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TEACHING THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE THROUGH PREACHING
THE OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS AT
HARLAN BAPTIST CHURCH,
HARLAN, KENTUCKY

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Brandon Lee Pugh

Read and Approved by:

Chad O. Brand (Faculty Supervisor)

Adam W. Greenway

Date _____

To Tracy,
my bride, my love

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PREFACE

Thanks are due to many people for helping me complete this project. I want to thank Vicki Ball, who not only does a great job of playing piano at our church and teaching humanities at Harlan High School, but also served me well by proofing my work.

I want to give thanks for Harlan Baptist Church. The people of Harlan Baptist Church gave me their full support while I preached to them, surveyed them, questioned them, and, I am sure at times, confused them. I thank God for their patience and generosity toward me and their prayers for me.

Also, I would like to express my appreciation to all my professors for their wisdom and insight, Jeff Walters and Bonnie Myers for their guidance and help, and Southern Seminary for equipping preachers for the gospel ministry.

I also want to give thanks for my wife, Tracy, who blesses me every day with her love and service. Thanks are due to her for her support, encouragement, and prayers, without which I could not have finished this. The Psalmist wrote that “he who finds a wife, finds a good thing” and no doubt, in Tracy, God gave me a good thing.

Finally, I want to thank God for his amazing grace. I love the Lord only because he first loved me and mercifully rescued me by his precious blood.

Brandon Lee Pugh

Harlan, Kentucky

December 2011

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach the unity of the Bible by preaching the Old Testament covenants.

Goals

Five goals were intended for this project. The first goal of this project was to improve my own skills in preaching the Old Testament genres of narrative and prophetic literature. For me, narrative and prophetic literature is the most difficult form of literature to exposit, and this project served as a useful tool to increase my own abilities to preach narrative and prophetic texts. Furthermore, my own grasp of biblical and covenant theology was strengthened as a result of this project, sharpening my ability to proclaim the gospel from the entire Bible.

A second goal of this project was to lead members of Harlan Baptist Church to understand the Old Testament covenants, arming them with a greater knowledge of the truth of God's Word and the witness of God himself. To this end, I established a biblical theology of redemption using the covenants in the Old Testament in order to develop a theological framework for the sermon series.

Another goal, similar in nature to the second one, was to lead people see the

unity between the Old and New Testaments so that members will not view the God and salvation of the Old Testament as different from Christ and the redemption of the New Testament. The idea was for the members at Harlan Baptist Church to develop a Theo/Christocentric-redemptive hermeneutic for understanding the Old Testament in place of a moralistic, self-help, example-driven reading of the Old Testament literature. By painting a broader theological landscape with a Christocentric hermeneutic, members would be more confident to navigate the smaller forests and glades of the Old Testament, taking in breath-taking vistas of God that before remained hidden to them.

Additionally, another goal was to lead the members to apply the Old Testament to their lives. Applying the texts of the New Testament world to the lives of the present world can be difficult to begin with. However, applying the Old Testament can be an even greater task. How does the reader bridge the cultural gap? More importantly, how does the New Testament believer apply the Old Testament text? Hopefully, this project helped members walk through the tricky process of application.

Context of the Ministry Project

Harlan Baptist Church is located in Harlan, Kentucky, a small, rural community that lies approximately one hundred miles northeast of Knoxville, Tennessee. As such, it sits in Southeastern Kentucky, an area known for its rich and abundant coal deposits.

Community

Harlan is the county seat of Harlan County, which is largely a coal-mining community that also supports a number of businesses that serve the community due to its

remote location from any significant population center. Therefore, there is a wide range of occupations, from government employees, lawyers, bankers, to coal miners and hospital workers represented in Harlan.

As noted, Harlan County is a rural community, containing roughly 30,783 people. The majority of the people are Caucasian, making up 94.8 percent of the population with African-Americans at 2.4 percent. According to census data, Harlan County has suffered a population decline of 15.8 percent since 1990,¹ and trends show an expected decrease of 0.44 percent from 2009 to 2014.²

No doubt, the population decline is due, in part, to a prevailing dysfunction in the county. Harlan County has all the typical problems associated with Eastern Kentucky and the broader region of Appalachia: declining population, poverty, rampant prescription drug abuse, lower levels of education, the highest tobacco addiction rates in the country, and more.³ For example, of those over the age of twenty-five, only 65.9 percent have a high-school diploma, and only 11.1 percent have at least a college bachelor's degree (compared to 84 percent and 27 percent respectively for the national average).⁴ The median family income for Harlan County is \$27,588, almost half the national average.⁵ Therefore, it is no surprise that the unemployment rate hovers near 10

¹U.S. Census Bureau, "Harlan County, Kentucky" [on-line]; accessed 11 July 2009; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>; Internet.

²Ibid.

³See Dianne Sawyer's report, "The Children of the Mountains," at <http://vp2.abc.go.com/watch/2020/166626/180725/2020-children-of-the-mountains>.

⁴U.S. Census Bureau, "Harlan County."

⁵Ibid.

percent (a deceptive statistic since it measures only those actually seeking work),⁶ and 26.4 percent of the individuals live below the poverty level (double that of the national rate).

Interestingly, the natural resources and geography of the county explain much of this. Harlan County is coal-mining country. Located within the Cumberland Mountains, little flat land suitable for farming or other industries is available. Furthermore, the mountains make it difficult to support quality and quick mass transportation. Thus, the only significant industry is coal mining, which makes the county fairly dependent on the coal market. The result is a cycle of poverty and problems for much of the county, especially when coal prices are down. During the first half of the twentieth century, the county experienced a population boom due to a more profitable coal market. Another population boom occurred during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, albeit on a smaller scale. Coal-mining automation and less demand have siphoned laborers and capital out of the county, however.

A closer look at the darker history of the area helps one understand the systemic problems and uniqueness of the county. As noted earlier, the mountainous terrain made easy travel almost impossible, leading to a sense of isolation and lack of progress. Furthermore, coal-mining is a difficult occupation that, especially in earlier days, lent itself to producing hardened men and women who were beaten by back-breaking labor and oppressive working conditions with little pay. Additionally, mine work is a life lived underground that often creates a sense of gloom. All of these

⁶U.S. Department of Labor, "Harlan County, Kentucky" [on-line]; accessed 3 August 2009; available from http://www.google.com/publicdata?ds=usunemployment&met=unemployment_rate&idim=county:CN210950&q=unemployment+rates+harlan+county; Internet. As of June of 2009 the unemployment rate was 12.9 percent. Over the last two years the rate has hovered around 10 percent.

difficulties have for generations created a volatile mix that has exploded from time to time in one fashion or another. Bill Bishop summarizes this in his report on the drug culture of small town America:

In the 1930's, Harlan ("Bloody Harlan" back then) was the center of union organizing efforts by both the Communist Party USA and the United Mine Workers of America. In the 1960's a revolt by unemployed Kentucky coal miners helped create the political momentum for the War on poverty. In the 1970's, the county was the backdrop for the mine strike viewed by the nation in the Academy Award-winning documentary, *Harlan County, USA*.⁷

As Bishop alluded, the county was known for its violence and is now known for its drug use. This drug addiction is linked to the coal industry due to coal-miners having a history of being medicated with pain-killers because of the damage done to the body from being crouched in narrow mine shafts for hours a day. Bishop notes, "Painkillers were dispensed by mining camp doctors in an attempt to keep the miners working. Self-medicating became a way of life for miners." That practice was passed down generation to generation, even to those who never gazed into the darkness of a mineshaft.⁸ This history has been recorded and documented in song⁹ and film¹⁰ as well as the standard book fare.

Of course, this is not to say that there are no positives to be found in the

⁷Bill Bishop, "Hard Times in Harlan," in *The Carsey Institute Reports on Rural America: Substance Abuse in Rural and Small Town America* (Durham, NH: The University of New Hampshire, 2006), 21-22.

⁸Ibid.

⁹One can grasp the sense of despair captured in the lyrics to the song "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive," by Darrell Scott:

Where the sun comes up about ten in the mornin'
And the sun goes down about three in the day
And you'll fill your cup with whatever bitter brew you're drinkin'
And you spend your life just thinkin' of how to get away.

¹⁰Barbara Kopple, "Harlan County, USA," First Run Features, 1976.

county. Harlan County enjoys the usual benefits of being in Appalachia, such as beautiful mountain scenery and small town life. For all of the hardships, the mountains of Appalachia seem filled with legend and myth, stimulating the imagination. The culture thrives on music and produces a number of quality musicians. Harlan Independent High School, located in the county seat of Harlan, is known as an excellent public school and consistently ranks well statewide and nationally. Despite the stereotypical addiction-plagued citizens of the region, there are also many law-abiding, white-collar (and blue-collar), educated people with conservative values and southern hospitality. In many ways, Harlan is much like other rural counties of the South.

Church

The church was organized in 1868 as The Baptist Church at Mount Pleasant and later changed its name to Harlan Baptist Church when the town changed its name to Harlan in 1912. After struggling for many years as part of a frontier community, the church stabilized itself. From 1897 to 1907, Harlan Baptist Church experienced ten years of growth through the leadership of Reverend T. J. Mahan. Once a passenger railway was constructed in 1911, the “avenue was opened for a population influx,”¹¹ and with it occurred an explosion of the church population through the twenties.

In 1920, 42 persons heard the new pastor, J. R. Black, preach his first sermon, and by 1924, 775 attendees were meeting in the basement of the new church building. The spectacular growth was due in large part to the population growth but also to a series of “protracted meetings” that resulted in many additions to the church. Furthermore,

¹¹Earl S. Bell, *A Century of Ministry: Harlan Baptist Church 1868-1968* (Harlan, KY: Harlan Baptist Church, 1968), 25.

during this time the church started four missions within the county.

In 1927, Harlan Baptist Church began services in the sanctuary of its new facility. Under the leadership of W. J. Bolt, from 1931 to 1949, the membership of the church grew from 1,310 to 1,976 with over 1,102 baptisms, and the church started seven mission churches in the county. In 1947, however, “an event took place which radically altered the life of the . . . church.”¹² A fire destroyed the facility which had stood as the meetinghouse of the Harlan Baptist Church for twenty-five years. The church rebuilt the building and reconvened at the present location on September 4, 1949.

Ironically, the burning of the church facility was somewhat symbolic of the future of the church. Although the church experienced some growth under the pastorates of Frank Davis and E. Keevil Judy (former President of the Kentucky Baptist Convention), and even hosted the Kentucky Baptist Convention in 1957, the population decline of the community due to changes in the coal industry and economic climate brought with it a slow leak of church population as well. Over the next forty years, the church’s attendance has hovered around two to three hundred attendees, and the church has enjoyed steady pastorates. Various ministries from youth choirs to bus/van ministries to the poorer communities in the county have brought forth baptisms, but with little assimilation of those converts into the life of the church. The church, at least for the last twenty years, has entertained a host of other churches that have conducted various mission trips to the area, targeting the more poverty-stricken areas within the county.

Despite the decline, Harlan Baptist Church is the largest Southern Baptist church in Harlan County. Due to its size and history, the church is a vital part of the community. Part of this influence is due to the constituency, some being lawyers,

doctors, local politicians, prominent land and business owners, and school officials. On an associational level, however, the church is generally not involved with the other churches in the Upper Cumberland Association. For example, we do not have an associational representative from our church and Harlan Baptist Church has even been voted out of the association before. While the church does participate in various community outreach projects and assists other churches that target Appalachian Kentucky as a mission field, Harlan Baptist struggles to figure out the best way to minister to the entitlement, poverty-stricken, drug-filled culture that presents an obvious ministry need and challenge. Although the older congregants do a fair job of ministering to one another, the congregation as a whole does not have an effective strategy for outreach and discipleship.

This short history of the church and the community sheds some light on the congregation's character. The "glory days" of the congregation seem to have come and gone, just as the zenith of this community has passed. The slow and steady decline of the county combined with the concomitant problems of Appalachia contributes to a sense of gloom and depression that somewhat subconsciously pervades many people in the area and in the church. People often speak of the "good ol' days" when the town and the church hustled and bustled, teeming with life. And as the town has accepted decline, so too has the church. Among the people is a feeling of apathy and the recall of faded memories, both in the church and out.

Yet, with this decline comes a willingness to listen and learn. The church called me to the pastorate in September of 2008, knowing that I was Reformed in my theology and had a desire to eventually establish different biblical polity. Therefore, the

¹²Ibid., 34.

church is examining polity such as establishing an elder body and church discipline. The church is drawing up a new set of by-laws since the church cannot find their current set. They are examining current membership practices with the hope of renewing the practice of regenerate church membership. There is a growing hunger for expositional preaching and heavier doctrinal content as well as a renewed focus on the gospel.

Furthermore, the church took an even greater chance on me, as I am still young as a pastor (this being the beginning of my eighth year as a senior pastor). My desire as a pastor is to preach Christ and him crucified. I know that sounds like a cliché; but in my three years here I have already discovered that Harlan Baptist, like so many other churches, has a membership that assumes the gospel. Therefore, my vision is to preach God's Word via the systematic exposition of the Bible, pray for God's Spirit to give life to the people, conduct loving pastoral care and oversight of all the members, endure the struggles, and see what God will do. My hope is that he will bless this church with conversions and a deep love for Christ. I am not creative nor an organizational genius, and I am not that worried about it; but I am concerned that I be faithful and simple.

Rationale for the Project

The rationale for this project was simple. The church is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, the living and chief stone (1 Pet 2:4-7), who was the revelation of the Father. Yet, the Scriptures also testify that the household of God was laid upon the foundation of the Apostles with Christ (Eph 2:20). The Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, forms the body of truth that begets faith in and sanctifies believers (see 2 Tim 3:15-17). As one pastor put it, "God's Holy Spirit

creates His people by His Word.”¹³ Without God’s written, special revelation, the people perish (Prov 29:18). Therefore, the prevailing famine in the land of the Word of God, particularly the Old Testament, bodes ill tidings.

