

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY JOURNAL



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EDITORIAL

Due only to the graceful provision of the Lord, The Master's Seminary (TMS) completed thirty years of ministry in June 2016, and *The Master's Seminary Journal* (MSJ) is completing twenty-seven years of publication with this issue. For these bountiful blessings, we can only give thanks to our great God. TMS was founded to be used of the Lord to train men that He had called to the pastorate for the ministry of expository preaching. From its beginning, TMS has sought to train men in text-driven biblical exposition. This expository ministry is based on a rigorous study of the biblical languages, the biblical text, historical and systematic theology, and pastoral ministry because an expository preacher must have a solid exegetical, theological, and practical foundation based on a historical-grammatical hermeneutic. In 1992, the faculty of TMS authored *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (since retitled, *Preaching*) to clearly state the biblical mandate and present a basic method of scriptural exposition. The school continues to stand on the principles and practices presented in that volume. In 1990, MSJ was formed to impact the greater ecclesiastical world with articles that explained biblical truth, interacted with current exegetical and theological discussions, and applied the lessons to practical ministry situations. In all of this, the Lord's hand has sustained the work of TMS and MSJ.

Nearly eight years after the founding of TMS, four years after the beginning of MSJ, and two years after the publication of *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, a new homiletic approach was introduced (or according to its exponents, "reintroduced") into broader evangelicalism. This homiletic goes by the label "Christ-Centered Preaching" and was popularized in a 1994 book by Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (a second edition was released in 2005). More than any other book, Chapell's book has impacted the homiletical discussion and Chapell has become the leading spokesman for the Christ-Centered Preaching movement among evangelicals who affirm biblical inerrancy and the need for expository preaching. Sydney Greidanus (*Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 1999), Graeme Goldsworthy (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 2000), and Dennis Johnson (*Him We Proclaim*, 2007) have authored further influential volumes that promote the Christocentric, gospel-centered homiletic as central to Christian preaching. Popular preachers like Tim Keller, D. A. Carson, and John Piper also promote and model Christ-Centered Preaching. To some degree, all Christ-Centered Preaching advocates argue that a sermon without Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the grace of God being mentioned is sub-Christian.

The continuing and growing influence of the Christ-Centered Preaching movement in contemporary evangelicalism led the TMS faculty to address this topic in the 2016 Richard L. Mayhue Faculty Lectures. The fruit of these lectures is presented in the *MSJ* articles that follow in this issue. The reader will soon glean that TMS presents a “friendly” critique of our fellow-Christians’ attempts to promote biblical exposition, the preaching of the gospel, and the exaltation of Jesus Christ. However, we do have reservations about the theological system that undergirds most of the proponents. Moreover, a Christocentric homiletic has historically come from or has led to an allegorical hermeneutic. My colleagues argue that to guard against a subtle or overt allegorical interpretation a rigorous historical-grammatical hermeneutic must undergird all of our expository preaching. Jesus Christ can rightfully be discovered in many OT and NT texts, but He must not be artificially imposed on those texts where He is not presented. Finally, the NT itself does not always preach OT texts in a Christ-centered manner; the NT uses the OT in a number of ways.

A further reason for this lectureship is to make sure that our TMS motto, “We Preach Christ,” is understood in its proper context. We affirm that the NT does speak of the need to focus on Jesus Christ when the gospel is preached. In an evangelistic context, the sin of man and the good news of what God has done for sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ is central to our proclamation. As we enter into the five-hundredth year of the anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, TMS once again dedicates itself to the truth of *solus Christus* (Christ alone). There is no other way of salvation given by God except through the work of Christ applied to the sinner through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that every biblical exposition is Christ-centered, but that every biblical exposition of the gospel must be Christ-centered. This theme of “We Preach Christ” will be explored further in March 2017 at the annual Shepherds’ Conference at Grace Community Church, cosponsored by TMS.

We invite you to come to the conference. But in the meantime, we present for your information, edification, and consideration the following articles from the TMS faculty.

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A HERMENEUTICAL EVALUATION OF THE CHRISTOCENTRIC HERMENEUTIC

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How to study and teach the Bible are of utmost importance for a pastor. The Christocentric hermeneutic has proposed a modification to a grammatical-historical hermeneutical approach. This article maintains that such an alteration is not scripturally warranted and that the grammatical-historical method is not only justified by Scripture but also more than sufficient to discover the glories of Christ as perfectly presented in God's Word. Accordingly, a Christ-centered ministry not only honors Christ in the pulpit by proclaiming Him but also in the study by handling His Word the way He demands.

* * * * *

Preaching occupies a central place in the pastor's ministry. It is mandated by God (2 Tim 4:1–2) for every season (2 Tim 4:2b) in order to feed and equip the flock (2 Tim 4:2b; cf. Eph 4:12; John 21:15). It is vital for the church (Eph 4:12–13), pivotal in one's ministry (1 Tim 4:16), and of the utmost importance to God (2 Tim 4:1; cf. 2 Tim. 2:14–15). For this reason, God demands we rightly divide His Word (2 Tim 2:15). We need to care about interpreting the text rightly as much as God does. However, what does it mean to “get it right”? Some have argued that preaching that is not Christocentric is sub-Christian. It falls short of Paul's declaration that he preaches Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). Such an allegation is of the utmost seriousness as it strikes at the core of one of the most important tasks for a pastor.

This dilemma illustrates the need not only to have an exegetical process or hermeneutical knowledge but, even more, hermeneutical *conviction*. We need to be convinced our hermeneutical approach is one that rightly divides the Word of Truth. The goal of this article is to evaluate the claims of the Christocentric hermeneutic to that end, to give us confidence and boldness that a grammatical-historical method not only honors what God has commanded us to do, but also brings the greatest glory to Christ.

Hermeneutical Definitions

As we begin to investigate the Christocentric method, we need to be familiar with two hermeneutical concepts: meaning and significance. These ideas are critical in articulating how any approach believes a text works and how we should understand it.

Meaning refers to the particular ideas within the text in a given context.¹ Within this we encounter two issues. First, we must define who/what sets the boundaries for what a text legitimately communicates. Options include author, text, reader, or community.² Second, we must also define how the dual-authorship of Scripture plays into determining meaning. This wrestles with whether God's intent matches the human writer's intent or if He intends more than what was communicated in the original context. These issues help us understand the goals and methodological limits within a hermeneutical approach.

Significance is another major concept in hermeneutics. Significance refers to the implications and applications a text can have. Put differently, meaning, like any idea, has consequences and significance is the sum of all those various consequences. The major issue within significance is how one articulates the connection between meaning and significance. After all, not every possible implication legitimately corresponds to the meaning of a text.³ One must prove the proposed inference is valid because it matches the nature of what is said and why it is said. How (if at all) an approach does this is another key matter in evaluating a hermeneutical viewpoint.

In sum, meaning and significance are two important ideas in assessing a hermeneutical approach. We want to know if a method puts the locus of meaning with the author, text, reader, or community. We also want to know how it frames how dual-authorship operates in this. In addition, we want to assess how an approach draws implications from a text. By answering the questions of meaning and significance, we can better grasp how a method works and thereby where the points of contention might be.

¹ E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 11–13; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 252–53; Robert L. Thomas, “The Principle of Single Meaning,” in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 155–56.

² Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wong Publishing, 1975), 27; P. B. Payne, “The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention,” *JETS* 20 (1977): 249; H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1975), 388; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 204–5.

³ For example, one cannot simply say a valid inference of “love one another” is to support people in their sin because that is the loving thing to do. John's definition of love would not tolerate that extrapolation (cf. 1 John 4:8–10). Another might be that since the Bible describes God having a “hand” (cf. Deut 4:34) that He must have a physical body (cf. John 4:24). The purpose the author has in describing God's hand does not intend for that type of inference.

Explaining the Christocentric Hermeneutic

With this in mind, we can proceed to contemplate the Christocentric hermeneutic. In doing so, we need to remember hermeneutical systems are not just a set of interpretative rules but are often driven by theological frameworks which justify a system's goals and method. Accordingly, to adequately grasp their approach, we need to wrestle through three major issues: *what* is the Christocentric hermeneutic, *how* it achieves its goals, and *why* it aims for such interpretation. In dealing with these three questions we can have a complete picture of how the Christocentric hermeneutic works.

What Is the Christocentric Hermeneutic?

The Christocentric approach has a long and varied history. The focus of this article concerns modern developments of this perspective. Even within this variation exists.⁴ Nevertheless, modern-day proponents stress certain features which distinguish their movement. Understanding these characteristics help us see the defining marks and goals of their hermeneutic. I would suggest there are at least six emphases that comprise the *sina qua non* of Christocentric hermeneutics.

1. The Christocentric approach fundamentally desires to present every text in its relation with the person and work of Christ.⁵

2. The Christocentric approach stresses the unity of Scripture. Because of this, it is sometimes called a redemptive-historical hermeneutic (however, some use the term without referring to a Christocentric model).⁶

3. The Christocentric approach emphasizes the theology of Scripture. It contrasts "moral models" which preach narratives as purely examples of ethical behavior. As opposed to morality, the Christocentric view desires to preach doctrine and theology, a theology of Christ and the gospel.⁷

4. The Christocentric approach stresses the need for grammatical-historical interpretation as a foundation for its method. It contrasts itself with allegorical systems in the early church as well as in recent history. To its supporters, viewing Rahab's red scarf as a symbol of Christ's blood is an illegitimate interpretation and use of a

⁴ See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 76–99; Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 70–92.

⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 279; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Model* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 203–5.

⁶ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Walt Kaiser on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," in *Christ-Centered Preaching and Teaching*, ed. Ed Stetzer (Nashville, TN: Lifeway, 2013), 14–15; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 203–5; David Murray, "David Murray on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," in *Christ-Centered Preaching and Teaching*, 9.

⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 294; Murray, "David Murray on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," 9.

text.⁸ As we will further discuss, while they desire to proclaim a theology of Christ in every text, they desire to do so with some sort of expositional base.⁹

5. At the same time, the Christocentric approach acknowledges the need to move beyond grammatical-historical hermeneutics to a theological method. It contrasts itself with a Christotelic approach which abides within a grammatical-historical framework. The Christotelic view upholds the original meaning of a text while acknowledging a text's implications may ultimately link with Christ.¹⁰ The Christocentric method views this as not enough.¹¹ To it, Christ is *in* every text. He is somehow the *topic* of every passage. Scriptural texts prefigure Christ's work or intentionally show who Christ is or is not.¹² Some caution here is required, for not every supporter of the Christocentric hermeneutic agrees on exactly how this works.¹³ Nevertheless, they agree that a Christotelic/grammatical-historical approach is not sufficient.

6. The Christocentric approach emphasizes its *Christian* nature. It is Christian because it focuses upon the gospel and so is at times called gospel-centered preaching. It is Christian because it derives from the apostles and so is at times called apostolic preaching.¹⁴ Christ-centered teaching is what makes teaching Scripture distinctively *Christian*. Accordingly, language of preaching and teaching the Bible as Christian Scripture is also adopted.¹⁵ To be clear, just because one uses such language or terminology does not automatically mean one engages in the Christocentric hermeneutic. Nevertheless, such phraseology is found in the movement.

These six emphases comprise key elements in the movement. It endeavors to proclaim how every text relates to Christ and His work. It stresses the need for an expositional foundation to explain a distinctively Christian theology (as opposed to morality). Although it acknowledges the need to avoid allegory, it still believes Christ is the subject of every text. This marks true Christian preaching.

⁸ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 279–85; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 75–79.

¹⁰ Daniel I. Block, “Daniel Block on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” in *Christ-Centered Preaching and Teaching*, 6.

¹¹ Murray, “David Murray on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” 10; Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 24–30.

¹² Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 24–30; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 76–79; Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 11. Although some might want to qualify how one sees Christ in every text, Greidanus sums up the sentiment well: “Since the literary context of the Old Testament is the New Testament, this means that the Old Testament must be understood in the context of the New Testament. And since the heart of the New Testament is Jesus Christ, this means that every message from the Old Testament must be seen in the light of Christ,” *Preaching Christ*, 51.

¹³ See discussion in Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 76–99.

¹⁴ Bryan Chapell, “Bryan Chapell on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” in *Christ-Centered Preaching and Teaching*, 18–19; Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, 1st ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 62–238.

¹⁵ Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 15–21; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 39–43.

How the Christocentric Hermeneutic Achieves Its Goals

Having established key ideas in the Christocentric approach, we can cover how promoters of this view practically achieve those goals. We can frame such methodology in terms of meaning and significance. Regarding meaning, as mentioned, the modern Christocentric approach rejects allegorical methods found throughout church history. Adherents frequently distance themselves from the school of Alexandria, known for its spiritualizing hermeneutic.¹⁶ Similarly, as noted above, this approach rejects analogies of Rahab's red scarf or the formation of Eve as a prophecy of the formation of the church.¹⁷ Christocentric advocates repeatedly state the concern for "right interpretation" and not a "forced interpretation."¹⁸ Along that line, the Christocentric position asserts the need for exegesis and expositional preaching. It affirms the need to understand the author's intent and thereby to understand it in its context.¹⁹ Hence, relative to meaning, this view would initially advocate authorial intent.

When it comes to significance, the approach becomes more complex and, as we will see, complicates how it precisely defines meaning. The Christocentric hermeneutic concentrates on a variety of practical techniques to connect a text to Christ. Initially, it would point out how texts work in God's plan in history, which culminates with Christ. Hence, one can show how certain ideas of the Old Testament will have repercussions in progressive revelation that impact our understanding of Christ. These methods are technically Christotelic in nature. As discussed, the Christocentric hermeneutic does not disregard these ideas but says they do not go far enough. They are not the only tools in the arsenal for a preacher or teacher.²⁰

For this reason, proponents suggest additional frameworks to show a more direct association with Christ. One deals with a fallen condition focus, which shows how a text addresses some kind of issue resulting from our fallen state. As a result of this, since Christ deals with that condition, we can show every text points to Christ and the gospel.²¹ Every text operates as a window into the gospel.²² Another method is to make an analogy between an event of the past and the work of Christ. Yet another method sets forth a contrast between particular characters or events and who Christ is and how He succeeds when they fail.²³

One particular method singled out by the Christocentric hermeneutic is typology. This is slightly different than analogy because analogy deals strictly with the

¹⁶ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 76–90; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 75–77; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 103–5.

¹⁷ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 75.

²⁰ Murray, "David Murray on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," 9–10; Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 106.

²¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 269–75.

²² Chapell, "Bryan Chapell on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics," 19.

²³ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 310–12; Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 106–8; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 191–205.

area of significance, but typology deals with both meaning and significance. Typology understands how a person, event, or item reflects a certain theological idea or function which culminates in Christ. It discovers patterns in the Scripture and shows how such repetition (type) was always depicting the culmination of the idea (anti-type).²⁴ Within this, there is some aspect of intentional foreshadowing.²⁵ Accordingly, typology is not merely an implication but part of what the texts discuss and purpose. One should read a typological text about Christ because, in fact, it is.

At this point, one may not have too strong of an objection to what the Christocentric hermeneutic proposes. After all, redemptive history does move to Christ (Acts 13:13–41; Rom 10:4; Gal 4:4). Texts at time do show people’s fallen condition and by implication, their need for Christ (Gen 3:1–15). Old Testament entities like the sacrificial system reflect a theology of God’s holiness, which Christ satisfies (cf. Leviticus 1–4; Hebrews 9:1–13)—a typological relationship. The controversial matter is not “how” one generally may link a text with Christ or even how it works in certain examples. Rather, the controversy ensues when these frameworks are put on every text of Scripture. Because the Christocentric hermeneutic insists that *all* texts must speak of Christ, the way they interpret and/or apply certain passages may make some uncomfortable.

For instance, a fallen condition focus points to how God’s forgiveness of David in the Bathsheba incident shows David’s need and dependence upon the gospel.²⁶ He is fallen as we are and needs God’s grace in Christ. Wisdom literature points out how we are sinful and how we need the One who embodies wisdom, Christ (Prov 8:22; cf. Col 1:15).²⁷ Analogy (both positive and contrastive) and typology generate some interesting results. The darkness surrounding Abram at the founding of the Abrahamic covenant parallels Christ’s own darkness at the cross (Gen 15:12; cf. Matt 27:45).²⁸ Israel’s exodus is a “faint shadow” of the spiritual exodus believers experience in Christ.²⁹ Achan’s trouble and punitive death (Josh 7:24–25) correlates with Jesus’ own death on a cross.³⁰ Samson’s rejection by his tribe mirrors how Jesus would be rejected.³¹ Samson’s victorious death is a picture of the victorious death of One who would not fail as Samson did.³² David and Goliath become a picture of how the ultimate David would vanquish sin, Satan, and death because all of those are derivations of how the Seed would crush the serpent’s head.³³ Furthermore, just as

²⁴ Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 105–14; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 200–15.

²⁵ Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 77.

²⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 307.

²⁷ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 175–76.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

²⁹ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 298–99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 311. Technically, this is part of a greater discussion on how Proverbs 15:27 interrelates with Christ’s life. Nevertheless, the connections between that text, Achan, and Christ are difficult to sustain.

³¹ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 17.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 30. The OT does make a connection between Gen 3:15 with other messianic texts. Interestingly enough, it uses consistent language to do so (cf. Num

David's men brought him water that was precious (2 Sam 23:16), so the new David brings us the precious water of life (John 4:10–11).³⁴ David's refusal to curse back when cursed (2 Sam 16:5–12) mirrors the Messiah who is also subjected to curse without resistance.³⁵ Naboth's death at the hand of false witnesses (1 Kings 21:13–14) parallels Jesus' own death with false witnesses.³⁶ Esther's willingness to lay down her own life (Esth 4:16) foreshadows the readiness of Christ to do the same with His own life.³⁷ The admonition in Proverbs to not take bribes (Prov 15:27) can only be truly fulfilled in Christ who can redeem us from our partiality.³⁸ After all, Jesus' own redeeming death occurred by bribery (Matt 27:1–20) but overcame such corruption to give us life.³⁹

What is wrong with the above suggestions? Some may argue the assertions above seemed "forced." We can be more specific than that. The problem revolves around how significance (implication) relates to meaning. As discussed, valid implications must match what the author said and why he said it.⁴⁰ In the examples above, the implications seem to go out of the bounds of what the author purposed. The author of 2 Samuel does not seem to intend for God's forgiveness of David to show something about the gospel. Rather, the focus seems to be upon the fall of the Davidic dynasty (cf. 2 Sam 12:11–14).⁴¹ Likewise, the author of Proverbs states that his proverbs are to instruct about righteous living (Prov 1:1–7), not show our iniquity as the Christocentric hermeneutic suggested.⁴²

The same logic applies to the analogies made above between Christ and Abraham, Achan, Samson, David, Esther, or Naboth. The authors of those texts do not seem to discuss any sort of foreshadowing or paralleling.⁴³ Thus, it appears the Christocentric hermeneutic is not deriving these implications from the author's intent but

24:17; Ps 68:21; 110:5–6; Hab 3:13). In other words, one cannot merely see the crushing of the head and make the association. The bar of proof must be higher since the OT itself has formulaic language to indicate a messianic reference.

³⁴ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

³⁶ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 311. See above; Johnson appeals to Naboth as part of a chain of texts dealing with bribery and links that with Christ's death, which redeems the believer from such corruption.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 311. Johnson technically here appeals to other stories in the Old Testament that involve bribery to prove his point. The question is whether Proverbs 15:27 is incorporated by the author of those texts and whether in fact those texts (like Naboth) have intentionally links with the New. In other words, Johnson has appealed to a series of correlations (significance) which are questionable. This is in fact the main issue of the Christocentric hermeneutic.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ The focus upon authorial intent is because the Christocentric hermeneutic itself advocates such a position. See above discussion.

⁴¹ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 371–73.

⁴² Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 176–80.

⁴³ As will later be discussed, this is not to say parallels could not be made. For example, one could talk of David's link with the Davidic covenant which has bearing upon Christ. This could for example be how Judas relates to Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. Those passages contextually build off of the Davidic covenant (cf. 2 Sam 7:9–14; Ps 69:13 [Heb., v. 14], 16 [Heb., v. 17]; 109:21, 26). Even more, language of those

from something else.⁴⁴ That is why such interpretations or applications seem forced, which is the very opposite of what the Christocentric hermeneutic desires.⁴⁵

Hence, the Christocentric hermeneutic has a practical method for seeing how a text discusses Christ. Within this we begin to see the problem. The problem is not initially with its viewpoint on meaning. The Christocentric hermeneutic affirms authorial intent. The problem is with how it frames the significance of a passage. Their instance on making every text speak of Christ and their way of accomplishing this produce implications that do not seem to fit with the main purpose of a passage. This imprecise connection between meaning and significance is the main dilemma in the Christocentric hermeneutic. In fact, the misconnection between meaning and significance is at times so great the suggested implications seem to give a new thrust to the text. In those cases the proposed significance appears to rewrite the meaning of the text and thereby undermine the Christocentric hermeneutic's emphasis on authorial intent. Thus, the Christocentric hermeneutic's claim to adhere to authorial intent seems to be at odds with the applications it suggests.

Why It Aims for Such Interpretation

The way the Christocentric approach resolves the tension between meaning and significance is through its theological framework. Advocates of the hermeneutic appeal to specific passages as well as a larger biblical theological rationale to show that their goals and method are justified.

We can begin with looking at the specific passages cited by the redemptive-historical hermeneutic. They remind us Paul proclaims Christ crucified (1 Cor

psalms is used by the prophets of the Messiah (cf. Ps 69:13 [Heb., 14]; Isa 49:8). Hence, one can demonstrate an intentional establishment of Davidic theology originally in those psalms, which not only potentially has legitimate implications on Messiah but also that the prophets have confirmed. The dots connect toward the New Testament. If one could prove that a narrative explicated a certain theological idea that has ramifications upon later revelation, that would be legitimate. However, that is not how the Christocentric hermeneutic frames the argumentation to these issues. See next footnote for an example. Furthermore, with the argumentation in this note, a different emphasis on the Old Testament would ensue. The primary emphasis would be upon mastering the theological concepts the author established so that when its implications are connected with Christ, one can see the full import that has on Christology. In other words, without studying thoroughly the Old Testament text exegetically, one lessens the theological weight that is attributed to Christ when a connection is made. This is a repeated problem that will be highlighted through this article.

⁴⁴ That is indeed the case. See Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 30–31. In dealing with the preaching of 1 Samuel 17 (David and Goliath), Goldsworthy argues both a moral approach (David as model) and a typological approach (David's victory a picture of Christ's victory) are valid. The reason he provides is "the overwhelming evidence of the New Testament is that the testimony of the Old Testament to Christ has priority over its testimony to the authentic Christian life in today's world... Jesus is thus the primary goal of all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament" (30–31). Note that Goldsworthy's argumentation is not based upon anything within 1 Samuel 17 itself that sets up for a parallel in some way but a greater deductive theological framework that produces the result. This will be further discussed in the next section.

⁴⁵ See previous discussion on the priorities of the Christocentric hermeneutic.

1:23).⁴⁶ The apostle even states he determined to know nothing among the Corinthians except Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2).⁴⁷ Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul repeats the sentiment, stating his proclamation that Jesus is Lord (2 Cor 4:5). These statements suggest Christ is the exclusive proclamation of the apostle. This is strengthened by his statement in Colossians 1:28: “Him [Christ] we proclaim.”⁴⁸ Such statements seem to define the nature of Paul’s ministry. Accordingly, those in the Christocentric camp claim Paul is Christ-centered in all of his work and preaching. This demands everything relate to Christ. *Every* text must be read about Christ because to those in the Christocentric approach, Paul demands every text be about Christ and His redemptive work.⁴⁹

Advocates for the Christocentric hermeneutic also argue this accords with Jesus’ own hermeneutic. In Luke 24:27, they claim Jesus explained all the Scripture in light of Himself. The phrases “Moses and the prophets” as well as “all Scripture” in that verse demonstrate Christ is found comprehensively throughout the Old Testament. Through and through, it speaks of Him.⁵⁰ Along that line, the Christocentric view also argues from Ephesians 1:10. Goldsworthy contends since Christ is the summation of *all* things (Eph 1:10), everything in creation and history is always categorically about Christ.⁵¹ Everything explains and points to the One who fulfills everything.⁵² Hence, the Scripture is typological and so everything in creation and revelation reflects Christ.

As we noted above, part of the Christocentric hermeneutic’s problem results from the determination to find Christ in *every* text. The counter is simply that the statements of the New Testament demand such a goal. This is what Jesus and Paul mandate. Thus, this is the way interpretation and preaching must overall operate. Scriptural claims support the goal of the Christocentric hermeneutic.

In addition, the redemptive-historical hermeneutic appeals to a biblical theological rationale in Scripture to justify its practical method. Overall, it points to the unity of Scripture. The Bible is one book, written ultimately by one divine author, dealing with the overarching theme of God’s redemption in Christ. For this reason, God wills that every text contributes in some way to that theme. That is inherent of every text

⁴⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 80; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 1, 32.

⁴⁷ Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 1, 32; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 5.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 75.

⁴⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 80. Chapell nuances this by saying “Somehow, though Paul addressed many issues of daily living, he believed he was always preaching about the person and work of Jesus. This must be the goal of expository preaching. The particulars of a passage need to be related to the overall purpose of Scripture.”

⁵⁰ Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 46–48, 84–85.

⁵¹ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 187–88.

⁵² *Ibid.*

as scriptural revelation.⁵³ Because this is the way Scripture works, seeing implications about Christ and redemption in every text is not foreign to the author's intent but completely compatible with God's intent in the text.

Such logic serves as a partial basis for typology. The unity of Scripture and God's sovereignty over His plan support that God intended the events and persons of the Old Testament to operate typologically. Scholars point to typological patterns like Christ and Adam (Rom 5:12–21) as well as the sacrificial system and Christ's death (Heb 9:9–12) to initially argue the Scripture works typologically.⁵⁴ They also observe how the Old Testament in and of itself works typologically. The first exodus leads to a second (Hos 11:1–11), physical circumcision pointed to a circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6), creation leads to new creation (Isa 65:17), and David leads to a new David (Hos 3:5).⁵⁵ The Christocentric view uses this to argue the Old Testament has an inherent typological nature that sets up for the New Testament. With that, proponents of the redemptive-historical hermeneutic contend God intentionally designed all things in His plan to discuss Christ. Even if the human author was not aware, they were intended by God.⁵⁶ Accordingly, drawing typological inferences about Christ abides in authorial intent because God ordained it this way.

For the Christocentric hermeneutic, all of this comes together in the way the New Testament uses the Old. Redemptive history, unity of revelation, and the typological operation of Scripture are all part of the interpretative framework of the apostles. They point to numerous examples where the New Testament writers seem to reinterpret the Old and change its meaning to talk of Christ. For instance, Hosea 11:1, which discussed Israel's exodus, now talks of Christ's deliverance from Herod (Matt 2:15). Jeremiah 31:15 spoke of Israel's exile but now discusses the tragic circumstances surrounding Christ's birth (Matt 2:18). The list can go on.⁵⁷

The Christocentric approach argues these examples reflect a hermeneutical shift that occurred in the Christ-event. Christ's coming unveils the full meaning of a text and allows the apostles to see it. His explanation of Scripture on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:24–26) reoriented the disciples' worldview and hermeneutic. It unlocked the symbolic meaning of the Old Testament. It showed the final ramifications of Scripture's unity, its ultimate horizon.⁵⁸ It established the Christ-event, the gospel, as the hermeneutical key for all revelation.⁵⁹ Paul expresses this sentiment in describing the Old Testament as that which makes one wise unto *salvation* (2 Tim 3:15).⁶⁰ Thus, the New Testament should be the interpretative grid over the Old and "every message

⁵³ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 3–5; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 67–86.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 224–29.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 228–29.

⁵⁷ Robert L. Thomas, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," *MSJ* 13, no. 1 (2002): 79–98. Thomas provides a list of when the apostles potentially re-read the OT.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 138–39.

⁵⁹ Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 54, 84.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

from the Old Testament must be seen in light of Jesus Christ.”⁶¹ Accordingly, the apostolic (and even Christ’s own) hermeneutic shows that typology and the unity of Scripture are not merely incidental or just limited to certain examples. Rather, these form the framework of how the New Testament writers read Scripture, how Scripture operates, and what God always meant them to signify.⁶² Hence, the Christocentric hermeneutic contends this is how New Covenant believers must read sacred writ if they are to abide by God’s intent.

As we have seen, the problem of the Christocentric approach concerns how its proposed implications (significance) do not tightly correspond with the author’s intent. Advocates resolve this by clarifying how intent works in Scripture. In doing so, they deal with one of the major questions about the nature of meaning: the way dual authorship operates in Scripture.⁶³ Their response is that while they believe in authorial intent, they distinguish the divine author’s intent from the human writer. This allows them to draw implications that may not cohere with the human author’s purpose but match God’s greater agenda. For the Christocentric hermeneutic, this model is based upon what the Scripture demonstrates in biblical theology as well as claims in specific passages. Consequently, objections against such an approach ignore the theological realities established in redemptive history and are more a product of the enlightenment as opposed to what God demands.⁶⁴

Evaluating the Christocentric Hermeneutic

The Question Posed: Are There Exceptions to the Rule?

In thinking through the Christocentric hermeneutic we can find much to applaud. For instance, its stress on the need to teach Scripture’s theology is important in an age that depicts the Bible as a self-help book that is devoid of truth and doctrine. Its stress on Scripture’s unity and redemptive history is also important in countering the destructiveness of higher criticism as well as supporting the positive rediscovery of biblical theology. Furthermore, its stress on Scripture as the grounds for how we interpret Scripture is an important reminder. That should drive us back to Scripture to make sure our hermeneutical framework matches what the Bible demands.

In doing so, how should we think through the Christocentric proposal? The question, “Are there exceptions to the hermeneutical rule?” is a good way to frame the matter. On one hand, from the discussion above, we observe the Christocentric hermeneutic affirms traditional hermeneutics as the “rule.” It explicitly affirms exposition, exegesis, and authorial intent. It upholds grammatical-historical interpretation as the core.

⁶¹ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 51; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 54, 84; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 137.

⁶² Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 153.

⁶³ See above discussion. Concerning meaning, two critical questions exist: the determiner of meaning in a text and the relation of dual-authorship in the biblical text.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 138–40.

This emphasis is commendable for it is biblical. Even the most basic observations from sacred writ confirm a literal-grammatical-historical approach. Scripture is literal in that its meaning is the author's intent. The Scripture expresses its ideas as "thus says the Lord" (Exod 4:22; Isa 7:7), "as the prophet says" (Acts 7:48), and the very communication of God (2 Tim 3:16). The Bible asserts its meaning, not whatever the reader desires, the community imposes, or what a text could denote. Rather, it is what the author said, authorial intent. That intent is expressed through language (grammar) in light of the facts of history. The biblical writers demonstrate this in how they pay attention to words (Josh 23:14; Heb 4:1–11), phrases (Jer 26:18; Mark 1:1–3), and even grammatical features (Gal 3:16). They have a linguistic approach to the text. Similarly, the biblical writers acknowledge the historical background of Scripture by discussing history (Deut 1:1–3:29), explaining historical backgrounds (Mark 7:1–11), as well as being aware of their place in God's redemptive historical plan (Neh 9:1–38; Acts 13:13–41). The Scripture affirms the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation. Again, the Christocentric hermeneutic places this at its core. There is no controversy in that regard. Proponents acknowledge and champion grammatical-historical approach as the hermeneutical rule of Scripture.

On the other hand, the question the Christocentric hermeneutic approach raises is whether there can be exceptions or modifications to that rule. This brings us back to the central dilemma within the Christocentric approach: the connection between meaning and significance. The Christocentric hermeneutic has proposed an adjustment to traditional methodology. Although we should seek the author's intent, the divine intent can overshadow the human author's purpose, which facilitates widespread typology and the fullness of meaning the New Testament brings to the Old. Consequently, the proposed significance of a text may not totally correspond with the human author's original meaning; however, it does correspond with the divine intent.

So should we have such exceptions to the rule? As discussed, the redemptive-historical hermeneutic argues the Scripture demands these exceptions. This is based upon specific texts of Scripture as well as a biblical theological rationale. To determine whether there should be exceptions, we need to tackle both lines of thought.

Are There Exceptions to the Rule?: A Look at Particular Passages

In light of this, we can first deal with the specific texts cited by the Christocentric hermeneutic, beginning with the texts that discuss preaching "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; 2 Cor 4:5; Col 1:28). What is interesting is the movement itself recognizes the need to qualify their claims about these passages. If we are to preach Christ and Him crucified alone, should we never preach Him resurrected? Later on in 1 Corinthians, Paul's emphasis on the resurrection makes such a proposal preposterous (cf. 1 Cor 15:12–14). Proponents of the view argue Paul was contextually talking about the resurrected Lord in the phrase "*Christ* and Him crucified."⁶⁵ That may be the case, but even that does not solve all the issues. Should one never talk of sin (1 Cor 15:3), Christ as Lord (Rom 10:9), or Christ's second coming (2

⁶⁵ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 6.

