive movement forward to Christ represent moments within a rich and complex meditation on the word of God that is addressing us (Rom 15:4).

We treat these various foci as moments within a larger whole. These moments can be isolated from that whole only at the cost of distortion and illusion. In fact, we always have a larger background, hermeneutically speaking, constituted by our previous understandings and assumptions and practices in living, a background that we do not explicitly address, but

which helps to guide our research on a single passage. Truth in Christ is not composed merely of isolated bits, like marbles in a bag.

Illustration of Variety with Genesis 15:1-6

We may illustrate with Genesis 15:1-6.

(1) First, it is valid and useful to do a careful study of the words, phrases, and larger linguistic textures of the passage. As one example, after examining the flow of the six verses, we may judge that verse 5 forms a kind of literary peak, with verses 4-6 forming a somewhat broader mountain top. So we try to appreciate how the earlier verses lead up to this peak, and how the peak functions as the main point for the entire episode.

(2) In addition, it is valid and useful to study the historical environment, which includes previous promises to Abram and the social contexts of the time. Included in social context would be the cultural atmosphere of placing value on having sons and having an inheritance to pass on. We may also study how Genesis 15:1-6 fits into a larger context: the further developments and the ceremony in 15:7-21; the section on the generations of Terah beginning in Genesis 11:27; the larger story of early history and the patriarchs found in Genesis as a whole; the context of the Pentateuch; and the context of the history of Israel continuing in Joshua, Judges, and beyond. Because God has a plan from the beginning, we may also consider how all this history leads to Christ. The history includes the promise of offspring, offspring traced through the line of Seth, the line of Noah, the line of Abraham, and the line of David. Genesis 15:5 offers us one point on this developing line.

(3) We also affirm the positive value of meaningful connections between passages, connections in many dimensions, through many themes. So, for example, human beings long ago, in Abram's time, were human like us. They serve therefore as moral and spiritual examples, good and bad and mixed. The climactic example is found in the humanity of Christ. We may ask of a passage, "What are human beings doing, and how are they analogous to Christ and to us?" In Genesis 15:1-6, what do we learn about Abram? We see his faith and also his insecurities and possible doubts, which he brings before the Lord. He is like us. And Christ is the climactic human being who

trusts God with all his heart.

(4) All of the events in the OT are redemptive-historical preparations,

along a time line. According to the unfolding plan of God they lead to the coming of Christ. A sermon may choose to focus on this aspect of preparation. Genesis 15:1-6 represents one episode along this long time line. How does it fit into the whole? As father of the faithful, Abram exercises faith, and is the fountainhead for a line of offspring of faith (as in Hebrews 11 and Romans 4). The final offspring and heir is Christ (Gal 3:14, 16, 29).

(5) Since God is always the same God, we affirm a systematic-

theological, God-centered approach that focuses on the question, "What is God doing, and what do we learn about him?" The climactic revelation of the character of God is in Christ: John 14:9; Hebrews 1:1-3. In Genesis 15:1-6, God appears as merciful, compassionate, promise-keeping, redemptively active, and miracle-working. He is the same God still today.

(6) We affirm a typological approach that looks for symbols that have

meaning in their own historical location and also point forward to a final, climactic realization in Christ. Edmund Clowney has shown how to avoid arbitrariness in treating typology by focusing first on the meaning of symbols in their own time. As a second step, we see how the truth symbolized at an earlier time is further unveiled in Christ.[9] (See fig. 1.1 above.)

How might this approach work with Genesis 15:1-6? The subsequent narrative in Genesis 15:7-21 has more obvious symbolical material than verses 1-6, and nothing about symbolism should be forced. One of the liabilities in the medieval fourfold method was to appear to suggest that we treat every passage of Scripture the same way. To practice such a uniform approach would be to ignore the unique character of genuine symbols and differences in genre.

We may nevertheless suggest that there are elements in Genesis 15:1-6 that have some degree of symbolical overtones. Verse 1 presents us with a vision, which connotes intimacy with God and thus symbolic depth. Verse 2 speaks about offspring and inheritance. In Genesis, physical offspring and inheritance are tokens of blessing in the context of a holistic personal relation to God. They thus betoken also spiritual fruit and spiritual

inheritance. "Your reward" in verse 1 links with the theme of inheritance. "Your shield" in verse 1 functions to guarantee God's care, and thereby suggests the larger pattern, where God promises to "be God" to Abraham (Gen 17:7, 8). Fruitfulness is suggested in verse 5, as confirmed by 17:6. Covenantal promises are suggested in verse 5, as confirmed by 17:4.

The topic of inheritance in Genesis 15:1-6 goes together with the prospects of ongoing life, beyond a single generation. And so it links us back to the origin of human life and the Garden of Eden. The tree of life in 2:9 (3:22) symbolizes real life in fellowship with God, and thus eternal life (3:22). This eternal life is still a prospect even after the fall, as is made visible by the promise concerning the offspring of the woman (3:15). The tokens of life and blessing that are found in 15:1-6 evoke this larger theme of blessing, which has climactic form in the blessing of eternal life. In verse 5, the stars betoken the power of God. The fact that the stars are used as a central illustration to confirm God's promise may invite us to slow down and experience more deeply what it means the actually look at stars and be in awe, as would have been Abram's experience.

A sermon focused on verse 5 could dwell on how Christ brings to fulfillment the covenantal promises in the verse. Christ inaugurates the new covenant (1 Cor 11:25); produces fruitfulness (Isa 53:10-12); receives an inheritance that is also ours when we are in him (Ps 2:8; Rom 8:17; Gal. 3:29).

(7) We affirm a fulfillment approach that stresses the superiority and climactic character of the revelation in Christ and the work of God in the earthly life, death, resurrection, ascension, and rule of Christ. So, for example, Christ is heir to the whole world, not simply the land of Canaan. Christ has dominion of over all, not only over animals and land. Christ is fruitful in bringing many sons to glory (and the spiritual fruit is surpassingly glorious, 2 Corinthians 3).

The theme of Christ as fulfillment encompasses the earlier emphases found in covenantal promises. Christ in perfect humanity fulfills earlier human examples. Christ in his work in the fullness of time fulfills the acts of preparation. Christ is God, and as God he climactically manifests the character of God. The cross and resurrection show the mercy and justice and wisdom of the Father. Christ as antitype fulfills the symbols.

(8) We can also consider focusing on themes. The major themes in

Genesis include blessing, offspring (and fruitfulness), and land. They are articulated in terms of promise, waiting/development/trial/threat, and fulfillment. These all have typological functions, in that physical blessings, offspring, and land betoken the centrality of spiritual communion with God. Also, the redemptive plot that consists in the movement from distress to deliverance is typological in its relation to the antitype of redemption accomplished by Christ.[10]

Here in Genesis 15:1-6 are found many of these themes. In particular, the obstacle is that Abram has no proper heir. It is a trial, corresponding to the trials of Christ and of Christians. The answer is given in terms of the character of God and his promises. Near fulfillment is found in Genesis 21, when Isaac is born, after overcoming the threat in Genesis 20. This deliverance is typologically related to the climactic deliverance in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Illustrating Christocentricity for a Single Verse

Having considered themes in Genesis and in the passage 15:1-6, let us now illustrate aspects of Christocentricity at the level of a single verse. Christocentricity belongs to OT verses by virtue of meaning relations with other verses and passages.

Let us consider a less prominent verse with Gen 15:1-6, namely verse 3: "And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given me no offspring ...'" One way of considering the larger significance of this verse comes from reflecting on why a situation with no offspring comes to exist at all. This verse 3 has a thematic contrast with the fruitfulness promised in Genesis 1:28, which includes offspring by implication: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ..." What makes the difference between the blessing described in Genesis 1:28 and the situation of frustration in Genesis 15:3? The obvious watershed is the fall of Adam. Given the fall, the favor of God that Abram experiences in 15:1-6, even in the midst of his temporary frustration, is a picture of grace. And Abram's response to God relies on this grace. Grace solves the demerit from the fall. As a result of the fall, Adam and his descendants lack proper standing before God. God acts to overcome Abram's lack.

Now grace is possible only through Christ. In Genesis 15:1-6, the

vision, the word of God, and the blessing are all mediated to Abram in a manner that must be consistent with God's justice. Grace is free from the standpoint of Abram's side, but from the standpoint of God it must be consistent with justice. And this requires dealing with demerit by means of substitution.

(This overall context, by the way, excludes the interpretation of verse 6 as if it meant that God accounted Abram's faith as righteousness in an analytic sense, that is, because his faith was itself a righteous act. That interpretation ignores the necessary presence of grace.)

Phrases and Clauses

Now let us illustrate some ways in which Christocentricity belongs to texts by virtue of relations, at the level of phrases and clauses. In Genesis 15:4, consider the phrase "the word of the Lord." God spoke to Abram. This phrase in context resonates with all the earlier speeches of God to man in Genesis. Ever since the fall, God's speech needs to be mediated to avoid death of the recipient. The mediator is the Son, the Word. Because of the necessity of mediation, we can confidently infer the presence of Christ and his work when God speaks to Abram. Christ's role in Genesis 15:4 anticipates his incarnation and verbal ministry on earth.

Genesis 15:4 also resonates with the speech of God in Genesis 1, which powerfully brings about what it specifies: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:3). In like manner, in 15:4-5 the word of God guarantees an heir beforehand and specifies authoritatively the nature of the heir. Both of these kinds of speech, in creation and in covenantal promise, are reflections within time that reflect the archetype, the eternal Word who is spoken by God, expressing the nature of God.

Embedding the Word of God

Consider also that the word of God can be embedded in the word of God. Genesis as whole book is the word of God, and in it is embedded the quotation in verse 15:4 from what God said at a particular point in the life of Abraham. Moreover, 15:4 could have included another level of embedding in turn, by quoting from what God said to Abram at Genesis

12:2 or 12:7 concerning Abram's offspring. 15:4 does not elaborate using the exact words of the earlier speeches in Genesis 12, but there is nevertheless an allusion to them. It is a kind of indirect embedding of an earlier divine speech. We may include also God's mention of offspring in 13:15-16.

How does it happen that the word of God can embed the word of God? Embedding of this kind involves a kind of miniature transcendence.[11] Human understanding, as a finite, created imitation of divine understanding, is capable of standing back from immediate involvement in a situation and grasping the whole. In this case, the whole is the earlier oral communication to Abram, which is actually several wholes that are brought together in an act of miniature transcendence.

Now miniature transcendence is possible to mankind because man is made in the image of God. The original, the archetypal image is not man but the divine Son, as seen in Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3.

Man's thoughts exercising miniature transcendence echo the thoughts of God. And on the divine level the Son is the original image echoing the Father. The word of God can echo the word of God, thereby reflecting the relation of the Father to the Son in the original divine instance of reflection.

Do we perhaps think that these reasoning are a stretch? The divine speech and activity is the archetype on which specific manifestations depend. In creation and providence, God does not depend on eternal abstractions outside himself, but on himself as the absolute origin. Thus there is a genuine relation between the original instance of communication in the relation of the Father to the Son, and ectypal instances in the world.

The Theme of Coming

Now let us look again at the expression "came to him" in Genesis 15:4. This expression describes a communication that, figuratively speaking, *moves* from God to man. Note also the particular style of the expression, "the word of the Lord *came* ...," instead of the simply expression, "God said," or "God spoke." The metaphorical idea of movement hints at a differentiation between God who is the origin and the word that comes out from him,

traveling out as a word distinct from the speaker. This differentiation adumbrates the fuller NT revelation of the distinction between God the Father and the Word, the Son.

In Genesis 15:4, a revelation originates in God, which man cannot control or compel, and which is a free act of God. In the situation after the fall, man cannot merit it and indeed has demerit, making communication from God problematic. The coming of the word is a coming of God that is by grace. As such, it anticipates and foreshadows the climactic coming in Christ. As Hebrews 1:1 says,

> Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets [and, we may add, through Abram, functioning as a prophet in receiving the word, Gen 20:7; Ps 105:15], but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son .... (Heb 1:1-2)

God sent forth his word to Abram. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son ..." (Gal 4:4).

Christocentricity in a Word

Let us now consider the level of individual words. The words, of course, function in interaction with literary context. So a focus on one word, like the earlier choices of focus, never leaves behind context. It would be comparatively easy to take a word like *heir* (Gen 15:2, 3, 4). The general idea of an heir and an inheritance makes sense only against a background defined by ownership and gift. The original of both is to be found in God. God created the world and owns it. Adam receives the world as a gift and is like an heir. He forfeited his position in the fall. Abram's heirship is a type of the climactic offspring who inherits, namely Christ as the last Adam.

Instead of continuing to reflect on the word *heir*, let us consider a more challenging case, the word *after* used at the beginning of Genesis 15:1 (Hebrew אַחַר). The word *after* functions together with the phrase *these things* to show a chronological link with the preceding chapter. As usual, the word functions in a context that colors its force and function.

What are we to say? Genesis 15 comprises one of a considerable number of episodes unfolding the promises of God to Abraham. First, a promise comes (Gen 12:1-3). Then there is a time of unfolding and development.

And in Genesis we also have the early events in the initial stages of fulfillment. History thus unfolds God's plan of salvation. Meditation on the serious implications of the fall shows that the continuation, that is, the history of redemption, is a kind of miracle and surprise of grace. And this grace, we know, can only be through Christ.

The progressive unfolding in the articulation of promises is shown in the ways that Genesis 15:1-6 adds to earlier articulations to Abram. "Fear not" (verse 1) is new. So is "I am your shield" and "Your reward shall be very great" (verse 1). Yet these promises are not absolutely new. The promises of blessings and care from God in Genesis 12:1-3, 7 and 13:14-17 already should provide Abram comfort in the security of God's promises, and therefore are cause for not fearing. However, making ***explicit*** the exhortation not to fear is significant encouragement. So also, the promise in 12:3 concerning God's curse on enemies hints that God is Abram's shield. But the explicit statement in 15:1 is more definite. "Organic growth" in revelation is rightly an idea applied to this sequence, and indeed well beyond Genesis into the entire OT period. This growth unfolds on the basis of the grace founded in the work of Christ, a work that is reckoned with beforehand as God blesses fallen people in Genesis.

We can see the role of Christ especially in Revelation 5. Let us focus in particular on the worthiness of the Lamb—the Lamb that has been slain in sacrifice—to take the scroll. Interpreters differ concerning the contents of the scroll. On the basis of parallels with heavenly books in Daniel, we may take it that the scroll is the book laying out God's plan for history, a history of redemption. The plan can unfold, as represented symbolically by the breaking of the seals, only because of the Lamb. We might observe that in Revelation 6 the results of opening the seals are more specialized, not necessarily the entirety of history. That is true. But the principle articulated in the symbolism is general: it concerns the worthiness of the Lamb as the driving center of redemption. This image is applicable beyond the specific details given as results of opening the seals. The principle is applicable, therefore, to the word ***after*** in Genesis 15:1.

In fact, at a principial level, the unfolding of history is trinitarian. It is according to the plan and initiation of the Father, executed by the Son, and consummated by the Holy Spirit. Doctrinal principle suggests that this execution of history extends not only to core events of redemption, where

it is obvious and most vividly articulated, but concerning the movement from creation to consummation that characterizes the pre-fall situation as well as post-fall.

The actions of God in history reflect the eternal trinitarian relations of action. The Father begets the Son eternally. This eternal begetting has a reflection in the causal unfolding of time on the level of the creature. Thus, the before-and-after structure articulated in the word *after* in Genesis 15:1 reflects the priority and posteriority of begetting and begotten in the Trinity.

All this represents implications of the teaching of the Bible as a whole. General principles concerning the Trinity have salient connections with the particular instances that manifest those principles. The particulars include every one of the once-for-all, never-to-be-repeated particularities of words, phrases, clauses, and paragraphs such as found in Genesis 15:1-6.

The principles, expressing unity in the Bible, and the not-repeated particulars, expressing the diversity in the Bible and in history, are, as Cornelius Van Til argued, equally ultimate.[12] As such, they reflect the equal ultimacy of unity and diversity in God, the one God in three persons. And that expression is necessarily Christocentric, because revelational, mediated by the Son.

Conclusion

The relations between words and context and the relations between passages, when extended to the whole canon and the larger vistas of history, provide resources in which we find many meaning connections that involve the work of Christ. In addition to these sources of meaning, we can affirm the principial importance of Christ in teaching in the church, because of the centrality of Christ in NT preaching and teaching, in the process of sanctification, and in NT affirmations concerning the significance of the OT.

---

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 15-17, 2017, in Providence, RI. The paper was part of a larger session, "Expository Preaching and Hermeneutics: Preaching Christ, the Text, or Something Else?"
2. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 98-112,

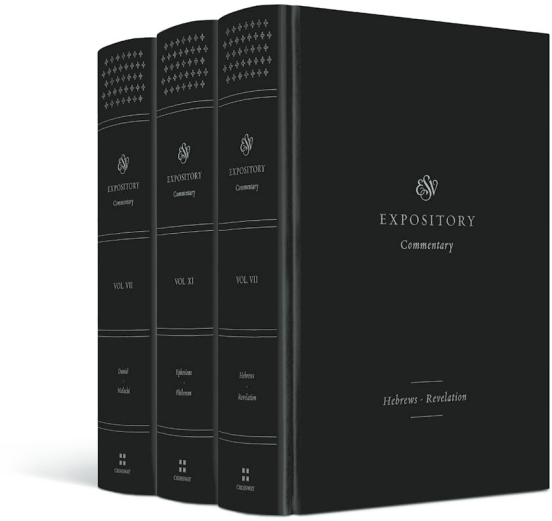
especially 110, where the triangle is found in its original form.

3. From ibid., 110, with some relabeling.
4. All English Bible quotations come from the English Standard Version.
5. For more representative approaches, see, for example, Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*; Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013); Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); Charles D. Drew, *The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). In addition, there are broader discussions of the history of redemption and the centrality of the role of Christ in that history: Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (reprint, Edinburgh/Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of Wisdom: A Redemptive-Historical Exploration of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012). For my own approach, see Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995); Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); Vern S. Poythress, *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999).

   It is hard to say just how my approach differs, and I do not want to make too much of differences. The main distinctive may well be the presence of explicitly perspectival thinking. I try to incorporate valid insights from other approaches to preaching, and to affirm variety in preaching. In addition, perspectival thinking is at work when I extend Christocentricity not only to every verse, but in principle to every word in every verse."
6. Thus a focus on Christ offers a *perspective* on the Trinity, and conversely a focus on the Trinity offers a *perspective* on Christ. This use of perspectives follows the pattern discussed in John Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism (Revised 2008)," https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism-revised-2008/, accessed Aug. 31, 2017; and more elaborately in Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) and John M. Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and its Significance* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017)
7. Note the link between life and teaching in 1 Tim 4:6-16 and other passages.
8. Note, in particular, the focus on the history of redemption and the history of revelation in Vos, Biblical Theology.
9. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 98-112.
10. Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), chapters 25-26; Vern S. Poythress, *The Miracles of Jesus: How the Savior's Mighty Acts Serve As Signs of Redemption* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), Part II.
11. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, chapters 11 and 12.
12. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (4th ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 45-51.

EXPOSITORY

Commentary



"Destined to become a standard Bible reference tool for serious students of Scripture around the world."

PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN
President, Wheaton College

CURRENT SERIES VOLUMES

Daniel–Malachi (Vol. 7)
Ephesians–Philemon (Vol. 11)
Hebrews–Revelation (Vol. 12)
Additional Volumes Coming Soon

SERIES GENERAL EDITORS

Iain M. Duguid, PhD
James M. Hamilton Jr., PhD
Jay Sklar, PhD

CROSSWAY | CROSSWAY.ORG/ESVEC

Preaching Christ from the Old Testament and from Genesis 15:1-6

Thomas R. Schreiner

Thomas R. Schreiner is James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean for Scripture and Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. A widely respected New Testament scholar, Dr. Schreiner is the author of countless articles and many books, including *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Baker, 2008), *Galatians* in the Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (Zondervan, 2010), *The King and His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Baker, 2013), *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification* (Zondervan, 2015); *Romans,* 2nd edition in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (Baker, 2018).

Introduction

The question of how we preach Christ from the Old Testament (OT) Scriptures is vital for those who proclaim the good news, and believers differ on the best approach. I am grateful for the essays of Dan Block, Elliott Johnson, and Vern Poythress who have carefully explored this matter. Dan Block and Elliott Johnson rightly and especially emphasize that interpreters must interpret OT texts in light of the OT context and historical horizon. Block warns us about the danger of superficially appealing to allegory or typology so that we end up reading Christ into the OT in ways that violate the integrity of the OT text in its historical context. Block maintains that we should preach christotelically instead of christocentrically. Johnson, with an approach that is quite similar in many respects to Block's, helpfully reminds us the role of promise when we interpret texts in the OT. Poythress's approach is quite different in that he stresses that OT

texts can be appropriated in a multiplicity of ways, and he, in contrast to Block, identifies his approach as christocentric. Whether we use the term christotelic or christocentric isn't a matter of great importance since the issue is what we *mean* by such terms, and they are defined in various ways. In what follows I will explore the question of how we should preach Christ from the OT by interacting with the three contributions of Block, Johnson, and Poythress and also by considering how we should interpret Genesis 15:6. In the reflections that follow I will reflect on the role of the human and divine author, the matter of the storyline of scripture, typology, and how we should interpret Genesis 15:6.

Human Author and Divine Author

As I noted above, Block and Johnson remind us of the importance of the human author and of interpreting texts in their historical context. Focusing on the historical context and the meaning of the human author saves us from arbitrary and ahistorical readings, from artificial and bizarre allegorizing, and from appeals to typology that lack warrant. On the other hand, Block and Johnson do not consider or interact with the notion of divine authorship of Scripture. In this respect Poythress's contribution is more complete and compelling.

The concern when one refers to a divine author is that such an appeal sunders the text from its historical context and from what the original author intended. Such a worry is obviated, however, if there is (as I would suggest) an organic connection between the meaning of the human and divine author, and that the meaning of the divine author is always derived from a canonical reading. We must remember in reading the scriptures that the Bible differs from every other book in that it is authored by both human beings and by God (cf. 2 Pet 1:21, "men spoke from God"). Historical criticism is deficient and sub-Christian when it limits itself to interpreting the scriptures like every other book, as if the book is solely the product of human beings. In doing so, however, historical criticism denies the claims scripture makes about itself (2 Tim 3:16-17).

The issue is whether there is warrant for positing both a human and divine author. First Peter 1:10-12 makes it plain that OT prophets did not understand fully their own prophecies, and such a state of affairs is

scarcely surprising since they spoke about a future fulfillment. It makes perfect sense that the things the prophets spoke about would be clearer retrospectively. In some respects, it is like a mystery novel where the reader looks back and understands more clearly the meaning and significance of events and words which occurred earlier in the story.

The great prophecy of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 (see Isa 52:13-53:12) functions as a good example. In Isaiah the servant is clearly identified as Israel (Isa 41:8-9; 42:19; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20), and yet at the same time the servant will bring Jacob and Israel back to the Lord (Isa 49:5). Indeed, he suffers and is struck down by the Lord for the sins and iniquities of Israel (Isa 53:5-6, 11-12). How can Israel restore Israel? How can Israel atone for its own sins? The servant in Isaiah is identified as Israel and yet is distinguished from Israel. It is doubtful that Isaiah fully comprehended what he wrote, and indeed when Jesus explained to his disciples on a number of occasions that he would suffer, they were perplexed and confounded (cf. Mark 8:31-38; 9:30-37; 10:32-45). The meaning of what Isaiah wrote is only clear retrospectively, after Jesus of Nazareth suffers, dies, and is risen from the dead. Then the early disciples and Christians understood the meaning of what Isaiah 53 prophesied, and there is no evidence that anyone understood the meaning of the prophecy before the great events in Jesus's ministry occurred. Does the fulfillment in Christ contradict what Isaiah originally wrote? Certainly not. Retrospectively we see the textual evidence for the suffering of the servant on behalf of his people, and thus is it clear that there is an organic relationship between the original prophecy and the fulfillment in Christ.

Biblical and Covenantal Storyline

The Bible is a grand story from Genesis to Revelation, and thus any good reading of the scriptures considers the whole story in reading any particular part. Astute readers of any novel realize that the significance of particular parts of the narrative will only be grasped if they understand the story as a whole. For instance, in Leo Tolstoy's great novel *Anna Karenina*, the significance of Anna's adultery early in the story is only grasped when we read about her suicide near the end of the novel. Any good story must be read consecutively, and Johnson in particular rightly emphasizes the theme

of promise and fulfillment. The story of the scriptures must be read as an unfolding story, as a consecutive story, and those who fail to read it in such a way will certainly be led off course. Here Block and Johnson remind us that it is crucial to read the scriptures in their historical context.

Poythress agrees that we should read the scriptures according to the biblical timeline as well, saying that we should read them redemptive historically. Another way of saying this is that we should read the Bible covenantally, in that the story of the Bible unfolds through the covenants God makes with his people.[1] We think here of the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and the New Covenant. In reading the scriptures according to the Bible's storyline we must always consider the epoch in which the story is told. The covenants represent key markers or progressions in the fulfillment of God's purposes for his people and for the universe he created. Another way of saying this is that we should read the Bible front to back, and in doing so we must always take into account where we are in the unfolding story. For instance, although there are hints from the beginning of the narrative, it becomes clear in the covenant with David that the promises given to Abraham will become a reality through a son of David, through a king.

Perhaps this is the place to interact briefly with what Block says about promises regarding a Messiah or a Christ. He rightly says that there are only a few places in the OT which speak of an anointed one, of a coming Christ. On the other hand, the Lord, in his covenant with David, pledges that the Davidic dynasty will never come to an end, that a descendant from David's line will rule forever (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17; Psalms 89 and 132). We are reminded here that a word study approach is insufficient in detecting a theme in the OT, for we will fail to see the pervasiveness of the promise of a coming king in the OT if we limit ourselves to the word "Christ." Many texts forecast that a king will come who will fulfill the promises to David and will reign as king over Israel (e.g., Ps 2:4-12; 110:1; Isa 9:2-7; Jer 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:15–22, 26; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11). We have often been warned in scholarship that those who rely on word studies alone may fail to see a concept or referent, and a careful reading of the OT demonstrates that the coming king from the lineage of David plays a significant role in the narrative.

I have been suggesting that we need to read according to the Bible's

storyline, from front to back and in terms of the unfolding story which develops covenantally. But it will not do, and Block and Johnson are not comprehensive enough here, only to read the story from front to back. We also need to read the story from back to front. Here the notion that the book has one divine author surfaces again. Yes, we must read the Bible covenantally, as an unfolding story, but we understand the story better when we read the whole story. When we read Psalm 110:1 we see that Yahweh says to David's Lord that as David's Lord he will sit at his right hand until his enemies are made his footstool. It is clear from the Psalm itself that someone who is superior to David is coming, but the promise is a bit fuzzy, just as my vision as fuzzy when I don't wear my glasses. Now that Jesus has come, now that he is the risen and reigning Messiah, we see clearly that he is the fulfillment of what we read about in Psalm 110:1. In other words, reading from back to front helps us understand Psalm 110:1 better than David did when he first wrote it, and as Christian preachers we must interpret every OT text both front to back and back to front. We carefully interpret the text in its historical context and in light of the entire storyline of the scriptures. We don't merely read the scriptures epochally in terms of redemptive-historical storyline, but we also read the scriptures canonically since there is a divine author.[2]

Poythress certainly agrees with what I am saying, and I think we are on the same page. Still, I worry that his emphasis on multiplicity might not have sufficient clarity and might prove confusing to students. I think it would have been more useful if Poythress explained more clearly how to preach Christ from the OT instead of stressing that there are many ways to do it. Students need to see the warrants and boundaries for interpretations offered, and it seems that Poythress's essay is most helpful for those who are already experienced and sophisticated preachers, i.e., for those who are already well-acquainted with the biblical storyline and have had experience proclaiming the whole counsel of God. He doesn't offer much counsel on how to preach Christ from the OT, and one is struck by the fecundity of his own mind, but structures, procedures, and warrants for doing such are lacking.

Typology

Christ-centered preaching, christotelic preaching, must also be typological preaching. Taking account of both the human and divine author of scripture, of the biblical storyline as it develops covenantally, and of typology are different ways of making the same point. The scriptures must be read as part of a whole fabric in terms of its redemptive historical development. Space is lacking to defend and define typology in detail here. The notion of typology, as we saw with the term "Christ," must not be limited to the word "typology." NT authors see typology in *events*, such as the exodus, in *institutions*, such as the tabernacle and sacrificial system, and in *persons*, such as David and Melchizedek. Typology is defined here as correspondences or patterns in events, institutions, and persons in redemptive history. Such correspondences aren't merely retrospective but are prospective in that they were intended by God from the beginning since the Lord foretells and ordains the end from the beginning (Isa 46:9-11). At the same time, there is in typology escalation so that the fulfillment is greater than the type.[3]

Scholars debate the distinction between typology and allegory, and they also debate which types are warranted. Such debates, and even some fuzziness at the edges, doesn't indicate that typology is arbitrary. We have to ask whether the correspondence or type has a historical anchor and if it is textually warranted. A prime example of typology is the exodus from Egypt where the Lord delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery. Block, if I understand him correctly, seems to think that the exodus can't function as a type since it is a physical rather than a spiritual deliverance. At one level, this is entirely correct since Israel was liberated as a nation at the Exodus from serving the Egyptians. On the other hand, if we disconnect Israel's freedom from the notion of deliverance of sin, God's judgments become arbitrary. God's wrath represented in the plagues against the Egyptians were not examples of Yahweh showing his power in judgment for no reason. The Lord judged Egypt in the plagues and in the slaying of their firstborn sons because of their sin, as even Pharaoh acknowledges (Exod 9:27), and Pharaoh's hardened heart and refusal to listen also signify his sin (Exod 7:3-4, 14; 8:32; 9:7, 34-35; cf. 9;17). Indeed, the Egyptians failure to know Yahweh also testifies to their sin (Exod 7:5; 9:14) and thus the

Lord's plagues represent his righteous judgment because of Egypt's sin (Exod 7:4).

At the same time, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, their redemption, is secured because they put the blood on the door of their houses. The deliverance of the firstborn among Israel at the Passover signifies the deliverance of the people as a whole. Israel would have hardly thought it was a great deliverance if they left Egypt and all their firstborn sons were dead! Certainly the blood on the houses spared Israel from the Lord's "judgments" and from the terrible plague that he promised to send on those who didn't have blood on their houses (Exod 12:12-13). Israel had to smear blood on their doorposts, for otherwise the Lord would destroy their firstborn just as he judged the Egyptians. The exodus story reveals that Israel deserved judgment because of their own sin just like the Egyptians, and thus they needed blood on their doors to escape. The Lord's judgments on Egypt and his deliverance of Israel were not arbitrary and capricious. Both *deserved* judgment because of sin, but the Lord had mercy on Israel because of his covenant and because of the atoning blood on the doorposts.

Block objects that the words "sin" and "redemption" are found together only once, but whether liberation from Egypt is connected to sin can't be resolved merely by looking at individual words. We have to consider the story as a whole and interpret it as a narrative. It is instructive that Ezekiel when he reflects on Israel's exodus from Egypt sees it as an act of grace, as deliverance from their sin. Considering a larger section of the text is instructive.

> "In that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands. I also said to them, 'Throw away, each of you, the abhorrent things that you prize, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.' But they rebelled against me and were unwilling to listen to me. None of them threw away the abhorrent things that they prized, and they did not abandon the idols of Egypt. So I considered pouring out my wrath on them, exhausting my anger against them within the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of my name, so that it would not be profaned in the eyes of the nations they were living among, in whose sight I had made myself known to Israel by bringing them out of Egypt. So I brought them out of the land of Egypt and led

them into the wilderness." (Ezek 20:6–10 CSB)

It is clear from Ezekiel 20:6-10 that Yahweh delivered Israel from Egypt despite their idolatry and sin, confirming that the redemption from Egypt was an act of his grace, and not merely a physical deliverance.

Once we understand the exodus along the lines suggested above, we find warrant in Paul identifying Christ as our Passover (1 Cor 5:7), seeing in his death a greater deliverance than that accomplished in the exodus. We remember that a feature of typology is escalation so that redemption, the exodus accomplished by Christ is greater than the freedom Israel experienced in being delivered from Egypt. There is continuity and discontinuity between the two events—the unblemished lamb of the Passover (Exod 12:5) points to the "precious blood of Christ" as "an unblemished and spotless lamb" (1 Pet 1:19). The voluntary death of the sinless one, the Son of God, and the Messiah of Israel, is certainly greater than the death of a lamb which has no idea why its life was being taken. And the blood on the doorposts points to a death, a sacrifice, a deliverance that is far greater—the blood of Jesus which cleanses us from all our sin (cf. 1 John 1:7). Jesus himself drew the connection when he instituted the Lord's Supper which commemorates his death since the Lord's Supper is a Passover meal (Mark 14:22-25 par.).