Sadly, many church members have little vision of the God of the Old Testament, His workings with His covenant people, or the theology that is the mother of New Testament thought and practice.¹⁴ This famine of the Word has left churches filled with malnourished attenders emaciated because preachers do not teach the whole counsel of God. Furthermore, parishioners have little understanding of the only Bible that Jesus knew and taught, let alone the sovereign King who shook the threshold of the temple of the universe in Isaiah 6.

Harlan Baptist Church is no different in many ways from the average church in America. It needs to understand theology, for theology breeds practice. It needs to know God, the God of the whole Bible and not a God of a few select texts. After all, knowing God is eternal life (John 17:3). This church needs to know the Scriptures, for they will thoroughly equip the church for every good work (2 Tim 3:17).¹⁵ Most of all, it needs to know the gospel, clearly and lovingly. Therefore, this project was needed to give believers a basic understanding of the Old Testament and its relation to the New Testament.

A thorough knowledge of salvation history is critical to the understanding of God’s love for us and His redemptive plan to bring glory to Himself through His people.

¹³Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 50.

¹⁴Daniel Block, “The Problem of the Old Testament” (classroom lecture notes, 80312 – *Expository Preaching and the Old Testament*, January 2006, photocopy), 25.

¹⁵Of course, Paul was most likely referring to Old Testament Scripture.

This salvation history is a unified plan and work of God seen in different ways through the Bible. One such way is God's dealing with His people through various covenants. An examination of the covenants provides a better grasp of the unified plan of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

Based on my experience, many church members have a fear of the Old Testament¹⁶ and erroneous notions of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. They see the relationship between Israel and God as one founded on works and not grace. Then, when they approach the New Testament, they find a great discontinuity that leaves them wondering why the Father is so different from the Son. In fact, it may be more accurate to say that the question in their minds is, "Who is the God of the Old Testament?"

With this in mind, a series of sermons on the Old Testament covenants provided a base of knowledge that would make people "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15) and help them know Christ more, since the law and prophets testified of Him (Luke 24:26-27). Indeed, the hope was that hearers' hearts would burn within them as Christ stands forth from the Old Testament.

Furthermore, much of what has passed as Old Testament preaching and teaching has undermined the gospel and true Christian living. Instead of using the Old Testament as a foreshadow of the Christ to come, it has essentially become a collected series of stories, somewhat unrelated, a mish-mash and hodgepodge of examples to emulate in order to become a better believer. The result is a "soft" legalism, a moral therapy program designed to gain a better life now rather than the redemptive story of

¹⁶Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 18-19.

salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and all to the glory of God alone.¹⁷ This is not to say that all passages of the Old Testament should be spiritualized or allegorized. Nor does it mean that there is nothing to learn by way of application from the Old Testament characters and stories. It is to say that a church that has lost the “big picture”¹⁸ of the storyline of the Bible will eventually turn those stories and characters into a therapeutic legalism and will systematically, though unwittingly, destroy the Old Testament.¹⁹ Therefore, there is a need to give the people of the church a more Christocentric hermeneutic and reorient them to the main, overall, big storyline of the Bible, which is God’s reclaiming ruined sinners through His Son.

This project served me as well. In light of the above statements regarding the sufficiency and power of the Scriptures, my primary goal in this project was to become a better preacher, especially of the Old Testament. It can be difficult to preach narrative literature, especially in regard to application. For example, how do I ensure my application is driven by the text, by authorial intent, not applying a promise to the modern church that was meant for someone else? This question, and more, was not answered in this one project, but it was certainly an objective to improve my preaching of the Old Testament narrative genre; and since God’s Word is the instrument of life and health for a congregation, for their sake (and mine), it behooved us that I improve in any way as a preacher that I may declare to them the whole counsel of God effectively.

¹⁷Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 102-03.

¹⁸Vaughn Roberts, *God’s Big Picture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 16.

¹⁹Graeme Goldsworthy, “An Obituary for the Old Testament,” *Present Truth Magazine*, 41, no. 2 [on-line]; accessed 3 August 2009; available from <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XLI/41-2.htm>; Internet.

Definitions and Limitations

This project defined “expository preaching” as a “sermon takes the main point of a passage of Scripture, makes it the main point of the sermon, and applies it to life today.”²⁰ This definition was used because of its simplicity, implying that good preaching takes its form and content from the text and it always makes application to the lives of the hearers. The definition also has flexibility. Rather than expository preaching being constrained to a mere paragraph or scene, the preaching unit can be more or less expansive, so long as the point of the sermon matches the main point of the text. While it is generally preferable to preach through a complete unit in the text, and even structuring the sermon after the structure of the text, it is not always necessary so long as the big idea of the text is taught and applied.

Also, a working definition of “covenant” was essential. Various theologians have sought to define the Hebrew use of covenant. Walther Eichrodt, basing most of his work on the covenant at Sinai and secular usage, notes that *berit* entails a bilateral relationship between two contracting parties.²¹ Von Rad affirms this definition but emphasizes the “unequal status” of the two parties in which the covenant is “often an agreement imposed by a superior on an inferior.”²² William Dumbrell defines his theology of covenant as essentially God’s unilateral commitment to continue and confirm

²⁰9 Marks Ministries, “Preaching” [online]; accessed online at <http://www.9marks.org/what-are-the-9marks/preaching>.

²¹Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 1:37.

²²Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 1:129.

his work of grace in the life of his people.²³ For this project, Dumbrell's theological understanding of covenant was used because his definition emphasizes the gracious working of God in an existing plan of redemption. The focus in this definition is not so much on the stipulations of the recipients but in the commitment of God and working out of his plan of redemption from beginning to end.

This definition and examination of covenant was delimited to handling the five basic texts of the Old Testament that specifically use the word covenant (Heb *berit*); Gen 9; Gen 15-17; Exod 19:3-6; 2 Sam 7; Jer 31:31-34). Therefore, the sermon series focused on texts where God establishes a covenant with a particular individual or the nation of Israel that are foundational to the progressive redemptive work of God. This selection of passages excluded many texts which speak of covenants between people or which describe or exposit the covenants God has already made with his people.

Another delimitation in the project concerned the sermon-evaluation group. Rather than this group being selected from the entire church body, a group of men were chosen based on their knowledge and experience with preaching. Most of the men had completed a book study of *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chappel and all of them had actually preached before. This knowledge base, both from study and experience, was helpful in evaluating the sermons honestly and effectively.

Also, since the project did not exceed fifteen weeks, the time restriction limited certain aspects of the project. For example, it would be difficult to measure the long-term effects of the instruction. Discipleship is a life-long journey and generally happens progressively in small steps, not large leaps. Therefore, the long-term growth of members from this project was more of a hopeful result than a limitation.

²³William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (London: Paternoster Press, 1984), 30-32.

Research Methodology

The bulk of this project consisted of an eight-week sermon series on the actual covenant texts of the Old Testament, including a sermon on the creation/fall and the new covenant as displayed in the book of Hebrews. The covenants and texts included Creation/Fall account (Gen 1-3); the Noachic covenant (Gen 9); Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17); the Israelite Covenant (Exod 19-20); the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7); the New Covenant as prophesied in the OT (x2; Jer 31; Ezek 36); and the New Covenant as presented in the NT from the book of Hebrews (Heb 8:1-13). A primary goal of the project was to lead people to understand the biblical theology of the Old Testament and how it unites with that of the New Testament. Therefore, this understanding was the objective of the sermon series.

Another goal of the project was to assess certain attitudes and skills of laypersons and then help them become more confident toward the Old Testament. Therefore, an eight-week seminar focused on the redemptive unity of the Bible with an emphasis on basic hermeneutical instruction was held. This seminar not only furthered the theological understanding of the people but also helped them feel more confident in handling the Old Testament. Therefore, in accordance with the goals of this project, the research measured the following: (1) the knowledge of the Old Testament of the participants; (2) their grasp on the unity of the Bible; (3) their use of the Old Testament; and (4) my improvement in preaching Old Testament genres.

The project was evaluated through the use of a questionnaire and two focus groups. Both tools were used before and after the project. The questionnaire, which was used to assess the effectiveness of the sermon series, was filled out by the entire

congregation and assessed the congregation's change in understanding and use of the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole. This questionnaire was based on a Likert scale and was evaluated statistically.

A second focus group of ten men assessed my own personal effectiveness as a preacher of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. The group was recruited based on their ability to provide honest feedback and was composed of a cross-section of ages. They, too, were selected prior to the project as well, and completed surveys regarding my preaching. This final group was given a short seminar on the basics of expository preaching so that they could evaluate my preaching more intelligently and objectively.

Conclusion

The following chapters contain the research for the project, the explanation of the project's implementation, and an evaluation of the project. Since there is a deficiency in Old Testament preaching, a lack of a coherent grasp of the Bible's unity, and an often overly moralistic application of the Old Testament Scriptures, hopefully, this project will be of some help to other pastors who wish to preach Christ from the whole of Scripture and help their church members see the glorious gospel from all of the Bible.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

Introduction

In Paul's letters to Timothy, the apostle reminded his young protégé of the Scriptures that were able to make him wise unto salvation and sanctify him as well. The Scriptures to which Paul referred were obviously the Old Testament. This declaration was a full affirmation by God that the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings of the Old Testament were sufficient to point people to Christ, just as Christ himself told his discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). This truth was also a reminder to him that the Old Testament contained within itself the redemptive story of God.

Roughly two thousand years later nothing has changed. If a young pastor and two forlorn followers of Jesus in the first century needed to see Christ in the Old Testament, so too do the members of Harlan Baptist Church. They also need to see the redemptive plan of God in the entire Bible. The covenants of the Bible, most of which are located in the Old Testament, provide an effective way of understanding God and his saving work.

This chapter will examine the covenants of the Old Testament as the means of understanding God's plan of redemption in Christ Jesus. First, a definition of covenant will be provided. Then the covenants will be examined with an eye to the important redemptive and theological themes in each one as well as those which are common to

each other. Furthermore, how the covenants are fulfilled in the New Testament will be noted.

A Brief Analysis of Covenant

“What is a covenant?” That question is how Palmer Robertson begins his book *The Christ of the Covenants*.¹ As he quickly notes, the answer to the question may not be as straightforward as one would like. Answers vary somewhat broadly depending on which tradition or theologian one queries.

However, a brief look at the word will prove helpful for the project. The word “covenant” translates the Hebrew word *תּוֹרַב* and is sometimes also translated as “alliance” or “treaty.” The origins of the word have proved difficult to figure out.² *תּוֹרַב* reveals similarities to various Akkadian words like *תּוֹרַב* (between), which is similar in meaning to the Hebrew preposition *בֵּין*, meaning “between.” The Akkadian word *תּוֹרַב*, “to band, clasp, or fetter,” is generally noted as a closer approximation of the Hebrew term.³ Still other roots of the word mean “to eat” or “to select,” which connote sharing a meal or election.⁴

However, since the etymology of the word is inconclusive, a better path to definition is by examining the use of the word contextually. Even a cursory glance at the extensive use of the word in the Old Testament indicates that a covenant is generally

¹O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 5.

²Ibid., 14. Similarly, William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (London: Paternoster Press, 1984), 16, and John Walton, *Covenant* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 14.

³Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 16.

⁴Paul Williamson, “Covenant,” in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 420.

made between God and persons, or between other persons. In other words, it is almost always established in the context of relationships; and simply reading the word in its context indicates that a covenant is a binding promise between two parties. Though the promise or oath can be unilateral or bilateral, conditional or unconditional, what remains fixed is that it is fundamentally relational and indeed expresses a commitment between the two parties, usually with binding or mutual obligations.

Furthermore, modern scholarship suggests that the covenants of the Bible were modeled after the suzerain-vassal alliances found in the Ancient Near East.⁵ These alliances resembled that of the feudal system of the medieval period, in which the higher power would pledge his protection and blessing to the lower powers in return for their loyalty and obedience. These treaties generally began with a *preamble*, which identified the king who made the treaty. Then there was a *historical prologue*, which was an explanation of why the vassal was to be loyal to the king. It was a brief rehearsal of what the king had done for the vassal. Next, the *stipulations*, or terms of the treaty, were outlined often with an appeal to *witnesses*. Then, the treaty contained a *blessings-and-curses* clause setting forth the consequences for covenant-breaking or covenant-keeping. Finally, a *deposit* of the covenant was made in the sacred temples of both parties (again, so the deities of both partners could serve as constant witnesses).⁶ While this structure cannot be found in every single covenant of the Bible (some features are more obvious than others), what is distinct and clear about the biblical covenants is that God is the

⁵J. Arthur Thompson, "Covenant (OT)," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:790.

⁶Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 25-27.

suzerain-king and the relationship forged with his vassals is more than a formality, but also suggests intimacy.

For the purposes of this project, the use of covenant is narrowed even further in that the covenants to be examined are all between God and man; furthermore, they are all initiated by God himself. One can see this in the various definitions of covenant offered by scholars who nuance it in different ways: Paul Williamson focuses on two aspects of a covenant: (1) “a covenant ratifies an already forged or existing elective relationship”; (2) “the ratification involves the making of solemn promises by means of a verbal and/or enacted oath.”⁷ Michael Lawrence notes that a covenant is “a [generational] bond that establishes an all-encompassing relationship” and has an “authority structure to it, with ongoing obligations, blessings, and curses.”⁸ Michael Horton calls covenant “a relationship of ‘oaths and bonds’ and involves mutual, though not necessarily equal, commitments.”⁹ O. Palmer Robertson writes that the biblical covenant is a “bond in blood sovereignly administered” in which God commits himself to man with life-and-death consequences through a formal process of blood-shedding. God unilaterally enters into a committed relationship with man, sets the terms of the covenant, and ensures fidelity to the covenant on pain of death. Thus since God cannot die, this bond is inviolable.¹⁰ Dumbrell argues similarly. He posits that a covenant, a unilateral vow by God to man, presupposes a set of existing relationships; but the cutting of the covenant

⁷Paul Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 43.

⁸Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 57.

⁹Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 10.

¹⁰Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 14.

