

Expository Preaching
from the Old Testament
WALTER C. KAISER

Preaching the
Book of Job
DEREK W. H. THOMAS

Why Preach the
Old Testament
STEVEN J. LAWSON

EXPOSITOR

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PREACHING *the* OLD TESTAMENT



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THE INSTITUTE FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

presented by STEVEN J. LAWSON *and* ONEPASSION MINISTRIES
in partnership with LIGONIER MINISTRIES

For over a year, OnePassion Ministries has partnered with Ligonier Ministries to host The Institute for Expository Preaching around the world to equip and encourage anyone who teaches and preaches the Bible. Our goal has been, and continues to be, to encourage pastors, church leaders, Bible teachers, seminary students, and those interested in the ministry of biblical preaching to stand firm and train them to rightly divide the Word of truth.

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AN ESSENTIAL PART OF PULPIT MINISTRY

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES

After I graduated from seminary and started my pastoral ministry, I immediately began preaching through the epistles in the New Testament. It was, admittedly, a comfort zone for me to start with these shorter letters such as Colossians and Ephesians. I then worked up my courage and proceeded to preach through a longer epistle, the letter to the Romans. Next, I extended my reach by expositing a Gospel, the Gospel of John.

In those early years, I never once ventured outside the safe confines of the New Testament in my preaching. To me, the Old Testament was a vast, uncharted territory, much like the dark continent of Africa in the days before David Livingstone journeyed into its unreached interior.

After this initial launch in my preaching, I went back to seminary to pursue a Doctor of Ministry degree, completely unaware of how one-dimensional I was in the pulpit. I had read *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul and was so affected by his writing that I chose to study under him at the seminary where he taught. However, once a student in his classroom, I began to experience the full extent of his influence upon my life.

As Dr. Sproul sized me up, he must have detected this glaring deficiency in me, that I was avoiding preaching from the Old Testament. That week, he intentionally assigned me an Old Testament passage to preach in class. I will never forget that intimidating experience. My text was Daniel 5, the drunken feast of Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall. As I stood to preach from the Old Testament, I felt awkwardly out of place, like an alien in a foreign country. Yet this was a necessary step in pointing me in the right direction.

Since then, preaching from the Old Testament has proven to be an essential part of my pulpit ministry. I have since preached sequentially, verse-by-verse through many Old Testament books and passages, including Joshua, Judges, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Daniel, Jonah, Habakkuk, and Malachi. I have also preached much of Isaiah and Ezekiel and many other selected passages in the Old Testament. I have written a commentary on Job and a two-volume commentary on Psalms as well as a book on the doctrines of grace, including in the Old Testament. As I preach in various conferences, I often preach from the Old Testament.

Expositing the Old Testament has developed many positive features in my pulpit ministry. Each section of the Old Testament—the high drama of the narratives, the divine authority of the Law, the literary beauty of the Psalms, the practical wisdom of Proverbs, the graphic visions of the prophets—has enhanced different aspects in my preaching that have made me more effective. I am sure that I preach the New Testament better because I have preached the Old Testament.

In this issue of *Expositor* magazine, our specific focus is upon effectively expositing the Old Testament. Just as I was challenged many years ago to preach this portion of the Bible, may the same influence be brought to bear upon you. May the articles that follow lead you to expound this foundational portion of inspired Scripture in your own pulpit ministry. ♦

PREACHING *the* OLD TESTAMENT



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ONEPASSION



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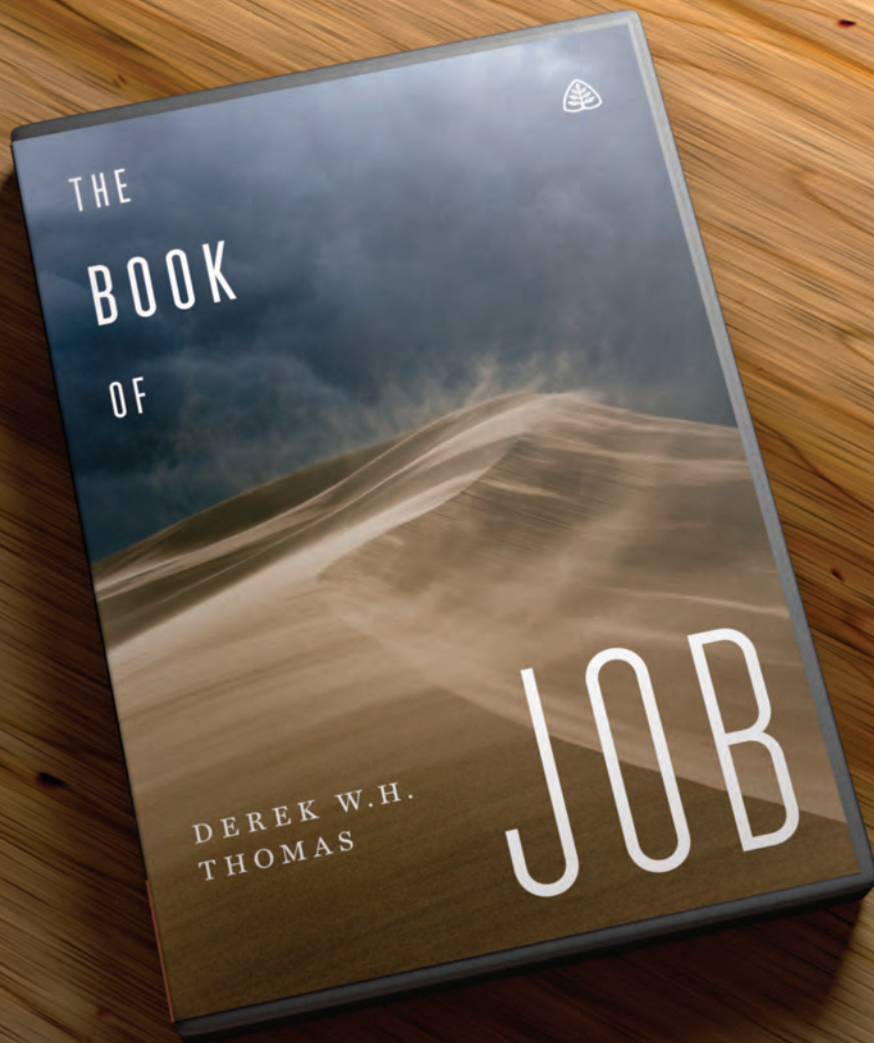
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HE GIVES AND TAKES AWAY

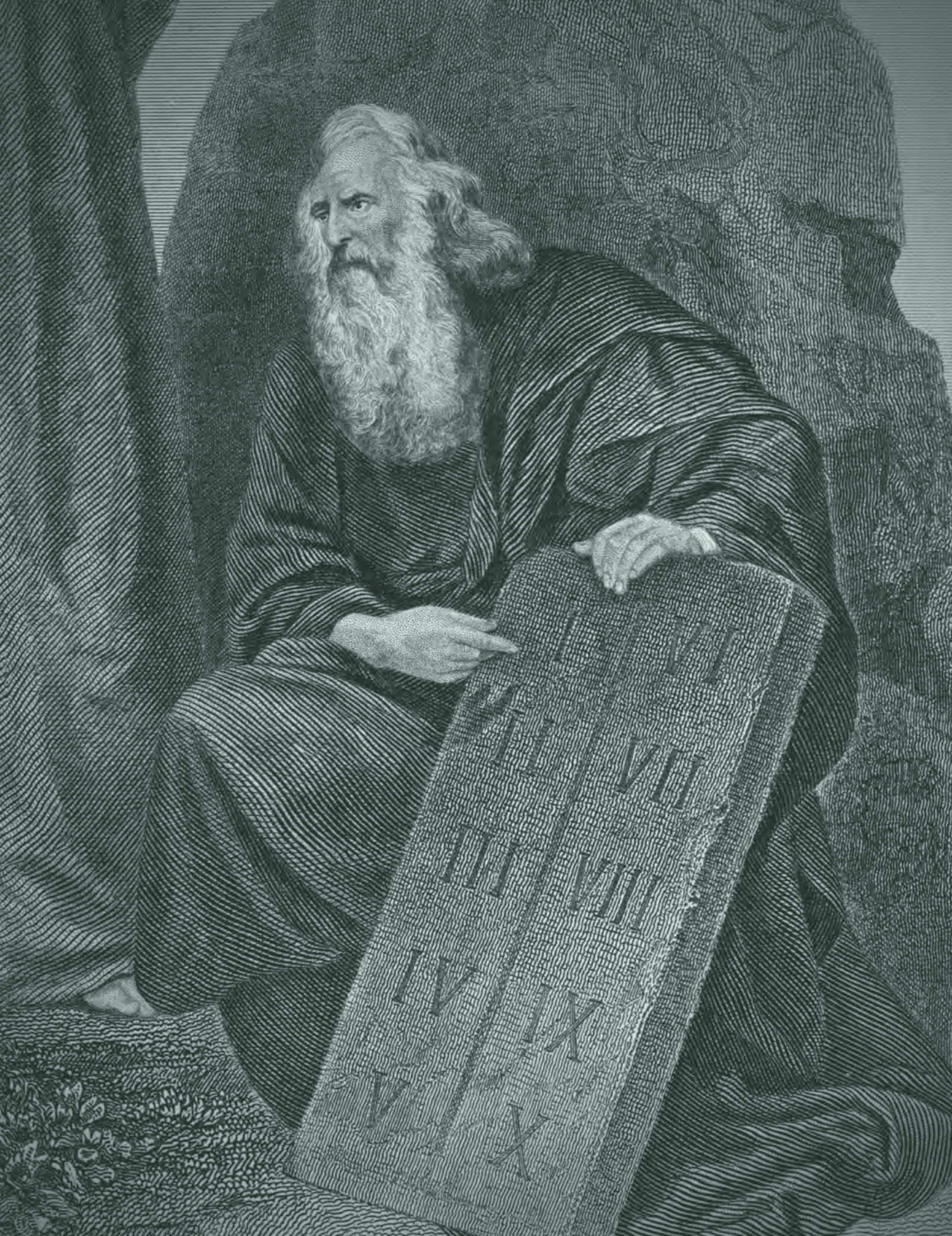
Why does God permit suffering? It's a question all of us have asked, and the book of Job points us toward the answer. Job's questions are our questions, and we can identify with his frustration, disappointment, and confusion in the midst of trials. This series walks us through the book of Job and considers what the Bible says about our darkest moments. In the end, it's in our trials that we learn to trust God and say with Job, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

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WHY PREACH THE OLD TESTAMENT

STEVEN J. LAWSON

The Bible is an amazing book—the greatest that has ever been written. There is no other book like it in the world. The Bible is, in fact, a book of books. That is, it is a book comprised of many books, a virtual library in itself. This collection of sixty-six books was written over a period of sixteen hundred years, by at least forty authors, on three different continents, in three different languages. Yet when compiled, its various parts fit together perfectly to form one book that is a literary whole. Included are different sections that include history, law, poetry, song, prophecy, biography, discourses, and correspondence.