We find further warrant for understanding the exodus as a reference to the great deliverance accomplished by Christ in the OT itself. Both Israel and Judah violated the covenant stipulations declared in the covenant made at Sinai, and as a result of their blatant and persistent sin both Israel and Judah go into exile, in 722 and 586 BC respectively. In other words, both Judah and Israel when they were exiled returned to the servitude the nation experienced in Egypt. Hosea, for instance, draws a parallel between the slavery in Egypt and exile to Assyria (Hos 11:1-11). All this is to say something that is obvious in reading the OT storyline: Israel and Judah were sent into exile *because of their sin*.

The Lord, however, did not abandon his covenant with his people, and the exile was not the last word. When we look at the prophets, but we will limit ourselves to Isaiah, the theme of the new exodus, a new deliverance, is pervasive. What we see, then, is that the prophets pick up the theme of the first exodus as a type and anticipate a second exodus, a new deliver-

ance for the nation. A second exodus from Babylon is clear in Isaiah 51:11, "The ransomed of the LORD shall return / and come to Zion with singing; / everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; / they shall obtain gladness and joy, / and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (ESV, see also 40:3–11; 42:16; 43:2, 5–7, 16–21, 48:20–21; 49:6–11). Israel was exiled, as Isaiah makes plain, because of its sin: "Who gave Jacob to the robber, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD? Have we not sinned against him? They were not willing to walk in his ways, and they would not listen to his instruction. So he poured out his furious anger and the power of war on Jacob. It surrounded him with fire, but he did not know it; it burned him, but he didn't take it to heart" (Isa 42:24–25 CSB). Israel's exile was not a historical accident, nor can it be explained merely in terms of power politics: the sin of Israel was the reason for exile (cf. 46:8: 48:1–2, 4; 50:1–2; 52:3–5; 57:3–13; 58:1; 59:1–15; 64:6; 65:2–7; 66:3–4).

When Isaiah heralds a new exodus, return from exile, therefore, he makes it clear that the nation was exiled because of its sin, and that its freedom from exile will come when its sins are forgiven. Israel's forgiveness of sins will be accomplished by the servant of the Lord (Isa 52:13-53:12), who will suffer and die and be raised again to atone for Israel's sins. Return from exile, the second exodus, only comes because Israel is forgiven of their sins by the servant's penal substitutionary work.[4] When the NT speaks of Christ as our ransom (Mark 10:45) and as the one who redeemed us (e.g., Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Col 1:13; 1 Pet 1:18-19), the theme of the exodus and the new exodus is picked up. Such an appropriation of the exodus, however, is not without warrant. We already see Isaiah and other prophets using the exodus theme as a type of the liberation of the nation, and NT writers (e.g., 1 Pet 2:21-25) proclaim that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the servant of the Lord. What was anticipated in Israel's deliverance from Egypt and in the new exodus is fulfilled supremely in Jesus's death and resurrection.

If we don't preach Christ from Israel's redemption from Egypt, what do we preach when we read about Israel's exodus from Egypt? Do we preach about Israel's political liberation a long time ago? But what does that matter to us today? The Lord doesn't promise us today political liberation from our enemies, nor does he promise that we won't suffer during this life. Indeed, we may suffer and even be put to death for the sake of the gospel. If

we don't preach Christ and him crucified from such texts, it seems that the passage remains a historical curiosity, unless one preaches from it liberation theology (which is a massive mistake) or prosperity during this present life (a popular heresy). Another way to put it is that the story remains largely irrelevant to us if it doesn't point to Christ.

Or let's think about the judges or saviors and deliverers in the book of Judges. Dan Block's commentary is one of the best in terms of the historical meaning of the text, and we are all grateful for his exegetical insight. He questions, though, whether we can apply what is said about the judges, who are better described as saviors and deliverers, to Christ. An understanding of typology, however, helps us to preach Christ today from the book of Judges. Certainly there is discontinuity between Jesus and the saviors and deliverers in the book of Judges, for as Block shows us in his commentary, though I think he overemphasizes this theme, the deliverers in the book of Judges are defiled by their sin, and Jesus is sinless. Furthermore, the saviors in Judges brought about a physical and temporary deliverance, and Jesus saves us forever from sin. The saviors in the book of Judges helped Israel stay in the land, its inheritance, and Jesus also gives us an inheritance, but one which is eternal in the new heavens and new earth. Even though the deliverers in the book of Judges preserved the nation physically, we must remember that these saviors were raised up because of Israel's sin. Israel suffered during the days of Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson because of their sin, and thus there is a typological connection between the sin of Israel and the sin of people today. The sin of Israel, if not forgiven, would deprive them of their earthly inheritance and our sin (apart from our Savior Jesus) will deprive us of our heavenly inheritance.[5]

We also have to think of the place of the book of Judges in the biblical storyline. Israel had just been granted rest from its enemies under Joshua, and it was in the land promised to Abraham. Perhaps the universal blessing (Gen 12:3!) promised to Abraham was around the corner. But we see in the book of Judges that even though Israel was in the land, their hearts were not transformed. Many of those in the land were not in the Lord! They needed a heart transformation; they needed the new covenant work of the Lord (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27). What was happening during the days of the saviors and deliverers forecasted Israel's coming exile which we talked about in the last section. In fact, the book of Judges makes it

clear that what Israel needed was a king. As the book concludes the author zeroes in repeatedly on the fact that there was no king in Israel and that the people did whatever they thought was right (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). And the story doesn't end there, because as the story unfolds in Samuel we see that Israel needed a king after the Lord's own heart, and that king was not Saul but David. And David himself, as was already mentioned, points forward in the Davidic covenant to a coming king, to a greater king (e.g., Isa 9:2-7) since David himself was flawed and sinful. Judges must not be read in isolation from the rest of the story, and the Davidic king is a type of Christ. Israel needed a greater savior than any of the saviors in the book of Judges, and finally it needed a king who is greater than David, one who can save it from its sins in a more profound way than any earthly judge, and that king is Jesus.

If the book of Judges doesn't point to Jesus, then how do we apply it today? Does God promise that saviors will arise to deliver us from our political enemies? Certainly not. Does he promise earthly blessing if we obey? In a sense yes, but we also suffer and are exiles during this present evil age as Peter tells us (1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:11). I suggest that the reason many preachers don't preach from the OT is because they limit themselves to reading the text in its original historical context, and they rightly sense that the historical meaning has little to say to us today. I am not diminishing what God did in the past, but what does it ultimately matter if Israel won victories years ago during the days of the saviors and deliverers? What do such victories mean for us today? As I already said, they certainly don't promise us political victories or triumph over our enemies. Unless one teaches the false prosperity gospel! No, the story must be read in light of the whole storyline of the scriptures, and the saviors must be read typologically, as pointing to the king.

Block also raises objections about Joshua being a type of Christ in Matthew, suggesting that such typology doesn't work since the Lord was the Savior instead of Joshua. Block, of course, is right in saying that the focus is on Yahweh instead of Joshua in the book of Joshua. Joshua is reminded that he was simply a servant in contrast to the commander of Yahweh's army (Josh 5:13-15). Still, when we read the book of Joshua, Joshua was clearly the agent by which Israel triumphed over the Canaanites. The human agent isn't completely inconsequential, and the author of Hebrews sees a corre-

spondence between the name Joshua and Jesus (Heb 4:8), in that both of them provided rest for the people of God. We have an example of typological escalation since Joshua granted earthly rest, and Jesus grants his people heavenly rest. Since the NT itself sees a typological relationship between Joshua and Jesus, we should do the same. Once again, what does the story mean to us otherwise today? We aren't promised the land of Canaan as an inheritance, and the political and religious fortunes of Israel long ago don't have much relevance to our lives today. Some might say that we need to exercise the faith and obedience that Joshua had. But faith in what? And what is the object of our obedience? If it is faith in God's promises, certainly they all culminate in Christ (2 Cor 1:20) since we aren't promised earthly blessings. The same truths apply to obedience. We obey to receive eternal blessings, not merely temporal ones, and such eternal blessings are ours only through Christ. We come back to the conclusion we saw earlier. If one doesn't preach Christ from the OT stories, if one only tells the stories from the OT context, then Christian preachers aren't going to preach from them much. They will tend to ignore the OT and will stick mainly to the NT. Preachers need to be the models of preaching the OT in light of both the human and divine author, in light of the covenantal storyline, and typologically, for otherwise, as we have often seen, preachers will continue to ignore the OT or just preach messages where OT characters function as good examples. It isn't wrong to appeal to OT characters as good examples, but the OT stories are much richer and deeper than this, and the danger of the former approach is a kind of moralism in which the gospel of grace is neglected.

Genesis 15:1-6

There is space here only for the briefest of comments on Genesis 15:1-6. First, we need to read the story in terms of the biblical storyline, in terms of the Lord's covenants with his people. The covenant with Abraham was graciously given by the Lord to solve the problem introduced by the sin of Adam. Abraham was Promised Land, offspring, and universal blessing (Gen 12:1-3). The curses introduced through Adam would be reversed through the blessings promised to Abraham. Romans 4 and Galatians 3:6-9 pick-up on the story recorded in Genesis 15:1-6. In that sense Romans

and Galatians provide the perspective of the divine author on the story in Genesis 15, and the divine perspective is given through Paul as the human author. Abraham's obedience (cf. Gen 12:1-3; Heb 11:8) isn't the foundation of his relationship with God, for Abraham was an idolater (Josh 24:2), showing that God's grace is the basis, not Abraham's works, for his relationship with the Lord.

The promise of the offspring is center stage in Genesis 15:1-6, but part of the significance of the whole story is that Abraham doesn't have the ability to produce even a single child. In other words, the promise of offspring will be fulfilled by God alone and by grace alone. Every time Abraham looked at his sex-organ, he was reminded that his children came from God's grace, for in the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17) he is promised that he will be the father of many nations. Abraham is frustrated in Genesis 15 that he hasn't had many children and complained to the Lord that his servant, Eliezer, would be his heir. The Lord took him outside on a starry night and promised him that his offspring would be as uncountable as the stars. Abraham could do nothing to bring the pass the promise, but he believed God could and would fulfill it, showing that he put all his trust in God's strength. In the same chapter (Genesis 15) the Lord alone passed through the cut up pieces of the animals, showing that the covenant will ultimately be fulfilled through God's grace and not by human strength. When we read the whole storyline of the scriptures, we recognize that the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, the true offspring of Abraham, the true Israel, is Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16). Even if Abraham didn't understand clearly how the promise would be fulfilled, he put his hope in the future deliverance the Lord pledged.

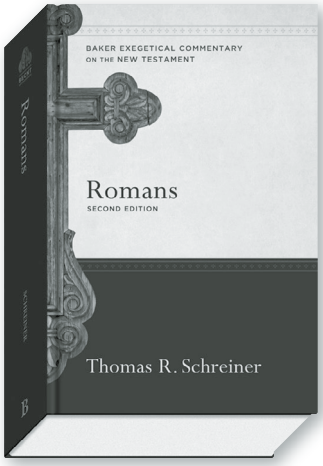
In Romans 4 and Galatians 3 Paul emphasizes that Abraham was saved by faith, not works, by believing not achieving, by resting not performing. The emphasis on God's grace in Genesis 15—the Lord passed through the cut up animals alone—indicates, contrary to Block, that we should not construe Abraham's faith *as his* righteousness. Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness, not because of his great faith, but because of the object of his faith—the Lord himself. So too, in Romans 4 the faith of believers that saves is like the faith of Abraham. It saves, not because faith *is our righteousness*, but because we trust in the atoning death of Jesus (Rom 3:21-26). Paul teaches us in Romans 4 that Abraham believed in a God who

could call into existence what did not exist and who could raise the dead (Rom 4:17). This faith in the God who can raise the dead finds its ultimate fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom 4:25). When we preach the story of Abraham today, we must point people to Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, as the object of their trust. God doesn't promise us today that we will have children as he promised such to Abraham and Sarah. He doesn't promise us that we will inherit the land of Israel. He doesn't promise us that kings will come from our body (Gen 17:6, 16). Abraham isn't merely a good example of faith, though he is that of course. His faith, when interpreted in light of the covenantal story of the Bible, is forward looking and is finally fulfilled when we trust in Christ as the crucified and risen Lord. Those who don't preach faith in Christ from the story of Abraham are actually misinterpreting the story of Abraham because the story of Abraham must be proclaimed from front to back and from back to front. There is an organic relationship between the promises originally give to Abraham and to the fulfillment realized in Christ. If we don't preach the story of Abraham and other OT texts in light of how the story ends, in light of the how the story is fulfilled, in light of the biblical covenants, we aren't preaching the story rightly. In preaching Christ from the OT we interpret the OT in its historical context and in light of the fulfillment in Christ. We consider the role of the human author and the divine author. We read both epochally and canonically, both historically and typologically, and in doing so we find textual warrant for preaching Christ from all of scripture.

---

1. See especially Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018). Cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose of the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017).
2. See here Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).
3. See especially Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TUPOS Structures* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981).
4. Israel, of course, returned from exile before the death of Jesus, but the initial return from exile points forward to the greater deliverance from exile in Christ.
5. There is much more to be said here, for I am not claiming that Jesus saves us from our sin, and we go on sinning without any corresponding change in our lives after salvation.

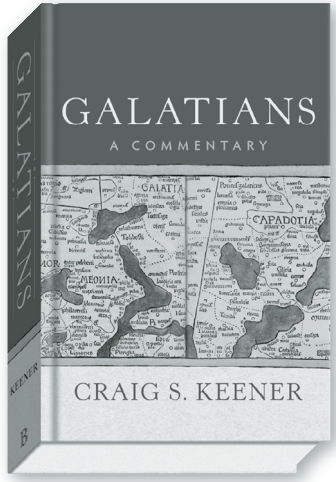
New from
BAKER ACADEMIC



978-1-5409-6005-4 • 944 pp. • $59.99c

"I expect this volume to be a source of wisdom for decades to come for scholars, students, pastors, and laypeople. Highly recommended!"

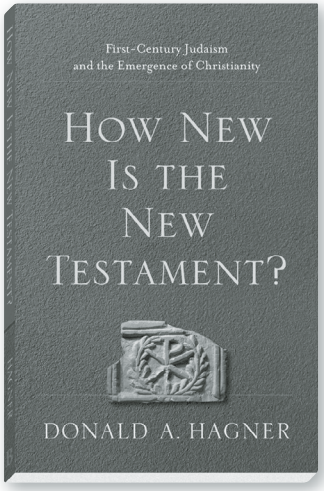
—Benjamin L. Gladd,
Reformed Theological Seminary



978-1-5409-6007-8 • 736 pp. • $59.99c

Coming February 2019

This commentary features Keener's meticulous and comprehensive research and offers a wealth of fresh insights. It will benefit students, pastors, and church leaders alike.



978-1-5409-6041-2 • 224 pp. • $22.99p

"A reminder that what came with Jesus not only was tied to the promises of old but also brought fresh realities and a renewed hope."

—Darrell L. Bock,
Dallas Theological Seminary

Baker Academic

Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Review of Elliott Johnson and Vern Poythress

G. K. Beale

G. K. Beale is the J. Gresham Machen Chair and Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). He earned his PhD from Cambridge University. He is author of such books as a commentary on *The Book of Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1999), *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (IVP, 2004), *We Become What We Worship* (IVP, 2008), *New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker, 2011), and a Handbook on the *New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker, 2012). Dr. Beale is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a husband, and father of three.

Review of Elliott Johnson, "Expository Preaching and Christo-Promise"

It is a privilege to comment on Elliott Johnson's essay, since I was a former student of his at Dallas Theological Seminary. His essay is brief. He writes in order "to demonstrate that a grammatical interpretation of various Old Testament (OT) mentions of promise includes the presence of Christ" (p. 36). Accordingly, this promise is unfolded as redemptive history progresses. He makes an important hermeneutical conclusion: biblical authors, like Moses, intend to express that Christ is the ultimate object of the promises (e.g., of the Abrahamic promise that his seed will bless all the nations) and that this authorial intent could be understood by readers of the time, despite whether or not there is any evidence that they, in fact, did understand. He successfully demonstrates this through his discussion of a few OT texts, especially texts from Genesis: Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3; 15:1-6;

2 Samuel 7:11b-16; and Psalm 16:10.

There is, of course, much more that Johnson could have discussed that would have further supported his argument. He cites 2 Corinthians 1:20 ("For every one of God's promises is 'yes' in him"), which supports the notion that all of God's promises in the OT begin fulfillment with Christ's first coming and will be consummated in him at his final coming. Likewise, Johnson adduces Luke 24:27: "beginning in Moses and all the prophets he (Jesus) expounded to them in all the Scripture things concerning himself" (HCSB). Elliott never tells us to what "all the Scripture" refers. Does it refer only to those places where there is direct verbal prophecy of the Messiah or where there are promises that ultimately look forward to him (the latter of which he focuses upon in his essay)? Or, does "all the Scripture" include not only these direct prophetic or promissory assertions but also, in some way, the other portions of Scripture containing historical narratives and wisdom literature? In other words, is "all the Scripture" to be understood in the former qualified sense or is it unqualified, so that in some way every part of Scripture (including every verse) concerns Christ. Johnson *appears* to favor the qualified perspective though he never explicitly says. Of particular note are the wide swaths of material composed of historical narratives. It would have been helpful to hear how Johnson viewed this material in relation to Christ.

Thus, as far it as it goes, Johnson's essay on finding Christ in the OT was fine, but one wonders what he would say about those vast portions of Scripture that do not contain direct prophecies and promises about the Messiah.

I have a quibble on another issue that Johnson raises. He says that Christ was not prophesied to "replace those called from the human race, Israel, but would represent them that they might realize the role to which they were called" (p. 44).(Since Johnson is a dispensationalist, his point here is that Christ's coming as true Israel would not cancel out ethnic Israel's future possession of their land and reign with their messianic king in a premillennial kingdom. I would rather say that Jesus sums up Israel in himself and is the continuation of true Israel and that all, whether ethnic Jew or Gentile, who identify with Christ become part of true Israel (so Gal 3:16, 29). This would leave open an amillennial, postmillennial or premillennial perspective. Obviously, I cannot delve more into this issue,

since Johnson only raises it briefly. Perhaps there will be another occasion when Johnson and I can discuss this issue in more detail.

Review of Vern Poythress on "Christocentric Preaching"

I am happy to evaluate Vern Poythress's essay, since he is a colleague of mine at Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia) and we have had many conversations about biblical interpretation and hermeneutics.

Poythress has a multifaceted perspective on how Genesis 15:1-6 relates to Christ and, as such, he raises many issues for which there is not space to respond to all of them. He begins by making some general introductory comments. First, he says that preaching should not be Christomonic. One should not focus only on Christ's incarnation but should also pay attention to his pre-existence. In addition, Christ-centered interpretation should be accompanied by Trinity-centered interpretation, since Christ is to be understood as being a person of the Trinity, in relation to the Father and the Spirit. This is a good corrective, but it needs to be recalled that the NT is dominated by portrayals and discussions of Jesus Christ much more than by mention of God the Father or the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is suitable that in preaching a passage from the OT and putting it into the context of the Bible's storyline that climaxes with Christ in the NT, the preacher should be focused more on how the specific passage is related to Christ than to other persons of the Trinity (indeed, Poythress does later acknowledge in the last sentence of his essay [pp. 65-66] the "principial importance of Christ in teaching in the church").

Secondly, Poythress acknowledges that expository preaching is preferable over other homiletical approaches, though he never mentions them (I assume he has in mind various forms of "topical" preaching). However, he says that Scripture does not restrict preaching to the expository preaching form, especially since once cannot find examples of expository preaching in Acts or the epistles. But one can find something close to expository preaching in various segments of the NT that are based on whole segments from the OT.[1] Furthermore, in the only place in the OT where a worship service in the temple court is elaborated on in some detail, the priests "read from the book, from the law of God, explaining to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Neh 8:8; so also 8:7). This appears to be an

extended time of consecutive reading of the Torah (Neh 8:2-3), though it is not clear where they commenced reading. Finally, should we not give contemporary congregations the opportunity to hear books of the Bible consecutively read (e.g., Paul's epistles) and commented on in the same way in which the first century Christians were able to experience hearing letters read, which later became Scripture (e.g., see Rev 1:3).[2] Such preaching over the years will ensure that congregations will hear the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). For these reasons, I would say that expository preaching is not only preferable but should be the rule rather than the exception.[3]

Among Poythress's multifaceted ways of relating Christ to Genesis 15:1-6 is that of placing the passage in its canonical context and storyline: "because God has a plan from the beginning, we may also consider how all this history leads to Christ," and Genesis 15:5 concerning Abraham's seed "offers us one point on this developing line" (p. 57). Thus, "a sermon focused on verse 5 could dwell on how Christ brings to fulfillment the covenantal promises in the verse" (p. 59).

Poythress also sees a typology of Christ in the Genesis 15 text:

> Also, the redemptive plot that consists in the movement from distress to deliverance is typological in its relation to the antitype of redemption accomplished by Christ.
>
> Here in Genesis 15:1-6 are found many of these themes. In particular, the obstacle is that Abram has no proper heir. It is a trial, corresponding to the trials of Christ and of Christians. The answer is given in terms of the character of God and his promises. Near fulfillment is found in Genesis 21, when Isaac is born, after overcoming the threat in Genesis 20. This deliverance is typologically related to the climactic deliverance in the death and resurrection of Christ (p. 60).

Poythress could have adduced Hebrews 11:17-19 in support of this (perhaps he is assuming it). While I agree with Poythress's interpretation here (and his proposal on "covenantal fulfillment" above), I do not think it is the central exegetical focus of Genesis 15:1-6, but that his typological view is included in what I would call the "cognitive peripheral vision"[4] or "tacit or subsidiary knowledge"[5] of the biblical writer. That is, one must go to other passages in the OT and NT to validate the interpretation. Another way to put this is if you asked Moses at this point whether or not he had such a

typological view, he might say "yes" but this was not his explicit conscious authorial intention. Geerhardus Vos puts it a bit differently,

> Our dogmatic constructions of truth based on the finished product of revelation, must not be imported into the minds of the original recipients of revelation. The endeavor should be to enter into their outlook and get the perspective of the elements of the truth as presented to them. There is a point in which the historic advance and the concentric grouping of the truth are closely connected. Not seldom progress is brought about by some element of truth, which formerly stood in the periphery, taking its place in the center. The main problem will be how to do justice to the individual peculiarities of the agents in revelation.[6]

A number of Poythress's interpretations of Genesis 15:1-6 are, in my opinion, to be placed in this "tacit" category. For example,

> Ever since the fall, God's speech needs to be mediated to avoid death of the recipient. The mediator is the Son, the Word. Because of the necessity of mediation, we can confidently infer the presence of Christ and his work when God speaks to Abram. Christ's role in Genesis 15:4 anticipates his incarnation and verbal ministry on earth (p. 61).

I would need for Dr. Poythress to explain this in, at least, one more paragraph for me to understand this better and for me even then to place it in the tacit category.[7]

One of Poythress's interpretations cannot even be placed in the tacit category. He says that the phrase in Genesis 15:4, "the word of the Lord came ..." "hints at a differentiation between God who is the origin and the word that" comes from God but as distinct from his as speaker. This "adumbrates the fuller NT revelation of the distinction between God the Father and the Word, the Son" (p. 63). Dr. Poythress would have to elaborate in much more depth to present a convincing case that this "adumbration" is present in Genesis 15:4.

Similarly, on the same page, Poythress says that "the coming of the word" [in Genesis 15:4] is a coming of God that is by grace," and that "as such it ... foreshadows the climactic coming in Christ" (p. 63). He then cites Hebrews 1:1 in support (p. 63), but that passage does not present Christ as God's word that came but one through whom the word of God

came: that, just as God spoke through OT prophets, now "in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son."

I have similar caution concerning Poythress's statement about the trinity:

> The actions of God in history reflect the eternal trinitarian relations of action. The Father begets the Son eternally. This eternal begetting has a reflection in the causal unfolding of time on the level of the creature. Thus, the before-and-after structure articulated in the word after in Genesis 15:1 reflects the priority and posteriority of begetting and begotten in the Trinity (p. 65).

This appears to me to be an unnecessary reading in of a theological point that cannot be found even tacitly in Genesis 15:1. Now, it may be that there are *philosophical-theological* implications of Genesis 15:1 that could ultimately relate it to the "before-and-after structure" of the Trinity, but this appears to be something different than the *hermeneutical* christologcal implications of Genesis 15:1-6.[8]

Truly, Dr. Poythress's essay is far-reaching and represents a multiperspectival stance on Genesis 15:1-6. I have registered agreements, qualifications, and some disagreements. However, I am confident that if I sat down with my colleague to discuss my disagreements that he would "be ready to make a defense ... for the hermeneutical hope in him, yet with gentleness and reverence" (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

My Own View of Luke 24:27

This conclusion serves as a partial response to Elliott Johnson's perspective on Luke 24:27.[9] First, I think "all the scriptures" in this verse includes every portion of OT scripture, including every verse. This may sound like an extreme, maximalist view, but I would contend that "all the scriptures" refers not only to explicit messianic prophecies but also to historical narratives that were typological foreshadowings of Christ or had their indirect fulfillments in Christ. Does this mean that every verse in the OT has to do with Christ? Well, yes and no. Graeme Goldsworthy has summarized this "yes and no" answer aptly:

> While some texts may be more peripheral to the main message, no text is totally

> irrelevant. Thus, an event or person in the historical narratives of the Old Testament may never be specifically mentioned again. But it functions theologically within its own epoch, even if only to be one of the less prominent events or people in the outworking of God's plan. It will always be part of a larger whole whose theological significance can be determined.[10]

In this respect, such *apparently insignificant* events are part of and are inextricably linked to larger narratives that point more clearly to Christ. So to whatever degree these apparently insignificant events or persons are inextricably linked thematically to the larger narratives, to that degree they have Christological significance.

My interpretation of Luke 24:27 may best be explained by an illustration adapted from C. H. Spurgeon.[11] In every town, village, and tiny hamlet in England there is a road leading to London. In the smallest hamlet there is a path leading to a tiny village. This pathway may be going in the opposite direction of London. Then from this village there is a small road leading to a larger village, which may be going parallel with London. From there is a larger road leading to a town, which is curving toward London. From that town is a major road going in the general direction of London. Finally, from that town is a highway going directly to London. Not all the paths and roads from each town go in a straight line toward London but they eventually get you to London. We may call this a "Londonocentric" view of road systems in England. Likewise, a "Christocentric" view of all the passages in the OT may not appear to be going in the direction of Christ but they are parts of larger wholes that more clearly point to or prophesy of Christ. It is in this sense that Christ says in Luke 24:27 that "he explained to them **in all the scriptures** the things concerning himself."

---

1 Examples may be found in Jesus's own synoptic eschatological discourse that is based on Daniel 7-12, in Revelation 4-5 (based on Daniel 7), 13:1-18 (based on Daniel 7), and Galatians (possibly based on Isaiah 49-55). In fact, the same kind of examples based on Daniel 7 or Daniel 11-12 can also be found in early Jewish writings (on all the passages adduced in this note, see G. K. Beale, *A Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 80-86.

2 We know that among the roles of Greco-Roman and Jewish letter carriers was that of explaining parts of the letter as they read it (on which, e.g., see Beale, Handbook, 10).

3 We have not yet defined expository preaching, but for a good definition see Sidney Greidanus: "Expository preaching is 'Bible-centered preaching.' That is, it is handling the text 'in such a way that its real and

essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer [and of God] and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers." (The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 11, citing Merrill Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955], 33). I would add here that such preaching goes through biblical books consecutively, paragraph by paragraph.

4 For this concept, see G. K. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Writers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 263-293.

5 On which see further Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co. 1966), 10-19, 55-62, 92-93.

6 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 25-26.

7 Poythress's view is that Christ is the one who speaks in Gen 15:5-6.

8 In the next sentence after the above quotation, Poythress says, "All this represents implications of the teaching of the Bible as a whole" (p. 13), but it appears to me that he is departing from the sphere of hermeneutical connections and referring to philosophical and theological implications, which is different.

9 In truth, it also applies to Dan Block's view of Luke 24:27.

10 G. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 256.

11 See Justin Taylor, thegospelcoalition.org, "Spurgeon on Preaching." March 20, 2008, which I have adapted with changes.

"Christotelic Preaching:" Reflections on Daniel Block's Approach

Peter J. Gentry

Peter J. Gentry is Donald L. Williams Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Director of the Hexapla Institute at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served on the faculty of Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College and also taught at the University of Toronto, Heritage Theological Seminary, and Tyndale Seminary. Dr. Gentry is the author of many articles and book reviews, the co-author of *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 2018) and *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* (Crossway, 2015), and the author of *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Crossway, 2017). Dr. Gentry is currently finishing a critical text of *Ecclesiastes and Proverbs* for the Göttingen Septuagint.

It is an honor to be asked to evaluate Dan Block's essay, since I was a colleague of his at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and we enjoyed many long hours affably debating interpretation of the Scriptures over the years. There is much that deserves comment in Block's essay, but there is not space to address all the issues that he raises.

In general, I found Block's position and presentation a bit confusing and conflicted. Several examples can be given without getting bogged down on issues of lesser importance. The difference between Christocentric and Christotelic proclamation was not clear in spite of a diagram to aid the explanation. His comments on "making a beeline for the cross" (p. 19) were amusing, yet he does appear to be concerned with ***how*** we get from a passage in the Old Testament (OT) to what it may instruct us about Christ.[1] This is a central issue, indeed, and he does well to make it so.

One of the problems is that the manner in which he adduces evidence to support statements is frequently selective and difficult to substantiate.

Block claims, "in the Scriptures Jesus is much more common as a designation for the second person of the Trinity than the title Christ" (p. 8). When one speaks of the second person of the Trinity, the designation that comes to mind first is "Son." Moreover, names and titles given to the incarnate Lord have to be treated in an interlocking network of meaning and not pitted one against the other. Any grammar of biblical Greek will note that while χριστός begins as an epithet and is usually articulated, later in the New Testament (NT) it becomes equivalent to a name or proper noun and is no longer articulated.[2] One must also consider compound names like Jesus Christ.[3] Why does Paul prefer "Christ Jesus" in his final letters (Timothy and Titus)? Why stop at Matthew 10:42 in adducing evidence from this gospel for the name Jesus? And why couldn't a gospel begin by focusing on his personal name? What exactly does this kind of data prove?

Block claims that "the epithet ὁ χριστὸς functions as a narrow technical term for the eschatological messianic son of David." "If we are honest," he says, "and if this is what we mean by 'messianic,' we could count all the relevant texts in the First Testament on our two hands and two feet" (p. 8). This amounts to asserting that the importance of the topic is indicated by the number of times the term מָשִׁיחַ (messiah) is used. Yet fundamental to literary skill is the ability to discuss someone or something without always employing epithet or name. Stephen Dempster's masterpiece Dominion and Dynasty concludes that the entire OT is focused on a coming king.[4] The genius of the book of Esther is that God is the central character without once being mentioned.

In the same vein, Michael Heiser states:

> The identity and purpose of the messiah are unknowable from a Bible verse—and even many Bible verses. The profile proceeds along conceptual trajectories that eventually merge into a portrait. And so Jesus' question (Luke 24:26) to the two men on the road to Emmaus makes eminent sense: "Was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Yes, of course it was. It's just hard to see that unless you know what you're looking for. The messianic portrait can only be discerned by assembling a hundred terms, phrases, metaphors, and symbols, which themselves take on meaning only when their patterns and convergences are detected.[5]

At the heart of the matter is the Christian interpretation of the OT, the

typology employed by Jesus and the apostles, and the larger metanarrative of Scripture. The epithet Christian was first used for followers of Jesus in Antioch, not long after the church was born (Acts 11:26). The term is a diminutive, meaning "little Christ." What it implies for our hermeneutical approach to the OT is that if we are to have a *Christian* interpretation of the OT, we must follow the teaching of Jesus and his authorized agents, the apostles.

In this regard Block makes an important comment on Luke 24:27: "and beginning with Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Block contends that "the evangelist did not say that all the Scriptures speak of Christ, but that he explained those texts that spoke of him from all the Scriptures" (p. 12). The adverbial prepositional phrase "in all the scriptures" modifies "he explained" and the phrase "the things concerning himself" is the objective content of the "explanation." The question is whether or not "in the scriptures" is to be qualified to mean only directly messianic prophecies, so that only some OT passages are in mind, or whether "in all the scriptures" is unqualified and in some way means "all the scriptures" in the sense of every OT passage. Block prefers the former, apparently believing that Jesus has in mind only "explicitly or implicitly royal messianic texts" (p. 15; I wish he had defined "implicitly"). He does not explain, however, why he prefers this. He believes that to "make every text about Christ" is to "pay no attention to what the divine and human authors originally intended," which results in "hijacking" the Jewish Scriptures (p. 17). Block's view that only explicit or implicit royal messianic texts are in mind in Luke 24:27 is not sufficiently inclusive, since it does not take into consideration OT texts that are not messianic texts but are historical narratives, which are seen by Luke and the other gospel writers as typologically pointing forward to and fulfilled in Christ (e.g., Luke 8:9; 20:17; Acts 1:16-20; 4:11; 28:25-27; likewise Matt 2:15-18; 12:40; 13:45; 15:7-9; 26:47-56; 27:9-10). In addition to direct or implicit messianic prophecies, Jesus would most likely have had these kinds of historical narrations also in mind in his statement in Luke 24:27. So, there is much more included in Jesus' reference to "all the Scriptures" than mere direct or implicit messianic prophecies.