Thess 1:7–10)? Paul discusses these matters. Does he contradict himself? Even advocates of the redemptive-historical hermeneutic suggest people preach Christ in these ways.⁶⁶ In light of this, advocates place additional qualifications on “Christ and Him crucified.” They contend the statement does not exclude teaching the whole counsel of God’s Word.⁶⁷ All of this demonstrates Paul’s statement in and of itself is not an exhaustive declaration. The proponents of the Christocentric hermeneutic admit this.

These qualifications demand we look at the purpose of these statements. What is Paul’s intent in making them? In 1 Corinthians 1:23 and 2:2, Paul deals with those who are factious based upon their pride (1 Cor 1:12–13).⁶⁸ Hence, he points to specific aspects of his message to show how the gospel demands the opposite of that. In 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul confronts false teachers who exalt themselves and he shows how the gospel message exalts Christ and not man.⁶⁹ In Colossians 1:28, Paul deals with those who would downplay the preeminence of Christ and states that he does the opposite: he preaches Christ.⁷⁰ Christ is not one we are ashamed of but, we proclaim Him. In each of these contexts, Paul’s purpose is rhetorical and polemical. His statements of “preaching Christ” fight against pride and a low view of Christ. They are a call to champion Christ when some are ashamed. They are a reminder to champion the “foolish” message of the gospel and be humble and unified (1 Cor 1:18).

Consequently, the use of these texts by the supporters of the Christocentric hermeneutic are not exactly accurate. They understand these texts to show how Paul knew only Christ in his preaching, as opposed to anything else in Scripture. However, in context, the apostle contrasts preaching Christ versus preaching human wisdom (Col 2:8) or one’s self (2 Cor 4:5a). He is not contrasting preaching Christ versus the rest of the ideas of sacred writ. Paul never intended these statements to be exhaustive of all he did in ministry. Rather, they were more to show what his ministry was centrally for and thereby against. This is precisely why these statements do not contradict any other declarations he makes about preaching the whole counsel of Scripture (2 Tim 2:15; 2 Tim 4:1–2; cf. Acts 20:27) or how his epistles deal with a variety of issues outside of Christ and Him crucified. Taken in their original context and purpose, these statements do not rule out other biblical and theological discussions. They rule out worldliness, pride, and human wisdom. Accordingly, these verses do not imply all the Christocentric hermeneutic inferences.

⁶⁶ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 19–85; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 178–82, 239–71.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 75.

⁶⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 172, 211.

⁶⁹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 331; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 79.

⁷⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 86. Bruce also notes that even Col 1:28 holds Christ’s centrality in tension with the whole teaching of Scripture. After all, Christ may be the center of Christ’s message, but Paul still needs to give further instruction as the participles in the verse relate. See also, Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 88. O’Brien’s discussion of wisdom that must qualify certain statements of preaching Christ. The idea is more *telic* in nature.

Likewise, Luke 24:27 does not indicate a hermeneutical shift. Luke does not state Jesus talks about Himself in every passage of the Old Testament. The precise wording states Jesus explains “in all the Scripture *the things* concerning Himself” (τὰ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ, emphasis mine). The idea is simply that Jesus comprehensively discussed the Old Testament texts which were about Him.⁷¹ This is not the same as reconfiguring every text to speak about Him. Again, the advocates of a Christocentric hermeneutic have taken this text too far. In fact, in context, Luke 24:27 proclaims the opposite of what they assert. Our Lord declares the disciples were foolish to not recognize what the prophets had spoken (Luke 24:25). With that statement, Jesus does not claim a hermeneutical shift. He does not reinterpret the prophets or give the “true meaning” of what they said but rather simply affirms what they said.⁷² He upholds what the human authors of Scripture meant. In doing so, Luke 24:24–26 better supports a grammatical-historical hermeneutic as opposed to a Christocentric hermeneutic.

Finally, Ephesians 1:10 has been used to prove all things in heaven and earth are about Christ, for He sums them all up. If all creation is about Christ, then typology is appropriate, for everything in some way depicts Him.⁷³ What does “summed up” (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι) denote? The idea of the word may have the idea of a summary in rhetoric.⁷⁴ Just as a summary shows how a variety of ideas coalesce around one central point or main idea, so everything in creation is designed to point to Christ.⁷⁵ However, this is not the same idea as what the Christocentric approach proposes. A summary does not claim all the lines of argument are the same as the main point. It only shows how all the distinctive lines of argument link with and support the main idea. In the same way, the context of Ephesians 1:10 does not describe creation as various representations of Christ. Rather, it demonstrates how Christ is the main point as He subjects all things under His feet and they give glory to Him (Eph 1:21–23). The notion stresses Christ’s chief importance. Accordingly, the idea of Ephesians

⁷¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 897; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 848. Green stresses the *telic* nature of the OT relative to Christ and His suffering and glory.

⁷² D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 283. “The New Testament writers, for all they understand that acceptance of who Jesus is comes as a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14), never stint at giving *reasons* for the hope that lies within them, *including reasons for reading the Bible as they do*. The ‘fulfillment’ terminology they deploy is too rich and varied to allow us to imagine that they are merely reading in what is in fact not there. They would be the first to admit that *in their own psychological history* the recognition of Jesus came before their understanding of the Old Testament; but they would see this as evidence of moral blindness. As a result, they would be the first to insist, with their transformed hermeneutic (not least the reading of the sacred texts in salvation-historical sequence), that *the Scriptures themselves can be shown to anticipate a suffering Servant-King, a Priest-King, a new High Priest*, and so forth.” Carson’s quote illustrates the shift in hermeneutics is not methodological per se but rather ontological. It is the shift from those reading with moral blindness to those who can see what the Scriptures intended. The hermeneutical shift pushes the believer to read the Scripture according to authorial intent, according to what was truly originally intended.

⁷³ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 187–88.

⁷⁴ Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 111.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 261; A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 33.

1:10 is not symbolic but telic. It does not teach a Christocentric idea that everything *is a portrait of Christ* but rather a Christotelic idea that everything ultimately *points to Christ* in worship. Yet again, the Christocentric hermeneutic has pushed the implication of Ephesians 1:10 too far.

This subsection dealt with the particular passages that advocates of the redemptive-historical hermeneutic use to support their approach. The problem with their proof texts is that they have inferred ideas that go beyond what was stated and why it was stated. The meaning of the text does not justify the full extent of the implications they have drawn. This is the exact problem the approach has had all along. For this reason, the particular passages cited by the Christocentric hermeneutic do not support their goal of making every text speak of Christ. To the contrary, their use of Scripture only illustrates the problem of their approach.

Are There Exceptions to the Rule?: A Look at the Biblical Theological Rationale

The Christocentric hermeneutic also argues from a biblical theological rationale based upon the New Testament's use of the Old. To them, the apostles' hermeneutic warrants a shift in our own hermeneutical approach. They claim New Testament writers' interpretative approach indicates the final way the unity of Scripture works in typological connections. The apostles reveal the full, divine intent of the text that we must recognize if we are to honor authorial intent. This justifies their method of seeing Christ in every passage.

Conversely, the apostles' introductory formulae provide a different picture. Rather than claiming a full or hidden insight into the text, the apostles say they reason "according to the Scripture" (κατὰ τὰς γραφάς, 1 Cor 15:3), "as it is written" (καθὼς γέγραπται, Rom 1:17), "for it is written" (γέγραπται γὰρ, Matt 4:6), "as the prophet says" (καθὼς ὁ προφήτης λέγει, Acts 7:48), "the word God spoke" (τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου, Matt 2:15), or observe how the Scriptures "are fulfilled" (τότε ἐπληρώθη, Matt 2:17).⁷⁶ Such language indicates the apostles desired to be consistent with the meaning of the Old Testament. They claimed their arguments were legitimate inferences that harmonized with what was written.

In addition, the formulae mentioned above suggest the apostles do not view divine intention as separate from human intention. They introduce Scripture as both the message of a particular prophet (Matt 8:17) as well as the divine author (Matt 1:22).⁷⁷ They appeal to the human and divine authors interchangeably because they

⁷⁶ "Fulfilled" does not always denote the technical category of prophecy-fulfillment. In the cases of "fulfilling the law" (Gal 6:2) or Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac "fulfilling" Gen 15:6 (James 2:8), fulfillment does not have those ideas. Instead, it denotes the accomplishing or the maturation of a concept. Fulfillment of prophecy is a subset within that category and having that idea allows one to rightly see the apostles' claims. See Robert L. Thomas, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 262–64; Douglas J. Moo, "The Letter of James, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 138; Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 191.

⁷⁷ In the case of Matthew 1:22 and 8:17, Matthew quotes from Isaiah and in one case says Isaiah spoke those words but in another case says God spoke those words. This implies both spoke the message of Isaiah and their intents are interchangeable and thereby identical.

knew what the prophet said is what God said and vice versa. This is consistent with their assertions that the prophets spoke from God; their message is His own (2 Pet 1:21; 2 Tim 3:16; cf. Exod 4:15–16; Isa 7:7; Amos 3:7).⁷⁸ Accordingly, it does not appear the apostles believed divine intent carried a fuller meaning than what the human author said. Thus, the apostles' introductory formulae do not point to a deeper meaning in Scripture or indicate a hermeneutical shift took place but the opposite: the apostles continued the logic of their predecessors.

The apostles practiced what they proclaimed. To see how they continued the prophets' logic, we need to begin with the prophets' hermeneutical work in the Old Testament. The prophets maintained the meaning of prior revelation. They claimed to do this (Josh 1:8; Pss 1:1–3; 119:15; Isa 8:20) and their job mandated it (Deut 13:1–18; 18:15–22).⁷⁹ A variety of examples illustrate their fidelity to the author's intent, including the way the prophets condemn Israel for its idolatry (2 Kings 17:5–23; Dan 9:5–6; Neh 9:29–33), confront it for twisting Scripture (Ezek 18:1–32), and maintain the Abrahamic promises of land, seed, and blessing (Mic 4:1–6; Ezek 36–48; Ps 72:3–17).

While maintaining the meaning of a text, the prophets also deal with its significance or ramifications. In doing so, they not only draw implications consistent with the original meaning but are even consistent with how their predecessors used the text. For instance, the prophets elaborate on how the Davidic Covenant will be fulfilled using the same language to build upon what past prophets have developed (Mic 5:2 [Heb., 5:1]; 7:14, 15, 20; cf. Hos 2:15; Amos 9:11–14). They also appeal to the exodus as a demonstration of God's love (Exod 4:22) which gives hope to the suffering (Ps 80:8, 15) and drives a new eschatological deliverance (Hos 11:1). The Old Testament is filled with examples that show how the prophets soundly developed theology.⁸⁰

Thus, there is a hermeneutical logic in the Old Testament. The prophets uphold the original meaning of a text and hone in on very specific applications of a text, often times continuing the way their predecessors used a text. Their applications do not grow broader as revelation progresses but more narrow and refined. Accordingly, by the end of the canon, the implications of previous revelation are quite particular.

⁷⁸ The language the men "spoke from God" (ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ) indicates the prophets act of speaking was the very message of God Himself. See Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, WBC (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1998), 233.

⁷⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 126. "In no case, however, do later Old Testament writers reverse Moses' teaching (cf. Deuteronomy 13, 18)." The whole point of Deuteronomy 13 and 18 is that Israel and the prophets were to uphold God's law.

⁸⁰ Although these examples are far from comprehensive, the nature of progressive revelation and Old Testament theology support how the prophets develop particular applications. Progressive revelation moves from general to specific just like the prophets develop specific implications from the general statements of previous revelation. Old Testament theology traces the progression of different themes, which is only possible if the prophets' development of those ideas is consistent and compounding in nature. See Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 55. All of this suggests the prophets did not take Old Testament ideas in random, disconnected, and dispersed directions. The implications of Old Testament concepts did not become broader as revelation progressed but more narrow and refined. Accordingly, by the end of the canon, the implications of previous revelation are quite particular.

The apostles do not depart from the logic of the Old Testament but pick up on and continue it. Two major observations suggest this. First, the apostles' clearly contextual uses of the Old Testament reflect their consistency with the prophets. Scholars acknowledge that the majority of the apostles' predominant use of the Old Testament is unquestionably contextual in nature.⁸¹ The New Testament writers contextually use the Old Testament to show Jesus' birthplace (Mic 5:2 [Heb., v. 1]; cf. Matt 2:1), His penal substitutionary death (Isa 53:5–10; cf. Mark 10:45), His kingship (Num 24:17; cf. Matt 2:1), as well as the nature of eschatology (Dan 11:31; cf. Matt 24:15), God's holiness (Lev 19:2; cf. 1 Pet 1:16), and God's dealings with His people (Ps 95:6–8; cf. Heb 4:4–9).⁸² In these cases their use abides by the original (human) intent of the Old Testament. In fact, the apostles at times even group Old Testament texts together that the prophets previously connected (cf. Rom 3:10–18; Ps 14:1–3; Isa 59:7; see also Gal 3:6–11; Gen 15:6; Hab 2:4). These particular contextual usages evidence the apostles knew exactly how the prophets wove the Old Testament together. They followed the prophets' logic closely.

Second, the apostles' consistency with each other also evidences how they continued the prophets' logic.⁸³ They all interpret and apply Isaiah 53 to the Messiah and His death (cf. Mark 10:45; Rom 5:19; Heb 9:28). They all understand the Stone that was rejected is Christ and that has ramifications upon God's people (Ps 118:22; Matt 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4–7). They all understand the goal of the law is love for neighbor (Lev 19:18; Matt 19:19; Rom 13:8; Jas 2:8). They all applied Israel's wilderness wanderings as a warning (1 Cor 10:1–11; Heb 3:10–19; Jude 5). All of these uses are not only consistent with each other but also consistent with the original intent of the prophets. In fact, the apostles' use of Israel's wilderness wanderings even matches how the prophets use those same passages (Pss 78:1–72; 95:8–11). The unity of the apostles' conclusions stems from how closely they followed the Old Testament. They applied Scripture the same way because they applied it along the lines the prophets specified. Consequently, the apostles had a unified method, one that was rigorously contextual.

At this point, we can observe that the vast majority of the apostles' use of the Old Testament does not support a hermeneutical shift but rather hermeneutical continuity. Thus, at best the Christocentric hermeneutic cites exceptions to the rule to demonstrate a hermeneutical shift. Nevertheless, even these supposed exceptions do not prove their point.

For example, scholars cite Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 to prove Matthew read Hosea typologically and christocentrically. In addressing this issue, an important question arises. If Matthew just wanted to compare Israel's exodus with Christ's escape from Egypt, why does he cite Hosea? He could have chosen a more obvious text like Exodus 4:22 to make the comparison. Matthew's citation of Hosea is not random

⁸¹ G.K. Beale, "A Surrejoinder to Peter Enns," *Themelios* 32, no. 3 (2007): 18.

⁸² For more examples see Thomas, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament," 2002, 243–47.

⁸³ B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (London: SCM Press, 1961); C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (UK: Fontana Books, 1965). Lindars argued for a sort of *testimonia* which cataloged and systematized the church's use of the OT. However, no such evidence of *testimonia* exists.

but strategic and picks up on how Hosea used the exodus. In context, Hosea 11:1 uses the Exodus to show how God's love in the first exodus will drive a second one (Hos 11:11) led by Messiah who functions like a new Moses (Hos 1:11 [Heb., 2:2]; 3:5).⁸⁴ Matthew picks up on this point perfectly. He depicts Jesus as the One who will lead that new exodus for He, like Moses, was delivered from a king who desired to kill Israel's children (Matt 2:13).⁸⁵ How did Matthew then reach his conclusions? It was not simply because he merely read Israel's history with a typological lens or saw a deeper meaning in the text. Rather, he draws upon certain implications of the exodus highlighted by Hosea. Matthew's exegesis is ultimately textual and not typological.⁸⁶

Similarly, some argue Matthew used Jeremiah 31:15 typologically for it originally talks of Israel's exile but now Matthew applies it to Messiah's circumstances.⁸⁷ Conversely, in the context of Jeremiah, a variety of factors point out how Jeremiah's words seek to depict the pain of the entire exile. For example, in context, Rachel's weeping continues to the time exile ends (Jer 31:23–40).⁸⁸ Accordingly, Jeremiah was not re-applying Israel's exile to Messiah. Rather, the slaughtering of the infants legitimately fits into what Jeremiah describes about the exilic period as a whole. Even more, the text in Jeremiah focuses upon the conclusion of exile and the inauguration of the New Covenant. This also fits with what Matthew discusses in Matthew 2. Christ's deliverance from Herod facilitates the realities of the end of exile and the New Covenant (cf. Matt 26:28). In that way, the circumstances of His birth coincide and complete what Jeremiah describes about exile. Jeremiah 31:15 is thereby fulfilled. Matthew's use of Jeremiah is based upon the rationale the prophet had. Matthew does not simply read in a parallel between Israel and Christ (even if that is involved). The grounds for Matthew's use of Jeremiah is not a typological grid but Jeremiah's own logic.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ G. K. Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One More Time," *JETS* 55 (2012): 703–5; Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 222.

⁸⁵ Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 166–69.

⁸⁶ See below. It is important to establish the right hermeneutical scheme of causation behind the apostles' conclusions. To be sure, Matthew does parallel Christ, Moses, and Israel. However, the question is why. The answer is not because he had a typological grid but because he understood Hosea and its implications. Hosea made these parallels and Matthew is expounding upon those ideas. Identifying what is happening helps us to identify Matthew's biblical theological rationale and see he is not necessarily validating the Christocentric approach. Rather, his hermeneutic is much more textual and grammatical-historical in nature.

⁸⁷ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 209. Johnson views that Israel's suffering is recapitulated in Christ such that a typological relationship exists between Christ and Israel.

⁸⁸ F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 274. The geography mentioned regarding exile is used throughout the Old Testament of exile in its beginning and end. The participle for Rachel's weeping implies ongoing action. These factors indicate Jeremiah's description is endemic of the entire era of exile of which Christ's birth is a part and climaxes.

⁸⁹ Although typological recapitulation and corporate solidarity may be a part of what is going on in Matthew, it is not entirely what takes place. Matthew is not merely citing Jeremiah as a description of exilic suffering and Jesus a repetition of that. If that were the case, Matthew could have chosen quite a few other texts that are more to the point (cf. Hos 10:14, 13:16). Instead, Matthew cites Jeremiah 31:15 not only to discuss exilic suffering, which legitimately then relates to Christ born in exile, but also to discuss how Christ's birth in exile concludes such suffering as prophesied by Jeremiah. That is the contextual point both in Jeremiah 31:15 and Matthew. As such, the whole connection between Matthew and Jeremiah

Space prevents me from being exhaustive. Nonetheless, scholars have gone through the most debated examples and shown how the New Testament continues the logic of the Old.⁹⁰ In fact, the problem is not that the apostles had a revolutionary interpretative approach but rather our lack of understanding of the Old Testament.⁹¹

Consequently, even the supposed exceptions to the apostles' contextual hermeneutic do not support a new (Christocentric) hermeneutical rule. The Christocentric hermeneutic has proposed a biblical theological rationale where the apostles saw a fuller Christological significance of Old Testament texts. However, this study has shown a different biblical theological rationale. The apostles uphold the meaning of the Old Testament and remain consistent with the theological significance developed by the prophets. They hone in on particular implications that the prophets discussed. Because of this, the apostles' hermeneutic does not justify reading everything in the Old Testament typologically. Instead, it demands a very close textual reading of the Old Testament. The way the Old Testament connects with the New and Christ have already been established by the prophets and apostles. We do not need a new hermeneutical (typological) grid to read over the text. We just need to follow the connections biblical writers set forth and identify their Christological ramifications as they

is much more precise than just an Israel-Jesus typology. Matthew's use of Jeremiah is not merely reading a one to one correspondence (or even a one to one heightened correspondence) between Israel's history and Christ. Matthew's use of Jeremiah recognizes Jesus' role in Israel's history as the One who accomplishes what Jeremiah predicts. There are more reasons and factors involved in relating Jesus with Israel's exile than merely "Israel typifies Jesus." Accordingly, Matthew's use of Jeremiah does not quite substantiate a typological grid over Israel's history. Instead, it substantiates understanding Christ's role *in* Israel's history. It also shows Matthew did not understand Jeremiah typologically but according to its intent and applied it precisely to the prophet's intent. The typological approach claimed by this text is too simplistic and omits the full intent of what is taking place in Old and New Testaments.

The same logic goes for David to new David (Hos 3:5). In context, Hosea and his predecessors recount the collapse of the Davidic dynasty (cf. Amos 9:11). Hence because the Davidic dynasty falls, a new David is required to raise up the kingly line. In other words, the rationale behind a David to new David is not simply David was intended to be a foreshadowing of Christ. Rather, redemptive history and God's plan triggered events that paved the way for Jesus to assume David's role. Furthermore, seeing how progressive revelation develops, technically David is not predicting Jesus as much as Jesus is recapitulating David. Put differently, David is not called in Scripture a proto-Jesus but rather Jesus is called a second David. David is not made to portray Jesus as much as Jesus is meant to portray and fulfill David. In this way, typology also has a sort of reverse directionality with how the Bible articulates categories and the direction of progressive revelation. See also, Eugene H. Merrill, "The Sign of Jonah," *JETS* 23, no. 1 (March 1980): 23–30. The same rationale goes for even the sign of Jonah (cf. Matt 12:39). Merrill rightly notes Jesus does not say Jonah himself is a type or analogy of Christ but rather they offer the *same sign*. The emphasis is not on Jonah as a foreshadowing but on the nature of the sign that verified his ministry. Just as Jonah's deliverance was a testimony of his validity, so Jesus' resurrection will be a testimony that He is the Messiah. In this case, Jesus does not provide a typological reading of Jonah *per se* but one which see a point of analogy between the signs they offer. In fact, that is the language our Lord uses. He talks of offering the sign of Jonah. He will provide the same sign Jonah did. That has no connotation of typological foreshadowing as much as analogy and parallel.

⁹⁰ See G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007). See also, Abner Chou, *The Prophet, Apostolic, and Christian Hermeneutic: Learning Biblical Interpretation from the Writers of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, forthcoming) for expanded argumentation found throughout this section.

⁹¹ Beale, "Hosea 11:1 in Matthew," 697–715. Beale demonstrates the resolution to the Hosea 11:1 issue deals with squarely with properly understanding Old Testament context.

are *textually expressed* in the intertextuality of Scripture. This will be developed in the next section.

At this point some may desire some more examples to support this thesis. How can we be sure a hermeneutical shift did not occur? The simplest answer to these questions is Christ Himself. If we look at His use of the Old Testament, He talks about a multitude of subjects. He uses past revelation to discuss the resurrection (Exod 3:6; cf. Matt 22:32), eschatology (Dan 11:31; cf. Matt 24:15), loving God (Deut 6:5; cf. Luke 10:27), loving one's neighbor (Lev 19:18; cf. Mark 12:31), marriage (Gen 2:24; cf. Matt 19:5–6), divorce (Deut 24:1–4; Matt 19:7–8), Israel's judgment (Gen 19:1–24; cf. Matt 10:15), and honoring father and mother (Exod 20:12; cf. Matt 15:4). Jesus does not make any of these passage speak directly of Himself. In fact, the apostles follow suit, declaring how the Old Testament is profitable (2 Tim 3:16), serves as a model for us (1 Cor 10:6), and provides us instruction and hope (Rom 15:4). Christ's own hermeneutic is followed by the apostles and they all acknowledge texts can speak of issues that are not Christological in nature. The Christocentric hermeneutic's goal of making every text speak of Christ is not Jesus' goal, or the apostles' for that matter.

Moreover, the way Jesus uses these texts is thoroughly contextual. Ellis even notes:

Contrary to some misguided modern interpreters, there is never any suggestion in the Gospels of Jesus opposing the Torah, the law of God, the OT. It is always a matter of Jesus' true exposition of scripture against the misunderstanding and/or misapplication of it by the dominant scripture-scholars of his day. This becomes apparent in Jesus' encounters with such rabbis in numerous debates, a number of which the Evangelists are careful to retain.⁹²

These observations coincide with what we earlier observed in Luke 24:25. Jesus affirms what the prophets spoke. He drew legitimate implications of Old Testament texts, which were based upon His careful reading of phrases (Exod 3:6; cf. Matt 22:32), words (Dan 11:31; cf. Matt 24:15), and His understanding of history (Deut 24:1–4; Matt 19:7–8) and God's plan (Luke 18:31–32).⁹³ Our Lord had a grammatical-historical hermeneutic.

Overall, adherents of the redemptive-historical hermeneutic have used the New Testament's use of the Old Testament to justify their reading of Scripture. However, the apostles' use of Scripture does the opposite. The apostles claimed to follow the meaning of Scripture. They believed human and divine intent worked confluently.

⁹² E. Earle Ellis, "How Jesus Interpreted His Bible," *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 2 (1989): 350.

⁹³ In the case of Exodus 3:6, Jesus understood the phrase "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" in its covenantal context. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2: 9:51–24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1624. Jesus paid attention to the term "abomination" as used in Daniel when dealing with eschatology in Matt 24:15. He understood the redemptive-historical situation of Israel when Moses gave the law concerning divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. He also grounded His viewpoint of the cross in Scripture, explicitly stating His arrival in Jerusalem marked the fruition of what was written by the prophets (τὰ γεγραμμένα διὰ τῶν προφητῶν).

Their use of prior revelation bears this out. They do not draw artificial or illegitimate implications because of a fuller understanding of a text's meaning. Instead, they hone in on very particular ramifications of a text that past scriptural writers have focused upon. This is even true in the supposed "exceptions." Such refined inferences further demonstrate how closely the apostles knew and understood the Old Testament. In addition, this discussion shows that such a hermeneutical mentality is not just among the apostles but also Christ and the prophets. They too practiced a grammatical-historical approach and did not read Christ into every text but discussed a variety of topics. Hence, the way Scripture uses Scripture does not substantiate the Christological method but actually shows the sufficiency of grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Put it this way, the biblical writers from the prophets to apostles to Christ Himself interpret in this manner. There is no other hermeneutic validated by Scripture.

Ramifications of the Christocentric Hermeneutic

One might wonder if this discussion is purely theoretical and academic. What harm results from a faulty hermeneutic? The problem in essence is known as a "canon within a canon." The phrase refers to how, although the entire Scripture is the canon, one can privilege a certain portion of or idea within Scripture above others. In focusing on one section or theme of Scripture, we may exclude other parts or topics of the Bible. As a result, we create a new canon within the canon of Scripture.

By honing in on Christ as the controlling idea of a text's meaning and significance, the Christocentric hermeneutic has created a "canon within a canon." To be clear, focusing on Christ and the gospel is not bad. However, what can that focus exclude and confuse? For one, it can confuse and distort the Trinity. Concentrating on Christ alone can cause one to neglect discussing the Father and the Spirit. It can even lead to confusion to the roles within the Godhead. Even more, it can distort the gospel which the Christocentric movement desires to proclaim. After all, the gospel is Trinitarian in nature (cf. Eph 1:3–14). If one thinks these are speculative allegations, those in the movement acknowledge the danger. Greidanus warns against Christomonism where the focus is "primarily on Jesus in isolation from God the Father."⁹⁴ Christocentricism can create a canon that can deemphasize the Trinity.

The Trinity is not the only doctrine at risk. Since the Christocentric approach often focuses upon Christ and soteriology, every other doctrine in systematic theology is at risk. Topics like eschatology, theology proper, ecclesiology, Israel, suffering, sanctification, and holy living may be overlooked or deemphasized. In addition, certain doctrines can become imbalanced as recent debate over "grace/gospel based" sanctification illustrates.⁹⁵ Again, those within the movement acknowledge these dangerous excesses generated by their interpretative approach. Some warn Christocentric proponents are "not Christ-centered enough" because they do not talk about

⁹⁴ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 178.

⁹⁵ Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*, Second Printing (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 137, 188–92. If one has a gospel-centered hermeneutic, one may exclude commands for obedience and personal labor required in sanctification. As a result, the presentation of sanctification becomes out of balance. A canon in a canon essentially rules out certain truths about a given topic, resulting in an imbalanced theology.

Christ in His other roles outside of soteriology.⁹⁶ Others remind that even if “moral models” are wrong, one still needs to preach moral imperatives in light of Christ and the gospel.⁹⁷ Such warnings indicate the canon within a canon can strip out theology from the Scripture, the very opposite of what the Christocentric method desires to do.

Consistently, a canon within a canon inherently denigrates Scripture. As Kaiser rightly observes, the redemptive-historical approach, in its haste to see Christ, jettison details of certain texts.⁹⁸ Accordingly, such a canon within a canon neglects and excludes that which God has inspired. It may inadvertently reflect a low view of Scripture, as Block observes.⁹⁹ Along this line, Block also states the Christocentric method results in showcasing “the creative genius of the preacher than the divinely intended message of the biblical authors.”¹⁰⁰ In effect, the Christocentric hermeneutic has moved from author-based meaning to reader-based meaning, the very opposite of what it desired. Once again, the Christocentric movement recognizes this danger. This is precisely why they demand careful attention to detail.¹⁰¹ They want to ensure pastors are not just jumping straight to Christ and neglecting how a text amplifies or adds to the theology about Christ.¹⁰² These exhortations reflect a danger of a canon within a canon: the flattening and devaluing of all of Scripture’s beauty.

Perhaps most ironic of all, the Christocentric hermeneutic can actually diminish Christ. This can occur because faulty connections can skew true connections that exalt the Savior. Block notes how the connection between Joshua and Jesus is artificial. It actually blocks how God is the One who saved Israel in the conquest and how Jesus *is* that God because He will save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21).¹⁰³ Similarly, although Moses and Christ share certain roles, one cannot let that obscure how Jesus is the One who gives the law from the mountain (Matt 5:1–2) as God Himself did at Sinai (Exod 20:1).¹⁰⁴ By making hasty connections, one may fail to see certain associations which lead to a high Christology or discredit the way Christ is legitimately in the Scripture.

Along this line, the deemphasis of Trinitarian, bibliological, and other doctrinal matters leads to emptying Christ’s glory. Put simply, by not expositing the entire Scripture, one cannot see the full picture Christ fulfills and so He is less glorious. For example, if one merely focuses upon His soteriological work in the first advent, then he fails to see the eschatological glory of Christ. One does not behold His eschatological majesty as King (Rev 19:11–13) who is exalted as the climactic hero by

⁹⁶ Murray, “David Murray on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” 11; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 179–81.

⁹⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 294.

⁹⁸ Kaiser Jr., “Walt Kaiser on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” 15.

⁹⁹ Block, “Daniel Block on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” 6–7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰¹ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 279–85; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 70–81; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 379–403.

¹⁰² Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 276–77; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 125–26.

¹⁰³ Block, “Daniel Block on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

heaven and earth (Rev 4–5) as well as restores the nations (Isa 60:3), Israel (Isa 2:2–4), and creation to rights (Isa 11:1–10). By not teaching eschatology or other doctrines, we see less of Christ. As noted above, proponents of the Christocentric hermeneutic have understood this danger for they warn of not being “Christ-centered” enough. They write on the danger of only viewing Christ as Savior as opposed to prophet, king, warrior, deliverer, and sympathetic high priest.¹⁰⁵ Their own words indicate the Christocentric hermeneutic’s focus may end up producing an emaciated Christology, the very opposite of what they desire.

Overall, the Scripture is God’s Word. It thereby has a perfect articulation of what it says and how it says it. A hermeneutic that restricts this message is bound to produce unbalanced results. That is precisely what a canon within a canon demonstrates. Although the Christological hermeneutic desires to teach Christian theology and exalt Christ, what happens is that people may not learn the entire Bible’s theology and end up with a lesser view of their Savior. The only way to handle life in all of its demand on our daily lives, worldview, and decisions is to know the whole council of God’s Word (Acts 20:27; cf. 2 Pet 1:3). A canon within a canon inherently cannot produce that.

Establishing the Sufficiency of Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutics

So if one desires to preach Christ in His full glory, how should he do it? The answer is grammatical-historical hermeneutics. This is the hermeneutic prescribed by Scripture, and this is the hermeneutic that leads to a full exposition of Scripture’s message that honors Christ.

As we briefly have observed, the Old Testament writers established particular implications of the text that set up for the New Testament. Within this, the prophets establish trajectories of thought that link with Christ. This is important for two reasons. First, the fact the prophets talk of Christ demonstrates the authors of the Old Testament were aware about and discussed the Messiah early on. This counters higher critical notions that the Messiah was a late concept in Israel’s history and thus, the prophets really did not intend to talk of Christ.¹⁰⁶ Instead, the Old Testament is a document that discusses Christ. So one can preach Christ based upon the prophets’ intent. Second, the fact the prophets talk of Christ in particular ways demonstrates there are set pathways to proclaim Christ from the Old Testament. Contrary to the Christocentric hermeneutic, one does not need a new grid to see connections between previous revelation and the Savior but to see what the authors have established. This is at the heart of grammatical-historical hermeneutics and by doing this, we can preach Christ.

Others in this series more thoroughly comment on the way Christ is in the Old Testament and how to proclaim Him. Others works have discussed this topic more

¹⁰⁵ Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery*, 91–105; Murray, “David Murray on Christ-Centered Hermeneutics,” 11.