The first thirty-nine books constitute the Old Testament. This Hebrew Bible is an integral and vital part of Scripture that stands on even par with the New Testament. Though often neglected, the Old Testament is as equally inspired by God as the twenty-seven books which span Matthew to Revelation. It is essential that Christian pulpits in this hour expound the timeless riches contained in these ancient books.

Noted Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser writes that the Old Testament “is clearly overlooked and frequently neglected in the preaching and teaching ministry of the church. This neglect is all the more baffling

when its claims and right to be received as the powerful Word of God are just as strong as those of the New Testament.” We want to address this disregard in an attempt to restore the whole Bible to present day preaching.

Why must the Old Testament be preached in these modern times? Why should it not be overlooked by the contemporary pulpit? The following are ten compelling reasons why the Hebrew Bible should be preached today with precision and power.

Reason 1:

It is the Inspired Word of God

First and foremost, the Old Testament should be preached because it is what it claims to be, namely, the divinely inspired Word of God. Moses asserted that the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy—was breathed out of the mouth of God. He wrote, “man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3c). That is to say, the written record of this divine revelation is God-breathed. Moses was affirming that every word of Scripture proceeds out of the mouth of God. This claim concerning divine inspiration is likewise true for every subsequent canonical book of the Hebrew Bible. In other words, when the Old Testament speaks, God speaks.

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS THE INSPIRED AND INERRANT WORD OF GOD. WHEN IT IS PREACHED TODAY, IT SPEAKS THE INCORRUPTIBLE TRUTH OF GOD HIMSELF, AND IT TESTIFIES THE UNVARNISHED REALITY OF EVERY SUBJECT IT ADDRESSES.

David, in writing half of the Psalms, maintained that “the Law of the Lord” was directly issued by God, the moral Judge of heaven and earth. The divine Law does not come from the courts of man, but from the very throne of God. It has come down from God himself. David refers to the Scripture as “the law of the LORD” (Ps 19:7). This means the Old Testament finds its origin in the divine decrees of God. Likewise, David represents it as “the testimony of the LORD,” “the precepts of the LORD,” and “the commandment of the LORD” (Ps 19:7–8).

The apostle Paul validated this claim when he wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16). This meant that the entire Old Testament is God-breathed,

as well as each New Testament book. Consequently, these foundational books of “the Law and the prophets” are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” That is, the Bible is useful for teaching what is right, exposing what is not right, instructing how to get right, and showing how to live right. Further, it is “able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). The Old Testament is an evangelistic set of books, able to lead sinners to faith in Jesus Christ. Moreover, it is an edifying collection of books, able to mature believers.

Being divinely inspired, the Old Testament is, therefore, the inerrant revelation of God to man. David records: “The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times” (Ps 12:6). In other words, every word of God is like the choicest silver that has been purified to the superlative degree. It is the pure Word of God, free from any imperfections. David further writes, “The word of the Lord is tried” (Ps 18:30). The meaning is the same. The Word of God has been tested as by fire and found to be flawless. Solomon confirmed, “Every word of God is tested” (Prov 30:5). Later, Jesus Christ claimed that what David wrote in the Old Testament, he did “in the Holy Spirit” (Matt 22:43).

Simply put, the Old Testament is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. When it is preached today, it speaks the incorruptible truth of God Himself, and it testifies the unvarnished reality of every subject it addresses.

Reason 2:

It Contains the Majority of the Bible

Second, the Old Testament should also be preached because it comprises the single largest portion of the Bible. To ignore the Old Testament is to pass over the major part of Scripture. The sheer size of its thirty-nine books requires the attention of the expositor in the pulpit. It comes first in the chronological arrangement of the Bible. It lays the sturdy foundation for all that follows. A preacher would ignore three quarters of the entire Bible if he did not to preach the Old Testament. Almost every major doctrine in the New Testament is found in seed form in the Old Testament. The preacher must understand the origins of these truths in the Old Testament in order to properly grasp their full richness in the New Testament.

Whenever one opens the Bible to the middle, he will find himself not even close to the end of the Old Testament. At the halfway mark, a vast portion of its books still remains before arriving at the New Testament. The

Old Testament contains 929 chapters, compared with only 260 chapters in the New. It has 33,214 verses, compared to the far fewer 7,959 verses in the New. The Old Testament is comprised of 593,393 words, compared to 181,253 in the New. An expositor should not pass over the first three quarters of the Bible and to only expound the final, fourth part. That would be a limited ministry indeed. To limit a pulpit ministry to only the New Testament is to limit the effectiveness of a ministry.

Reason 3:

It Reveals the Lord Jesus Christ

Third, the Old Testament should be preached because it reveals the person and work of Jesus Christ. This truth remains today for every expositor. The apostle Paul testified that he must preach Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2). Every preacher is charged to expound the Old Testament because the coming Messiah is found throughout the scope of its pages. Here lies a vast resource of prophecies and types of the Lord Jesus Christ for the preacher to proclaim.

Beginning with the first verse of the Old Testament (Gen 1:1), Jesus Christ is implied as the divine Agent in creation. The New Testament writers make this clear (John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:3). As soon as man rebelled in the Garden, Jesus was promised as the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). God then killed an animal and made a covering for the guilt of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21). This slain substitute pictured the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Subsequently, God entered into a covenant with Abraham in which he promised to bless all the nations with his saving grace (Gen 12:1–3). This promise would be realized in Jesus Christ. God later entered into a covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai in which he issued the Law, an expression of the holiness of Christ (Ex 20:1–7). Christ is also the perfect fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, and whose obedience to it achieved the perfect righteousness that is imputed to believers in justification. God also established the sacrificial system to show that he cannot be approached by sinful man, except by a priest who brings a prescribed sacrifice (Lev 6:8–13). This system pictures Jesus Christ as the perfect high priest who represents God's people, offering himself the perfect sacrifice to atone for their sins (Hebrews 8–9).

Later, God entered into an everlasting covenant with David that establishes his lineage to be the royal line of the coming King who will reign forever (2 Sam 7:11–14). Jesus Christ will be its perfect fulfillment (Luke 1:32–33). In

addition, other passages prophesied His virgin birth (Isa 7:14), sinless life (Isa 50:4–9), public ministry (Isa 42:1–4), vicarious death (Isa 52:13–53:12), and bodily resurrection (Ps 16:8–11). From Moses to Malachi, the entire Old Testament bears a strong witness of Jesus Christ. To preach these thirty-nine books is to preach Christ crucified.

THE OLD TESTAMENT SHOULD BE PREACHED BECAUSE IT REVEALS THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST. THIS TRUTH REMAINS TODAY FOR EVERY EXPOSITOR. . . . EVERY PREACHER IS CHARGED TO EXPOUND THE OLD TESTAMENT BECAUSE THE COMING MESSIAH IS FOUND THROUGHOUT THE SCOPE OF ITS PAGES.

Reason 4:**It is the Bible Jesus Preached**

Fourth, the Old Testament should be preached because it is the Bible that Jesus himself preached. It can be argued that if we are to walk as he walked (1 John 2:6), we should certainly preach as he preached. Any reading of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—reveals how repeatedly Jesus quoted the Old Testament throughout his earthly ministry.

A brief survey of the Gospel of Luke reveals some of the Old Testament texts Jesus used in his ministry. When he launched his public ministry, the Lord cited Isaiah 61:1–3 to explain the power of the Spirit upon his preaching (Luke 4:18). Jesus soon affirmed his messiahship by quoting Isaiah 35:5 when John the Baptist began to doubt if he was the expected one (Luke 7:22). Jesus cited Malachi 3:1 to describe His forerunner, John the Baptist, as the one who would proceed Him and prepare the way of His coming (Luke 7:27). He clarified his use of parables in his ministry by quoting Isaiah 6:9. This was to explain that many would not receive His truth (Luke 8:10).

In his work of evangelism, Jesus again appealed to the Old Testament. He cited Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 to show what was necessary to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 10:26–28). If people did not listen to the Old Testament, He asserted, they would not believe regardless of what else is presented to them (Luke 16:31). When approached by a rich young ruler, Jesus quoted Exodus 20:12–16 to expose the lost condition of his soul (Luke 18:20). In that encounter, Jesus used the Law like a skilled surgeon would use a scalpel to reveal this man's sin and his need for grace. Jesus referenced Ezekiel 17:23 to explain the kingdom of God in Luke 13:18–19.

On another occasion, Jesus quoted Psalm 6:8 to announce divine condemnation upon the unconverted (Luke 13:27). When He cleansed the temple in Luke 19:46, he quoted Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Jesus explained His rejection by Israel by referring to Psalm

118:22 (Luke 20:17). To defend His messiahship before the Sanhedrin in Luke 22:69, Jesus used Psalm 110:1. To expound upon the end of the age in Luke 23:30, Jesus used Hosea 10:8.

Further, Jesus defended His own deity in Luke 20:41–43 by quoting Psalm 110:1. Jesus cited Daniel 7:13 to explain His future coming in glory in Luke 21:27. Jesus also spoke of the necessity of His saving death in Luke 22:37 by asserting Isaiah 53:12. To His disciples, Jesus taught the meaning of His death and resurrection from the Old Testament: “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).

In like manner, every expositor should preach the Old Testament with the same authority that was used by Jesus. The Hebrew Bible was a powerful force in His preaching ministry. Those who would preach as He did will not be restricted in their pulpit endeavors when expounding this important section of Scripture.

Reason 5:**It is the Bible the Apostles Preached**

Fifth, the Old Testament should be preached today because it is the Bible that

the apostles preached. Until the New Testament was written and collected, the apostles drew heavily from the Old Testament in their ministry. Their constant appeals to the Hebrew Bible and its profound truths in no way hindered their gospel ministries. Arguably, the greatest sermon of the church age ever preached was by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. This Christ-exalting message was laced with Old Testament texts from beginning to end. Peter first read Joel 2:28–32 and then explained it by cross-referencing Psalm 16:8–11 (Acts 2:26–28). He then quoted Psalm 132:11, returned to Psalm 16:8, and proceeded to Psalm 110:1. God honored this biblical exposition, resulting in the conversion of three thousand souls.