This raises the issue of typology. Block attempts to demonstrate that Joshua is not a type of the coming king according to the intent of the text

of the OT. At the same time, he does not clearly define typology. He seems to think that Jesus and the apostles are operating by hindsight and that the typological teaching is not the intent of the divine or human authors of the OT.

In previous publications, Steve Wellum and I have labored to describe as accurately as possible the notion of typology *as employed by the authors of Scripture*.[6] We have noted that typology is grounded in *history*, the *text*, and *interbiblical/intertextual development*. First, typology is a feature of divine revelation rooted in history and the text.[7] It involves an organic relationship or analogical correspondences between "persons, events, and institutions" in one epoch ("type") and what they anticipate, or their fulfillment, in a later epoch ("antitype"). Second, typology is prophetic and predictive and thus divinely intended. In other words, God planned for the type to point forward to its fulfillment, or antitype, in a later epoch of redemptive history.[8] For this reason, typologies are recurrent patterns pointing forward to and culminating first in Christ and then applied to or appropriated by Christ's people, the church. Typology is best viewed as a subset of predictive prophecy, not in the sense of direct verbal predictions but more "indirectly" in the sense of predictions built on models/patterns that God intends, which become unveiled or more clearly seen as later OT authors reinforce those patterns, with the goal of anticipating their fulfillment in Christ.

In my book, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets*, I discuss typology and the factors that determine correct interpretation: what is a type and what is not a type.[9] In brief, typology is governed by four factors.

The first is correspondence between events, people, places, etc., of one time, and events, people, places, etc., of a later time. This correspondence is due to the fact that God in his providence sovereignly controls history, and he is consistent in his character so that there are repetitive patterns to his works in history.

Second is escalation from type to antitype so that the later event, person, or thing that can be said to be the fulfillment of the type is much better and greater than that which foreshadows it.

Third is biblical warrant. For something to be considered a type, there must be exegetical evidence in the original text that indicates that what the text is dealing with is intended to be a model or pattern for something to

follow in history. Norbert Lohfink shows from *Exodus 15* that the deliverance through the Red Sea was intended from the start to be a model for future salvation.[10] Thus, when the Major Prophets predict a future salvation through the work of a coming king, they are right to speak of it as a new exodus and to describe the coming salvation in the language of God's great deliverance in the past. They are right, because they have correctly understood Exodus 15 as intended by divine and human authors. In this regard, Isaiah employs the term גאל, ("to perform the duty of nearest relative," "to redeem") for the forgiveness of sins in Isaiah 44:22. He specifically transfers the term from the economic realm of the Exodus to the realm of our broken covenant relationship with God in the New Exodus. Was the exodus event intended by God and Moses as a model for future salvation so that all readers could understand this? Block says, "no;" Isaiah says, "yes." This shows, also, that Block's discussion of expressions for "redeem" in the OT is too selective.

The fourth factor is that the progression of the covenants throughout the narrative plot structure of the Bible both creates, controls, and develops the typological structures across the canon of Scripture. For example, in the covenant with creation, Adam is portrayed as a king-priest who must be an obedient son in relation to God and a servant king in relation to creation. This role is taken up by Noah in the covenant with God that reaffirms the covenant with creation. Next, in the covenant with Abraham the king-priest role devolves upon him.[11] In Exodus 19, we see how Israel as a nation is called to be an obedient son and servant king, functioning in a priestly role in relation to the nations of the world. In the Davidic covenant, this role is narrowed from the nation as a whole to the king in particular. Finally, in the new covenant, Jesus the Messiah fulfills these roles adequately and fully.[12]

The end of Block's essay focuses on the interpretation of Genesis 15:1-6. He concludes that nothing in this passage points "to a future eschatological Messiah" (p. 30). His first reason for arguing this is that the quotation of Genesis 15:6 in Habakkuk, Romans 1:17, and Galatians 3:11 (see also Heb 10:38) is different from the meaning of Genesis 15:6 ("then he believed in the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness"). Habakkuk changes Abraham's "belief" to God's "faith." Romans and Galatians, too, in the immediate context, views Christ as the object of faith. Block concludes that

the meaning of Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, contains "alien elements" in relation to the "original," and that "we may not force onto earlier texts meanings that were irrelevant to the original situation." Genesis 15:6 provided Habakkuk, Romans, and Galatians "convenient verbal instruments for communicating new and [a] quite different message," which has a "polemical purpose" (p. 26). Block believes that the statement that Abraham will have an heir (Isaac) whose seed will be multiplied into an uncountable host, at least in this context, does not include Christ (Gen 15:4-5). He contends for this despite his acknowledgement that Matthew's genealogy presents Jesus as the climactic seed of Abraham (p. 30). But he apparently thinks that since Jesus did not physically come from the loins of Joseph, that in some sense this nullifies or significantly qualifies what Matthew's genealogy says about Jesus' Abrahamic descent (though in the same sentence, he says Jesus is the climactic seed of Abraham, p. 30). But Matthew's point about Jesus as part of Abraham's "seed" stands on a legal genealogical basis (as most commentators agree), so that the "seed" mentioned in Genesis 15:5 would include the individual royal seed, as would Galatians 3:16: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "and to seeds," as referring to many, but to one, "and to your seed," that is, Christ." Many believe the promise about multiplying Abraham's "seed" likely refers collectively, at least, to the following texts: Genesis 13:15-16; 15:5; 22:17-18; 26:4; 32:12.[13] Included in these collective seed promises (such as Gen 15:5) would be the coming individual royal seed, which Genesis 22:17-18 and Psalm 72:17 demonstrates (the latter alluding to the "seed" in the former). Acts 3:25-26 also cites the promise of a seed from Genesis 22:18 and applies it to Jesus. Accordingly, Block concludes his section on Genesis 15:1-6 by saying, "I see no hand here pointing to a future eschatological Messiah" (p. 30).

In addition, Block's description of righteousness is skewed. Why jump to Deuteronomy 6:25 to explain Genesis 15:6? It certainly is not "the closest analogue to Genesis 15:6 in the First Testament." The connection is inappropriate because the referents in Deuteronomy 6:25 are already in the covenant. Since no space can be given to discuss this in detail, I may refer the reader to the exposition by Stephen G. Dempster.[14] Unlike Block's overly narrow "grammatical-historical" treatment of the text, Dempster is able to treat the *textual* horizon and move to the *epochal* and *canonical*

horizons of the text without setting the textual horizon of Genesis 15 at variance with later authors of Scripture.[15] Why is Block concerned to show in the epochal horizon Abraham's roller coaster ride between doubt and faith but not allow the same epochal and canonical horizons to govern interpretation of the seed? The occurrence of the word with singular pronouns and verbs in Genesis 22:17-18 shows that the narrative is focusing on a single seed amongst the multitude (as stars in the heavens). Why does Block ignore the focus on faith in the narratives of the Pentateuch between the blocks of legal material?[16] Why does Block not address the connection between righteousness and salvation in the canonical horizon of the OT long before we get to the NT?[17]

Finally, what I have learned from the last thirty years in which *Kingdom through Covenant* was hatched is that the metanarrative we have of Scripture limits our interpretation of any individual text. Block's essay on the covenants[18] indicates a different understanding of the metanarrative, which, in truth, accounts for different ways of approaching the Christocentric reading of Scripture. I would contend that the basic metanarrative of Scripture is already clear before one is finished reading the Pentateuch or Torah of Moses. In the future, fruitful discussion could focus on this point.

Summary Reflection

Block's essay raises a host of issues. I have focused on only three. First Block affirms that "later revelation cannot correct, annul, or contradict earlier revelation." What he means is that later authors cannot contradict his "grammatical-historical exegesis" of the OT. In my view, the problem is that Block tends to do his exegesis independently of Jesus and the apostles, which is problematic.

Second, I am convinced that Block does not do justice to a biblical use of typology, which is another large area of disagreement in our Christological reading of the OT. In this regard, Peter Leithart's comment is apt:

> Liberal interpretation of the Old Testament can, in fact, be understood as the product of an exclusive reliance on the grammatical-historical method, and evangelical biblical study often has the same narrow focus. Interpretation of the Old Testament must be

grounded in grammar and history, but if it does not move to typology, it is not Christian interpretation.[19]

Finally, the metanarrative on which Block's approach rests limits the epochal and canonical horizons of his exegetical enterprise, which has critical implications for the preaching task.

---

1. See Peter J. Gentry "The Atonement in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)," *SBJT* 11/2 (2007): 20-47 where I attempt to show how one may interpret Isaiah 53 according to the literary macrostructures of the OT to arrive legitimately at fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth.
2. James H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Vol. 3 *Syntax*; Nigel Turner, ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 167.
3. It must be noted in regard to Block's discussion of "The Narrator's Designations for God" that El-Shadday is a compound name. *Pace* Block, Abraham did not know God as Shadday, but only as El-Shadday. Since Gen 49:25 is poetry, compound names may be split over parallel lines.
4. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (NSBT 15; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
5. Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 248.
6. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 129-137 and chapter 5 of Peter J. Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).
7. The historical and textual dimensions are important. Types are not symbols of spiritual ideas but are real historical people and events, and in God's plan, he intends for them to point forward to the antitype.
8. See Earle E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 127; Paul Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 21.
9. Stephen Wellum devotes chapter 3 of Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* to a discussion of typology. See also Peter J. Gentry, "The Significance of Covenants in Biblical Theology," *SBJT* 20.1 (2016): 9-33.
10. See Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets*, 71-92 and Norbert Lohfink, *The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament* (R. A. Wilson, trans.; Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968), 67-86.
11. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).
12. This last point is based on Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*. There we argue that the succession of covenants in scripture (Creation, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, New Covenant) are the key to the plot-structure of the Bible. Typology, then, in terms of events, persons, and places foreshadowed, are all be tied to the covenants because these are the Bible's own categories for structuring its message.
13. We have not included "seed" texts that promise possession of the land, since that does not appear to be in mind in Gal 3:16 or anywhere else in the epistle. Among the above-cited Genesis texts, Gen 22:17-18 may be most in mind, since the first mention of "seed" is collective but the second and third mention of "seed" is singular, referring to a royal individual descendant of Abraham. Gal 3:16 appears to have in mind this promised individual seed of Gen 22:17b-18. See C. J. Collins, "Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete was Paul?", *Tyndale Bulletin* 54 (2003): 75-86 and idem "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3.15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 48/1 (1997): 142–144. Also noteworthy is Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, "Christ or Family as the 'Seed' of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16." *SBJT* 14/3 (2010): 36–49.
14. Stephen G. Dempster, "'He Believed the Lord': The Pedigree of Justification in the Pentateuch," in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical and Pastoral Perspective*

(Matthew Barrett, ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 37-93.

15. For an explanation of the categories described by Richard Lints, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 118-129, 656-657.
16. See Dempster, "'He Believed the Lord'," 56-57; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); idem, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Rev¬elation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); Hans-Christoph Schmitt, "Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie: Beobachtungen zur Bedeutung der 'Glaubens'-Thematik innerhalb der Theologie des Pentateuch," *VT* 32, no. 2 (1982): 170–89.
17. Dempster expounds the connection between righteousness and salvation from Genesis on in to Isaiah, see op. cit.
18. Daniel I. Block, "Covenance: A Whole Bible Perspective," Unpublished Paper, Wheaton, 2011.
19. Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000), 27.

Reflections on Preaching Christ from the Old Testament

Sidney Greidanus

Sidney Greidanus taught for many years at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He also taught at The King's College. He earned his PhD from the Free University of Amsterdam. Since his retirement from full-time teaching in 2004, he has devoted his time to writing commentaries specifically for preachers. He is the author of many books, including *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Eerdmans, 1989); *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1999); *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Wipf & Stock, 2001); *Preaching Christ from the Psalms* (Eerdmans, 2016); and *From Chaos to Cosmos: Creation to New Creation* (Crossway, 2018).

These three authors each approach the topic of "Preaching Christ, the Text, or Something Else?" in their own way, using Genesis 15:1-6 as a test case. I will comment briefly on each article, provide a definition of "Preaching Christ," suggest seven legitimate ways to move from the Old Testament (OT) preaching text to Jesus Christ in the New Testament (NT), and analyze Genesis 15:1-6 for sermon preparation.

Comments on Each Article

I appreciated Daniel Block's redemptive-historical perspective of Scripture. He writes, "The Bible (First and New Testaments) tells a single story of God's gracious plan of redeeming the cosmos from sin and the effects of the rebellion of those created as his images and commissioned to govern the world on his behalf. That story climaxes in Jesus, whose work is accomplished in two identifiable phases: first, in the incarnation 2000

years ago, when through his death he dealt sin and all the forces of evil a mortal blow, and through the power of his resurrection was exalted as the Son of God. And now we wait for phase 2, when he will return and recreate the heavens and the earth in all their original and this time irrevocable perfection and glory. This is the story." This statement should be framed and placed on every preacher's desk. Block continues, "Not every text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ as Messiah, but every text presents a vital part of that story of Jesus, 'who is also called the Christ.' We may often grasp the Christological significance of a First Testament text only with hindsight" (p. 14). Hindsight is certainly true with the ways of redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, and typology which I explain below.

I also appreciated Block's "Discourse/Syntactic Diagram of Genesis 15:1-6" (p. 19) which, without using the narrative headings I use, comes close to the plot line which captures the conflict, rising tension, the turn in the narrative, resolution, and outcome (see my plot line below). We might note in passing that Block's "Theme: Abram's Struggle with Childlessness" is technically, homiletically, not a theme but a title. Block's "theme" identifies the subject; to get to the real theme we must answer the question: What does the author say about this subject? In other words, a theme formulates the message of the text in a single sentence, subject and predicate, such as I propose below: "The LORD promises childless Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens."

Unfortunately, Block does not seem to like the term "Christocentric" or "Christ-centered" and sets up a straw man to fight it. He writes, "Many Christocentric sermons I have heard are anything but expository. The problem with a Christocentric hermeneutic surfaces early in the history of the church" (p. 17). Then follow examples of allegorizing and antisemitism. It is true that allegorical interpretation has been used in church history to seek to preach Christ, but that does not mean that one can equate allegorical interpretation with "a Christocentric hermeneutic." Christocentric interpretation is radically different from allegorical interpretation.[1] As far as I know, all published contemporary scholars who promote Christocentric interpretation and preaching reject allegorical interpretation.

Block sees another problem with "a Christocentric reading of OT narratives" and instead opts for "a Christo-telic reading of First Testament

narratives." He writes, "Based on a particular reading of Jesus' comments to the Emmaus disciples in Luke 24:27 and 44, the Christocentric hermeneutic assumes that all the Scriptures (i.e., every text) speak of him" (p. 12). Who are these Christocentric preachers who assume that "*every text*" speaks of Christ? The Christocentric method insists that every preaching text be a literary unit, not a fragment or a single text. If I understand Block correctly, I think we are dealing here with another assumption that a Christocentric reading of OT narratives necessarily "assumes that all the Scriptures (i.e., every text) speak of him [Jesus Christ]" (p. 12). I have no difficulty with a "Christo-telic" reading (except that many people will not understand it), but see no reason to have it replace the time-honored phrase "Christocentric interpretation" and "Christocentric preaching."

Instead of "Christ-centered preaching," Block argues for "Jesus-centered preaching." He writes, "Jesus is a personal name, in contrast to Christ (ὁ χριστός), which is a title. By definition, a name invites a personal relationship, as opposed to an official epithet, which acknowledges a formal relationship based on status" (p. 8). But this is just a theoretical distinction which does not hold up in practice. When I think of preaching Christ I am not thinking of preaching an office but preaching the *person* who holds the office of Messiah, who is none other than Jesus Christ. Since Jesus is the Christ and Christ is Jesus, I think "Jesus-centered" and "Christ-centered" can be used interchangeably.

I like Vern Poythress's emphasis on theocentric interpretation because that is where Christocentric interpretation should start. But instead of Christ-centered interpretation he argues for Trinity-centered interpretation. Poythress writes, "Christ-centered interpretation and Trinity-centered interpretation should be seen as two sides of the same coin" (p. 51). And again, "Rightly understood, Christocentric preaching is also necessarily Trinity-centered preaching. Conversely, Trinity-centered preaching is Christ-centered" (p. 52). But saying so, doesn't make it so. Poythress has added the Holy Spirit to the equation. It is difficult enough to preach Christ from the OT without adding the Holy Spirit as another objective. And how should we understand Trinity-centered preaching? Should we strive to give more or less equal time to each person of the Trinity in every sermon on every text as some have suggested?[2] That would place an impossible burden on preachers, for it places them in a straitjacket

that is bound to distort the text. But in his "exposition" of Genesis 15:1-6, I don't see Poythress moving in that direction except for mentioning "trinitarian" a few times. So what does he mean by "Trinity-centered preaching"?

I suggest that the content of the sermon should be dictated *not* by systematic theology but by the content of the preaching text. Sometimes that content is indeed the Holy Spirit, in which case the sermon will be Holy Spirit-centered. But most often the sermon will be centered on God the Father and the Son. For in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit serves to exalt not himself but the Father and the Son. Jesus said about "the Spirit of truth," "He will glorify *me*, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that *the Father* has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14-15).[3] And Paul does not say, "We proclaim Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," but "We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23-24). Preaching "*Christ* crucified" is preaching "the power of *God* and the wisdom of *God*."

I also question Poythress's defense of expository preaching from a single verse. He writes,

> Often expository preaching is considered more narrowly. It often means focusing on expounding one verse or one passage from the Bible ... We may indeed affirm that it is a tradition with wisdom and it can serve to instruct aspiring preachers. The principal people who advocate expository preaching do not themselves claim that single-text preaching is absolutely the only way to preach—only that it is generally preferable. In particular, they offer it as wise counsel for young men who are still gaining their feet with the practice of preaching. With that understanding we may agree (p. 54).

I think it is irresponsible to teach "aspiring preachers" to expound on a single verse because it opens the way to misinterpreting the biblical author's message and replacing it with one's own. Thus it may derail the sermon's message from the start. Biblical authors did not communicate in single verses, of course,[4] but in literary units, often marked with ancient rhetorical structures such as repetition, inclusio, and chiasm. Only a biblical literary unit makes for a good preaching text.[5] Perry Yoder rightly argued, "In the

study of the Bible we need to begin with the assumption that the Bible writers were attempting to communicate to their audience by writing in organized units. These compositional units or paragraphs are the smallest unit of communication in the text ... To take less than this is to chop up the ideas of the author and perhaps misunderstand them as a result of studying them out of context."[6]

Elliott Johnson's "Expository Preaching and Christo-Promise" shows good awareness of progression in redemptive-history and the way of promise-fulfillment. At first I thought that he might have limited himself to "Christo-promise" with God's promise of Genesis 15:1-6 in mind. But then he concludes,

> The title *Christo-Promise* seeks to represent the *intention-directed revelation* of the OT. *Promise*, having the force of a prophetic-future, speaks to God's intent to restore and bless the fallen creation. That restoration includes both the restoration of mankind's relationship to God and the restoration of mankind's mediating role of rule in God's will in the creation. It is God's stated commitment in promise that certifies the believer's hope. *Christo* speaks to the ultimate One through whom fulfillment of the promise would appear (p. 44).

This is a fine description of the way of promise-fulfillment. But Johnson appears to miss several other legitimate ways to move from an OT passage to Jesus Christ in the NT (see below).

Definition of "Preaching Christ"

It would be well if we all started with the same definition of preaching Christ from the OT. Some twenty years ago I proposed the following definition which, according to reviews, was well-received: Preaching Christ is "preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament."[7]

This definition highlights that preaching Christ from the OT involves basically a two-step hermeneutical process. The first question that needs to be answered is: In this passage, what was the author's message for Israel? This question focuses on the OT context. This first step should lead to

the formulation of the *textual* theme (the author's message for Israel) and goal (the author's purpose or reason for sending this message). Second, What is God's message in this passage for the church today? This question expands the OT context to the NT. Here we look for ways in which we can legitimately move from the message of the preaching text to Jesus Christ as revealed in the NT. This second step should lead to the formulation of the *sermon* theme and the preacher's goal in preaching this sermon.

But how do we move from the message of the OT to Jesus Christ in the NT? Charles Spurgeon's graphic illustration sort of stuck in my mind when he instructed a young preacher: "Don't you know, young man, that from every town and every village and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London? So from every text of Scripture there is a road to Christ. And my dear brother, your business is, when you get to a text, to say, now what is the road to Christ? I have never found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if ever I do find one, I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savor of Christ in it."[8] Unfortunately, Spurgeon often left the road to Christ by going over "hedge and ditch," and getting trapped in the swamp of allegorizing, typologizing, generalizing, and moralizing.[9] Not all roads to Christ are legitimate. But he was right that there are indeed major roads that run from the OT to Christ in the NT.

Legitimate Roads to Christ

In *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* I identified seven major roads the NT and the church used to move legitimately from an OT text to Christ in the NT. These seven ways are: redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, longitudinal themes, NT references, and contrast. I will briefly explain these seven, sometimes overlapping, ways.[10]

1. *Redemptive-historical progression is the most basic, foundational way*. It acknowledges that after the fall into sin, God's redemptive work progressed through history from the *protevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 ("he [the seed of the woman] will strike your [the serpent's] head,"—a fatal wound) to his redemption of Abram, Isaac,

Jacob, Israel—progressing to all nations with Jesus' first and second coming. The advantage of using redemptive-historical progression in preaching Christ is that in the sermon one can fast-forward from the OT historical context to the NT historical context, thus covering centuries in a few minutes of sermon time.

Along the way of redemptive history, God made certain promises and raised up certain prophets, priests, kings, and institutions. This leads to the next two ways of preaching Christ from the Old Testament: promise-fulfillment and typology.

2. *The way of promise-fulfillment moves from God's promise in the OT to its fulfillment with Jesus' First or Second Coming.* The way of promise-fulfillment seems rather straight-forward, but one must keep in mind that some promises fill up gradually during the course of redemptive-history until they are finally completely fulfilled in the First or Second coming of Christ. Christopher Wright likens progressive fulfillment to a "time-traveling rocket, the promise is launched, returning to earth at some later point of history in a partial fulfillment, only to be relaunched with a fresh load of fuel and cargo for yet another historical destination and so on."[11] The progressive fulfillment of God's promise to childless Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens can be pictured as follows:

3. *The way of typology moves from an OT type prefiguring Jesus to the antitype, Jesus himself.* Typology is marked by two characteristics: analogy between the type and Jesus and escalation from the type to Jesus.

The danger with typology is that one can easily slip into typologizing—a close cousin to allegorizing. I have appreciated Edmund Clowney's barrier against typologizing by insisting that an OT type must be a symbol in the OT before it can be interpreted as a type. But this can be misunderstood. Poythress writes, "We affirm a typological approach that looks for symbols that have meaning

in their own historical location and also point forward to a final, climactic realization in Christ" (p. 58). However, instead of *starting* typological interpretation by looking for symbols in the text which results in exploring countless rabbit trails that lead nowhere, I think it would be more efficient to look for OT "*persons, institutions, and events*"[12] that are symbolic in their own time. This eliminates many of the so-called symbols from contention as legitimate types.

4. *The way of analogy notes the similarity between the teaching or goal of the author and the teaching or goal of Jesus*. Since the church is the new Israel, one can find analogies between what God did for Israel and what God through Christ does for the church as well as analogies between what God required of Israel and what God through Christ requires of the church.
5. *The way of longitudinal themes traces the theme (or sub-theme) of the text through the OT to Jesus Christ in the NT*. Tracing a theme through the Scriptures can be time-consuming and tedious and preachers using this way need to be careful not to stall the sermon with information overload.
6. *The way of NT references usually supports the other six ways to Christ by quoting NT verses that cite or allude to the OT preaching text and link it to Christ.*
7. *The way of contrast.* I have placed this last because it is negative and I think it is better to move to Christ along the positive ways, such as redemptive-historical progression and typology, which disclose not only discontinuity (contrast) but also continuity. But there may be instances where the way of contrast can be used by noting the contrast between the message of the text and that of Jesus in the NT—a contrast that exists because Christ has come or because Christ teaches the opposite.

Interestingly, our three authors each highlight one of the first three ways to Christ listed above: Daniel Block concentrates on the way of redemptive-historical progression, Elliott Johnson on the way of promise-fulfillment, and Vern Poythress on the way of typology.

Genesis 15:1-6

> After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." 4 But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." 5 He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

In preparing a sermon on this passage let me mention a few of the steps I would take.

1. Text and Context

The text has to be a literary unit, not just a verse or a fragment or a phrase which can be turned into any message. Genesis 15:1-6 is a literary unit which begins with "After these things" (a new unit) and concludes with Abram believing the LORD and the LORD reckoning his faith to him as righteousness. So we have a good preaching text.

As to its context, this is the third time the LORD makes this promise to Abram on ever grander scale. When Abram was seventy-five years old the LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you *a great nation*… (Gen 12:1-2). Later the LORD promised Abram, "I will make your offspring like *the dust of the earth*; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted" (Gen 13:16). And now that he is eighty-five years old, the LORD promises Abram, "Look toward heaven and *count the stars*, if you are able to count them ... *So shall your descendants be*" (Gen 15:5).

2. Literary Features

Characters and Character Description

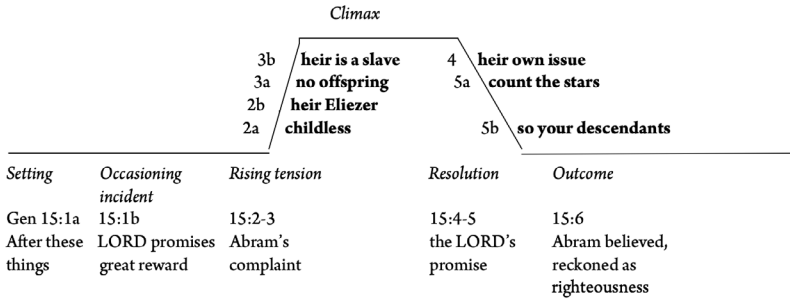
There are two main characters in this passage: the LORD and Abram. Character description is infrequent in Hebrew narrative but important

when present. With the repetitions of his promise, the LORD is presented as faithful and Abram as believing the LORD (v 6).

Repetition

Repetition will frequently reveal the issue the author wishes to emphasize. Abram is mentioned four times in the first three verses (vv. 1 [2x], 2, 3). Notice also the frequent repetition of "childless," "no offspring," "heir," and "descendants." This passage is about the lack of Abram's descendants. But God is also mentioned four times, three times with the covenant name YHWH (LORD) and once as "Lord God." What is the covenant God going to do about Abram's problem? This is recorded in the verses 4-6.

The Plot Line



Sketching the narrative plot line is helpful for preparing sermons. The plot line will reveal the tension in the narrative and thus indicate how to build tension in the sermon. It also reveals the turning point in the narrative, which may be helpful in formulating the theme. In contrast to a complex plot, we can sketch this plot line as a single plot:

3. *Theocentric Interpretation*

The LORD is central in this narrative. He initiates the conflict by telling Abram, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (v. 1). This causes Abram to complain that after many years he is still childless and his heir is a slave (vv. 2-3). The turn in the narrative is the LORD's promise that Abram's descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (vv. 4-5). Abram "believed

the LORD," and the LORD responded by reckoning "it to him as righteousness" (v. 6)

4. Textual Theme and Goal

We can formulate the theme of this text as follows, *The LORD promises childless Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens.* The author's goal with this message is *to assure Israel that God will be faithful to fulfill his promise to make Abram's descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens.*

5. Ways to Preach Christ

Since there is no type of Christ in this passage, we cannot use the way of typology to preach Christ. Nor are the ways of analogy or contrast good candidates. We could possibly use redemptive-historical progression supported by NT references, but since the theme of this passage concerns God's *promise* to Abram, the obvious way to preach Christ is the way of promise-fulfillment supported by NT references. In this case, however, the LORD's promise gradually fills up in the course of redemptive history until it comes to complete fulfillment in the Second coming of Christ.

In the sermon, therefore, we need to show first the fulfillment of God's promise in the OT. God's promise to Abram was first fulfilled when the barren Sarai (Gen 11:30) became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac: "The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him" (Gen 21:1-3).

Next God fulfilled his promise of numerous descendants in the birth of Jacob and God's promise to him, "your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth (Gen 28:14). By the time Jacob moved his family to Egypt to escape drought in the Promised Land there were a full seventy (7x10) descendants (Gen 46:27). While in Egypt "they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly" (Gen 47:27). Then they went back to the Promised Land and continued to multiply. But they were still only a small number of Jews and a few "God-fearers."

Then came Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God opened up to Gentiles as well as Jews. In response to Peter's sermon at Pentecost "about

three thousand persons were added [to the church]" (Acts 2:41). Paul writes in Romans 8:14–17, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God ... When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Paul follows up: "It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants [of Abraham]" (Rom 9:8). And Paul writes "In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek...; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are *Abraham's offspring*, heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:26-29).

God's promise of countless descendants for Abram is filling up. John reports in Revelation 7:9, "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that *no one could count*, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands." When Jesus comes again, God's promise to Abram will be completely fulfilled.

6. Sermon Theme and Goal

We formulated the textual theme as, "The LORD promises childless Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens." In the context of the whole canon, we can formulate the sermon theme as follows: *God's promise to childless Abram of numerous descendants gradually fills up in the OT and church history, and will be completely fulfilled when Abram's descendant Jesus Christ comes again.*

The author's goal with this message was "to assure Israel that God will be faithful to fulfill his promise to make Abram's descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens." The sermon goal will be *to assure God's people that God will be faithful in fulfilling his promise of adding countless people to his church.* This goal points to the need this sermon could address: the concern about the declining membership of the church in North America.

The sermon introduction can flesh out the need addressed with statistics about declining membership of the church in North America, our denomination, and our own local church. The body of the sermon can

follow the plot line from the occasioning incident (v. 1) to the rising tension with Abram's complaint (vv. 2-3), to the resolution with the LORD's marvelous promise (vv. 4-5), to the outcome of Abram's faith (v. 6), to the gradual filling up of God's promise of countless descendants in the history of Israel, with the coming of Christ, Pentecost, church history, and the final filling up at Jesus' Second Coming. The conclusion of the sermon can clinch the goal: The LORD will be faithful in fulfilling his promise of adding countless people to his church.

---

1. See my *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 70-90.
2. E.g., Johann Le Roux in his ThD dissertation contends that "every sermon should bear witness to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as the one singular God, who while being one, is at the same time three distinguishable persons." Quoted in my *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 181, n. 10.
3. In this article I quote the NRSV, adding italics to highlight words and phrases important for our topic.
4. "The first English New Testament to use the verse divisions was a 1557 translation by William Whittingham (c. 1524–1579). The first Bible in English to use both chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible published shortly afterwards in 1560. These verse divisions soon gained acceptance as a standard way to notate verses, and have since been used in nearly all English Bibles and the vast majority of those in other languages." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapters_and_verses_of_the_Bible#History
5. "Whether the preaching-text ought to be short or long can be answered in only one way: whether short or long, a preaching-text ought to be a literary unit." Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 126. For text selection for four different genres, see pp. 221-22, 250-51, 296-97, 323-25.
6. Perry Yoder, From *Word to Life: A Guide to the Art of Bible Study* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1982), 56, as quoted in my *Modern Preacher*, 126.
7. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 10.
8. Spurgeon, "Christ Precious to Believers," as quoted in David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 168.
9. For documentation, see my *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 160-62.
10. For more detailed explanations, see my *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 203-27.
11. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament: Rediscovering the Roots of our Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 72, as quoted in my *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 208.
12. According to Eichrodt's definition, Types are "persons, institutions, and events which are regarded as divinely established models or representations of corresponding realities in the New Testament salvation history." Quoted in my *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 254. See pp 255-61 for rules for using typology.

How Do We Preach Christ from the Old Testament? A Response to Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson, and Vern Poythress

Graeme Goldsworthy

Graeme Goldsworthy served for many years as Lecturer in Biblical Theology, Old Testament, and Hermeneutics at Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia. He earned his PhD from Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Goldsworthy has written numerous books including *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Paternoster, 2001); *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* (IVP Academic, 2010); *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology* (IVP Academic, 2012); and *The Son of God and the New Creation* (Crossway, 2016). Dr. Goldsworthy lives in Brisbane, Australia, with his wife, Miriam. They have four adult children.

In responding to essays by three well-known evangelical preachers, each presenting its author's perspective on preaching, the question arises "How do they differ from one another?" At the outset I would like to say that, while I have read each essay several times and summarized their arguments, it is possible I have at times misunderstood the authorial intent. If so, I apologize in advance. I can only respond to what I perceive the arguments to be, and to do so in a way that reflects my own views on preaching.