¹⁰⁶ T. Longman, “The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings,” in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. S. E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 16–23.

thoroughly.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, I can point out at least three major ways the grammatical-historical approach can bring out Christ from the Old Testament.

First, the Old Testament *prophesies* directly of Christ. Starting with Genesis 3:15, the prophets have written of Christ (Gen 49:10; Num 24:17; Pss 72; 110). The interconnectedness of the Old Testament may assist in anchoring these texts as messianic. If a later text of Scripture is linked with a clearly messianic text, arguably that text speaks to the Messiah as well. Hence, when later texts talk of an eschatological king crushing the head of his foes like a serpent (Num 24:17; Pss 68:21 [Heb., v. 22]; 72:9; 110:5–6; Isa 27:1; Hab 3:13), scholars recognize this deals with Genesis 3:15 and the Messiah.

Consequently, there are numerous prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament and they are not merely just a set of random predictions. Rather, they show how certain theological concepts will be fulfilled in Christ. For instance, Isaiah 53 incorporates Psalm 22 (Isa 53:3; cf. Ps 22:6 [Heb., v. 7]) as well as the sacrificial system (Isa 53:8–11; cf. Lev 5:14–19) to discuss the Davidic king’s ultimate redemptive suffering. Daniel 7 draws upon creation (cf. Gen 1:26–28) to show how one like the son of man is the ultimate ruler of all the world. This sets up for Christ’s own use of “Son of Man” (cf. Luke 21:27). Zechariah speaks of how the Messiah will return to and split the Mount of Olives in half (Zech 14:4). In light of the past defeats at the Mount of Olives (cf. 2 Sam 15:30), the prophet reminds us how the Messiah will have final eschatological victory over all defeat. He is the final and definitive conqueror. Old Testament prophecies are not just foretelling but thoroughly theological. In this way, direct prophecies contribute to a rich Christology.

Second, a grammatical-historical hermeneutic can trace how the Old Testament *prepares* for Christ. As opposed to Christocentrism, this is Christotelicity. As discussed, the Old Testament connects itself together, which connects certain texts and ideas with Christ. This happens on two levels. On a macro level, Old Testament writers interconnect their writings to form an overarching story or narrative. Various passages recount this story line (Deut 1:3–3:26; Josh 24:1–12; Ps 78:1–72; Neh 9:1–37), which sets up for the New (cf. Acts 7:1–60; 13:13–41).¹⁰⁸ Hence, one can see how texts connect and climax in Christ as they contribute to that storyline. Every event moves the story closer to Christ and thereby prepares the way for Him. One does this by not zooming in and forcing details to conform to Christ but zooming out and seeing how a text plays in the bigger picture.

On a micro level, the prophets weave specific Old Testament texts together to connect with Christ. One can see how the sacrificial system and its theology intersects Christ’s death in Isaiah 53. One can observe how parts of David’s life will be recapitulated in the ultimate David who is born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2 [Heb., v. 1]) and

¹⁰⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1995); Philip S. Satterthwaite, “David in the Books of Samuel,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 41–65; James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Paul R. House, “Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology,” *WTJ* 67 (2005): 229–45.

must sojourn in the wilderness like David (Mic 1:15; cf. 1 Sam 22:1; Matt 4:1).¹⁰⁹ One can see the theology of the Davidic Covenant expressed further in Psalms (cf. Pss 22; 69; 72; 109; 110), which then has inherent applicability to Christ, the final Davidic king (Hos 3:5; Isa 11:1–10; 53:1–11; Matt 27:24–66; Acts 1:20).¹¹⁰ One can see how the commands and blessings bestowed to Adam (Gen 1:26–28) are disseminated to Noah (Gen 9:1), Abraham (Gen 12:1), and David (2 Sam 7:9–13; Ps 8:4), which again leads to Christ (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22; Heb 2:6–9).¹¹¹ In addition, one can observe how the New Testament draws upon the Old Testament to show the theological significance of aspects of Christ's life. For instance, Jesus' temptation alludes back to Adam and Israel in the wilderness (cf. Luke 4:1–13). He succeeds where they fail. His work in Nain (Luke 7:11–17) parallels the work of Elijah and Elisha highlighting His superior ministry and His outreach to the Gentiles.¹¹² Accordingly, a better understanding of Adam, Israel, Elijah, and Elisha has implications for better understanding Christ, even if passages about these men do not directly prophesy about Him. All these cases of intertextuality illustrate that specific texts do link with Christ and they do so in ways that are not up to the reader but revealed by the writers of Scripture. Following these specific connections shows how the theology established in certain texts legitimately connects with Christ.¹¹³

Thus, in the cases of how the Old Testament prepares for Christ, a grammatical-historical hermeneutic helps produce a rich Christology in two ways. First, as discussed, it is sensitive to how the biblical writers make connections between the Old Testament and Christ on both the macro and micro levels. That allows us to connect the dots to show that what we are saying is what the Scripture says and not our own imagination. Second, a grammatical-historical approach ensures that we have studied a text with the right emphasis which in turn appropriately sets up for its connection with other texts and Christ. If we do not understand the Old Testament deeply, then when the New Testament draws on the Old Testament to speak of Christ, we will not know the full import of what is taking place. Because New Testament Christology draws from the Old Testament, a shallow understanding of the Old Testament leads to a shallow Christology. Even more, without a thorough and proper awareness of

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 60, 96.

¹¹⁰ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Psalm 72: An Historical and Messianic Current Example of Antiochene Hermeneutical Theoria," *JETS* 52, no. 2 (2009): 257–70; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 888–89.

¹¹¹ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 71–72, 77–78, 147.

¹¹² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1–9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 653.

¹¹³ In these instances, later applications of texts do not change the fundamental meaning of prior revelation. In fact, later usages depend upon that original meaning in order to have the theology of that text to apply to Christ. Even in the example of Jonah, Luke's claim is *not* that Jonah is a prophecy of Christ. Rather, later usages apply the information already established to Christ. Within this, the examples above show how the connections are not arbitrary but legitimate. They do not occur because the reader observed them but because they are logically explained in Scripture itself. As stated before, the logic of the connections are found textually through the intertextuality of Scripture. As Scripture uses one text repeatedly, it explains why and how it applies it providing the rationale for such an implication being accurate. Tracing connections this way works well because it works with the way authorial intent and progressive revelation operate.

the Old Testament, we might miss more subtle yet legitimate connections the New Testament makes with the Old. As a result, we miss the theological weight that brings us to the majesty of Christ. A grammatical-historical approach allows us to see the breadth and depth of Old Testament theology on a micro and macro level. This in turn allows us to see the glory of Christ from a variety of angles.

Finally, Christ is in the Old Testament because He is at work in history. The Old Testament does not merely predict or prepare for Him but depicts the Son as a *participant* in that part of Scripture. The Angel of YHWH is a good example of this. Exegetical details establish a tension concerning this being. On one hand, these details suggest the Angel of YHWH is God Himself. He receives worship (Exod 3:2–4) and God identifies Himself as such (Gen 22:11–12; Judg 6:21–22). On the other hand, other details point to how God is distinct from the Angel. God, presumably in heaven, looks down through the Angel in the pillar of cloud (Exod 14:24). God sends the Angel and puts His name upon the Angel (Exod 23:20–21). Thus, the Angel of YHWH is God Himself yet distinct from Himself. However, the Old Testament specifies this further. God identifies the One who guided Israel through the wilderness as the Rock (Deut 32:4), a title given later on to the Messiah (Isa 8:13–14; 26:4; cf. 28:16). All of this together suggests that the Angel is God yet distinct from God because He is the second person of the Trinity, the Son. If this is the case, then the Son’s glory is revealed in the Old Testament as He speaks to Abraham, calls Moses, and leads Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Other “Christophanies” occur in the Old Testament (Gen 32:25–30; Josh 5:13–15) brought out by similar exegetical details and tensions.¹¹⁴ Accordingly, a grammatical-historical hermeneutic can point to Christ not only as the Old Testament climaxes in Christ, but also because He is part of what drives Old Testament events. He is not merely revealed in the end but present in the process.

This list is certainly not comprehensive in either categories or texts. Nevertheless, it reminds us the Old Testament speaks of Christ and speaks of Him in particular yet varied ways. Bottom line, we are those who explain Scripture and not write Scripture (2 Tim 4:1–2). Our job is to say what the texts say, what the biblical writers say. Consistently, we want to speak about Christ based upon what the biblical authors said of Him as opposed to what is not in the text. This is why a grammatical-historical approach is so important. It enables us to see the variety and details of the theology in the Old Testament. It allows us to see the numerous ways the biblical writers connect the weight of that theology with Christ. It thereby allows us to say of Christ what the biblical writers said of Christ, to speak of Him in His complete glory as revealed by all Scripture in its breadth and depth.

Conclusion

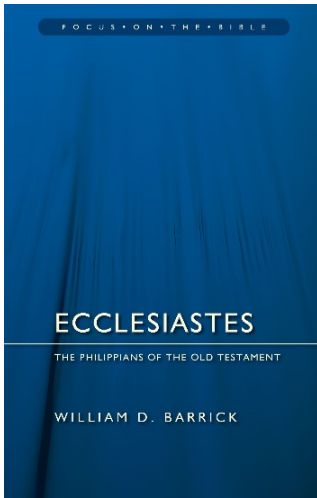
How do we honor Christ in our study and proclamation of Scripture? We have observed we must honor Him both in the means and in the end. We revere Christ not only by exalting Him in the pulpit but also by hermeneutical obedience in the study.

¹¹⁴ James A. Borland, *Christ in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 65–72. See also, K. A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 558; David M. Howard, *Joshua*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 157.

After all, the Scripture mandates that the exegete seeks the author's intent as communicated through precise language and in light of historical background. It does not warrant exceptions to this method. This is the way the prophets and apostles interpreted Scripture. This is also seen in Christ Himself who affirmed what the prophets spoke and used Scripture to speak to a variety of issues according to what was written. He does not demonstrate a Christocentric hermeneutic but a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. In this way, God shows consistency in His care for the way we reach our conclusions as much as the conclusions themselves.

There is good reason for this. We have seen how faulty hermeneutics can create a canon within a canon. This leads to unbalanced formations of theology and even an emaciated Christology. We can inadvertently ignore the complete glory of Christ by forcing texts to speak only of Him or even a specific facet of His ministry. A grammatical-historical approach allows the Scripture to speak to all issues, which brings out not only a balance in ministry and theology but the total glory of the Savior as revealed in the connections of Scripture.

So we need to have confidence the method prescribed in Scripture is sufficient to showcase the complete glory of Christ. We also need to invest the time and effort in seeing the way the biblical writers connect God's Word with the Word. Then, as we exposit the full counsel of God, we can glorify Christ in hermeneutical obedience as we proclaim Him fully.



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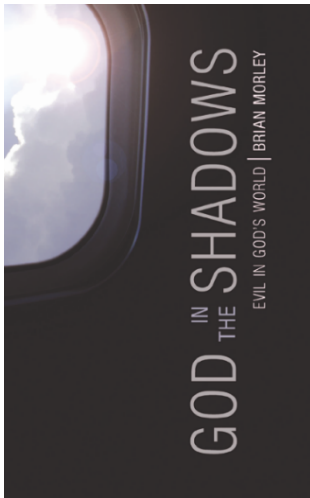
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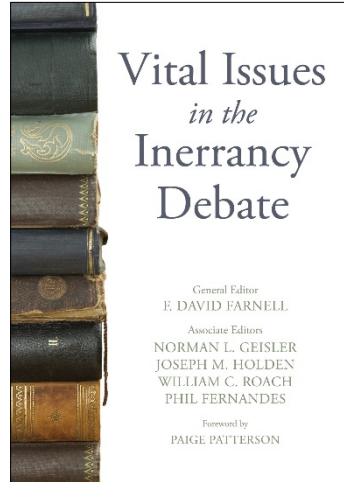
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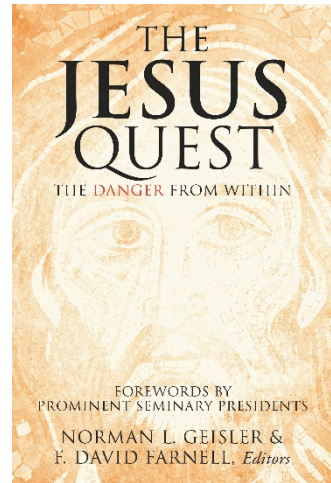
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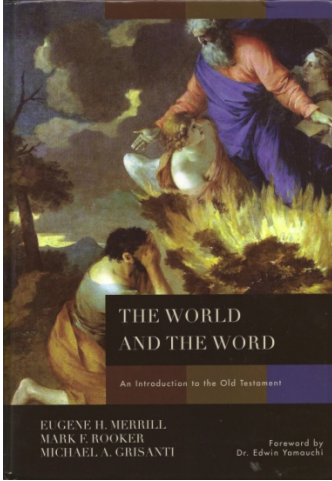
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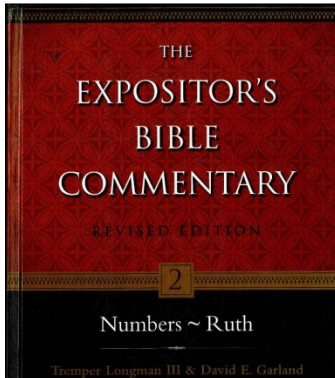
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FROM OLD TESTAMENT TEXT TO SERMON

Bryan Murphy, Th.D.
Associate Professor of Old Testament
The Master's Seminary

From a practical standpoint, the issue of Christ-centered preaching is not about whether it is appropriate or acceptable to relate the content or principles found in OT texts to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is fundamentally a question of whether every sermon needs to have Christ as the point of the message—regardless of the actual point of the text itself—in order to be true Christian preaching. This article seeks to demonstrate a number of biblically legitimate ways to preach the OT in a NT church context—thereby disproving the tenet that every message must have Christ as its point.

* * * * *

Introduction

How does one faithfully preach an Old Testament (OT) text in a New Testament (NT) church context? This question dominates this edition of *MSJ*. The simplest answer is, preach it in its context and then relate it to today. While this may seem clear to many, some evangelicals assert that the OT must be preached in a Christ-centered or Christocentric way in the NT church today. That is, Christ must be the point of every message preached from the OT in today's Christian context. Anything short of this is an unfaithful exposition. If this position is biblically correct, then anything less is wrong and needs to change.

In some contexts, it might prove beneficial to address the many and varied interpretations and applications that others have made for the Christ-Centered Preaching model.¹ But, the more profitable approach, in this writer's opinion, is to simply

¹ The best work following the Christ-Centered Preaching model is unquestionably the series done by Sidney Greidanus (e.g., Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). Bryan Chapell, an exceptional writer, thinker, evangelical, and proponent for Christ-centered preaching, describes Greidanus as “the dean of redemptive preaching and its finest scholar” (Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005, 13). Greidanus proves to be a gifted and faithful exegete. His works demonstrate the highest commitment to first finding the meaning of the text in its original context before seeking to bring Christ into the text. He is also characteristically honest in acknowledging

demonstrate from Scripture a number of different legitimate ways that one can preach OT passages in a NT church context. It is hoped this will demonstrate the fallacy that every OT message preached today must have Christ as its point.

The OT Was Written to Lead Us to Christ

Those who propose a Christocentric approach to preaching the OT in a NT church context are not wrong in a great many cases. The fallacy is that Christ must be *the* point of every passage. While it is true that He is not directly the point of every OT passage, He is most definitely the point of many OT texts. When He is, He should be preached as the point of the text today.

Jesus used the OT in many ways during the time of His earthly ministry. A number of these instances reveal that He frequently used it in what might well be equated to an evangelistic use—i.e., pointing people to Jesus as Messiah. Many of these uses demonstrate a model that is acceptable today.

Jesus used the OT to affirm His identity. Scripture records a miracle Jesus performed on the Sabbath that resulted in an intensification of persecution by the religious leaders (John 5:1–17). His response to their challenge, however, was even more controversial. He claimed equality with God the Father (John 5:17–18). In fact, He went so far as to claim to be the One the Father had appointed to render the final verdict over the living and the dead (John 5:19–29).

In order to affirm the veracity of these claims, Jesus brought forth several witnesses. The first was the miracles He performed (John 5:33–36). The many miracles Jesus did were a definitive and lasting testimony to His identity. No one could do the things Jesus did if God were not with Him. The best argument that His enemies could ever level against Him in this regard was that He did them through the power of Satan (Matt 12:22–24). Even then, Jesus demonstrated the irrationality of their argument (Matt 12:25–29). So the miracles Jesus did were a clear and credible witness to the fact that the Father had sent Him.

The second witness He brings forward is the Father's personal testimony (John 5:37–38). There are three specific occasions recorded in the Gospels when the Father spoke audibly affirming Jesus' identity. At His baptism, God affirmed the sinlessness and identity of Jesus as His Son (Matt 3:17). At the transfiguration, God affirmed the authority and identity of Jesus as His Son (Matt 17:5). In the Passion Week, God affirmed the glory of His Son (John 12:28). Jesus recognized the Father's verbal witness for what it was. But few others were there or discerning enough to hear it for what it was. It is very likely that only John the Baptist was witness to the first event. The inner-circle of disciples was the only group present for the second. The third was given in a very public context. Yet, even then, most heard only thunder. Some heard what they believed was an angel's voice. That is why Jesus says that His persecutors have neither heard the Father's voice nor seen Him at any time (John 5:37–38). For this reason, He brings forth one last witness—the OT Scriptures. He points to the

when Christ is not in a text. These aspects make his works useful even for those who do not agree with all his suggestions on how Christ can be brought into the exposition of a text. They also make his work one which could be debated on a point by point basis. But the approach of this current article seems more likely to further the discussion and make the case at this time.

books of Moses as those Scriptures that point to Him. He said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46). Jesus said that the OT specifically has portions of it that are directly written about Him. That means there are OT passages NT preachers can go to in order to point people directly to Jesus as well.

Jesus also used the OT to respond to His critics. Luke records a series of challenges brought against Jesus in His final days on earth by the scribes, chief priests, and Sadducees (Matt 21–22; Mark 12; Luke 20). He justifies His actions by citing Scripture (Matt 21:13), the actions of others (Matt 21:16), and ultimately the actions of God (Matt 21:42). He responds to the final assault by appealing directly to Scripture (Luke 20:37). When He silences the last of His attackers, He quotes from Psalm 110 in order challenge them. Jesus used the OT to justify His actions, respond to His critics, and confirm His identity. A NT preacher can do the same in pointing to Christ from OT texts when they fit the context.

Jesus even used the OT to illustrate and make His points. Jesus used the wickedness of Sodom as an illustration of just how inexcusable and eternally condemnable Capernaum's lack of repentance was (Matt 11:23–24). He used Jonah as a sign of His own pending death, burial, and resurrection (Matt 12:38–40). He used the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South as counter illustrations of repentance to the people of that generation (Matt 12:41–42).

Even after the resurrection, Jesus used the OT as the basis for both His earthly ministry and the apostolic ministry that was to follow (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47). When Jesus appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He started with the Pentateuch and then expanded His exposition into the rest of the OT in order to show that the Christ had to suffer all the things that had taken place that week. While that does not mean that Jesus is the point of every OT passage, it does mean that Christ can be found throughout the OT.² So, Jesus made use of the many passages that do point to Him, His earthly work, and His ministry in exposing the truth about the events pertaining to the Passion Week.

Later that day, Jesus appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem. He then affirmed to them that everything that had happened to Him was a fulfillment of what the OT said would happen. This was based upon His preaching for the whole of the OT—the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 22:44). NT preachers can likewise go back into the OT and find many passages that point to precisely these truths. From those OT passages, it is completely appropriate to preach Christ as the point and fulfillment of those texts.

Jesus went one step further with His disciples. He also said that the OT called for their future ministry as well. He said, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, *and that* repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46–47). So, a NT preacher can find passages in the OT that both reveal the ministry of Christ at the cross, and the mission to the Gentiles that would follow. NT preachers should preach that message when they handle those passages.

² For a full treatment of the exegetical fallacy that Christ is the point of every OT passage, see the previous article in this journal by Abner Chou.

The apostolic and early preaching in the NT is founded upon the OT Scriptures as well. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 is supported by texts Jesus used during His own preaching ministry. Paul's practice is described in Acts 17:1–3:

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."³

The three highlighted portions above demonstrate that it was Paul's regular practice to preach Christ from the OT. No doubt, he used many of the same texts that Jesus and His apostles did to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. The epistle to the Romans is possibly a good representation of the types of arguments and proofs these gospel presentations might have included. Regardless, Paul's habit was to use the OT to prove the gospel.

The OT is an inspired witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It was written in portions dating back to as many as 1,500 years before the incarnation. As such, it is a marvelously useful basis from which to preach the gospel in a NT church context. It can be used both to evangelize the lost and build up the faith of believers. Passages like Isaiah 53, which was written seven hundred years before the incarnation, demonstrate the sovereignty of God in accomplishing His plan of salvation in a way that goes beyond even NT passages. Jesus and His apostles readily used the OT to point people to Jesus as the Christ. Accordingly, any OT text that has an aspect of the person or work of Christ as its point is an appropriate text to preach Christ from in a NT church. But that is far from the only biblical way to preach from the OT today.

The OT Was Written to Encourage Us in Faith

Paul says the OT was written to teach believers (even in a NT context) how to live for God. In Romans 15:4, he states that, "whatever was written in earlier times [referring to the OT Scriptures] was written for *our* instruction [i.e., NT saints], so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." So, Christ is not the point of every passage. The OT was not just written for OT saints. The proper use of the OT includes an element of instruction in living for God. It was written to give hope to believers in contemporary contexts that comes from reading about God's acts in the past. That is, at least in part, why they were recorded in Scripture in the first place.

Hebrews 11 is frequently referred to as the "Faith Hall of Fame" because it puts together a composite lesson from several lives of faith from the OT as a means to exhort those in a NT age to live a life of faith like theirs. It exhorts NT saints to look

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations will be from the NAU.

forward to a future city whose maker and builder is God, just like their OT counterparts did. There are practical lessons that can be derived from a study of each of the OT saints mentioned in Hebrews 11. For that matter, the entire OT is an inspired record of men and women of faith who believed God, walked with God, gained the approval of God, and were made righteous by God, despite the fact that they fell short of the righteousness of God on their own. For the sake of this discussion, it should be enough to consider some of the many lessons and encouragements that could be derived from a study of Job—even just the first two chapters.

Job is introduced as a godly man of wealth, prosperity, family, and faith (Job 1:1–5). In particular, he is identified as being “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil” (1:1). At this point, the scene shifts to a day when the angelic host (angels and demons) were required to present themselves before God in heaven (1:6–7). What follows is a conversation between God and Satan that results in the first wave of calamities that comes upon Job. But what is most notable is the fact that it is God who brings up Job to begin with. What is more, He brings him up by identifying him as the most godly and devoted believer on the planet:

The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8).

Now, there are manifold points of interest that could be discussed here. But at least three significant lessons can already be derived from this passage that have great relevancy for believers in a NT age. First is the fact that Job was singled out for this trial by God, not by Satan. Second is the fact that Job was specifically chosen by God for this trial. But, it was not because he had done anything wrong. It was because he was doing everything right. Finally, the entirety of this information was inaccessible to Job.

Those three lessons alone can speak volumes to NT believers today. Even the most mature saints tend to view trials as the result of attacks from the outside, consequences of things they have done wrong, or lessons they need to learn. It is not uncommon to hear that even mature believers convey desires like, “I wish I could learn whatever it is God is trying to teach me, so this trial would end.” But one of the lessons that can be taught from this passage is trust. For mature and faithful believers, there may be times when God orchestrates a trial in this life that simply cannot be understood on this side of glory. What is more, it may well be that the current trial is so that God can put real faith on display—not just in this realm, but in the heavenly one. These types of lessons are imminently practical and utterly relevant for today’s saints.

Preaching messages like this from the OT connect NT believers to their heritage of faith, and equip them to live for God today. Every message preached from the OT should not have Christ as its main point, because Christ alone is not the whole counsel of God. A great deal of the OT is useful for practical instruction in living a life of faith—not to mention the many examples given in the OT.

The OT Was Written to Teach Us through Examples

Paul makes it very clear in his letters that there is much for NT believers to learn from the OT by way of example. In 1 Corinthians, for instance, Paul tells the church that there is a great need to exercise self-control in the Christian life. Just as athletes make great personal sacrifices to win a temporal award, so too believers need to live in order to secure eternal rewards (1 Cor 9:24–25). Paul himself—model Christian that he is—disciplines himself constantly so that he will not in the end be disqualified (1 Cor 9:26–27). Then, he turns to the OT in order to give an example of this straight from the books of Moses.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:1–5).

Paul begins by pointing out that the Israelites all shared the same experiences of God’s grace and deliverance at the exodus. They saw the same miracles. They experienced the same blessings. They saw the same evidences of God’s provision for them and presence with them. Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not well-pleased. In many respects, this is a monumental understatement since only Joshua and Caleb actually entered the promised land.

But most significant, as it relates to the subject of preaching the OT in a NT church context, is the point Paul makes in the text that follows.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.” Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty–three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor 10:6–11).

The “these things” Paul mentions are all the recorded incidents of God working with His people. It includes the many miracles as well as the various ways God rebuked, admonished, and even punished the Israelites from the exodus through the wilderness wanderings. Paul makes a point of saying that they “happened” as examples. In other words, God worked the way He did with that generation so that it would be an example for others to learn from. God does not work in obvious and miraculous ways every day or even every few generations. But He did work in deliberate obvious and even miraculous ways in that day specifically to provide an example for believers of all times to learn from.

Equally relevant to this discussion is the fact that Paul walks through four key texts from the OT and shows a lesson to be learned from each. In verse 7, the lesson to be learned is not to be an idolater (from Exodus 32). In verse 8, the lesson is on immorality (from Numbers 25). In verse 9, the lesson is on putting God to the test (from Numbers 21). In verse 10, the lesson is on grumbling (from Numbers 11, 16, 17). In each case, the point is clear. God hates sins like these. He demonstrated it objectively in that generation. That message is intended to ring loud and clear today as well. God judged severely those who committed fornication as well as grumbling and complaining. That is the same God believers worship today.

The reiteration in verse 11 of the point he made in verse 6 gives solid instruction to contemporary preachers on how the OT can be preached today. God acted demonstrably in that day as an example for all time to convey what He thinks about those types of behaviors and attitudes from His people. And, He had it included via inspiration in the pages of Scripture specifically so that it would instruct future generations. The generations Paul points out in particular are NT believers!

So, how can the OT be preached in a NT church context today? It is not just by preaching the excellencies of Christ and His person and work directly. It is also completely appropriate to preach OT passages like those referenced by Paul above in their historical context. Then, drawing implications and applications for a contemporary NT church congregation that help them understand better the character and nature of the God they worship and serve. In fact, one need only look at 1 Corinthians 10:12–13 to see both the doctrinal and practical way Paul applies this message to his own audience.⁴

These kinds of OT texts, preached in context, and then related by way of application and implication to today, are marvelous ways to equip the saints in NT church contexts today. Second Samuel 11 can be used to instruct today's church on what David did and what resulted. It can also be used as an example of how even a man after God's own heart today can set himself up for a major fall. The chapters that follow can be used not only to show how God dealt with David and preserved His nation, but also the temporal consequences of sin that will attend even a choice believer's life after a major moral failure. Many wonder why God let David live after he sinned so heinously. But, a study of the rest of 2 Samuel shows that God would not be mocked—even by David. He let David continue to live and reign in Israel so that he could be a lasting example of reaping the consequences of sin in this life. These implications merely scratch the surface of lessons one can find and share from OT texts in a NT church context.

⁴ It may also be worth mentioning that when Paul starts the discussion by saying he disciplines himself so that he will not be disqualified, his example rings with thoughts of Moses himself. Moses was the humblest man on the planet. He was God's chosen instrument of deliverance for His people. Yet, due to one sin, he too was excluded from entrance into the promised land. These are great messages to preach in a NT church context. If Paul was concerned about being disqualified based upon the lesson he learned from the example of Moses, how much more every believer in every church today?

The OT Was Written to Benefit Us Spiritually

Paul defined the role of pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11–12 as those given to the church for the purpose of “equipping the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” In other words, the preaching and teaching ministry of the church is not just evangelistic. It is equipping. The clear implication that can be drawn from Paul’s description of his own practices in Ephesus is that this work included “not shrinking from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The point is that Paul did not just preach the gospel. He also equipped the saints for the work of service.

The preaching ministry in the church today needs to equip the saints for ministry. A comparison of God’s expectations of the saints in Ephesians 4:11–16 with the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 is helpful in understanding this. Elders are expected to be able to: (1) know and live the truth; (2) teach the truth; and (3) refute those who contradict the truth (Titus 1:9). The church (including every member) is expected to know and live the truth (Eph 4:11–13) and to recognize error while continuing to function as part of the body (Eph 4:14–16). The responsibilities of the eldership are so much bigger than just getting the gospel right. God expects His church to be fully instructed in sound doctrine so that no errant teaching undermines either the unity of the church, the faith of the saints, or the work of the ministry. That is why preaching the OT in a NT church context is both essential and bigger than just preaching Christ as the point of every text.

Perhaps Paul makes this point best when he defines the two-fold role of Scripture in Timothy’s life and ministry. First, the Scriptures can point people to Jesus Christ and lead them to salvation.

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:14–15).

But, they are also useful in equipping the saints in living for God, discerning the truth, revealing sin, correcting beliefs and practices, and functioning in the body.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16–17).

While this passage is overflowing with significance, a few observations will suffice here. First, “all Scripture” includes all Scripture—OT and NT in their entireties. So, even in a NT church context, the OT is “profitable” or beneficial for the saints to hear and learn from. It is all equally breathed out by God. It is all equally authoritative, inerrant, and inspired. So, it is all worth preaching in a NT church context. Second, its usefulness includes four practical benefits: (1) It is useful for “teaching” or instruction. In other words, it can teach a believer about God, the things of God, the ways of God, how to live for God, and so much more. It is useful to instruct

believers on all doctrines, matters, and practices in the Christian life. (2) It is useful for “reproof” or rebuke. That is to say that it is useful to show a person where, how, and why they are wrong—biblically. It is useful to point out sin. (3) It is useful for ‘correction.’ Correction means to set something right either in the sense of restoring something that is broken or out of alignment, or improving something. Scripture can be used in a preaching ministry from either testament to do just that. (4) It is useful for “training.” Training or discipline here basically speaks of teaching how to put it all into practice. It is the ongoing regimen of discipline that results in a life lived for God. So, since this is what the Scriptures are profitable for, does it not then necessarily follow that this is how they should be preached in the church today?

Conclusion

It is hoped that this short essay has helped make the case for preaching the OT in a NT church context. There are so many valuable lessons that can be learned from a study of the whole counsel of God. Many of these lessons and truths are very much about the person and work of Jesus Christ. But every OT text does not have Christ as its point. That is the primary objection to the Christ-Centered Preaching model championed today. Even beyond those discussed above, the following represent some of the many and varied additional topics and purposes of the OT relevant for the NT church:

- Prophetic announcements which convey eschatological teaching (not limited to Christ)—especially those regarding Israel’s future
- Practical wisdom—especially from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes
- Identification of God’s character and actions—regarding both the Father’s and the Spirit’s works and character—not just Christ
- Identification of sin—especially from the Law of Moses, but throughout the OT
- Warning of error
- Confirmation of the historical accuracy of the OT (e.g., regarding creation and the Flood, etc.)

In the end, there are three real dangers to following the Christ-Centered model of preaching the OT today and preaching Christ as the point of every OT text. First, it models bad hermeneutics. It not only practices it, it models it. The saints who sit under a ministry like this will begin to follow those same practices. They will look to find Christ in every OT passage and fail to learn sound hermeneutical principles of letting the text speak for itself.

Second, it rejects the biblical model. In Luke 24, Jesus did walk through key texts in the OT to prove His death, burial, and resurrection. But that does not mean He was suggesting every text was about Him. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:2, preach the Word. He does not say, preach Christ. He says, preach the Word. As shown above, Scripture is useful for more than just pointing to the person and work of Christ. It is useful for everything from evangelism to practical Christian living (2 Tim 3:14–17).

Finally, it fails to fully equip the saints. In Ephesians 4, Paul clearly lays out the role of pastors and teachers. It is not just to evangelize the lost. It is to equip the saints for the work and build them up into a unity of faith and knowledge. This knowledge certainly includes a great deal of instruction on the person and work of Christ. But it extends to the whole counsel of God as well.⁵

How does one preach an OT text in a NT church context? Preach it in its biblical context and then relate it to the church today. If it points to Christ, make Christ the point of the message. If Christ is not the point of the text, then do not force it. There are many ways that NT believers can benefit from a faithful exposition from an OT text.