(usually via a ceremony of some form) gives binding expression to the covenant. Or, to put it another way, a covenant gives concrete expression and formalizes a set of existing arrangements.¹¹

The last two definitions are insightful because this means that each covenant is simply a new expression of a covenant or relationship that already existed, a new way for God to express his loyalty to men, a new fleshing-out of the relationship to which God was already committed. Since man's sin has marred this relationship, the covenants, in essence, unfold or unpack the redemptive plan of God whereby God would rescue sinful men from judgment, remake them into a new people, and bring them back to himself into a perfected relationship.

Another aspect of the biblical covenants concerns the two parties' involvement, namely whether the covenant is bilateral or unilateral, and whether it is one of works or solely grace. Essentially, all the covenants are unilateral in the sense that God is the one who initiates the covenant (indeed, the relationship itself), and it is he who graciously condescends to interact with man even to the point of blessing him.¹² However, most of the covenants have some kind of bilateral element to them. This bilateral element is seen clearly in the stipulation clause of the vassal-suzerain treaties of the Ancient Near East after which the Lord patterned many of his covenants. Even those covenants that are essentially unilateral impose a new set of conditions that create expectations on the part of the recipient. These covenants of grace, therefore, generally include a response of faith and obedience by the recipient. Of all the covenants, the

¹¹Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 20.

¹²Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 58.

Mosaic is the most conditional. Though the basis of the Mosaic covenant is the rescue and redemption of Israel by God, the vassal's response is clearly one of keeping the law, and the blessings of the covenant will only be enjoyed as such. As Bruce Waltke states regarding all the covenants, "God authors the covenants and graciously obligates himself to fulfill blessings to elect beneficiaries, usually on the basis of their trust in God as demonstrated by their obedience to do his will."¹³

Creation and the Fall of Man (Gen 1-3)

The argument for or against a covenant with Adam or an intratrinitarian covenant has compelling points on both sides and no doubt will continue until the Lord returns. This project does not intend to add anything to that debate. Instead, the creation account and the fall of man into sin will simply serve as the springboard into examining the covenants as part of God's unfolding plan of redemption, a plan God instituted in Genesis 3:15 with the promise to provide a seed that will crush the enemy. Regardless what one believes about the Adamic covenant, most evangelicals would agree that the first three chapters of Genesis serve as the basis for understanding God's redemptive plan throughout the rest of the Bible and thus are germane to any discussion of the remaining covenants in the Bible.

A few specific verses in Genesis 1-3 will prove foundational for the story of redemption and a fuller understanding of the covenants. The first is the creation of man in Genesis 1:26-29. What is important to note here is that God made man in his own image, after his likeness. The terms "image" and "likeness" indicate that mankind will be

¹³Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 284.

God's representatives on the earth. Stephen Dempster writes that these terms "stress the unique relationship humanity has to its Creator . . . [and] indicate the exalted, regal role humanity plays in its natural environment. The male and female as king and queen of creation are to exercise rule over their dominion, the extent of which is the entire earth. . . . Being made in the image of God signifies humans exercising dominion as God's vice-regents of creation."¹⁴ The unique roles and responsibilities God gives mankind clearly demonstrates the royal status of the divine image: They are to rule (*rada*) and subdue (*kabas*), terms used throughout the Scriptures to describe kingship and authority. Additionally, man is given the command to procreate. In fact, the command is given prior to that of exercising dominion and suggests that in order to fulfill their dominion mandate they must reproduce. Procreation is germane to ruling and subduing the earth, for in doing so, man is filling the earth with God's image-bearers, glorifying him, "functioning as a type of priest-king, mediating God to the world and the world to God."¹⁵

The second foundational text is Genesis 2:15-17. The chapter begins with the statement that God rested on the seventh day followed by the first of ten *toledot* formulas of Genesis. What follows is a more detailed explanation of the creation with particular emphasis on the Garden of Eden. The creation of man briefly mentioned in chapter 1 is also made more specific in chapter 2. In verse 15, God commands Adam to work and keep the Garden of Eden, no doubt part of what it means to exercise dominion over the

¹⁴Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 57-59.

¹⁵Ibid., 62. See also Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 140-44.

earth.¹⁶ But in verses 16-17 God provides the first condition of this rule: Adam's diet is open to all trees and fruits but one. Clearly, Adam's authority is derivative. His rule is only good in so much as he subdues himself under the rule of another: God. The implication is that only as he subdues himself under the Creator can he properly subdue the creation. Furthermore, the prohibition serves as the condition for life or death.¹⁷

Unfortunately, it is a condition that Adam fails to keep. Falling prey to temptation, Eve, then Adam, succumb to the wiles of the serpent and eat the prohibited fruit. At once, their relationships with God and each other are marred. God metes out various punishments on all parties involved, but the two-fold punishment-promise given to the serpent in verse 15 is absolutely critical to the story of redemption. First, there will be enmity between the serpent and "the woman, and between [the serpent's] offspring and her offspring" (v.15) and then this hostility will eventually mean the crushing of the serpent's head. Scholars debate the meaning of this promised lifelong mutual enmity, yet, the promise at least suggests a long-lasting rebellion of some against God (John 8:31-32, 44; 1 John 3:8; Col 2:15) and others who love God and submit to his rule, with an added "individual to deliver the fatal blow and to be struck uniquely on his heel."¹⁸ This promise, called the *protoevangelium*, becomes the foundation of the redemptive work of

¹⁶Adam's naming of the animals in vv.18ff. also demonstrates the dominion function of man as well. Furthermore, Eve's formation, embedded in this section, shows that being Adam's "helper" means assisting Adam in subduing the creation. Though not limited to procreation, it certainly would include the multiplication of image-bearers to fill the earth.

¹⁷Many scholars point to all this as the basis for a covenant of works. God entered into a promissory relationship with Adam complete with blessings and curses hinging on the stipulation of not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁸Bruce Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 93.

God in Christ throughout history (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:45-49; Heb 2:14; Rev 12).

Bruce Waltke elaborates on the good news found in verse 15:

[This] prophecy to the Serpent implies sovereign grace. In the narrative, the woman left to her own gives her affection, her allegiance, and her friendship to the Serpent. By placing enmity between her and the Serpent, God utilizes his sovereign right to alter her religious affections and allegiance. The hostility toward the serpent entails her reorientation toward God with a love for him and a desire for his intimacy.¹⁹

In short, the gospel is foreshadowed. God will redeem a people for himself out of the world through the work of a godly seed.

However, the question remains: “How will God redeem his people?” The remainder of this chapter will explain that God uses the covenants of the Bible to unfold the plan of redemption. In the covenants, God calls out for himself, using various promises, a people from those who are hostile to him, a people whom he will redeem and with whom he will fellowship. These promises come through various mediators and are “yes and amen” in Jesus of Nazareth, the one true, ultimate mediator (1 Tim 2:4-5) of a better and final covenant.

The Noahic Covenant (Gen 6-9)

Having been mercifully cast out of the Garden of Eden, the corruption of man takes center stage. Chapters 4 and 5 serve as a microcosm of the two seeds of Genesis 3:15. Chapter four explicates the ungodly seed starting with Cain and culminating with Lamech, a much more violent man than his progenitor. The chapter ends, however, with the birth of Enosh and the hopeful statement that “at that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen 4:26). Whereas chapter 4 deals with the ungodly seed of Cain (or the Serpent), chapter 5, which begins with a sort of rehearsal of God’s creation

¹⁹Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 265.

of mankind in verses 2-3, outlines the godly seed of Enosh culminating with the birth of Noah, the son of a better Lamech, and Noah's three sons, all of whom will play the pivotal role in the redemption of creation.

The contradistinction between the godly and the ungodly and the need for such redemption is quickly seen in the opening lines of chapter six. First, the author writes of some kind of strange but ungodly union between “the sons of God” and the “daughters of man” that revisits the sin of Eve (both were driven by their lusts: “saw . . . attractive . . . took”).²⁰ Then he notes the extensive wickedness of man along with the grief this caused the Lord (note the disparity between what God saw in his original creation – “it was good” – and what he saw at this point – “wickedness”). While man is fulfilling the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, he is doing so in a twisted fashion, displaying his proclivity to miss, either directly or indirectly, or reject the purposes of God.²¹ The solution to this is to “blot out man” and start over with Noah, in whom God finds favor. Thus, God's Spirit will be removed from man, a reversal of the vivifying work of the Spirit presented in Genesis 1:2 and 2:7. Clearly, fallen man has rejected or at the very least twisted his role as vice-regent of God, not representing God nor blessing the world, but rather afflicting the world and one another. However, Noah stands in contrast to the rest of man and serves as one of the godly seed mentioned in Genesis three.

The *toledot* of verses 9-10 serves as transitional verses bridging the summary of the flood account to the specifics of God's judgment and salvation given in 6:9ff.

²⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, 117.

²¹Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 262.

Once again the writer notes the pervasive corruption of the earth and God's announcement to Noah that he will "make an end to all flesh" (Gen 6:13). After providing Noah with a blueprint for the ark, God gives Noah the grounds for constructing such a vessel: "I will bring a flood . . . Everything that is on earth shall die" (Gen 6:17). However, much like the connector in Romans 3:21, God's judgment of man's sin is assuaged by the promise to save his people (and creation), this time through a vessel. The "everything" of verse 17 is mitigated by God's promise to "establish [his] covenant" with Noah. Hamilton notes, "This verse highlights not primarily God's establishment of a covenant, but rather the establishment of that covenant with Noah."²² Indeed, Wenham interprets the phrase as "confirm my covenant" to show that "Noah is viewed as already in a covenant relationship with God"²³ and that this merely ratifies a pre-existing covenant with Noah.

Of course, in chapter 6, no explanation of the covenant is given to Noah, but what is easily inferred is that it will involve the sustenance of life. However, in chapter 9, more detail regarding the covenant is given. Once Noah removes himself from the ark, he offers an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord, who then pledges never to "curse the ground because of man" or "strike down every living creature." Sandwiched in this pledge is a statement regarding man's radical depravity once again. What is clear is that the grounds of God's withheld judgment is not man's righteousness but God's mercy. God's redemptive grace is seen in that God's decision not to curse the earth with a flood is not grounded in man's righteousness but instead is in spite of his sinfulness (Gen 8:20-22).

²²Ibid., 283.

²³Gorden Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol 1. (Dallas: Word, 1987) 175.

Indeed, as Robertson notes, “However God understands that the sin-problem never will be cured by judgment and curse.”²⁴ The flood demonstrates God’s judgment and the wrath to come (a wrath that is greater than any earthly catastrophe; see 2 Pet 3:4-6) and that this judgment can only be missed by God’s gracious intervention.

At this point, Noah has become another Adam, so to speak.²⁵ The charge of filling the earth is renewed as is the right to have dominion over the land and animals. Yet this dominion has bounds, as it will not include the right to injure his fellow man but rather to preserve life since man is made in God’s image. Indeed, in v7 the command to fill the earth reappears, suggesting that the taking of human life is fundamentally inconsistent with the mandate to populate the earth. God is preserving his purpose for man to image forth his glory as his representative to the earth.

Verses 9-17 contain the densest use of the word “covenant,” and here is where God begins to speak more explicitly of the covenant. Essentially, the covenant is a promise to never destroy life on the earth via a flood. What is interesting here is that God confirms the covenant not only with Noah (and his family) but also with all of creation (vv9-10). Again, the obvious must be pointed out: Through one man, a “mediator” so to speak, God is saving the earth and preserving a godly seed for himself. On the one hand, God is ensuring the continuation of man, the filling of the earth with his image-bearers; on the other hand, God is preserving the woman’s seed (Gen 3:15), a people for himself, and a person who will crush the enemy.

²⁴Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 114-15.

²⁵In fact, the postdiluvian account indicates that not only is Noah a new Adam, but that the creation story is also being rehearsed. See Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 292ff.

Furthermore, a “sign,” that of setting the bow in the air, is enacted to ratify the covenant; and the sign functions as a reminder to God of his covenant promise.

Christopher Wright comments on the remarkable significance of the bow: “Although we live on a cursed earth, we also live on a covenanted earth.”²⁶ God binds himself. He will not destroy the earth but rather, as history unfolds, will destroy sin through his Son and redeem all the creation from the sinful condition to which sin subjected it. In this way, again, Noah, a new Adam, serves as a type of the perfect and final Adam, Jesus Christ.

So, in summary, God establishes a unilateral covenant through Noah with all of mankind and creation. The parallel language of the creation account and the flood account indicates that Noah is a new Adam meant to fill the earth with God’s image. Humanity’s multiplication mandate is renewed (9:1-7), and God’s commitment to preserve man is made (9:8-17). After all, it would do no good for man to refill the earth if God is going to destroy it. In doing so, God calls man to fill and subdue the earth with image-bearers who will represent him. This covenant then points us to the global heart of God. Just as the judgment of the flood points to a greater flood of wrath, so too the covenant with all of creation shows God’s desire that all the world glorify him (1 Pet 3:18-22; 2 Pet 3).²⁷ Furthermore, the covenant was issued in the context of grace. Noah is a sinner, among an ungodly world, and God’s promise not to destroy the earth is in spite of the fact that man is still sinful. Williamson explains, “What had earlier explained the necessity of the flood now highlights the necessity of the covenant that God was

²⁶Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 326.

²⁷Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 122-23.

about to establish.”²⁸ Jesus, the perfect Adam, sinless unlike Noah, will come to perfect all of creation, not just preserve it.

The Abrahamic Covenant

According to Genesis 15:18, God “made a covenant with Abraham.”

However, the foundation of this covenant began in Genesis 12. There God called Abraham out of Haran to go to an unknown land where God would make him into a great nation, make his name great, and use him to bless the nations (Gen 12:1-3). Years later, Abraham is somewhat disillusioned and doubting God’s promises to him since none of these promises has been realized (Gen 15:1-3). At this point, Abraham receives a divine visitation from the Lord, who confirms his promises with Abraham. God reassures Abraham that he will provide him a son (Gen 15:4-5) and a land (Gen 15:7, 13-16) via his Word and a covenant ceremony.