Vern Poythress heads his essay, "Christocentric Preaching," while Elliott Johnson's is entitled "Expository Preaching and Christo-Promise." Finally, we have Daniel Block's essay "Christotelic Preaching." At first sight, none of these alternative descriptions excludes the others; I see them as different aspects of what I would consider to be an adequate sermon. First, I want

to present some of my own convictions that will largely determine how I view these essays.

I believe the most basic principle that determines our preaching method is our attitude to the inspiration and authority of the Bible. This will be reflected in our Christian theistic worldview, and it has ramifications for all the variables that will affect how we read, understand, and preach biblical texts. The second principle is the unity within the diversity of both the theology and the literature of the Bible. Holy Scripture contains a collection of books that we include under the one cover because the Christian Church has, since the acceptance of the canon, always recognized the underlying important unifying factors that make the canon what it is.

The unity of the Bible involves our attitude to the Old Testament (OT) and how it relates to the New (NT). The doctrinal confession of my own (Anglican) denomination asserts: "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man."[1] This implies that the OT is about Christ. When this is queried, I want to ask, "If the OT is not about Christ, what is it about?" Of course, it is about Yahweh and Israel and many other things. But, it is about Christ if we accept the unity of Scripture as the one word of the one God about the one way of salvation through the one savior Jesus Christ. For the evangelical, the authoritative word of God gains its unity, not only from its divine authorship, but from the relationship of all its parts to the central feature of God revealing himself and providing salvation in his Son, Jesus Christ.

I regard these two main principles of divine inspiration and unity within diversity as essential to the evangelical use of the Bible. But, I also recognize that "evangelical" covers a range of different emphases, as our three essays under review demonstrate. Thus, a third principle that affects our understanding of the unity of Scripture and, with it, our preaching, is the structure of that unity. Structure is a matter that exercises all biblical theologians who address the task of understanding the unity of either or both Testaments. It underpins any concern for a central theological theme and for a continuous historical narrative to the Bible. Although the structure of revelation is seminal in moving from text to sermon, it is here that there is so much variety in the hermeneutic processes among

evangelicals.

As a broad assessment, that I grant carries the risk of over simplification, I believe that the biblical theologian's view of Scripture affects the conclusions reached through biblical-theological study, and this influences the approach to sermon construction. When I set out to write a book about using the whole Bible to preach Christ, I surveyed every book about preaching that I could lay my hands on.[2] I was astonished to find how few of them even acknowledged that biblical theology should be a concern for the preacher. But, one cannot refer to biblical theology as a distinct theological discipline without also implying the importance of systematic theology.[3] Unfortunately there are those who discount the importance of either in preaching. Yet, every preacher and biblical theologian will come to the task with some systematic or dogmatic theological presuppositions about the Bible and the place of preaching.

Essential to an evangelical biblical theology is the dogmatic construct of *unity and distinction* as the principle governing all relationships. This is derived from the doctrine of the Trinity and the relationship of the three Persons as unity (one God) and distinction (three Persons). This reality is also reflected in the Incarnation in that Jesus is one Person, two Natures (fully divine; fully human; two natures but one person). While the Christian Church did not provide an enduring formulation of this until the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), the principle governs everything in the Bible from start to finish. It is well summed up as the principle of unity with no fusion, and distinction with no separation. It thus controls the relationship of every part or every text of the Bible to every other part or text. For a Christian approach to Scripture, unity-distinction is relevant to the narrative progression and to the relationship between OT and NT. It underpins any sense of progressive revelation and of the relationship of all texts to Christ.

Historically, evangelical theology includes two very different approaches to the unity and distinction in the Bible: the dispensational and the covenantal. The former breaches the dualism of unity and distinction by dividing its various dispensations, virtually separating them from each other, appealing to criteria that are not unique to each dispensation. It also imposes an unbiblical hermeneutic of a rigidly literalistic fulfillment of prophecy, something the NT knows nothing of. Covenant theologians, by

contrast, are sometimes charged with asserting the unity of the covenants too strongly. And, as there are varieties of dispensationalism, so also there are varieties of covenant theology. Thus, even amongst evangelical biblical theologians there are found considerable differences of opinion concerning the understanding of the structure of revelation.

The three essays under consideration do, I believe, proceed from the presuppositions of divine inspiration and authority of the Bible, and its central role of testifying to Christ as the one mediator between God and man. They all recognize the role of preaching to proclaim Christ. They all indicate the importance of a sound reading of the OT text using a grammatical-historical method. An evangelical grammatical-historical approach views the biblical narrative as entirely reliable and rejects the higher-critical attempts to reconstruct the "real" history of the creation and of Israel. I will now address each of the essays contributed in alphabetical order of the authors.

Daniel Block: Christotelic Preaching

My first comment is that I am somewhat mystified by Block's statistics concerning the occurrences of the name *Jesus* and the title *Christ* in Scripture, and what he is seeking to conclude from them. It seems that Bible Works has led him to conclude that the name Jesus is more common than the title Christ as the designation of God the Son. In doing so, it apparently ignores the dynamics of the NT. It also seems that Block's statistical analysis has isolated *Jesus* from *Christ* when the two occur together. My search,[4] however, indicates that Jesus is the predominant designation in the Gospels and Acts. I would expect that to be the case. But the designations Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, or Christ are by far and away the most frequent names in the epistles, which are the post-Pentecost teachings for Christian churches. And, I would expect that to be the case also. The Gospels are, of course, also written post-Pentecost, but they understandably use the appropriate terminology for the Jesus-narratives. While Jesus is here on earth his disciples, those who literally followed him around Palestine, knew him as Jesus. Peter tells us at Pentecost that the ascension signifies that God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). I would therefore expect the theological reflections on the significance of this to use the title

Christ, with or without the name Jesus. It is part of the dynamic of the gospel that is also reflected in the fact that, after the ascension, Christians are not said to follow Jesus, nor are they designated disciples.[5] There is clearly a distinction in Scripture between those who knew the incarnate Christ while he was here on earth, and between those who know him through his Word and Spirit since his ascension.

What, then, is Block's distinction between Christotelic and Christocentric? His two diagrams are not explained but seem to suggest that a Christotelic hermeneutic follows the stages of revelation in salvation history, while a Christocentric hermeneutic is prone to go directly from text to the cross. There is probably a semantic problem here. I have consistently referred to my approach as Christocentric, which has never meant to me that we avoid the stages of progressive revelation. I regard them as essential to sound interpretation. I do not understand Block's distinctions here. Nor do I understand what he means when, in one of a number of pejorative dismissals of those he disagrees with, he refers to modern day charlatans and quotes Ezekiel 13:2-3. Is he saying that Christocentric interpreters are charlatans who are following their own impulses?

Historically, there are two main methods that have been used to move from an OT text to its fulfillment in Christ. Allegory often employs a kind of Freudian free-association of words. I read one commentator who used this method in referring to the decorative pomegranates on the priest's robes (Exod 39:24-26), and then resorted to word association thus: pomegranate = fruit = fruit of the Spirit; which led to a sermon on Galatians 5:22-24![6] This allegorizing completely ignores the historical meaning of the text. While I agree with Block that it is unsafe to rely on Luke 24:27 alone to assert that all OT texts are about Christ, his interpretation is equally unsafe. Luke 24:27 does not prove that Jesus cherry-picked the appropriate texts, selecting only the ones that were directly about him, from all the Scriptures. There is so much more in the NT that substantiates the link between the entire OT and Jesus the Christ. Block seems to be saying (I beg his pardon if I misunderstand him) that Christocentric means dealing only with specifically messianic texts, thus excluding a whole range of texts including complete books of the OT. I have never thought of Christocentric in this way. I would argue that all OT texts testify to Jesus Christ, though some do so more directly than others. Jesus was more than the Jewish messiah; he

was, for example, the new creation, the new temple, the new Israel. If, in the fullness of time God has summed up *all* things in Christ (Eph 1:9-10), this must include the whole OT. He represents the renewal of all created reality in its true relation with the Creator.

When Block says: "It is no wonder that our Jewish friends are upset with us; we have hijacked their Scriptures, and made every text about Christ, often paying no attention to what the divine and human authors originally intended" (p. 13), it is not at all clear what he is getting at. Is he saying that OT texts have only one (Jewish) meaning? If we have "hijacked" the Jewish Scriptures is only because Jesus and the Apostles did so. But in fact, they did not hijack anything, they only laid claim to what belonged to them. We must recognize the hermeneutical divide that the coming of Jesus caused. Jewish interpretation was split between those who saw their Scriptures as about Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and those who rejected then, and go on rejecting now, the claims of Jesus to be the fulfiller of the Hebrew Scriptures. The use of "hijack" as a pejorative is unhelpful. If Jesus is the Jewish messiah, as we believe, then to see the OT as Christian Scripture is not to hijack it but to follow the interpretation of Jesus and the Apostles. Of course, we need to deal fairly with the text in its OT context, but if it cannot then be related to Christ and his people, why bother with it at all in a Christian sermon? Jews who reject Jesus as Messiah may well be our friends, but their refusal to submit to Jesus is tragic. When Block comments, "Later revelation cannot correct, annul, or contradict earlier revelation," and God "never needs to say, 'Oops! I was wrong'" (p. 16), I think a straw man is confusing the issue here.

Block's treatment of the text of Genesis 15:1-6 provides an exemplary piece of grammatical-historical exegesis, though somewhat of an overkill. It is a thorough and enlightening exposition of the dynamics of the narrative. It is also an important reminder that avoiding due exegetical care so that we can "make a bee-line to the cross," is not an option. (I can't believe Spurgeon would have said that!) When Block says that "Not every text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ as Messiah, but every text presents a vital part of that story of Jesus, 'who is also called the Christ'" (p. 14), I find this confusing. I would have liked him to demonstrate this with the prescribed text. After all, a sermon is more than exegesis.

Block's polemics against evangelicals along with Ambrose and Luther

makes me suspect that again there are a few straw men hiding in the detail. To me, Christocentric hermeneutics seeks to understand the text by a close reading, but it likewise understands the dynamic that leads to Christ. It also recognizes that we need the OT to understand Jesus as its fulfiller. But, since Jesus is God's last and definitive Word, he determines the ultimate meaning of the OT. That is what I understand Christocentric hermeneutics to be all about. If "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad," (John 8:56), can we not rejoice with Abraham to see the day of Christ from his OT perspective? God's fullest and final Word, Jesus, is the hermeneutical norm, not just for Scripture, but for every fact in all reality.

Elliott Johnson: Expository Preaching and Christo-Promise

Johnson's essay focuses on the promissory nature of OT texts in dealing with the prescribed text to demonstrate the approach. The initial problem recognized is that of combining a grammatical-historical hermeneutic with the presence of Christ in an OT text. His approach is to deal with it in terms of promise. Johnson asserts that, "prophecy, OT Scripture, and promise, find a central and essential place for Jesus Christ according to the NT" (p. 36). With this I can only concur. He tells us that: "It is the intent of this essay to demonstrate that a *grammatical* interpretation of various OT examples of promise includes the presence of Christ. This is because the promise is expressed as progressively unfolding in *history*" (p. 36). This dynamic of promise and fulfillment is shared by dispensationalists and covenant theologians in its essence. Johnson does not seem to accept Block's apparent hang-ups about fulfillment in Christ. Taking the theme of promise, he deals with the way Genesis 15:1-6 embodies promise that is fulfilled in Christ. Thus, his conclusion is a sermon application that is Christian in a way that I think Block backs away from.

Johnson begins by defining promise with a common sense hermeneutic. He then moves on to deal with what he calls "Christo-promise" which, I think, is a self-explanatory term. The presupposition of this promise is the creation and fall. The Christo-promise is exemplified in God's promise to Abraham concerning the nations, and the necessity of an appropriate

response. The law was added to test the appropriateness of the response of Abraham and his descendants. The history of those descendants demonstrates that only the descendant chosen by God as his partner in the promise, namely Christ satisfies the requirements of the law. Between Abraham and Christ, the promise was progressively unfolded. Although Johnson's outline of this process stops with Joshua, I think we can assume that he includes the entire fickle history of Israel and its final demise in this progression. Prophetic eschatology is presumably involved in this history.

Johnson's conclusion is that: "Jesus Christ did not *replace* Israel, but *represented* Israel in her partnership with God. So, Israel was the covenant partner (Rom 9:4–5), a partnership which was intended to be fulfilled through a coming Offspring" (p. 42). I find this somewhat confusing. His dispensational roots seem to be in evidence here, but to what extent is not clear. Dispensationalists typically accuse covenant theologians of embracing a "replacement theology." They reject the claim that the church is the new Israel, thus replacing historic Israel. I grant this is a view that has some popularity, but not universally held in that form. I prefer to talk of fulfillment theology.[7] Jesus Christ *is* the true Israel, and Jews who are outside of Christ are not true Israel. Dispensationalists and, in my opinion, all premillennial approaches to prophecy, diminish the role of Jesus as fulfiller. Jesus does not merely represent Israel, he *is* Israel, and fulfills all God's promises as 2 Corinthians 1:20 indicates. I think Johnson misses out by not looking seriously at the theme of covenant as structuring the progressive nature of the promise. The content of the covenant is the kingdom of God, a central theme that I have championed from time to time.[8]

Johnson's handling of the chosen passage, Genesis 15:1-6 is a rather sketchy treatment of the main hermeneutic points getting from the promissory origins of the blessing to the nations, to the fulfillment in the true seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. A fuller outline of how he would translate this into a sermon would have been helpful. I value what appears to be his position on Jew and Gentile, in that it preserves the role of those we refer to today as Messianic Jews (Jewish Christians) as the objects of God's promise to Abraham, and who have the privilege of sharing their gospel with us who are Gentiles.[9]

Vern S. Poythress: Christocentric Preaching

I fully expected to be most at peace with Poythress's essay in that I share the general covenantal view that his use of Clowney's diagram suggests. Clowney's *Preaching and Biblical Theology* was standard reading for our students at Moore College in the 1960s and since.[10] I have indicated my qualifications of the covenantal-epochal structure elsewhere.[11] Poythress warns us that he does not consider himself a typical representative of the Christocentric approach. It would have helped if he had specified how he differs from it. He also declares that he is against Christomonism which he understands as preaching *only* on Christ incarnate, and preaching Christ apart from the context of the Father and the Spirit. While I am also against the latter, I must query the meaning of the former.

Let me explain that qualification. I would have thought that Clowney's approach to typology would include the fact that there is no other Christ than Christ incarnate. The OT is about Christ incarnate foreshadowed.[12] The OT is about God's actions within our space and time, which anticipate the incarnation and are fulfilled in it. The incarnation is not only *in* our space and time—it defines it. The Gospels are about Christ as incarnate and present. The remainder of the NT speaks about Christ incarnate, ascended, and present by his Spirit, who will come again in incarnated glory to judge the living and the dead (Luke 1:11). The NT says little about the pre-incarnate and pre-existent second Person of the Trinity, although what it does say is significant. To preach the pre-incarnate Christ in the OT is to preach him whose whole significance in the OT is the prospect of his coming incarnation and ministry fulfilling the OT. It is also to acknowledge him as the Word of God who becomes flesh (John 1:14). Poythress enunciates principles of a biblical-theological preaching approach that is also Christocentric. I can only wish that he had gone on to demonstrate these with a treatment of Genesis 15:1-6 showing how he would go from text to sermon.

Summary Conclusion

The present form of the three essays under review leave me somewhat disappointed. While they demonstrate to some degree that being

evangelical in one's attitude to the inspiration and authority of Scripture does not mean that we will necessarily develop our hermeneutic principles in the same way, I find unsatisfying the failure to demonstrate their respective homiletic approach with more detailed attention to preaching the prescribed text. We should rejoice in the common cause to honor the Bible as God's word, and in the desire to see Christ proclaimed in a way that will make the offer of the Gospel to the whole world. We must nevertheless continue to scrutinize and test our own presuppositions and their logical outworking in preaching and teaching. Comparing the different approaches of the three essays under review is an opportunity for us to be carefully critical of our own approach.

I considered first Block's Christotelic essay. I found his use of technical terms confusing, particularly in discussing what is requisite in a Christian sermon. Block says, "However, if we would preach Genesis 15:6, we must preach Genesis 15:6, and not some message that later biblical authors adopted and adapted for quite different polemical purposes" (p. 26). What does this statement mean? Block raises the question we all must wrestle with: "What is a Christian sermon on an OT text?" I must respectfully differ from him in his diminishing of "the message that later biblical authors adopted and adapted for different polemical purposes" (p. 26). If Jesus did it, and the Apostles did it, why should we not do it? After all, was this not the ultimate meaning in the mind of God?

Johnson's apparent premillennial view of Christ in his gospel raises a wider question of fulfillment or eschatology. It is not clear to what extent he follows a dispensationalist approach. So, these comments may not be pertinent. Not only is the literalistic fulfillment of premillennialism absent from the NT (the apocalyptic symbolism of Revelation 20 does not support it; nor can we cram a secret rapture into 1 Thess 4:16-17), but it destabilizes the relationship between justification, sanctification, and glorification. I believe the NT teaches that ALL OT expectation is fulfilled FOR us in Jesus of Nazareth; goes on being fulfilled IN us and in the world through the Spirit's application of the preached gospel; and will be fulfilled consummatively WITH us at the Parousia.[13]

Positively, then, I have noted the following plusses in the three essays. First, Daniel Block forces me to consider what, if any, differences lie in the respective hermeneutics of Christocentric and Christotelic preaching.

Then, I must express my admiration for the detailed example of grammatical-historical exegesis. No sermon preparation should ever proceed without careful exegesis of the text. Second, Elliott Johnson's emphasis on promise as a key component of the OT is important as a vital link between the two Testaments. Third, Vern Poythress sketches a Christocentric approach that we can all learn from. His use of Clowney's diagram points us in the direction of a scrupulously careful use of typology structured on the unity of the covenantal epochs.

My final point is a practical one. What strategy do we use as pastors in preaching to a congregation? Of course, as Block remarks, not every sermon will be evangelistic. A stable and continuous situation, for example a father regularly teaching his family around the dinner table, or a church home group that meets weekly, does not need on every occasion to make a direct application of the text to Christ. However, any application that is made apart from Christ tends to lead to legalism or moralism. When it comes to a Sunday congregation in the local church, we need to be attuned to its present spiritual needs. Here I prefer the attitude of a friend of mine who said: "If someone comes in to a meeting by chance or is brought by a friend, provided he or she is listening, then, when it is over, I want him or her to know what we are on about." It is to be hoped that we are always on about Jesus and the salvation he has won for us.

---

1. Articles of Religion, 1562: Article VII. *Of the Old Testament*.
2. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
3. I have dealt with this matter in my essay: "'Thus Says the Lord!'—The Dogmatic Basis of Biblical Theology," in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox* (P. T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson, ed.; Homebush West NSW/Grand Rapids: Lancer Books/Baker, 1986), 25-40.
4. Using a well-worn hard copy of *Young's Analytical Concordance of the KJV*.
5. There is one metaphorical reference to Christ leaving us and example that we might follow in his steps (1 Pet 2:21).
6. I have also read a print-out of a sermon on Nehemiah repairing the gates of Jerusalem (Neh 3). The preacher chose to deal only with the Sheep Gate (Neh 3:1-2) and the Horse Gate (Neh 3:28), and ignored other gates including the Dung Gate! The arguments went thus: Sheep Gate = Sheep with shepherd = the Good Shepherd and a sermon on John 10; Horse Gate = horse with riders = riders are mainly soldiers = soldiers wear armor = sermon on "put on the whole armor of God" from Eph 6. I regard this as an appalling use of the OT.
7. I endorse Donald Robinson's view that the church consists of spiritual Israel with spiritual Gentiles grafted in. See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 201-206, and the articles by Robinson referenced there. See also Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading*

Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism: Christ's Mission Through Israel to the Nations (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

8. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981), now part of *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2000); *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991).
9. This is very different from the dispensationalist's separation of the salvation of Jew and Gentile.
10. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).
11. Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 84-88.
12. So, Poythress's book, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991).
13. This view is simply another way of speaking of our salvation as "I have been saved; I am being saved; I will be saved." The fulfillment of prophecy for us, in us, and with us, is ably set out by Adrio König, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology: Toward a Christ-Centered Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). The fulfillment is not a part + a part + a part, but all + all + all, but in different ways.

Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Response to Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson and Vern Poythress

Craig A. Carter

Craig A. Carter is Professor of Theology at Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He earned his PhD from the University of St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto. Dr. Carter is the author of numerous articles and books including *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Baker Academic, 2018).

My assignment given by the editor is to respond to the papers by Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson and Vern Poythress and to discuss what I take to be their strengths and weaknesses in the light of the approach to interpreting Scripture that I describe in my book, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*.[1] It might be helpful if I quickly summarize a few of the main points of that book before moving to critique.

The Interpretation of Scripture in the Great Tradition

The basic thesis of the book is that a great deal of the best Evangelical preaching in the contemporary church is at odds with much of the hermeneutical theory taught in modern, Evangelical seminaries. This situation results from the fact that academic hermeneutics has been more influenced by Enlightenment-inspired historical criticism, whereas church preaching has been more indebted to an oral tradition of Great Tradition

hermeneutics handed down from generation to generation and connecting the best evangelical preaching of today to traditional orthodoxy. With apologies to any professors of hermeneutics who may read these lines, it must be said that many preachers park their hermeneutical theories at the door of the seminary as they leave and proceed to preach the way their revered mentors in ministry do. My proposed solution, however, is not to call for preaching to be brought into line with academic theory (which currently is in a state of considerable confusion), but instead to reform academic hermeneutical theory in such a way that it becomes more suitable for supporting and enhancing the great evangelical preaching of the church—a tradition that stretches all the way from Irenaeus and Athanasius to Augustine and Calvin and on to Wesley and Whitefield and down to Charles Spurgeon, W. A. Criswell and John R. W. Stott.

The Christ-centered preaching of the Old Testament (OT) has nourished the faith of the people of God and has linked the church in every age to the apostles. However, it appears that many modern Evangelicals have been influenced by the rise of historical criticism and, as a result, have become hesitant to interpret Scripture as divinely inspired by the Triune God and given to point us to salvation in Christ. This is particularly apparent in their academic writing. Since we lack the theoretical apparatus to express our conviction that Christ is present throughout his Word, the issue of how the OT bears witness to Christ has become problematic for us on the theoretical level.[2]

I describe the rise of Enlightenment-inspired historical criticism in chapter four of the book as the systematic rejection of the theological metaphysics generated by the Nicene doctrine of God, which became integral to the Great Tradition of Christian orthodoxy. Evangelical hermeneutics has resisted many of the worst elements of higher criticism, yet Evangelical scholars have not remained untouched by its errors. Since it is a fact that the philosophical naturalism of the Enlightenment has come to dominate Western university culture, anyone wishing to operate within the university context has to contend with an atmosphere dominated by the rejection of classical metaphysics and Christian orthodoxy. Compromises and confusion are inevitable in such a situation and the wonder is that Evangelical hermeneutics has managed to avoid even worse corruption. Here I point out four specific areas of confusion.

First, historical criticism puts all the emphasis on human authorial intent (HAI); the text means only what the original human author meant to say to the original audience in the original situation. This is what modern historical critics mean by the "historical meaning." However, this approach ignores Divine authorial intent (DAI) and is therefore extremely reductionistic.[3] I would suggest that to do this is to render the doctrine of divine inspiration partially inoperative in one's interpretative work regardless of how strongly one affirms inerrancy.[4] Reducing the meaning of the text to the conscious intention of the human author is to view the text as merely a repository of human meaning arising from the mind of the human author, through the influence of the culture in which the text was written. Reconstructing the historical context, therefore, is seen as the key to determining the author's meaning. One result of this approach is that long-term, predictive prophecy becomes impossible, which is why even fairly moderate biblical scholars, such as Walter Moberley,[5] routinely deny the existence of long-term predictive prophecy in the Bible, despite what I take to be the obvious presence of long-term predictions in the text and the practically unanimous witness of the church to that fact for two millennia.[6] Such confusion arises when one argues for the single-meaning of the text in such a way as implicitly to rule out DAI, which thus unwittingly emasculates inspiration.

Secondly, historical criticism creates confusion by moving the interpreter's attention from the text itself to the author's subjective state of mind (intentions). The inconvenient truth is that we do not have access to the human author's mind. Even though, in some cases, we have quite a bit of biographical information to go on, it is problematic that, in other cases, we have very little and, in some cases, none to go on. In some cases, the canonical form of the text owes a great deal of decisive importance to the anonymous redactor or editor of the final form of the text. For example, the presence of Davidic psalms such as Psalm 110 in Book Five of the Psalter is crucial for understanding the overall theology of the Psalter and the relationship of the Davidic Messiah to the final redemption of the world.[7] Yet, we do not even know the name of the editor of the final form of the Psalter! What was that editor thinking in putting Davidic psalms in the final book of the Psalter? A focus on HAI here can easily degenerate into baseless speculation absent hard evidence. We are thrust back on the HAI of the psalm itself, which is fine as far as it goes; but the result is an atomizing

effect on the Psalter and a loss of appreciation for the shape and meaning of the book as a whole. I do not have time to develop this discussion here, but my main point is that a focus on the meaning of the text, including DAI and canonical structure, is necessary in order to interpret the text responsibly and any aspect of our hermeneutical theory that militates against that is unhelpful. Moving the focus from the subjective state of the human author's mind (without, of course, completely ignoring the HAI as a step toward understanding the text) and putting the focus on the meaning of the text itself as our ultimate goal allows us to understand the text as the Word of God and not merely the human words alone.

Thirdly, historical criticism is rooted in a materialistic metaphysics of philosophical naturalism and thus is blind to the full scope of reality. The eliding of DAI and the shift from the text to the subjective intentions of the human author understood in his historical context is hardly accidental in Enlightenment-inspired historical criticism. These moves are rooted in metaphysics. In chapter three of my book I argue that Modernity can be understood as a point-by-point rejection of the main tenets of the Christian Platonism that emerged as the metaphysical framework for the Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy at the heart of the Great Tradition. Philosophical naturalism says that the universe to which we have access through our five senses is the sum total of reality and there is nothing real beyond this universe. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches the reality of a spiritual realm that is connected to the universe to which we have access and cannot be reduced to this universe. Augustine's understanding of the phrase "the heavens and the earth" as the sum total of spiritual and material reality was already traditional in his day. The Bible presupposes the existence of heaven as a real place; angels go back and forth on assignments and the resurrected body of Jesus ascended to heaven, is there now, and will return from heaven to earth in the second coming. So biblical interpretation must occur within a context of metaphysical realism and must reject nominalism, materialism and mechanism.

In particular, we must reject the Enlightenment myth of the world as a giant perpetual motion machine that moves itself and is self-sufficient. Cheerful and confident embrace of the supernatural may be frowned on in the secular academy, but it is as natural as breathing for Christian orthodoxy and should be natural for Evangelical hermeneutics. A Christian theological

metaphysics is the natural and healthy context in which exegesis is done.

Fourthly, the anti-supernatural bias of philosophical naturalism can be seen in the subtle but devastating re-definition of the word "history" since the eighteenth century. Whereas history used to be understood as "the interpretation of past events," it has come to be understood within historical criticism as "the interpretation of past event assuming that there is no such thing as the supernatural." This materialist understanding of history eviscerates the biblical narrative, denies the reality of the mighty acts of God in salvation history and reduces the reconstructed history behind the text that is thought to hold the key to the meaning of the text to that which is human, natural and non-supernatural. It is like the Gnosticism that Irenaeus combated in that it seeks to read an alien metaphysical system into the Bible as if biblical texts were to be understood in terms of the "myth of the world as self-sufficient machine" instead of being interpreted from within the theological metaphysics generated by Scripture itself. What we need to see is that all interpreters work in the context of some set of metaphysical assumptions or other and no one is "neutral." Either interpretation occurs within a philosophical naturalist context or within a Christian theological metaphysics or it occurs within some other worldview. It can also be done in the context of confused and logically contradictory assumptions held together by arbitrary decisions of will, but in that case the results will be all over the map and hardly satisfactory. It behooves biblical interpreters to get their metaphysical act together if they want to interpret Scripture well.

Reform and renewal of evangelical hermeneutics needs to focus on these four areas as priorities: bringing DAI back into the picture, focusing on the text itself rather than on the human author of the text only, making a realist metaphysics operative for hermeneutics, and abandoning the reductionist version of history that is the poison fruit of philosophical naturalism. If we were to reform hermeneutics along these lines, much of the confusion over how to preach Christ from the OT would dissipate and the preaching of the church over the past twenty centuries would appear in a different light. Some of the persistent problem we face as interpreters such as those which appear in these papers we are about to consider could be resolved. We would be able to see Christ in all of Scripture because we would be able to give a rational account of a sacramental metaphysics in which the world is held together by the Word of God and all reality participates in the ideas

in the mind of God, which make things in the world what they are, keeps their natures constant thorough time and ultimately gives them their *telos* or end. As the One in whom "all things hold together" (Col 1:17) Christ is the eternal Son of the Father and is present in all places and at all times. All things point to him and in him all things make sense. So for Christ to be present in the OT as the one whose Spirit inspires the prophets (1 Pet 1:11), as the one to whom the Scriptures point (Luke 24:27) and as the one who himself speaks in the Scriptures (Heb 10:5; cf. Ps 40:6-8) is perfectly comprehensible. It is little wonder that this has been believed by the vast majority of the great pastors and theologians of the church throughout church history.

Daniel Block and Christotelic Interpretation

Dr. Block begins with a statement that his fundamental concern is to proclaim the truth with integrity and with the passion of God's heart and that bringing these two together is a great challenge (p. 7). This is a common way of defining the task of a believing OT scholar. It is a challenge to mediate between the secularized academy and the church of believers and we all feel the tension at times.

Block discusses the relationship between human authorial intent and divine authorial intent and posits two alternatives: one the one hand there are those who say that "what the human author said the divine author said" and, on the other hand, there are those for whom there is no connection between these two (p. 13). Block affirms the first alternative and blasts the second alternative as irresponsible. He never considers a third alternative, however, in which there is an expanded or extended literal sense, that never breaks off from its connection to the literal, humanly intended sense, but does go beyond what the original human author had in mind.

It seems to be the case that an OT prophet like Isaiah, at many points, records the oracle God inspired him to write but does not, himself, understand all that the oracle means. What would it mean for Isaiah to fully understand all the meaning inherent in the poem he wrote in Isaiah 52:13-53:12? Would it mean that he understood that a baby would be born to a virgin, centuries later in Bethlehem after the return from exile, and that he would grow up to be a messianic figure who would die on a Roman cross

as an atonement for the sins of the world? Well, it seems to me that we have to say that Isaiah had some inkling of a divine Servant who would atone for the sins of Israel by suffering vicariously, but the details and timing were very unclear to him. And Isaiah had a vision of an anointed conqueror who would fulfill the promises of the restoration and glorification of Zion. In his mind, how did these two figures relate to each other? It is difficult to say precisely. However, the contemporary interpreter has advantages Isaiah himself did not have in understanding what Isaiah's oracle means.

It seems to me that Peter is talking about this very ambiguity when he writes:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves by you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Pet 1:10-12)

Notice where Peter conceives Christ to be. Christ was in the prophets by his Spirit. Christ was also future to the prophets as the Suffering One their prophecies foretold. And Christ is currently glorified following his period of suffering. The sacramental presence of Christ is magisterially present in all times because no time can contain or limit the divine presence. Also note that Peter distinguishes between the revelation given through the prophets (what person or time the Spirit of Christ was indicating) and the prophets' own partial understanding of that revelation. This is the basis of the distinction between human and divine authorial intent. But both of these sources of meaning inhere in the text of Scripture and both can be understood by the interpreter who is aware of the "good news" of Jesus Christ and guided by the Spirit. Isaiah did not know "who" or "when" but he had an inkling of "what" the coming One would do. Isaiah 53 is about divine provision for sin as necessary for the forgiveness of intransigent sinners who otherwise could not be saved. What the people of God could not do for themselves, even with the provision of the temple, sacrificial system and priesthood, YHWH would do for them through the mysterious

figure we know as the Suffering Servant.

If Block were to recognize the presence of this gap between the human and the divine authorial intention in the text, his constant rhetorical attacks on straw men such as those who supposedly see Christ in every text of Scripture would be unnecessary (p. 14). He could honor the human authorial intent while also recognizing that the meaning of an OT text often goes beyond the human intention because of divine inspiration. In his discussion of the sacrificial system, he correctly asserts that the author of Hebrews understood the OT sacrificial system as pointing to Christ. But he also stresses that Moses and the Israelites who brought their sacrifices to the tabernacle were not looking forward to a "coming sacrificial Messiah." (p. 17) The question left open here is the thorny issue of how the author of Hebrews can justifiably interpret Christ as the fulfillment of the sacrificial system if the meaning of the OT text does not contain a reference to Christ. Has the meaning of the text changed? If so, this sounds like the New Testament (NT) writers in fact did exactly what those Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah accuse them of doing: namely, they hijacked the Jewish Scriptures by reading into them meaning that is not really there. The issue is what the OT really *means*. Either the apostles got it right or they got it wrong. They either correctly discerned the meaning of the text put there by the Spirit of Christ that the original human author did not fully understand or else they read their own meaning into the text. Everything hangs on which it is; does the OT really point to Christ?