⁵ While it is beyond the scope of this article, it is also worth pointing out that a NT church service typically consists of more than just a sermon. That means that elements like a gospel presentation or invitation can be incorporated faithfully into the service in more ways than just the preaching event. Additionally, while there are likely always going to be unbelievers present in a NT church service, the purpose of the regular weekly assembly should be primarily geared to instructing believers in living for God, and facilitating believers in worshiping God corporately. Most services should not be primarily geared to addressing unbelievers about God. Christ should be exalted every service. But, the main focus should be on the saints of the church, not the visitors in the church on most Sundays.

CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING: AN OVERVIEW

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This overview offers a survey of the contemporary Christ-Centered Preaching movement (hereafter CCP), focusing on its: (1) profile, (2) proponents, and (3) alleged proofs for acceptance. Next, the unintended improprieties of this phenomenon are discussed with attention devoted to: (1) an improper use of hermeneutics, (2) an improper view of God, and (3) an improper view of Scripture. Finally, because Christ-centered preaching practiced properly reflects actual New Testament preaching examples, major New Testament emphases are explored. In conclusion, seven identifying characteristics of a biblically-directed, Christ-centered preacher are described.

* * * * *

Around 1985 I wrote a series of articles for a popular Christian periodical outlining proper and improper ways to interpret the Bible. One article warned against reading information into a biblical text and then drawing conclusions that were not really in the text. One example of this improper practice, called eisegesis, dealt with the Song of Solomon. I observed that, although many over the centuries concluded Christ was the Song's centerpiece, Christ was actually not to be found there. Weeks later, in the next issue, a letter to the editor scathingly rebuked me because I did not believe that Christ was to be found in every text of the Bible. That was this young pastor's initial introduction to the contemporary trend of "Christ-Centered Preaching."

Unfortunately, fielding the question "Do you believe in CCP?" is like responding to the classic manipulative question "Have you stopped beating your wife?" No matter what yes or no answer one gives, it will indict the respondent in the eyes of many. However, the issue lies not with the answers but rather with the questions. Unless they are framed with more detail, accurate yes or no answers cannot be rendered by the one being interrogated.

So let me frame the question thusly for the sake of the following discussion: "Do you believe that Christ should be preached from every text in Scripture that contains Old Testament, God-intended reference to Christ?" Of course, the answer is "Absolutely!" for any God-fearing, Bible-believing, justified-by-faith-alone Bible

expositor who desires to honor Christ and follow Paul’s unforgettable and undeniable testimony, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5).

The purpose of this article is to provide a brief introductory overview of CCP. This overview consists of three parts:

1. Overviewing Contemporary Practices of CCP
2. Overviewing Improper Practices of CCP
3. Overviewing Biblically-Based Practices of CCP

Overviewing Contemporary Practices of CCP

There is no one style of CCP. Many variations exist; therefore, the contemporary movement cannot be considered monolithic. The thoughts that follow—Profile, Proponents, and Proofs—represent a general summary derived from multiple sources.

Profile

Eight frequently mentioned characteristics form a general profile of the modern CCP movement:

1. The conviction that Christ is the central theme and person of Scripture.
2. A specialized CCP hermeneutic that goes beyond the normal historical-grammatical practice of interpretation to find Christ.
3. The entire Bible is Christian Scripture with an exclusive emphasis on the theological unity of the Bible at the neglect of its diversity.
4. Christ can be found in and should be preached from every text and passage of Scripture.
5. Typological and/or allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament are permitted/encouraged, even if not validated by the New Testament.
6. A “redemptive-historical” (*heilshistorisch*) derived theological grid or trajectory is the lens through which all of Scripture is to be viewed.
7. A CCP *sensus plenior* approach to interpretation is acceptable, even required.
8. A strong emphasis on preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

Proponents

By theological persuasion, CCP proponents with rare exception are Covenantalists. By denominational affiliation, they are usually, but not always, Presbyterian, Reformed Baptist, or Southern Baptist.

Because of their writings, the following authors/pastors are frequently thought of as representative leaders in the movement:

1. Bryan Chapell—formerly of Covenant Theological Seminary
2. Edmund Clowney—formerly of Westminster Theological Seminary
3. Graeme Goldsworthy—formerly of Moore Theological Seminary
4. Sidney Greidanus—formerly of Calvin Theological Seminary
5. James Hamilton—Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
6. Dennis Johnson—Westminster Seminary California
7. Tim Keller—Presbyterian pastor in New York City
8. David Murray—Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

Proofs

Proponents and practitioners almost always have a high-view of God and Scripture. Therefore, they undergird their preaching emphasis with a desire to exalt Christ and to be true to Scripture. The following six Bible texts represent the usual Scriptural support that allegedly proves the validity of CCP:

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place. And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we are hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us.

When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. And some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.” And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:13–27).

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations—beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:44–48).

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me (John 5:39).

For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness (1 Cor. 1:22–23).

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2).

For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor 4:5).

However, appropriate motives need to be accompanied by correct textual interpretations in order to consistently honor God and His Word with one’s preaching and teaching.

A quick review of direct Old Testament quotes in the New Testament (using UBS, 4th ed., GNT, 887–88 as a reference) yields some interesting facts:

1. There are 360 direct Old Testament quotes in the New Testament.
2. 24 of 39 Old Testament books are quoted in the New Testament (61.5%).
3. 87.8% of Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come from only 7 (17.9%) Old Testament books.

- Pentateuch 28.6%
- Psalms 43.9%
- Isaiah 15.3%

4. Only 12.2% of Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come from the remaining 17 (43.6%) quoted Old Testament books.

5. 15 of 39 Old Testament books are not quoted in the New Testament (38.5%).

That Christ is found in the Old Testament is not a recent discovery. That the vast majority of Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come from Moses, the Psalms, and Isaiah is not surprising either (see Luke 24:44). What is amazing is how few quotes, if any, come from 32 of 39 Old Testament books. If Christ is to be preached from every Old Testament text/passage, one would expect significantly more Old Testament quotes in the New Testament, where Christ is mentioned ca. 529 times and Jesus is used ca. 917 times.

Overviewing Improper Practices of CCP

CCP practitioners employ: (1) improper use of hermeneutics, (2) improper view of God, and (3) improper view of Scripture. For the vast majority, these improprieties are unintentional, but nonetheless real. An improper use of hermeneutics leads to an improper view of God and Scripture. If one's hermeneutical practices are improper, one's interpretation and exposition will be errant.

Improper Use of Hermeneutics

This is best illustrated with an introduction written by J. I. Packer:

What is covenant theology? The straightforward, if provocative answer to that question is that it is what is nowadays called a hermeneutic—that is, a way of reading the whole Bible that is itself part of the overall interpretation of the Bible that it undergirds.¹

Packer has used a theological-construct, i.e., covenant theology, to define his hermeneutic. If one starts with a theological system from which a hermeneutic is derived, then one will always conclude with the theological system. This represents an unambiguous case of circular reasoning.

¹ J. I. Packer, "Introduction: On Covenant Theology," in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, vol. 1 (1677; repr., Escondido, Calif.: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 1.

Actually, one should use the historical-grammatical approach to hermeneutics, which includes an emphasis on ‘single meaning’ and ‘authorial intent,’ to interpret individual texts whose sum defines a theological system. Neither a “redemptive-historical motif,” nor a “canonical context,” nor a “canonical *sensus plenior*” should be used to develop one’s hermeneutical approach to interpreting the Bible.²

Improper View of God

The vast majority of CCP practitioners do this unintentionally. Their motive of exalting Christ proves honorable, but their practice of “cutting it straight” falls short (cf. 2 Tim 2:15). Scripture is exclusively theocentric in a triune sense, not limited to Christ alone. To focus on CCP is in effect to ignore or seemingly demote God the Father and God the Spirit in importance. All three members of the Godhead are to be preached, not just one in isolation from the other two. To artificially inject Christ into every text/passage makes this error.

Improper View of Scripture

It is improper to interpret an Old Testament passage as though it is about Christ when in fact it is not. It is wrong to find types of Christ in the Old Testament that God did not intend. It is erroneous to find allegories in the Old Testament that God never intended. Daniel Block renders a straightforward, blunt assessment regarding these interpretive blunders. “It is exegetically fraudulent to try to extract from every biblical text some truth about Christ.”³

Put another way—it is an error of the first order to extract an errant interpretation from an inerrant Bible. The interpreter will be ashamed before God, not approved, regardless of how honorable the intent to exalt Christ.

Overviewing Biblically-Based Practices of CCP

Broad Biblical Instructions

Paul pointed the Roman church to the Old Testament for perseverance and encouragement that resulted in Christian hope (Rom 15:4):

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Paul exhorted the Corinthian church with Old Testament examples (1 Cor 10:6, 11):

² Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (1890; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950), 203–10.

³ Daniel Block in *Christ-Centered Preaching & Teaching*, ed. Ed Stetzer (Nashville, TN: LifeWay, 2013), 6.

Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. . . . Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Paul urged Timothy to preach the Old Testament for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16):

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

Christ in the New Testament

Of the 260 chapters comprising the New Testament, Christ is found in 251, which amounts to 96.5% of the New Testament. Christ can be found in every chapter in 23 of the 27 New Testament books.

Only 9 New Testament chapters do not refer directly to the Lord Jesus Christ:

- Acts 12, 27 (historical narratives)
- 1 Corinthians 13–14 (context of 1 Cor 12–14)
- 2 Corinthians 7 (historical reminder)
- Revelation 8–10, 18 (context of judgment)

This stands in bold contrast to the Old Testament. Christ is taught sporadically in the Old but thoroughly in the New.

Preaching Christ in the New Testament

Not only can Christ be found throughout the New Testament; moreover, Christ was preached throughout the New Testament. For example:

1. “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).
2. “And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35).
3. “But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).

4. “And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, ‘What would this idle babbler wish to say?’ Others, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,’—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18).
5. “But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches’” (Acts 19:13).
6. “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past” (Rom 16:25).
7. “But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23).
8. “Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor 15:12).
9. “For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us,—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him” (2 Cor 1:19).
10. “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5).
11. “To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood” (Gal 1:16).
12. “Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will.” (Phil 1:15).

Being a New Covenant Expositor

Three New Testament texts compare the “shadow” of truth in the Old Testament to the “substance” of truth in the New:

Shadow	Substance
Colossians 2:16-17	Colossians 2:17
Hebrews 8:4-5	Hebrews 8:6
Hebrews 10:1	Hebrews 10:1

Hebrews 8:7, 13 speaks of the Old Testament as the first covenant (cf. Heb 9:1, 15, 18; 10:9) that is now faulty and obsolete. However, Hebrews 8:8, 13; 12:24 refer to a better covenant, a new covenant which is new in time (Heb 12:24—*neos*) and new

in quality (Heb 8:8, 13; 9:5—*kainos*). The only reasonable conclusion to be reached is that Christ should be preached primarily and most frequently from the New Testament which is current in time and clear in quality because it reveals the clear substance, not the veiled shadow.

Augustine (A.D. 354–430) is frequently paraphrased as writing, “The New is in the Old contained—the Old is in the New explained.” While the general sense of this statement is true, it is noteworthy to read what Augustine actually wrote. Here are Augustine’s exact words:

This grace hid itself under a veil in the Old Testament, but it has been revealed in the New Testament according to the most perfectly ordered dispensation of the ages, forasmuch as God knew how to dispose all things. . . .by this very circumstance it might be signified that it was then the time for concealing the grace, which had to be revealed in the New Testament by the death of Christ—the rending, as it were, of the veil.⁴

The proper paraphrase should be, “The grace of God’s salvation in Christ is in the Old veiled, i.e., concealed, but in the New revealed, i.e., clear.” He speaks like the writer of Hebrews about the shadow, i.e., veiled truth in the Old Testament contrasted with the substance clearly revealed in the New Testament.

Questions

Any biblical expositor must pose and answer these questions to determine from which portions of Scripture he must preach in order to be an authentic Christ-centered preacher:

1. What about Christ is better explained in the Old Testament than in the New Testament?
2. What doctrine relating to salvation, sanctification, and glorification is better explained in the Old Testament than in the New Testament?
3. Why preach a veiled view of Christ from the Old Testament when one can preach a clearly revealed Christ from the New Testament?
4. If Christ would have preached about Himself on earth after the New Testament had been written, would He have primarily preached from the Old or the New Testament?

From a biblical perspective and a logical point of view, the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn is that today’s expositor must preach Christ primarily from the New Testament.

⁴ Augustine, “Anti-Pelagian Writings,” in *NPNF-1*, vol. 5, chaps. 27, 95.

A Final Word

The following basic descriptions should characterize the scriptural, Christ-centered expositor:

1. He acknowledges the eternity of Christ, which extends from eternity past through time and into eternity future.
2. He avoids hermeneutical practices driven by theological constructs.
3. He employs a triune emphasis in understanding the persons of the God-head.
4. He commits to a historical-grammatical hermeneutic that emphasizes original authorial intent.
5. He treasures being a New Covenant expositor.
6. He freely uses the Old Testament in general for appropriate examples and illustrations.

When preaching Christ from the Old Testament, he primarily does so from the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and Isaiah, as did the New Testament authors.

ISRAEL'S REPENTANCE AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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The exact timing of Jesus' return and the kingdom of God is known only to God. Yet in His sovereignty God has determined that the return of Jesus the Messiah is closely linked with the repentance of national Israel. This article examines both Old and New Testament texts that reveal a close connection between Israel's repentance and the coming kingdom of God.

* * * * *

Introduction

This article examines the connection between national Israel's repentance and the kingdom of God. The argument promoted here is that the kingdom's coming to earth is connected with and contingent upon Israel's repentance.¹ God is sovereign over all matters, and His universal kingdom extends over all, yet He has determined that the arrival of the mediatorial kingdom² on earth is connected with Israel's turning from sin and unbelief. This position, that the kingdom's timing is related to national Israel's repentance, is not popular and is often rejected. For example, the amillennial theologian, Kim Riddlebarger states, "But the New Testament knows nothing of a kingdom offered and kingdom withdrawn according to the whims of unbelieving Israel."³ Yet the biblical evidence for the kingdom's arrival being related to Israel's repentance is strong, with multiple passages in both testaments supporting it. This is an oft-neglected truth, even among those who affirm a future for national Israel. Yet it is an important part of the Bible's storyline.

¹ By contingency we mean that certain conditions must occur before an event can happen.

² By mediatorial we mean the God-intended reign of man on earth for God's glory fulfilling the rule and subdue mandate of Genesis 1:26–28.

³ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 103.

Contingency and Nations (Jeremiah 18:1–11)

Jeremiah 18 addresses the concept of contingency concerning God's dealing with nations. This chapter reveals and emphasizes both God's sovereignty and His varied responses to nations based on their actions toward Him:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make (Jer 18:1–4).

The potter and clay analogy emphasizes God's sovereignty and the Creator's superiority and control over His creatures. This analogy is an important part of Paul's argument in Romans 9 where Paul explains God's sovereignty with His saving purposes (Rom 9:20–23). Then the potter and clay analogy is related to Israel:

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it. So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds"' (Jer 18:5–11).

Particularly important is the statement that God might declare calamity upon a nation, yet if that nation repents of its evil then God will "relent concerning the calamity" He predicted for that nation (vv. 7–8). In other words, if a nation repents, God will not bring the predicted judgment upon that nation at that time. Likewise, God might speak of blessing for a nation, yet if that nation does evil in God's sight, then God will not bring blessing. So then, *by God's sovereign design the response of a nation can influence God's dealings with that nation*. As Toussaint observes in regard to Jeremiah 18, "Here the response of a nation to God's prophecy may affect its future."⁴

One clear example of this principle is found in Jonah. The prophet Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days—"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jon 3:4). But the people of Nineveh and their king "believed in

⁴ Stanley Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, eds. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 225.

God” and repented (Jon 3:5–9). As a result, God relented concerning his judgment upon them: “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” (Jon 3:10). Judgment was predicted for Nineveh in forty days, yet Nineveh repented and justice was delayed.

Compare the principle in Jeremiah 18 with what occurs in Jonah 3:

Jeremiah 18:8: “if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.”

Jonah 3:10: “When God saw their [Nineveh’s] deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” (Jon 3:10).

This is a case where national repentance connected with a major city (Nineveh) delayed God’s judgment.

On multiple occasions the OT prophets declared that national repentance on Israel’s part would bring kingdom blessings and reinstatement to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant:

Leviticus 26:40–45:

“If they [Israel] confess their iniquity . . .”

“Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob . . . and I will remember the land.”

Jeremiah 3:12–18:

““Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD . . .”

“Then I will give you . . . (shepherds to feed, prosperity in the land, God’s presence, nations coming to Jerusalem, unification of Israel)”

2 Chronicles 7:13–14:

“If . . . My people . . . humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways . . .”

“then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Note the cause and effect relationship above. If Israel repents then God blesses Israel. These passages assume Israel’s disobedience and consequences for covenant betrayal. But hope exists. If Israel repents then kingdom blessings will arrive and a reversal of negative circumstances will occur. This includes spiritual salvation and physical prosperity, including the land.

The concept of contingency resurfaces again in Jeremiah 4:1–2, but this time concerning what Israel's repentance means for the nations. Israel's repentance will lead to blessings for the nations:

“If you will return, O Israel,” declares the LORD . . .”

“then the nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will glory.”

This reaffirms the truth of Genesis 12:2–3 and 22:18 that God's plans are mediated through the nation Israel, but they also extend to Gentile nations. God's blessing of Israel results in the blessing of the world (Isa 27:6). So Israel needs to know that their obedience or disobedience affects others as well as themselves. In this case Israel's repentance can lead to blessings for the nations. This is something Paul explicitly states in Romans 11:12, 15 where Israel's belief leads to greater blessings for the world:

Now if their [Israel's] transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their [Israel's] fulfillment be! (Rom 11:12).

For if their [Israel's] rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their [Israel's] acceptance be but life from the dead? (Rom 11:15).

Contingency and the Kingdom (Leviticus 26)

Leviticus 26 discusses the relationship between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants and predicts consequences to Israel for both obedience and disobedience. This chapter also reveals how Israel can once again experience the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant after judgment and dispersion.

Verses 1–13 promise blessings for obedience. If Israel obeys God's commandments the people will be blessed in every way. They will experience national prosperity including abundant rain and harvests. The people will not fear wild animals or hostile people groups. They will also enjoy God's special presence—“I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (26:12). In short, obedience to the Mosaic law will keep Israel connected to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

Yet Leviticus 26 also spells out devastating curses for disobedience (26:14–39). These include a reversal of all the blessings described in Leviticus 26:1–13. This also involves removal from the land of promise and dispersion to the nations:

“But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you. So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies. . . .” (Lev 26:38–39).

In short, disobedience to the law means removal from the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. The warning concerning removal from the land and captivity to other nations is shocking. After all, the people were dramatically rescued from captivity in Egypt. Would captivity really happen again? And would God do this to His people, Israel? Yes. Israel would not be exempt from punishment for disobedience. As Barrick rightly notes, “The nation’s apathy toward Yahweh and His covenants would result in God making them landless again. In order to cure their selective amnesia, Yahweh would return them to the bondage from which He had delivered them.”⁵

But Israel’s encounter with captivity will not be permanent. Divine retribution has the goal of repentance. Verses 40–45 offer a conditional element that, when satisfied, leads to a reversal of Israel’s banishment to the nations. This section assumes a coming dispersion of Israel to the nations. But God declares that “if” the people repent and come to Him in faith, then He will restore Israel and place them again in the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant:

“If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me—I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies—or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land” (Lev 26:40–42).

The return to blessing does not happen automatically. Israel must repent with a humble and contrite heart. There needs to be national repentance and acknowledgement that not only the current generation sinned, but those before sinned, too. If Israel does this God will remember His covenant with Abraham. This return to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant includes “the land” which God remembers to give Israel (v. 43). Just as the consequences of Israel’s disobedience involve dispersion to other lands, repentance will lead to restoration in the land of promise. To compare (→ = “results in”):

Israel’s disobedience → Israel being taken captive in the land of their enemies

Followed by:

Israel’s repentance → Israel returning to the land of promise

The reason there must be a restoration of Israel to the promised land is because God must be faithful to His promises of the Abrahamic covenant:

⁵ William D. Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 16:1 (Spring 2005): 99. Brueggemann states, “It is hard enough for landed people to believe land will be lost. It is harder to imagine Yahweh will do it.” Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 113.

“Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD” (Lev 26:44–45).

If God were to leave Israel in permanent dispersion this would mean God broke His unconditional covenant with Abraham. But that cannot happen. Instead, God will “remember” His covenant with Israel’s ancestors and bring Israel back to the promised land. That God connects this promise with what He did for Israel is also important. As Barrick points out, “The Land-Giver and Exodus-Causer will always be loyal to His covenants and to His covenant people.”⁶

Paul will later reaffirm God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel in Romans 11. After declaring that a day is coming when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26), he ties this with God’s faithfulness: “but from the standpoint of God’s choice they [Israel] are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:28b–29). Paul’s statement concerning God’s faithfulness to Israel coincides with what God promised in Leviticus 26.

Looking to the future, the question must be asked, “Is Israel’s repentance a precondition to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom?” The answer is, Yes. “The restoration of Israel from worldwide dispersion will depend upon repentance (cf. Jer 3:11–18; Hos 5:13–6:3; Zech 12:1–10).”⁷ Arnold Fruchtenbaum argues that “confession of Israel’s national sin” is “a major precondition that must be met before Christ will return to establish the Messianic Kingdom.”⁸ This backdrop helps with understanding the significance of Jesus’ declaration, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). Jesus will call for national repentance which is necessary for the arrival of the kingdom.

Deuteronomy 4:25–31 and 30:1–10

Both Deuteronomy 4 and 30 expand upon Moses’ words in Leviticus 26. With Deuteronomy 4:25–28, God predicted that future generations of Israel would disobey God’s commands and be dispersed to the nations in judgment. But 4:29–31 declared that repentance would lead to restoration in the latter days:

But from there [the nations] you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD

⁶ Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” 97.

⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1989), 784, 781. Saucy writes, “This restoration is conditioned on the confession and humbling of the hearts of the people, but the final outcome is assured.” Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 222.

your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.

While this section does not explicitly offer an “If . . . then” scenario, one is implied. Israel’s volitional choice to disobey God will be the reason for dispersion to the nations. Likewise seeking the Lord and searching for Him will be a volitional choice as well. Turning to the Lord (“return”) will mean a reconnection with the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

What was predicted in in Leviticus 26:40–45 and Deuteronomy 4:25–31 is expanded upon in Deuteronomy 30:1–10. We start with verses 1–5:

“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.”

Israel’s dispersion to the nations will be reversed if/when “you return to the Lord” (v. 2). When that occurs “then” (v. 3) God “will restore” Israel from captivity and bring the people into the land. God will cause them to prosper. While the word “kingdom” is not mentioned, these are clearly kingdom conditions.

Verse 6 is significant since Israel’s choice to “return” to the Lord for kingdom blessings, is because of God’s enabling: “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” This promise anticipates the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34, which also stresses the giving of a new heart by God as the basis for covenant blessings. God will circumcise Israel’s heart so that the people can love and obey God as they should. Deuteronomy 30, therefore, covers both sides of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. Israel will turn to God in repentance and faith, yet as they do so it is because God changes their hearts. Verses 8–9 further describe kingdom blessings for Israel as a result of their repentance:

And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers.

Jeremiah 3:12–18

Jeremiah 3:12–18 foretells a coming united Israel that will experience kingdom blessings as a result of turning to the Lord. God sent Jeremiah with a message to the northern kingdom of Israel that was taken captive by the Assyrians: “Return, faithless Israel,” declares the LORD; “I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious” (3:12). The term “return” (*shub*) means repentance. Thus, the condition for forgiveness was repentance. Israel needed to acknowledge its iniquities and admit it “transgressed against the LORD” (3:13).⁹ If Israel does this the LORD will take the people from the cities where they were scattered and “bring you to Zion” (3:14). Kingdom conditions for Israel are contingent on Israel turning back to the Lord.

That Jeremiah discusses future times is evident by the words “in those days” (3:16) and “at that time” (3:17). Verse 16 promises two things for Israel. First, Israel will be “multiplied and increased in the land.” So God plans for Israel to experience physical blessings in its homeland. Second, there will be no need for the ark of the covenant—“They shall say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ And it shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, nor shall it be made again” (3:16). The ark represented the presence of God, yet in the future the presence of God will be with His people even more directly. Also, this shows a transition in the last days away from the Mosaic covenant to the New Covenant (see Jer 31:31–34). Since the New Covenant replaces the Mosaic Covenant, there is no more need for the prestigious ark representing the old covenant.¹⁰

The kingly nature of this period is clear since Jerusalem will be called “The Throne of the Lord” (3:17). But this kingdom is not just for Israel since Jeremiah says, “all the nations will be gathered to it” (3:17). Again this shows Israel’s kingdom is not just for Israel but for all nations that walk by the ways of the Lord. Israel is a means for blessing the nations and is not an end in itself. This kingdom period will be characterized by heart obedience since the people will no longer walk by their stubborn hearts (3:17).

Harmony in Israel characterizes this period as “the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance” (3:18). For the first time since Solomon’s reign, Israel will be united and the tribes will be at peace with each other. This unification is in the “land” God promised to Israel’s fathers. Even after division and dispersion of the tribes of Israel the expectation of a literal land is still part of Israel’s hope. After captivity the prophets still speak of a future land for Israel.

In sum, this passage shows that temporary judgment for disobedience does not mean God is done with the nation Israel. Blessings will come to Israel, yet these blessings are contingent on Israel’s repentance.

⁹ “While God offers to allow Israel to return (vv. 12, 14), the offer does carry conditions (v. 13). Guilt and covenant disobedience need to be acknowledged, and Israel’s return needs to be with ‘her whole heart.’” John Martin Bracke, *Jeremiah 1–29*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 39.

¹⁰ Kaiser says, “The Ark of the Covenant, traditionally the throne of God, would now be replaced by Jerusalem, the new throne of God.” Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Evidence from Jeremiah,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 107.

Israel's Repentance Leads to Blessings for the Nations (Jeremiah 4:1–2)

Contingency resurfaces in Jeremiah 4:1–2. Whereas, Jeremiah 3:12–18 emphasized kingdom blessings for Israel if national repentance transpired, Jeremiah 4 reveals that Israel's repentance will lead to blessings for the nations:

“If you will return, O Israel,” declares the LORD . . .”

“then the nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will glory.”

This reaffirms the truth of Genesis 12:2–3 and 22:18 that God's plans include the nation Israel, but they also extend to Gentile nations. Israel needs to know that their obedience or disobedience affects others as well as themselves. In this case, Israel's repentance can lead to the salvation of the Gentiles.

Hosea

Israel's repentance leading to the kingdom also is taught in Hosea. Hosea 3:4–5 explicitly states that Israel will go for many days without a king but then repent and experience God's blessings:

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.

Hosea 5:15–6:1 also has implications for Israel's repentance and the kingdom:

“I will go away and return to My place
Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”
Come, let us return to the LORD.
For He has torn us, but He will heal us;
He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

Together, this passage (Hos 5:15–6:1–3) indicates that acknowledgement of guilt (repentance) and seeking God's face (belief) during a time of affliction will lead to God's favor and blessing for Israel. The statement, “I will go away and return to My place,” could refer to the Messiah who returns to heaven after a time on earth. This would coincide with the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus came to Israel presenting the kingdom. Yet the people did not believe (see Matt 11:20–24). Jesus returned to heaven until the time of Israel's national repentance (see Matt 23:37–39; Acts 3:19–21).

“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:5)

The theme of Israel's repentance being connected with the kingdom is found in the New Testament. The message of Jesus and John the Baptist can be summarized in one statement—“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”:

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:1–2).

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17).

The apostles also preached the nearness of the kingdom in relation to Israel's repentance:

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 10:5–7).

While Matthew 10:5–7 does not mention “repent,” repentance was part of the message. For in Matthew 11:20 we are told, “Then He [Jesus] began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.” So the message of the kingdom to the cities of Israel was offered with repentance as a necessary condition.

The prophesied kingdom was on the brink. The words “at hand” mean the kingdom was impending. The kingdom was near so Israel needed to be ready; the people needed to repent. It would not be bestowed simply based on ethnicity. Repentance was the prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom. With John 3:3 Jesus declared, “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” While there is a close relationship between salvation and the kingdom, the two are not the same thing. We cannot say “salvation is the kingdom,” or “the kingdom is salvation.” The kingdom of God is a broader concept than human salvation. One must be saved in order to enter the kingdom. Thus, *salvation is the qualification for entrance into the kingdom.*

The statement, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” is reliant upon the informing theology of passages like Leviticus 26:40–45; Deuteronomy 4:25–31; Deuteronomy 30:1–10; Jeremiah 3:12–18; Jeremiah 4:1–2; and 2 Chronicles 7:13–14, namely that Israel's repentance brings Israel's restoration to Abrahamic covenant blessings and the kingdom of God. The word “Repent” coincides with the Hebrew term—“return (*shub*). Thus, the call to repent for the kingdom is at hand is a call to Israel to return to the Lord so they can experience kingdom blessings.¹¹

¹¹ The kingdom's nearness is linked to the person of Jesus the Messiah who is the King standing in their midst (see Luke 17:20–21).

Leviticus 26:40–45
Deuteronomy 4:25–31
Deuteronomy 30:1–10 → Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7 “Repent for kingdom is near”
Jeremiah 3:12–18
Jeremiah 4:1–2
2 Chronicles 7:13–14
Hosea 3; 5:15–16

Consequences for Missing Visitation (Luke 19:41–44)

Luke 19:41–44 is strategic for understanding the relationship of Israel’s repentance to the kingdom program. As Jesus approached Jerusalem, He announces consequences for Israel’s unbelief. Matthew 11:20–24 revealed that the cities of Israel had not repented. Matthew 12 showed that the leaders of Israel rejected Jesus the King, attributing His miracles to Satan (Matt 12:24). As a result, Israel’s refusal to repent and believe in Jesus meant the kingdom would not be established at this time. Instead, judgment for Israel was impending. Verse 41 states: “When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it.” As Jesus approached Jerusalem eastward from the Mount of Olives for the short remainder of the travel to Jerusalem He was sorrowful. Verses 42–44 tell us why:

[Jesus] saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

Jesus weeps for Israel like a parent weeping for a lost or wayward child, since Israel’s rejection of Messiah will result in terrible consequences.

Jesus declares the significance about “this day”: “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace” (v. 42). The reference to “this day” is emphatic and reveals something unique about this day. This day had the potential to bring “things which make for peace.” Kingdom blessings most probably are in view. This “peace” must be more than just individual salvation since Jesus is addressing the nation of Israel as a whole. Plus, the *consequences* for unbelief here are national and physical. It will be a disastrous destruction of the city, a calamity that would occur in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. So if the consequences for unbelief are national and physical, so too must the offer of blessings be national and physical as well.¹²

¹² “In Luke’s mind, this would have meant primarily equity among all people (1:48–53), a change of government (1:52 cf. 19:38), a fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy (4:21), restitution by the rich (3:10–14 cf. 18:22) and a reversal of social roles (cf. 22:24–27).” McGlory Speckman, “The Kairos behind the Kairos Document: A Contextual Exegesis of Luke 19:41–44,” *Religion & Theology* 5.2 (1998): 214.

Jesus declared that peace could have come to Israel. Instead, peace will be “hidden” and judgment will come. Enemies will surround Jerusalem and destroy the city. Why?—“because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.” Israel’s visitation was the appearance of her Messiah and the kingdom He presented. Yet Israel did not respond properly. Salvation and restoration were before her, but she refused.¹³

So how does Luke 19:41–44 relate to the kingdom of God? Previously, Jesus revealed the kingdom would not be established until he travelled to a distant country (heaven) and then returned (Luke 19:11–27). Now we are told there could have been “peace.” Peace here refers to the kingdom blessings promised in the OT. Of course, spiritual salvation would be at the heart of this peace, but this peace would include security and prosperity for Jerusalem and Israel. Physical peace and prosperity for belief must be in view because of the opposite consequences now facing Jerusalem because of unbelief. Since Israel rejected her Messiah, the consequences would be a literal destruction of the city. Thus, just as there would be a literal destruction of the city of Jerusalem for unbelief, there could have been peace and security for Jerusalem if the Jewish people accepted their Messiah. To put it another way:

- National belief could lead to national peace.
- National unbelief will lead to national catastrophe.

In sum, Luke 19:41–44 reveals that Jesus presented kingdom blessings to the people of Israel. These blessings were linked with their acceptance of the King. This must be the case because Jesus wept over Israel’s choice and the consequences for Israel rejecting Him. Israel is held responsible for not accepting the Messiah. As McClain asserts, “The historic fact that Israel did not receive Him, however, subtracts nothing from the reality of the offer and the divinely imposed obligation.”¹⁴ Yet as Brent Kinman points out, the judgment of Luke 19:41–44 is not permanent: “Jesus’ announcement at 19:41–44 need not represent a definitive or final break between God and Israel—as in the Old Testament, the aim of chastisement visited upon Jerusalem is restoration.”¹⁵ As terrible as the coming judgment will be, hope for the nation remains (see Luke 21:24b).