The covenant ceremony of chapter 15 is most prominent and the implications for it are significant. First, it should be noted that throughout the ceremony God consistently links the promises of land and offspring. Not only is the Lord confirming these promises, but he is also showing Abraham that the two fit hand in glove.²⁹ Abraham’s offspring will be a geopolitical entity, a people possessing a definite land—though, as God explains, the realization of this promise is a deferred one. Furthermore, the words to Abraham are more narrow in focus, tied primarily to the future nation of Israel and not the nations.³⁰

²⁸Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 61.

²⁹Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 50.

³⁰Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 87.

Second, the ceremony itself displayed the unilateral nature of the covenant. It essentially involved the cutting in two of various animals at which point only the Lord passed through the midst of them in the form of a “smoking fire pot and a flaming torch” (Gen 15:17). Such an act was reflective of the self-maledictory covenant ceremonies of the Ancient Near East in which the covenant-making parties passed in between the broken animals as a way of declaring fidelity to the covenant lest they be torn asunder just as the sacrificed animals. In this way, God makes a binding promise to Abraham to grant him a people and a place and “a curse upon himself if he does not keep his covenant.”³¹

Though the covenant is formally made in Genesis 15, it is not until Genesis 17 that God grants to Abraham the sign of the covenant and elaborates on the covenant. God appears to Abraham and speaks these words: “I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” Several immediate questions emerge: Do these words from God not make the covenant conditional upon Abraham’s walking before God blamelessly? Is this not different from the unilateral covenant God made with Abraham in chapter 15? Is this a separate covenant altogether from the earlier one?

One position holds that this is a distinct covenant from the one made with Abraham years earlier. Paul Williamson notes that the covenant of chapter 17 is bilateral (the *waw* consecutive at the beginning of v. 2 serves as a purpose or intention clause making the covenant conditional upon Abraham’s blameless walk), eternal (vv. 7-8, 13), and international (vv. 2, 4-6 with the emphasis on “nations”), as opposed to the unilateral

³¹Waltke, *Genesis*, 245.

(no conditions), temporal, and national covenant (more focused on Israel) God made with Abraham in chapter 15. He notes, “These chapters focus on two distinct, but related covenants.”³²

Another way to understand the difference is to recognize the covenants as one and the same but focused on two different and distinct aspects. John Sailhamer notes these distinctions as “the one stressing the promise of the land (15:18-21) and the other stressing the promise of a great abundance of descendants (17:2).”³³ Additionally, the conditional nature of the covenant reflects the truth that “total obedience [or at least a genuine whole-heartedness or orientation toward God] is the necessary condition to experience the covenant promises.”³⁴ The unilateral nature of the covenant still retains its force and can be seen in that God is still the one who will “give” the covenant. It is not Abraham’s to give but to receive or rather to benefit from by faith.

It could be that the covenants are one and the same and that indeed they are focused on two distinct but related aspects. But that distinction is not primarily between land and offspring. Rather, the distinction and relation is embedded in the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. While the first half of the call focuses on God blessing Abraham, the second half focuses on Abraham being a blessing to the nations. The former serves the latter and the latter is dependent on the former. The larger goal is blessing to the nations. The smaller goal is a nation of people through whom that

³²Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 88-89.

³³John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 138.

³⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, 259.

blessing will come and, even more specifically, an individual through whom all the world will be blessed. Genesis 15 deals with the former goal and Genesis 17 the latter goal.³⁵

What about the sign of the covenant? Just as the Noahic covenant had a sign (the bow) so too the Abrahamic covenant had a sign (circumcision). After explicating what he will do, God spells out the responsibilities of Abraham and those who would enjoy the covenant after him. Essentially, it came down to one commitment, that of circumcising every male in their household on his eighth day, whether born in their house or not, whether slave or free, whether foreign or native. This was the “sign” of the covenant, the signification of Abraham’s offspring covered under this covenant. A few items bear immediate distinction. First, the external nature of the sign was an issue. Essentially, the covenant-keeper could keep the covenant without the genuine, heartfelt commitment to the Lord to which Abraham had been called, hence the call Moses rendered to the people in Deuteronomy 10:16 to circumcise their hearts. Ironically, the covenant-keeping circumcised ones, though part of the covenant community, could actually be those hostile to the Lord (Gen 3:15). Certainly King Ahab and King Ahaz, both circumcised Israelites, were in enmity with the Lord. This uncircumcised heart but circumcised foreskin would be the motivation behind the cutting of the new covenant, a covenant that would not be broken (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26ff.). Rather, the circumcision of the skin pointed to the sign of the new covenant, baptism, reflective of the baptizing of the Holy Spirit, heart circumcision (Rom 2:25-29; Col 2:11-12). Second, one notices that this covenant is not merely Jewish but one can become a Jew or part of the covenant community via circumcision even if he is a Gentile. Clearly the

³⁵Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 89.

point was not so much ethnic but ethic, keeping the covenant. Thus, this inclusion pointed to the global heart of God. God will include in his covenant all those who will keep the conditions of the covenant – in this case circumcision – regardless of ethnicity.

Therefore, the earlier themes of creation, the protoevangelium, and the Noahic covenant are unfolded. The mandate to fill the earth continues, but there is a narrowing focus to one people, through Abraham, the godly seed in enmity with the Serpent and his seed. This one people shall become a blessing to the nations. And from this one people shall come the individual who will crush the Serpent's head (Rom 16:20; Gal 3:7-22; 4:21-31). This one nation shall be God's vice-regent³⁶ in a more definitive way, for it will live in covenant with God, with greater covenant blessings superseding the general blessing of withheld destruction for all of creation. Yet this does not mean God is unconcerned for the families of the earth. On the contrary, the promise to bless Abraham is pregnant with the promise to bless the nations, a promise that "gradually fills up" when Joseph feeds the world (Gen. 41:57), Israel witnesses to the world (see the story of Jonah as an excellent example), and Jesus sends his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20).³⁷ There are new promises such as land and union with God, a union that offers protection, provision, and guidance. So, the redemptive plan of God is unfolding, and this plan is seen in the two-fold call of Abraham and God's concomitant blessing. Man's redemption will be played out in a land, through a certain people, and through one man.

³⁶Note the provision of kingship in Gen 17:6. Through the monarchy, the idea of vice-regency becomes even more apparent. The Davidic covenant demonstrates this more fully.

³⁷Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 147.

Thus one sees the work of grace all through the covenant with Abraham, perhaps more so than any other covenant. First, God calls Abraham, a pagan (see, for example, Josh 24:2; Gen 35:2), not out of any perceived righteousness but simply out of his own divine purpose. In doing so, it is as if God is calling into existence things that were not (Rom 4:17), similar to the creation of the world itself.³⁸ Second, God binds himself to Abraham, ensuring that he will keep his promises. Indeed, the initiating work of God is seen all through the narrative, from the call to the bestowal of life upon the barren Sarah. It is worthy of note, this covenant is made with Abraham despite his various lapses of faith including taking an offspring for himself outside of the promise of God. Third, the call and covenant of Abraham must be viewed in light of the Babel rebellion. The increasing sinfulness of man climaxes with a declaration and act of self-autonomy and a humanistic utopian fantasy. God judges man again, but like the story of the flood and Noah, the Lord chooses a man to mediate his redemptive blessing to the nations. Waltke writes that “Noah is the savior at the end of the antediluvian history, and Abraham is the savior at the close of the postdiluvian history. With Noah, the Creator makes a covenant to save his creation; with Abraham, the Lord of history makes a covenant to save the nations.”³⁹ God’s work with Abraham is a reversal of Babel, the rescue and restoration of that which sin has marred.

To conclude the discussion of the Abrahamic covenant, it is necessary to see how this covenant serves as a paradigm for the new covenant mediator and people.

Stephen Wellum writes,

³⁸Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 57-58. Dumbrell, in keeping with his theme, also parallels the calling of Abraham as a new creation similar to the forming of the creation through God’s Word.

[Circumcision] serves as a type anticipating New Testament realities that have now come to fulfillment in Christ. . . . In a typological way, then, every male offspring of Abraham was a type of Christ and thus anticipated his ultimate coming. In this regard, Luke 2:21 is important. Jesus' circumcision is not a minor event; it marks the fulfillment of circumcision in its purpose of preserving a line of descent from Abraham to Christ.⁴⁰

In being circumcised, Jesus points back to the Abrahamic covenant. Furthermore, as noted above, not only does circumcision serve as a type for the savior to come, but it also serves as a type of the heart-circumcision that will take place in the new covenant people of God. Interestingly the new covenant people of God are brought in by faith which was anticipated by Abraham's believing unto righteousness in Genesis 15:6. Obviously, Abraham's faith stands forth in the light of the staggering promises God had made to him. However, Abraham's act of faith is more than just a great story. It serves as a paradigm for all the covenant people of God and, as Paul notes four times in the New Testament, it anticipates the response of all those in the new covenant. Entry into the new covenant comes via faith and with it comes salvation. And not only does faith anticipate covenant entry, it models covenant faithfulness as well. The life of faith is the life of the covenant-keeper.⁴¹ Thus Abraham is a model of how the new covenant people of God should live by faith.

³⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, 111.

⁴⁰Stephen Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants," in *Believer's Baptism*, ed. Shawn D. Wright and Tom Schreiner (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 157.

⁴¹See Heb 11:9-22, where Abraham serves as a model of one who lives by faith in the promises of God, which translated into obedience.

The Mosaic Covenant

Perhaps no other covenant mirrors the vassal-suzerain treaty of the Ancient Near East like the Mosaic covenant.⁴² With this covenant, there is a clear preamble (Exod 20:2a) and historical prologue (Exod 20:2b). The stipulations form the heart of the covenant (Exod 20:3-17),⁴³ witnesses are present in a blood-ratification ceremony (Exod 24:1-14), a deposit for both parties is provided, and blessings and curses are pronounced (Deut 27-28).

Yet the importance of this covenant is not in its ordered structure but in its theological emphases and redemptive implications. First, there is the organic connection between the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. God's national covenant with Israel is based upon God's individual covenant with Israel's progenitor. It is safe to say that the Mosaic covenant is the fleshing out and fulfillment of the former covenant with Abraham. When Israel was in bondage, God "remembered his covenant with Abraham" (Exod 2:24) and what follows (the exodus and the covenant) is simply God acting upon this "memory." God multiplied Abraham's seed (cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:2; with Exod 1:7-9) and placed them as sojourners in slavery, meeting the preconditions of Israel's nationhood (cf. Gen 15:13 with Exod 2:23). God reminds them even before their deliverance that he will make good on the forging of his unique relationship with Israel (cf. Gen 17:7-8 with Exod 6:7) and that he will bring them into the Promised Land (cf. Gen 15:13-21 and 17:8 with Exod 23:31).

⁴²Note that some refer to this covenant as the national covenant since it is made with the whole nation of Israel. The name Mosaic covenant gives more emphasis to the mediator of the covenant.

⁴³Although the stipulations are given much greater detail in Exod 21-23, the covenant with Israel is typically associated with the Decalogue. See Exod 34:28 and Deut 4:13.

Secondly, the ethical dimension of the Mosaic covenant cannot be missed. It is not that God merely wanted his people to behave. Rather, the giving of the law functioned with a revelatory purpose.⁴⁴ Not only is Yahweh revealing what his people are to look like, but he is also displaying his character.⁴⁵ Again, this is connected to the covenant with Abraham, whom God called to walk blamelessly before him (Gen 17:1-2). Israel is called to keep God's commandments, obeying his voice and words, just as Abraham did (Gen 18:19; 26:5). In so doing, they enjoy the covenant blessings and display the character and ways of Yahweh to the world around them (Lev 19:2ff.). It also is apparent that such enjoyment of the blessings is conditioned on their obedience (Exod 19:5).

Thirdly (and related to the second point above), as they keep the commandments Israel becomes a blessing to the nations. This call can be seen in Yahweh's words to Israel in Exodus 19, and this text forms the heart of the covenant. God reminds them, first of all, of his rescue, suggesting that their status as his people is not based on their merits but his redemption and that the motivation for keeping the covenant is gratitude for his grace. Then, God calls the people, upon condition of their covenant faithfulness, his special possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. The titles are significant: "treasured possession" (*segullah*) – the term refers to the private property of the king, carefully set aside for his own personal use.⁴⁶ In this case, King Yahweh has set Israel apart for himself. Thus, Israel was a nation, and not just any

⁴⁴See Lev 19 where God's holiness is coupled with various ethical demands made upon the people followed with the formula "I am the Lord."

⁴⁵Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 96-99.

⁴⁶Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 85.

nation, but God's nation who stood in a unique and special relationship with him.⁴⁷ The next title, "kingdom of priests," gives fuller expression to the purpose of Israel's call. Embedded in this call and relationship was the duty and privilege of being "mediators of Gods' grace to the nations of the earth even as in Abraham 'all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.'"⁴⁸ However, to do that, they had to be distinct, "a holy nation," like their God, and as such they revealed God's ways and character and attracted the world to him.⁴⁹ This is why the preface to these titles begins with the conditional statement, "if you obey my voice and keep my covenant." In so much as they did this, they were a light to the nations meant to "mediate God's identity to the entire family of nations."⁵⁰ Thus, Exodus 19 "is a key programmatic statement by God, coming, like a hinge in the book of Exodus, in between the exodus narrative (Exod 1-18) and the giving of the law and covenant (Exod 20-24). It defines the identity of Israel and the role God has for them."⁵¹

One sees previous covenant themes emerge in the Mosaic covenant. Despite the oppression of slavery, Israel was "fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them" (Exod 1:6-7). One can see the connection to the creation mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 and the re-creation mandate of Genesis 9:1-7. However, as noted above, Israel is not merely to be numerous as if existence alone represents God, as if procreation is the main duty of vice-regents.

⁴⁷Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 103-07.

⁴⁸Ibid., 109.

⁴⁹The Apostle Peter sees this fulfilled in the church. See 1 Pet 2:9-10.