Soon thereafter, Peter preached in the temple area,

EVERY EXPOSITOR SHOULD PREACH THE OLD TESTAMENT WITH THE SAME AUTHORITY THAT WAS USED BY JESUS.

referencing multiple Old Testament passages. In rapid-fire fashion in Acts 3:13–26, he proclaimed Exodus 3:13, Deuteronomy 18:15, 18–19, Leviticus 23:29, and, finally, Genesis 22:18. The result of this sermon firmly based upon the Old Testament was the further growth of the church through the conversions of lost sinners (Acts 4:4).

When called before the Sanhedrin, Peter did not hesitate to bear witness of Jesus Christ by quoting Psalm 118:22: “He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, *but* **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone**” (Acts 4:11). Stephen also gave a bold witness be-

fore the Sanhedrin by giving a survey of the Old Testament. This walk through the Hebrew Bible was, in reality, a *tour de force*. Stephen began with Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, quoting Genesis 11:31–12:1 (vv. 2–3), Genesis 17:1 (v. 7), and Exodus 2:14–15 (vv. 27–30), Exodus 3:1, 5–7 (vv. 32–34), Deuteronomy 18:5 (v. 37), and Exodus 32:1 (v. 40). He then referenced Joshua 24:20; Isaiah 63:10; Jeremiah 19:13; Ezekiel 20:39; Amos 5:25–27 (vv. 42–43), and Isaiah 66:1–2 (vv. 48–50). His entire defense before the ruling body of Israel was a powerful exposition of the Old Testament.

When Paul launched his first missionary journey,



he quoted Habakkuk 1:5 to explain the rejection of the gospel (Acts 13:41). Then he cited Isaiah 42:6 to clarify why he was turning to the Gentiles with the gospel message of salvation (Acts 13:47). Paul continued to use the Old Testament in his evangelistic endeavors on his second missionary journey. In Thessalonica, Paul reasoned from the Old Testament: “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” (Acts 17:2–3). Souls were converted and a church was planted as a result of this preaching.

This should be a compelling motivation for preachers today to preach the Old Testament. It was by the fervent preaching of these inspired books that the church was birthed and revival fires spread. It was by the preaching of the Law and the prophets that souls were saved and believers matured. What God did in the past, he continues to do in this hour. The scriptural mandate to preach the full counsel of God remains true for every expositor in the twenty-first century. This includes the truths of the Old Testament.

Reason 6: It Was Used by the Early Church

Sixth, the Old Testament should be preached because it was the Bible that the believers in the first-century church used. During the early days when the Spirit powerfully emboldened them, it was these first books of Scripture that fueled their faith and enabled them to live triumphantly in difficult times. The early church found enormous strength by resting upon the truths of the Old Testament.

After Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin, they were threatened and released. When the church in Jerusalem learned of their freedom, they immediately prayed to God, offering their praise and thanksgiving for these apostles’ liberation. As these believers prayed, the Old Testament came pouring out of their mouth. In Acts 4:25–26, we read that they declared to God Psalm 2:1–2: “Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying...” The words of the Psalm became the words of their own prayer to God.

Later, Philip was directed by God to the Gaza road to witness to an Ethiopian eunuch. He explained the substi-

tutionary death of Jesus as taught in Isaiah 53:7–8. This dramatic witnessing encounter is found in Acts 8:32–33.

On a later occasion, a doctrinal matter arose in the Jerusalem church. The issue was the vital message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. James, the half-brother of Jesus, presided over this meeting known as the Jerusalem Council. In this discussion, James settled the matter of the purity of the gospel by quoting Amos 9:11–12 and Isaiah 45:4. Specifically, he established that salvation is by grace alone in Acts 15:16–18.

Similarly, matters of prayer, evangelism, and doctrine in the church must still be directed by the Scripture. This includes using the Old Testament as it was utilized by the first-century church. The power of its truths, whether in praising God, preaching Christ, or clarifying doctrine, is a vital force for the church today. The church will be stronger when the Old Testament plays its role in guiding our worship, witnessing to the lost, and understanding the gospel. Is it possible for the church today to be as healthy as it should be without the truths of the Old Testament as part of its foundation? I think not.

Reason 7: It Is Filled with Compelling Narratives

Seventh, the Old Testament should be preached because of the spiritual force found in its compelling narratives. Some of the greatest stories every recorded in human history are found in the Hebrew Bible, and preaching these accounts from the first thirty-nine books of Scripture inspires the expository listener. For example, there is hardly a more dramatic story than Noah building the ark to escape the wrath of God in the great flood. There is scarcely a more attention-grabbing account than Abraham sacrificing Isaac. There is not a more courage-building narrative than Daniel in the lions’ den. Preaching these Old Testament accounts establishes a strong faith in the hearts of God’s people. These stories inspire a deeper allegiance and greater fidelity in the pursuit of holiness.

Likewise, these ancient narratives also bring conviction of sin. The story of Achan, whose sin brought defeat to the nation, teaches the power of the sin of one individual. The tragedy of David and Bathsheba reveals the corrupting influence of the lust of the eyes. There is not a greater warning against disobeying God than the story of Jonah and the great fish. Many Old Testament stories are the record of the grace of God in the lives of people who have made wrong choices in their lives. The story of Rahab the prostitute shows how God can take someone

with a sinful past and use that person to extend the work of his kingdom.

These passages in the Old Testament were written so that they might be preached today for our example (1 Cor 10:6) and to inspire our faith (Hebrews 11). What power there is in the pulpit when these stories of faith in God are expounded! The lost are converted and believers are brought to greater commitment to God as these ancient accounts are expounded. When they are proclaimed, something special is gained in the lives of people.

Reason 8:

It Teaches Practical Wisdom

Eighth, the Old Testament should be preached today because it contains the practical wisdom needed for daily Christian living. The Hebrew word “wisdom” (*hokmah*) refers to the demonstration of a great skill in a particular field of endeavor. Such expertise could have been in carpentry, tapestry-making, or jewelry. In the Bible, wisdom means skillfully living as God intended a per-

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FROM ITS ANCIENT
PAGES.**

son to live. The Old Testament teaches us how to live with God-given direction and success.

The middle section in the Old Testament is especially wisdom-oriented and is known as wisdom literature. It consists of five books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Each of these wisdom books is uniquely devoted to teaching how a believer should live to glorify God. Practically speaking, Job teaches how to suffer, Psalms how to worship, Proverbs how to walk, Ecclesiastes how to enjoy, and Song of Solomon how to love.

Universal to men are some deep questions: Who am I? What am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Who is God? What is life? How can I find happiness? What is on the other side of the grave? How can I be right with God? The Old Testament addresses and answers these issues.

Preachers should expound the Hebrew Bible because it leads believers today into the fullness of the abundant life. It speaks to the importance of the dignity of human life, the design for the family, and the purpose of government. The Old Testament lays the foundation for the necessity of law and order, the virtue of work, and the need for rest. Matters of a Christian worldview and living in a fallen world are found here. To preach the Old Testament is to be a practical preacher in modern times.

Reason 9:

It Promotes Proper Worship

Ninth, the Old Testament should be preached because it magnifies the greatness of God and teaches how he is to be worshiped. In particular, the Hebrew Bible reveals the holiness of God. Here is revealed the majestic transcendence of God: “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:3). These foundational books reveal God in breathtaking fashion: “Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders” (Exod 15:11)?

Throughout the Old Testament, the attributes of God are presented in stunning beauty. Its inspired pages showcase the being and character of God. Here is the divinely inspired record of who God is in his divine perfections. Here we vividly see the brilliance of his sovereignty, aseity, immutability, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, love, grace, wrath, and much more. To preach the Old Testament is to preach a towering, high view of God that humbles present day believers and strengthens their souls.

Further, the timeless principles for worship are rooted and grounded in the Old Testament. The Law com-

PREACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT FUELS THE PURSUIT OF PERSONAL HOLINESS IN THE LIVES OF CHRISTIANS.

mands: “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth....You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exod 20:3–4, 7). In this testament, we see that it matters to God how he is worshipped. Unacceptable worship is exposed as an affront to him. He is a jealous God and will not share his glory with another. The expositor fulfills his role as the worship leader in the church as he unveils a transcendent vision of God before the hearts of the people from its ancient pages.

Reason 10:

It Promotes Personal Holiness

Tenth, preaching the Old Testament fuels the pursuit of personal holiness in the lives of Christians. These first thirty-nine books bring a powerful sanctifying effect upon daily living. The holiness of God revealed in the Hebrew Bible mandates the moral purity of his people. God says, “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44a). Again, the Law states, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). Moses announced, “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God” (Deut 7:6). Such holiness of mind and heart is still required in the lives of believers today (Matt 5:8; 2 Cor 7:1; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:15–16; 1 John 3:3). This standard has not been lowered in these days of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).

In unmistakable terms, the Old Testament calls for what the New Testament reinforces. This includes separated living in which Christians are to be set apart from the defilements of the world. The psalmist makes this clear: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the

counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!” (Ps 1:1). Much spiritual good would be seen in the church if this Old Testament passage and others like it were taught. We are to be in the world, but not of the world. Nothing has changed.

The prophet writes, “Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean; go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD” (Isa 52:11). This pursuit of holiness must arise from a heart of love for God: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). Such love for God includes fearing him, a repeated emphasis in the Old Testament: “what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 10:12). Preaching the Old Testament reinforces this needed emphasis.

A word needs to be said about the emphasis of the Hebrew Bible upon the necessity of maintaining purity of the heart. David testified, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart” (Ps 24:3–4). “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Ps 51:10). Solomon taught, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it *flow* the springs of life” (Prov 4:23). Proper exposition of the Old Testament stresses personal obedience to the Word of God and his commands. “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). This obedience must arise from the heart: “let your heart keep my commandments” (Prov 3:1). Preaching such texts and countless more from the Old Testament helps to establish the purity of the church in the midst of this decadent society in which we find ourselves.

Preaching the Whole Bible

For these reasons and more, it should be clear that the expositor should be preaching the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, in his pulpit ministry. Regularly expounding the Hebrew Bible is a necessary part of preaching the whole purpose of God. These first thirty-nine books of Scripture lay the unwavering foundation for a right understanding of the last twenty-seven books. From Genesis to Malachi, these inspired truths should be expounded from pulpits today and cause Matthew to Revelation to have even greater effectiveness in our preaching.