Block wants the apostolic interpretation of the OT to be accepted as valid. He wants to affirm that the Christian understanding of the prophets is objectively true, not arbitrary and subjective. And that is commendable. But if he were to recognize the role of DAI in the OT text as extending beyond the conscious intention of the human author he would be able to affirm a *sensus plenior* that goes beyond the literal sense without breaking off from the literal sense and becoming a free-floating "anything goes" kind of interpretation. This would anchor the gospel of Jesus Christ in the OT text and it would allow the OT text to be fully Jewish and fully Christian at the same time.

The methodological confusion surfaces when he argues that the underlying assumption of Christian exegesis is that "Jesus Christ is the heart and goal of all revelation" but this is "not the starting point of biblical

analysis." (p. 18) How can an "underlying assumption" not be a "starting point"? The overly sharp rhetoric about evangelical credibility being undermined by "dishonest" and "fraudulent" contrasts with his actual procedure. He quotes Austin Farrer who says "It is an exegetical fraud to read developed Christian dogmas between the lines of Jewish narratives," (p. 18) but he does not explain how Christ being an underlying assumption of exegesis escapes this criticism. What Block appears to mean is that if we read the OT without using the lens of Christian dogma we can conclude at the end of our reading that it points to Christ. But we cannot use our Christological convictions in our actual exegesis. This appears to leave open the possibility, however, that a non-Christian reading of the OT would be another valid reading for one who does not believe in Christ. Therefore, the view appears to be that we believe in Christ on other grounds than the OT witness and then we read him into the OT and this is one possible valid reading of the OT. I want to say it much more strongly than that; I would want to say that this is the only, *right* reading of the OT. And I want to emphasize with the church fathers, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, that the fulfillment of OT prophecy by Jesus Christ is the strongest possible evidence that he is the one who was to come.

When he comes to Genesis 15:1-6 Block first criticizes Ambrose for saying that this text means that Abram believed in Christ. Block comments: "Really? The text offers no hint that this was either what Abram was thinking or what the author of this text (human or divine) had in mind." (p. 17) So it would seem that Block is against a Christological interpretation of Genesis 15:1-6. But then, a few pages later, Block says: "This means that the person who encounters Abram in this text is none other than Jesus." (p. 20) How do we explain the apparent contradiction?

I suggest that the confusion goes back to the failure to distinguish clearly between different definitions of authorial intent. Let us think of five possible meanings of "authorial intent" and label them M1, M2, M3, M4 and M5. M1 is the straightforward human authorial intent. M2 is the Divine authorial intent. M3 is the intention of the character in the text. M4 is the meaning of "the text" as opposed to any author's or character's subjective intentions. M5 is the meaning of the text as embedded in the chapter, book, testament and canon as a whole. It would seem that Block is thinking of one or all of M1, M2 and M3 on page 17, but he is thinking of M5

on page 20. What drives Block's rhetoric condemning the Christological reading of the OT seems to be his confusion over the relationship of M5 to M2. If he were to recognize that M5 is M2, he could say that the correct interpretation of Genesis 15:1-6 (and a great many other OT texts) would be a Christological one and he could also say, consistently, that Jesus Christ is our underlying assumption in exegesis in the sense that M5 is connected to M2 by the doctrine of divine inspiration. The worry that viewing the meaning of the text as going beyond the conscious intention of the human author opens the door to interpretive anarchy would be alleviated by the canonical control on the *sensus plenior*.

Elliott Johnson and Vern Poythress: Some Reflections on their Approaches

My comments on Johnson's and Poythress's papers will be brief. Johnson recognizes the importance of understanding the Christological meaning being inherent in the OT text and not merely read into it after the fact. He says: "The presence of Christ is the result of the author's intent as the promise is expressed in the text and is capable of being understood at that time in history; whether or not we have indication in the text that characters did understand." (p. 36). Johnson argues that a grammatical interpretation of OT texts lead to a Christological interpretation. This emphasis on the objective Christological meaning of the text is a welcome one insofar as it grounds the Christological meaning identified by the apostles as inherent in the text itself.

Where Johnson runs into difficulties is in trying to explain how this is not reading NT meaning into the OT text. In considering Peter's use of Psalm 16, he says that the promise in Psalm 16:10b, cited by the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:32 "referred ultimately to Jesus and his resurrection." He would be better off avoiding labelling the Christological meaning as "NT meaning" and seeing the Christological meaning as validly present in both testaments. I believe he is very close to doing this and the reason is his high doctrine of inspiration and his emphasis on prophecy and fulfillment. In these two ways, Johnson stands in continuity with the church fathers. A closer analysis of the relationship between HAI and DAI would help him clarify what he means by the "intention-directed revelation" of

the OT. But he is very close to this way of thinking in his closing sentence: "In the progress of revelation, what it known of Christ is always true but is more fully understood as more is revealed" (p. 44).

Vern Poythress makes an important point about Christocentric preaching being Trinity-centered preaching. He rightfully sees the doctrine of the Trinity as undergirding a Christian approach to interpreting the OT. He also stresses the crucially important fact that the NT indicates that the OT is about Christ. I also found his affirmation of the validity of a variety of interpretive approaches to be helpful and reasonable. He affirms the basic necessity of grammatical-historical study, which nobody should consider optional. He affirms the value of a redemptive-historical movement hermeneutic, which leads the interpreter from the OT to Christ. He considers that this approach, properly executed, is a valid form of Christotelic exposition. But Poythress also seems to be open to seeing Christ in the OT text in a more substantial sense, as indwelling the text and not just being predicted by the text. In his discussion of the key phrase "the word of the LORD" in Genesis 15:4, Poythress points out that all divine speech to man in Genesis is mediated. Since the fall, God's speech, he says, must be mediated in order to avoid the death of the recipient. This theological insight leads him to write: "Because of the necessity of mediation, we can confidently infer the presence of Christ and his work when God speaks to Abram. Christ's role in Genesis 15:4 anticipates his incarnation and verbal ministry on earth" (p. 61). This affirmation of the presence of Christ in the OT text is what we find throughout the Great Tradition, but sadly neglected in modernity.

Poythress points out that Genesis 15:4 says that the word of the LORD "came to him, that is, Abram." This way of putting it expresses a differentiation between "God and the word that comes out from him, traveling out as a word distinct from the speaker" (p. 63). He views this as an anticipation of the NT revelation of the God (Father) and Word (Son) differentiation. The key thing to note is that for Poythress the idea of the differentiation of the Father and Son as God and his word is not something dreamed up by the NT writer; rather, John gets it from the OT. This does not mean that there is no advance between the word that comes to the patriarchs and the Word become flesh (John 1:14). But it does mean that they are not unconnected either. And the main way this connection can be

seen to be real and not imagined or subjective is the ontological constancy of the eternal Triune God who inspired Genesis and became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. It is the same God. That is ultimately why Christ can be said to be present in the OT.

There is one other little detail in this passage that adds to what Poythress has already pointed out about the distinction between the speaker and his word. Michael Heiser points out that in v. 4 it says that the word of the LORD came to Abram and in v. 5 it says that "he" brought him (Abram) outside. Now, we usually think of a word as a disembodied sound, but v. 5 sounds like a visible person is doing something: "he brought him outside." Either the LORD was made visible to Abram or the word of the LORD was a visible presence to Abram. One way or another, Abraham was having an encounter with a person. Looking back on this passage from a Trinitarian perspective, it seems hard not to conclude that Abraham experienced a theophany in which the pre-incarnate Christ appeared to him.

Is Christ present in the OT text? I think he is—literally—present. I would argue for an Augustinian Christological literalism as the best label for a hermeneutic rooted in a sacramental metaphysics derived from Nicene Trinitarianism. Block seems to resist such a hermeneutic, Johnson seems to implicitly presuppose something like it and Poythress comes the closest to explicitly affirming it. All of us wish to affirm that the OT text, in this case Genesis 15:1-6, points to Christ. But I would want to go further, with Poythress, and view Christ himself as doing the pointing. I would also like to affirm a sacramental worldview as the metaphysics that makes sense of such a hermeneutic. Christological literalism sees Christ as not just predicted or pointed toward, but actually present in the OT text—the Word in the words of Scripture.

---

1. Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).
2. This is so despite the fact that many Evangelical scholars preach themselves in church in ways that do not seem to follow logically from the academic, hermeneutical theories they espouse in their scholarly publications. This kind of inconsistency is an occupational hazard faced by those who try to inhabit the academy and the church simultaneously.
3. A key text here is I Peter 1:10-12. I will discuss this text later in the paper, but for now just note the distinction made by Peter between what the prophets knew humanly (HAI) and what the Holy Spirit was saying through them (DAI): "the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours search

and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories."

4. I do not deny inerrancy; rather, I affirm it wholeheartedly. But the concept of inerrancy is only part of the doctrine of inspiration. Believing in inerrancy is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for a good hermeneutical theory.
5. R. W. L. Moberley, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 146-53.
6. Allis remains the indispensable resource here. See Oswald T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah: A Study in Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).
7. For an outstanding discussion of these and related issues, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015).

Real Thick Meaning and Preaching Christ from the Old Testament

Abner Chou

Abner Chou is the John F. MacArthur Endowed Fellow at The Master's Seminary. He earned his ThD from The Master's Seminary, California. Dr. Chou as written a number of articles and he is the author of *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Wipf & Stock, 2013) and *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Kregel, 2018). He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and Society of Biblical Literature. He is married to Johanna, and has four children.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov 27:17). Proverbs reminds us of the necessity of critical yet constructive dialogue. It grinds out our error, sharpens our reasoning, and roots (and unifies) us more deeply in the truth (cf. Eph 4:15). We need more of these discussions.

Thus, we should be immensely thankful for the contributions of Drs. Block, Johnson, and Poythress. Their articles have provided the opportunity for iron to sharpen iron regarding the crucial matter of preaching Christ from the Old Testament (OT).

My goal is *not* to critique these senior scholars as much as to aid in thinking through what we might learn from them. To facilitate this, I would like to put these articles in conversation. That way we can synthesize these scholars' major contributions and observe how they refine each other as they make point and counterpoint. We can see how iron sharpens iron. Within this, I specifically want to note the hermeneutical contribution they make together. As we will discuss, their assertions and concerns formulate an essential hermeneutical point that instructs us on why and how we can

preach Christ from the OT.

Hence, I want to build upon these articles so that we can gain further hermeneutical clarity on this important issue. I hope that this insight will help us in preaching Christ in a way that honors his Word.

The Shared Concern of Hermeneutics

As just stated, the focus of this review article will be on hermeneutics and for good reason: all three scholars wrestle with the same hermeneutical tension. On one hand, all three desire the preaching act to champion Jesus and believe the OT speaks of him. On the other hand, all three also express concerns that this be done in a way that upholds the integrity of the OT and the intent of the author. Poythress, who might be considered the most "Christocentric" of the three, is quite vocal on this matter. He warns against Christomonism, preaching Christ apart from the Trinity, preaching only in relation to Christ's first advent, as well as adding or subtracting from God's Word.

So, all three scholars are emphatic that the way we preach Christ from the OT matters. They agree that Christ must be preached from the OT in a manner that values grammatical-historical methodology. Their unity on this is important and a contribution to the discussion in and of itself. The issue of Christocentric hermeneutics seems so polarizing. However, those on different sides of the issue have more common ground than we might think. Though Poythress concedes he may not represent the whole movement, he represents a growing consensus that has the same aims and concerns. Namely, they want to exalt Christ and do so from a legitimate process. These two realities comprise the goal and tension that these respective articles contemplate.

Vern Poythress: The Need for Thick Meaning

With this in mind, we can begin putting the three articles in dialogue with each other. Poythress's article begins to tackle these hermeneutical concerns by reminding us that the meaning of Scripture is sophisticated. Poythress stresses that the interpreter should respect the entire biblical canon and the unity it brings. He points out that texts often connect

with other passages and are a part of a unified storyline culminating in Christ (cf. Gal 4:4). Because the prophets' writings participate in grand theological developments, they have theological depth of meaning. Poythress observes that such depth results in multifaceted significance or implications. A text may pose a moral example, development of a theology or theme, or function typologically. Poythress asserts that this complexity of meaning and significance is instrumental for preaching Christ from the OT. We can see how this works in Genesis 15:1-6. That text is part of God's agenda of Genesis 3:15 which is about Christ. Consequently, it advances the themes of seed, inheritance, and faith which climax in Christ (cf. Rom 4; Heb 11). It also showcases Abram as a moral example which directs us to having faith in Christ. Thus, Poythress reminds us that the unity of Scripture establishes the depth of Scripture and this helps us to see ways the OT connects with Christ.

In fact, because biblical texts have such depth, Poythress contends that Christocentricity not only extends to every verse but "every word in every verse." He backs this up with the example of Genesis 15. The very term "word" in Genesis 15:1 is case in point. Because of God's activity of speaking in creation and the personification of the "word" (it/he moves to Abram), Poythress argues that this refers ultimately to God the Son (cf. John 1:1). Block also affirms this observation. In this case, a single term is loaded with Christology in light of its union with a greater context. Overall, while stressing that the interpreter has "executive authority" to exhort but not "legislative authority" to invent what Scripture says, Poythress emphasizes that the canon exists, passages connect with canon in various ways, and so texts have a lot more dimensions to them than we might think.

In making these claims, Poythress introduces us to the literary concept of "thick" meaning. Thick meaning refers to how texts convey more ideas than the sum of their parts because of how they import from and interact with other texts.[1] Consistently, because of the Bible's interconnectivity, even simple stories, phrases, or individual words can have theological depth because of how they draw from and develop the truths of prior revelation. Poythress reminds us that because of the unity of Scripture, it has thick meaning; it is theologically rich. That depth provides the grounds for Christ focused preaching in the OT for he is present and anticipated.

This sounds good but raises a problem as Johnson and Block point

out. This dilemma in sum is "Where is meaning found?" Since Poythress has heavily emphasized canon, one might wonder if this "thick meaning" is really *in* the text or because it is *in* the canon. Poythress's qualification on expository preaching may reflect this struggle. He affirms expository preaching relative to teaching sound doctrine based upon the canon. Yet, Poythress perceives that expository preaching relative to explaining a specific text (like a verse or verses) is too restrictive. Poythress's reticence seems to suggest shifting the locus of meaning from a single text to something broader, more canonical. Contrast this with Johnson who insists that authorial intent can be discerned from a single text. He calls this assertion the "basis of expository preaching" (p. 36). This is not merely a contrast of style but rather of hermeneutical underpinnings. Where is meaning found? Does thick meaning come from the author in a text or is it found on the level canon and read into a text?

Block presses this point. He contemplates whether people's Christocentric conclusions really come from the text itself. Poythress's response to such a question is telling. For example, he acknowledges that his connection of the "word" with the "Word" in Genesis 15:1-6 might be considered a stretch. However, he argues that the archetypal communications within the Godhead provide ultimately justification for it. In other words, since it is true of the Godhead, it must be true of the Godhead's activity in this text whether Moses was aware or not. Block's objection would be that this is a theological abstraction and not exegetically grounded even though it could have been as Block will demonstrate. In any case, Block points out the problem of such a rationale. In essence, it removes the restriction of what the human author communicated and "has led to all sorts of bizarre perlocutions, which typically say more about the interpreters' ingenuity than the text itself" (p. 13). At that point, Block wonders whether one has preached Christ *from the OT* or from somewhere else. Can one really say that they have said "thus says the Lord" as opposed to acting like false prophet who proclaim from their own impulse (Ezek 13:2-3)?

Poythress's essay indicates he does not object to this pushback. Rather, Poythress reads a text quite closely as he discusses individual phrases and words in Genesis 15:1-6. He explicitly affirms the need to pay attention to grammatical-historical information of the text. Moreover, he mentions the tensions between the generals of canonical unity yet the particulars of

a given passage. So these authors are not disunified on this point but in agreement. Their counterpoints are refinements.

All of this shows that Poythress's emphasis on the thickness of meaning is absolutely valuable. Indeed, seeing that texts carry theological depth and thereby sophisticated ramifications is essential to knowing God's Word in general and preaching Christ from the OT specifically. However, the pushback has indicated that we are searching for more than just thickness. If we are to preach Christ *from the OT*, we want to make sure that this thickness is *in the OT* and not somewhere else.

Elliott Johnson: The Need for Meaning/Authorial Intent

This is where Johnson steps forward in the conversation. He presses the need to account for authorial intent as conveyed through the text. In his own words:

> It is the intent of this essay to demonstrate that a grammatical interpretation of various Old Testament mentions of promise includes the presence of Christ … The presence of Christ is the result of the author's intent as the promise is expressed in the text and is capable of being understood at that time in history; whether or not we have indication in the text that characters did understand. This thesis is then the basis of expository preaching (p. 36).

Johnson's goal, then, is to show that Christ is present in authorial intent. To accomplish this, he proposes the notion of "Christo-promise." He traces through the OT noting how God's promise drives its framework and storyline. Based upon this, he argues that the OT prophets wrote the entire OT with the expectation of future fulfillment, one that culminates in Christ. Thus, the prophets both directly proclaimed Christ in developing this promise and necessarily implied Christ as the fulfillment of what they outlined. In the case of Genesis 15:1-6, Johnson contends that Abram believed God about his promise of seed. In context, this promise built upon God's first promise of Genesis 3:15 and thereby has messianic elements in it. Being part of the redemptive historical storyline, it also has an expectation of future fulfillment beyond Abram. Thus, when the New Testament (NT) claims Abram believed in the gospel and Christ (Rom

4:3-5; Gal 3:8), that is a legitimate inference. After all, the Messiah was already implied in context in God's promise and that text look forward to a future fulfillment. The NT usage fits well with the OT writer's intent.

Johnson's entire notion of Christo-promise anchors preaching Christ from authorial intent. We preach Christ from the OT because the prophets discussed and anticipated him; we preach Christ per its "intention-directed revelation" (p. 44). Such an emphasis healthily balances Poythress's emphasis on thick meaning. It reminds us that thickness of meaning is because both human and divine author willed that complexity. That is why we can preach Christ *from the OT*.

The pushback against Johnson's suggestion is not necessarily in the proposal itself but its lack of comprehensiveness. Though Poythress agrees with Johnson on promise, he would note that the text contains more Christological elements than just mere promise. For instance, Johnson does not comment upon the potential activity of the second person of the Trinity via the "Word of the Lord" in the passage. Poythress's pushback then is not about having less authorial intent but more. His assertion would question whether we have read them thoroughly enough. Christo-promise is a good start but does not encompass their full sophistication.

Block raises this concern from a methodological side. This revolves around the issue of typology, a topic that all three scholars comment upon. Johnson argues that certain historical figures are types of Christ in light of the OT's promissory nature. Poythress also suggests this possibility. Block bristles at this, arguing that such typology drowns out authorial intent with a foreign grid. He uses Joshua as an example. Block observes that many have seen Jesus as a new Joshua. However, the data of both OT and NT point to the fact that Jesus is not a new Joshua but rather the God of Joshua. From this, Block observes the deceptive nature of imposing grids like Christo-promise or typology on a text: they can make us think we have authorial intent when we do not. The tragedy of this is that we may miss a vital Christological point (Christ's deity) to make a connection we had no grounds to make. Accordingly, like Poythress, Block's pushback on Johnson's emphasis is not less authorial intent but more and to truly have it.

Hence, Johnson contributes an important ingredient to the discussion: authorial intent. If we are to preach the OT, we must not merely preach what is true on a canonical level but what those authors specifically intended for

they can and do speak of Christ. The criticism is not that we need less of this emphasis but more. We need a higher view of the biblical writers in all their complexity and a method that is rigorous enough to ensure we glean all they articulated and implied, and nothing but that.

Daniel Block: The Need for Real Meaning

This concern for proper methodology leads us to Block's contribution. The opening line of his article declares "my fundamental concern in conversations about preaching is that we proclaim the truth of God with integrity and with the passion of God's own heart" (p. 7). He desires that we have preaching which is true to the content of Scripture. Block scorns "cheap and trivializing typologizing and Christologizing, which often actually reflects a low view of Scripture and a low Christology" (p. 11). He also rightly debunks the notion that Luke 24 supports a Christocentric hermeneutic.

At the same time, Block also states that our methodology cannot be atomistic. Block warns against grammatical-historical interpretations that are in isolation from other Scriptures. He reminds us that the Scripture has a Christotelic quality. Every passage participates in God's agenda that culminates in Christ. The OT does witness to Christ. The key is to have the right starting point. He advocates that instead of reading Scripture backwards that we read Scripture forwards. Newer revelation does not rewrite what previous revelation meant. As Block observes about Genesis 15:6, "How Jesus fits into the message of Genesis 15:1-6 is an important question, but I cannot answer it until I have dealt with other issues" (p. 18). In having such a strict method, Block contends we will not only gain legitimate insights about Christ from the First Testament but also ones far deeper than the artificial connections we manufactured. Block's example of Joshua is case in point. As noted, proper method would lead us to conclude that Jesus is not merely a new Joshua but the God of Joshua.

All these exhortations ensure that we focus on the actual unique witness of the OT. Block's exegesis of Genesis 15:6 shows he practices what he preaches. From his thorough analysis, he comments on the wide range of theological implications that stem from the text. This affirms certain observations already made (like the involvement of the second person

of the Trinity in Gen 15:1). He also brings up certain observations not emphasized by the other scholars. For example, he brings out how God in context is refining Abram in using him in his redemptive plan. This has ramifications upon God's faithfulness, our sanctification, the privilege of serving God, and participating in God's saving work that focuses upon Christ. These implications and applications go beyond Christology proper but still honor Christ. This affirms Block's point. Careful and proper methodology will produce all that we desire to exalt Christ and more.

Having made these assertions, Block also warns about the dangers of not practicing a faithful methodology. He declares that a faulty Christologizing hermeneutic undermines evangelical credibility; it makes us "dishonest, fraudulent interpreters" (p. 18) because we read into a text something it never meant to say. This not only strips the OT of any substance but even more, Block contends that this is really an act of false prophecy (cf. Ezek 13:2-3). Block's warnings exhort us that methodology is not merely about preference but about pleasing God.

With that, Block reminds us that we not only need to observe thick meaning in the OT, but it must be real. We need to make sure that what we observe in the OT is the intent of the dual author as opposed to some other source (including our own theological ingenuity). Such verification happens through discipline to a rigorous methodology.

Poythress and Johnson would not disagree with such a methodological emphasis in principle but may push back on its application. This revolves around two assertions Block makes in discussing Genesis 15:1-6. First, Block asserts that the seed promise in this context does not have the Messiah in view. While the line of Abraham culminates in Jesus (cf. Matt 1:17), Block argues that the seed promise of Genesis 15 refers to his corporate line. So, Abram's faith was about that corporate promise. The pushback would be whether the seed promise can be so restricted. Both Poythress and Johnson argue that the seed promise intentionally develops Genesis 3:15. That promise then encompasses both a corporate line and an ultimate singular referent (Messiah). Even Block admits that the seed promise has a singular element in certain texts (Gen 22:16-17). If this is the case, the promise of seed does not so harshly distinguish between the singular and corporate aspects of this promise. Rather, even if one is emphasized in a context, it still encompasses an agenda that necessarily has

corporate and singular elements. With that, Abram's trust in God was more visibly Christotelic than Block articulates.[2]

Second, Block argues that God accounting Abram as righteous primarily refers to an acknowledgement of righteous behavior rather than his status. While the language of Genesis 15:6 can be used to describe righteous behavior (cf. Deut 6:25; 24:13), its closest parallel in Psalm 106:31 refers to covenant status. That idea fits well with Genesis 15:1-6 since, in that context, Abram will go through a covenant ceremony (cf. Gen 15:9-21). Hence, Genesis 15:6 speaks of how God concluded that Abram was righteous before him and thereby eligible to enter into a covenant. Unlike other situations where one's behavior is a factor (cf. Deut 6:25; 24:13; Ps 32:1), Genesis 15:6 states that God's verdict is based upon Abram's faith. Such a contrast would impress upon Israel that their covenant relationship is not grounded in works but faith. In context, this faith pertains to relying solely upon God to accomplish his promise of seed. These ideas of faith in God's seed promise (which includes Messiah), righteous status, and covenant entrance all coincide closely with Paul's later soteriological usage (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6).[3] Again, Genesis 15:6 is more directly Christotelic than Block expresses.

On both of these issues, the pushback might be that Block's rigorous methodology may have omitted data that might make the Christotelicity of a text more forceful or deliberate. This takes the "conversation" full circle as one now desires a "thick" meaning that Poythress presented at the beginning of this discussion. Nevertheless, Block's incisive assertions make a major contribution into the discussion. We should have thick meaning, but we must make sure that this is *real* in that it comes from the OT prophets and no one else. Only then are we truly preaching Christ from the OT.

Real Thick Meaning and the Prophets as Theologians

So, what should we learn from all of this? As we put the articles in conversation, we can see what these three scholars were wrestling with and looking for. They want meaning that is thick (Poythress) yet within the author's intent (Johnson) and can be proven to be so via a rigorous method (Block). In sum, they want "real thick meaning." For these scholars, this becomes the underlying justification and regulating principle to preaching

Christ from the OT. We can preach Christ from the OT because the prophets' intent is sophisticated enough to speak of and set up for him. At the same time, since the prophets' intent is the source of preaching Christ, that becomes the hermeneutical standard and prevents the abuses the three scholars were concerned about. Thus, real thick meaning is instrumental in resolving the aforementioned hermeneutical tension of how to preach Christ while honoring the OT.

The question now becomes whether real thick meaning exists in the OT and how do we know that? Even more, if it does exist, how do we discern it? I would submit the answer to these questions is that the prophets are theologians.

People have different perspectives on the OT prophets which affects their view of the OT. For example, if, as in the case of liberal scholarship, one perceives the prophets as political strategists, then their works become political justifications or rebuttals of certain social movements in Israel. If one views the prophets as merely historians, then their works are just records of what happened in the past. If one views them as merely shepherds or farmers, then one may see their works as simple. In any of these cases, seeing the presence of theology, much less Christ, is difficult if not impossible. How we view the prophets determines how we read them.

However, the Bible gives a different picture than anything mentioned above. It compels us to see the prophets as theologians. On a deductive level, Scripture declares that the prophet's role is to reveal divine truth (Deut 18:18). They are thereby givers of theology. Consistently, Scripture also claims that the prophets had sophisticated knowledge when writing. The OT declares that the prophets were immersed in Scripture (Josh 1:8; Ps 119:15; Isa 8:20). The NT affirms this also. It asserts that certain prophets knew of Messiah and the resurrection (Acts 2:31; 1 Cor 15:4). Directed by the Spirit, they knew of the Messiah's suffering and the glory thereafter even if they did not know the timing or exact circumstances (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-11; John 12:38-41). Although Luke 24 does not claim that every OT text speaks of Christ, it acknowledges that the OT collectively proclaims him and that the prophets willfully did so. That is why Jesus condemns the disciples for not believing "all the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). With that, Scripture gives overarching evidence that the prophets themselves wrote theology consciously and intelligently.

From an inductive standpoint, we can see why this is the case. Numerous studies have observed that the prophets frequently alluded to earlier revelation.[4] Some of these connections are on the level of a single phrase or word. Thus, the prophets were constantly explaining, developing, applying, and interacting with other passages of Scripture. That activity is theology. With that, Scripture not only deductively portrays the prophets as theologians, but we can also inductively observe their theological work through the way they connect with previous revelation. The prophets, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are brilliant theologians.

As noted, how we view the prophets determines how we read them. If they are profound theologians, then what they write is profound theology. This demonstrates why real thick meaning exists in the OT. It is thick because the prophets write deep theology which has enough sophistication to both discuss Christ (at times) as well as establish implications that will connect with Christ. It is meaning because such depth is in their immense knowledge of prior revelation and in what they, under inspiration, said in developing those concepts. It is real because we can demonstrate that this complexity came from the prophets themselves. They establish the theology of their writings through their linguistic connections with antecedent passages. Even more, at times, a series of prophets will highlight and refine how the ramifications of an earlier text will lead to the NT. Thus, we do not make up the complexity of the OT. The connections the prophets make establish their theology and even the significance of certain texts. With that, the OT has real thick meaning because the prophets are theologians. Under the Spirit's perfect guidance, they have engaged in theology. Our job then is to just trace what they have done.

What does that look like? How do we do that? We should be cautious of forcing categories on a text. After all, we just learned that the author makes the connections and we follow them. Hence, fundamentally, we need to look for ways the author makes allusions via distinctively similar wording. We then need to prove that this was intended by the author.[5] Having done so, we can see how the connection brings out the theology of the text and how that may participate in a chain of texts leading to Christ. There is no substitute for such an inductive method.

Nevertheless, I can still suggest four major ways this may occur:

1. The prophets can directly prophesy about Christ. All three scholars have mentioned this.
2. The prophets can describe situations which imply the participation of the second person of the Trinity. For instance, Block and Poythress observe this in the activity of the Word of the Lord in Genesis 15:1-6.
3. The prophets can prepare for Christ on a micro-level via individual theological themes and truths. Non-predictive parts of the OT still establish a theology that may have pertinence in thinking about Christ. For example, Poythress and Johnson mention that the theology of faith and righteousness in Genesis 15:1-6 sets an important foundation for understanding faith in Christ in the NT. The NT also draws from OT scenes (John 4:1-38; Exod 2:16-19) and concepts (John 1:29; Lev 4-5) as the backdrop for the life of Christ. Understanding OT theology ensures we not only have real thick meaning in the OT but also in the NT.
4. The prophets can prepare for Christ on a macro-level or relative to redemptive history because they wrote with a view to God's grander plan (cf. Neh 9:1-38; Dan 9:1-19). We can see how a moment advances God's agenda towards Christ. For instance, Block, Johnson, and Poythress all comment on how Genesis 15:1-6 functions in God's plan about the seed.

These four ways happen often in the OT. They illustrate that much of the OT has bearing on Christ in ways that go beyond what we might anticipate. Nevertheless, all of this is determined by the author. This reiterates, as Block already asserted, the importance of carefully reading the OT. Doing this not only ensures we do not make a baseless conclusion but also prevents us from missing all the immense ways the OT does magnify Christ.

Hence, real thick meaning reminds us that, in preaching Christ, our hermeneutical task has not changed. The prophets are theologians who have established a theology that proclaims and prepares for Christ in textually discernible ways. So, we do not need a new method to find Christ in the OT. Rather, we just need to do what we are always supposed to do with all Scripture: say what the biblical writers say (cf. 2 Tim 2:15; 2 Pet

3:16) because a Christ exalting theology is there.

Conclusion

With that, a final contribution Block, Poythress, and Johnson have made is that they clarify for us why preaching Christ from the OT is difficult. It is not because the OT is somehow deficient, and we need to come up with creative methods to find or insert Christ into the text. Rather, it is because the OT is complex and rich, and doing justice to all of that is an intricate task. They remind us that we need to work hard to grasp all that is there with the confidence that by carefully connecting the dots, the prophets themselves will direct us on how to magnify the Savior. In doing this, we will not only proclaim Christ legitimately from the OT but also glean the full truth to help our people honor him. My prayer then is that we keep "iron sharpening iron" so that we learn better to exalt Christ in ways that honor what he has written.

---

1. Juliana Claassens, "Biblical Theology as Dialogue: Continuing the Conversation on Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Theology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 129; Jacob Meskin, "Textual Reasoning, Modernity, and the Limits of History," *CrossCurrents* 49, no. 4 (1999): 477.
2. See discussion in T. D. Alexander, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 205.
3. See further discussion in K. A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (New American Commentary; Nashville, TN: B&H, 2005), 168.
4. Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning Interpretation from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 51–54; Michael Fishbane, "Types of Biblical Intertextuality," in *Congress Volume* (ed. A. Lemaire and M. Saebo; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 39–44; Martin Pickup, "New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rationale of Midrashic Exegesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 353–381.
5. See discussion in Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 206-207.

Lifting the Veil: Reading and Preaching Jesus' Bible through Christ and for Christ[1]

Jason S. DeRouchie

Jason S. DeRouchie is Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology at Bethlehem College and Seminary. He earned his PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. DeRouchie has written numerous articles and he is the author of *A Call to Covenant Love: Text Grammar and Literary Structure in Deuteronomy 5-11* (Gorgias, 2007); *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible* (Kregel, 2013); and *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (P&R, 2017). Dr. DeRouchie serves as an elder at Bethlehem Baptist Church. He is married to Teresa and they have six children.