⁵⁰Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 109-10.

⁵¹Wright, *The Mission of God*, 330-31. Wright notes that the priest's function was to make God known to the people and make atonement for the people to God, thus blessing the people (cf. Num 6:27-29). It is not too difficult to see Christ as the fulfillment of such this priestly role.

Rather, they are his special people, out of all the peoples of the earth (Deut 10:10-18), and as such they are to be like him—holy. They are called out, so to speak, separated unto the Lord from those who are not his followers. To this end, Yahweh gives them a law, and to follow this law makes them holy—which is to say distinct, which is to say different from a world in rebellion against him. In so doing, they become a blessing to the nations, displaying the character and glory of God to the world that the nations might know the one true God (Exod 7:5, 17; 9:14; 14:4, 18).⁵² Thus the godly nation (or offspring), though in enmity with the world, blesses the world as a kingdom of priests, just as Christ, the godly seed *par excellence*, though in enmity with unregenerate man (see, for example, Rom 5:8; Eph 2:2-3), blesses the world through his keeping the law of God even unto his atoning death (Matt 5:17-20; Rom. 8:3-4; Gal 4:4-5; Phil 2:8; Heb 9:14-15).

Of course, the atoning death of Christ brings up a salient and new point.⁵³

Though the people of Israel pledged themselves to keep the covenant (Exod 19:7), it was a flawed obedience at best and outright apostasy at worst (Exod 32). Indeed, Israel's history demonstrates an inability to keep the covenant (Josh 24:19). Their first "official" act of covenant-breaking results in the stoking of God's anger and Moses' atoning offer. It becomes clear that a means of atonement must be made in this covenant in view of God's holy perfection and Israel's rebellious nature. This was hinted already in Exodus 19. Not only did God tell them who they were to be, but it also becomes obvious that, despite their unique nature and calling, God is so different from them, so distinct, so holy,

⁵²Walton, *Covenant*, 33. See Walton's chart that displays all the references to God's actions for the purpose of making himself known.

⁵³One could argue that earlier sacrifices by Abel (Gen 4:4), Noah (Gen. 8:20-21), and others served as atonement. However, nowhere is it spelled out as propitiation and/or expiation so well as in the Mosaic covenant.

that they cannot approach the mountain on which he dwells lest they die. There is a distance that must be bridged. Atonement is necessary. Thus the law is a double-edge sword: On the one hand, it details the stipulations of covenant as a means to blessing in so much as they keep it (see, for example Exod 19:5-6; Deut 28:1-14); on the other hand, it reveals their sinfulness and need for atonement, a need pointed to by the blood-sacrificial system but never fulfilled until Christ (Heb 8-10).

The Davidic Covenant

The first thing that comes to mind regarding the Davidic covenant is the absence of covenantal language—namely, when God established his covenant with David, the word “covenant” is not used. However, the following points suggest that God’s agreement in 2 Samuel 7 with David was covenantal: (1) Numerous biblical texts refer to the agreement or promises as that of covenant (see, for example, 1 Kgs 8:23; Ps 89:3-4, 28, 34; Jer 33:21); and (2) the nature of the promises and agreement is covenantal, not to mention the language itself does have some covenantal overtones.⁵⁴

The context of the Davidic covenant is worth noting. The Ark of the Covenant has just returned to Israel, prompting David’s decision to build the Lord a house, and *then* comes the royal covenant. The sequence is telling: “Yahweh’s kingship must be first provided for before the question of Israel’s can be taken up. Only when such an acknowledgment of Yahweh’s rule has been made may the possibility of a firmly established Israelite royal line be discussed.”⁵⁵ Indeed, what becomes apparent is that

⁵⁴Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 121. Williamson points to the use of the word *hesed*, “a term sometimes used as a synonym for *berit* and having strong covenantal associations.”

⁵⁵Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 142.

Israel is not to be in reality a monarchy but a theocracy.⁵⁶ The nation is not to have a king like all the other nations (1 Sam 8:1-7) but Yahweh as king with a chosen seed ruling as his vice-regent.⁵⁷ As Jonathan Leeman notes, “The occupant of David’s throne was expected to preeminently embody the values of Sinai, thereby reflecting the kingship of God as God’s vice-regent (Deut 17:18-20).”⁵⁸ In other words, “God shall maintain his permanent dwelling-place as king in Israel through the kingship of the Davidic line.”⁵⁹ Yahweh will mediate his rule through his established earthly king, and the king’s authority is derivative of Yahweh. This is the explicit message in Yahweh’s rejection of David building him a house, the point of which is Yahweh’s assertion that he has not commanded David to do so (2 Sam 7:7). Clearly, the Word of the Lord is the governing word, and the king shall rule according to it and nothing else (Deut 17:18-20), imaging his glory as he does so.⁶⁰

At the center of the Davidic covenant is the “house” theme. Due to the perceived rest Israel has received from God, David decides to build a temple for the Lord (Deut 12:10), which was typical protocol for conquering kings to honor their deities after

⁵⁶Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 230.

⁵⁷Note the difference in titles. David (and seed) are “servants” and “leaders” (*nagid*), while Yahweh is king (*melek*) (see Deut 17:19; Judg 8:23; 1 Sam 8:7). See Ronald Youngblood, *2 Samuel*, in vol. 3 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 888, and Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 229.

⁵⁸Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, 238.

⁵⁹Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 233.

⁶⁰Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 60. Lawrence notes that this covenant “gives the nation’s responsibility to reflect God’s glory particularly to the King. He now represents the whole, and so is called the son of God, just as Israel has been at the Exodus, and Adam was at the beginning. The vice-regency is once again focused in a single person.”

vanquishing enemies.⁶¹ Additionally, David notices an apparent “disparity” between his dwelling and Yahweh’s, a disparity he means to reverse. However, the Lord rejects David’s proposal, citing his mobility and that he has not commanded the fabrication of any such house of worship/dwelling. Rather, in a startling act of grace (and play on words) the Lord promises to build David a house (dynasty) instead. This dynasty shall proceed from David’s seed, which parallels God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:4, and it shall be eternal (2 Sam 7:13, 15-16). It is this seed who will build the temple for the Lord. But what is staggering is the generosity of the Lord toward David’s posterity. The Lord will establish a familial bond with him, a father-son relationship (Pss 2:7; 89:26-28), grounded in the *hesed* (or steadfast love) of the Lord. This love will be primarily fleshed out in two ways: (1) When the son disobeys, God will discipline him but not remove David’s dynasty; and related to this, (2) David’s kingdom will be permanent, a permanency not even threatened by sin (as was the case with Saul). Unlike Saul, “the Davidic king may be disciplined, but he will not be set aside.”⁶² Again, just as with the Noachic covenant, it is the mercy of the Lord that is the foundation of this covenant, and it is this covenant that is the basis of Israel’s hope and the Messiah to come.

Additionally, just as with Abraham (Gen 12:2), Yahweh promises to make David’s name great, a promise which is clearly seen not only in David’s fame and affection among the Israelite people, but also in its connection to the Messiah who often bears the title “Son of David” (Matt 12:23; etc.). Likewise, as with Abraham, the Lord

⁶¹Robert Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 236.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 240.

promises a place for his people to dwell (Gen 15:15-21) in rest. As such, with the rest being fulfilled and the need for mobility removed, the Lord's house can be built (cf. Deut 12:10 with 2 Sam 7:11).⁶³ In this geopolitical context, with the promised rest and the finished temple, the Lord's reign will be mediated to the nations through his chosen sovereign, one example of which is typified in the Queen of Sheba's reaction to Solomon's just and wise reign (2 Kgs 10).

Just as with the other covenants, one sees previous themes again in the Davidic covenant. In fact, Kaiser writes, "What God had promised David was no brand-new unrelated theme to his previous blessings".⁶⁴ (1) God promised to make David's name great (7:9; cf. Gen 12:2); (2) God promised Israel a place to dwell (7:10; cf. Gen 15:18); (3) God promised David an established seed (7:12; cf. Gen 17:7-10, 19); (4) God promised sonship (7:14; cf. Exod 4:22);⁶⁵ and (5) God promised identity and union (7:23-24; cf. Gen 17:7-8). This continuity points once again to one unfolding redemptive plan of God in Christ.

Perhaps more than any other covenant thus far given to the people of God, the Davidic covenant points to Christ. First, there is the "servant designation" in 2 Samuel 7:5. As Baldwin points out, "It is worth pondering that it was by the 'servant' imagery that the role of Jesus was most profoundly foreshadowed in the Old Testament" (Isa 42:1).⁶⁶ Second, there are several major New Testament teachings about Jesus found

⁶³Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 125-27.

⁶⁴Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 152-53.

⁶⁵Though this promise does not appear explicitly in a covenant-cutting incident, the clear point is that Abraham's seed became Israel, who was indeed God's son.

⁶⁶Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 229.

right here in the Lord's words to David – namely, that he is (1) the Son of David (see, for example, Matt 1:1; Acts 13:22-23; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 22:16); (2) the Son of God (Mark 1:1; John 20:31; Acts 9:20; Heb 4:14; it must be noted that, unlike the other offspring of David, Jesus will not be disciplined for the times he goes astray, for he kept the Mosaic covenant perfectly;⁶⁷ yet he is “disciplined” on his people's behalf); (3) enthroned (Heb 1:8; Rev 3:21; etc.); (4) the possessor of an eternal kingdom (1 Cor 15:24-25; Eph 5:5; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:11; etc.); (5) builder of the temple (John 2:19-22; Heb 3:3-4; etc.).⁶⁸ Third, there is simply the idea of kingship. As noted already, God will mediate his rule and blessing to the world through a king. Israel's king, though more narrow in focus and specifically tied to the people of Israel (though at times blessing the world as noted above), serves as a shadow of the One to come who will reign over all. Jesus is not only Israel's true king (Matt 2:2), but the King of Kings (Rev 19:16). Ironically his kingship is mediated to the world through his atoning death (Matt 27:42). Through the cross of King Jesus, blessing comes to the nations (Rev 5:9).

The New Covenant in the Old Testament

For many commentators, the new covenant is the critical issue in the book of Jeremiah. Though steeped in judgment, Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy holds out hope for the exiled people of God, assuaging the message of doom with the promise of life. Yet this promise far exceeds previous promises. Though the new covenant is

⁶⁷Interestingly, the discipline provision does not appear in the post-exilic version of this covenant located in 1 Chr 17.

⁶⁸Robert D. Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 337-38.

related to and unfolds earlier covenants, there is a greater discontinuity with it that supersedes the promises of the earlier covenants.

The first point to notice is that the new covenant will be different than the covenant at Sinai. In a real sense, Israel's "persistent failure to live according to the terms of the covenant" posed a spiritual dilemma.⁶⁹ Despite the gracious work of the Lord on Israel's behalf, the consistent covenant unfaithfulness of Israel necessitated the cutting of a new covenant. Israel was a people unable to change (Jer 13:23). Indeed, one could say that Israel was a serial adulterer against her divine husband, a point emphatically made through God's declaration of being a faithful husband to them (Isa 54:5) via a play on words, since the word "husband" translates the Hebrew word *baal*. Israel, rather than being faithful to Yahweh, was faithful to Baal. Clearly, Yahweh was pointing out that Israel's covenant infidelity was primarily that of breaking the first commandment (Jer 11:9-10). The result was a reversal (so to speak) of the previous covenant promises: Israel would be exiled from their land, treated as those uncircumcised, considered no longer a people or God's people, and a byword among the nations. The new covenant, instead, will reverse the fatal deficiencies of the old covenants to ensure that these curses will not be permanent and that the Lord will realize his purposes of a redeemed humanity.⁷⁰

Secondly, the new covenant will involve the internalization of the law. This internalization is juxtaposed with their present position in which sin is written on their heart (17:1) and the law is engraved on stone (Deut 5:22). The old covenant is

⁶⁹J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 580-81.

⁷⁰Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 271-72.

insufficient in that it allowed for insincere obedience or for outright rebellion.

Furthermore, the medium on which the law was written can be broken (Exod 32:19; Deut 9:17) and “scrolls can be lost or ignored (2 Kgs 22:8), and burned (Jer 36:23) or drowned (Jer 51:63). Written documents are also limited to one location, and their availability is restricted,”⁷¹ whereas, the new covenant will promote free and glad obedience.⁷² It “will include a revolutionary change in will, heart, and conscience. It will be an internal rather than an external covenant . . . a principle of life . . . part of the nature of God’s people . . . instinctive.”⁷³

This internal renewal forms a close link to the next element of the covenant: union or fellowship with the Lord. Of course, this is a promissory refrain embedded in the previous covenantal formulas (see, for example, Gen 17:7-8; Exod 6:7; 29:45; Lev 19:12; Deut 26:17-18; Heb 8:12) and one could argue is the goal of God’s gracious work of redemption.⁷⁴ This union is already seen in the husband-wife metaphor in v32 and is certainly part and parcel of the guarantee of experiential knowledge of the Lord given in v34. The heart of the covenants is the establishment or renewal of a relationship, and the new covenant does not change this.

Indeed, the new covenant with its promise of deeper knowledge heightens the relational element between Yahweh and his people. Thompson calls this knowledge

⁷¹Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 27 (Dallas: Word, 1995), 133.

⁷²William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 198.

⁷³Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, in vol. 6 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 576.

⁷⁴Note the declaration of Yahweh at Sinai that suggests union as the goal: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and *brought you to Myself*” (Exod 19:4; emphasis mine).