May you faithfully incorporate the preaching of the Old Testament into your pulpit ministry. May its transcendent truths ignite your preaching of the Word and may God use his ancient text to build his church in these modern times in which we live. ♦



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EXPOSITORY PREACHING FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

WALTER C. KAISER, JR.

Our Lord has given to us thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, which amounts to over three-fourths of his total message in Bible to humanity (actually it is 77.2%—but I added the .2 % to make it sound authentic!). However, one is saddened by the way this part of the revelation of the Lord Almighty has been either avoided or mishandled by his church and many in the academy. In general, three main excuses are given for avoiding the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Is Difficult to Understand

The most common reason for rejecting and avoiding the message of the Old Testament is that it is too difficult to read. The church's strange silence concerning these thirty-nine marvelous books is justified by excuses such as "I can't understand it," "It really is about the Jewish people and their relationship to God," "It doesn't sound Christian to me," "It really is B.C. in time and message," and "It all seems to be outdated and very difficult to comprehend." But did not Paul say, "All Scripture is inspired... and is useful?"

Some who do not reject the Old Testament outright resort to a second type of response: using various sorts

of allegory, spiritual so-called "deeper meanings," or typology to modernize the Old Testament so that it says more than the words originally meant. This technique is also used to make the Old Testament say the same thing as the New Testament, leading to the reasoning that if both testaments say the same thing, why bother going to the Old Testament at all? But if that were anywhere near the correct method of interpreting or re-interpreting the Old Testament, what were the people to whom the text was first addressed to understand when the words were first spoken? If the first hearers did not have access to the New Testament, then how could anyone who lived before Christ have understood scripture at all?

A third solution to making the Old Testament a relevant and comprehensible spiritual guide in our day is to point to "Jesus" as the real meaning on every page, chapter, and verse in the Old Testament, i.e., by re-interpreting, or spiritualizing, it so that the new meaning from the New Testament replaces the older meaning that originally adhered to the text. If Jesus is not found *directly* in the text of the Old Testament, claims this view incorrectly, then he at least must be *implied* in every text of that testament! But such Christo-exclusivism that makes Jesus appear everywhere in that testament often fails to see those passages in the Old Testament that really are predictions of Messiah, even while it makes

Jesus appear on every page or even every verse in the Old Testament by allegorizing, spiritualizing, psychologizing, historicizing, or applying some variation of the same bad exegesis to passages that do not teach what they are made to say.

All three of these approaches do very little to reinstate the valid use and original meaning of the Old Testament. If anything, they throw the Old Testament into an even greater quandary and irrelevance for pastors and laypersons alike—in fact, they raise more questions than they answer! The truth remains: few messages or sermons today are taken from the Old Testament, and many that do venture into that testament use poor methodology.

The Debate Over What the Author Meant

These problems, in our times, have been made the key object of concerted study, especially since the 1967 landmark work offered by John Bright in his book, *The Authority of the Old Testament*. Bright began his argument with this edict:

No part of the Bible is without authority, for all parts reflect in one way or another some facet or facets of that structure of faith which is, and must remain, supremely normative for Christian faith and practice.

His point, of course, was that Christian ministers must preach the entire sixty-six books of the Bible, which embody the “whole counsel of God,” for anything less tends to form “a canon within a canon,” or it unfairly jettisons a good part of what God had to say to humanity (viz., the Old Testament), as it is left to a forgotten past. Moreover, if we wish to have a divine authority for our messages today, these messages must stick to what the biblical author, who originally received that word from God, intended to say, for John Bright went on to say:

Once the plain meaning [or the author] has been abandoned, control over interpretation is gone and Scripture may mean anything the spirit (and who shall say [who or what that “spirit” is], if it be the Holy Spirit or the preacher’s?) may see in it.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart agreed with this same line of thought, for they had an identical reaction to such subjective impositions of individual or later meanings on Scripture:

The only proper control for hermeneutics is to be found in the original intent of the biblical text ... In con-

trast to ... [human] subjectivity, we insist that the original meaning of the text—as much as it is in our power to discern it—is the objective point of control.

However, as Bright proceeded in his argument, he suddenly and sadly lost the agreement, following, and good will of a huge number of modern preachers and scholars, including a goodly number of evangelicals, when he rightfully but dramatically stated:

Let us say it clearly: The text has but one meaning, the meaning intended by its author; and there is but one method for discovering that meaning, the grammatico-historical method.

What Bright was trying to do was to limit the imposition of all sorts of subjective and arbitrary interpretations that might be attached to the Old Testament from external, extraneous, or subjective, sources. In the same year as Bright’s book appeared, an English professor at the University of Virginia, Professor E. D. Hirsch, was making the same point in his volume entitled *Validity in Interpretation*. Hirsch’s work has now become a classic, as his point of view is how I would characterize my own

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thinking, writing, and speaking, for I too am a “originalist,” or a “textualist” in interpretation. If we cannot go to the author to validate what we thought he was saying, where then do we go to validate any interpretations?

But many pastors and homiletics professors have begun to think that this line of argumentation, which leads back to the author’s truth-intentions, is too “simplistic” and unnatural to the contemporary meaning process! What they tend to go on affirming, however, is that the meaning of the author of Scripture often tends to be “elusive,” and imposing such a limitation as the single or original meaning of the text on its interpretation raises the question as to “where is the meaning of the text to be located, anyway?”

The argument of modern interpreters is that the act of reading or listening to a text is filled with enormous complexity, a complexity that belies any simple attempt to sort out what the author meant, for that fuller meaning is both “discovered” and simultaneously “created” anew by the reader. This was the essence of the view of “post-modernity,” for meaning could not be left alone to the task of discovering what an author meant to say by his own words; according to post-modern means of reading and understanding a text; indeed, some, today, go on to argue that meaning is found in the very act of searching for such meaning. Thus, Professor Elizabeth Achtemeier, in a 1973 publication, concluded that John Bright was wrong to limit meaning just to what the author meant to say by his words as he used them; Instead, she taught:

It must be emphasized that no sermon can become the Word of God for the Christian church if it deals only with the Old Testament apart from the New.

But Sidney Greidanus was closer to paving a way for interpreters when he taught that preachers had to do justice to three intertwined strands, all of which were part of uncovering the real meaning of a text, viz., (1) the literary genre and context of the particular book, (2) the historical setting those words were found in, and (3) the theocentric interpretation of them as part of the theology of the whole Bible.

Some interpreters sought to identify a “deeper” meaning, which they said was found in the *sensus plenior*, “multiple senses” of the text. The argument was that we must not only be concerned with the meaning of the human author, but since this revelation came from God, often there was a “deeper” sense that was unknown

to the human writer who first received the message, but known only to the divine author of the text.

But where was this “deeper” meaning to be found? It was not found in the grammar, nor was it in the syntax, nor in the philology of the words; it was somewhere in between the lines. But if that statement was accurate, then that meaning was not inspired by God, for 2 Timothy 3:15 made the point that all that was “written” (Greek, *graphe*) was inspired. This deeper sense was not located in the “written” text; it was between the lines. This, then, would not serve the interpreter well. Instead, we affirm that meaning could only be found in the single sense of the words as used and intended by the human writer who received them from God. All other avenues would only lead us up a trail that would frustrate us and leave us deficient concerning what God wanted us to hear and learn.

Moving from Meaning to Application

The task of the preacher and the exegete is to move from the meaning of the text of scripture to the application of that word in these modern times for specific listeners and readers. Since scripture is a word from God, it is natural, then, to presume that our Lord is showing to us, in our day and from his word, how we can have the relationship he wants us to have with him and with his people. As Dale Ralph Davis put it:

I’m using the term [“theology”] here to refer to the theology of a biblical text, that is, what the text means to say about God, his ways and his works. Or to put it a bit differently, I use the term to refer to the *intended* meaning of a biblical text.

I have contended that the move from the text to application can be described as the process of “principlizing” or “generalizing” the specifics of the scriptures into universals or timeless truths. I defined this as follows:

To ‘principlize’ is to (re)state the *author’s propositions, arguments, narrations and illustrations* in timeless, abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church.

Some have misunderstood what I had intended by this method, as if the statement of such abiding truths gathered from the particulars or specifics of scripture were imposed on the text arbitrarily *ab extra*, or that they came somehow from “behind,” or even from “under” the text. That is totally incorrect, for these truths



were nothing less, or more, than what the author had originally intended to say when he gave the particulars now gathered into general principles. The only word of the preacher here was one of stating the identical concepts and truths in the current idiom of our day, a word that moved from merely adducing specifics and particulars to stating the same teaching in a universal or general principle. Neither can one conclude, as some incorrectly do, that the search and identity of the principle was *antecedent* to the heeding or exegeting what the author meant by his text. The text must remain prior and foremost to all discussions about the application of the text, for that is what is meant by one's being an "originalist" or a "textualist." Originalists always give priority and privilege to the text as being of first and primary importance.

Abraham Kuruvilla, in his otherwise majestic treatment in *Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*, after arguing against "principlizing" the text as I had just done so, finally had to acknowledge that "... some sort of generalization is essential in this process of [applying the text]." In fact, he added: "Without generalization, most forms of teaching are rendered impossible... An ethic without universals would be no ethic,

[it would only be] a series a disconnected arbitrary imperatives. Precisely so! Of course, as I have argued all along, any and all acts of generalizing or principlizing must show how any universals are actually drawn from the text, and from the particulars of that text, and that the principle remains faithful to the truth-intentions of the particulars/specifics. Kuruvilla himself illustrated this point when he demonstrated that the statement "the Honda Civic stopped because it ran out of gas" implies a general principle that "All cars that run out of gas will stop." Kuruvilla wanted to establish the fact that there were different levels of generalizing from the specifics of scripture to the theological principles those details taught; and indeed, there are such levels. But the load limit that one may put on each level of theology taught in such a passage depends on the weight of the specifics. However, it is important in the interpretive stage to stay with the uniqueness of the particular passage, rather than moving to what might be classified as parallel teachings of the same or extended particulars and specifics in other passages before establishing the meaning of the text under discussion.

True, the task of the interpreter is to teach the *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., the "setting in life" of the text of scripture,

but, as Kuruvilla also argued, the preacher must go on to describe the *Sitz in unserem Leben*, i.e., the matching “situation in our life.”