Hope for Jerusalem in the Midst of Judgment (Matt 23:37–39)

Coming off His eight woes to the religious leaders of Israel, Jesus presents a picture of both judgment and hope for Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37–39. Jesus rebukes

¹³ Some scholars have postulated that “this day” and “visitation” is connected with the fulfillment of the Daniel 9:25 prophecy where Messiah the Prince is predicted to come to Israel at the end of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel. Harold Hoehner claims that the sixty-ninth week of Daniel expired exactly on the day of the Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. If this is the case, “this day” could have prophetic significance back to Daniel 9. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

¹⁴ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 353.

¹⁵ Brent Kinman, *Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem in the Context of Lukan Theology and the Politics of His Day* (New York: Brill, 1995), 132.

the people of Jerusalem for killing the prophets. This was tragic since Jesus, in tenderness, stated that He wanted to gather the Jewish people “the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” This again shows that Jesus presented a genuine offer of blessing to the Jewish people. The problem, though, rested with obstinate Israel — “You were unwilling” (Matt 23:37). This unwillingness points to Israel’s volitional refusal to believe in Christ and parallels Jesus’ statement in Luke that Israel missed its “time of visitation” (Luke 19:44).

Because Israel killed the prophets and now was rejecting the Messiah, destruction would come: “Behold your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt 23:38). Like Luke 19:41–44, this too is a prediction of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its temple that would occur in A.D. 70.

Jesus’ next statement is strategic concerning the kingdom program and Israel’s place in it. This judgment for Israel’s unbelief will someday be reversed: “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’” This statement has been understood in three ways. The first is that the declaration of “Blessed is He . . .” is a cry of a reluctant and unsaved Israel at the time of its judgment. Allegedly, Israel will be forced to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. John Calvin stated, “He [Jesus] will not come to them [the Jews] until they cry out in fear—too late—at the sight of His Majesty.”¹⁶

But this view is unnecessarily pessimistic. As Graham Stanton points out, “the difficulty with this interpretation is that Ps. 118:26 which is cited in Matt. 23:39 is surely an expression of joyful praise rather than of fear or mourning.”¹⁷ Jesus quotes Ps 118:26a, which is hopeful concerning Israel’s relationship to God. The last part of Ps 118:26 states, “We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.” This is a happy and willing declaration from people who know the Lord, not the words of a reluctant group on their way to judgment. Craig Evans points out that “The rabbis understood Ps 118:26 in reference to the day of redemption.”¹⁸ This negative judgment view also is in conflict with various Scripture passages like Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 11:26–27 which speak of a coming, positive response of the nation Israel to her Messiah.

A second view is that Jesus’ words are an unqualified, straightforward prediction of Israel’s salvation in a coming day. While the current generation had not believed and was facing national calamity, a coming generation of Israel will cry out in embracement of her Messiah. Craig S. Keener notes the hope in this passage:

This passage reminds us that God does not forget his promises to his people. . . . Matthew places it among the woes of coming judgment, but in so doing transforms this into a promise of future hope. . . . Israel’s restoration was a major theme of the biblical prophets and reappeared at least occasionally in early

¹⁶ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke, and James and Jude*, vol. 3, trans. A.W. Morrison, (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1972), 71.

¹⁷ Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 249.

¹⁸ Craig Evans, “Prophecy and Polemic: Jews in Luke’s Scriptural Apologetic,” in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke–Acts*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 179, n. 33.

Christianity (Rom 11:26), though the emphasis of early Christian apologetic came to focus on the Gentile mission.¹⁹

This view has more going for it than the first. Other passages of Scripture predict a future salvation and restoration of Israel. But there is another perspective, a third option that fits even better. This is the conditional coming view. With this, Israel believes and then Jesus comes. In his study of Matt 23:39 and Luke 13:35b, Dale Allison argues that Jesus' words include a "conditional" element and are more than an unqualified and straightforward declaration of salvation for Israel.²⁰ Yes, the deliverance of Israel would occur. But there is a conditional element to this statement that highlights the importance of Israel's belief as a condition for Jesus' return and kingdom blessings. This view does more justice to the context. Judgment for unbelief is probably not followed by an unconditional statement of salvation but a call for belief so that Israel can experience Jesus' return. As Allison puts it:

The text then means not, when the Messiah comes, his people will bless him, but rather, when his people bless him, the Messiah will come. In other words, the date of the redemption is contingent upon Israel's acceptance of the person and work of Jesus.²¹

Allison's point is not that Jesus comes first and then Israel believes. Rather Jesus' coming is contingent on Israel's acceptance of Jesus. He offers several reasons for this contingency perspective. The first is that "belief in the contingency of the time of the final redemption is well-attested in Jewish sources of the second century and later."²² Second, the word "until" (*eos*) "can indicate a contingent state in Greek sentences in which the realization of the apodosis is dependent upon the realization of the protasis."²³ This means the Greek term *eos* "is not simply temporal" as in the sense of "until" but "properly conditional," more in the sense of "unless."²⁴ Thus, the people of Jerusalem will not see Jesus "unless/until" they say "Blessed is He . . ." Third, Allison holds that the structure of Matthew 23:39 "argues for the conditional interpretation."²⁵ He points out that several Jewish eschatological passages carry a conditional element along with an eschatological event. The structure is:

(a) statement about the messianic advent with adverbial particle of negation attached ("The Son of David will not come")

¹⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 341.

²⁰ Dale C. Allison Jr., "Matt. 23:39 = Luke 13:35b As a Conditional Prophecy," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983): 81.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

²² *Ibid.* He lists many examples in pages 77–78.

²³ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

(b) conditional particle (עַד)

(c) condition to be met (in Israel) for fulfillment of the messianic advent (e.g., “no conceited men in Israel”)²⁶

He then points out that Matthew 23:39 (along with Luke 13:35b) “can be analyzed as having precisely the same structure”:

(a) statement about the messianic advent with adverbial particle of negation attached (“You will not see me,” “me” being Jesus, the Messiah)

(b) conditional particle (εως)

(c) condition to be met (in Israel) for fulfillment of the messianic advent (those in Jerusalem utter, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” and thereby acknowledge the person and work of Jesus)²⁷

Allison then summarizes this point: “It therefore appears that the synoptic verse sets forth, in a traditional fashion, a condition for the great redemption.”²⁸

Fourth, Allison argues that the conditional view avoids the “pitfalls” of the other two options and is a better fit contextually. A permanent rejection of Israel does not fit the context of Matthew or the Bible. Also, an unqualified statement of future salvation is not satisfactory because just as there was a volitional rejection of Jesus, there must be a willing acceptance of Him to experience the blessings of His return.

Thus, the better view is the “contingency” perspective in which Israel’s restoration is based on Israel’s belief in Jesus. As Allison states, “For Jesus affirms that, if she will, Jerusalem can, in the end, bless in the name of the Lord the one who will come, and her doing so, that is, her repentance, will lead to deliverance.”²⁹

Matthew 23:39, predicts a future salvation and deliverance of Israel. This coincides with another truth that Jesus’ return is linked with Israel’s belief in Him. The abandonment of Jerusalem by Jesus will come to an end “when Jerusalem genuinely understands Ps. 118:26, the text shouted by the crowd at the triumphal entry.”³⁰ Just as sinful rebellion against God’s Messiah will result in terrible judgment, so too, embracement of the Messiah will lead to blessings and reversal of judgment. Contingency in Matt 23:39 does exist. As Charles H. Talbert concludes in regard to this verse, “When his [Jesus’] people bless him, the messiah will come (cf. Acts 3:19–21). The date of redemption for the Matthean Jesus, then, is *contingent* on Israel’s acceptance of him.”³¹

²⁶ Ibid. On this page he offers several such examples.

²⁷ Ibid., 78–79.

²⁸ Ibid., 80.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Turner, *Matthew*, 561.

³¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, in *Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 260. Emphasis is mine.

Israel's Belief and the Coming of the Kingdom in Acts 3:12–26

Acts 3:12–26 discusses the relationship of Israel to the return of Christ and the kingdom after Jesus' ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. This section also lays out what McClain has rightly called “the official reoffer of the Messiah and His Kingdom.”³²

The healing of a lame beggar at the temple by Peter led to the apostle addressing the “Men of Israel” (Acts 3:12). Because of the Feast of Pentecost, many Jews were present in Jerusalem, including the same Jewish leadership that put Jesus to death (see Acts 4:1, 6). The setting of Jerusalem, the temple, the Jewish people, and the Jewish leadership make this address by Peter an event with national implications.

Peter states that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made Jesus His Servant, and this Jesus has fulfilled the OT prophecies concerning His suffering (see 3:13, 18). But Peter tells the Jewish audience that they “disowned the Holy and Righteous One” and “put to death the Prince of life” (3:13–15). It is this same Jesus who gave “perfect health” to the lame beggar (3:16).

What follows next is important. Peter does not proclaim irreversible judgment for Israel's rejection of her Messiah. Instead, he softens his accusation by saying that the people and leaders of Israel “acted in ignorance” (3:17). What he offers now is a second chance or offer to believe in the Messiah and receive the kingdom:

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:19–21).

This section speaks of cause and effect situations. Peter calls on the Jews to “repent and return.” His call is similar to the calls from the OT prophets for rebellious Israel to repent. And it is a summons to salvation. The leaders are encouraged to turn from their sins and believe in Jesus the Messiah, whom they have rejected so far.³³ If they do, something positive will happen. The words “so that” (*prōs ta*) indicate purpose. Repentance will lead to sins being “wiped away.” Thus, Israel's acceptance of Jesus the Messiah will lead to the removal of sins. More than just individual sins and repentance are in view here. The national sin of rejecting the Messiah must be reversed by national repentance.

But Peter does not stop there. Forgiveness is not the only result of repentance. Peter then mentions “in order that” (*hopōs an*), which indicates another purpose is in mind. Repentance leads to forgiveness but then forgiveness of sins leads to something called “the times of refreshing,” which results from the Lord's presence (3:19).

³² McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 403.

³³ The sins to be wiped away probably include both individual sins and the corporate sin of rejecting the Messiah.

This phrase, “times of refreshing,” which occurs only here in the NT, involves the ideas of rest and refreshment. In this context it refers to an eschatological refreshment from God. There is some debate concerning what this “times of refreshing” is and when it occurs. Some see “times of refreshing” as forgiveness of sins and the experience of the Holy Spirit in this age. Others see the “times of refreshing” as the kingdom itself that comes when Jesus returns. The latter option is more likely. The “times of refreshing” refers to the kingdom and is connected with the return of Jesus and the “restoration of all things” (v. 21). Toussaint argues that the grammar supports this link between “times of refreshing” and the return of Jesus:

The two clauses that follow *hopōs* go together. In other words, “that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” must be taken with the words “and that He may send Jesus.” As Haenchen puts it, “But the two promises are complementary statements about one and the same event.” Nothing grammatically separates the promises: in fact, they are joined together by the connective *kai*.³⁴

So then, this refreshing period is future and refers to coming kingdom conditions. James Montgomery Boice rightly links this with national blessings for Israel in connection with the return of Jesus. He says, “[‘times of refreshing’] probably concerns a future day of blessing when the Jewish people will turn to Christ in large numbers and a final age of national blessing will come.”³⁵ Experiencing the “times of refreshing” means experiencing the blessings of Messiah’s kingdom when He comes again. If “times of refreshing” refers to Messiah’s kingdom on earth, then Peter is saying that if Israel repents the people’s sins will be forgiven and then the kingdom will come.

So is this a statement of contingency? Are kingdom conditions contingent on Israel’s response to Jesus? It appears so from this text. The near context of 3:19 has already revealed a clear statement of contingency. If Israel would repent then their sins would be forgiven. So why couldn’t contingency in regard to the next purpose statement regarding the coming of the kingdom be present as well? As Toussaint states, “Peter had just said that removal of their sins was contingent on their repentance (v. 19). If contingency exists here, then it is certainly also present in verses 20–21.”³⁶

In addition to “times of refreshing,” Israel’s repentance will also mean that “He [God] may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.” This is a specific reference to

³⁴ Toussaint, “The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom,” 229–30.

³⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 69. Boice also says there may be a sense in which the phrase may include blessings for God’s people now. Walker also agrees that “times of refreshing” is a reference to a future kingdom: “The expression probably looks on ultimately to the time when Christ shall come again and when those Messianic promises which still remain unfulfilled shall be perfectly consummated. . . . That will be the golden age of blessing for the Jewish nation, and, through them, a period of spiritual quickening to the world at large (Romans xi. 11–36).” Thomas Walker, *Acts of the Apostles*. Kregel Expository Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1965), 106–07.

³⁶ Stanley D. Toussaint and Jay A. Quine, “No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God’s Promised Kingdom,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (April–June, 2007): 144.

the second coming of Jesus. The context and grammar make it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the return of Jesus is linked with Israel's belief and repentance. The term for "may send" (*aposteilei*) is an aorist active subjunctive emphasizing possibility and a contingent element to this promise. If Israel believes, then God will send Jesus the Messiah. As John Phillips puts it:

If the Jews had repented then and there, the initial fulfillment of such prophecies, as were evidenced at Pentecost, would have blossomed into a complete fulfillment, and the return of Christ could have taken place within a generation.³⁷

That Peter states "the Christ appointed for you," is also significant. This highlights the continuing close relationship between Israel and the Messiah. Even the death of the Messiah at the hands of the Jewish leadership does not change this fact. Jesus is Savior and Messiah of all the world, but there is still a specific sense in which He is the Messiah of Israel. The crucifixion does not change this. Jesus is appointed for Israel because of the covenants and the promises (Rom 9:4). This also shows the close connection between Israel's response to her Messiah and the Messiah's coming.³⁸

Peter then offers an extra truth about Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the One "whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things" (3:21a). Jesus' session in heaven is not a last-second addition to God's plans. It is something that "must" occur. The fact that heaven must receive the Messiah until the kingdom is established was predicted in the OT. David spoke of this in Psalm 110:1–2 when he related that Yahweh told David's Lord, the Messiah, that He will sit at His right hand until the time comes for David's Lord to rule over His enemies. A session for the Messiah at the right hand of God must precede Messiah's kingdom reign from Jerusalem (see Ps 110:1–2). That Peter has Psalm 110 in mind is likely since Paul quoted this psalm in His first address to the Jewish people in Acts 2:30–36.

In addition to "times of refreshing" and the sending of the Messiah, Peter then introduces "the restoration of all things," of which the OT prophets spoke. The word for "restoration" is *apokatastasis*, a term used in verb form in Acts 1:6 when the disciples asked Jesus about when the kingdom would be restored to Israel.³⁹ To restore something is to take a marred entity and renew it, to fix what has been broken. The close connection of "restore" in Acts 1:6 and 3:21 is no coincidence. It reveals that the promised coming restoration of Acts 3:21 includes the restoration of Israel.

³⁷ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*. The John Phillips Commentary Series. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), 75.

³⁸ In regard to the "appointed for you," Peter Goeman observes, "The dative 'you' . . . is likely a dative of possession and brings out the fact that this was the Jewish Messiah, He belonged to them. Thus, Peter's argument appears to focus on the necessity of Jewish repentance so that their Messiah would be sent back." Peter Goeman, "Implications of the Kingdom in Acts 3:19–21," *MSJ* 26:1 (Spring 2015): 78.

³⁹ I. Howard Marshall also points out that the reference to "times" in 3:19 may have links with Jesus' statement that the disciples were not to know times or epochs in regard to Israel's restoration: "There may be a link with the 'times' in 1:7 associated with the restoration of the rule of God for Israel." I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. Reprint 1989), 93.

As Beverly Roberts Gaventa observes, “Given that the apostles have already inquired about the ‘restoration’ of the kingdom . . . the ‘restoration of all’ surely includes restoring the kingdom of Israel.”⁴⁰ This idea is reinforced by OT prophets who often predicted a restoration of Israel. Jeremiah 16:15 states, “For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.”⁴¹ Keener points out that when the connection with Acts 1:6 and the OT prophets is considered, the restoration of Acts 3:21 includes a restored Israel:

In view of the cognate usage in Acts 1:6 and the texts’ claim that the object of restoration is what all the prophets spoke about, the restoration of Israel is the likeliest interpretation. Israel’s restoration appears repeatedly in the biblical prophets (Amos 9:14; Ezek 39:25; Acts 1:6), a significant point here given that the restoration of what “the prophets predicted” (Acts 3:21).⁴²

So the restoration to come includes Israel. Yet there is no reason to limit the restoration of all things to just national Israel. Since the prophets portrayed Israel as a microcosm for what God was doing with all nations and the creation (see Isa 27:6), the restoration of Israel will lead to global blessings on a wide scale and includes cosmic renewal and harmony in the animal kingdom (Isa 11:6–9). Again, this is a case where both a *particular* and a *universal* work together in harmony. The restoration of all things is focused on the restoration of Israel but the implications of this restoration are global and holistic. Thus, the “restoration of all things” involves kingdom blessings for Israel but also expands to the whole earth and all nations.

To summarize, a significant cause and effect scenario arises in Acts 3:19–21. If the people and leaders of Israel believe in Jesus they will be saved and their national sin of rejecting the Messiah will be forgiven. This salvation will lead to the arrival of the kingdom (“times of refreshing”), the return of the Messiah, and the restoration of all creation. The “times of refreshing” and “restoration of all things” is the kingdom, while the return of Jesus focuses on the return of the King. These are inseparably connected. Thus, the scenario below (→ = “leads to”):

Israel’s repentance → Israel’s forgiveness → Return of Christ → Kingdom of God

This cause and effect scenario has not gone unnoticed by scholars. F.F. Bruce rightly pointed out that the “call” to Israel in Acts 3:19–21 had the opportunity to change the course of world history. If only Israel had believed at that time the kingdom would have come “much more swiftly”:

The exact meaning of these words of Peter has been debated from various points of view. This at least may be said with assurance: the whole house of Israel,

⁴⁰ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Acts* in Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 88.

⁴¹ See also Jer 23:8; 24:6; Hos 11:11.

⁴² Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 2:1112.

now as on the day of Pentecost, received a call to reverse the verdict of Passover Eve and to accord Jesus united acknowledgement as Messiah. Had Israel as a whole done this during these Pentecostal days, how different the course of world history and world evangelization would have been! How much more swiftly (we may imagine) would the consummation of Christ's kingdom have come!"⁴³

Bruce even uses the word "offer" in regard to what Peter is presenting to Israel at this time. The refusal of Israel to heed the offer delays the coming of Jesus:

Israel as a whole declined the renewed offer of grace and refused to recognize Jesus as Messiah. . . . The grand consummation and the *parousia* of Jesus lie still in the future: "we see not yet all things subjected to him" (Heb. 2:8)."⁴⁴

Others have noted a contingency element regarding the coming of the kingdom and the second coming of Jesus in Acts 3. I. Howard Marshall sees the future kingdom of God as "dependent" on the belief of the Jews: "That is to say, the coming of the 'messianic age' or the future kingdom of God, for which the Jews longed, was dependent upon their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah."⁴⁵ Ben Witherington also states, ". . . and Christ's second coming is seen as in some sense dependent on Israel's repentance (cf. Rom. 11:12, 15, 26)."⁴⁶ David Peterson notes, "Peter's point in vv. 19–20 is that the previously rejected Messiah will return only if Israel repents."⁴⁷ Richard L. Longenecker sums up the message of Acts 3:19–21 well when he states, "Peter goes on to say that if his hearers repent, their repentance will have a part in ushering in the great events of the end time."⁴⁸

Also important is the repeated emphasis that the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is based on the OT: ". . . until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (3:21). And, as we argued earlier, the prophets of the OT on several occasions promised kingdom conditions based on Israel's repentance:

- Leviticus 26:40–45 predicted that a dispersed Israel could be brought back into the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant "if" repentance occurred.

⁴³ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 91–92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 92. Underline emphasis is mine.

⁴⁵ Marshall, *Acts*, 94.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 187.

⁴⁷ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 181. Munck states, "Both Jews and Christians knew that there would be human participation in the fulfillment of salvation. The Jews maintained that Israel must first be converted, otherwise the Messianic age could not occur." Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company), 1967), 29.

⁴⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9., ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 297.

- Deuteronomy 30:1–10 declared that a changed heart on behalf of Israel would lead to regathering from dispersion and spiritual and physical blessings.
- Jeremiah 18:7–10 revealed that promises of blessings or calamity can be affected by a nation's response to God.
- In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God stated, “and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Note also that the wording of Acts 3:21 closely parallels the words of the Spirit-inspired Zacharias in Luke 1:70:

“As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old” (Luke 1:70).

“. . . about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (Acts 3:21).

And like Acts 3:21, the content Luke 1:70 involves the restoration of national Israel:

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—
Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES,
And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;
To show mercy toward our fathers,
And to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear.

Peter then says these truths were taught by the prophets since Samuel (Acts 3:24). Then with Acts 3:25 Peter tells the leaders of Israel, “It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’” These words refute any idea that the Jewish nation is no longer significant in God's kingdom plans. Even after killing the Messiah and after Jesus' ascension and pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Israel is still important to God. Peter affirms Israel's continuing relationship to the Abrahamic covenant. And he singles out the promise of Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 concerning Israel's bringing universal blessings. This occurs through Israel's Messiah, even if the people refused to believe.

In sum, Acts 3:19–26 is a strategic passage for the kingdom program. McClain points out that with this section, “we have something better than a term,” we actually have “a *definition* of the Kingdom.”⁴⁹ And this definition has three components. First, in regard to “content,” the kingdom brings “the restoration of all things.” Second, as

⁴⁹ McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 406. Emphasis is in the original.

for “timing,” the kingdom comes when Jesus sends the Christ appointed for Israel after His session at the right hand of the Father. And third, the condition for the kingdom's coming is “contingent upon the repentance and conversion of Israel.”⁵⁰

Romans 11:11–15

Another passage that could have implications for Israel's repentance and the kingdom of God is Romans 11:11–15:

I say then, they [Israel] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Here Israel's unbelief and then later belief are related to world blessings. Israel's current “transgression” and “failure” has brought “riches” for “the world” and “Gentiles” (v. 12). So Israel's unbelief has not halted God's plans, for God is using Israel's unbelief to bless the world. But more is to come with Israel's belief. As Schreiner states concerning verse 12, “If the trespass of Israel has led to worldwide blessing, then their belief will bring even greater blessing to the world.”⁵¹

Yet Paul offers more. Verse 15 reveals that Israel's “acceptance” will mean even greater blessings—“life from the dead.” Life from the dead has been understood in different ways. Some say it refers to the salvation of Israel or physical resurrection. While these will occur, the best answer is that life from the dead is kingdom blessings, and probably includes the glorification of the creation discussed earlier in Rom 8:18–25. Salvific blessings in this age will be followed by a holistic restoration of creation, what Acts 3:21 called the “restoration of all things.” The point is that blessings now lead to much greater blessings to come. If God can use Israel's current unbelief to bring world blessings, what greater blessings will follow for the world when Israel believes (see Rom 11:26)? What happens now is good, but it gets much better.

Another issue is Paul's references to “their rejection” and “their acceptance” in verse 15. Do they refer to God's rejection and then God's acceptance of Israel? Or do they refer to Israel's rejection of Christ and the gospel and then Israel's acceptance of Christ and the gospel? Or to put another way, does God first reject and then accept Israel, or does Israel first reject the gospel and then believe later? The former view argues for an objective genitive. The latter argues for a subjective genitive—Israel's rejection of God and the gospel by not believing in Jesus.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 596.

There certainly is room for debate on this issue with fine scholars who argue for the objective genitive and thus God's rejection of Israel. Yet Jim Sibley has put together a fine case for the subjective genitive understanding.⁵² Perhaps the strongest argument for the "God's rejection of Israel" view is that Romans 9–11 is a section emphasizing God's sovereignty. Yet Romans 9–11 also indicts Israel for their unbelief. Israel stumbled over Christ, choosing to try to work their way unto salvation instead of trusting in Christ through faith (see Rom 9:30–10:4). Certainly, the "transgression" of v. 11 and v. 12 is Israel's volitional choice of unbelief. Since verses 12 and 15 parallel each other, the "transgression" is probably parallel to "rejection" in verse 15. Just as Israel committed "transgression," they probably are the ones committing the "rejection."

If Israel's rejection of the gospel is in view this is evidence that Israel's repentance and belief are linked with kingdom blessings, since verse 15 states, "what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" So Israel's belief is tied to kingdom blessings.

Israel's Repentance and the Second Coming of Jesus

Several passages connect Israel's repentance with the Messiah's second coming and kingdom, supporting the claim that Israel's repentance is connected with the kingdom of God. Zechariah 12–14 speaks of a time when Jerusalem is under siege and the Lord returns and defends Israel. The result is that "The LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one" (Zech 14:9). Zechariah 12:10–14 links Israel's salvation with a deep and heartfelt national repentance from the various families of Israel:

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves.

With His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 Jesus linked His second coming with Israel's repentance:

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from

⁵² Jim R. Sibley, "Has the Church Put Israel on the Shelf? The Evidence from Romans 11:15," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58.3 (September 2015): 571–81.

the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt 24:29–31).

Jesus' statement that "all the tribes of the earth will mourn" is best translated "all the tribes of the land will mourn" and has specific reference to the tribes of Israel that repent in connection with the Messiah's return and kingdom. The Greek term *gēs* (γῆς) can be translated as "earth" or "land." Since the context of Matthew 24 focuses heavily on the land of Israel and Jesus quotes OT passages involving the gathering of Israel from foreign lands for kingdom blessings, the better understanding is that Jesus is referring specifically to the tribes of Israel and the land of Israel, and not universally to all people groups. This understanding is bolstered by the fact that Jesus quotes a cluster of OT prophetic texts that foretell a rescue of Israel after a time of scattering and persecution. His reference to "all the tribe of the land will mourn" refers to Zechariah 12:10, which speaks of Israel's salvation as the people look unto the Messiah.

His reference to "the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY" harkens to Daniel 7:13, a passage that speaks of the deliverance of Israel and a kingdom reign of the saints after withering persecution (Dan 7:24–27). Jesus' mention of "A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect" is a quotation of Isaiah 27:13 and the gathering of Israel from around the world for kingdom blessings. Deuteronomy 30:4–5a, also seems to be a backdrop for Jesus's words: "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed . . ." In sum, Matthew 24:29–31 links Israel's repentance with the return of Jesus and His kingdom (see Matt 25:31).

We have already surveyed Romans 11:11–15 and Paul's telling of future kingdom blessings for the world when Israel believes. When one connects this section with Romans 11:26–27, we see that the repentance and salvation of all Israel and kingdom blessings are linked with the return of Jesus:

and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,
 "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,
 HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."
 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,
 WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

Answers to Objections

Some object to the idea that the arrival of the kingdom of God is contingent on national Israel's belief in God and Jesus the Messiah. Does this not challenge the sovereignty of God? Does this not make God's plans wholly dependent on the will of man? The answer is no. To start, most Christians acknowledge contingency of

salvation and eternal life at an individual level. Is it not true that a person's salvation and eternal destiny is linked with conversion (repentance/faith)?⁵³ A person must believe in Jesus to be saved. We offer the gospel to people, telling them to believe in Jesus for eternal life. If a person believes he will be saved and inherit the new earth, if not he will be lost and sent to the lake of fire. A conditional element exists for a person's eternal destiny. So what is true at an individual level (belief linked with salvation) can also be true at the national level for Israel.

Another objection is that God already knew Israel would not believe, so how could a genuine offer of kingdom blessings be given when God knew Israel would not believe? Yet, again, a genuine offer of salvation can occur at an individual level even for those God knows will not believe. Those who are reformed in their theology usually affirm a genuine offer of salvation to the non-elect. God can and does genuinely offer blessings to those He knows will not believe. Why can't God also present a genuine offer of kingdom blessings to Israel, even though He knows Israel would not believe at that time? Again, what is true at an individual level can be true at a national level.

Still another objection is that the cross of Christ would be unnecessary if Israel believed in Jesus at His first coming. Allegedly, if Israel had believed in Jesus then the cross of Jesus would not have occurred. Our response to this is twofold. First, whatever view of the kingdom one holds, Jesus was presenting it before the cross. This is true whether one believes Jesus was presenting a spiritual kingdom in the heart or an earthly kingdom. For the sake of argument, what if Jesus' hearers believed in the spiritual kingdom He was presenting, wouldn't the cross have been unnecessary? Of course not.

Also, we strongly affirm that God's kingdom purposes could only be accomplished through the death of Jesus. No cross, no kingdom! No reign without suffering (Rev 5:9 – 10). The cross had to occur. Both human and cosmic reconciliation happen only through the atoning work of the Suffering Servant (see Isa 52–53). Jesus' atonement is the basis for the kingdom. Thus, the suffering of the Messiah is not only predicted in the OT, it is necessary for the kingdom. Colossians 1:20 says that the "reconciliation of all things" occurs "through the blood of His cross." Those positing a contingent offer of the kingdom to Israel do not believe the necessity of the cross would have been removed if Israel believed. This objection is an unnecessary inference from those opposed to the contingent offer view.

So what would have happened if Israel had believed at Jesus' first coming? On one level, this is an issue that does not need to be answered, since it is a hypothetical question. It is up there with the question, "What if Adam did not sin?" Or, "What if a person who died as an unbeliever had believed?" Genuine salvation and blessing can be offered to those who refuse to believe. All we need to know is that Israel was offered real kingdom blessings. Yet with hindsight we know that in God's sovereign plan this was not going to occur at this time.

⁵³ This is consistent with the doctrine of regeneration in which God causes someone who is spiritually dead to become spiritually alive. Even those who believe that regeneration precedes faith or occurs at the same time as conversion believe that lost people must repent and believe the gospel to be saved.

For those who identify with covenant theology, they face the same issue. Covenant theologians often affirm a covenant of redemption in which the members of the Trinity covenanted together in eternity past to save elect persons. Jesus' role in this pre-time covenant of redemption is to die on the cross to pay the sin penalty for the elect. Yet covenant theologians also often affirm a covenant of works in which God genuinely promised Adam salvation for obedience, yet death for disobedience (see Gen 2:15–17). Covenant theologians tell us that God's offer of salvation and perfection to Adam was real. It was genuine. If Adam obeyed there would be no sin and he would obtain eternal life. But what if Adam obeyed and had not sinned? Does this mean the covenant of redemption including Jesus' cross would be void?

Conclusion

Both the OT and NT teach that the arrival of the kingdom of God is related to national Israel's repentance. This position is consistent with both God's sovereignty and his omniscience. Christians should note this theological truth and incorporate it into a proper understanding of the Bible's storyline.

**THIS JUST IN: DAVID’S VICTORY OVER
GOLIATH WAS *NOT* AN UPSET!**

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The story of David and Goliath is perhaps the most famous of any of the biblical narratives, used throughout the world in both religious and secular circles anytime an underdog defeats a heavily favored champion. There is only one problem with this interpretation: the Bible clearly shows that David defeating Goliath was anything but an upset.

The expression “David versus Goliath” to explain a contest has become ubiquitous in the sport and political worlds so that no explanatory information is needed. Virtually everyone knows this as the biblical record of David, the brave young shepherd, going to battle against Goliath, the giant who was a seasoned warrior. The odds were so overwhelming against David it is generally viewed that his victory would be extremely unlikely. Thus, when the weaker participant defeats the heavily favored, stronger opponent, this would be considered a David versus Goliath upset.

Only one major problem exists with this line of reasoning: it is *totally* opposite from how the Bible uses it. Scripture makes it exceedingly clear that David’s victory over Goliath was anything but a one-in-a-million type of upset. As we will see, God had announced the outcome multiple times before David ever went out to fight the Philistine. It will be shown that instead of the David versus Goliath scenario being only a historical note of interest, how one understands—or misunderstands—this biblical account will factor into to the interpretation of other texts past that chapter.

God’s Original Promise in Genesis 12:1–3

In what would eventually become the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised Abram the following in Genesis 12:1–3:

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great;

and so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”¹

While these promises seem straightforward enough, how one interprets these verses is one of the most argued components of biblical theology. For instance, Stephen Sizer, in writing as an antagonist against dispensationalism, concludes, “There is, however, no indication in the text of Genesis 12 that this promise of blessing and warning and cursing was ever intended to extend beyond Abraham.”² Further, Sizer concludes that the “idea that the Jewish people continue and enjoy a special status by virtue of the covenants made with the Patriarchs is in conflict with the clear and unambiguous statements of the New Testament.”³

It is difficult to over-emphasize how important the study of the Abrahamic Covenant is because its interpretation affects the interpretation—rightly or wrongly—of virtually the entirety of Scripture:

It is recognized by all serious students of the Bible that the covenant with Abraham is one of the important and determinative revelations in Scripture. It furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and reaches its fulfillment in the New. In the controversy between premillenarians and amillenarians, the interpretation of this covenant more or less settles the entire argument. The analysis of its provisions and the character of their fulfillment set the mold for the entire body of Scriptural truth.⁴

Essex adds regarding both the issue and the interpretational importance of the Abrahamic Covenant: “All segments of evangelicalism recognize the importance of a proper understanding of this covenant. Interpretative decisions concerning it will determine one’s theological perspective. Therefore, it is imperative that every Bible student study the Abrahamic Covenant carefully.”⁵ Additionally, “The Lord’s determination to bless mankind leads to the narrative concerning the Abrahamic Covenant.