“the intimate personal knowledge which arises between two persons who are committed wholly to one another in a relationship that touches mind, emotion, and will.”⁷⁵ This knowledge will not be the sort that is transmitted by religious instruction but rather is based on obedience, an obedience fostered by the law written on the heart of every person in the covenant.⁷⁶ So, “all shall know [him], from the least of them to the greatest” (v34). No class distinctions or age limitations are given. Thus, one easily sees the overlapping of these elements. Since the Lord will internalize the law such that obedience becomes the norm, his people will know him – not through certain mediators like Moses or Abraham or David, but individually, giving the relationship a deeper expression to the husband-bride metaphor.⁷⁷

Finally, the basis of the prophetic new covenant oracle is grounded in the forgiveness of God. Holladay notes that the phrase “remember their sins” in Jeremiah 14:10 refers to Yahweh taking action on their iniquity, not recalling something he forgot. Thus to “remember their sins no more” expresses “the reassurance that there will never be an impediment again to the free relationship between Yahweh and his people.”⁷⁸ No explanation of how the sins will be forgiven is provided, but the declaration seems to suggest that the current sacrificial system is unable to permanently remove their sins,

⁷⁵J. A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 581.

⁷⁶The word *yada* suggests an experiential knowledge. However, knowledge of the Lord comes through obedience, since know connotes intimacy more than intellectuality.

⁷⁷Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 135.

⁷⁸Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 199.

hence the repetitive nature which “underlined that sin was not in fact removed but merely passed over.”⁷⁹

Of course, one cannot help but notice that all of these blessings do not seem exactly “new.” God’s fellowship (as noted) was always a goal of the covenants. Individuals who knew the Lord deeply and experientially appear throughout the Old Testament. Forgiveness was offered through the cultic system. And at least David followed the law wholeheartedly, though imperfectly (see all of Ps 119). What seems to be new is the scope of the covenant. No longer will it be a remnant of people within the circumcised community who faithfully follow Yahweh, but every single person in the new covenant will experience the promises limited in number in the other covenants but expanded in the new.⁸⁰ This may be the reason for the merging of the two houses in v31 into the unified house in v33, as Dumbrell notes, “The new covenant will express the prophetic conviction that there can be, and that there has been, only one unified people of God.”⁸¹

Furthermore, what is new about this covenant is its permanence and its unbreakable nature. As House explains, “The greatest problem with the Mosaic covenant is always human disobedience [see 11:1-17; 31:31-32]. . . . Once all covenant people are faithful there will be no reason for the making of other covenants.”⁸² Indeed, since every person will know the Lord, obey the law, and enjoy the forgiveness of the Lord, covenant breaking will be a thing of the past. The Lord will deal decisively with sin both in

⁷⁹Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 157.

⁸⁰Ibid., 154. See also House, *Old Testament Theology*, 318.

⁸¹Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 145.

⁸²House, *Old Testament Theology*, 319.

practice and guilt. Williamson writes, “Sin cannot imperil the divine-human relationship guaranteed by this new covenant, for sin will not be brought into account.”⁸³ It is difficult to imagine a more complete picture of God’s grace since he is the sole provider of all these benefits. (Note the “I will” emphasis throughout the passage.)

In summary, the new covenant will produce a permanent, intimate fellowship with the Lord, characterized by a personal knowing of him, based on the forgiveness of sins. This new work is the circumcision of the heart of which Moses spoke and to which the sign of the Abrahamic covenant pointed, a circumcision that will finally and eventually make God’s people the vice-regents and representatives he intended for them to be. The means of forgiveness is left open but hints at the inefficacy of the current covenant to deal with sins and a new sacrifice to usher in the blessings of the new covenant.

The New Covenant in the Book of Hebrews

The new covenant foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted in its entirety in Hebrews 8:8-12. The reader of this section in Hebrews realizes that nothing new regarding the new covenant is expounded. Though Jeremiah spoke of the new covenant, he essentially only mentioned the benefits of the covenant. There the reader learned that the new covenant is superior because of the internal, permanent, and all-encompassing forgiving work of God. What is not explained is how the Lord will execute such a covenant. However, this forgiving work is the focus of the writer of Hebrews. Though the apostolic writer quotes the entire prophecy, he does not expound on the elements of

⁸³Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 157.

that covenant either, but rather focuses on the mediator and means of execution the mediator uses.⁸⁴

No doubt what prompted the citation of Jeremiah's prophecy was the assertion of the new covenant's superiority and the old covenant's limitations (Heb 8:6-7). In fact, the quotation of the new covenant prophecy is the grounds clause of the writer's assertion. However, the writer explains the superiority of the new covenant more fully in chapters nine and ten in terms of the "cultic ideas of priesthood and sacrifice by seizing on the forgiveness of sins announced in Jeremiah 31:34."⁸⁵ The very next section after the new prophecy citation is a contrast between the old (Heb 9:1-10) and new (Heb 9:11-14) sacrificial systems for the forgiveness of sins. After the contrast, the writer then demonstrates the careful link between death or sacrifice and covenant inauguration. Clearly, the point is that Jesus' death is the new covenant-inaugurating event.⁸⁶ Later, the writer of Hebrews calls Jesus the "mediator of a new covenant" through his shed blood without which "there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:15, 22; 12:24). As Attridge notes, the "Christological exposition of Hebrews 8:1-10:18 is a reflection on Jer 31, in . . . which Christ's death [is] interpreted as a sacrifice that effectively atones for sins and establishes a lasting covenant between God and humankind. The complex exposition [indicates] how it is that Christ's death accomplishes those ends."⁸⁷ For the writer of

⁸⁴Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 413.

⁸⁵Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1998), 280.

⁸⁶Harold Attridge, *Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 226. Similarly, Noah's death-sacrifice (Gen 8:20-21), Abraham's covenant ceremony (Gen 15:7-20), and Moses' ratification ritual (Exod 24:3-8) all pointed to death as covenant-inauguration.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 216.

Hebrews, what is critical is not so much the new covenant's promises or blessings, but the One who inaugurates it and how he does so.

This is made clear in the other announcements of the new covenant in the New Testament. In the gospels, Jesus notes that the inauguration of the new covenant will be through his body and blood sacrifice (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23). Paul understood this to be the case, as well (1 Cor 11:23-26). In neither the gospels nor Paul's writings are there an extrapolation of the new covenant prophecy, at least directly. In all cases, the simple emphasis is on the mediator's sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

The blood sacrifice of Jesus as the means of enacting the new covenant recalls earlier truths regarding the covenants. As noted above, many covenants were issued with self-maledictory oaths, such as the Abrahamic covenant. The idea was that the covenant was not to be broken except on pain of death. In the new covenant, the mediator himself, the giver of the covenant himself, does not break the covenant, yet he still receives the due penalty for the breaking of the covenant. The basis for the new covenant was the inability of the people to keep the old one (Jer 31:31). The new covenant is installed for this reason with one caveat: Rather than the covenant-breakers blood being shed, the mediator himself and the one who does not break the covenant offers his blood. Clearly, the mediator, Jesus, has substituted himself in the place of covenant-breakers.

That is not to say that there are no other indirect connections by the writer of Hebrews to the new covenant as written in the book of Jeremiah. The author continually exhorts the reader to press on toward holiness (Heb 12:10) with the understanding that keeping the law is evidence of being in the covenant—thus the conditional statements in the warning passages: “For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence

firm to the end” (Heb 3:14). The reader would know that the new covenant promised not merely to purify one positionally but ethically as well. The new covenant promised an entire covenant community who would love and know God, a covenant community of confidence or trust in the Lord. On the one hand, one could say that faith was the condition of entering into the new covenant and into eternal life; and, on the other hand, one could also hold that keeping the law was a condition as well, since keeping the law (or having it written on one’s heart) was evidence that one was in the covenant by faith.

Conclusion

It is clear that the covenants are more than simple agreements God made with one or more particular persons relegated to their moment in time. Rather the covenants are best understood as the unfolding of God’s redemptive plan to secure a people for himself. Are they all part of one “covenant of grace,” as many Reformed theologians posit? This could be. Or it could be more accurate to speak of them “in terms of a plurality of covenants (e.g., Gal 4:24; Eph 2:12; Heb 8:7-13), which are all part of the progressive revelation of the one plan of God that ultimately is fulfilled in the new covenant.”⁸⁸ Either way is sufficient if the point is to understand the covenants as a gradual unpacking of God’s eternal plan of salvation through Jesus. As such, each covenant builds on the previous ones, developing them more and more, displaying the continuity of God’s plan, and pointing the people of God to the Christ of God. As Wellum argues, “We may then think more accurately about how the one plan of God, tied

⁸⁸Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” 126.

to the promises of God first given in Gen 3:15, is progressively revealed in history through the biblical covenants.”⁸⁹

More specifically, what the covenants do is point the reader to three main themes: (1) the character and nature of God; (2) the people of God, and (3) the mediator of God. Each covenant reveals the faithfulness, holiness, and goodness of the Lord either by God’s direct action or through his promises. Each covenant explains who the covenant people of God are, why they are in the covenant, how they stay in the covenant, what their purpose in the covenant is, and more. And each covenant has a mediator, all of whom—whether Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, or David—failed or imperfectly administered the covenant. Rather, “they only typified and anticipated the one to come (Rom 5:14),” the Lord Jesus Christ, “the last Adam” who did not fall prey to the temptations of the serpent, “the true seed of Abraham” through whom all the nations are blessed, “a prophet greater than Moses” who perfectly kept the law displaying God, and “David’s greater Son,” who was the perfect King imaging forth God’s glory.⁹⁰ As such, the Messiah, Christ Jesus, reverses all that sin and the Serpent marred. In healing the lame, the sick, the blind, the deaf, the leper, he was reversing the effects of the fall. In raising the dead, he was reversing the plague of sin. In preaching, he revealed the truth of who God is, a truth distorted by the enemy in the Garden. In dying, he erased the curse of sin. In short, as the King and the last Adam, he ushered in a new kingdom that anticipates the restoration of all creation.

⁸⁹Ibid., 127.

⁹⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER 3
PRINCIPLES FOR PREACHING OLD TESTAMENT
NARRATIVE AND PROPHECY

Introduction

It is no secret that the Old Testament receives less “airtime” than the New Testament when it comes to the teaching of the church. Walter Kaiser laments, “There remains a distressing absence of the Old Testament in the church. It is possible to attend some churches for months without ever hearing a sermon from the older testament, which represents well over three-fourths of what our Lord had to say to us. This vacuum is unconscionable for those who claim that the whole Bible is the authoritative Word of God to mankind.”¹ As Elizabeth Achtemeier notes, “It is fair to say that the Old Testament is largely a lost book in many parts of the U.S. church. . . . Many preachers rarely, if ever, preach from the Old Testament. . . . The Old Testament is unknown and unimportant to [laypersons], an unopened antique book from the distant past that can safely be left with the other antiques on the curio shelf.”² The result is a diminished view of Scripture and a truncated understanding of God’s redemptive plan.

However, if one is careful to notice, just as the previous Kaiser quote indicates, part of the blame, if not much of the blame, rests on the shoulders of those who preach.

¹Walter Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 10.

²Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 21.

Many contend that preaching in general is not what it used to be.³ Would anyone argue that preaching the Old Testament is an exception to this trend? If these poor preachers grew up in the very congregations that gave little attention to the Old Testament, can it be assumed that their preaching of the Old Testament is better than their preaching of the New Testament, if they do it at all? The truth is that many congregations' deficiency in the Old Testament reflects a deficiency in the preaching of the Old Testament, whether in form, content, or absence.

Other homiletical issues aside, for most preachers bridging the gap between the Old Testament and the modern church can be quite a struggle. How does one apply the Old Testament promises of land and wealth to a New Testament people? How does one apply the imprecatory Psalms to the church, which is to mark itself in the world by its love, even for its enemies? How do genealogies and the food laws relate to Christians? It is not so much that preachers have to make the Old Testament relevant – it *is* relevant. Rather, the point is that it is *more difficult* to make the Old Testament relevant for the New Testament church in its application, at least for the average pastor.

Additionally, the Old Testament is on the other “side” of the cross, making the distance theologically greater. It seems that God was “nicer” before the crucifixion. It is the idea embedded in the general theology of the average church attender that the God of the Old Testament is different than Jesus. As one church member recently said, “The general tone of the New Testament is that our God is a loving God.” To be sure he did

³See T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009) for a detailed lament on the state of preaching in North America. Gordon notes that after hearing that one-half of all ordained ministers leave the profession before retiring, his colleague Douglas Stuart remarked, “I wish the number were higher; only about one in five can preach” (18).

not say that the general tone of the Old Testament is that our God is a grumpy old man, but one can connect the dots without much difficulty.

So, here is the first ingredient for the neglect of the Old Testament in the pulpit: bad preaching in general. Add to it a general disregard of the Old Testament. Throw in a large portion of the misconception of the character of God in the Old Testament. Sprinkle it with the difficulty of applying the Old Testament to New Covenant people, and you end up with either an ignored majority of the Bible or a poorly preached portion of Scripture.

However, there is another last additive in this deadly mix: the difficulty of accurately interpreting certain types of Old Testament literary genres, which then forms the basis for right preaching of the Old Testament. Two types of genres in the Old Testament can be particularly tricky when applying the Scriptures to the modern church: narrative and prophecy. Again, think about some of the inherent difficulties: the tendency to reduce narrative characters into moralistic exemplars, the temptation to apply a prophecy given to Israel to modern-day America, the difficulty of knowing whether certain incidents that happened in the past can or should happen again (e.g. does God's call to Israel in Deuteronomy 6 to instruct their children mean the modern-day believer is to as well?),⁴ and more. Since these genres contain the covenantal texts of the Old Testament, for the purposes of this project—and if one is going to preach the covenants, project or not—it would be helpful to think about an effective plan for communicating these pivotal texts from these sometimes difficult genres.

⁴Obviously this is a New Testament principle as well, but Deut 6 is one such passage that is often used for a host of various applications to the modern church.

Preaching Old Testament Narrative to New Covenant People

Understand the Passage in Its Historical Context

The first step toward an exegetically responsible and relevant sermon is to understand the narrative passage within its own historical context. All biblical narratives must be understood as the original author intended and as the original audience understood them. Sidney Greidanus writes that “only after we have heard a passage the way Israel heard it can we move on to understand this message in the broad contexts of the whole canon and the whole of redemptive history.”⁵ Again, the goal is original intent, and the reason is simple: without knowing the author’s original intent, the text is left to the whimsical intuitions and fancies of each and every preacher or teacher. Simply put, the preacher can make the text say just about anything he wants. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart guard against this subjectivity by using authorial intent as the point of control: “The only proper control for hermeneutics is to be found in the original intent of the biblical text. . . . Otherwise biblical texts can be made to mean whatever they mean to any given reader. . . . Anything goes. In contrast to such 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.”⁶

Of course, discovering the author’s original meaning applies to all literary genres of Scripture. Here the concern is knowing what the author meant when he wrote the narrative in question. This can be tricky because, while it may be somewhat simple to

⁵Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 228.