The summer of 2005 I moved to Minneapolis to begin my first full-time teaching post as an Old Testament (OT) professor. Upon my request (and with some help from Tom Schreiner), John Piper agreed to have lunch with me, during which I shared with him and Justin Taylor, his assistant at the time, how much a passion for God's glory had captured me and how eager I was to proclaim the beauties and bigness of God from the initial three-fourths of the Christian Bible. After listening for a while, Pastor John asked Justin if he had any reflections, and Justin offered a single statement that shook me to the core and that God used to reorient my affections and to set me on a path of discovery and awe that I am still treading today. He said, *"I hear a lot about the glory of God and very little about Jesus."*

As a Christian, did my hermeneutical approach and ministry practice align with the truth that God created *all things* (including the OT) by the Son, through the Son, and *for the Son* (Col 1:16) and that "*all* the promises of God find their Yes in [the Son of God, Jesus Christ]" (2 Cor 1:20)? Could I, who like Paul was a teacher of Jesus' Bible, say with the apostle, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2; cf. 1:23)? Did I approach Abraham as one who saw and rejoiced in Jesus' day (John 8:56), even if from afar (Heb 11:13; cf. Matt 13:17), and did I affirm that Moses, in his writings, wrote of the divine Son (John 5:46–47; cf. 5:39)? Did I grasp that to "understand the [OT] Scriptures" means that in them I should find a unified message declaring the saving work of the Messiah and the mission he would spark (Luke 24:45–46; cf. Acts 26:22–23)? Did I truly believe that "God foretold by the mouth of *all* the prophets that his Christ would suffer" (Acts 3:18; cf. 3:24), and did I recognize that they were all carefully searching and inquiring about the person and time of Christ's sufferings and subsequent glories and yet "were serving not themselves" but us (1 Pet 1:10–12; cf. Acts 10:43; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11)? Did I affirm that Paul and Timothy's sacred writings could only make others wise for salvation––past, present, and future––when linked to faith *in Christ* (2 Tim 3:15), and Did the principles guiding my interpretation of the OT affirm that there were "mysteries" kept secret there that only the lens of Christ's coming could unlock (Rom 16:25–26; cf. Isa 29:18; Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9) and that, because of this, the apostolic teaching provides a necessary grid for properly grasping all that God wants us to gain from the OT (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20)? In short, did I interpret and preach old covenant materials in a way that embraces that "only through Christ" does God *lift the veil*, allowing us to fully understand and appropriate their significance (2 Cor 3:14–15)?

I am grateful to the three evangelical "fathers" (1 Tim 5:1) who have served us in the main articles of this volume. And I now humbly offer this critique of their proposals on how best to proclaim the divine Son from Jesus' Bible. My reflections will first address the guiding hermeneutical principles, and then I will engage the various discussions of Genesis 15:1–6.

Guiding Hermeneutical Principles

All three authors helpfully define most of their terms and supply the hermeneutical principles grounding their respective approaches. Both Poythress and Block rightly affirm that preachers bear authority only as mouthpieces of God, which means that, while they may be creative in presentation, they must stay tethered to the biblical text in both interpretation and proclamation. As we will see, however, Block's view of tethering is much more limited than Poythress's, but it is the latter's view that more faithfully accounts for authorial intent, canonical context, and the interpretive patterns of the biblical authors themselves.

Vern Poythress on Method

Poythress argues for Christocentric interpretation and Christocentric preaching, which he carries down to "every word in every verse" (p. 66, n. 5). Such an approach is necessary because the Trinitarian God is revealing himself in the whole of Scripture and because the realities of Scripture (all written post-fall to sinners) and of redemptive history (of which Scripture both testifies to and discloses) are expressions of the grace purchased through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Poythress supplies four reasons why the church must keep Christ central in its whole life, including its OT preaching. First, the pattern of the apostles was Christ-centered preaching of OT texts (e.g., Acts 2:33; 1 Cor 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15). Second, a Christ-centered gospel is all that can save (Rom 1:16), and it was this message that characterized both Jesus's (Mark 1:15) and the apostles' proclamation (Rom 1:1–3; 1 Cor 15:1–8; Col 1:28). Third, both justification and sanctification demand focusing on union and communion with Christ (e.g., 2 Cor 3:18; Col 2:3). Why would we, therefore, seek to preach anything else? Fourth, the NT identifies that the OT is centrally about Christ (Luke 24:25–27, 44–49; John 5:39, 45–46; Rom 1:1–3; 2 Cor 1:20; Hebrews; 1 Pet 1:10–12).

Poythress importantly stresses that a proper magnifying of Christ in OT preaching will only happen when one respects the varied thematic and rhetorical distinctives of each passage, the overall unity of Scripture and doctrine, and the redemptive story's progression and climax in

the person of Jesus. So there is "a spectrum of ways through which this [Christ] centrality is wisely expressed and maintained" (p. 48). Drawing from this multi-perspectival approach to the biblical text, Poythress offers eight different ways one can faithfully proclaim the divine Son in an OT passage, all of which I find both helpful and reflected in the interpretive patterns of the biblical authors themselves:[2] (1) tracking words, phrases, and larger linguistic textures; (2) assessing historical aspects both within the story and the setting of the day; (3) considering how the characters are analogous to Christ and us; (4) placing the passage on the redemptive-historical trajectory that climaxes in Christ; (5) reflecting on the portrait of God's makeup and deeds; (6) looking for the symbols or types "that have meaning in their own historical location and also point forward to a final, climactic realization in Christ;" (7) celebrating Christ as fulfillment of earlier promises, examples, preparations, and the work of God; (8) examining the progression of specific themes that intersect your passage.

Poythress's introductory homily on Genesis 15:1–6 was unnecessarily weak, focusing most on analogy (#3 above) rather than on the text's place in redemptive history (#4) and the particular ways the promise and declaration of vv. 5–6 progress, integrate, and climax in Christ (#6, 7). Nevertheless, I find myself most closely aligned with Poythress's own approach to seeing and preaching Christ in the OT.

Elliott Johnson on Method

Johnson avoids some of the challenging questions by limiting his article to a proper reading and preaching of OT promises, all of which he terms "Christo-promises" in light of the way they stand as "intention-directed revelation," caught up in a story climaxing in Christ, who both represents Israel and reverses and overcomes the curse. Johnson asserts that every *grammatical* interpretation of an OT promise will include the presence of Christ when understood "as progressively unfolding in *history*" (p. 36). While seeking to avoid "unwarranted reading" of the New Testament (NT) into the OT, Johnson nevertheless stresses the need to read every OT passage in light of "completed revelation" (p. 40). In employing a canonical interpretive approach, Johnson stretches the definition of grammatical-historical beyond its common usage. Nevertheless, he rightly recognizes

that faithful exposition demands assessing a passage's use of antecedent Scripture and its function and employment in the rest of Scripture. He also correctly affirms that, when we recognize how Jesus represents rather than replaces Israel, we grow to grasp how "*all* the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor 1:20) and that only through him do they bear lasting relevance for the church (7:1).

Johnson asserts that "the basis of expository preaching" is the conviction that, while *the characters* hearing God's promise may not have understood all that he was predicting, *the author* surely did. Johnson is not clear whether he is referring here only to the divine author, or whether he would see the understanding of the human and divine authors as one. Scripture is clear that most old covenant members were hard hearted, blind, and deaf (Deut 29:4[3]; Isa 29:10–11; Rom 11:7–8) and that awakening would come to them only in a future new covenant age associated with the Messiah (Deut 30:8; Isa 29:18; 30:8; 2 Cor 3:14). The Bible is also clear that the human authors themselves definitely knew in part what they were writing, having searched and inquired carefully (likely into antecedent Scripture) in order to know "what person and time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Pet 1:11). Nevertheless, these same authors were writing for us, not themselves (1:12; cf. Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11); they only visualized from a distance what was coming (Matt 13:17; Heb 11:13); and some of what they saw still included mystery *to them* that would only be revealed through the actual appearing and work of Christ (Rom 16:25–26; cf. Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9). We must affirm, therefore, both the organic continuity between OT anticipation and NT realization and potential discontinuities between the nature of original understanding of OT human authors and the makeup of the fulfillment in Jesus. Johnson does not address the reality of discontinuities.[3]

Daniel Block on Method

Block's paper summarizes his plea for a Christotelic *reading* of Scripture and a Jesus-centered *proclamation*. Block's summary of how he finds Jesus in the OT is limited to three primary spheres. First, all expressions of Yahweh's character and work point to Jesus, whose name means "Yahweh

saves" and who embodies the very saving work of God in space and time. Block writes, "When I preach YHWH, I preach Jesus" (p. 11). Second, Block is willing to affirm "a disciplined Christocentric hermeneutic" (p. 13), but he applies it only to explicit or implicit messianic predictions, for "Christ" is commonly a technical term for the eschatological royal figure manifest in the person of Jesus in the NT era. Third, we find Jesus as the climax of the redemptive story that begins in Genesis and culminates in Revelation. Block notes, "Not every text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ as Messiah, but every text presents a vital part of that story of Jesus, 'who is called the Christ'" (p. 14).

Block strongly disparages broader applications of a Christocentric hermeneutic, believing they encourage forms of "typologizing," "allegorizing," and "Christologizing" that are "illegitimate," "foolish," "cheap," "trivial," "bizarre," "popular," and "contemptuous" (pp. 11–12), that manifest "a low view of Scripture and a low Christology" (p. 11), that "say more about the interpreters' ingenuity than the text itself" (p. 11), and that result in "anti-Semitism" (p. 32) and in "drowning out the voice of God and obscuring the true message" (p. 12). Those who interpret Scripture this way are "dishonest" and "fraudulent" (p. 18) and "have hijacked the Jewish Scriptures, and made every text about Christ" (p. 13). Using such strong language certainly cautions one from employing such methods. But when one queries what Block means by "typologizing," "allegorizing," and "Christologizing," we find no explicit definitions, nor does he attach such abuses to specific contemporary scholars, whose methods we could analyze in greater detail.[4] This leaves me wondering whom Block is actually battling.

Block does clarify that he is targeting those who find "no connection between the illocutions (intended meanings) of these two [human and divine] authors" and who often pay "no attention to what the divine and human authors originally intended" (p. 13). Perhaps he is overstating his case, but such a claim would automatically disqualify Poythress's Christocentric hermeneutic from Block's target. Indeed, rather than engaging in extreme forms of *sensus plenior* (fuller meaning), Poythress has stressed that God is never speaking less than the biblical authors were aware but is often speaking more and that we must see an organic link between all anticipation and fulfillment.[5] We can say the same of Doug Moo, Greg

Beale, Darrell Bock, Peter Gentry, and Steve Wellum, among others, all of whom equally stress that later author's appropriations of antecedent texts always stand in alignment with and not in contradistinction to the original human author's intent.[6] Beale's words are representative of this group: "The NT Scripture interprets the OT Scripture by expanding its meaning, seeing new implications in it and giving it new applications ... This expansion does not contravene the integrity of the earlier texts but rather develops them in a way which is consistent with the OT author's understanding of the way in which God interacts with his people which is the unifying factor between the Testaments."[7]

With respect to typology, Block strongly claims that we should not read characters like Joshua (p. 10), events like the exodus (pp. 10–11), or institutions like tabernacle worship and sacrifice (pp. 15–16) as originally looking forward to the work of Christ. Rather, "in the wise and all-knowing providence of God," they simply "provided the vocabulary with which Jesus and the apostles could later interpret Christ's work" (p. 14). Here Block seems to miss that, for later authors to use the vocabulary that earlier Scripture associates with particular characters, circumstances, and structures means that they believed God intended these portrayals to bear witness to the Christ event. That is, the OT stories themselves are the means by which we actually understand the significance of Jesus's person and work. As one of my students has highlighted:

> The OT vocabulary is not mere ornamentation placed on an otherwise understandable and perceivable person. Rather, the OT vocabulary (types) becomes the only way that we can perceive the reality of Christ, and the only way that we are permitted to see him. Without this vocabulary, we have no words (indeed, no divine words!) to describe Jesus, and the Christ event is literally meaningless. Without the complex web of types, metaphors, and symbols that form the vocabulary of the OT, Christ is a none-thing—an indescribable essence that we cannot name. We must see the OT vocabulary as, at least partially, *constituting* the Christ event. And if we should see the OT as constituting the meaning of the Christ event, then we must see the OT as part of the revelation of the man Jesus Christ. We can debate how much the OT authors understood about that revelation, and that debate is worth having, but it must not continue to overshadow the true meaning of the OT, God's revelation of the Word.[8]

Along with the above, I believe that we must affirm that the OT human authors were often quite aware that their portraits of persons, events, and institutions were indeed pointing ahead to the person and work of the promised deliverer (Matt 13:17; John 5:39, 46–47; 8:56; Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 1:10–12) and yet that they did not always understand fully all that God intended (Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9; cf. Rom 16:25–26). As for someone like Joshua, we take no glory away from Yahweh in identifying this human figure as an agent through whom Yahweh led his people to victory and who supplied his people a type of rest that pointed ahead to something greater (Heb 4:8)—something the OT saints themselves *saw* and *longed for* (11:13–16). Similarly, Moses knew that the tabernacle and its worship were merely earthly replicas of a heavenly paradigm (παράδειγμα) or prototype (τύπος) (Exod 25:9, 40; cf. Heb 8:5; 9:23–24), and thus he would have also recognized that the earthly picture would be unnecessary when the heavenly reality came to earth as was promised, contingent on Israel's perfect obedience (Lev 26:11–12; cf. Ezek 37:27). Furthermore, the NT stresses that events like the exodus and those in the wilderness years "were examples [τύποι] *for us*" (1 Cor 10:6), "written down *for our instruction*" (10:11). That is, from their inception the types bore a divinely wrought, forward-pointing, predictive nature, and this truth stands regardless of how often the OT authors recognized it or not.

Block writes, "Rather than reading the Scriptures backwards I read them forwards, interpreting Isaiah in the light of Moses, and Luke and Paul in the light of Moses and Isaiah … Moses does not need to account to Paul, but Paul needs to account to Moses … Later revelation cannot correct, annul, or contradict earlier revelation" (pp. 15–16). He later adds, "While we interpret later texts in the light of earlier texts, we may not force onto earlier texts meanings that were irrelevant to the original situation ... If we would preach Genesis 15:6, we must preach Genesis 15:6, and not some message that later biblical authors adopted and adapted for quite different polemical purposes" (p. 26). Does Block think the later authors were justified in handling antecedent Scripture as they did? If they were, why are Christians not legitimately allowed to follow their hermeneutical and homiletical methods?

Block does say that "when we preach evangelistically, we need to follow the paradigm and kerygma of the apostles and preach Jesus Christ

crucified and risen again" (p. 15). However, when our goals are something other than evangelism—e.g., "to bring about repentance, to reveal God, to encourage and guide believers in a life of godliness, to console those who grieve, and to present hope for the future by effecting transformation in the present"—we apparently do not need to follow the apostolic pattern (p. 15). I struggle in at least two ways with Block's assertions. First, the church was guided by the apostles' teaching and only through them by the OT prophetic word (Acts 2:42; Rom 16:25–26; Eph 2:20). For the early Christians, Jesus's Bible gained its full significance only in the light of and through the lens of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Thus, Paul, whose Bible was principally the OT, could declare, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). He could also affirm that "all the promises of God find their Yes *in him*" (2 Cor 1:20), which within the greater context of the book includes OT promises (cf. 7:1).[9] Second, Block seems to limit "gospelizing" sermons to first-encounter experiences, but the effectiveness of all the other purposes he mentions are directly contingent on the pardon bound up in the gospel and the power and promises it produces. As one contemporary preacher has declared, "The only sin that we can defeat is forgiven sin."[10] That is, even mature Christians need a God who is one hundred percent for them already in order to find fuel for pursuing progress in sanctification. The good news that the reigning God saves and satisfies believing sinners through Christ's life, death, and resurrection is the only message that brings salvation in all its tenses (Rom 1:16)—past justification (Eph 2:8), present sanctification (1 Cor 1:17), and future glorification (Rom 5:8). I agree with Block that "failure to mention Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins and whose resurrection gives us hope in life eternal in a sermon does not mean we have not preached a Christian sermon" (p. 15). But I believe that failure to read and preach the OT in this light and through this lens would. In my own exposition of Genesis 15:1–6 that follows, the reader will see that I focus less on Jesus's death and resurrection and more on his perfect obedience and righteousness, which highlights this point. With Poythress, we must approach Christocentrism through a multi-perspectival approach, with Scripture's Christotelic nature being *one* valid avenue for seeing and making much of the divine Son in the OT.

Block claims that the Christocentric hermeneutic is based on a wrong

interpretation of Luke 24:27, 44 that reads the evangelist to say that all the Scriptures speak of Christ rather than that those Scriptures that do speak of him he has come to fulfill. I agree with Block's reading of Luke 24:27, 44, but Poythress and others have identified that a Christological hermeneutic bears a far broader basis than these two verses. In addition to Poythress's comments (see above), I would add that Colossians 1:16 (all things were created *by*, *through*, and *for* the Son) necessitates that we interpret *all things* through a Christocentric grid, that 2 Corinthians 1:20 (all God's promises find their Yes in the Son) necessitates that we read *all promises* through the light and lens of Christ, and that Luke 24:45–47 declares that we have only "understood the Scriptures" if we see how they ultimately anticipate the Messiah and the mission he would spark (cf. Acts 26:22–23).

Confusingly, Block does say, "We may often grasp the Christological significance of a First Testament text only with hindsight" (p. 14). Would this not require reading backward rather than forward? Because Block uses "Christological" rather than "Christotelic," perhaps he is here referring to proclamation rather than interpretation (as he noted on p. 8). Later, however, when writing with respect to Genesis 15:1–6, he states that "with hindsight" the meaning of Jesus' name ("Yahweh saves") "provides the first clue to this text's *Christotelic* significance" (p. 19). For Block, "Christotelic" relates to something bound within the text itself and not just to preaching (p. 8), so I struggle to see how he is here not engaging in the very forward to backward reading that he elsewhere rejects. His claim that "the person who encounters Abraham in this text [Genesis 15:1–6] is none other than Jesus" is similar to how the author of Hebrews attributed Moses's reproach for *God's* sake as a reproach endured for *Christ* (Heb 11:26) and how Jude identified *Jesus* as Israel's deliverer at the exodus (Jude 5). While "Jesus" is the earthly name of the Christ and not the name of the pre-incarnate Son, the NT authors readily identified him with Yahweh, while never collapsing into Christomonism.

We must affirm that, while God disclosed much to the original authors, who searched and inquired carefully regarding the person and time of the Messiah (1 Pet 1:10–11), they were ultimately writing *not* for themselves but for us (1:12), and there were "mysteries" in the biblical text that neither they nor their readers fully understood (Rom 16:25–26). With respect to the readers, Yahweh declared through Moses that the majority of the

covenant community were deaf to God's Word and would only listen after their hearts were circumcised (Deut 30:6, 8; cf. 29:4[3]; Rom 2:29). Similarly, God noted through Isaiah that the majority in Israel would only grasp God's book in a future day after the substitutionary sacrifice of the Servant when God would teach all covenant members (Isa 29:11, 18; 30:8; 54:13; cf. John 6:44–46). As for the authors themselves, the Lord charged Jeremiah to write his words in a book for a future generation living after the exile and during the days of the new covenant who alone would fully understand his writings (Jer 30:1–3, 24–31:1, 33–34). And Yahweh told Daniel that, while he understood some of God's mysteries (Dan 2:27–28; 10:1), full disclosure would be granted to a future generation at the time of the end (12:8–9). Block writes that those practicing a Christological reading of the OT have "veiled the message of the inspired authors" (p. 18); however, with echoes of Moses in Deut 29:4[3], Paul would assert that a veil actually remains on the eyes of all who attempt to approach the old covenant materials as if the new covenant hasn't come: "For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away" (2 Cor 3:14).

Jesus comes to reveal "the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11), providing both light *and* lens for rightly grasping God's Word. In my view, we *must* read the OT *both* forwards and backwards—the OT authors themselves intended this. What was inscribed in each OT book was "for the time to come" (Isa 30:8) when those who were once "unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD" (30:9) would be superseded by those "taught by the LORD" (54:13). "In the latter days you will understand this" (Jer 30:24). At "the time of the end … those who are wise shall understand" (Dan 12:10).

Interpreting and Preaching Genesis 15:1–6

Block says of Genesis 15:1–6, "I see no hand here pointing to a future eschatological Messiah" (p. 30). He further writes: "The text offers no hint whatsoever" that either Abram or the human author believed "prefiguratively that Christ through the incarnation would become his heir" or that on this basis the Lord "reckoned it to him as righteousness" (p. 17). Significantly, Block agrees with me and others that Genesis 22:17–

18 is "a Christological text, for this would indeed involve a royal figure" (p. 23).[11] However, "the opposite is true in Genesis 15:1–6," for whereas Abram's focus was on "an *individual* heir, the aim of YHWH's response was to get him to think in terms of an innumerable host of descendants" (p. 23). What Block fails to consider enough, however, is whether the wider context of Genesis ties together the promises of the one and the many and how that answer should inform our reading of Genesis 15:1–6.

The Messianic Context of Genesis 15:5

In Genesis 15:2–3, Abram raises two related issues that control 15:1–6 as a whole: offspring and inheritance. With an eye to the broader literary context of the book, Poythress stresses that God's earlier promises to Abram of nationhood (Gen 12:2) and of the multiplication of his "offspring" (13:15–16) had already suggested that the patriarch's "offspring is also the offspring of the woman" (p. 49). This passing reference is to the promise in Genesis 3:15 that a single, male offspring of the woman would crush the serpent's head—a text Block never considers in relation to 15:1–6.[12] Similarly, Johnson rightly notes that the "selected line of offspring in the genealogies of Genesis 5:1–42 and 11:10–32 … link the choice of Abram to Adam and Eve" (p. 38), and this connection must inform our reading of Genesis 15:1–6. Furthermore, Genesis 3:15 already identified that the "conflict with the serpent … would ultimately be resolved by one offspring (he, him)," whom Paul later identified "with Jesus Christ" (Gal 3:16; 4:4) (pp. 40–41).

To these statements I would add the following observations with special attention given to the "offspring" promise in Genesis 15:5. First, from Genesis 3:15 forward, the book directly associates the promise of a single, male "offspring" deliverer with a global problem of curse due to human rebellion, the reality of which colors every narrative that follows. As Poythress states, "What makes the difference between the blessing described in Genesis 1:28 and the situation of frustration [i.e., no offspring] in Genesis 15:3" is "the obvious watershed … the fall of Adam," which places all of God's favor toward Abram and in indeed all of redemptive history as a result of grace, made possible ultimately "only … through Christ" (p. 61). Block does recognize that "the point of the

divine agenda for the chosen ancestor and his descendants was the removal of the curse from the world and its replacement with blessing" (p. 27). Nevertheless, with what appears to be mindful contrast to Paul's use of Genesis 15:1–6 in Romans 4, Block says, "The issue in Genesis 15:1–6 is not personal salvation from sin, but the sustainability of YHWH's plan of redemption and Abram's role in it" (pp. 26–27). While Abram's sin is not at the forefront of 15:1–6, we must recognize that his own experience of curse seen in his lack of children identifies him with Adam and creates the context for his looking to God in faith.

Second, Genesis 12:1–3 use two separate imperatives ("Go" in 12:1a; "And be a blessing" in 12:2d) to create two eras of promise associated with Abram's inheritance: stage-one included an earthly kingdom associated with one people in the promised land (12:1–2c) (fulfilled, I believe, in the Mosaic covenant); stage-two entailed a multi-ethnic, global kingdom associated with the reversal of Babel (see "families" in 10:32 and 12:3) and with God's blessing rather than curse (12:2d–3) (fulfilled ultimately in the new covenant through Christ; cf. 22:18).[13] When Abram stresses that he has neither offspring nor biological heir (15:3), we must place both realities within the book's vision of global reconciliation with God.

Third, God's renaming of Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude") reaffirms, now in paternal language, the global scope of the patriarch's future "fatherly" influence (17:4–5; cf. 12:3)––a paternal relationship over the nations that would apparently be based on election (through adoption) rather than on biology.[14] As such, the greater context of Genesis calls us to use this broader paternal application when interpreting the book's promise that the patriarch's *offspring* would become "like the dust of the earth" (13:16; 28:14), "like the stars of heaven" (22:17; 26:4; cf. 15:5), and "like the sand of the seashore" (22:17; 32:12[13]). That is, regardless of whether one affirms Block's unlikely insistence that "all Abram had on his mind was physical progeny" (p. 31), both the divine and human author of the book would have us understand that the ultimate referent extends beyond biology and that Scripture's later allusions to the "dust-stars-sand"-promise in association with Israel as a nation were only initial (stage-one) fulfillments of a promise that would find broader, more world-wide realization in a multi-ethnic kingdom (stage-two) (Rom 4:18; cf. Isa 48:19; Hos 1:10).[15]

Fourth, whereas Block insists that Yahweh sought to get Abram to think about "an innumerable host of descendants" *rather than* on "an individual as his heir" (p. 23), I believe God's declaration in Genesis 15:5 is actually addressing how the singular "offspring" will give rise to many. Block translates the last part of 15:5 as "This is how your seed will be" (thus giving "seed" a plural referent), but the clause כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ more naturally reads, "Thus your seed will become," with "offspring/seed" referring back to the singular "son" and "offspring" of 15:3–4. Furthermore, we know that God would establish his covenant with Isaac (17:19, 21), but when the Lord later pledges that "through Isaac shall your offspring be named" (21:12; cf. Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18) we see that the "offspring" in view is *not* Isaac but rather a later seed who would be associated with him. While the promise demanded that Isaac survive and father offspring, the promise itself pointed beyond Isaac to another male descendant––one that Genesis 22 specifically identifies as a royal figure who would possess his enemies' gates (thus suggesting the expansion of his kingdom turf, Gen 22:17c; cf. 24:60; 26:3–4) and serve as a channel of curse-overcoming blessing to all nations (22:18).

Fifth, within the context of Genesis 22:17–8, the narrator invites us to link the anticipation of a single male descendant through whom the nations would be blessed (22:18) with the promise that Yahweh would, in allusion to Genesis 15:5, multiply Abraham's offspring "as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore" (22:17b). Following the use of collective singular nouns elsewhere, Moses at times uses the number in pronouns to explicitly identify whether זֶרַע ("seed/offspring") bears a singular (3:15; 22:17c–18; 24:60) or plural (17:8) referent.[16] In light of the singular in 22:17c–18, we should view the same messianic figure as the assumed agent in those ambiguous channel-of-blessing-texts that include no pronouns (e.g., 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14). Block claims that "the plan making Abram a blessing to the entire world depended upon progeny [plural] who could scatter to the ends of the earth and thereby serve as agents of blessing" (p. 23). Indeed, he goes so far as to say that "the incredible contribution Israelites and their successors the Jews have made to the advance of civilization and culture" (p. 23) fulfills this anticipation. But such statements miss that in Genesis "blessing" stands in alignment with Yahweh and in direct contrast to sin and curse. The promise of global

blessing is about reconciliation between God and man, with cultural transformation being only a subsidiary result. Later Block affirms that Yahweh "determined to rescue his world from the ravages of sin, and is determined to use human beings—representatives of the Adamic race that is responsible for the problem—to accomplish that agenda" (p. 29). But how can those who are part of the problem serve as decisive agents in the solution? In contrast, Genesis portrays the decisive agent in the world's salvation to be *not* a community but a person, not the many but the one, who will represent the nation and inherit all the promises God made to Abraham. We will now explore the importance of this point in relation to Genesis 15:6.

Justifying Faith in Genesis 15:6 and the Need for the Perfectly Obedient Messiah

"And [Abram] believed the LORD, and he counted it to [Abram] as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). In Romans 4, the apostle Paul identifies Abraham in Genesis 15:6 as a model of one "who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5). We must now consider how the original context of Genesis envisions justifying faith and then reflect on what it means that God regarded the patriarch's believing as righteousness.

Following the divine promise in Genesis 15:5 that Abram's single offspring would multiply like the stars, we are told that the patriarch "believed in Yahweh" (וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה, 15:6), thus identifying that the man's confidence was in God himself.[17] That is, for Abram, there was an intimate tie between the desirability of the promise and the believability of the promise maker, and the latter took precedence in his faith. Block wants to define the Hiphil of אמן as "to demonstrate confidence in" (pp. 24–25), asserting, "While faith may be discussed as a disposition, it is never perceived in Scripture as a mystical quality nor primarily as an interior state. It is a jack-in-the-box that must be demonstrated in action observable to a watching world, and certainly to God" (p. 30). Significantly, Block's statement about faith distinguishes the expression from its demonstration ("It [i.e., faith] … must be demonstrated"), which shows that Block's own definition of faith misses the mark, defining the root as if it were the fruit. The Westminster divines were correct that faith "is not alone in the person

justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love" (Jas 2:17, 22–23, 26; Gal 5:6).[18] Nevertheless, faith is itself not a work; it is less doing and more receiving (John 1:12; cf. 6:28–29) and being satisfied in all God is for us (6:35), ultimately in Christ. Both *HALOT* and *DCH* note that, absent of a Qal usage, the Hiphil of אמן means simply "to believe, trust,"[19] and in the discussion that follows I will note the vital importance of this point for properly understanding the passage.

So what was Abram trusting God for? First, he was *trusting God to accomplish something in, through, and for him that he could not accomplish on his own*. His faith was a response to his recognition of his own inability and his deep confidence in God's ability. At one level, Block recognizes this fact when he draws attention to Abram's potential frustration and accusation in 15:2–3. Furthermore, both Poythress and Johnson draw attention to how the mention of both Sarai's barrenness (11:30) and Abram's lack of a biological son as his heir (15:3–4) emphasize Abram's personal powerlessness to bring about the fulfillment of God's promises. Nature was stacked against the patriarch, directly calling readers to question whether he could indeed become a great nation (12:1–2b) and have an offspring that would become a blessed multitude made up of some from all the families of the earth (12:2c–3; 15:5). That Sarah later laughed when the angel of Yahweh told her she would bear a son (18:13–15) only highlights that the fulfillment of God's promise would take a miracle. For us to enjoy a justifying faith like Abram's demands that we embrace that what God calls of us is impossible without his help (cf. Rom 4:18–22; Heb 11:11).

Second, within the broader scope of the book's messianic promises in Genesis 3:15; 22:17b–18; 24:60; and 49:8–10, we see that Abram's justifying faith was specifically in relation to his *trusting God to bring the promised offspring through whom all evil would be demolished, the curse of sin reversed, and lasting life with God restored to the world at large.* While Abram was clearly trusting God before Genesis 15 (see Heb 11:8), the narrator withheld the language of "believing" until Genesis 15:6, likely in order to associate faith directly with the book's offspring promise and to identify that, for sinful humans infected and affected by the fall of Adam, believing (and not doing) supplies the only ultimate ground for standing right before God in this age.[20]

We next learn that, of Abram's believing, God "counted it to him as righteousness" (וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה). Block reads this to mean that the patriarch's "present act of faith was a righteous act" (p. 28) and that "Abram/Abraham proved his righteousness by faith" (p. 29). This is one possible reading of the text, and Block supports it by paralleling Genesis 15:6 with two important texts in Deuteronomy.[21]

> Deut 6:25. *And it will be righteousness for us* [וּצְדָקָה תִּהְיֶה־לָּנוּ], if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.
>
> Deut 24:12–13. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. *And it shall be righteousness for you* [וּלְךָ תִּהְיֶה צְדָקָה] before the LORD your God.

In Block's discussion, he correctly stresses that Scripture uses the term "righteousness" to "refer not simply to a status or state, but to behavior in accord with an established standard" (p. 27). More specifically, in my assessment, all forty-two other occurrences of the צדק word group in the Pentateuch appear to speak of aligning with or doing what is right in God's world.[22] The language of "righteousness" is about the orientation of one's life with right order through character or behavior.

While I agree with Block's understanding of the term "righteousness," I think that he has misinterpreted Genesis 15:6, and in doing so he diminishes glory due the Righteous One, the perfectly obedient Son of God. First, I have already noted that the context of Genesis 15:6 emphasizes Abram's *inability* rather than ability, and it is this powerlessness to generate the fulfillment of the offspring promise that sets the very context for justifying faith. If "righteousness" by nature focuses on behavior and doing as Block rightly argues, Abraham's faith is itself *not* a righteous act.[23]

Second, Block seems to assume that God is "accounting" or "crediting" Abraham for something that is true in him (i.e., faith = a righteous act). Thus, using nearly the same language at Genesis 15:6, we are told that God counted Phinehas' zeal against the sexually immoral for *what it was––a righteous act*: "Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed. *And that was counted to him as righteousness* [וַתֵּחָשֶׁב לוֹ לִצְדָקָה] from generation to generation forever" (Ps 106:30–31). However, Scripture also

uses the verb חשׁב with respect to "reckoning" *what is not*. For example, Leah and Rachel claim that their father Laban "reckons" them as strangers ("Are we not regarded [נֶחְשַׁבְנוּ] by him as foreigners," Gen 31:15), and the sage declares that a person who receives a blessing at the wrong time can view it as a curse ("Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, *will be counted* [תֵּחָשֶׁב] as cursing," Prov 27:14). I suggest the context of Genesis 15:6 supports reading the meaning of חשׁב in this latter way—as God imputing to Abraham something that was by nature *not* his own: "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."[24] In this vein, Brian Vickers writes regarding what is going on in Genesis 15:6:

> "Because Abraham believes the promise for an heir, God counts Abraham as holding the same status or position as that of a person who has done everything right according to God's standards.... The status or description typically reserved for actions is here counted to Abraham on the basis of faith. Abraham's faith is counted to him as something that it inherently is not, righteousness ... What might usually be declared over a person who did what is right in God's sight is declared upon Abraham through faith."[25]

In my view, this reading more faithfully accounts for the focus in the text on the patriarch's inability. Furthermore, it seems to align better with Paul's reading, when he wrote (Rom 4:2–5): "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." We must, in Carson's words, see that "when faith is imputed to Abraham as righteousness, it is *unmerited*, it is all of grace, because it is nothing more than believing God and his gracious promise."[26] Abraham's righteousness was what systematicians call an "*alien* righteousness"—one that is credited to the ungodly apart from behavior. And because we know that "he who justifies the wicked" is "an abomination to the LORD" (Prov 17:15), Yahweh could have only counted Abram's faith as righteousness in the light of the coming Son's penal-substitutionary work. Thus, Abram by faith received from God by declaration what he did *not* have in himself.

