

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

AUBREY SEQUEIRA

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

RESPONSE TO DANIEL BLOCK

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

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

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

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

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

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

popular “Christ-centered” children’s Bible?⁸ Who is Block attacking?⁹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RESPONSE TO VERN POYTHRESS

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

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

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

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

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

the apostles did.

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

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

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

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

RESPONSE TO ELLIOTT JOHNSON

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

- Fulfillment in Christ: Biblical-Theological Exegesis in the Epistle to the Hebrews” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).
15. I am alluding here of the longstanding and venerable theological tradition within Protestant Reformed theology, best represented by the words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:9): “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”
 16. For an exegetical study of the unity and plot structure of the Abrahamic narratives, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (2nd ed.; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 322–26.
 17. For a defense of this notion, see Sequeira and Emadi, “Biblical-Theological Exegesis,” 15–18; Moo and Naselli, “Problem of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” 702–46; Jared Compton, “Shared Intentions? Reflections on Inspiration and Interpretation in Light of Scripture’s Dual Authorship,” *Themelios* 33 no. 3 (2008): 23–33; and Beale, “Questions of Authorial Intent,” 152–80.
 18. John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 160.
 19. See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 259–311; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 118–129. The discussion here is indebted to Gentry and Wellum. Kevin Vanhoozer also describes an approach to exegesis very similar to the three horizons of interpretation: “When describing ‘what it meant / means,’ it is perhaps best to think of a series of expanding interpretative frameworks. There is first the semantic range of what words could possibly have meant in their historical situation, then the historical context of what authors could have meant at a particular point in the history of redemption, then the literary context of what the words could have meant as part of a particular kind of literature, and finally what the words at a certain time in a certain kind of text mean today when read as part of a unified Canon that, taken as a whole, points to Jesus Christ.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 62.
 20. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 119–20.
 21. *Ibid.*, 120.
 22. *Ibid.*, 127.
 23. I have sought to demonstrate the methodological fruitfulness of using these three horizons in understanding Hebrews use of the OT in Sequeira, “Hermeneutics of Eschatological Fulfillment.”
 24. For instance, see Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 272–330.