⁶Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

figure out that Elijah called fire from heaven, it may not be as simple to know why the author included that story specifically and how it applies to New Covenant people. For example, Robert Plummer notes the difficulty of applying narrative texts: “Many details in stories are not presented as normative. That is, the author is not intending to present all persons or actions as moral lessons.”⁷ However, one may ask, why did the author put those details in the story? What was his message or intention? So, to discover the intended meaning and value for the original reader, one must use the grammatical-historical method of interpreting narrative Scripture.⁸

The grammatical-historical method of interpretation refers to the literary, linguistic, and historical analysis of a passage in order to determine the text’s meaning for the original audience as presented by the author. Essentially, this method refers to the careful study of the text, analysis of its literary context (where does the story fit in the overall storyline of the book?), historical setting (where does the story fit in history?), and the actual words of the passage (what does the grammar tell the reader?). The reader wants to answer the question, “Why did this biblical writer include this story in this book of the Bible?”

Therefore, after the preacher has selected a textual unit for preaching, he will study the context of the passage and begin to exegete the text via grammatical analysis, such as studying the original languages, analyzing the structure of the story, picking out

⁷Robert Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 193.

⁸An abundance of books on biblical interpretation will aid the reader, including Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), or Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

key words for further examination, reading other passages alluded to in the text, and more. Additionally, he will consult other commentators or preachers to help guard his interpretation from any false or weird conclusions. Furthermore, the reader might analyze the text for certain items that clue the reader in to the meaning. For example, Walter Kaiser focuses more on certain “elements” in the narrative itself. These include scene, plot, point of view, characterization, setting, dialogue, key-wording, structure, and stylistic or rhetorical devices.

Sidney Greidanus advocates a similar three-fold approach with his third point being an important distinction: (1) the literary interpretation is the foundational step of investigating the words and phrases of the text as well as its literary context. Issues such as conflict and resolution as well as flow of argument must be dealt with; (2) the historical interpretation answers all the questions related to authorship and audience but also grasps at the “why” question or what need of the audience the writer was addressing; (3) the theocentric interpretation deals with the big questions about God, namely, what does this passage say about God?⁹

At this point the preacher has not necessarily bridged the gap into the New Covenant people. He has merely laid the foundation, a foundation on which the sermon is built, a foundation that will assist him in understanding the passage in its canonical-redemptive context.

Understand the Passage in Its Canonical-Redemptive Context

Once a grammatical-historical analysis of the narrative is complete, it is important to ask the canonical question: “How does this text fit within the narrative of the

whole of Scripture and redemptive history?” The reader has already dealt with the historical context, discovering cultural clues and pointers that will help him understand the text. And the reader has examined the passage within the immediate literary context of the chapter, unit, whole book, and the whole section of Scripture. What remains is the issue of storyline. Where do the events of this narrative fall within the Bible and, specifically, the redemptive plan of God? And does that affect the way one understands and applies that text?

To begin with, it may be necessary to ask the question, “Why is it important to understand the passage within the context of canonical and redemptive history?” First, the canonical-redemptive context places the text within the framework of God’s progressive revelation. Unlike the Muslim’s claim that the Koran was handed to Mohammed all at once, the Bible was written over hundreds of years. What was given to Moses, David, or Asaph was not complete. Promises that were made had yet to be fulfilled. Not to recognize this previous revelation is to read a passage as though God did not exist prior to or after the text being studied. To read a text as such is like opening a mystery novel and randomly choosing a page to read. One could “understand” the words, but there is no way he could understand the plot or story. For example, to read Exodus without Genesis is to miss the covenant faithfulness of God and to misunderstand God’s destruction of the Canaanites. Either way, God’s character is twisted or diminished in some fashion. Plus, there would be all these names and references that would make no sense. Rather, the canonical and redemptive context gives the reader the fullest possible understanding of the passage. So, in the most literal sense, a canonical reading of the text helps the reader to understand the grammatical-historical interpretation as well.

⁹Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 228-30.

Similarly, it helps the reader understand the character and person of God more fully. Historical passages are notoriously used for their exemplary value. David is seen as a model for courage. Abraham is held up as an example of faith. Joseph is the quintessential model for character and integrity. While all of these may be true and have homiletic value, they lack the power of a breathtaking vision of God's greatness. As Graeme Goldsworthy notes,

Biblical characters, even major ones, are frequently ambiguous as to their exemplary value. It is not always clear whether some characteristic or action is recounted intentionally as a blemish or a virtue. We need to evaluate the biblical characters, even the great heroes of faith, in the light of the larger perspective of salvation history. In opting for a salvation history approach we do not thereby rule out any appeal to biblical characterization. It is a matter of the perspective of the text as a whole. If we must see narratives in terms of characters, then let us remember that the chief character in the unfolding drama of redemption is God himself.¹⁰

Furthermore, the canonical-redemptive context guards the sermon from simply being an Old Testament sermon.¹¹ With a canonical-redemptive approach, the reader understands that this narrative event has taken place within the redemptive plan of God, a plan that culminates in the person and work of Christ. To preach about circumcision without moving to New Testament baptism, the circumcision of the heart, and Christ as the mediator of both; or to preach about David without recognizing his Messianic significance is to understand the Bible differently than the apostles and Jesus himself.¹²

Then, as one sees the character of God and sees the redemptive plan in Christ fulfilled, the sermon becomes a way to display the glory of God in Christ rather than a mere story from which to draw some life lessons. The latter can lead to legalism. The

¹⁰Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 141.

¹¹Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 230.

former leads to the gospel that has the power to save sinners. The latter leads to burned-out, disillusioned church members. The former leads to a joyful obedience based on the grace of God. The goal is for the reader to understand the narrative event as the original reader understood it and understand its historical significance in the specific time and place it occurred. The greater goal is for the reader to see the character and nature of God displayed in the passage. But, since he or she lives on this “side” of the cross, the greatest goal is to see the event through the cross and second coming of Christ. Only then can one make application of the text to himself.

How then does one do canonical-redemptive interpretation of Old Testament narrative? As with many methods of interpretation or discovery, it all depends on answering certain questions well. For example, Achtemeier notes that the preacher needs to ask the question, “What is going on in the story?” This question has a broader aim and context than merely figuring out who died or what happened. The idea is to figure out how this story fits with the overall story up to that point. This keeps the preacher from simply isolating the story into religious or timeless principles for living. So, for example, David is not simply a man who committed adultery but a king in covenant with Yahweh who, unlike Saul, did not lose his throne though his sin was great. David has a prior history, and that history is important to the story. The preacher also needs to inquire about the outcome of the story. What happened? What was the result of the events? How does it unfold? And then the preacher has to inquire about the outcome of the story in regards to the total canonical context.¹³ How does Jesus affect the outcome of the

¹²See, for example, Luke 24:27 and Acts 2:25-28.

¹³Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 63.

story, or at least how do his life, death, and resurrection affect one's understanding of the story?

Michael Lawrence proposes that the preacher use certain biblical theology tools once the grammatical-historical analysis is complete. For example, there is the tool of *covenants*. As noted in chapter two, these are promissory relationships that God uses to establish fellowship and salvation with his people. One needs to ask when examining a text, "What covenant(s) govern God's people at this point?" The preacher also should consider the tool of *epochs*. Epochs answer the question, "How does God relate to his people under this covenantal arrangement?" In the patriarchal period the focus is faith in and the fulfillment of God's promises. From Moses to David, the emphasis is on God's forging a nation that will be distinct and holy. While neither of these concerns evaporates at any point, the inauguration of the monarchy also brings about a new theme, that of the Messiah King. Then there is the *canonical* tool. This tool looks more directly at how the text points to Christ and his salvation. By using these tools the preacher locks the narrative passage into the grand scheme of the Bible and redemptive history.¹⁴

Goldsworthy advocates examining each passage with regard to where it fits in the two epochs of salvation history. If the text is from Genesis 12 to Solomon, then the positive theme is the progressive revelation of salvation and the kingdom of God. If the text is located within the period of the divided kingdom to the end of the Old Testament, then the negative theme is the progressive decline of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah under judgment. The first epoch is the age of promise. The second epoch is the age of

¹⁴Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 64. Lawrence points to other tools like prophecy (what promises are fulfilled or to be fulfilled?), typology (is there a typological figure that foreshadows Christ?), and continuity/discontinuity (which themes or events carry into the New Testament and which ones do not?).

prophecy. In the former, the emphasis is on the covenant promises being fulfilled in the Davidic kingdom. In the latter, the emphasis is on the eschatological promises of renewal in a period of judgment to be fulfilled at a later time. To get the right theological understanding of the text, one must first answer the question, “Where does the text appear in regard to these two epochs?” The answer gives one the redemptive context.¹⁵

No doubt all of these methods have overlap. All of these advocates are using biblical theology to some degree. They are figuring out how the events of the narrative fit into the history of Israel and salvation history. Robert Plummer notes that the beneficial question to ask is “In what ways does this passage reveal God’s progressive, saving revelation of himself to wayward humans? Or, Where does this passage fit into God’s saving plan – is it anticipatory, climactic, or looking backward to God’s culminating intervention in Christ (Heb 1:1-3)?”¹⁶ Fee and Stuart summarize this section nicely by focusing on three levels of history in any narrative text: “Every individual Old Testament narrative (bottom level) is at least part of the greater narrative of Israel’s history in the world (middle level), which in turn is a part of the ultimate narrative of God’s creation and his redemption of it (the top level).”¹⁷ Recognizing these levels helps the preacher recognize the canonical-redemptive implications of the text and serves as a bridge to apply the text to the modern church through the person of Jesus.

¹⁵Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scriptures*, 140-43.

¹⁶Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 157.

¹⁷Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 80.

Bridge the “Gap” between the Old Covenant People and the New Covenant People with Sound Application

It seems that the primary misuse of Old Testament narrative texts is that of moralism, of using the characters of the story as exemplars to be emulated. It should be noted that there is a sense in which this is warranted. Abraham is often cited as a pattern of justification by faith (see Rom 4). Vaughn Roberts writes, “David is not just a model of Christ, the son of David; he is also a model for us as believers in his relationship with God. The Psalms certainly invite us to look forward to Christ, but they also call on us to look up to God and consider our relationship with him.”¹⁸ Certainly narrative texts can be used to encourage the believer in the faith, in the Christian life.

However, more often than not, the characters of narratives are used in a way that betrays the intended meaning of the text. If this betrayal is not done in the interpretation portion of sermon preparation, it certainly is often done in the application. For example, Plummer recalls a sermon that illustrates the point: “My wife and I were once listening to some audio messages for new parents. The speaker exhorted parents to put their babies in cribs (as opposed to having them in the parents’ bed) because Mary put Jesus in the manger.”¹⁹ Notice the problem here. It is not that the speaker used a character from a narrative (in this case a New Testament text) as an example. The problem was the speaker derived a principle from the text that was divorced from the author’s intended meaning. As Plummer notes, “The key interpretive question of course is: why does Luke tell us that Jesus was placed in a manger? Was it to teach us how to

¹⁸Vaughn Roberts, *God’s Big Picture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity), 155.

¹⁹Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 193.

put our children to bed, or was it to emphasize the Savior's humble origins?"²⁰ The point is that authorial intent, which is discovered further back in the interpretive process using grammatical-historical analysis, also controls application. Think of Gideon's call and rise as a deliverer. If the author's intent was to demonstrate the way in which God calls believers to ministry, then certainly one might apply the text as a paradigm for setting people apart for his work. The preacher may encourage believers to get alone in a winepress or place of work and listen for the voice of God. But if the passage is about the degradation of the nation such that the deliverer is a fearful pagan hiding out, then a more appropriate application might point listeners to the power of God to raise up unlikely deliverers who will save his people. Jesus is one such deliverer. Or it might be that the author wants to show what happens to God's people when they syncretize their religion with other religions, the disastrous effects of idolatry. Furthermore, if Gideon is an example to be followed, does this mean believers should constantly seek signs to confirm God's will, even though the New Testament suggests otherwise? Or is Gideon a paradigm for those of little faith, struggling to trust God? Of course, if those points were the author's intention then such applications are right. The point is that all application flows first out of the author's intent. So, in Gideon's case, if the author's intent is to show a very flawed, sinful person, then the appropriate response would be to exhort God's people to trust in God and point them to the unflawed Deliverer.

Another helpful line of thinking may be appropriate. In figuring out the New Covenant application of an Old Testament narrative, one must first answer the question, "What is it that God's people are to do?" However, the question here is not necessarily, "What is the particular, appropriate response to this particular text?" Indeed, that

²⁰Ibid.

question should come at some point. The first question, rather, is “what general response is needed?” The answer is repentance and faith.

Here is where Bryan Chappell’s Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) is helpful. He defines the FCF as “the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God’s people to glorify and enjoy him.”²¹ Usually, in any narrative, there is a mutual condition that the modern reader shares with the ancient context that would call forth the response of repentance and faith. This is why it is key to preach Christ from the text as well, because in calling for this general response the preacher is calling the listener to respond to the grace of God extended in Jesus. No doubt the call to repentance, then, will include, not only a general turning from the hearer’s own sinfulness, but also specific acts of obedience (see Acts 26:20 and Luke 3:7-14); and it will include not only a general trust in the promise of Christ’s free pardon of sin, but also the trust necessary to conform to the Lord’s character and ways presented in the biblical narrative.