¹ All Scripture references used are from the NASB 1971 edition unless otherwise stipulated. The “Thee” and “Thou” usage have been updated to modern norms.

² Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester Lei 7GP, England: Intervarsity, 2004), 148.

³ *Ibid.*, 149. Sizer would go so far as to imply that anyone who makes a distinction between Israel and the church may be committing heresy (*Ibid.*, 150). See also Clarence Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960): 27–29, for a similar assessment of the dangers of seeing Israel as having any special standing with God. Sizer likewise understands the belief in a future for the Jewish people to be only a relatively recent development in history as a man-made doctrine that certainly has no biblical basis: “In Europe, a larger proportion of evangelicalism would identify with a covenantal perspective than in the United States. But just as British evangelicals exported dispensational Christian Zionism to the United States in the nineteenth century, so now, through the popular writings of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, for example, evangelicals in the United States are exporting their apocalyptic dispensational pro-Zionism to the rest of the world, with devastating consequences for the Middle East” (*Ibid.*, 25).

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1959), 139.

⁵ Keith H. Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10:2 (Fall 1999): 191. See also Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Covenant with Abraham and its Historical Setting,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 (July-September 1970): 241–57, and Robert Saucy, “The Crucial Issue Between Dispensational

The foundation of the Abrahamic Covenant is in the promises to Abraham that would be developed in Gen 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17 . . . Genesis 12:1–3 is pivotal because it stated the essential features of the Lord's promises to Abraham that would be developed in the ensuing narrative.⁶

Genesis 12:3 contains an aspect of what God revealed that would eventually become the Abrahamic Covenant: "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." While obviously all items regarding the Abrahamic Covenant are important, all of them cannot be covered in this study. This article will focus on one of God's specific concluding promises in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you" (וְאֲבָרְכָה וְאֲבָרְכָה) "and the one who curses you, I will curse" (וְאֲקַלֵּל אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יִקְלֵל) that would ultimately include Abraham's physical descendants.⁷ God chose two different Hebrew words for "curse" in Genesis 12:3 with the first one being a reference to those who slighted Abraham while the primary emphasis here is the absence (or reversal) of a blessed or rightful state and lowering in esteem to a lesser state.⁸ The second use of "curse" in Genesis 12:3 is a much stronger term, where God promised not just to disdain or slight someone but instead to "bind under a curse."⁹ The verb form means "to snare, bind," and the noun form means "noose, sling," and "to bind (with a spell), hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist."¹⁰ Thus the original curse in Genesis 3:14, 17, "cursed are you above all cattle" and "cursed is the ground for your sake" means "you are banned/anathematized from all the other animals" and "condemned be the soil (i.e., fertility to men is banned) on your account."¹¹ Similarly, God's word to Cain, "you are cursed from the earth" means that Cain is banned from the soil, or more specifically, he is banned from enjoying its productivity.¹² It should be noted

and Non-Dispensational Systems," *Criswell Theological Review* 1/1 (Fall 1986): 149–65 for a survey of key interpretational issues between these two groups.

⁶ Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," 197.

⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 26, writes: "This is immediately apparent in Genesis 12:1–3, the initial and programmatic statement of the covenant. Abram was told that he would be made into a great nation that would be the means by which Yahweh would bless all peoples on earth. God's concern was still clearly universalistic, but the *means* of addressing that concern was very specific—the nation of Abram" [emphasis his].

⁸ Leonard J. Coppes, "קָלַל," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 volumes. Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, 2:800–801. For various derivatives that convey the ideas of to curse, to be insignificant, to have a low opinion of; to be insignificant, contemptible to despise, disdain, have scant regard for, despise, see "קָלַל," Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. and ed. by M. E. J. Richardson, electronic ed., Accordance 10 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1994–2000), 3:1103.

⁹ "אָרַר," *HALOT*, 1:91.

¹⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, "אָרַר," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:75. Further, the majority of "curse" sayings fall into three categories: (1) the declaration of punishments, (2) the utterance of threats, and (3) the proclamation of laws. "It is interesting that all these curse-sayings are a reflex of one violating his relationship to God" (*Ibid.*).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

that as is so often the case in Scripture, no middle ground or third option exists, only blessing or cursing. The one who “slights” Abraham, by not recognizing the exalted status granted to him by God Himself, God will bind under His curse.

Are the previous examples of God’s cursing declared in Genesis and God’s promises made in Genesis 12:3 to be understood as literal promises? If so, the Bible should contain multiple examples of God being true to His Word and responding accordingly. However, and of equal importance, if God has replaced the nation of Israel with the church, as some claim, then a specific terminus should be evident of when that replacement happened. In other words, if replacement theology is the correct biblical interpretation, then it should be evident biblically when God ceased honoring His promise to curse the ones who curse Israel and thus no longer to be operative. Furthermore, no future promises or prophecies that show God blessing or cursing national Israel should be in effect beyond that determined terminus. One of Sizer’s quotes contains the key words and phrases and the core issue: “no indication from the text (of Gen. 12), that “the promise of blessing . . . and cursing, was ever intended beyond Abraham.”¹³ So with Abrahams’s death recorded in Genesis 25, if Sizer’s view if correct, then no biblical support past Genesis 25 should be expected that God still curses those who curse Israel.

Consideration of Pertinent Promises God Made to National Israel

Part of the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant, where God told Abram: “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years” (Gen 15:13), includes an implementation of the Genesis 12:3 pronouncement of “I will curse the one who curses you,” as would be expected if God kept His previous promise, “But I will judge the nation whom they will serve,” which, of course, was ultimately Egypt. Exodus 2:24–25 and 3:8 reiterate that God brought about the exodus in keeping with His Word based on His covenant faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant. Exodus 2 concludes: “So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them” (Exod 2:24–25). In the commissioning of Moses, as the human agent whom God would employ, comes this clear reminder that God is the true redeemer and again refers to the Abrahamic Covenant promise: “So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite” (Exod 3:8). All of the events in Exodus did not merely happen; God acted because of His covenant vow *and* in keeping with what He had previously promised the descendants of Abraham.

Yet it was not only the Egyptians whom God cursed in judgment for cursing national Israel. Another such response by God occurred when the people grumbled against Moses and put God to the test shortly after God had punished Egypt and the

¹³ Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?*, 148.

nationally redeemed Jewish people had been brought out of Egypt. In the immediate context, God had instructed Moses:

“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” (Exod 17:6–7)

Kaiser summarizes the significance of this event:

Thus the dual name brought out both the people’s testing of God (*Massah* “test”) and quarreling (*Meribah* “contention,” “strife”; NIV mg., “quarreling”) (v.7). In less than six months they had witnessed ten plagues, the pillar of cloud and fire, the opening and shutting of the Red Sea, the miraculous sweetening of the water, and the sending of food and meat from heaven; yet their real question came down to this: “Is the LORD among us [*beqirbenu*] or not?”¹⁴

The very presence of God in a unique way should not be overlooked in this passage. It is not only that God had performed a miracle, but rather that God’s special presence was there that day as God had explicitly promised Moses in saying “I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb.”¹⁵ The Apostle Paul later reveals the messianic significance of this event: “For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:1–4).¹⁶ In answer to the question, “Is the LORD among us or not?,” the LORD certainly was at Rephidim with preincarnate Messiah present.

¹⁴Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Exodus*, in Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:406–07.

¹⁵Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 2:391.

¹⁶McClain argues “. . . we find the Apostle Paul applying the historical Name to the Son of God in other passages where the reference to His pre-existent state is unmistakable. (cf. Heb 11:26 and 1 Cor 10:4, “the rock was Christ.”)” Alva J. McClain, “The Doctrine of The Kenosis In Philippians 2:5–8,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 9:1 (Spring 1998): 90. See also along these same lines Norman L. Geisler, “In Defense of the Resurrection: A Reply to Criticisms (A Review Article),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34:2 (1991): 244; Julius R. Mantey “New Testament Facts About The Apostle Peter,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 21 (September 1978): 212; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 726–27; David K. Lowry, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 526. See further Paul Ellingworth, Howard Hatton and Paul Ellingworth, *A Handbook on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 217, who regard the “last part of this verse, *and the Rock was Christ*, contains Paul’s interpretation of this tradition.” For a study of this verse and Jewish tradition, see Peter E. Enns, “The ‘Moveable Well’ in 1 Cor 10:4: An Extrabiblical Tradition in an Apostolic Text,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 23–38.

In Exodus 17:8–13, after the special presence of God had been revealed, Aaron and Hur hold Moses' arms up during the battle as God gives Israel the victory over the Amalekites. Following the defeat of one Gentile king and his people who had attacked national Israel, and in keeping with Genesis 12:3, God also issued this divine pronouncement in Exodus 17:14–16:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner; and he said, "The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."¹⁷

It is of utmost importance to note that the ramifications resulting from the battle with Amalek in Exodus 17 went far beyond the immediate situation. "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" is literally "war for Yahweh against Amalek from generation [to] generation,"¹⁸ which is another way of saying that Yahweh had declared holy war on the Amalekites. Stuart offers details of some of the characteristic of a Jewish holy war: "The Israelite encounter with the Amalekites at Rephidim represents an example of Old Testament holy war, an instance that anticipates the fuller delineation of the concept in later texts. The principles of holy war are codified in Deuteronomy 20:1–20, but important examples and supplemental aspects of the concept are found in many locations."¹⁹ Therefore, God's declaration, "I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven," constitutes a very early "oracle against a foreign nation," a common form of oracle found later in the prophetic books, with such oracles predicting the destruction or suppression of an enemy of Israel (and thus automatically an enemy of God) at some time of God's choosing in the future.²⁰ Cole concurs by writing, "Presumably the idea in either case is an oath of perpetual war, taken with the right hand on YHWH's altar or on some tribal 'banner' symbolizing his presence."²¹ Regarding the importance of God's instruction after the battle, it was not only for the immediate situation, but "in order

¹⁷ Kaiser, *Exodus*, 2:407–08 writes, "The Amalekites lived in the desert, south of Canaan around Kadesh (Gen 14:7), otherwise known as the northern part of the Negev (Num 13:29; 14:25, 43). Amalek was the son of Eliphaz (Esau's eldest boy) by a concubine named Timna (Gen 36:12) and became a 'clan' or 'chief' in the tribe of Esau (Gen 36:15). Thus the Amalekites were distant cousins to the Israelites. There is every possibility that they had known about the promise of the land of Canaan that had been given to Esau's twin brother, Jacob; therefore, they should not have felt any threat to their interests in the Negev had this promise been remembered and taken seriously."

¹⁸ See Noel D. Osborn and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 424, for various translation issues regarding precisely what God promised.

¹⁹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 395. Stuart argues that holy war may be summarized by twelve propositions, among which are (1) no standing army was allowed; (4) holy war could be fought only for the conquest or defense of the promised land, and (5) only at Yahweh's call could holy war be launched (*Ibid.*, 395–97).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 399–400.

²¹ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

that he might carry out this decree of God on the conquest of Canaan, but to strengthen his confidence in the help of the Lord against all the enemies of Israel.”²² Kaiser notes the importance of these ones who had cursed Israel by their actions as being more representative of a deeper and future battle:

Amalek's assault on Israel drew the anger of God on two counts: (1) they failed to recognize the hand and plan of God in Israel's life and destiny . . . and (2) the first targets of their warfare were the sick, aged, and tired of Israel who lagged behind the line of march (Deut 25:17–19). Thus Amalek became the “first among the nations” (Num 24:20)—in this case, to attack Israel. They are placed in juxtaposition with another group of Gentiles in the next chapter (Jethro's Midianites) who believed in Israel's God. These two chapters illustrate two kingdoms and two responses to the grace of God from the Gentile world.²³

Elsewhere, Kaiser writes by comparing another enemy Edom: “Edom alone is singled out because of her marked hostility toward the people of God. Their role was similar to that of the Amalekites, the earliest nation to represent the kingdom of men (Exod. 17:8; Deut. 25:17–19), which stood violently against the kingdom of God.”²⁴

Here is biblical evidence of God cursing an enemy of Israel who had cursed them—just as He had promised—and obviously one that went well beyond Abraham's life.²⁵ If God's declaration in Exodus 17:14–16 is to be understood as a literal promise, then one would expect (1) for God eventually to blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven, and (2) that the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.²⁶ Yahweh, though sometimes over centuries delayed, determines by His sovereign counsel the time when such divine retribution will occur—as well as the means of that retribution—of “cursing the one who curses you.” Even more striking in the Exodus 17 account is that this military victory for Israel was directly due to the presence of God and His divine intervention. The key issue is not who won this initial battle; the key issue is that Yahweh was utterly faithful to His promise of Genesis 12:3 to “curse the one who curses you.” Simply expressed, the “I will curse the one” promise goes beyond the immediate military victory and points to divine action by God at some point(s) in the future.

(Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 2:144.

²² Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., trans by James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 2:82.

²³ Kaiser, *Exodus*, 408.

²⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of Gentiles (Amos 9:9–15 and Acts 15:13–18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20:2 (June 1977): 103.

²⁵ Contra Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?*, 148.

²⁶ For consideration of different approaches by those who wrestle with what they consider to be the moral dilemmas of God declaring a holy war on people yet to be born, see Avi Sagi, “The Punishment of Amalek in Jewish Tradition: Coping with the Moral Problem,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87:3 (July 1994): 323–46. For another article dealing with the supposed way the redactors of Scripture interpreted this, with a focus on teaching later Jewish generations that the true hero of the story being Yahweh instead of Moses, see Bernard P. Robinson, “Israel and Amalek: The Context of Exodus 17:8–16,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (June 1985): 15–22.

God's Promises to National Israel from the Mosaic Covenant

After the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus 24, the nation of Israel received specific instructions concerning their military outcomes, all contingent on their covenant obedience or lack thereof.²⁷ Even though Yahweh ultimately promised to curse the ones who cursed Israel, military victory against those who cursed Israel was not guaranteed unless the nation walked in covenant obedience before Yahweh. In Leviticus 26:6–7, God promised certain and on-going blessings by military victory when the nation lived in obedience to Him:

“I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making you tremble. I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword will pass through your land. But you will chase your enemies, and they will fall before you by the sword.”

Yahweh later reiterated this promise of military victory if the nation walked in covenant obedience to Him in Deuteronomy 28:7: “The LORD will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way and shall flee before you seven ways.”

However, such military victory was never automatic; the same God also would pronounce His cursing of the nation—including military defeat—when Israel strayed from Yahweh and into sin (Lev 26:14–39). Yet regardless that Israel's blatant sin would eventually lead to her exile among the Gentiles, Leviticus 26 concludes with God's utter covenant faithfulness to regather the Jewish people to their promised land in spite of their unfaithfulness at some undisclosed time in the future (Lev 26:40–45).²⁸

The Theological Significance of God's Promises in Numbers 22–24

For those who take God's Word to heart with a literal-grammatical hermeneutic, nothing—other than God's grace—should be surprising in how He dealt with His own people Israel (Lev 26), or in how he dealt with those who cursed the Jewish nation (Gen 12:3). Yahweh had done precisely what He had promised—repeatedly—and nothing within the text (other than a presupposition brought to the text) allows for anything other than the natural understanding of God's Word that these were actual events based on the literal promises of God. So the importance of Numbers 22–24 in detailing more precisely the unfolding revelation from God should in no way be underestimated. While all particulars of these chapters cannot be dealt with in detail here, certain matters must be noted because of their utmost importance,

²⁷ See William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10:2 (Fall 1999): 213–32 for this and particularly how the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant does not annul any of the previous covenant promises of Yahweh. Also see John H. Sailhamer, “The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 241–61.

²⁸ For an excellent article about the future regathering of the nation of Israel back to the promised land, see William D. Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” *Master's Seminary Journal* 16:1 (Spring 2005): 95–126.

namely, (1) the oracles in Numbers 22–24 are God's word, not Balaam's word, (2) national Israel as a people are repeatedly referred to within the text, (3) the blessing/cursing of Numbers 22–24 is the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant issue, (4) the unfolding, revelatory light concerning the promised Messiah expands and harmonizes with God's previous promises, and (5) the importance of Amalek as a past and future enemy of Israel is emphasized.

The Oracles in Numbers 22–24 Are Yahweh's Word—Not Balaam's Word

While virtually universally referred to as “Balaam's Oracles,” or “the Oracles of Balaam,” this is not how God viewed these prophecies.²⁹ The wonderful promises and revelation that occur in these chapters are neither Balaam's thoughts nor his opinions, nor do they transpire by means of any learned technique on his part; he was simply a mouthpiece for God to communicate these holy truths. Repeatedly, the text emphasizes that these are the very words of God. For instance, God told Balaam to go with the king's emissaries, “but only the word which I speak to you shall you do” (Num 22:20). After Balaam's terrifying experience with the Angel of the Lord, God warned Balaam, “Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you” (Num 22:35). Numbers 23:5 says, “God put a word in Balaam's mouth and said. . .” concurring with Numbers 23:16: “The Lord met Balaam and put an oracle in his mouth,” again instructing him precisely what he must speak to Balak. In Numbers 24:2 the text states that “the Spirit of God came upon [Balaam].” As Allen writes in his superb article on Balaam, “Nevertheless, when Balaam spoke the Word of God, he spoke just that: *the Word of God*. The corrupted nature of Balaam *left no scratch* on the record of the Word of God.”³⁰ Consequently, any attempts to downplay the importance of what is revealed in these chapters should not be accepted since they are the very words of God Himself. Kaufmann thusly concludes about the efficacy of God's spoken word:

In pagan thought blessings and curses are a variety of incantations; they are regarded as automatically effective, and—since the gods also used and are affected by them—transcendentally potent. YHWH neither uses nor is affected by incantations. He acts by the word; but that this is no more than an expression

²⁹ The person and work of Balaam has sparked much interest and debate as to who or what he was. For instance, for a more positive interpretation of what Balaam brought in regard to “the virtue of a man, his contribution to Israel's well being, and indeed the well being of all nations” see George W. Coats, “Balaam: Sinner or Saint?” *Biblical Research* 18 (1973): 21–29 [quote cited from page 29]. Also see J. R. Baskin, “Origen on Balaam: The Dilemma of the Unworthy Prophet,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 37:1 (March 1983): 22–35. For the conclusion that Balaam was not only a believer but a prophet of Yahweh, see Michael L. Barre, “The Portrait of Balaam in Numbers 22–24,” *Interpretation* 51:3 (July 1997): 254–66. See also, Ulrike Sals, “The Hybrid Story of Balaam (Numbers 22–24): The Theology for the Diaspora in the Torah,” *Biblical Interpretation* 16:4 (2008): 315–35.

³⁰ Ronald B. Allen, “The Theology of the Balaam Oracles,” in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*. Edited by John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 107; [emphasis in original]. Allen sees Balaam as “neither a false prophet nor a true prophet in the usual sense of those terms . . . Balaam is best understood as a pagan who unwittingly steps into the focus of the drama of the people of Israel and their God, and finds himself totally overwhelmed by what happens to him” (87–88).

of his will is indicated by the fact that he never used fixed words or formulas. . . . His utterances simply say what he wills at a given moment: “Let there be light. . . . Let there be a firmament. . . .”³¹

So the Word of God given by means of Balaam in Numbers 22–24 should be received as any other part of the Word of God elsewhere in Scripture.

National Israel as a People Occurs Repeatedly Within the Text

Contra Sizer, (“There is, however, no indication in the text of Genesis 12 that this promise of blessing and warning and cursing was ever intended to extend beyond Abraham”),³² the designation of the nation of Israel as a people occurs frequently in Numbers 22–24. For instance, in the immediate context there was a “great fear because of the people” [of Israel] (Num 22:3). Numbers 22:5 gives this description by Balak, “a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me,” with his following request for Balaam to “come curse this people” (Num 22:6, 17). Before beginning one of the oracles that God gave him, Balaam saw “a portion of the people” (Num 22:41). Elsewhere, God by means of Balaam describes Israel as “Behold, a people who dwell apart” (Num 23:9), and “a people who rises like a lioness” (Num 23:24).

Of even infinitely more importance was Yahweh’s own statement in Numbers 22:12 as He instructed Balaam concerning the nation of Israel’s present (at that time) status before Him. When Balak’s messengers first approached Balaam, Yahweh warned him, “Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed.” God considered the blessing that He Himself had given as still operative for the Jewish nation at this time and certainly not restricted only to the original promise He had made with Abraham. The nation of Israel’s current status was that “they are blessed” before Him because of the unfailing love and the covenant promises given by Yahweh.

Finally, beyond the present situation at that time, God by means of Balaam informs Balak and others what will transpire in the future in Numbers 24:14: “And now behold, I am going to my people; come, and I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come.” The significance of this verse will be developed in an upcoming section of this article, but suffice it to say that the burden of proof is on those who would want to remove any of the references made to the people of Israel instead of understanding it in its normative way.

³¹ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. and abridged by Moshe Greenberg; reprint (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 84. This author would not be in full agreement with Kaufmann’s assessment of Balaam: “In the Balaam story (Num. 22–24) the pagan magician and Israelite prophet are combined. Balaam the magician is a potent dispenser of blessings and curses; this is the belief of Balak and his officers, and is accepted by the Bible as part of its belief in the reality of non-divine magical forces. Despite his uncanny power as magician, however, Balaam cannot curse ‘one whom God has not cursed.’ But he is also a prophet, in Israelite style, and as such he speaks only the word of God” (Ibid.). The position of this article is that of Allen’s whereby Balaam is neither a false or a true prophet in the normal sense of the terms (Allen, “The Theology of the Balaam Oracles,” 87–88).

³² Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?*, 148.

The Blessing/Cursing of Numbers 22–24 Is the Heart of the Abrahamic Covenant Issue

Balak's request to have Balaam curse Israel is more than just an inappropriate choice of words: they are the very heart of whether or not God's promises to national Israel were still in force. Based on the three victories found in Numbers 21, Numbers 22–24 is one unit that further develops in more detail the same theology with the repeated emphasis throughout this account of either blessing or cursing. Allen offers this introductory thought to the section:

The specific contribution of the Balaam incident in the Old Testament theology appears to be its graphic development of the concept of Yahweh's blessing of Israel. The story is an unexpected event. It appears to be an extended excursus on the theme of blessing, but an excursus acted out in the arena of human history. The setting, the personae, the conflicts, and the very subject matter all contribute to one of the most eloquent expositions of Yahweh's deep and abiding relationship with His people Israel.³³

While the immediate context for Numbers 22–24 was the three victorious battles that God granted in Numbers 21, the earlier context since the exodus has not spoken well of Israel as a whole and includes such things as the evil reporting by the spies and God's subsequent judging of that generation (Num 13–14), Korah's rebellion (Num 16), and Moses sinning by striking the rock the second time (Num 20). Thus, "the theological drama" of the moment should not be overlooked that in spite of Israel's sins, Yahweh still would honor His word:

Hence, when the reader comes to Numbers 22:1 and reads that Israel has finally reached the shores of the Jordan River and is encamped across from the land of promise, the questions might well arise, is this indeed the people of promise? Does this nation really have a unique relationship with the God of the universe? Is Israel really the chosen people?

The answers to those questions come in a most unexpected manner. The reader is taken to the enemy camp and is given an inside view of the machinations of Israel's foes in their attempts to destroy the nation. The threat of Israel is felt to be so great to Moab that that nation turns to a superstitious and supernatural means to attempt to ward off the enemy. The resort to which Moab turns is the curse. And then God breaks in. Yahweh, the God of Israel, confronts an internationally-known pagan diviner in his homeland, far removed from the people of Israel. Yahweh, the God who spoke to Moses, now speaks to a heathen mantic prophet. Yahweh, the God of patriarchs, breaks into the dealings of a power play on the part of unbelievers in the realm of the occult. And God says, "You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed" (Num. 22:12).³⁴

³³ Allen, "The Theology of the Balaam Oracles," 84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 84–85.

Even more to the point, Genesis 12:3 becomes the basis for the Balak-Balaam encounter: “It is a test case for the Abrahamic Covenant in its most elemental and fundamental level. Balaam was called by Balak to put Yahweh to the test, though neither Balaam nor Balak knew the nature of the roles in which they found themselves.”³⁵ Again the core issue:

The institution of Israel’s blessing is to be found in Yahweh’s choice of the primal patriarch, Abraham, as described in Genesis 12. It seems nearly impossible to overestimate the seminal significance of the Abrahamic Covenant in Old Testament theology. At the very beginning God’s intent for this new people was quite clear. To Abraham He said, “I will bless you” (Gen. 12:2). The Balaam story may be regarded as a frontal attack by Satan on the foundational blessing of God’s people—a frontal attack that was countered and defeated by the intervention of Yahweh Himself.³⁶

Numbers 22:1–3 explains the fear that is based on the victories Yahweh had recently given Israel in Numbers 21: “Then the sons of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho. Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel.” Balak’s invitation to Balaam came with a specific purpose: “Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed” (Num 22:6). This statement cannot be true, for Genesis 12:3 has already indicated that blessing and cursing are exclusively reserved for Yahweh, especially at it relates to national Israel. Hamilton adds:

Readers of the Torah know that Yahweh had promised Abraham that he would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him, and so Balaam’s prospects are not bright. Try as he might, he simply cannot curse Israel. So, in the darkened wisdom of those who do not know God, Balaam keeps trying. His first oracle seems to reflect the awareness of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Balaam acknowledges the difficulty in cursing whom God has not cursed, denouncing those whom God has not cursed (Num. 23:8).³⁷

God appeared to Balaam warning him, “Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people; for they are blessed” (Num 22:12). Notice should be made that Yahweh considered the Jewish people then currently blessed, with the basis of this blessing originating from the Abrahamic Covenant, not the people’s repeated failure

³⁵ Ibid., 112, n. 11.

³⁶ Ibid., 85.

³⁷ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 118.

at keeping the Mosaic Covenant.³⁸ So Balak's second plea for Balaam to curse the people (Num 22:17) is met by Balaam's response: "I could not do anything contrary to the command of the LORD my God" which, as subsequent events will show, is not a true indication of Balaam's spiritual status. Nonetheless, Balaam was completely accurate in his statement about not being able to speak contrary to God's word nor His will.

The second attempt to have Balaam curse Israel follows the episode of Balaam, his donkey, and the terrifying presence of the Angel of the LORD with drawn sword in hand (Num 22:22–34), who sent Balaam to Balak but who strongly warned him to speak only what God revealed to him (Num 22:35–41). Thus, Balaam pronounced a discourse directly from the LORD (Num 23:5). When Balak requested "Come curse Jacob for me" (Num 23:7), Balaam had no response other than "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? How shall I renounce whom the LORD has not renounced?" Worded differently: "The history of the Jewish people is replete with examples of attempts to curse and destroy them. But the Balaam incident seems to be the test case for the objective reality of the blessing of Israel."³⁹ Consequently, Numbers 22–24 should not be considered as some minor offense against Yahweh, but rather as "a direct, studied, and frontal attack on the blessing of God's people. But those who wished to curse Israel found themselves cursed. Israel's blessing is unique (Num 23:7–10); it is based on her unique relationship to Yahweh (Num 23:18–24); and it has an ultimate fulfillment in her Deliverer from all of her enemies (24:15–19). The enemies of Israel, present and future, are under the very curse that they wished had been placed on her (Num 24:20–24)."⁴⁰ This point, too, is well taken: "This passage in itself, and in the larger context, never allows Israel to take center stage. The genuine theological truth presented in the testimony to the uniqueness of Israel is the fact that Israel was related to the incomparable Yahweh. It is only because Yahweh is beyond compare that His people become distinct,"⁴¹ and this alone is by God's sovereign election of national Israel (Rom 9–10).

Another attempt at cursing Israel was just as futile as the others (Num 23:11–30). Again, "the LORD met Balaam and put a word in his mouth" (Num 23:16). It is within the discourse that follows that the famous verse Numbers 23:19 occurs: "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" This separates liberal theology from true biblical theology (Dan 2:10–11, 27–28). Also, from Genesis 1:1 through Numbers 23:19, other than items yet to be fulfilled (e.g. Lev 26:40–45), can anyone legitimately challenge and prove that God has not done what He has promised and that He has not made good every bit of His Word? Not only has

³⁸ See David Andrew Dean, "Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence: New Terminology and a Case Study in the Abrahamic Covenant," *JETS* 57:2 (June 2014), 281–308, who concludes: "The Abrahamic Covenant is founded upon the promise of God himself and does not depend upon the performance of its vassal party, Israel. Its fulfillment is as certain as the faithfulness of God himself, who does not lie. His faithfulness to his word is 'an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil' (Heb 6:19 NKJV)" (*Ibid.*, 308).

³⁹ Allen, "The Theology of the Balaam Oracles," 85.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 85–86.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

Yahweh repeatedly done what He said He would do, but He Himself is the One who said “do not curse these people for they are blessed” (Num 22:12), based on His own previous blessing of them.

The Unfolding Revelatory Light Concerning the Promised Messiah Expands and Harmonizes with God’s Previous Promises

Obviously, time and space limitations do not permit a fuller treatment of all pertinent texts up through Numbers 24 regarding God’s promises. However, three texts in particular relate to God’s promises in Numbers 24, namely, Genesis 22, 27, and 49. Initially is the additional revelation from God regarding the promised seed in Genesis 22:16–18, after the Angel of the Lord abruptly stopped Abraham from sacrificing his own son:

“By Myself I have sworn,” declares the LORD, “because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

“And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Later, Yahweh appeared to Abraham’s son Isaac and further promised in Genesis 26:24: “And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, ‘I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, for the sake of My servant Abraham.’” Isaac later reaffirmed to his son Jacob what God previously had promised: “Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine; May peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; Be master of your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you” (Gen 27:28–29).

Many understand this promise in Genesis 22 and 27 to be an expansion of the promised seed.⁴² Hamilton writes regarding the promises to Abraham’s seed and their development in Scripture:

⁴² The term “seed” can denote both a singular or plural idea since the noun does not have a distinctive singular or plural form. The singular form can also function as a plural, as a collective noun. T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 363. For a more developed argument see James M. Hamilton, Jr. “The Seed of Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 59 (2007): 253–73. For a more detailed account of Paul’s use of the seed in reference to Jesus and Israel, see also Michael Riccardi, “The Seed of Abraham: A Theological Analysis of Galatians 3 and Its Implications for Israel,” *MSJ* 25/1 (Spring 2014), 51–64.

We must also note that the promises made to Abraham are passed on to his seed, and as the narrative unfolds these promises are clarified. What has been promised comes into sharper focus as the original blessings are restated with new promises layered onto the old ones.⁴³

That Genesis 27 and Numbers 24 promise much the same but are more fully developed, Sailhamer writes:

Commentaries generally agree that the purpose of citing Genesis 27 in Numbers 24 is to identify the king in Numbers 24:7 as the promised seed of the Abrahamic blessing. However, since the “king” in Numbers 24:7 is commonly but wrongly identified with Israel, the “seed” in the Genesis promise narrative is also sometimes understood to be collective Israel. I . . . argue . . . that the king of Numbers 24 is not a collective, but is an individual king who is, in fact, contrasted with Israel. Numbers 24 is thus to play a major role in the identification of the “seed” of Abraham as an individual king.⁴⁴

Regarding the future Messiah there is a sense of the collective plus the individual seed:

To be sure, at numerous points with the promise narratives, the identity of the “seed” of Abraham is clearly understood collectively. But, as true as that observation is, it is not the whole story. By connecting the poetic texts to the promise narratives, the author of the Pentateuch moves decisively away from a collective reading of the promise narratives and toward an individual understanding of Abraham’s “seed” (Gen. 12:3–7). It is hard to avoid the implication that in the quotation of Genesis 27:29 in Numbers 24:9b, the author identifies the individual “king” in the Balaam oracle (Num. 24:7–9) with the “seed” of Abraham in the Genesis promise narratives. The king whom Balaam foresaw is the individual “seed” of Abraham through whom the nations will be blessed.⁴⁵

However, regarding the future Messiah:

Regardless of the sense of the details in these texts, everyone seems to agree that the citation of Genesis 27 in Numbers 24 establishes an intentional connection between all the major poems and the promise narratives in the Pentateuch. That connection lies at the highest thematic level within the Pentateuch—that

⁴³ Ibid., 262–63. Sailhamer connects that the individual “seed” promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 22 is identified as “the scepter from the tribe of Judah” in Genesis 49 and the victorious king in the oracles from God through Balaam in Numbers 24, and develops and traces the “seed promises” in Genesis with the “king poems” of Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 33, all with a view toward “the seed of Abraham” as an individual king and “part of the picture of the biblical Jesus.” John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 472–80.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 476.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 478.

is, the composition as a whole. At that level this link identifies Abraham's "seed" in the promise narratives with the king in Numbers 24. In addition, since the king in Numbers 24 is also identified here with the king in Genesis 49 that king (Num 24) cannot be a collective figure for Israel. According to Genesis 49, he can only be the promised king from the tribe of Judah.⁴⁶

By the time of the events of Numbers, God had already revealed much regarding both Abraham's promised seed (plural) and the promised seed (singular). He has also given much more definitive information regarding His promised Messiah. For instance, Genesis 49 adds additional information not only regarding Israel, but also regarding specific prophecies related to the future promised Messiah found in God's oracles by means of Balaam:

The second and third oracles are concluded with words reminiscent of Jacob's blessing on Judah (23:24; 24:9; cf. Gen. 49:9). Balak dismisses Balaam in frustration, but this elicits yet another blessing on Israel, ancestral voices prophesying war, speaking of a scepter and a star that will arise out of Jacob to crush the head of the seed of the serpent (Num. 24:17).⁴⁷

Sailhamer argues that the Pentateuch has a unified, single structure of composition based on, to a large degree, the homogeneous poetic theme that links Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 32 is the messianic theme in each of these poems. "They are the primary means for developing what the narratives are about."⁴⁸ Sailhamer adds further as to the future relevancy of such promises from God:

As we have suggested above, the central theme of each of the major poems is the promise of a coming "king." As an introduction to each of these poems we find the phrase "in the last days." This is terminology that is paralleled closely in the messianic eschatology of the prophets. It can hardly be accidental that

⁴⁶ Ibid. Essex adds, "Ultimately, according to Gen 49:8, [the one from whom the royal lineage aspect of the promised seed of Abraham] will be Judah, particularly the final ruler from Judah (Gen. 49:10), 'whose hand will be on the neck of your enemies.' . . . He will be the one whom the peoples will obey and who will lavish blessing to all (49:10–11). Truly, 'all the nations of the earth will gain blessing for themselves' (22:18) (22:18) through the obedience to 'the lion from the tribe of Judah' (Rev 5:5). Therefore, it seems best to understand the 'seed' in Gen 22:17b and 18 in the singular; the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant comes through Abraham's 'seed,' the king of the sons of Israel from the line of Judah. All of this is certain because Abraham obeyed God's voice (22:18)" (Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," 205–06). Merrill agrees, writing, "The patriarchal seed, Israel herself, was that remnant, a nation that would exist as a microcosm of the kingdom of God and the vehicle through which the messianic king would come to reign over all creation (Gen. 49:10)," Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," 30.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, 118.