Third, this understanding is further supported by the broader biblical context, some of which Block points to but the whole of which ought to impact our understanding of Genesis 15:1–6 more than Block perceives. Specifically, Genesis 12:2d–3 makes the fulfillment of the ultimate promise of Abram serving as a channel of blessing to the world contingent on the patriarch (or his representative) being a blessing.[27] Furthermore, 18:19 adds that only by Abraham's children "doing righteousness and justice" would Yahweh "bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Without obedience, the curse would not and could not be overcome by blessing. Significantly, while Noah, after finding grace in Yahweh's eyes, is tagged "righteous" (Gen 6:8–9), we are also told that all those who came off the ark continued to be evil at their core (8:21; cf. 6:5). Indeed, the Pentateuch's overwhelming message is that God's people were not and indeed could not be perfectly righteous. Their innate stubbornness and uncircumcised hearts rendered them unrighteous and spiritually disabled (Deut 9:4–6; 10:16; 29:4[3]), and this fact would result in their destruction (4:25–28; 31:16–17, 27–29). Moses would have affirmed Paul's words when he described such people as "ungodly" (Rom 4:5) and when he noted that they were part of a covenant that bore a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor 3:7, 9).

Within this framework, God's "righteousness" (צֶדֶק / δίκαιος) as a standard was what Israel was to *pursue* (רדף / διώκω) (Deut 16:20), and he would regard perfect commandment keeping as righteousness (צְדָקָה, 6:25). Paul rightly noted, however, "that Gentiles *who did not pursue righteousness* [τὰ μὴ διώκοντα δικαιοσύνην] have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel *who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness* [διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης] did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works" (Rom 9:30–32). The ultimate *telos* of the law-covenant was Christ for righteousness to all who believe (10:5). God intended that the law disclose and multiply sin (Rom 3:20; 5:20; Gal 3:19), so as to show everyone their need to receive from God by declaration the right standing that no one could himself earn.

On this, Johnson rightly notes that, because Abram's imperfect "obedience did not fulfill God's promise," the promise's certainty "*necessarily implies* that there will be an ultimate descendant through whom

the promise will be fulfilled" (p. 39). He adds, "The *promise* of God assured what in the commitment would be fulfilled. The *law* of God was added to identify the descendant who would be willing and able to obey and thus the one chosen by God to use as the partner (Gal 3:23, 24)" (p. 39). He also notes, "The Mosaic law would only be effective in the intended purpose (Exod 19:5, 6), if some partner were willing and able to obey fully … The law was never expected to be fulfilled through a fallen people. Rather, the law was expected to be a schoolmaster to reveal Israel's Messiah (Gal 3:24). Thus, Jesus did not *replace* Israel, but *represented* Israel in her partnership with God" (p. 42).[28]

The old covenant was set up such that "righteousness" was *goal*, not *ground*. Christ fulfills the perfect obedience demanded in the law (Rom 5:18–19; Phil 2:8–9), and by this he fulfills the call to "be a blessing" set forth in God's original directives to Abram (Gen 12:2d).[29] And the natural result was the overflow of justification of life for all who believe (Rom 5:18). When we believe God, trusting him to accomplish for us what we cannot do on our own and to do so ultimately through his promised offspring, he justifies the inept, unable, and powerless ungodly ones, counting our sin to Christ (2 Cor 5:20) and crediting Christ's righteousness/perfect obedience to us (Rom 8:4; cf. 5:18–19). By this he in turn empowers us to be who we could not be on our own (6:17, 22). The only ones who can practice "righteousness" are those who are already declared "righteous" (1 John 3:7).

Moses was able to portray Abraham as a covenant keeper who "obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen 26:5; cf. 22:18) only because the patriarch experienced a preceding divine grace (cf. 6:8–9) wherein, having been declared right with God (15:6), he was then empowered to walk in his ways, giving sustained evidences of justifying faith. It is from and only from this perspective that James, speaking with respect to Abraham's offering up of Isaac, identified the patriarch's act as a *fulfillment* of God's earlier declaration: "You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'" (Jas 2:21–24; cf. Rom 4:20–22). Only those who are "of faith … are the sons of Abraham" (Gal 3:8), and because "the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring … who

is Christ" (3:16), "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (3:29; cf. Rom 4:13, 24–25).

Conclusion

A Christocentric hermeneutic that reads the OT both forwards and backwards most faithfully aligns with the nature of Scripture as divine revelation and with the explicit statements and approaches of the biblical authors themselves. We must affirm Block's insistence that the entire OT story climaxes in Jesus. To him all Scripture points, and from him all fulfillment comes. Nevertheless, we must not restrict ourselves to a Christotelic reading in order to faithfully magnify the divine Son in the initial three-fourths of the Christian Scriptures. Instead, we must follow Poythress's practice of a multi-perspectival approach that recognizes that all things, including the OT, find their source and goal in the divine Son (Col 1:16). Furthermore, we must affirm with Johnson that *all* the promises of the OT point in some way to Christ and through him find their significance for the church (2 Cor 1:20). We know that the OT remained a closed book for most OT readers (Deut 29:4[3]; Isa 29:10–11), and we also know that, even for the OT human authors themselves, there remained mysteries that only Christ's coming clarifies (Rom 16:25–26; cf. Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9). We must, therefore, approach the OT in a way that affirms that "only through Christ" does God lift the veil from our hearts, allowing us to more fully and faithfully read and preach Jesus's Bible as Christian Scripture (2 Cor 3:14).

---

1. I thank my students Josh Bremerman and Tyler Holley and my colleagues Drs. Chris Bruno, Andy Naselli, and Rick Shenk for reading an earlier draft of this paper and for offering helpful feedback. I am also grateful for the encouragement of my fall 2018 Intermediate Hebrew class and of Drs. Jason Meyer, John Piper, and Miles Van Pelt in the process of writing.

2. For a comparable list, see Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 481–89; cf. 365–67.

3. See D.A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and New," in *The Paradoxes of Paul. Vol 2 of Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, 2 vols., *WUNT* 2/181 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 393–436; G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

4. The closest Block comes to identifying his antagonists is by linking the methodology to "a supposedly

astute institution, the Gospel Coalition," and to a passing comment on preaching Christ by "R. Albert Mohler," Block's former boss and The President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

5. See, for example, Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995); Vern S. Poythress, *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999); Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).
6. E.g., Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 175–211, 397–405; G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?," *Themelios* 14.3 (1989): 89–96; G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and the Apostles Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Revisiting the Debate Seventeen Years Later in the Light of Peter Enns' Book, Inspiration and Incarnation," *Themelios* 32.1 (2006): 18–43; Darrell L. Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 105–51; G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); G. K. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors: J. Gresham Machen Chair Installation Lecture," *WTJ* 76 (2014): 263–93; G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014); Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 702–46; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (2nd ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 107–58. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, *From Typology to Doxology: Paul's Use of Isaiah and Job in Romans 11:34–35* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012); Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 39–68; Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Brent E. Parker, "Typology and Allegory: Is There a Distinction? A Brief Examination of Figural Reading," *SBJT 21.1* (2017): 57–83; Aubrey M. Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology," *SBJT 21.1* (2017): 11–34; DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 347–79; Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 230–59.
7. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?" 394; cf. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors," 283.
8. Tyler Holley, person correspondence, Sept 13, 2018. Tyler is one of my ThM students at Bethlehem College & Seminary, and he is focusing his thesis on the nature and significance of typology.
9. See Jason S. DeRouchie, "Is Every Promise 'Yes'? Old Testament Promises and the Christian," *Themelios* 42 (2017): 16–45.
10. John Piper, "I Act the Miracle," a sermon on Phil 2:12–13 presented at Bethlehem College & Seminary chapel, Feb 24, 2011; https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-act-the-miracle.
11. See T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' In Genesis," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 363–67; Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, "Christ or Family as the 'Seed' of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16," *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 36–49; Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," *JETS 56* (2013): 219–47; Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS 58.3* (2015): 445–85; Jason S. DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in Old Testament Perspective," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 7–38; cf. C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 139–47.
12. Block mentions Gen 3:15 once at p. 22 n. 23, but he does not relate it to his interpretation of Gen 15:1–6.
13. For more on this, see DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets," 459–60, 479–80; DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations," 13–14, 31–32; for a more detailed exegetical assessment, see DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 209–11, 247–50, 258–63, 315–17.
14. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets," 457–61; DeRouchie, "Father of a

Multitude of Nations," 10–15.

15. "Dust" = 2 Chr 1:9; "stars" = Exod 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chr 27:23; Neh 9:23; Heb 11:12; "sand" = 2 Sam 17:11; 1 Kgs 4:20; Isa 10:22; Heb 11:12; cf. Rom 9:27.
16. On this feature, see especially Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15)," 139–47 and Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' In Genesis," 363–67.
17. Williams and Beckman note how verbs like the Hiphil of אמן can "take a prepositional phrase beginning with בְּ where English would use a direct object" (Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *William's Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §244.
18. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, §11.2.
19. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. and trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994), s.v. אמן; David J. A. Clines, The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, 9 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), s.v. אמן.
20. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Is It the Case That Christ Is the Same Object of Faith in the Old Testament? (Genesis 15:1–6)," *JETS 55* (2012): 291–98; cf. E. Ray Clendenen, "Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness in the Book of Habakkuk?" BBR 24 (2014): 505–13.
21. Block's reading appears to align with the common pattern in early Judaism, wherein Gen 15:6 is read in relation to Abraham's obedience in Gen 22 and taken as evidence of his merit (see 1 Macc 2:51–52; Mek. 35b, 40b), Paul's own reading in Rom 4 stands as a polemic against such a view. See D. A. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates* (ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 56.
22. There are four terms in the צדק word group: (1) Verb צדק (Qal, "to be right, just"; Niphal, "to be justified"; Piel, " to make someone appear upright, to declare as in the right"; Hiphil, "to obtain rights for, to declare as in the right, to treat as right; Hithpael, to prove oneself right); (2) ms noun צֶדֶק (bears a collective meaning and points to the standard of "right order" in God's world; (3) fs noun צְדָקָה (denotes proof of uprightness or an act of justice, with the focus on proper behavior that aligns with right order); (4) adjective צַדִּיק ("righteous, just, in the right, innocent"). Within the Pentateuch, the noun צְדָקָה consistently means "proper or upright behavior" that is expected or performed, often explicitly in association with Yahweh (Gen 18:19; 30:33; Deut 6:25; 9:4–6; 24:13; 33:21).
23. Carson is correct that, "In some broad sense, of course, God-commanded faith is in 'conformity to the will of God,' but in the context [of Gen 15:6 and Rom 4] this faith justifies the ungodly, that is, those who are not in conformity to the will of God" (Carson, "Vindication of Imputation," 68). We find similar teaching in 2 Cor 5:19–21; Phil 3:8–9.
24. Cf. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation," 58.
25. Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair,* Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 58, 60–61.
26. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation," 60.
27. For more on the relationship of human responsibility (imperative) and divine commitment (promise) in Gen 12:1–3, see DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 209–11; cf. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (NSBT 23; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 78–79; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 266–70.
28. On this, Gentry and Wellum write: "The covenant will be fulfilled not by a faithful Father alone (i.e., Yahweh keeping his promises) but also by a faithful son (i.e., the obedience of the king to Yahweh's Torah)" (Kingdom through Covenant, 449, 703). "God's demand of complete obedience from his creatures … is crucial in establishing the grounding to the active obedience of Christ. This is consistent with who God is as the standard of righteousness and justice. To demand anything less than full devotion and obedience from his creatures would be a denial of himself" (778). "Through the Bible's unfolding covenants, it becomes clear that God must provide a [sic] greater than Israel, an obedient Son, who will keep the provisions of the covenant, who will not fail, and who will bring all God's promises to pass, including the land promise, but in a greater way" (827).
29. For more on this concept, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "From Condemnation to Righteousness: A Christian Reading of Deuteronomy," *SBJT 18.3* (2014): 108–13.

Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Response to Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson, and Vern Poythress

Aubrey Sequeira

Aubrey Sequeira is Associate Pastor at the Evangelical Community Church of Abu Dhabi and a professor of Bible and Theology at the Gulf Training Center in Dubai. He earned his PhD in Biblical Theology and Old Testament from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky where his focus was on the NT use of the OT in the book of Hebrews.

Introduction

As a pastor of a large international evangelical church in the Middle East, I find it impossible to understate the primacy and centrality of faithful expository preaching in the life and worship of God's people. It is through the faithful and regular preaching of the Scriptures that the Lord gathers his redeemed from every tribe, tongue, and nation; unites them as his covenant people; feeds and nurtures them into maturity; and equips them for ministry and witness. Given the centrality of preaching for the life of God's church, it is imperative for Christ's under-shepherds to know what the task of expository preaching entails—what does it mean to declare the "whole counsel of God?" In particular, what does it mean to proclaim the "whole counsel of God" when preaching the Old Testament (OT)? The discussion on preaching Christ from the OT is not merely an academic

debate. Rather, it is an issue at the heart of pastoral ministry that deeply affects the health of local churches globally.

At the outset it might be helpful to identify my own hermeneutical and homiletical posture: I am a practitioner of what Vern Poythress refers to as "classical Christocentric preaching."[1] I believe that it is *imperative* for preachers of the new covenant to herald the Lord of the covenant, proclaiming Jesus Christ and his saving work from the Scriptures in the power of the Spirit, so that God's covenant people behold the glory of their Savior and experience his grace and power unto salvation. In my view, to preach any text of Scripture without showing how it sheds light on the person and work of Jesus Christ is to fail in our task as Christian shepherds. At the same time, to proclaim the person and work of Christ without submission to the Spirit-inspired and authoritative text of Scripture is also a misdemeanor. Rather, as Edmund Clowney put it, we must recognize the "authority, urgency, and relevancy of preaching Christ from the Scriptures."[2] It is incumbent upon preachers to show how the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central message of the whole Bible *and* how all of Scripture—indeed, every text—finds its *telos* in him. With this in mind, I will respond to each of the essays by Daniel Block, Vern Poythress, and Elliott Johnson.[3]

Response to Daniel Block

Block expresses that his fundamental concern is "that we proclaim the truth of God with integrity and with the passion of God's own heart" (p. 7). I wholeheartedly share this concern. I would add, however, that we must also share the apostolic concern for the glory of Christ to shine through the text of Scripture so that God's people are increasingly transformed by what (or rather, by *whom*) they behold (2 Cor 3:7–4:6). The Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* is more than a theological slogan; it is also a hermeneutical principle.[4] The Bible teaches us how to read the Bible.[5] We learn to read the OT from the apostolic authors of the New Testament (NT). I would argue that *sola scriptura* is also a homiletical principle: the apostles do not just model for us how to interpret the OT rightly, but also how to proclaim the OT with integrity.

I agree with several of Block's contentions. First, Block rightly observes

that a desire to preach Christ from every text of Scripture has often led to strange and arbitrary allegories that do violence to the meaning of Scripture. It seems, however, that Block persistently creates a straw man that bears no resemblance to any thoughtful proponent of Christ-centered preaching. In fact, most proponents of Christocentric preaching would agree with Block's concerns for interpretive integrity and attention to authorial intent.[6] The kind of arbitrary allegorization that Block rightly wants to avoid stems from the influence of postmodern interpretive strategies and subjectivism than from Christocentric preaching.[7]

Second, I appreciate Block's concern for grammatical-historical exegesis of the text in its original literary and historical context. Block gives meticulous attention to the details of the OT text and context in his exegetical study of Genesis 15:1–6. Preachers would do well to imitate such rigorous grammatical-historical exegesis and narrative analysis in their study of OT texts. The first step in preaching Christ from the text is to understand the text in its original context and endeavor to learn what its Spirit-inspired author intended to communicate. Block helpfully models the labor involved in this step of exegesis.

Third, Block rightly recognizes that we must proclaim Jesus not only in his role as the Son of David who fulfills the Messianic promises of the OT, but also in his identity as the Sovereign Lord, Yahweh himself, come in the flesh to accomplish salvation for his people. We must not forget that David's Son is also David's Lord—the Son of God is God the Son, made flesh for us and for our salvation.

These areas of agreement notwithstanding, I find Block's "Christotelic approach" on the whole unpersuasive, for several reasons. First, as I have already indicated, Block falsely caricatures proponents of Christocentric preaching, claiming that they encourage "illegitimate and foolish typologizing and allegorizing" that "obscures the true message of the First Testament texts" (p. 12). Block even applies Ezekiel's castigation of false prophets to "modern-day charlatans," who have "hijacked" the Jewish Scriptures and "made every text about Christ, often paying no attention to what the divine and human authors originally intended" (p. 13). In all honesty, it is completely unclear who Block's interlocutors are. Is he rejecting advocates of Christocentric preaching, medieval allegorists, or postmodern literary critics? Perhaps Block is critiquing the thrust of a

popular "Christ-centered" children's Bible?[8] Who is Block attacking?[9]

It is also difficult to discern against whom Block is arguing when he claims that a Christocentric hermeneutic assumes, based on Luke 24:27 and 44, that every text somehow is a messianic text. But this is *not* what Christocentric preaching claims, nor is Luke 24 the only passage on which Christocentric preaching is based. Advocates of Christocentric preaching take Jesus' statements in Luke 24:27 and 44 to mean that Scripture *in toto* speaks of Christ—as indicated by the reference to the OT canon as "the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms." Christocentric preachers instead seek to understand every text in light of its ultimate literary context—the whole canon of Scripture, Old and New Testaments, written by a single divine author and sharing a unity and coherence as the one Word of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ. Christocentric preaching aims to show how every text fits in the unfolding plan of God and exegetes texts in their immediate context and also in their biblical-theological and canonical context, setting forth the meaning of every passage in the whole of redemptive history.[10] Block seems to be attacking a Christocentric straw man and unfortunately he does not make a *single reference* to any contemporary advocate of Christocentric preaching in either the body or the notes of his essay. I cannot help but conclude that in his assault on this kind of Christocentric preaching, Block ignores what his opponents actually say and thus overlooks the numerous cogent arguments in favor of a Christocentric approach to preaching the OT.[11]

Second, Block creates an artificial division between "evangelistic sermons" and sermons that are part of a "regular worship service" (p. 16). Hebrews is the one NT example we have of a complete apostolic sermon, meant to be heard in the gathered assembly of God's new covenant people. Throughout this homily, the author proclaims Christ from the text of the OT. The author of Hebrews traces the OT to its fulfillment in Christ and presses upon his hearers the urgency of responding in faith to the person and work of the Son in whom God has spoken finally and climactically.[12] Likewise, Paul is eager to preach the gospel to his Christian readers in Rome (Rom 1:15); and based on his exposition of the gospel in Romans, we may safely assume that this preaching of the gospel is a preaching of Christ from the OT (including Genesis 15:6!). It is the same gospel that saves sinners *and* sanctifies saints. And this gospel must be proclaimed

both evangelistically and ecclesiastically. Block is right that, in preaching in the Christian assembly, we must get out of the way and let the Scriptures speak. But these Scriptures speak of Christ (John 5:39). Christ must be proclaimed from the Scriptures to the unbelievers often present in our gatherings, and to God's saints, for it is in the Scriptures that they meet their Lord and are transformed from one degree of glory to another (1 Cor 14:24–25; 2 Cor 3:12–4:6).[13]

Third, Block disregards the inner-biblical exegesis of OT texts by the NT authors as providing a suitable paradigm for exegesis and proclamation by Christian interpreters today. The Christocentric impulse is not based merely on a simplistic misreading of Luke 24:27 and 44. Rather, Christocentric preaching is based on a desire to follow the interpretive and kerygmatic strategies of the inspired NT authors and the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The NT authors proclaim Christ from texts throughout the OT. For instance, Block rejects a Christocentric reading of Joshua as a type of Jesus, except in the meaning of Joshua's name signifying that Yhwh will save his people. The author of Hebrews, however, does not hesitate to make a typological connection between Joshua and Christ. In Hebrews 3–4, Jesus is presented as leading God's people into the eternal rest prepared for them by God, which the author of Hebrews sees as the antitypical fulfillment of the fleeting and anticipatory rest into which Joshua led Israel after their sojourn in the wilderness. Joshua is a type of Christ, for both are commissioned with leading God's people into his promised rest, and Christ accomplishes what Joshua failed to do. A Christocentric preaching of the book of Joshua recognizes and teaches this fact, much like the author of Hebrews does.

Similarly, Block claims that salvation from slavery in Egypt does not point forward to salvation from sin through Christ. Such a reading isolates Exodus from the preceding context of the Pentateuch, where human sin and its attendant consequences are the fundamental impediment to the fulfillment of God's promises. Moreover, this reading also overlooks the fact that the exodus itself is presented as a template for future acts of deliverance—which, if read in the context of the Pentateuch, does include deliverance from the dire consequences of Genesis 3. Thus when the NT authors interpret Christ's redemptive work in terms of the exodus event, they are rightly interpreting the exodus in its fullest theological sense, as

pointing forward to the salvation from sin accomplished by Christ for his people.

Block also avers that Leviticus and the sacrificial system do not give any hint of a coming sacrificial Messiah and that this connection is not made until Isaiah 53. Block acknowledges that the author of Hebrews understood the sacrificial system as pointing to the sacrifice of Christ, but claims that the original readers would have made no such connection. Does this mean we must preach the book of Leviticus with no or minimal reference to Christ and his sacrifice? We live in the same epoch of redemptive-history as the author of Hebrews and his hearers—the "last days," in which God has spoken to us fully and climactically in his Son. It is therefore incumbent upon us to make the links between the Levitical sacrifices and the self-offering of the suffering servant, exegeting the sacrificial system in its biblical-theological and canonical context to proclaim Christ as its fulfillment—just as the author of Hebrews does. Though the original Israelite readers of Leviticus may not have grasped the full significance of the sacrifices that they offered, we do; and given our privileged place in redemptive history, we fail to do justice to the unity of Scripture and to the fullness of revelation that we have received if we proclaim anything *less* than Christ's ultimate sacrifice as we preach Leviticus.

Space constraints preclude a further response to Block's claims that books like Judges, Proverbs, or Jonah say nothing of Christ. Yet each of these books, understood in their redemptive-historical and canonical context, has much to say about Jesus: Judges looks forward to the true king that will rule God's people in righteousness, Proverbs portrays the embodiment of divine wisdom in the Davidic King, and Jonah gives us the "sign" of the prophet who dies and rises again bringing a proclamation of repentance and blessing to the nations.

Fourth, it is precisely at this point that Block makes assertions that are surprising at best and problematic at worst. Faced with the fact that the NT authors do proclaim the person and work of Christ from OT texts throughout the canon, Block responds by saying that later authors used the OT for "rhetorical purposes" that are somehow in "tension" with the original meaning of the OT texts. Admittedly, the NT authors may occasionally use an OT text rhetorically, with no reference to its original meaning (for example, Paul's use of Ps 19:4 in Rom 10:18). This is not

the case, however, with the vast majority of NT uses of the OT—in most cases the NT authors set their Christian interpretation of OT passages over and against other interpretations of these texts. Block claims that "earlier locutions provided later prophets and apostles convenient verbal instruments for communicating a new and quite different message" (p. 26) Thus, in preaching the OT, we are not free to preach "some message that later biblical authors adopted and adapted for quite different polemical purposes" (p. 26). It is difficult to see how such statements can be squared with the assertion of the NT authors that they were rightly interpreting the OT and proclaiming its true meaning (Acts 17:2–3; 18:28; 2 Tim 2:15). If we assert that the NT authors "adopted and adapted" OT texts to fit "some message" that is "quite different" from the meaning of the OT, then we begin to undercut not only the unity of the testaments, but also the validity of the apostolic reading of Scripture—our warrant for Christian belief. For the NT authors, Christian belief is *warranted* because of the OT—Christ enables us to read the OT rightly *and* the OT rightly read, leads to Christ. The apostles did not simply treat the OT texts as "convenient verbal instruments" to proclaim Christ—instead, they traced the meaning of OT texts, anchored in the original author's intention, but broadened and developed through the canon to fulfillment in Christ.[14] In preaching Christ from the OT, we must do the same.

In his exegesis of Genesis 15:1–6, Block claims that the promise of seed to Abram is fulfilled in the "incredible contribution Israelites and their successors the Jews have made to the advance of civilization and culture" (p. 23). It is striking, however, that the NT never interprets the fulfillment of this promise this way. How does such an interpretation fit with Paul's exegesis of the same text to mean that Abraham's offspring includes both Jews and Gentiles who believe "in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:24–25)? Block here has delimited the meaning of Genesis 15:1–6 to what he can ascertain through grammatical-historical exegesis, with no consideration for how Scripture itself, through the inspired apostle Paul, teaches us concerning the meaning of the passage. Does the skill and expertise of the 21st century interpreter take precedence over the interpretation of Paul? The reverence that Block so admirably wants to show to Scripture must not end with the exegesis of the OT

text on its own but also we must learn how Scripture itself teaches us to interpret the OT.[15]

Moreover, Block treats the seed promise of Genesis 15:4–5 as a separate promise from what he sees as a Christological seed promise in Genesis 22:17. However, these promises cannot be isolated from each other in parallel streams. Genesis 22:16–18 builds on and solemnizes with an oath the same promises already enshrined in covenant in Genesis 15 and confirmed in Genesis 17. The plot structure and unity of the Abrahamic narrative simply does not allow for the bifurcation of the offspring promise that Block posits.[16] Furthermore, by treating Genesis 15:1–6 as a separate promise fulfilled in ethnic Israel and Jews, Block misses a fundamental interpretive strategy of both the OT and NT authors, namely, corporate solidarity. Christ is the promised seed (singular) of Genesis 22:17 and all those who are united to Christ by faith are now the offspring of Abraham, who is the father of many nations, in fulfillment of the promise (Rom 4:16–17). When Block finally does connect the dots between the promise to Abram and us today, he states that "we recognize that we are part of the fulfillment of this promise" (p. 31). Citing Paul in Romans 9–11, Block notes that, though we are Gentiles, we "have been grafted into the tree that represents Abram's heritage" (p. 31), and share in the Abrahamic and Israelite commission to bring blessing to the world. What Block fails to emphasize here, however, is that we have been grafted into the Abrahamic promises *in Christ*, through the gospel. We experience the fulfillment of this promise by our faith-union with Christ—it is his death and resurrection that makes it possible for both Jews and Gentiles to become heirs of the promise and channels of blessing to the world.

Block's hesitation with making links such as these, if I understand him rightly, is due to his (praiseworthy) concern to preserve the authorial intention of the OT authors. But in doing so, he glosses over both the progressive nature of revelation and the fullness of revelation that we have received in Christ. Moreover, Block does not deal with several texts that indicate that the OT authors themselves looked forward to and anticipated the arrival of their Messiah (2 Tim 3:15–16; 1 Pet 1:10–12; 2 Pet 1:16–21). While the Spirit-inspired writers of the OT wrote Scripture, they may not have been exhaustively aware of every aspect of what they wrote, but they did recognize that what they wrote pointed forward to a greater reality.

Recognizing divine authorial intent in the writing of the OT does not do violence to the intent of the human authors if the divine authorial intent demonstrably grows out of the human author's intent and is exegetically verifiable within the canonical context.[17] As preachers, we must preach each text in its ultimate context—the entire canon of Scripture, showing the meaning of every text in light of its eschatological fulfillment in Christ and helping our hearers see his glory in the preaching of the Scriptures, both old and new.

Response to Vern Poythress

I found Vern Poythress's proposal for Christocentric/Trinity-centric preaching both enlightening and stimulating. Poythress helpfully applies the principle of *sola scriptura* to preaching, showing how the sufficiency of Scripture both constrains our preaching and also provides great freedom in preaching. He also modifies traditional Christocentric preaching with the goal of being more self-consciously Trinitarian and of extending Christocentricity beyond texts as a whole to individual verses, phrases, and even the individual words of Scripture. Poythress makes his case through a theological interpretation of Genesis 15:1–6 that he backs up with careful argumentation. At times, Poythress's Christocentric interpretation may seem like a stretch—for instance, setting forth the progressive unfolding in God's salvation promises simply from the word "after," or moving from how later Scripture echoes earlier Scripture to the eternal Trinitarian relations between Father and Son. Even in these instances, however, Poythress's reasoning and interpretive moves are theologically grounded and almost persuade.

Therefore, while not disagreeing with Poythress per se, I offer the following reflections and criticisms with the intention of sharpening our interpretation and Christ-centered proclamation. Fundamentally, I concur with Poythress's application of *sola scriptura* to preaching. As Poythress points out, preachers have "executive authority" (p. 53), rather than "legislative authority" (p. 53), and it is the principles of Scripture alone that must guide our praxis. Scripture, however, through precept and example, places more constraints upon our preaching than Poythress seems willing to allow. I appreciate Poythress's concern for freedom and flexibility, but

to say that our only constraint in preaching is to "proclaim and teach the content of Scripture" without adding or subtracting borders on a truism. If *sola scriptura* means that Scripture teaches us how to interpret and preach Scripture, then it seems like the NT authors were limited by at least two more constraints.

First, the NT authors evince a deep concern to respect the intention of the human authors in their use of texts. This is evident from the apostolic concern that the word of truth be rightly handled—what is taught must cohere with what the biblical authors intended to communicate (Acts 17:11; 2 Cor 4:2; 2 Pet 3:15–18). Paul instructs Timothy to "preach the Word," but in the same letter also instructs him to study diligently so that he might rightly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15; 4:2). Therefore, I would maintain that *sola scriptura* places upon us the constraint that the content of our preaching must match the burden of the biblical author—we must preach what John Piper calls "the reality that the text is communicating."[18]

Second, the NT makes it clear that the central obligation of new covenant preaching is to preach Christ and him crucified. Poythress recognizes the "importance of Christ" and maintains that "there are several motivations for keeping Christ central" (p. 55) in the life of the church and in preaching. I would go one step further to state that *sola scriptura* constrains us to preach Christ, and to do so from the Scriptures, for this is the apostolic model of proclamation. Once, again, we might consider Hebrews, the only example we have of a full-length apostolic sermon. The author of Hebrews exposits several passages of Scripture, shows how each of these texts points to the person and work of Christ, and impresses the implications of Christ's finished work upon his hearers. Likewise, Paul states that his Scriptural proclamation of Christ's sacrificial death for sinners and his resurrection on the third day was of "first importance"—the central message of the apostle's preaching (1 Cor 15:3–11). Indeed, as Poythress also rightly observes, the centrality of proclaiming Christ crucified from the Scriptures is seen throughout the NT (Acts 17:2–3; 18:28; Col 1:28). And Jesus and the NT authors assert that the whole OT is about Christ (John 5:39). If we understand *sola scriptura* as a hermeneutical principle that constrains us to learn how to interpret and preach the Bible from the Bible itself, then *sola scriptura* also constrains us to preach Christ from the Scriptures as

the apostles did.

So I agree with Poythress that we should preach Christ from the OT, but *how* must we preach Christ? It is here that the constraint of respecting the intentions of the OT's human authors causes me to diverge from Poythress's approach. Poythress argues for great freedom in how we can preach Christ and then illustrates how this freedom permits him to read Genesis 15:1–6 theologically and make Christocentric extrapolations even from single words and phrases. But do these Christocentric conclusions cohere with Moses's intentions in Genesis 15:1–6? I struggle to see how they do. Poythress might respond that his preaching of Christ in these ways is warranted by divine authorial intention that operates at a canonical level. However, we must preach Christ *from the Scriptures*. And this means that we must read Scripture in a way that accords with its nature as both a divine and *human* book. We must read the Bible on its own terms, reading each text as it wants to be read—with respect for both the immediate context and the larger biblical-theological and canonical context. What Poythress does seems to "work," but only because of his strong theology and his thorough knowledge of Scripture's contours. Poythress's approach in the hands of lesser interpreters who do not share his theological genius and confessional commitments might (and often does!) result in radically different conclusions and hermeneutical flights of fancy that would make Origen blush.