Displacing Israel: Replacement Theology

But another question remains: Why is there often such avoidance of the author’s meaning of his own text, especially in the Old Testament’s references to Israel? What gives rise to so much controversy over the place and role of the divine promises made to the Jewish people and its nation? From the narrative in the Old Testament, it would seem that the promise-plan of God began specifically with Abraham and his line of Hebrew/Jewish offspring. Why, then, have some concluded that God had to scrap that plan and instead replace that line of Jewish people with the new body of Christ? Given the oath God took as he originally instituted his plan in Genesis 15:1–6, would not such a displacement of the Jewish people in favor of the church have brought about the death of God?

There are a number of attempts to explain how this teaching came about, but one explanation that involves theological presuppositions has tended to have enormous effect on how the text of scripture in the Old Testament is even approached: it is the option of approaching the text from a supersessionist position, i.e., one in which the promises made to Israel have been discarded and replaced by giving them instead to the New Testament church due to Israel’s sad failure to keep the covenant and their rejection of Christ. In its latest form, some evangelicals that have embraced “New Creation Theology” have followed N. T. Wright in “Christifying” the concepts of the nation of Israel and the land. Thus, the territory of Israel and God’s promise to them has been spiritualized and “Christified” so that the plan of God is changed from its Old Testament promise to Israel now to a spiritual people of God.

The story of the Bible did, as a matter of fact, involve a divine promise-plan chosen and carried out exclusively by our Lord. Almost from the beginning, our Lord decided to call a man named Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 12:1–3). He and his offspring were meant to be the channels through which the offer of divine salvation and the grace of God would be offered and extended to all nations and families on earth (Gen 12:3). To confirm this promise-plan, God “cut/made a covenant” with Abraham by passing by himself through the “cut” pieces of the three animals, and two uncut birds, to show that if he did not keep his oath and covenant with Abraham and Abraham’s line of offspring, then the

oath of cursing would fall on him, and he would cease to exist as God, similar to what had happened to the cut animals that formed the aisle through which he walked (Gen 15:1–6). Meanwhile, Abraham slept soundly to one side while all of this was going on; he was not a part of this covenant!

God reaffirmed and enlarged that same covenant in 2 Samuel 7 (with its parallel in 1 Chron 17), where he added to this grand plan that David’s house/dynasty would inherit a perpetual throne, an everlasting dynasty, and an eternal kingdom that would endure forever (2 Sam 7:16–19). This plan was further rounded out in Jeremiah 31:31–34, where God described the “New Covenant” that he was going to make with this same line of descendants, which embraced much of what he had already offered along with many new things that were to come.

This is the gospel for which Paul had no shame, for it was and continues to be the power of God to the whole world, beginning first with the Jewish people and then extending to all the Gentiles (Rom 1:16). Ever since Old Testament times, Gentile believers have continually been grafted into the one and same olive tree along with believing Jewish people, who were reintroduced back into the olive tree by grafting. So God’s promise-plan is still operative (Romans 9–11). While no covenant has been made directly with Gentiles or the body of Christ, yet the believing body of Christ and all confessing Gentiles are invited to join that one olive tree, whose roots are nurtured in the promises God made to the patriarchs and whose trunk is the ancient plan to Israel. The natural Jewish branches have been cut off because of unbelief, but whenever Jewish people believe in Yeshua (Jesus), they too are grafted back into the tree from which they had been detached. (Romans 9–11).

Conclusion

The word of God embraces his promise-plan that began in the Garden of Eden with the promise to Eve about a coming Deliverer who would crush the head of the Serpent (Gen 3:15). And that plan has continued to dominate the narrative of the Bible.

To understand that word, we must first listen to and heed what the men who stood in the counsel of God received as his message for us. That meaning of the text was not hidden, placed in a code, or double-tracked in a surface sense with a deeper sense attached to the text of Scripture. It was instead meant to be understood as to a word for all peoples in all times and in all cultures and in all languages. ♦

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PREACHING OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

IAIN D. CAMPBELL

Ed Clowney wrote in an essay on “Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures,” “Preaching that does not center on Christ will always miss the dimension of depth in Old Testament revelation. It is in this dimension that the real significance of that revelation lies.”

It is a sentiment with which every faithful preacher of the Scriptures would agree: our aim is to preach Christ, and to preach him with clarity, freshness, and relevance as much from the storyline of the Old Testament as from the doctrinal sweep of the New.

Yet that immediately presents a challenge: how are we to handle the narratives of the Old Testament in a way that will do justice to their messianic import? How do we preach them without merely re-telling the stories or presenting them as a series of character studies?

To have recognized that narrative is a genre in its own right is, of course, a major first step toward getting the sermon right. Narrative is not prophecy or poetry: it is a telling of events. It tells of things that took place in history, introduces us to various people in various settings, tells about the various turnings of their fortunes and the influences that shaped them, tells of outcomes both good and bad. As Sinclair Ferguson notes in *From the Mouth of God*, “about forty per cent of the Old Tes-

tament is in the form of narrative.”

Narrative involves both external and internal factors. The external factors involve the person writing the story (the author), the person telling the story (the narrator), and the person reading the story (the reader). The internal elements include where the story takes place (its setting), what happens in it (its plot), and who is involved (its characterization). Once these are determined, we can move forward to interpreting and preaching the narrative.

This fact itself ought to arrest us. The Bible is a book about God; it is an event of divine revelation, a theophany in words. But it does not come to us as a multi-volume set of Dogmatics; it comes to us in the form of story. God is in the details; he is both interested and involved in our everyday lives. There is a sermon in the fact that the infinite God of eternal purpose reveals himself in his involvement in the drama enacted on the stage of the world he has made.

If we are to do justice to the self-disclosure of God in the storyline of the Bible, we must pay attention to the principles on which the narrative of the Old Testament operates, the promises that God is fulfilling in the narrative, the people around whom the narrative revolves, and the purpose toward which the narrative is moving.

Principles

First, there are principles operating in the storyline of the Bible. The narrative passages of the Old Testament, like those of the Gospels, are selective (cf. John 20:30). They are chosen for particular reasons, but they are no less important for that. We can identify at least three of these reasons.

The narrative of the Old Testament is *theological*. “The history of Israel,” Iain Duguid writes, “is not a meaningless sequence of events...On the contrary, history is the story of God carrying out his grand plan in this world for the redemption of his people in Christ.”

Calvin is a master in interpreting the Old Testament in this way. In his Dedication to his Commentary on Genesis he spends time dealing with the “utility” of the ancient history. For Calvin, Genesis is no mere story: we see in it, he says “the building of the Church out of ruins,

THE NARRATIVE DERIVES ITS SIGNIFICANCE FROM JESUS' PERSON AND WORK, SO THAT WHAT IS REVEALED IN HIM IN FULLNESS AND GLORY HAS BEEN ANTICIPATED IN THE EARLIER REVELATION OF THE BIBLE.

and the gathering of it out of broken fragments, and out of desolation itself,” and this “instance of the grace of God ought to raise us to firm confidence.” There is a divine hand at work in the story, and reading it, according to Calvin, ought to fuel our faith.

The narrative of the Old Testament is also *unified*. Its disparate stories form one storyline, and are constituent elements of the linear development of God’s covenant purpose. One of the functions of the Books of Chronicles, for example, with their sweep from Eden to Exile, is to give us a framework for interpreting the whole of the Old Testament. We are reminded that the story moves forward, bringing ever-increasing light on God’s saving purpose, and an ever-narrowing focus on the Messiah of God’s providing.

The narrative is also *incomplete*. It is running towards a *telos*, a goal; but that goal is not found within the Old Testament itself. Its history points forward to Jesus Christ, who stands behind every word of the older covenant. But the narrative also derives its significance from Jesus’ person and work, so that what is revealed in him in fullness and glory has been anticipated in the earlier revelation of the Bible.

Perhaps no passage illustrates this more than Stephen’s defense in Acts 7, which begins with the God of glory appearing to Abraham in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2) and ends with Stephen seeing the glory of God and the risen Christ at God’s right hand (Acts 7:55). For Stephen, the storyline of the Old Testament is of a piece, always leading to Jesus and everywhere drawing from his ministry as Prophet, Priest, and King of his people.

Promises

The reason this is so is because the narrative of the Old Testament is driven by the Word of God. God gives a promise at the very beginning, following on the fall of Adam, that the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15); the subsequent story of what happens outside of the Garden of Eden fulfills the promise that God made inside the Garden. The atoning work of Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of that promise, as he comes to destroy the devil (Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

But the narrative is also punctuated by serpent-bruising activity on God’s part. Redemption from Egypt is a defeating of the serpent, indicated by the fact that the staff of Moses becomes a snake that Moses can take by its tail and conquer (Exod 4:4); the staff will thereafter be the symbol of God’s victory over Egypt (cf. Exod 17:9, where it is called “the staff of God”). David’s defeat over

Goliath is another serpent-crushing moment in which the anointed Shepherd-King defeats the enemy of Israel (1 Sam 17). And even the return from exile is described by Ezekiel as a return to Paradise, in which the Messianic figure described as “my Servant David” will bring God’s people back to a field of blessing (Ezek 34:20–27).

In other words, the narrative fleshes out the original, foundational promise, and moves toward its fulfillment. All that Adam lost in the Garden, God will restore through the work of another Adam. The deliverances of which the narrative speaks are all redemptive in design, messianic in nature, and gracious in execution, because they are driven by the promise of salvation.

Yet the stories are punctuated by other promises too, promises both to individuals and to the nation. For example, in Genesis 46:3, God says to Jacob that he will bring him back from Egypt and make him a great nation. In Joshua 1:5, God promises Joshua that he will be with him as he was with Moses to complete the great work of redemption. In 2 Samuel 7:12–13, God promises David a son who will build the Temple. To the people, God promises that he will be with them in fire and water (a 43:2), and that he will restore the years eaten by the swarming locust (Joel 2:25).

These promises both highlight the trustworthiness of God’s Word and show how the sacred history is shaped by it. Old Testament narrative is simply God’s Word made flesh, showing his glory, until it finds its denouement in him who is both the Word and the living embodiment of it (John 1:14).

People

There can be no narrative without people. Narrative is the telling of the stories of individuals: the contexts in which they live, the situations they face, the events that shape their lives, the resolutions of their difficulties, the outcome of their circumstances. Old Testament narra-

tive is the same. It revolves around key figures, people like Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon, as well as a host of lesser characters of varying significance. But the narrative bears out several important points.

For one thing, the narrative reminds us of the personal nature of God’s covenant. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 26:24; Exod 3:6). His design is to get glory for himself by redeeming a people for himself (Exod 6:7). God’s covenant involvement in the lives of individuals is part of the whole missionary dynamic of Old Testament narrative. The God of Jacob will become the fortress of all who trust in him (Ps 46:11). The narratives of the Old Testament illustrate for us the many ways in which God’s covenant commitment to his people is their salvation. Left to themselves, they would be undone; but God makes himself known in their ex-



perience, and others will enter into that same covenant bond, too.