⁴⁸ John H. Sailhamer, "The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001): 19. Sailhamer adds, "Nevertheless, as in the prophetic books, there is also a message of hope to be found in the Pentateuch. Like the prophets, it is a message centered on a coming king. It is that king that is the center of the focus of the poems in the Pentateuch. Each major (and minor) poem in the Pentateuch centers on his coming. He is the king that will arise from the house of Judah. He will rule over the nations, and he will restore God's good land to all humanity. The Pentateuch leaves little doubt when this king will come. He will come בְּאַחֲרֵי יָמַי ("in the last days")" (ibid., 20).

each of these poems stress the coming of the king is set in the context of “the last days.”⁴⁹

Within these oracles that God gave came a developing clarity about the identity of the One to come. Numbers 23:21b states: “The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.” Allen notes the significance of this extremely important prophecy: “Amazingly, Balaam was the first to be given the revelation that Yahweh was the King of His people Israel.”⁵⁰ Further: “The ascription of the term *king* to Yahweh is a first in the theology of the Pentateuch (cf. Deut. 33:5). This is remarkable. One of the grandest titles of God, and one that becomes the designation of the Lord Jesus Christ, was first used by Balaam, the pagan mantic, who was used as Yahweh’s tool.”⁵¹

With a glimpse into the future, God also explained how He currently viewed national Israel in spite of their multiple high-handed sins: “For there is no omen against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel; at the proper time it shall be said to Jacob and to Israel, what God has done” (Num 23:23). Ever the slow learner, King Balak hoped that perhaps another change in location would render a different result (Num 23:25–30). This sets the stage for the magnificent divine revelation of Numbers 24 with the emphasis again being that this is ultimately God’s Word—not Balaam’s—as “the Spirit of God came upon him” (Num 24:2). Hamilton writes regarding the theological development up to this point:

The placement of the allusion to the ruler from the line of Judah (Num. 24:9a) next to the allusion to the blessing of Abraham (24:9b) interweaves these lines of promise. If it was not clear before Numbers 24:9 that these promises belong together, this verse sounds the note that unites the themes. This union means that the blessing of Abraham will come through the king who will arise from the line of Judah, reminding readers of the Pentateuch of the promise to Abraham that he would sire kings (Gen. 17:6; see the references to Israel’s king in Num. 23:21; 24:7). Balaam’s oracles, then, clarify the blessing of Abraham by linking it to the king from Judah.⁵²

Among other things, God through Balaam promised: “He shall devour the nations [*goyim*] who are his adversaries, and shall crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with his arrows. He crouches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? (Num 24:8–9a). Immediately after a pronouncement of what the Messiah will eventually do to His adversaries follows the reiteration of God’s earlier promise in Genesis 12:3 now restated in Numbers 24:8–9: “Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.” In Numbers 24 the focus turns to God’s promise to deliver Israel in the future, especially by means of His own “deliverer” (Num 24:8c–e).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 20–21.

⁵⁰ Allen, “The Theology of the Balaam Oracles,” 103.

⁵¹ Ibid., 118, n. 66 [italics his].

⁵² Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” 264.

Within this same passage another marvelous messianic preview is given in Numbers 24:17–19:

“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir, its enemies, also shall be a possession, while Israel performs valiantly. One from Jacob shall have dominion, and shall destroy the remnant from the city.”

The tremendous significance of these verses should not be understated as it relates to the future work of the One of whom the prophecy speaks. Again, the future aspect is not only that the Messiah will fight, but also of the enemies whom He and His descendants will fight in the future: “[Numbers 24:17] is a passage that has fulfillment in the wars of conquest (holy war) of David and of successive Davidites; ultimate fulfillment is in the person of Messiah who will win final victory over the enemies of Israel, represented in this passage by Moab and Edom.”⁵³ Cole likewise marks the importance of these verses:

Now in the fourth oracle the contents project the reader/hearer immediately into the future; the knowledge Balaam has received from Yahweh applies not to the now, for the time is not yet at hand for this glorious kingdom . . . The glory of this King is portrayed using two metaphors, the “star” (*kōkāb*) and the “scepter” (*šēbet*). Isaiah used the star imagery in the context of royalty in describing the coming fall of the king of Babylon (Isa 14:12–13), and in the New Testament Jesus Christ is referred to as the royal “Root and Offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star” (Rev 22:16). His birth as the incarnate King was declared by the heavens in the appearance of a star over Bethlehem (Matt 2:1–10).⁵⁴

Hamilton offers this summary of the Messianic promises highlighted in Numbers 24:

In the context of Numbers 24, Moab is the nation over which Balak is king (22:4), and it is his desire to have Israel cursed (22:6). Understanding Israel’s enemy, Moab, as the seed of the serpent, the statement that the ruler of Israel will crush the forehead of Moab can be understood as a poetic reformulation of the statement that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the seed of the serpent.

The Balaam oracles in Numbers 24, then, knit together these significant strands of promise. The blessing of Abraham is firmly linked to the king from Judah as the language of Genesis 49:9 is set next to the language of 27:29 and 12:3 in Numbers 24:9. The sceptre of the ruler from Judah mentioned in Genesis

⁵³ Allen, “The Theology of the Balaam Oracles,” 118 n. 68.

⁵⁴ R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers* in The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 426.

49:10 is then set next to what appears to be an allusion to Genesis 3:15 in Numbers 24:17. Thus, it seems valid to conclude that these texts indicate that the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham would be realised through a triumphant king of Israel, descended from Judah, who would defeat Israel's enemies. These enemies of Israel are regarded as the seed of the serpent, so that their defeat is simultaneously Israel's victory. Israel's victory is God's victory.⁵⁵

With the promises made by God from Genesis through Numbers 24, a composite sketch of the promised Messiah emerges. The future King will have the service of an obedient Israel (Gen 27:29; 49:8) whom He has brought back into the land, in accordance with His covenant faithfulness (Lev 26:40–45). This King will ultimately rule over the nations as well (Gen 49:10; Num 24:17–19), will possess the gates of his enemies (Gen 22:17), will have His hand on the neck of His enemies (Gen. 49:8), and will exercise dominion over them (Num 24:19). Genesis 49 depicts the promised king as fierce, crouching and lying down like a lion, and no one will dare to rouse him (Gen 49:9; Num 24:9), and—most significantly—it is through this promised individual king that both the blessing and the cursing will come in its fullness (Gen 12:3; 27:29; Num 24:9).

It is difficult to argue that God considered His promise to curse those who curse Israel as having been completed during Abraham's lifetime,⁵⁶ since the core component issue to bless/curse national Israel repeatedly occurs in Numbers 22–24 and is part of the rationale for God's instruction to Balaam and the revelation about the nation, the coming Messiah, and the future reign of the king. Not only is the promise to bless/curse of Genesis 12:3 still present and operative, but also God more greatly expands His previous revelation to include the Messiah as both a beneficiary of the promise as well as the ultimate means by which it will be fulfilled. Sizer and others would have to explain the following: (1) would they take all, any, or some of the promises that God gave in Numbers 22–24 as literal promises, (2) on what basis should they be considered as either literal or allegorical, and most importantly, (3) if the promises that God made and expanded in these chapters are not literal truths regarding the nation of Israel and the Messiah, exactly what did God mean by reaffirming and expanding these passages using either very similar or identical language in what He had previously promised?

The Importance of Amalek as a Past and Future Enemy

Also included in this section where the ultimate victory and reign of the One who will have the scepter of Israel is God's remembrance by means of Balaam of what He had previously promised: "And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said, 'Amalek was the first of the nations but his end shall be destruction' (Num 24:20). That the Amalekites were "the first of the nations" is interpreted in various ways, some of them having merit of varying degrees. For instance, one

⁵⁵ Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," 265–66.

⁵⁶ Contra Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?*, 148.

way to see this is that the Amalekites “considered themselves among the preeminent of the nations,”⁵⁷ or in a much more generalized way, they were first among the nations “in the sense that their ancestry could be traced back to Esau, making them an ancient people (cf. Gen. 36:16).”⁵⁸ Wenham offers an expanded explanation regarding the Amalekites’ ancient status:

The first of these short sayings about other nations is cast in proverbial form and concerns the tribe of Amalek. They lived in the Sinai peninsula and were implacable foes of Israel (cf. Exod. 17:8–16; Num. 14:43–45; Judg. 6:3, 33, etc.). They considered themselves *the first of the nations*, either because of their antiquity (they are termed Meluhha in third-millennium inscriptions) or because of their quality (cf. 1 Sam. 15:21; Amos 6:1). But in sharp contrast ‘his end’ (literally ‘his last’) will be ‘utter destruction’ (NEB).⁵⁹

But beyond these explanations, that Amalek was first among the nations holds a very important distinction regarding matters in their future: “as the first heathen nation which opened the conflict of the heathen nations against Israel as the people of God.”⁶⁰ Kaiser likewise notes the importance of this one who had cursed Israel by his actions, writing, “Thus Amalek became the “first among the nations” (Num 24:20)—in this case, to attack Israel. They are placed in juxtaposition with another group of Gentiles in the next chapter (Jethro’s Midianites) who believed in Israel’s God. These two chapters illustrate two kingdoms and two responses to the grace of God from the Gentile world.”⁶¹

The fact that the Amalekites were the earliest of the nations to be hostile to national Israel after the exodus implies that there have been many more such hostilities from other nations throughout history and that there will be many more in the future. Furthermore, as was shown, several eschatological prophecies occur in the immediate context of Numbers 24 regarding the king (24:7) who shall devour the nations (24:8), and is in harmony with “the end of the days” prophecies in Genesis 49:1 and the Lion who is from the tribe of Judah and His Scepter (Gen 49:8–12; Num 24:9). It is in this context of the Messiah’s future presence in national Israel that Yahweh reiterates His promise: “Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you” (Num 24:9b). Even more to the point, the section that contains the reference to Amalek, begins with the opening phrase, “come, and I will show you what this people will do to you people in the days to come” [“end of the days”] (Num 24:14).

⁵⁷ Cole, *Numbers*, 429–30.

⁵⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, “Numbers,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Old Testament, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill: Victor, 1983), 245.

⁵⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 4:203 [italics his].

⁶⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3:195.

⁶¹ Kaiser, *Exodus*, 408. Elsewhere Kaiser describes the Amalekites as “the earliest nation to represent the kingdom of men (Exod. 17:8; Deut. 25:17–19), which stood violently against the kingdom of God” (Kaiser, “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of Gentiles,” 103).

To summarize this enormously important section, the Bible contains many references proving that God literally and repeatedly fulfilled His promise to curse the ones who cursed national Israel up through Numbers 24. In fact, not one of the enemies that Israel encountered was exempt from the promised cursing; every enemy that attacked Israel received immediate judgment, and sometimes (as with Amalek) God also promised future punishment. Everything Sizer stated about the promise of God in Genesis is incorrect, and his inaccuracies are repeatedly repudiated by Scripture. Instead of “There is, however, no indication in the text of Genesis 12 that this promise of blessing and warning and cursing was ever intended to extend beyond Abraham,”⁶² the people of Israel are often referred to in Numbers 22–24 in both the immediate context, including God describing them as “They are blessed” (Num 22:12), as well as in subsequent promises about their future. Nor is Sizer’s statement correct: the “idea that the Jewish people continue to enjoy a special status by virtue of the covenants made with the Patriarchs is in conflict with the clear and unambiguous statements of the New Testament.”⁶³ These covenants are certainly not in conflict with additional revelation made by God Himself up through Numbers 24. Finally, it would likewise be wrong to label these prophecies as “exported dispensational Christian Zionism . . . in the nineteenth century,”⁶⁴ because God alone is the author of the prophecies made about the Messiah and the people from which He would emerge.

In fact, not only is the promise to bless those who bless and curse those who curse national Israel still operative up through Numbers 24, but also this promise is added to and expanded by God so that it begins to show more frequent and profound glimpses of this coming King who will emerge from that nation. Well beyond the Genesis 12:3 original promise, Numbers 24:9 becomes God’s reiterated and expanded promise to include the future Messiah not only as a participant in this promise as a Jew, but also to fulfill this promise to the fullest degree when Messiah will reign (Num 24:8). Incredibly, some of the most precise messianic prophecies come in this section, as well as another promise of the future destruction of Amalek (Num 24:20). Replacement theologians such as Sizer would have to explain not only what God meant by these additional promises given through Numbers 24, but also why anyone should ever believe God’s first revelation given in Genesis 12 because centuries later the same God will make the same (and expanded) promises to Abraham’s descendants. If God did not intend to keep His subsequent promises in Numbers 22–24, why should anyone believe them when He first gave them in Genesis 12:3? These promises harmonize perfectly with what He has previously promised, including matters related to “the end of the days” (Gen 49:1; Num 24:9), yet we are told that these verses have no reference to national Israel in eschatological matters.

Hamilton best summarizes the position of this article:

Yahweh even turns an attempt of a pagan prophet to curse his people into an opportunity to remind them of his promises. Not only does Yahweh reiterate his

⁶² Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?*, 148.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶⁴ *Contra* Sizer, *Ibid.*, 25.

promises; he weaves several lines of promise together. Numbers 24:17 refers to a “scepter” and “star” that will arise out of Jacob and “crush the forehead” of Moab. The head crushing alludes to Genesis 3:15, and the “scepter” is reminiscent of the “scepter” that will not depart from Judah (Gen. 49:10). The many references throughout Numbers 22–24 to the impossibility of reversing Yahweh’s blessing on Israel reminds of the blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). Thus, the Balaam oracles connect the seed of the woman to the blessing of Abraham and the promise of a king from Judah who will judge the enemies of Israel.⁶⁵

Numbers 24 concludes with the “I will bless/I will curse” promise fully in place, as Numbers 24:9 clearly shows: “He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.”

God’s Further Instruction in the Pentateuch Regarding Amalek

Written to the children of the mostly wicked wilderness generation, Deuteronomy reveals additional details that are not disclosed elsewhere as Yahweh repeatedly reviewed His covenant faithfulness to Israel. For instance, in reviewing the three victories over the Gentiles recorded in Numbers 21, Yahweh disclosed this new revelation concerning what He had performed for national Israel: “This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, shall tremble and be in anguish because of you” (Deut 2:25). In a sovereignty of God passage that would be completely behind the scenes unless God also revealed it came this truth: “But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as he is today” (Deut 2:30). It is noteworthy that Moses reviewed the military victories of Numbers 21 in Deuteronomy 3, which was the historical setting for Balak imploring Balaam to curse Israel (Num 22–24), but completely omits this part and goes to the sin at Baal-peor (Num 25:1–3; Deut 4:1–4). Along with other reasons, it may very well be that at least Balak the king had enough fear of God that he himself would not curse the people, for instead he departed and “went his way” (Num 22:25). Technically speaking, Balak did not specifically curse Israel and fight against them and thus receive the explicitly promised cursing from Yahweh.

As was previously shown, God declared holy war on Amalek in Exodus 17 “from generation to generation,” and the foretelling of his future demise also occurs in Numbers 24:20: “And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said, ‘Amalek was the first of the nations, but his end shall be destruction.’” Elsewhere, Deuteronomy clearly shows that Yahweh had not forgotten Amalek’s sin (Exod 17), or His own divine word by means of Balaam regarding their future destruction as the first of the nations (*goyim*) to fight against the nation of Israel after the exodus. Consequently, it should not be surprising that Yahweh fully intended to carry out His

⁶⁵ Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, 119.

decree as He gave this explanation, command, and warning in Deuteronomy 25:17–19:

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God.”

“Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget.”⁶⁶

Three points are of special importance. First, the core problem with Amalek was that “he did not fear God” (Deut 25:18); his subsequent actions against Israel proved this. Because of Amalek’s cowardly actions, the LORD placed the Amalekites under His judgment (Exod 17:14), promising to bring them to utter ruin (Num 24:20).⁶⁷ If Scripture revealed nothing else about this, one would/should expect that these truths that Yahweh revealed here are the literal promises which He expected in the literal judgment on the Amalekites once the nation of Israel had entered their land promised to them by Yahweh, and yet these promises are also tied in eschatologically with Messiah’s reign at “the end of the days” (Num 24:14). Second, Yahweh revealed the means by which He would accomplish His judgment on the Amalekites, namely, by using the Jewish people: “you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (Deut 25:19). Third, God concludes this section by admonishing the Jewish people of the seriousness of what He had just instructed them to do regarding Amalek as He ended His instruction to Israel saying, “you must not forget,” which became a command rather than a statement: “Do not forget!” or “Remember this!”⁶⁸ employing an emphatic enforcement of the word “remember.”⁶⁹ This strong command “Do not forget!” is the last of nine such commands in Deuteronomy and was to be taken most seriously by the Jewish people.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Kalland sees more of a generalized cursing of God on the Amalekites “on the same basis as the destruction of the pre-Noahic people (Gen 6:5–7) and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20–21; 19:24–25). Their incorrigible wickedness was such that annihilation was necessary. Besides this the Amalekites, by their attacks on God’s people—and that against the weak and worn-out ones—indicated that ‘they had no fear of God’ (v. 18)” Earl S. Kalland, *Deuteronomy*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 3:154. Thompson notes the holy war aspect of what Yahweh had called for: “In terms of the conduct of the Holy War these foes were to be exterminated along with those from whom Israel wrested the promised land (Deut. 20:10–15, 16 18).” J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 5:276–77.

⁶⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 4:330–31.

⁶⁸ Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 418.

⁶⁹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., trans by James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 3:425.

⁷⁰ Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 307.

God's Judgment on Amalek in First Samuel 15

In spite of God's specific instruction to the Jewish people in Deuteronomy 25, the people did forget about Amalek and did not carry out God's commands against the descendants of Amalek. First Samuel is one of the books which clearly reveals that God indeed carries out His Word (Num 23:19), that Yahweh had not forgotten His previous declarations, and that He was about to act. First Samuel 15:1–3 is the account of God remembering His previous prophecies regarding Amalek:

Then Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

If one did not know that this command was centuries removed from the previous ones, it would seem as if it were given only a short time after God's previous commands in Deuteronomy 25:19: "Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget." Obviously, nothing can be shown at this time in history that Genesis 12:3/Numbers 24:9 had either ended or had been fulfilled. God based His command entirely on His promise in Genesis 12:3/Numbers 24:9 to curse those who curse Israel and the holy war promise God had made regarding Amalek (Exod 17:14–16).⁷¹ Davis' comments on God's commandment to Saul are cogent:

Samuel strikes the keynote of the chapter in verse 1: "Listen," he orders Saul, "to the voice of Yahweh's words." The verbal root *šāma* ' (listen, hear; obey) occurs eight times (vv. 1, 4, [not discernable in English translation], 14, 19, 20, 22 [twice], 24). That is a covenant king's first priority: he must submit to Yahweh's will. That is the matter that matters in this chapter.⁷²

Baldwin adds:

When Samuel appeared suddenly to Saul, it was to point out to him that he was king, not primarily by popular acclaim, but by the Lord's appointment. His duty,

⁷¹ For a critical assessment of the historical narrative, see Diana Edelman, "Saul's Battle Against Amalek (1 Sam 15)," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (June 1986): 71–84. Edelman writes, "1 Sam 15 gives a seemingly genuine account of a battle between Saul and the Amalekites" (80), but also concludes, "Individual events apparently could be reshaped to conform to larger views of history, without qualms or repercussions" (Ibid.).

⁷² Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking at the Heart* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 153.

therefore, was to carry out the commands of the Lord, and in particular the command, *go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have*. The verb . . . 'utterly destroy', is used seven times in this account, as though laying stress by repetition on this special act of consecration to the Lord of hosts, who directed and gave victory to Israel's armies.⁷³

Indeed, such commands for utter destruction were seen in Yahweh's declaration of Holy War centuries earlier against Amalek and future generations:

The command required Saul to "attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them" (v. 3). The destruction was to include "men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." This kind of warfare, called *herem*, was practiced only against peoples who had come under the Lord's severest judgment (e.g., Jericho). It required the destruction of all people and possessions captured in battle. The task was a solemn and holy one since those Israelites who carried it out functioned as the Lord's agents of judgment. The soldiers were not to profit from their assignment through the acquisition of slaves or booty; like Aaronic priests who offered up burnt offerings (*ōlāh*) to the Lord, they were to receive no compensation for their efforts other than the satisfaction of having fulfilled a divinely mandated mission.⁷⁴

Saul, however, carried out only partial obedience to Yahweh's command in 1 Samuel 15:8–9: "And he captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed." Davis comments regarding Saul's lack of obedience in executing Yahweh's command of holy war:

Some readers, however, are bothered not with Saul's partial obedience but with Yahweh's severe command. The total "curse of destruction" sounds horrid. How can these be the words of the God whose compassion is over all that he has made (Ps. 145:9)? How can we claim this passage as the word of this God? To begin a response . . . First it *is* horrid. Second, our claim is only that Scripture

⁷³ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 8:121 [italics in original].

⁷⁴ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 7:168. Roger L. Omanson and John Ellington, *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001), 311, conclude: "This holy-war practice, which was followed also by Israel's neighbors, consisted of devoting everyone and everything to the god or gods that the people worshiped. This devotion to the deity required the total destruction of everything captured in war (see Josh 6:17). All of the nouns that follow are singular in Hebrew, referring to particular classes or groups. The sense is plural, since these nouns are collective, that is, 'men,' 'women,' 'children,' and so on."

is true, not that it is sanitized. Third, Yahweh's vengeance should not be repudiated but praised if it is virtuous vengeance, that is, if it is just vengeance.⁷⁵

Partial obedience to God's command seemed to Saul as only a minor offense, and additionally Saul ultimately blamed the people for what had happened as he repeatedly protested to Samuel that he was obedient to Yahweh's command (1 Sam 15:13–21). Saul's disobedience impugns both God and His character because God had promised that His eradicating judgment would come to Amalek, and King Saul failed to completely fulfill the requirements of God's command.

Because Saul had rejected God's Word, God had rejected Saul from being king over Israel (1 Sam 15:22–28). Bergen adds, "God's immutable action was taken as punishment for Saul's failure to fulfill Torah commands. It serves as an object lesson of how seriously God reacts to willful disobedience."⁷⁶ In spite of Saul's eventual and very late repentance and his attempt to cling to Samuel's robe, the following certainties were revealed: "But Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.' And as Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. So Samuel said to him, 'The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you'" (1 Sam 15: 26–28).⁷⁷

As was previously shown, part of God's prophecies by means of Balaam was the destruction of Amalek and his descendants, since they were the first of the nations (*goyim*) to fight against the redeemed people of Israel after the exodus (Num 24:20). It was also in this section that the divine revelation of Numbers 23:19 was given: "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" This previous pronouncement of the utter and absolute faithfulness of God to His Word becomes the basis for Samuel's strong rebuke and renunciation of Saul and connects with the divine prophecies in Numbers 22–24: "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind" (1 Sam 15:29). "To emphasize the finality of the judgment against Saul, Samuel created a new title for Yahweh, *nēšah*, "the Everlasting One" ("the Glory") and attached

⁷⁵ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 154–55 [emphasis in original]. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 2:395–97, argues that holy war may be summarized by twelve propositions, among which are (1) no standing army was allowed; (4) holy war could be fought only for the conquest or defense of the promised land, and (5) only at Yahweh's call could holy war be launched.

⁷⁶ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 7:167. John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1989), 221 add, "Like Samson, he [Saul] was a man of talent and ability, but these were an asset to his leadership only as they were committed to God and brought into conformity with His will. The experiences of Saul are an unmistakable lesson to believers of all ages. The possession of physical attractiveness, talent, and popularity does not guarantee divine blessing or success in one's pursuits."

⁷⁷ Hamilton argues that Saul's protestation that he wants to "worship" in 1 Sam 15:30 has more to do with his desire expressed "to honor me now before the elders of my people," than it has to do with genuine repentance and a desire to worship Yahweh, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, 168, n. 60.

it to an indirect quotation from the Torah (cf. Num 23:19): “the Everlasting one does not lie or change his mind” (v. 29). Thus, the words of judgment spoken against Saul by an eternal God would stand unchanged forever.⁷⁸

Ultimately, the prophet Samuel—not the previously anointed King Saul—accomplished Yahweh’s stated will before the very presence of Yahweh:

Then Samuel said, “Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”

But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal (1 Sam 15:32–33).

At the very least, Yahweh’s promise to curse the ones who curse Israel is still clearly operative up to 1 Samuel 15. Nothing in the text makes sense otherwise; all of the subsequent actions are based entirely on God’s stated word and promises. In addition to this, key considerations up to this point in Scripture should be marked: (1) Yahweh clearly meant what He had said in Exodus 17, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 25 concerning the destruction and annihilation of Amalek due to the holy war that Yahweh had pronounced against him and his descendants; (2) a literal-grammatical hermeneutic is evident in both the prophecy and its fulfillment; (3) centuries removed from pronouncement to ultimate fulfillment in no way nullifies the clearly stated decrees and promises of God; (4) because Amalek was the first of the nations to wage war against Israel after the exodus (Exod 17), that his end shall be destruction was based entirely on the “I will curse the ones who curse you” promises of God in Genesis 12:3 and Numbers 24:9; (5) therefore, similar fates should be expected for other Gentile nations who would wage the same kind of war against Israel not only in the biblical account but also throughout history, unless God has indeed abrogated his promise to national Israel; and finally, (6) “the replacement” of replacement theology definitely has not occurred by 1 Samuel 15.

The David Versus Goliath Account in View of God’s Previous Promises

With this background thusly presented, the account of David versus Goliath may now be read through the biblical grid that God established. As was shown previously, Yahweh rejected Saul from being king of Israel (1 Sam 15). God then instructed Samuel to go to Jesse of Bethlehem and anoint the new king of Israel (1 Sam 16:1–11), with God’s emphasis not on the outer appearance but on man’s heart (1 Sam. 16:7). God by His sovereign election chose the shepherd youth David as the next king of Israel. After Samuel anointed the future king, “the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam 16:13), but the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit was sent to terrorize him (1 Sam

⁷⁸ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 7:174. Ronald F. Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 3:678, adds, “Samuel gives to the unchangeable God a unique name by calling him the ‘Glory’ (*nesah*) of Israel (the word is also used once as an attribute of God; cf. NIV’s ‘majesty’ in 1 Chronicles 29:11).”

16:14). With God's anointing of the next king, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David (as He came upon the judges before him), thus enabling him to fulfill the specific tasks which God assigned to him."⁷⁹

Therefore, the account of David and Goliath in First Samuel 17 is much more than a good example of a wonderful lesson to teach in children's church; instead, it is another example of Yahweh being completely faithful to His revealed word in what He had previously promised. First Samuel 17 records the Philistines going to war against the nation of Israel by using Goliath, their Philistine champion, and this battle becomes the perfect background for God to demonstrate His covenant faithfulness to His people. The fact that the Philistines stand in battle against disobedient, unbelieving King Saul shows the poor spiritual condition of both the king and his people (1 Sam. 17:1–18). As was the case before, the problem for Israel was not a military one; it was a spiritual problem.

The Philistine champion Goliath defied "the ranks of Israel" (1 Sam 17:10, 25) and did so morning and evening for forty days (1 Sam 17:16). Consequently, the Genesis 12:3/Numbers 24:9 promise of "I will curse the one who curses you" ultimately applies to Goliath and to the Philistines as well. However, since the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 24), "the blessing or the curse" from Lev. 26/Deut 28 also applied to the nation of Israel. Yahweh promised military victory against the enemies of Israel only if the nation was in covenant obedience to Him (Lev 26:6–8; Deut 28:7), but certain military defeat if the Jewish nation lived in covenant disobedience before Him (Lev 26:23–25; Deut 28:25). Yahweh offered no middle ground: as always, it was an "either/or proposition" for the nation of Israel based on their spiritual condition; their only hope for victory was in obedience to Yahweh. Saul and the nation were living in covenant disobedience before Yahweh when they encountered Goliath and the Philistines; David, however, was living in covenant obedience before Yahweh and had confidence in Him, correctly appraising the situation based on the truthfulness of God to His Word.⁸⁰ Bergen asserts, "David, the Lord's anointed one, discerned a theological purpose in warfare. This perspective is one that must be examined because it is of utmost importance for understanding the mind-set of orthodox Israelites in the Old Testament."⁸¹

In 1 Samuel 17:26b, David asks in more of a challenge mode than a mere question: "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" Bergman writes:

David was deeply disturbed that a Philistine, who was uncircumcised and therefore outside of a covenant relationship with the Lord, would so boldly heap shame on (NIV, "defy"; v. 26) "the armies of the living God." Goliath's words were not just an insult directed against the Israelite army; they were also an assault on "the living God," since the army was composed of members of the Lord's covenant community.⁸²

⁷⁹ Davis and Whitcomb, *Israel: From Conquest to Exile*, 223.

⁸⁰ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 7:196.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7:196.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7:192.

Throughout the remainder of the chapter, David's basis for the victory he knows will come is that this Philistine has taunted the armies of the living God (1 Sam 17:36–37):

Next, he [Goliath] “cursed David by his gods” (v. 43). The author's use of the term “cursed” (Hb. *qālal*) here is theologically significant; readers knowledgeable of the Torah would know that by cursing this son of Abraham, Goliath was bringing down the Lord's curse on himself (cf. Gen 12:3)—a favorable outcome to the battle (from an Israelite perspective!) was thus assured.⁸³

As a sad indication of the spiritual condition of Saul and the nation, First Samuel 17:26 contains the first reference to God in the entire chapter: “Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, ‘What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?’” This is in keeping with the vastly different spiritual conditions of David (1 Sam 16:12–13) and Saul (1 Sam 16:14) and as seen in their subsequent actions. Once David rightly refers to God's name (1 Sam 17:26), the name Goliath does not occur in the remainder of the chapter. “Goliath” occurs only in 1 Sam. 17:4 and 23. After this, he is repeatedly referred to as, for example, “this uncircumcised Philistine” (1 Sam 17:26), “this Philistine” (1 Sam 17:33), or merely “the Philistine” (17:41ff.)—just another in the long line of Gentile enemies of God and His people, but absolutely nothing more. God's promise in Genesis 12:3/Numbers 24:9 and Leviticus 26/Deuteronomy 28 (as an enemy of national Israel) applied just as much to this uncircumcised Philistine as it did to all other enemies of Yahweh and His people:

In righteous indignation David implicitly offers himself to fight Goliath (v. 26), and in David's eyes the presence of Goliath the “uncircumcised Philistine” . . . has already brought on Israel disgrace that must be removed. The Hebrew root for “disgrace” in v. 26 is the same for “defy” later in the verse: Goliath is disgracing/defying Israel, and David—with God's help—intends to remove that disgrace/defiance.⁸⁴

Goliath cursed David by his—the uncircumcised Philistine's—gods (1 Sam 17:43). David repeatedly referred to Yahweh as the basis for his victory as 1 Sam 17:45–47 shows:

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7:195.