For heuristic purposes, therefore, I think it is best to have some methodological controls that guide us in our biblical-theological moves to preach Christ from the OT. The schema of three horizons for the interpretation of every text, proposed by Richard Lints and developed and applied by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, provides a helpful framework for Christocentric interpretation with hermeneutical warrant.[19] The "*textual horizon*" or "immediate context" is investigated according to "the grammatical-historical method, seeking to discern God's intent through the human author's intent by putting the text in its historical setting, understanding the rules of language the author is using, analyzing the syntax, textual variants, word meanings, figures of speech, and the literary structure, including its literary form and genre."[20] The "*epochal horizon*" is investigated by reading texts "in light of where they are located in God's unfolding plan."[21] Thus on this horizon, the relationship of texts

to previously revealed texts must be established. Finally, the "*canonical horizon*" places texts "along the story line of Scripture" so that they are "ultimately interpreted in light of the culmination of God's plan in Christ."[22] Tracing the meaning of every text along these three horizons enables preachers to preach Christ from every text of Scripture with persuasive exegetical clarity and hermeneutical warrant.[23] While Block's Christotelic approach seems to operate almost exclusively within the textual horizon, Poythress's Christocentric model seems to emphasize the canonical horizon while minimizing authorial intent at the textual (i.e., human authorial) level and the intra-canonical development of a text's themes across the epochs of redemptive history. Poythress, as demonstrated in the plethora of approaches he sets forth for preaching Genesis 15:1–6, is certainly not opposed to understanding and teaching the text on the textual and epochal horizons. It seems, though, that the great freedom and variety that Poythress favors ultimately results in overshadowing the central message of the text as just one option among many.

To preach Genesis 15:1–6 along these three horizons would involve, first, preaching at the textual horizon: the tension in the unfolding of God's call and promises to Abram, Abram's childlessness and doubting of God's promises, the wonder of God's promissory word spoken that elicits a response of faithful trust from Abram, and God's justification of Abram by faith. Second, in preaching the epochal horizon, we would emphasize how Abram's childlessness and fears are rooted in the Fall, yet God's promises to Abraham are rooted in his redemptive plan to redeem his people and ultimately, renew his creation through this man and his family. Finally, preaching the canonical horizon, we would show how Israel failed to be the vehicle of blessing to the world, but all of the promises to Abram are fulfilled in Christ, Abram's ultimate offspring, who by his death and resurrection inherits the cosmos. And everyone who believes in Christ as Abram believed in God is justified as Abram was and becomes an heir, together with Abram, of the inheritance that Christ has won.

Response to Elliott Johnson

Elliott Johnson's essay focuses on "promise" and "law" as the primary categories in the OT that ultimately find fulfillment and resolution in

Christ. Arguing from within his framework of dispensational theology, Johnson avers that grammatical exegesis of OT mentions of promise will uncover the presence of Christ, who ultimately brings God's promises to fulfillment as these promises unfold through salvation history. Borrowing from Hirsch's conception of a "willed type," Johnson maintains that the category of "promise" necessarily implies future fulfillment and thus it is hermeneutically warranted to preach Christ from OT promise texts.

I appreciate Johnson's twin concerns for grammatical-historical exegesis and preaching Christ from the OT using the rubric of "promise." Johnson also seems to take seriously the progressive/unfolding nature of revelation. Moreover, without using the language of typology, Johnson argues for preaching Christ from the types of the OT, even noting that the anticipatory nature of types is fashioned by promissory covenants. Again, I am in agreement. In some ways, Johnson shares several affinities with the classic Christocentric approach to preaching.[24] It is difficult to see, however, how Johnson's model advances the conversation. If I understand him correctly, it seems as though Johnson wants to limit the proclamation of Christ from the OT either to only those texts that contain some kind of Christ-promise or to preaching Christ from the law in a law-gospel dichotomy. But evangelical interpreters from almost any school of thought would agree with Johnson here. The debate on preaching Christ centers on how to preach Christ from texts that *do not* contain an explicit promise or messianic prophecy. Moreover, how does one distinguish texts that contain a "Christo-promise" from those that do not? Proponents of Christocentric preaching, including myself, would respond that the whole OT itself is a "Christo-promise," and therefore every text of the OT can and should be placed along a trajectory that leads to Christ.

Conclusion

As preachers of the new covenant, we must preach Christ from the OT. We must do so with integrity, through careful exegesis of the OT text in its original context, but always reading it in its wider biblical-theological and canonical contexts, tracing the unfolding of God's redemptive plan to fulfillment in Christ. We must not only proclaim Christ to our hearers, we must also help them see how the text points to him, and connect for our

hearers the biblical-theological dots so that they can see their Savior in the text of Scripture and be further conformed to his image.

---

1. Best represented by Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007); Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1961 repr. 2002); and Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).
2. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 87.
3. I consider it an honor and privilege to respond to Vern Poythress, Daniel Block, and Elliott Johnson in this forum on expositional preaching. Each of their essays has helped and sharpened my thinking (and my preaching) in various ways.
4. I am indebted to Stephen Wellum for this crucial hermeneutical principle. His repeated admonition to his students to submit ourselves to the authority of Scripture and "read the Bible on its own terms, in its own framework and categories" has deeply and pervasively influenced how I approach Scripture.
5. Indeed, the very task of biblical theology has been described as embracing "the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors" (see James M. Hamilton, *What is Biblical Theology?* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2014], 15). In other words, we must follow the biblical authors in their hermeneutical commitments and embrace their theological presuppositions. For a defense of the normativity of the hermeneutic of the NT authors, see G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?" *Themelios* 14 (1989): 89–96.
6. See, for instance, *Johnson, Him We Proclaim*, 134–64.
7. For an argument against the arbitrary interpretations engendered by postmodern interpretive strategies such as "figural reading," see Aubrey Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology," *SBJT* 21.1 (2017): 25–29.
8. One example of a very popular "Christ-centered" children's Bible that employs flawed and unhelpful hermeneutical moves to find Christ in the OT is Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* (Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2007). See also the incisive review by Lee Irons, "The Sentimental Gospel of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*," available at: http://www.upper-register.com/papers/jesus-storybook-bible-review.pdf.
9. At this point, it is necessary to note that the reason Christian interpreters call the Old Testament, "old," is not because of some vendetta to "hijack" the Jewish Scriptures, but because God himself, through the prophet Jeremiah, and later through the author of Hebrews, has declared the former covenant "old" through his inauguration of the new covenant in Christ that fulfills everything the old covenant anticipated (Jer 31:31–34; Heb 8:7–13).
10. See Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 74–121, and Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 198–271.
11. By launching an attack on his opponents without making the effort to represent their views accurately, Block runs afoul of a cardinal dictum of charitable reading: Being able to say "I understand," before saying "I disagree." (Mortimer J. Adler and Charles van Doren, *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972], 142–43).
12. On Hebrews as an example of apostolic Christ-centered preaching of the OT, see Johnson, Him We Proclaim, 167–97, and Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study* (NSBT 42; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 104–17.
13. For an exegetical defense of these twin concerns in apostolic preaching, see Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, 75–94.
14. For a compelling defense of this hermeneutical position, see G. K. Beale, "Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of the Use of the Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise," *IBS* 21 (1999): 152–80. See also Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 702–46, and Sequeira and Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis," 11–34. For an illustration showing how the author of Hebrews reads the OT in this way, see Aubrey M. Sequeira, "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological

Fulfillment in Christ: Biblical-Theological Exegesis in the Epistle to the Hebrews" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

15. I am alluding here of the longstanding and venerable theological tradition within Protestant Reformed theology, best represented by the words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:9): "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."
16. For an exegetical study of the unity and plot structure of the Abrahamic narratives, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (2nd ed.; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 322–26.
17. For a defense of this notion, see Sequeira and Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis," 15–18; Moo and Naselli, "Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," 702–46; Jared Compton, "Shared Intentions? Reflections on Inspiration and Interpretation in Light of Scripture's Dual Authorship," *Themelios* 33 no. 3 (2008): 23–33; and Beale, "Questions of Authorial Intent," 152–80.
18. John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 160.
19. See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 259–311; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 118–129. The discussion here is indebted to Gentry and Wellum. Kevin Vanhoozer also describes an approach to exegesis very similar to the three horizons of interpretation: "When describing 'what it meant / means,' it is perhaps best to think of a series of expanding interpretative frameworks. There is first the semantic range of what words could possibly have meant in their historical situation, then the historical context of what authors could have meant at a particular point in the history of redemption, then the literary context of what the words could have meant as part of a particular kind of literature, and finally what the words at a certain time in a certain kind of text mean today when read as part of a unified Canon that, taken as a whole, points to Jesus Christ." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 62.
20. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 119–20.
21. Ibid., 120.
22. Ibid., 127.
23. I have sought to demonstrate the methodological fruitfulness of using these three horizons in understanding Hebrews use of the OT in Sequeira, "Hermeneutics of Eschatological Fulfillment."
24. For instance, see Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 272–330.

Reflections on Preaching Christ from the Old Testament

Hershael W. York

Hershael W. York is Victor and Louise Lester Professor of Preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dean of the School of Theology. He earned his PhD from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Cordova, Tennessee. Since coming to Southern Seminary in 1997, Dr. York has written dozens of articles in journals and online publications on preaching and he is the author of *Speaking with Bold Assurance* (B&H, 2001) and *Preaching with Bold Assurance* (B&H, 2003). His preaching has been featured in *Preaching Today* as among the best in North America, and he has twice preached at the International Congress on preaching in Cambridge, England. Dr. York is also the Senior Pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church, Frankfort, Kentucky.

How to read and to preach the Old Testament (OT) remains one of the greatest challenges and points of debate among evangelicals. It does so precisely because the issue stands at the intersection of so many others, such as: hermeneutics, biblical theology, eschatology, and homiletics—all of which are subjects of disagreements! These three essays by three serious biblical scholars demonstrate how far evangelicals are from consensus, not only on how to preach the OT, but even how to understand it and its relationship to the New Testament (NT).

I am grateful to Daniel Block, Elliott Johnson, and Vern Poythress for allowing us to peer over their shoulders as they each look at a single text and explain how they read it, understand it, and proclaim it.

One of the best arguments against open theism was written by a classical Arminian, Robert Picirilli. Calvinists predictably denounced

the suggestion that God did not know, let alone control, the future, but Picirilli's pronouncement that open theist John "Sanders and his friends may be doing evangelical Arminianism more harm than good"[1] and that it was "too flawed to be helpful,"[2] was effective precisely because his criticisms could not be construed as knee-jerk reactions to a view radically at odds with his own.

My criticisms of Daniel Block's article, "Christotelic Preaching: A Plea for Hermeneutical Integrity and Missional Passion," are not because I agree with the Christocentric model he condemns because I do not; nonetheless I find his characterizations largely superficial and unfair, and the argument for "Christotelic" preaching underdeveloped and inconsistent.

Block portends an argument for "missional passion" in preaching that never materializes nor merits even a passing reference beyond the first paragraph, leaving one to wonder why it deserved a place in the title—a strange irony for an article with promise and fulfillment at its heart. Furthermore, the dichotomy he laments between passionless sermons with substance and firebrand sermons that are "at best a trivial pursuit of biblical truth" (p. 8) could apply to either Christocentric or Christotelic orientations. Dull, lifeless preaching can be heard in any denomination, theology, or preaching philosophy. My deeper objections to Block's article are first, his assessment of Christocentric preaching, and second, his proposal for an alternative.

I share Block's concerns about the Christocentric model. As a frequent critic of the more extreme fringes of this homiletical approach, I fear not only an unrestrained creative typology that surpasses the warrant of Scripture, but also a model of preaching that could read meaning into *Aesop's Fables* as easily as OT narratives. I, too, worry about unwarranted "typologizing and Christologizing" that no inspired biblical author (a redundancy, for clarity's sake) ever reveals, but his characterization of it as "cheap and trivializing" and reflective of "a low view of Scripture and a low Christology" (p. 11) is undeserved. I would be interested to see an example of Christocentric preaching that betrays an insufficient view of Christ or an adherent that does not absolutely value the Bible as God's Word. He offers no evidence to support his claim.

Block assumes the guilt of Christocentric preaching without ever making the case against it by employing plenty of unflattering epithets.

With descriptive words like "demagoguery," "dishonest," and "fraudulent," he accuses them of making the OT a "dead book" and veiling "the message of the inspired authors with four or five layers of trivia and speculation" (p. 18). The article begged for direct interaction with a twenty-first century author or preacher instead of one from the fourth century. If indeed Ambrose is representative of what contemporary preachers are doing then correct them rather than Ambrose. Walt Kaiser already surveyed the abuses of the church fathers in 1981 in the first chapter of *Toward an Exegetical Theology*. A critique of Dennis Johnson or Graeme Goldsworthy would have been more effective than resurrecting Ambrose.

Worst of all, however, was Block's insinuation that a Christocentric understanding of the OT "was of a piece, not only with Ambrose's virulent anti-Semitism, but later also of Luther's repugnant disposition toward and treatment of the Jews of his day" (p. 17). While Ambrose and Luther should not be excused for any sinful anti-Semitism, demonstrating a connection between that and a Christocentric reading of the OT is another matter altogether, and one that the article makes no effort to prove beyond the author's statement. Casting that pall over the many preachers who read and preach the OT Christocentrically is not only unfair but a *post hoc* fallacy.

I concur with Block's explanation of Luke 24:27 and deny that it establishes a norm that must be followed in every sermon from any passage of the OT, but the suggestion that a Christocentric interpretation is the reason that "our Jewish friends are upset with us" because we have "hijacked their Scriptures, and made every text about Christ" (p. 13) is not a legitimate argument against Christocentric preaching. Indeed, an orthodox Jewish rabbi will be no more comfortable with Daniel Block's view or Walt Kaiser's view than he is with that of Sidney Greidanus or Edmund Clowney. Block himself grants that "the Bible (First and New Testaments) tells a single story of God's gracious plan of redeeming the cosmos from sin ... That story climaxes in Jesus." Our Jewish friends would not accept that statement either, though that can hardly be a reason to read the OT any other way.

Block is clear and, I believe, correct when he opposes locating redemptive types and Christ in passages where no NT author ever sees those things, but more troublingly he suggests that what some NT authors see really is not there at all. For this reason, I was disappointed that Block did not

engage NT texts in which the author explicitly points to an OT text, and reveals that the event, prophecy, or speech which originally referred to an immediate person or thing also refers ultimately to Christ. Block neglects to explain this phenomenon, indeed choosing not to mention it at all, in his extensive explanation of Genesis 15:1-6. After going to great lengths to clarify that he reads the Bible "forwards, interpreting Isaiah in the light of Moses, and Luke and Paul in the light of Moses and Isaiah" (p. 15), one is astounded that he ignores Galatians 3:16 in which Paul unequivocally says that the singular seed of Abraham was Christ. How does his "forward" reading explain this?

Block's assertion that "Moses does not need to account to Paul, but Paul needs to account to Moses, and if he contradicts Moses, he is the one under the anathema of Deuteronomy 13" (p. 16) leaves one wondering whether Block considers Paul's identification of Abram's seed as Christ, which cannot be asserted merely on the exegesis of Genesis 15:1-6, contradiction, allegory, or additional revelation. Block carefully guides his readers through his reading of Moses, but he leaves us wondering how he reads Paul. Has *Paul* angered his Jewish friends with his understanding of Genesis 15? Indeed, he has!

In addition, what does Block's forward reading make of the NT category of "mystery," something that was previously hidden but has now been revealed in Christ? While "Later revelation cannot correct, annul, or contradict earlier revelation" (p. 16), subsequent inspired revelation certainly can correct, annul, and contradict earlier incomplete or wrong human assumptions about that previous revelation. More importantly, NT revelation adds *more* to that single story of redemption that illumines OT narratives in the light of Christ and his work. We cannot read the Bible merely forward or backward, but every constituent part contributes to the whole and the whole sheds light on every constituent part. While subsequent revelation cannot nullify an original author's meaning, it certainly can reveal that the Holy Spirit meant more than the original context made plain.

How does Block account for this phenomenon? When Paul claimed that the Rock that followed the Israelites in the wilderness was Christ (1 Cor 10:4) was he guilty of eisegesis? Was he merely using the vocabulary of the exodus? When Block does not answer this question in his article, he leaves

the distinct impression that Paul must one day stand before the judgment seat of Moses and answer for a Christological emphasis that Moses never intended.

I share Block's concerns about Christocentric overreach and about the insistence that every single sermon from the OT *must* show a connection to Christ. In a pastoral context, surely a pastor can construct and explain a redemptive historical framework and remind his congregation of it often enough that he need not restate it in every sermon when he's preaching through 2 Samuel. Surely one must preach on David's greater Son from 2 Samuel 7, but I reject that preaching against adultery from 2 Samuel 11 is mere moralism, particularly when a pastor has already taught his congregation about David's greater Son on many occasions. Like Scripture itself, we should evaluate our pastoral ministry as a whole rather than through the lens of any single sermon.

Still, Block's uncharitable mischaracterization of Christocentric preaching and his refusal to engage NT authors who see Christological significance in texts that also have an immediate referent, make his suggestion of Christotelic preaching unconvincing.

Finally, I do not know what to make of Block's summation of the Mosaic sacrificial system. Insisting that faithful Israelites had no understanding of the sacrifices as a precursor to a future earthly event, he encapsulates their faith as knowing "that *if their lives were in order* (emphasis added) and if they brought their sacrifices with contrite hearts and according to God's revealed way of forgiveness, they were forgiven" (p. 15). Apart from the question of what they knew about future events, the statement begs the question, how much order in their lives was enough?

Toward the opposite end of the Christocentric spectrum, Elliott Johnson's call for a Christo-Promise hermeneutic and preaching, attempts to mediate the historical-grammatical approach to expository preaching with a recognition that Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's promises and covenants. He rightly diagnoses that "the problem emerges when the presence of Christ in the text is difficult to substantiate" (p. 35).

This is precisely why one might wish that, rather than Genesis 15:1-6, which Paul clearly points to as fulfilled in Christ, these three essayists had been assigned a text to which the NT makes no Christological reference, or better yet, one that makes a reference distinctly focused on behavior rather

than soteriological faith. As I read Johnson, I kept wondering how he would explain the way James uses the OT, because he does not seem to follow the Christocentric model. For example, in his treatment of 1 Kings 17, James makes no Christological reference but points to Elijah as a faithful example of prayer (James 5:17-18).

Would it be legitimate to preach Elijah as a type of Christ in precisely the same way that the author of Hebrews sees Melchizedek? Even apart from Psalm 110, which mentions his perpetual priesthood, the author of Hebrews makes much of the fact that Melchizedek is "without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever" (Heb 7:3). Are readers of the NT free to suggest Elijah as a type of Christ not merely because he is a prophet but because the OT never gives his genealogy and he never dies? Certainly the Holy Spirit makes connections that we might not otherwise see without his revelation. Similarly, the Spirit remains silent where Christ is not specifically foreshadowed in type and it seems presumptuous and forced to interject a type that the Spirit did not unambiguously indicate.

Though my question about Elijah is beyond the scope of Johnson's essay, he nonetheless plainly argues that any passage of promise in the OT includes Christ, not only in NT fulfillment, but even in the authorial intent, "whether or not we have indication in the text that characters did understand" (p. 36). This assertion is certainly defensible in light of 1 Peter 1:10-12 provided that one interprets Peter as saying that what they searched for was the identity of the Christ and the time of his arrival.

Johnson's proposal of Christo-Promise preaching is more satisfying than Block's apparent disconnect between original authorial intent in the OT and what the NT writers do with it, merely relying on it for a vocabulary with which to explain redemption. Johnson sees the identity of Christ in the seed of Abram, but does he believe that to be the human author's intent or was that the intent of the Spirit only revealed later in time?

Of the three articles, Poythress' "Christocentric Preaching"—though he himself admits that his definition and practice of it "may disappoint those who expect a robust defense of a classical understanding of Christocentric preaching"—(p. 51) is personally the most satisfying because he seems to grapple with and attempt to resolve certain tensions in preaching with

the restraints of authorial intent, while consciously locating it in the metanarrative of God's redemptive work in history. While Block warns against reading Christ into Joshua or the exodus, and Johnson implies that authors were conscious of every promise's fulfillment in a Messiah, Poythress resolves the tension first by allowing the preacher freedom to use various strategies to convey biblical truth, even in the narrow confines of Genesis 15:1-6, and second by expanding his understanding of how to keep Christ at the "center" of preaching.

As a deeply committed expositor whose weekly pastoral preaching is almost exclusively passage by passage through books of the Bible, I nonetheless concur with Poythress that this is a strategy based on wisdom and pragmatism within a conviction about *sola scriptura* and agree that "no passage in Scripture restricts preachers to this method" (p. 55).

Interestingly, even as Poythress argues that "no passage in Scripture restricts preachers to this method," he then insists that "preaching in Acts and the letters in the NT provide examples of the centrality of Christ" (p. 55). I certainly agree that most of the preaching in the NT does that, but, again, I must point to the epistle of James. How does the epistle of James fit into his insistence that "the centrality of Christ in the life of the NT church implies his centrality in the preaching and teaching of the church" (p. 48)? If that is the methodology of for preachers to follow, why does James not make that explicit in the way he teaches the OT to NT believers? I appreciate Poythress' trinitarian emphasis and warning against Christomonism, whether convictionally employed or simply by default. But again, should we insist on an explicit methodology that the Holy Spirit does not lead one of his inspired authors to employ?

After reading these essays written by three scholars for whom I have great respect and admiration, I am even more keenly aware of the difficulty of finding consensus in hermeneutics and homiletics, particularly in preaching the OT. Poythress' admonition to exercise freedom governed by *sola scriptura* seems the most liberating and yet properly confining advice for the preacher of the OT: "the principle of *sola scriptura* also governs *how* the preacher does his preaching" (p. 54). When the inspired authors of the NT reveal or clarify a type or meaning that I may not have otherwise seen, I am free, even responsible, to preach it. When the Scripture itself does not bear witness to a type or meaning, I should not assert that I do.

1. Robert Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to John Sanders's The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44/3 (September 2001): 467.
2. Ibid., 491.

Book Reviews

Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination. By John Corvino, Ryan T. Anderson, and Sheriff Girgis. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 262 pp., $21.95 Paper.

In 2015, the United States Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, redefined the institution of marriage by ruling that same-sex couples possessed the "right" to marry. At the time, many cultural observers believed that the marriage debate had finally been settled. However, in the two years since the decision, the opposite has proven true.

Rather than resolving the twenty-first century's most hotly debated culture war issue, *Obergefell* merely expediated the new frontier of the culture wars: the inevitable collision between erotic and religious liberty. In fact, the confrontation between these liberties—the former, championed by LGBT revolutionaries, and the latter, enshrined and protected by the United States Constitution—has been at the center of several high-profile and contentious legal battles across the country over the last two and a half years, particularly in wedding-related professions, as Christian photographers, florists, bakers, and custom service professionals have faced fines, lawsuits, and even jail time for refusing to participate in ceremonies that violate their religious convictions.

This ideological conflict was foreseeable. During *Obergefell* oral arguments, Donald Verrilli, President Obama's Solicitor General, conceded that legalizing same-sex marriage would present a challenge to religious liberty. When pressed by Justice Alito on whether Christian colleges would be forced to provide housing to same-sex couples if marriage were redefined Verrilli replied, "It's certainly going to be an issue. I don't deny that."

Prophetically, Verrilli's remark foreshadowed the post-*Obergefell* political and legal landscape increasingly antagonistic to institutions and professionals guided by sincere religious convictions. This includes private adoption agencies, hospitals, charities, and universities. Despite Justice Anthony Kennedy's assurance that Americans holding traditional

beliefs about marriage and human sexuality based on "decent and honorable premises" would be treated with respect and not "disparaged," the intervening years have proven otherwise. LGBT advocates, not content with "marriage equality," are now campaigning for SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) laws that would abrogate the liberty of those with religious convictions. Conservative Christians have responded with pleas for tolerance and an open public square that respects a diversity of opinion.

In the clash between erotic and religious liberty, emotions are raw and tensions are high. Conflicts surrounding religious liberty and discrimination touch on a plethora of issues that meet at the intersection of morality, law, and public policy. Unfortunately, debate on these issues rarely moves beyond soundbites and talking points and often devolves into personal attacks. It's in this context that *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination* presents a welcome and refreshing entry into the discussion. Clear, compelling, and civil, the authors discuss legislation such as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) and the First Amendment Defense Act (FADA), antidiscrimination laws, the nature of dignity, the significance of conscience, and offer a needed model for debating society's most contentious issues.

On one side is John Corvino (PhD, University of Texas at Austin), a philosopher and longtime LGBT rights advocate, who argues in favor of SOGI laws, questions the need for exemptions from neutral laws of general applicability, calls for demoting RFRA religious liberty claims from "strict scrutiny" to "intermediate scrutiny," and offers a defense of antidiscrimination laws. He also advances an expansive view of dignitary harm. Corvino is the Chair of the Philosophy Department at Wayne State University in Michigan.

On the other side, Ryan T. Anderson (PhD, Notre Dame), a Roman Catholic philosopher and Sheriff Girgis (JD, PhD candidate, Princeton), a conservative legal scholar, construct an ethical and philosophical framework in support of broad religious liberty protection, argue against SOGI legislation, and show through recent examples (such as Hobby Lobby and Kim Davis) how the basic good of religion can be protected without compromising socially progressive policy goals. In short, they present a vision for how both sides of the debate can co-exist. Anderson is

a senior research fellow at The Heritage Foundation and Girgis is finishing his PhD in philosophy at Princeton.

In chapter 1, Corvino presents his argument. He begins by contending that current law (mainly the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act [RFRA]) goes beyond safeguarding religious liberty but instead protects "majority religious privilege" (30). He argues that RFRA was an "unnecessary overaction" to *Employment Division v. Smith* (1990), a Supreme Court decision that ruled against Native Americans denied unemployment benefits for testing positive for a drug used in a religious ritual. Although he does not advocate for RFRA's repeal, he argues that RFRA should be modified to require "intermediate scrutiny" (instead of "strict scrutiny") for incidental burdens on religion. In short, Corvino believes that in a religiously diverse nation, "any system requiring strict scrutiny for laws burdening religious beliefs is 'courting anarchy'" (50). Due to the wide variety of religious beliefs in the United States, Corvino questions the wisdom of a "widespread exemption regime" which—borrowing language from *Reynolds*— would effectively allow every citizen to "become a law unto himself" (47).

Although Corvino believes some exemptions to generally applicable laws are acceptable, he believes that current exemptions unnecessarily favor religious people. He argues that exemptions from antidiscrimination laws "place burdens on the very minorities whom the law is intended to protect" (66). Strikingly, he concludes his lengthy discussion on exemptions (52-68) by noting, "Just because people's religious beliefs *can* be easily accommodated, it does not follow that they *should*" (68). In Corvino's view, some religious beliefs are so inherently offensive that they must be repudiated rather than accommodated.

Another important aspect of Corvino's argument is his discussion of antidiscrimination law. In Corvino's view, antidiscrimination laws provide necessary protections for LGBT people. He contends that existing laws should be expanded to cover the contested categories of sexual orientation and gender identity. Remarkably, he extends his argument further and posits that the law should take into account "dignitary harm," a concept which he defines expansively as "(1) treating people as inferior, regardless of whether anyone recognizes the mistreatment; (2) causing people to *feel* inferior, intentionally or not; and (3) contributing to systemic moral

inequality, intentionally or not" (74). Dignitary harm involves the negative experience of being treated as morally inferior. Because dignitary harm can lead to material harm (discrimination that limits access to goods and services), Corvino argues that the law should address both material and perceived dignitary harms. Corvino contends that these laws are necessary to ensure LGBT people "have a place at the table in public life" (77). However, as Anderson and Girgis note in their reply, Corvino's proposal comes close to codifying into law the curtailment of moral judgement which would have the unintended effect of nullifying religious liberty as well as free speech protections.

In chapter 2, Anderson and Girgis advance an ethical and philosophical framework in defense of religious liberty. They begin by making the case for the presence of basic human goods which they define as "ways of being and acting that it makes sense for us to want for their own sake" (125). These goods constitute the elements requisite for human flourishing. Anderson and Girgis argue that in a free society citizens must be free to pursue these goods unencumbered. In fact, the sole purpose of the state is to empower people to adequately pursue basic goods. They then make the case that religion should be considered a basic good. As the locus of efforts to achieve harmony with the ultimate source(s) of meaning, religion deals with man's perennial quest to answer transcendent questions about reality. Thus, achieving harmony with the transcendent—whoever or whatever that is determined to be—produces integrity. Thus, religion is a basic human good, and as such, deserves protection; all impositions on religion should be avoided whenever reasonably possible (131).

Even if religion is recognized as a basic good why should we protect religious liberty over and above other civil liberties? Why are laws like RFRA necessary? Anticipating these questions, Anderson and Girgis make the case that the underlying good of religion is more fragile than other civil liberties (134). Religion is fragile because it requires choosing particular options to avoid deficiency. For example, a devout Sikh man would experience deficiency if he were prohibited from wearing his Dastar, a Sikh-specific head-covering. It would not be enough to provide him with a baseball cap to cover his head. The analogy illustrates the underlying principle: one is deficient in the basic good of religion if he acts against what he judges to be his religious obligations. This fact is what separates

religious and conscience claims from other civil liberties. As Anderson and Girgis explain, "Of no other civil liberty can we say that an easily identifiable burden on it would pressure you into deficiency in a whole basic good" (136).

From this basis, Anderson and Girgis argue in favor of laws such as RFRA and the proposed FADA (First Amendment Defense Act) legislation that provide broad exemptions from laws that curb religious exercise unless enforcing the law is the least restrictive means of serving a compelling government interest (153). They argue that the burden of proof should favor religious claims due to religion's inherent fragility. Thus, a substantial burden on religious exercise is one that prevents or unreasonably raises the cost of living by religious convictions. This principle was recognized by the majority in the *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* decision (In 2015 the Supreme Court ruled for-profit corporations could be exempt from a regulation that violated its owners' religious convictions if there is less restrictive means of furthering the law's interest). Whereas Corvino regrets the *Hobby Lobby* decision, Anderson and Girgis commend the ruling as a faithful application of the law in step with the spirit of the Constitution.

Anderson and Girgis devote the last section of their chapter to antidiscrimination laws. Although they oppose SOGI laws, they argue that antidiscrimination laws are appropriate when the need for the ban is high and the cost of enforcement is low (179). They argue that the Civil Rights legislation in the 1960's meets these standards but the current gay-rights movement does not because unlike African Americans in the mid-twentieth century, LGBT people today do not face systemic, widespread material and dignitary harms. Comparing the movements, they note, "The most important difference between laws on SOGI and race… is this: over and over, SOGI laws impose gratuitously on important personal and social goals … they're designed and applied to needlessly penalize conscientious refusals to participate in morally controversial actions to which many people reasonably object" (185). Because LGBT people are not locked out of markets or denied basic services, SOGI laws are unnecessary and worse, do not avoid needlessly burdening other interests (such as religion).

Chapter 3 contains Corvino's reply to Anderson and Girgis. Notably, he responds to his counter-point authors' discussion of religion as a basic good. Although he agrees with them to a point, he argues, "My claim is

that integrity … may lack value when the underlying belief is *badly* wrong" (211). He adds, "In addition to caring about people's internal harmony, we should also care about their getting things right" (212). However, as Anderson and Girgis point out in their reply, such a position comes precipitously close to making the government an arbitrator of theological truth claims. Finally, Corvino reveals one of his chief concerns—LGBT sensibilities—in his closing section when he defends himself against Anderson and Girgis' charge regarding the curtailment of free speech. Corvino explains, "The answer to that question is that in general, actions pose greater risks than speech … the speech/action distinction is thus a reasonable if necessarily imperfect place to draw a legal line with respect to dignitary harms" (226). Corvino concludes by affirming his support for religious liberty but betrays abiding suspicion concerning the actual motivations of those with traditional and religious convictions related to marriage and sexuality.

Concluding the book, Anderson and Girgis reply to Corvino by articulating their earlier positions, specifically relating to the basic good of religious integrity and antidiscrimination laws. They respond to what they perceive is Corvino's mischaracterization of the *Hobby Lobby* decision and offer a rejoinder to Corvino's SOGI-race analogy.

In short, it is difficult to think of authors better equipped to write a book on this topic. *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination* provides readers with a remarkable opportunity to learn about the relevant issues surrounding the religious liberty debate from top scholars on both sides of the ideological spectrum. A helpful introduction to the issue, the book focuses on the most significant issues related to current public policy discussions. Admirably, the book helpfully applies potentially abstract topics such as the purpose of government and the nature of basic human goods to the current debates concerning religious liberty and discrimination.

Although at points the discussion (particularly Anderson and Girgis' framework) requires reflection on philosophical principles, the authors are careful to explain each concept and the technical terminology in a way that non-specialists can understand. Overall, the book is clear and easy to follow. The final chapters (where the authors respond to one another) offer readers a parting glimpse into the significant yet complex arena of public

policy by revealing areas of agreement as well as points where further dialogue is needed. Intellectually rigorous, provocative, and civil, *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination* is the best, most up-to-date book on a subject that Christians should care about and be informed on.

David Closson
Research Fellow for Religious Freedom and Biblical Worldview,
Family Research Council,
Washington D.C.

THE
SOUTHERN BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

2825 Lexington Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40280
(502) 897-4413 • 1 (800) 626-5525
www.sbts.edu

ST-025-2019