It is also the personal narrative of the Old Testament that opens our eyes to the glory of God’s sovereignty and to the rich theology of Scripture. Israel’s redemption gives rise to the song that says “The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name ... Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?” (Exod 15:3,11). The theology is woven into the history and emerges from it.

There is perhaps nothing that illustrates this better

IT IS A JOY TO PREACH THIS GREAT MESSAGE, KNOWING THAT THE STORIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT FORM PART OF THE TAPESTRY OF THIS GREAT CANONICAL WORD, AND TAKE US TO JESUS CHRIST.

than Calvin's commentary on Genesis 45. This is the passage in which Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. The narrative is compelling, emotive, and arresting; it forms a turning-point in the circumstances of both Joseph and his brothers. Previous strands of the plot are woven into a whole, and Joseph absolves his brothers in the light of God's evident purposes of grace.

In his *Commentary on Genesis*, Calvin comments:

This is a remarkable passage, in which we are taught that the right course of events is never so disturbed by the depravity and wickedness of men but that God can direct them to a good end. We are also instructed in what manner and for what purpose we must consider the providence of God.

Calvin's interpretation of Joseph's history becomes one of the best treatments of the doctrine of God's sovereignty in providence. Though he might have had reason to complain, Joseph, in Calvin's words, "is carried forward to another view of the case."

That is precisely how we are to preach Old Testament narrative: to take another view of the history, seeing God in it at every turn, learning from the strengths and weaknesses of the faith of the people, but always seeing the narrative as the record of God's work and the fulfilling of a higher design.

That is not to say, of course, that every question will be easily answered. What is the theology, for example, in the story of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 36? Or, why does God allow the spirit of Samuel to appear to Saul in 1 Samuel 28? Or, what is the main issue in the story of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19?

One thing is clear: God's work in the lives of his people in the Old Testament has a direct bearing on our faithful service to God. As Paul puts it, writing about the story of Israel in the wilderness, "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 10:11). If we are to preach the message of the Old Testament history faithfully, we, too, must work hard to know what happened, why it happened then, and what it says to us now.

Purpose

All Old Testament narrative is superintended by God's redemptive purpose in Jesus Christ. There are many stories, but the purpose of God is one. It was hidden in past ages but is now revealed in the gospel (Col 1:25–26). The God who continuously spoke in the Old Testament until he definitively and finally spoke in the New (Heb 1:1) has given us the combined witness of both testaments as a sure word of prophecy in which our faith may be grounded.

It is a joy to preach this great message, knowing that the stories of the Old Testament form part of the tapestry of this great canonical word, and take us to Jesus Christ. As with all things, the narrative of the Old Testament is "from Him and through Him and to Him" (Rom 11:36). We need not allegorize the details to find Christ, nor moralize on the lives of the patriarchs to preach him. By faithfully proclaiming the redemptive deeds of God in the stories of the Old Testament, we will show that the blessings of salvation that they narrate are ours in the Christ from whom they derive. ♦

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JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES, PT. 4

Jesus began the requests for his disciples by addressing God as Holy Father. The emphasis on God's holiness sets the stage for the rest of this section, which targets the holiness of the disciples in the midst of the hostile and wicked world. Their relationship to God was a sanctifying one. They were unholy men, but through the Son they had been brought into a purifying relationship with Holy God. Jesus' first petition, *keep them* is a request for the disciples' spiritual security.

God's name represents all that he is, though in this case there is a marked emphasis on his holiness. Jesus asked the Father to guard the disciples according to his holy character and attributes. That request is all-encompassing, and extends to all believers. The Lord again emphasized his perfect oneness with the Father by noting that the name of the Father is also the name which the Father has given the Son. God's holy character was reflected perfectly in him. "No one has seen God at any time," John wrote earlier in his gospel. "[But] the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (John 1:18). Jesus had provided the disciples with a perfect picture of who God is and what he expects.

The Father's protection was essential for the disciples for at least two reasons. First, it secured their glorification, as it does for all believers. Second, the Father's protection also secured their unity with one another—that they would be one even as Christ and the Father are. That unity the Lord had in mind is the spiritual unity that all believers possess, namely, the life of God in their regenerated souls, secured to them forever by his power and presence. The emphasis here is not on a fluctuating, visible unity in the church, but on the real, constant unity that is invisible. The Lord is praying for the essential oneness of believers that they share in common eternal

life. This prayer is answered every time a sinner is regenerated.

The unity of invisible eternal life implanted in Christ's followers is the foundation for a visible unity that crosses all organizational lines and that produces an effective gospel and testimony to the lost. It is produced by the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer. Practically, this spiritual unity of divine life produces a common love for the Lord, commitment to his Word, affection for his people, and separation from all that is ungodly and worldly.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus had been keeping the disciples in the Father's name which he had given him. In fact, he guarded the disciples so well that not one of them perished but the son of perdition. The Lord had taught them, empowered them, and shielded them from the attacks of the hostile Jewish authorities. Soon, in Gethsemane, he would do so again. The Son asks the Father to secure his disciples, knowing that it is the Father's will. The omniscient Son always prayed in perfect agreement with his Father. The work of securing His people is a Trinitarian work.

The loss of Judas, the son of perdition, was not due to Jesus failing to keep him. He knew all along that he was a false disciple. Far from catching Jesus by surprise, Judas' apostasy took place so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. Judas, of course, was still personally responsible for his wicked actions. Yet, what Judas intended for evil, God in his perfect purposes worked together for good. God would use the most horrific event in human history—the murder of his Son—as the means by which he would atone for the sins of his elect.

The prophetic Scriptures fulfilled in Jesus were certainly much broader than just those that reference Judas. The Old Testament foretold that the Christ would

BELIEVERS ARE TO REACH THE LOST WORLD WITH THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL. THAT IS THEIR PRIMARY REASON FOR REMAINING HERE; IT IS THE ONE THING THEY COULD NOT DO BETTER IN HEAVEN.

be a descendant of Abraham (Gen 22:18), from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10), of the family of Jesse (Isa 11:1), in the line of David (Jer 23:5). He would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), have a forerunner (Isa 40:3; Mal 3:1), begin his ministry in Galilee (Isa 9:1; cf. Matt 4:12–17), be anointed by the Spirit (Isa 11:2; cf. Matt 3:16–17), have a ministry of miracles (Isa 35:5–6; cf. Matt 9:35), and bring healing and life to his people (Isa 61:1–2; cf. Luke 4:18). At the end of his ministry, he would enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zech 9:9; Luke 19:35–37). Then, having been fully rejected by the Jewish leaders (Ps 118:22; cf. 1 Peter 2:7), he would be falsely accused (Isa 53:7; Matt 27:12), made to suffer (Isa 53:5–6; cf. Matt 26:67), and crucified with thieves (Isa 53:12; cf. Matt 27:38). Moreover, his garments would be divided (Ps 22:18; cf. John 19:23–24), his side pierced (Zech 12:10; cf. John 19:34), and his body buried in a rich man’s tomb (Isa 53:9; cf. Matt 27:57ff.). All of this took place just as it had been foretold by the Old Testament.

Hence, after his resurrection, Jesus could rebuke two of his followers on the road to Emmaus for not under-

standing that the Old Testament Scriptures revealed the necessity of his suffering and death (Luke 24:25–26). As Luke records, “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (v. 27). Jesus knew that Judas’ betrayal had been part of the divine plan all along. Judas did not defect because Jesus failed to protect him. Rather, Judas fell because he had never been a true disciple of Christ in the first place and was void of spiritual life, and because his role in Jesus’ death was part of God’s sovereignly predetermined plan.

Confident of the Father’s protective care for the disciples, the Lord looked to his return to the Father. “But now I come to you,” Jesus acknowledged, “and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves” (John 17:13). For the third time that evening, Jesus spoke of the joy that was his legacy to his followers. Understanding the Father’s protection and Christ’s intercession inevitably produced joy in the hearts of the listening disciples. This had to have been a stunningly wonderful experience for the disciples—to hear their Lord praying as he did to the Father to guarantee their eternal glory and remove all fear that they might fail and perish. Elsewhere, Jesus had earlier prayed that the disciples would share in the fullness of his life and in his peace; now he prayed for their fullness of joy. All of this concern and care for his own is enriching because it reveals his love for them.

Having spoken only divine truth, Jesus had given them God’s Word, which the world rejected. In the past, God had spoken through his prophets; but now he had spoken through his Son. Yet, just as the world had rejected the message of the prophets beforehand, so it also rejected the message of the Son.

In contrast to the world, the disciples had received and believed his word. Because of that, the world hated them, just as it had hated Jesus. After all, they were not of the world, even as Jesus was not of the world. Because the disciples had been born again from above, their citizenship was no longer in the world but in heaven—making them aliens and strangers on this earth.

Though they were not part of the world, Christ did not request that they be removed from the world. He plainly said to the Father, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world” (John 17:15). Jesus’ earlier promise to them was not that they would be taken out of the world, but that in him they would triumph over it. Like the disciples, true believers today are in the world, without being part of its evil system.

Believers are to reach the lost world with the truth of

the gospel. That is their primary reason for remaining here; it is the one thing they could not do better in heaven. Far from taking believers out of the world, God “has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:19–20).

Though he does not ask for them to be removed from the world, he does reiterate the basic request of verse 11, that while they live on the earth the Father would keep them from the evil one. There is nothing that Satan would like better than to destroy saving faith; to snatch a soul from the safety of Christ’s and the Father’s hands would be his desire. But the Lord’s intercession for his people guarantees that none of them will be reclaimed by Satan.

As he concluded his first request for the disciples, Jesus reiterated the fact that they are not of the world, even as he is not of the world. On the one hand, that meant they would face the persecution of the world—for they would be treated by unbelievers just as Christ himself was treated. Yet, on the other hand, it also meant they

JUST AS JESUS HAD BEEN SENT TO THE WORLD BY HIS FATHER, SO NOW THE DISCIPLES WERE BEING SENT TO THE WORLD BY JESUS.


would enjoy the protection of the Father, for they would likewise be treated by the Father in the same manner as Christ. Verse 16 is therefore more than just a restatement of verse 14. It is a reiteration by the Son, before the Father, of the solidarity that those whom he was leaving in the world shared with him.