⁸⁴ Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, 3:698.

that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands.”

Hamilton rightly surmises regarding David:

As he challenges Goliath with these words, it is clear that David relies on Yahweh, not his own boyish might (17:47). Moreover, David is defending not his own reputation but Yahweh's, whom Goliath defied (17:45). David is not concerned with the reputation he will gain, but he wants all to know that there is a God in Israel (17:46). Through the judgment on Saul comes salvation by David through the judgment on the Philistine champion for the glory of God.⁸⁵

Although this is a unique situation, the core truth of this encounter should not be overlooked: contrary to virtually universal modern usage, *David defeating Goliath is not an upset of the underdog against seemingly overwhelming odds*. David's victory is just another example of Yahweh being true to His Word, especially the Genesis 12:3/Num. 24:9 promise to curse the ones who curse Israel and the promise to grant military victory to national Israel when they were in covenant obedience to Him (Lev 26; Deut 28). This is also another in a long line of examples of Numbers 23:19: “Has He said, and will not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” Baldwin concludes: “This was no ordinary battle, but one in which God's honour was at stake, and in this circumstance David's exposure to danger permitted God's honour to be more clearly acknowledged than if David had more obviously been a match for the Philistine. At no point did David take any credit for the successful outcome, which he confidently expected.”⁸⁶

Summary and Significance

Although the world at large and many theologians often do not deem it so, David's victory over Goliath clearly was not an upset. Upsets are sometimes as high as the “one in ten thousand” chance of something to occur. In David's victory over Goliath, God had not established “the odds.” God had previously revealed and announced this outcome long before the 1 Samuel account.

It should also be noted that *nothing* that God promised or its ultimate fulfillment should be taken in anyway other than the normative, literal, grammatical hermeneutic. From God's initial promise to “curse the ones who curse” Israel (Gen 12:3), up to God's promise to curse Amalek for his attacking Israel (Exod 17), to His reiteration of these promises in Numbers 22–24, His additional warnings for national Israel not to forget to fulfill the promised destruction of the Amalekites up through 1 Samuel 13, all make perfect sense with the normative use of language. To put this another

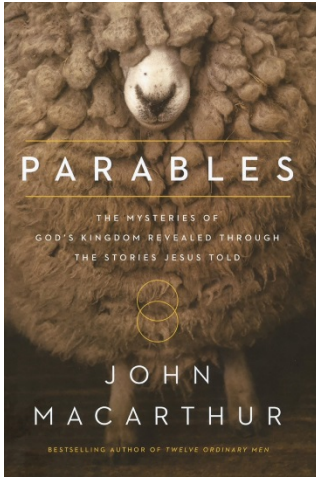
⁸⁵ Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, 169. Youngblood adds: David fights Goliath “in the name of” the Lord—that is, “as his representative” (*BDB*, p. 102; cf. 25:5, 9; 2 Sam 6:18; Exod 5:23; Deut 10:8; 2 Chronicles 14:11). One of the names of the “God of the armies of Israel” is the regal name “LORD Almighty” (lit., “LORD of Hosts/Armies”), (Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, 3:701).

⁸⁶ Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 8:137.

way, God Himself employed the literal, grammatical hermeneutic in both the pronouncement of His cursing Amalek and descendants and its subsequent fulfillment.

Also, when Goliath cursed Israel by his gods in 1 Samuel 16, the Genesis 12:3/Numbers 24:9 curse rested on him as well. With David walking in covenant obedience to Yahweh under Mosaic Covenant, the military outcome was already determined before the two representatives faced each other. Not only was David's victory not an upset, under these circumstances, the outcome would have been the same each time. Further, let one thousand Goliaths or more appear under these same conditions, they all would have been defeated—every time—just as God's Word has repeatedly promised. After all, the Spirit of the LORD had come upon Samson mightily (Judg 14:19), resulting in Samson slaying one thousand Philistines with the fresh jawbone of a donkey (Judg 15:15–16). When this same Spirit came mightily upon David (1 Sam 16:13), would one expect any less striking of a victory, all in keeping with God faithfully keeping His covenant promises?

Finally, as has been repeatedly shown, with God's pinpoint precision of both His pronouncement and fulfillment, one should confidently expect Him to continue fulfilling His Word in the normative, literal, grammatical hermeneutic past this point as it relates to future prophecies and their fulfillment. With the careful faithfulness of God to honor His Word up to First Samuel 17, the burden of proof is on those who would switch to allegorical interpretations of related prophecies before or after David's victory over Goliath and with those who would curse national Israel.



Parables: The Mysteries of God's Kingdom Revealed through the Stories Jesus Told by John MacArthur

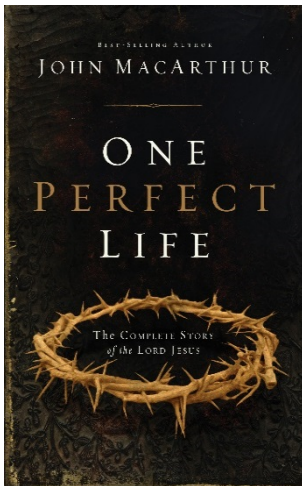
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REVIEWS

Greg Harris. *The Bible Expositor's Handbook—Old Testament Digital Edition*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017. \$19.99.

Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Retired Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

Greg Harris has authored a number of books that have majored upon the unity and continuity of the Bible from the Old Testament through the New Testament: *The Cup and the Glory: Lessons on Suffering and the Glory of God* (Kress, 2006); *The Darkness and the Glory: His Cup and the Glory from Gethsemane to the Ascension* (Kress, 2008); and *The Stone and the Glory: Lessons on the Temple Presence and the Glory of God* (Kress, 2010). The author has been Professor of Bible Exposition at The Master's Seminary since 2006. He also ministers as the teaching pastor at Lake Hills Community Church in Castaic, CA. After completing his studies at Talbot Theological Seminary (M.Div. and Th.M.) and Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.D.), Dr. Harris taught on the faculty of Washington Bible College for seven years and then for ten years at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also continues to serve as an international faculty member of the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary in Amman.

The Bible Expositor's Handbook—Old Testament Digital Edition takes the Glory Series a step further—explaining the literal-grammatical hermeneutical basis for the author's interpretation of Scripture. The goal remains the same—to highlight the unity and continuity of the biblical text. He accomplishes that goal very effectively in a step-by-step reading of the Old Testament, drawing the reader's attention to context and covenants in preparation for biblical exposition.

Box inserts containing key truths, observations, and warnings direct the reader's attention to key hermeneutical and theological points and their spiritual implications for the reader personally. Each chapter of the volume concludes with "Deeper Walk Study Questions" enabling the expositor to review the chapter's teaching and to find ways to apply that knowledge to his Bible exposition. In addition, Greg Harris produced thirty videos of less than two minutes each to provide his personal comments about each chapter—one for each chapter's introduction and one for each chapter's conclusion. These videos give the study a more personal touch, allowing the readers to hear from the author himself.

Chapter 1 (“So You Want to Be an Expositor?”) opens the volume by focusing on the expositor’s reverence for God. Methodology takes second place to a right relationship to the God of the Bible. The author also takes the opportunity to explain why he should write a Bible exposition handbook. Expositors must study the continuity and unity of Scripture in order to expound it accurately and faithfully.

Then, in Chapter 2 (“The Old Testament *Is* the Story of Jesus”), the author directs the reader’s attention to the role of the Old Testament in presenting God-given truth. To complete preparation for exposition the reader must turn those truths into life lessons. Second Timothy 3:14–17 contains the biblical foundation for the role of the Old Testament. In addition, the Old Testament reveals significant Christological truth. However, the student of Scripture must avoid trying to make everything in the Old Testament a reference to Jesus. The author introduces readers to key biblical texts in both testaments that enable them to understand that the written Word itself points to these truths. Those truths demonstrate that God has no “Plan B”—He has but one original plan.

Turning to the concept of biblical covenants, Chapter 3 (“Why Are There So Many Different Interpretations of the Bible?”) introduces readers to the definition of “covenant.” Expositors can only properly identify and understand the biblical covenants by means of the application of a literal-grammatical hermeneutic. Biblical covenants manifest their significance in the Christological truths proclaimed in both testaments. No one can accurately expound the story of Jesus without understanding God’s covenants.

In Chapters 4 through 6 the author develops the covenant themes that contribute to the continuity of the Pentateuch as well as to its immense theological significance for the program of God. Chapter 4 (“Four Examples of Moses Writing about Jesus”) examines the Old Testament teachings regarding the Angel of the Lord, God’s Passover Lamb, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, and the Rock. These three examples within the Old Testament prove that it presents the story of Jesus. Throughout these examples, the author appeals to New Testament texts and parallels that confirm the Christological truths of the Old Testament.

Moving on from the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants, Chapter 5 (“The Mosaic Covenant and Its Biblical Relevance”) explains how the Mosaic covenant arises out of the revelation of the Abrahamic covenant. Without understanding the prior covenant, an expositor cannot accurately teach and preach the latter covenant. Those to whom God gives a covenant are responsible to obey the stipulations of that covenant. Therefore, those covenant obligations consist of instructions for living for God. For Israel, the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant behaved as a spiritual barometer. A literal understanding of the covenant blessings and curses revealed either the corresponding obedience or rebellion of God’s people. Galatians 4:4–5 marks covenant chronology with regard to the life and ministry of Jesus.

Chapter 6 (“A Star! A Star! Shining in the Night!”) explains how to look for key words and phrases that unlock biblical meaning, especially in prophetic texts like Numbers 24:14, 17. But the author also demonstrates the significance of context as he walks the reader through Numbers 22–24. These chapters in Numbers highlight the importance of the people of Israel to God’s covenant program. The biblical text unfolds the truths about the Messiah that expand upon and harmonize with God’s

previous promises. Divine revelation in Scripture unfolds progressively and purposefully. Spiritualizing or allegorizing the biblical promises results in diminishing the importance of both Israel and the Messiah. Indeed, nothing but a literal-grammatical interpretation finds agreement with what Jesus claims about Himself from the Old Testament.

Having completed his survey of the Pentateuch and its teachings, Harris utilizes Chapter 7 (“The Biblical Logic of Joshua 1–6”) to continue his analysis of the Old Testament by pointing to the continuity of the covenant truths from the Pentateuch on into the Book of Joshua. In order to properly comprehend the significance of the conquest of Jericho, Bible readers must take into account God’s land promises to Israel in the Pentateuch and the blessings and cures of the Mosaic covenant.

The author next devotes a chapter (In Chapter 8, “But Doesn’t Joshua 21:43–45 Show That God Has Fulfilled His Land Promises?”) to respond to those who reject the view that the biblical covenants have already been completely fulfilled and that nothing remains in God’s program for Israel regarding the land of promise. Harris deals with this biblical text by taking readers back through the biblical covenant background. The evidence includes geographical details, division of the land of Canaan for Israel’s possession, Leviticus 26’s stipulations for repentance and restoration, eschatological promises, and biblical evidence after Joshua 21.

Remaining in the Book of Joshua (Chapter 9, “Choose You This Day Whom You Will Serve; as for Me and My House, We Will Serve the Lord”), the author develops the covenant renewal at Mts. Ebal and Gerizim. By walking through the text itself and what it meant for Israel, he also demonstrates the applicational truths that Christians need to grasp for themselves.

The books of Samuel continue to testify to the ongoing significance of the prior covenants to God’s dealings with Israel and the nations around them (Chapter 10, “This Just In: David’s Victory over Goliath Was *Not* an Upset!”) and present an additional covenant (Chapter 11, “The Davidic Covenant and Its Theological Relevance”). Chapter 10 highlights God’s promise to Abraham that those who curse His people will in turn be cursed. On the other hand, those who bless God’s people will be blessed. This covenant truth appears with regard to Amalek, to Egypt, and even to Goliath—just to name a few instances of covenant relevance.

However, Chapter 11 focuses on the need to properly interpret and to accurately preach biblical prophecy, not just the books of Samuel. The Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) has roots going all the way back to Genesis 49:8–12 and the theocratic primacy of the tribe of Judah. Throughout the remainder of the Bible the Davidic covenant surfaces again and again—emphasizing Messiah’s reign. The covenant’s significance shows up in the fact that it bookends the New Testament (Matt 1:1 and Rev 22:16). Therefore, an expositor must approach biblical prophecy with all of the covenants in mind—especially the Davidic.

How far into the Old Testament do the biblical covenants extend? In Chapter 12 (“Worship and Wisdom”) the author reveals that Old Testament wisdom books cannot be understood without observing the relevance of the covenants to true worship and true wisdom. This chapter returns to the more theocentric and spiritual focus of Chapter 1, rather than tracing covenant details. The author argues that expositors must define worship and wisdom biblically, rather than using the more man-centered definitions so popular in the present. As the bodily representation of divine wisdom,

Jesus received and accepted worship under the Mosaic Covenant. In this fashion the author also reminds the reader of the relevance of the topic in Chapter 2.

Chapter 13 (“I Know the Plans I Have for You”) returns to the basic line of thought regarding prophetic literature that the author first addressed in Chapter 10. The discussion commences with an analysis of Jeremiah 29:11 and its contexts—biblically (Old and New Testaments), historically (post-exilic), and in regard to the biblical covenants.

Taking the title for a popular hymn based upon Lamentations 3:23, Chapter 14 (“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”) develops the background to Lamentations and this key theological declaration. Such a study returns the reader back to the key covenant text of Leviticus 26, as well as the companion text, Deuteronomy 27–28. God remains faithful to His covenant promises—even through His judgment of Israel in their exile to Babylon.

In the concluding chapter of this volume (Chapter 15, “As I Live, I Shall Be King over You”), Harris limits its scope to primarily that of the prophet Ezekiel. The prophet’s revelation concerning the glory of God will have a significant bearing on the person and work of the Messiah in the New Testament. Likewise, the prophet’s descriptions of the future restoration of Israel demonstrate that the covenanted promises have yet to be fulfilled. The concluding comments in this chapter make the transition to a promised second volume, *The Bible Expositor’s Handbook—New Testament Digital Edition*.

Everyone aspiring to expound the Bible should read *The Bible Expositor’s Handbook—Old Testament Digital Edition*. One of the crying needs in our day involves the shameful neglect of adequate preparation both in personal spirituality and in interpreting the Bible with accuracy. Such neglect leads to a denial of biblical unity and continuity. Greg Harris instructs the expositor by exemplifying the process and explaining the foundation for each step. He studiously ties exposition to the text by means of a sound hermeneutic. May God prepare many more such expositors of His Word by means of this volume.

Steve Swartz. *Shattered Shepherds*. The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2015. 127 pp. (paper) \$14.99.

Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition, The Master’s Seminary.

When I wrote *The Cup and the Glory* years ago, I wrote for “wounded, bruised, and hurting sheep” within the church. When Steve Swartz wrote *Shattered Shepherds*, he wrote for when the wounded, bruised, and hurting sheep is one of the pastors or other high leadership positions in the church. This does not mean the pastor who committed adultery and was removed from his position as the consequence of his own sin, such as adultery. Instead:

This book is for the pastor, elder, deacon, or other leader in the church who has invested his life and passion into his love for Christ’s church—and been shot

up for doing so by the very ones he serves. You have experienced the colorful gamut of emotions from crushing grief to teeth-grinding indignation. You've had 1,001 imaginary "I should have said" conversations with yourself, replaying the painful interactions with others but with a happier more victorious ending in which you overcome your opponent with unstoppable biblical logic. You have wept in the arms of your wife and had to put on a brave face for your children. You've had even the foundations of your understanding of the sovereignty of God shaken hard (9–10).

Further, even more selective the target audience for *Shattered Shepherds*:

This book is not primarily for the one in the midst of the trial that is still ongoing, although he may find this useful as a lesson in what to avoid. It is for the one who is sitting in the ash heap with Job, the devastation already complete, the loss total, and the possibility of recovery zero. It is for you have asked questions like, "Why me?" "Why now?" "What has my ministry really accomplished?" "Am I done in ministry?" "Can I do this again?" "Can my family do this again?" "Can I love a congregation again?" "Can I trust church leaders again?" (10).

Swartz presents a twofold purpose for his book:

First, it is my hope that you gain traction on your road to feeling like a normal human being again. I know the bone-jarring impact that ministry disaster can have on every single aspect of your life, from your marriage to your blood pressure. Everything is touched. The faster you get your bearings once again, the better off you and your family will be. But I have a second, more eternal reason. You are a minister of the gospel of Christ, with experience and training. The Church of Jesus Christ is crying out all over the world for faithful men who will lead the charge for sound doctrine, biblical preaching, and bold evangelism. The church desperately needs men to train other men (2 Tim 2:2). The enemy is prowling around devouring weak churches and weak believers, promulgating false doctrine, a seeker-sensitive cotton candy gospel, and mystical practices pawned off as legitimate worship. We are in a war and the Church cannot afford to have her most experienced officers sitting back behind the battle while the foot soldiers are getting clobbered. We need leaders, and we need them now. Sometimes in a war, even the wounded have to get up and fight (10–11).

Steve Swartz does not write as an academician cloistered away on a campus instructing others how they should respond. He writes from intensely painful firsthand experience in his life. And he writes not only as a pastor to pastors, he writes as a previously shattered shepherd to other shattered shepherds. The book is written in an easily readable format and small sizes. However, the truths are so profound in here. Don't be surprised if you find yourself pondering one of the many biblical nuggets and profound godly counsel with *Shattered Shepherds*.

The book divides in two parts. The chapters in "Part One: What You Must Stop Doing," are explanatory by their names: Chapter One: "Blaming Others;" Chapter

Two: “Defending Yourself;” Chapter Three: “Worrying Constantly;” Chapter Four: “Succumbing to Anger;” and Chapter Five: “Viewing Yourself as the Tragic Hero.” Each chapter, including the ones not yet listed, ends with a beautifully biblically reasoned and heartfelt prayer unto God for grace to implement the material from that chapter. The second part of the book, “What You Must Start Doing” likewise shows its relevance: “Chapter Six: “Genuinely Trust the Sovereignty of God;” Chapter Seven: “Accept the Loving Discipline of the Lord;” Chapter Eight: “Forgive, Forgive, Forgive;” Chapter Nine: “Ask for Grace from the Lord;” and Chapter Ten: “Prayerfully Looking Ahead.” Three appendixes address “Dealing with Complete Ministry Disqualification,” “The Wife of the Shepherd,” and “Communicating Your Position with Blame or Aggressive Defense.”

I highly recommend *Shattered Shepherds*. Many, many people under such circumstances have already greatly been ministered to by reading it; many, many more people will do so in the future because, one, people around the world are entering today into the very situation that Steve Swartz wrote of, and two, the godly wisdom and counsel in this book will not change either. One final thought: perhaps you know of someone who fits this situation. This would be a tremendous grace gift present for you to give to them. If they do not know about *Shattered Shepherds*, do not be surprised if they rise up and call you blessed for gifting them with such a treasure.

Sinclair Ferguson. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 256 pp. (hardback), \$24.99.

Reviewed by Paul Shirley, Pastor of Grace Community Church at Wilmington, DE.

The difficulty of explaining the role of the law in the life of a believer has occupied the attention of pastors, theologians, and church laymen since the time of the New Testament. Sadly, when given the opportunity to explain the duty of a Christian before a gracious Master, droves of people have fallen off one of two cliffs—legalism or antinomianism. The confusion about the role of obedience in the Christian life has only intensified in recent years. An increasing aversion to authority in this age of high-octane individuality, coupled with decreasing levels of theological nuance in this age of high-speed information, makes the issue seem like an unsolvable conundrum. However, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* by Sinclair Ferguson reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun, especially when it comes to these matters.

The Whole Christ (TWC) addresses the issues of legalism and antinomianism through the lens of the Marrow Controversy, an eighteenth-century debate on the role of the law and the gospel within the Scottish Presbyterian Church. As a Scotsman and a systematician, Sinclair B. Ferguson (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is poised to bring out the salient theological implications from this episode in church history. Ferguson is one of the few theologians who needs little introduction. His pulpit ministry, teaching posts, and numerous books make him a familiar voice for many Christians.

The content of *TWC* began to take shape in 1980, when Ferguson received an invitation to speak at a conference on the “Pastoral Lessons from the Marrow Controversy” (17). The audio from those lectures can still be found online, and now, after three decades, an expanded version of that material is available in *TWC*. In Ferguson’s words, *TWC* “is an extended reflection on the theological and pastoral issues that arose in the early eighteenth century viewed from the present day” (19). Thomas Boston, who stood at the center of the Marrow controversy, finds a significant voice in this book. In fact, one of the aims of *TWC* is to infuse a “tincture” (20) of Thomas Boston’s emphasis on grace into the thinking of readers. As Ferguson puts it, “It seems to me that anyone who wrestles theologically and personally with the great themes of gospel grace, legalism, antinomianism, and assurance, and is redirected to the Scriptures, should emerge with something of this ‘tincture’” (20).

The book begins with an enthusiastic forward from Tim Keller, who considers this volume “a tract for the times” (11). Keller describes the main inference he drew from reading *TWC*:

But if it is true that our main problem is a disbelief in the love and goodness of God, then to say, “All you need for sanctification is to believe your justification,” is too simplistic. That may lead you to cure a legalistic spirit with just less emphasis on law. You need more than just an abstract belief in your legal exemption from punishment; you need a renovation of your view of God (15–16).

In the body of the book, Ferguson spends the first several chapters introducing the details of the Marrow Controversy and drawing parallels between it and the issues that face the church today. The controversy began as a result of a poorly worded ordination question, which required ministerial candidates to reject preparationism. The question, “which became known as the Auchterarder Creed” (27), was eventually rejected by the 1717 General Assembly of the church. The church’s rejection of the question raised the ire of a group of ministers led by Thomas Boston. Armed with the controversial book, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, the “Marrow Men” argued that the gospel should be freely offered to all men on the basis of Christ’s finished work rather than on the basis of man’s preparatory work of rebuking sin. As a result of the subsequent debates about sin, grace, and law, the “Marrow Men” were suspected of antinomianism. In this section it will interest and surprise many readers to consider Ferguson’s critique of *Pilgrim’s Progress* for leaving the door open to preparationist interpretation.

After introducing the issues surrounding the Marrow controversy, Ferguson spends several chapters addressing the subsequent issue of legalism. Ferguson provides this explanation of the underlying error of legalism:

The essence of legalism ... is a heart distortion of the graciousness of God and of the God of grace. For that reason ... legalism is, necessarily, not only a distortion of the gospel, but *in its fundamental character it is also a distortion of the law*.... The gospel never overthrows God’s law for the simple reasons that both the law and the gospel are expressions of God’s grace. Therefore the reverse is true: grace confirms the law and its true character (88, emphasis in original).

In these chapters, readers will be interested to consider Ferguson's emphasis on the character of God as the basis of grace and the nature of law as a means of grace.

In addition to dealing with legalism, *TWC* spend several chapters addressing the opposite error of antinomianism. Ferguson alerts his readers that "for our purposes the simplest way to think of antinomianism is that it denies the role of the law in the Christian life" (140). As with legalism, Ferguson identifies a number of iterations and applications of antinomianism, but also offers a diagnosis concerning the underlying error that characterizes all strands:

At one level the problem is indeed rejection of God's law. But underneath lies a failure to understand grace and ultimately to understand God. True, his love for me is not based on my qualification or my preparation. But it is misleading to say that God accepts us the way we are. Rather he accepts us *despite the way we are*. *He receives us only in Christ and for Christ's sake*. Nor does he mean to leave us the way he found us, but to transform us into the likeness of his Son. Without that transformation and new conformity of life we do not have any evidence that we were ever his in the first place (154, emphasis in original).

In these chapters, readers will be challenged to keep up with detailed conversations about the law and will be refreshed by Ferguson's explanation of the power of grace to produce law-keeping fruit in the life of a believer.

In the final chapters of *TWC*, Ferguson addresses assurance of salvation and concludes:

Christian assurance is not self-assurance and self-confidence. It is the reverse: confidence in our Father, trust in Christ as our Savior, and joy in the Spirit as the Spirit of sonship, seal of grace, and earnest of our inheritance as sons and daughters of God. When these are the hallmarks of our lives, then the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ has come home to us in full measure (226).

In these final chapters, readers will appreciate Ferguson's pastoral tone and practical theology.

Ferguson never specifically defines the "tincture" he hopes to infuse into the thinking of his readers. Whatever the "tincture" is (or whatever that word even means), Ferguson's aim is to exalt the grace of God available through union with Christ. In fact, a thoughtful reading of the book makes it clear that a full-orbed understanding of grace is the solution to problems relating to legalism and antinomianism. "Antinomianism and legalism are not so much antithetical to each other as they are both antithetical to grace" (156). Furthermore, grace is found only in the person of Christ and thus, "God's grace in our union with Christ, is the antidote to both" (156). Biblically rich principles await readers willing to follow Ferguson as he travels back and forth through the centuries and doctrine of church history.

Critiques of *TWC* won't arise from the overall message of the book, but rather from the limitations of the book. Ferguson attempts a rare feat when he blends historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. While the compilation

of theological disciplines is admirable, at times it makes it difficult to “keep up” with Ferguson’s line of argumentations and virtually impossible for Ferguson to “cover” everything. Frankly, several trains of thought leave the station but never seem to arrive at their final destination. For instance, readers will be left with a number of unresolved questions about the Marrow Controversy, and how their own lives might parallel it. As a result, it will be possible for readers on all sides of the issue to find ammunition and affirmation for their view as they fill in the blanks. *TWC* will not resolve the ever-present debates about the law and gospel. It does, however, remind us that the intense debate over the role of obedience in the Christian life is not new and if we are going to cut through the confusion we must look to “the Whole Christ” who graciously forgives and changes sinners as Savior and Lord.

John A. Beck. *Discovery House Bible Atlas*. Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2015. 347 pp. \$39.99 (cloth).

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master’s Seminary.

The author of this volume, John Beck, has taught at numerous colleges and universities and is presently an independent scholar and writer. He is a permanent adjunct faculty member at Jerusalem University College in Israel and leads several study trips to Israel each year. He has authored numerous article/essay books and study tools that have generally focused on customs and geography of the Bible lands. I often tell my students that I would buy whatever he writes. His superb work on this atlas makes this volume one of my favorites.

After a very helpful introduction to the potential impact of biblical geography on biblical studies and the reader of the Bible, the author summarizes the general geography of the Promised Land. Then he connects the geography (topography and archaeology) discipline to the biblical narrative in ten chapters that cover both Old and New Testaments. Throughout that discussion he provides 93 helpful maps, hundreds of clear photographs of relevant panoramas, buildings, and key artifacts, and a handful of artistic reconstructions. At the end of the volume he includes an appendix containing important biblical dates, endnotes, photography credits, and a Scripture and subject index.

Throughout the volume he makes countless helpful observations and takes a number of solid stands. In his introduction to the volume, he points out that two types of investigation have impacted his study of geography: historical geography and literary geography. Historical geography entails “a study of how geography shaped events,” while literary geography concerns “a study of how geography mentioned in the Bible shapes readers” (10). Beck points out that geography “is not just incidental in the stories of the Bible. It’s an integral part of the Bible’s communication with us, and we need to recognize its role in shaping the meaning and message of a text” (13). One example of this geographic shaping of a narrative (part of God’s intended text) is the introduction to the David and Goliath account (1 Sam 17:1–2). The passage begins with oft-overlooked geographical information: “The Philistines gathered their forces for war at Socoh in Judah and camped between Socoh and Azekah in Ephes-

dammim. Saul and the men of Israel gathered and camped in the Valley of Elah; then they lined up in battle formation to face the Philistines.” The Elah valley was one of the key E-W conduits that connected the coastal region with the central ridge of Israel. The Philistines had worked their way into Judean territory and dominated the western and southern sides of that key trade route. The geographical notices emphasize the gravity of the situation Saul (and Israel) faced in 1 Samuel 17. One other example of a helpful geographical connection must suffice. Jesus’ raising to life a dead man who was from Nain (on the N side of the Hill of Moreh) took place a very short distance from Shunem, on the S side of that same hill. In Kings, Elisha had raised a young boy to life in Shunem, demonstrating his credentials as a God-appointed prophetic. That OT event would have been well-remembered by those who lived in that region. Jesus’s miracle outside of Nain, through geographic proximity, connects Jesus as a promised prophet, like Elijah was.

Although Beck does not develop his views on these issues, he seems to accept large numbers at face value and clearly supports an early date for the exodus and conquest (see his appendix with dates). His consistent connection of geographical features with interpretive insights is quite helpful. One might not agree with every observation he makes, but since he is carefully engaging the text of Scripture, he contributes to our understanding of various passages.

There are a number of top-notch atlases of Bible lands. Beck’s atlas is easily in my personal “top-five” and likely in the “top-three” of my favorite Bible atlases. If you need to have one atlas in your library, I would get a copy of the *Satellite Bible Atlas* (<http://www.bibleplaces.com/satellite-bible-atlas-schlegel/>) written by my colleague, Bill Schlegel at IBEX, the Israel campus of The Master’s University. In addition to that great resource, I would strongly encourage students of the Word to consider this volume by John Beck for their personal library as well.

John A. Beck, ed. *The Baker Book of Bible Charts, Maps, and Timelines*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016. 240 pp. \$29.99 (cloth).

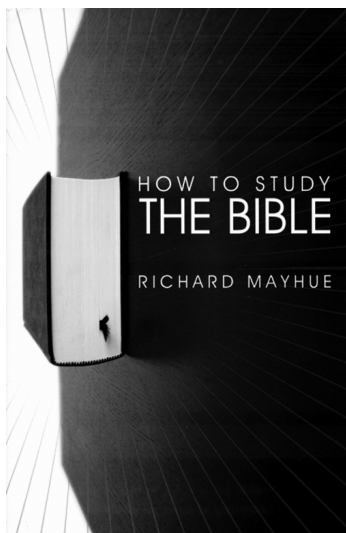
Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master’s Seminary.

For a brief overview of the author, see the review of his *Discovery House Bible Atlas* in the above book review in this issue. Although this work overlaps in ways with the atlas written by Beck, it offers a wider variety of resources that are more diverse and less unified than an atlas. This volume presents its information in three large sections: general Bible, Old Testament, and New Testament.

The first section, general Bible, has a general timeline (2600 B.C.–300 A.D.), general Bible maps (very helpful), and various charts dealing with a number of issues (23 of them; for example, ancient texts of the Bible, archaeology and the Bible, seasons and culture, weights and measures, etc.). The Old and New Testament sections both have these subsections: timeline, maps, charts, archaeology (with images and explanations of key archaeological discoveries relating to the OT or NT), and illustrations or reconstructions. The volume concludes with an index to all the maps.

This volume is not one that a student or pastor would work through from beginning to end. As they are preparing a lesson or a sermon and they come across a question about a place, custom, location, or date, they could look at that section of the volume for helpful information. Also, some of the charts compare common evangelical positions on big issues in OT or NT studies (e.g., date of the exodus, large numbers, reading the book of Revelation). As someone who teaches courses that deal with geography, history, archaeology, and uses images to help travelers picture things on trips to Israel, this resource seems to be a treasure trove of information.

I understand that there is a growing number of resources like this volume. One feature I wish this volume had is a CD with the key images available already in electronic format. Regardless, serious lay people as well as pastors and teachers will find Beck's work on this volume a helpful resource for their teaching and preaching ministry.



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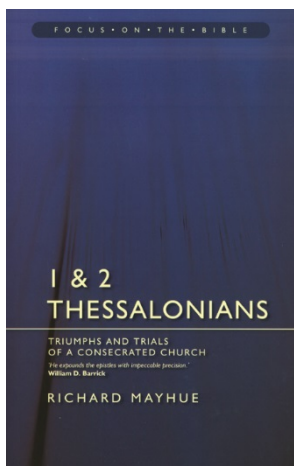
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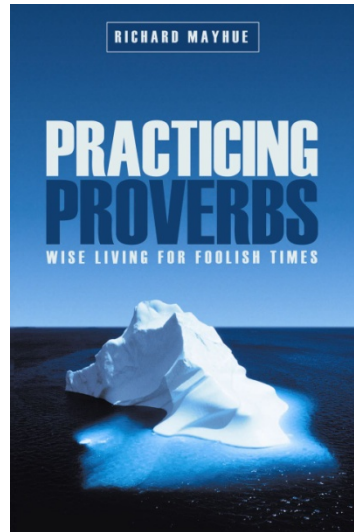
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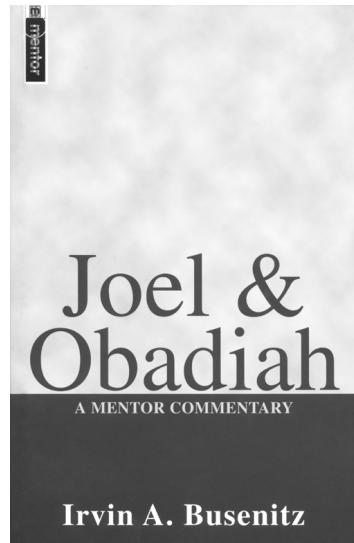
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