Having prayed for their spiritual protection from the world, Jesus continued by asking the Father to sanctify and purify the disciples as they prepared to preach the truth to the world. It was not enough that they be safe-

guarded from outside evils. They must also be internally conformed more and more to the Son. Though they had already been cleansed, they still needed to occasionally have their feet washed from the filth of this world. The Evil One would aggressively try to derail this work of sanctification, but the Father himself guaranteed it through the Word of truth, empowered by the Spirit of truth.

Jesus therefore asked his Father to sanctify them in the truth, to set them apart from sin. Only sanctified believers are ready to be sent into the world as the Father sent Christ into the world. These words, directed at the eleven, served as a preview of the Great Commission the Lord would give these same disciples following his resurrection. Having been set apart from the world and transformed by God’s grace, the disciples would be the heralds of that same grace to the very world that hated them. Just as Jesus had been sent to the world by his Father, so now the disciples were being sent to the world by Jesus. Through their witness, the world would be exposed to the gospel and many would come to saving faith.

But no such salvation would even be possible, if it were not for the sacrificial death of the Son. The Lord returned to that thought in verse 19, acknowledging that what he was about to endure at the cross would make salvation possible both for the eleven and for those who would be saved through their extended ministries. For the disciples’ sakes, Jesus would sanctify himself; that is, he would set himself apart to righteously obey the Father’s will by dying on the cross. It was only because he atoned for their sins that they themselves also would be sanctified in truth. Having been justified through their faith in him, they would be daily conformed more and more into his perfect image.

As he always did, Jesus prayed consistently with the will of the Father. He asked the Father to do what he had predetermined in eternity past to do—to pour out his love, grace, mercy, and power on those whom he had chosen and given to Jesus. It is on that basis that Christ appealed to the Father to protect and secure the disciples. Guarded by the Father, interceded for by Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, these men, along with the apostle Paul, would provide the solid foundation upon which all believers in the ages to come would rest. 



PREACHING FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

DEREK W. H. THOMAS

Theodore Beza, whose commentary on Job was first published in English in 1587, spoke of the difficulty of the task: “I am minded to expound the histories of Job, in which . . . there are many dark and hard places, insomuch as I must here of necessity sail, as it were, among the rocks: and yet I hope I shall not make any shipwreck.” As Beza knew well, preaching on Job can prove hazardous.

Preachers embarking upon an exposition of the book of Job face some significant problems, some peculiar to the message of the book and some due to its structure. This situation is by no means unique to Job. Similar problems might arise in preaching Proverbs, for example. Does one preach sequentially (hardly!) or thematically? And, difficult issues arise in preaching the lengthy “judgment of the nations” sections of Isaiah 13–27, or the tortuous opening chapters of 1 Chronicles with its lists of names. Still, the book of Job brings its own challenges—exegetical, structural, theological and pastoral.

Right Doctrine, Wrong Text

It is all too easy to take random texts from the book of Job and preach wonderfully orthodox sermons, only

to completely misrepresent what is actually being said. Take as an example Job 4:17. The text comes from the mouth of Eliphaz, presumably the oldest of Job’s three friends. Responding to Job’s lament in chapter 3 (in which, among other things, he curses the day on which he was born), he utters the following:

“Can mortal man be in the right before God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?”

The text seems to be a Reformed preacher’s gift! What clearer expression of man’s utter inability to make himself right with God could we find? The text appears to be a direct highway to a sermon on justification by faith alone, straight out of Martin Luther’s notebooks. We could suggest an outline:

1. Man’s mortality
2. Man’s inability
3. Man’s depravity

If we follow the path from this text to John 3:16, this sermon will preach!

Or, take the most famous passage in the book of Job, one made famous by George Frederick Handel in *The Messiah*:

“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last He will take his stand on the earth.
Even after my skin is destroyed,
Yet from my flesh I shall see God;
Whom I myself shall behold,
And whom my eyes will see and not another.
My heart faints within me!”
(Job 19:25–27)

Clearly, this is a reference to Jesus and an assurance of a personal resurrection of the body when he returns. Or is it?

The problem with both of these sermon ideas is that they ignore the context of the selected verses within the book of Job. Eliphaz’s point in chapter 4 is to insist that Job is a sinner and that the reason for his suffering (the death of his ten children and the loss of his wealth and health) is entirely his fault. Eliphaz is operating according to an unqualified principle of instant retribution: you get out of life what you put into it, no more and no less! You reap what you sow—a valid enough principle in most circumstances, and one that Paul employs in Galatians 6:7 to reinforce personal accountability for our actions in the face of indifference and laziness. But here, in the Book of Job, it is entirely misplaced. God tells us *three times* that the reason for Job’s suffering lies outside anything that he has done or will do. He is “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (1:1, 8; 2:3 ESV). “Can a mortal man be in the right before God?” is Eliphaz’s way of saying, “Job, you are a sinner and the reason why these things have happened to you is because you deserve them.” Clearly, this is an entirely different sermon from the one outlined above!

Similarly, Job 19 calls for a more nuanced understanding. Job is *not* saying that he needs a Redeemer in the sense of someone to forgive his sins. Job has been saying all along that he is innocent, and though we may find that worrisome (given our biblical belief in human depravity), God himself corroborates Job’s innocence. For the man born blind in John 9, it was not his sin or that of his parents that accounted for his blindness. Jesus tells us that. His malady was due to an altogether different reason, one that remains a mystery to us. All we are told is that God would employ it for good ends (John 9:3). The “Redeemer” (Hebrew *go’el*) of whom Job speaks is one that will defend his case in the divine tribunal and show him to be in the right against the machinations of his “friends”—whether that be in the here and now or in the life to come (personally, I think Job is talking about a bodily resurrection, though some commentators have

argued strongly that what is raised is not so much Job’s physical body but his innocence—his legal case).

These two examples will suffice to demonstrate how textual preaching from the book of Job can lead preachers astray.

Right Series, Just Too Long

Not only are Job’s friends repetitive; they are also tediously rambling. Job calls Eliphaz a “bag of wind” (Job 6:26), and he was right! Every preacher is faced with the dilemma of the length of a series of expositional sermons. How many sermons should we preach from Job? Faced with the example of Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Ephesians or Romans, for example, a preacher who preaches anything less than a 100 sermons on Job is poor to say the least. Our Reformed legacy hangs in the balance on our ability to say in a conversation, “Last week, when I was preaching my one hundred and eighty-sixth sermon on Hebrews...” No one can come close to the seventeenth century Puritan Joseph Caryl, who preached a series of 424 sermons on Job over a period of twenty-six years, all of which were published and are available in a modern 12-volume edition today.

Just how many sermons will do justice to the book of Job? A dozen? Twenty? Fifty? How does one answer this question? True, the answer lies in a combination of a preacher’s gifts, the need of a particular congregation, and (frankly) the structure of the book of Job. Not everyone can sustain a lengthy series, and Caryl’s congregation seems to have suffered as a result of this prolonged study.

One consideration that almost certainly affects decisions regarding the length of a series of expositional sermons on Job is the repetitive thematic content of the “speeches” by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (and to some extent, Elihu). John Calvin, who preached a series of 159 weekday lunchtime sermons on Job over about fourteen months from February 1554 to April 1555 said, “They have no more songs but one, and have no regard at all to whom they sing it.” This is an important and difficult issue for a preacher. How many weeks, saying more or less the same thing, can a congregation bear?

Right Doctrine, Just Not Relevant

Job’s friends have a great deal of orthodox theology to contribute. They were not liberals who denied the wrath of God or found favor in a post-modern, accommodating view of ethics. They believed and taught with considerable force that God is sovereign, just, and powerful. Their doctrine of creation was sound and relevant, but

THERE IS A TRICKY THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL ISSUE IN JOB. WHEN IS IT RIGHT TO PREACH "INNOCENT SUFFERING" AND WHEN IS IT NOT?

not in the context of the book of Job. They are insistent that God punishes sin, else the entire morality of the universe is called into question. They point again and again to God's immeasurable sovereignty, emphasizing that it was pointless and wrong of Job to call attention to himself. They viewed Job as self-serving and as denying fundamental truths about God's character. Ultimately, their use of orthodox doctrine demonstrated a complete lack of empathy for Job and rigid, implacable belief in their own point of view.

Take Elihu's contribution in chapters 32–37. Commentators have taken radically differing points of view as to what Elihu contributes to the overall theological narrative of Job. He puts himself forward as a true sage.

In a graphic portrayal of human suffering, Elihu says:

"...a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal. His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now stick out. His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the messengers of death."

Then, Elihu imagines an "mediator" pleading for him, and he is spared from "going down to the pit." As a consequence:

"...his flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of his youth. He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored to God to his righteous state. Then he comes to men and says, 'I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. He redeemed my life from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light.'" (Job 33:19–30)

Elihu's point is that suffering can teach something about ourselves. Job may not have been punished for some past sin, but the suffering has disclosed how far he is capable of falling. Job's life may have been blameless before the trial; but the events of these last days have shown just how his own heart can be led into ways that otherwise he might have thought impossible. Suffering can show us the sinfulness of our hearts. Suffering can lead us to appreciate God's love in new ways.

Some, like Calvin, have seen in Elihu's speeches the very quintessence of what the book of Job is attempting to convey—that suffering is educative. We learn from suffering what cannot be learned in any other way. Others take a middle road and suggest that Elihu begins well, showing that positive things have emerged from Job's suffering—but ends badly, faltering as he proceeds into a theology of instant retribution echoing that of the three friends. Preachers will need to sort this out before starting a series on Job, for sure.

Right Doctrine, for This Congregation

There is a tricky theological and pastoral issue in Job. When is it right to preach "innocent suffering" and when is it not? Paul, for example, in addressing the errant Corinthians, spared nothing when he insisted that some of them were sick and some had died—as the just desserts of their wayward and sinful ways: "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (1 Cor 11:30). This comes at the conclusion of the passage often read at the celebration of the Lord's Supper in which though these words are hardly if ever read on such an occasion. If a person contracts a disease as a result of living a sexually immoral lifestyle, that person only has him- or herself to blame. If the same person insists, "I'm innocent! I'm a hapless victim of the lack of justice in this universe!" he or she will gain few if any supporters. But, if someone were to contract that same disease through some contagion passed on in a medical



procedure, everyone will countenance the plea of innocence, and lawsuits filed on the person's behalf will almost certainly prove successful.

Audience analysis is an important part of preaching. The Puritans were masters at it, reflecting carefully as to who might be unconverted, near the kingdom, a young believer, or a lapsed Christians and so on. Application was carefully made to each of these categories.

Preaching an extensive series of sermons on Job will require a careful disposition. Some whose lives are unsanctified and rebellious, who need to hear a word demanding repentance and self-denial, might inadvertently garner strength from Job when they should not. When is it right to comfort and when is right to convict? Not every sufferer in our congregation is an "innocent sufferer" like Job.

Right Doctrine, for All Occasions

In the first sermon Calvin preached on Job, he made an important and immensely pastoral statement. "It is good," he insisted, "to be subject to the sovereignty of God." This is a topic that comes to something of a peroration in the closing chapters when Job is asked to consider Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40:15; 41:1).

Interpretations vary as to the identity of these two "creatures." Are they pre-historic creatures made extinct by the flood as catastrophists sometimes argue? Are they, in fact, a mythological representation of Satan (who appeared clearly enough in the opening prologue and then is never heard of again)? Or are they fantastic descriptions of an elephant, a hippopotamus, a crocodile? For our purposes in this article, it matters little. Elephant, rhinoceros, or hippopotamus; whale or crocodile—it doesn't really matter; all are creatures that look a little odd. And their existence is a puzzle—to us.

Job has already lost the first round of this epistemological battle with God, saying: "I lay my hand on my mouth... I will proceed no further" (Job 40:4-5). Now, he must face the interrogation once more:

"Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me"
(Job 40:7)

C. S. Lewis noted, in his book *A Grief Observed*, that we can sometimes ask questions which God finds unanswerable! These are questions such as "how many hours are there in a mile?" According to Lewis, "probably half the questions we ask half our great theological and metaphysical problems—are like that."

Job needs to be humbled, not so much for what he had done *before* the trial, but for what he had said *during* the trial. Job's problem had extended further than merely asking silly questions. Job had been angry with God. In being angry, he had entered into judgment of God and his ways. God had been placed "in the dock." Job had, in effect, set himself *above* God. He had committed man's most prevalent sin: of making himself a god.

In what must be one of the most startling passages in this extraordinary book, God throws down the gauntlet. If Job really does/can discern right and wrong, then let him extend his fury and judge accordingly.

"Do you have an arm like God's,
and can your voice thunder like his?
Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor,
and clothe yourself in honor and majesty.
Unleash the fury of your wrath,
look at every proud man and bring him low,
look at every proud man and humble him,
crush the wicked where they stand.
Bury them all in the dust together;
shroud their faces in the grave.
Then I myself will admit to you
that your own right hand can save you."
(Job 40:9–14)

If Job can do this, God will worship at Job's feet! Job will be acknowledged as divine.

This *reduction* of God in Job's mind is as old as Adam. Like Job, we think we know better than God, and this gives us the moral edge. It is this—that our hearts are idol factories—that needs confronting. In the end, despite Job's innocence, he requires a humbling before the face of Almighty God. And that is a lesson preachers need to return to again and again. ♦

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7 TIPS ON TEACHING AND PREACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT

DAVID MURRAY

“Do you have any tips on things that might be helpful in teaching through the Old Testament, or potential pitfalls?”

That’s the question I was recently asked via email, and I thought it might be profitable to share the answer with all readers of the *Expositor*.

1. Focus on the Original Message

One of the biggest mistakes in Old Testament preaching is to think that these books were written only for us. They were written for us, but only in a secondary sense. They were originally written for Israel, and therefore we have to ask first, “What was the message to Israel?” What problem was this book addressing? We often do this with New Testament books and letters, but for some reason that step is often skipped in Old Testament preaching. Once we get the original message to the original audience, it is so much easier to move to the present message to the present audience. Richard Pratt’s *He Gave Us Stories* is a great book for learning this skill.

2. Learn Old Testament History, Geography, and Culture

This is linked to the first tip, because you cannot figure out the original message to the original audience without first knowing the historical, geographical, and

cultural setting. There are many “Introductions to the Old Testament,” or study Bibles such as the ESV Study Bible, the Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible, or the Reformation Study Bible that give excellent summaries that set each book in its context.

We can’t assume that people today know anything about Old Testament books. We’ve got to do a lot of education before we get to edification. Because of that, it’s probably best to start with the familiar stories and passages, because that will need less background information. Which demands that we...

3. Develop the skill of summarizing and modernizing

As I’ve said, one of the biggest mistakes in Old Testament preaching is to ignore the original setting. However, another mistake is to get totally bogged down in the original setting. Many Old Testament sermons have failed to lift off because the preacher turned his hearers into snorers as he droned on about the Gibeonites or the date of the Exodus.

We need to give our hearers the background information that honors the original setting, but we must learn how to do it with brevity and relevance. By that, I mean we must learn how to summarize the history, geography, and so on while giving enough information without drowning in detail. And, we must make it rel-

evant by showing what that would look like in our own day. Try to imagine and describe the situation using modern nations and situations to engage the listeners and draw them into the ancient setting.

4. Vary Your Genres

As very few preachers can sustain a consecutive expository series of sermons through an Old Testament book, I would recommend doing short series of maybe three or four sermons in one book before moving on to another. This might mean preaching a few sermons on Abraham, two or three Psalms, then perhaps some prophecies or some obvious types. By following this pattern, you are helping people to build a big picture of the Old Testament, rather than becoming limited experts in just one book.

Once you've managed, over a few years, to lay the foundations of the redemptive-historical timeline, then you can perhaps linger for a while in one book. But even when doing a series on the Old Testament, I like to break it up regularly and refresh myself and my hearers with New Testament sermons.

5. Ask Two Questions

There are many questions to ask of Old Testament texts, but the two most important are: (1) What did this passage teach Israel about God? and (2) What did it teach them about God's way of salvation?

We have to assume that Israel read the Scriptures the same way as we do—wanting to learn about God and how to be saved. So, perpetually ask, “What did they

learn about God and salvation from this passage?”

6. Balance Moral Lessons and Christocentric Interpretation

Avoid the extremes of either making all your Old Testament sermons about following (or avoiding) the examples of the Old Testament characters, or of making all your Old Testament sermons theological flyovers that land finally in Christ but never impact the spiritual lives and ethics of your hearers. Old Testament sermons should have both emphases, although sometimes a sermon will have more of one than the other.

7. Remember that Old Testament Believers Were Believers

Sadly, many view Old Testament believers as pretty mixed up people. The most common view I come across is that they were theists—i.e., they had a fairly general faith in God (not in the Messiah), which they topped off with a mixture of sacrifices and good works. If that's the case, then we really can't learn anything from them, because God has two ways of salvation, and there are going to be two very different kinds of people in heaven—those saved by grace and those saved by an amalgam of faith, works, and sacrifices. This view is not exactly a recipe for harmonious fellowship, is it!

Although the Old Testament believers did not have as much light or clarity as we do, Hebrews 11 and other passages teach that they were still saved by faith alone, in the Messiah alone, to the glory of God alone. ♦





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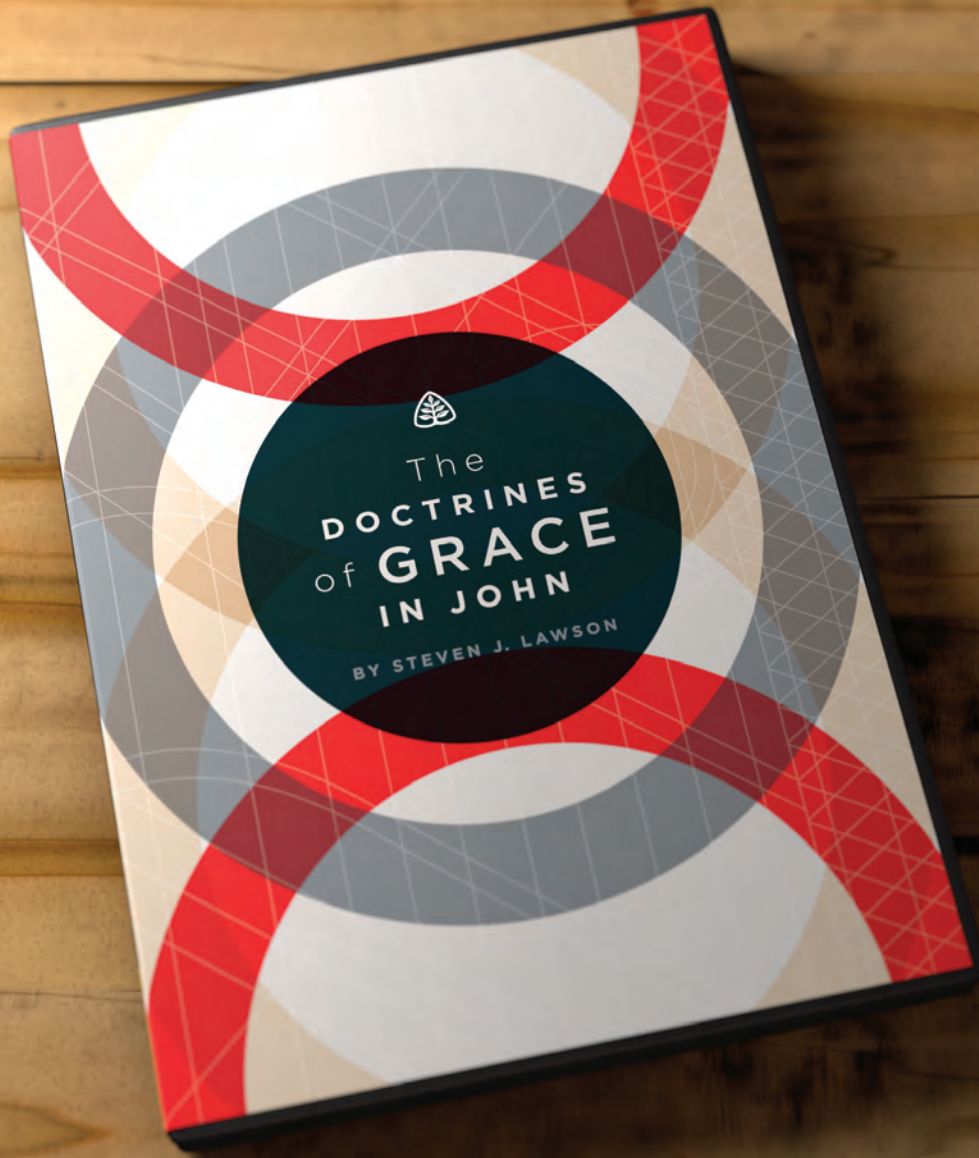


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