Find a Hermeneutically Sound Way to Preach Christ from the Narratives

The foundation of this section is the conviction that the Hebrew Scriptures “bear witness about” Christ (John 5:39). As Edmund Clowney writes, “The Bible is the greatest storybook, not just because it is full of wonderful stories but because it tells one great story, the story of Jesus.”²² He points this out using the example of the narrative of David: “David is not a brave little boy who isn’t afraid of the big bad giant. He is the

²¹Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 50.

²²Edmund Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1988), 9.

Lord's anointed, chosen of God to be the king and deliverer of Israel. God chose David as a king after his own heart in order to prepare the way for David's great Son, our Deliverer and Champion."²³ The point is an Old Testament narrative is not so much intended to give the reader a life lesson as much as it is to give the reader life in Christ. But how does one preach Christ from an Old Testament narrative text?

Once the preacher has finished his canonical-redemptive interpretation, he has probably already discovered Christ in the Old Testament narrative. At the very least he has a theocentric picture, a vision of the character, nature, plan, and ways of God, which will no doubt link him to Christ, the God-man. So key links have been formed. Bridges, at least in the mind, have been built. Additionally, the preacher has discovered the stage of redemption in which God's people are located. If he has answered the questions noted in the earlier section, he has probably already discovered Christ in the text. The issue then is not so much discovering Christ in the narrative but proclaiming him in a sound way.

Asking the right questions and employing some key principles can lead to preaching Christ soundly from the Old Testament narratives. First, rather than asking, "How does this character testify to my existence (or character)?" ask, "How does this character testify to Christ?"²⁴ The first question leads to moralism, which is not necessarily or always wrong. The second question gets the reader to the gospel, which is always right. In fact, the character in question can actually lead the reader to Christ because of his or her sin. The Bible generally takes pains to tar every character in it save

²³Ibid., 15.

²⁴Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 151.

One: Christ. Showing the imperfections of the deliverer Samson is a great way to display the perfect Savior Jesus, even though both did indeed deliver God's people (albeit in a different way, which would be another good way to expound Jesus from the text).

Second, look for direct references of the narrative in the New Testament. For example, if the narrative is that of Abraham (or any other character), are there references in the New Testament to the passage that connect the reader to Christ? Of course there are, such as Hebrews 11, Romans 4, or Galatians 3. Sometimes the reference may be indirect, such as the tabernacle (John 1:14-18), or it may be a direct Messianic reference like Isaiah 53.

Third, is there a typological figure or event, which foreshadows the person or work of Jesus like that of the cultic sacrifices, the Passover, or King David? To be sure, one can go typologically crazy, but typology is still a viable way to preach Jesus.²⁵

Fourth, is there a theme developing or later developed, or a promise later fulfilled in Christ? While Samson may be a flawed type, the theme of deliverance of God's people by a single person who dies foreshadows the deliverance of the church by the self-sacrifice of Jesus. God's concern for the poor throughout the Old Testament blossoms into salvation for the poor in spirit via a Savior who became poor for his church that she might enjoy the riches of God (see Matt 11:28-30; 2 Cor 8:9). One can see the overlap with typology because both types and themes foreshadow a greater reality in Christ. In terms of promise-fulfillment, the predicted seed, who would crush the enemy, finds its fulfillment in the seed of God, Christ (cf. Gen 3:15 with Rom 16:20). This

²⁵For a fuller discussion on the dangers of typology and the different ways to understand it, see Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 249-54; Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 75-80.

promise finds fulfillment in Christ but it is also developed through the whole of Scripture, as Chapter 2 of this thesis showed.

Fifth, is there an attribute of God to be explained more fully in Christ? For example, when Moses asked to see the glory of God, the Lord answered by pointing to his mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love, faithfulness, and forgiveness; but he also pointed out his insistence that he would not “clear the guilty” (see Exod 34:6-7). Not only is it not difficult to point listeners to these attributes as seen in Jesus, but the work of Christ on the cross unites both these themes, justice and mercy, perfectly. Thus, a theocentric interpretation can yield a Christocentric sermon.

In summary, the preacher is asking the questions Edmund Clowney suggests: “What truth about God and his saving work is disclosed in this passage? . . . How is this particular truth carried forward in the history of revelation? How does it find fulfillment in Christ?”²⁶ By answering these fundamental questions, the preacher not only finds the redemptive-canonical context, but he also discovers legitimate ways to preach Christ in the passage.

Preaching Old Testament Prophecy to New Covenant People

As one common textbook states, “Probably no part of Scripture mystifies and frustrates readers more than the prophets. Indeed, OT prophecy presents a veritable snake pit of interpretive problems.”²⁷ If it frustrates readers, then it certainly confounds preachers when they move from the text to the pulpit. Questions abound: Do all the

²⁶ Edmund Clowney as quoted in Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 267.

²⁷William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Kermit A. Ecklebarger (Dallas: Word, 1993), 302.

promises to Israel apply to the church? What about America? Do national promises of judgment or blessing given to ancient, geo-political, theocratic Israel have any bearing on a modern nation state? If preachers model for their congregation how to handle the Scriptures, then poor preaching in this area only serves to increase the frustration of the average person in the pew trying to understand the prophets. Once again, what is needed is a clear way to preach the Old Testament text to New Covenant people.

Understand the Passage in its Historical Context

As noted above, the first step in preaching a sermon from an Old Testament prophetic passage is to understand its grammatical-historical meaning. The preacher will apply the standard rules for historical exegesis. He will determine the flow of the argument, the meaning of words, the role of coordinating conjunctions and other sentence connectors, the relation between subjects and verbs, verb tenses, and more. He will look for contrasts, comparisons, illustrations, metaphors, inclusios, chiasms, and other rhetorical devices. The point, as always, is to determine the author's original intention, meaning, and main point. Dennis Johnson states it well:

The text must be read in light of all that can be learned about the historical situation and experience of the first recipients, as well as their broader cultural and religious environment. Each passage is an answer to questions that lie behind and beyond it, a solution to its readers' needs, problems, and crises. What were those questions and problems? What, moreover, could and did the author expect them to understand and believe – or at least hold them accountable for knowing and believing – in light of their previous exposure to God's self-disclosure in the created order, in his covenantal dealings with Israel, and in Scriptures already in their possession?²⁸

Additionally, the features of prophetic literature need to be accounted for.

Some prophecies are predictive and others are descriptive. Some prophecies are

²⁸Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), 275.

conditional and others are unconditional. Generally, all prophecy is heavy with metaphors and vivid images. The interpreter, therefore, needs to be able to discover how to interpret symbolic language well. Furthermore, the interpreter must determine with what kind of prophetic genre he is dealing. Is it an oracle of woe? Or weal? Is it a prophetic lawsuit? Is it an oracle against another nation? Is it a pronouncement of grace and restoration?²⁹ All of these help unveil the author's original intent.

However, the preacher needs to go a step further with a prophetic passage because the “the basic feature—and problem—of interpretation is the promise-fulfillment dynamic. This is what divides interpreters. When, where, and how a prophecy is fulfilled helps us understand its meaning.”³⁰ Is this a prophecy that will be fulfilled immediately? Is it more futuristic? Does it have both fulfillments in view?³¹ Is it conditional upon something man does? Will the fulfillment be literal or figurative? Or will it be something unexpected?

Essentially, the preacher needs to figure out if the message of the prophet is one of foretelling or forth-telling. Is the message predicting something in the future? Or is the message addressing the audience right then and there? Is it a combination of both? Most of the prophet's prophecies are not predictive of future events. Rather, the majority of the messages are prophetic in the sense that they speak to the sin or predicament of God's people at that moment.

²⁹Kaiser, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, 110-11. It should also be noted that even within prophetic literature other genres appear such as historical narrative.

³⁰Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 48-49.

³¹Various books on hermeneutics use the mountain/horizon analogy to describe how prophecy-fulfillment works.

Understand the Passage in Its Canonical-Redemptive Context

As noted in the previous section regarding narrative, the preacher needs to locate the prophetic textual unit in its canonical context for purposes of accurate historical interpretation. However, it is also imperative to grasp the canonical-redemptive context of the passage in order to bridge the gap to the modern church. The preacher will use a similar process as noted in the previous section dealing with narratives to help him ascertain the redemptive context. He will use the covenants, epochs, and history to determine when the prophecy was made chronologically and where it falls in the progressive revelation of God's story. In doing so he will "place [the] Old Testament text into the context of a historical trajectory that points from the shamed and banished Adam and Eve at history's dawn to the second Adam at history's crux."³²

Goldsworthy points out a few issues to keep in mind when interpreting the prophetic text. First, the prophets called the people back to keep the Mosaic covenant. Even the non-writing prophet's ministry was that of turning back the wayward people of God to covenant faithfulness.³³ With the kingdom divided, the people slid more and more into idolatry and apostasy, such that the God-sent prophets still called for a return to the Lord via covenant faithfulness. These messages often consisted of "stinging indictment and accusation" along with warnings of judgment.³⁴

Second, the prophet also reminded the people of God's faithfulness and willingness to restore the people; and this restoration is couched in terms of the old

³²Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 277.

³³For example, Elijah and Elisha.

³⁴Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 171.

structures of covenant and kingdom but unparalleled in scope and content. In short, the promises of future blessings outweigh the earlier blessings found in the covenant and certainly supersede their present afflictions.

So, there are two main foci of these messages: “a more immediate one affecting the nation of Israel, and a more universal one involving the whole of creation.”³⁵ With this knowledge in hand, the preacher can then discover how to take an Old Testament prophecy given to Israel and apply it to the modern church. This process may be a little simplistic since there are different levels of redemption that are often taking place or overlapping. Many scholars point to a “horizon” principle for understanding prophecy. Grasping the time-table for prophecy fulfillment is compared to observing the multiple horizons of an ascending mountain range. The nearer smaller mountains appear against the backdrop of taller mountains. To the eye, these mountains seem right next to each other but in fact can often be a great distance apart. Likewise, prophetic fulfillments may appear in the same way. The more immediate fulfillments appear against the backdrop of larger, more complete fulfillments and while they seem close together they in fact may be much further apart in time and scope.³⁶

Bridge the “Gap” between the Old Covenant People and the New Covenant People with Sound Application

All of the previous analysis is critical because how one understands the prophets determines how one preaches the prophets. Again, Achtemeier notes, “Many clergy tend to view [the prophets] simply as social reformers and preachers of ethics, who

³⁵Ibid., 172.

³⁶See n. 31 above and texts like Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*.

castigated their contemporaries for their failure to live up to proper ethical and moral standards.”³⁷ One result is to use the prophets to preach against some moral sin prevalent in the country of one’s choice, and in so doing totally miss the redemptive element in the text and, worst of all, miss the promised reversal in Christ and the new creation. Hans LaRondelle writes:

A major problem in applying the ancient prophetic messages to our times is that many modern interpreters manifest a total disregard for the essential theological – specifically the Christological – dimensions of the Old Testament prophecies. The prophetic view of history was never directed to secular events of a political nature, disconnected from the Messiah and his people.³⁸

Thus, if the preacher thinks about the nature of prophetic literature, or more specifically, the nature of the prophet’s message, application for the modern church might be less difficult than supposed. Notice how Lawrence describes the role of the prophet: “Not only do they make the case [against God’s people for breaking the covenant], they prophetically warn of the judgment to come (calling for repentance)³⁹ and prophetically proclaim the salvation to come (calling for faith).”⁴⁰ In some sense, this is always the application in any sermon, turning from a sinful act or mindset and trusting in Christ alone as the only hope of the church, repentance, and faith.⁴¹ Indeed, it is important to assert that repentance and faith are not merely the responses of the unconverted but are the responses of those in covenant with the Lord already. The believer is always in need

³⁷Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 107

³⁸Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 2.

³⁹Dennis Johnson notes as well that “God also sent his prophets . . . to diagnose his people’s . . . spiritual treachery and to summon them to deep repentance” (*Him We Proclaim*, 321).

⁴⁰Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 48.

⁴¹See Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21, where Jesus and Paul emphasized this response to the gospel.

of turning from sin and looking unto Christ. Since the majority of the prophets point to sin and restoration, the preacher simply needs to find a modern contextual bridge from the covenant unfaithfulness of the people of Israel to the church's corporate and/or individual's sin; but he also must traverse the promised restoration to the church's Savior.

No doubt there is some difficulty here and this is where the redemptive-canonical context matters. The preacher sees the promises as shadows of a greater reality.⁴² The promise of a return to the Promised Land or of a perfect peace must be bridged to Christ and heaven. This does not mean the preacher ignores the varying levels of fulfillment in the text. Lawrence notes, "For example, in the flow of Isaiah's narrative, the 'sign of Immanuel' in Isaiah 7 is fulfilled in Isaiah 8 with Isaiah's own son. But that is just the first range of mountains. Behind and towering over that range is the text's ultimate fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ."⁴³ Even in this example this final range has multiple pinnacles. The first is Christ's initial advent and the final pinnacle is Christ's second coming. Taking this into account enables the preacher to see the context of the situation and then bridge the application to Christ. Furthermore, even though the first range of mountains may have been Isaiah's son, this initial fulfillment for Israel is not something that is necessarily applicable for the modern church.

Dennis Johnson posits several questions that help the preacher move from the ancient text to the modern hearer/reader:

Have socio-cultural factors changed? How will these affect your hearers' understanding of the text's message? How will they affect application? . . . How

⁴²This brings up issues regarding the continuity and discontinuity of the Old and New Covenants, of the Israel of God and the church. Depending on one's stance (dispensationalist or non-dispensationalist), the preacher may have different issues with which to deal.

⁴³Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 48.

does the text's occasion, initial problem, Fallen Condition Focus manifest itself in your situation and that of your hearers? E.g., what does 'meat offered to idols' represent in a Western Culture where butcher shops are not subsidiaries of idol temples? . . . How must you respond to this part of God's Word in your thoughts, motives, attitudes, speech, and behavior? What idolatrous habits of the heart does this text expose? How does it expose our tendency to 'play God' by being our own lawgiver rather than submitting to God's holy law (self-indulgent antinomianism)? How does it expose our tendency to 'play God' by being our own savior rather than submitting to God's grace in Christ (self-righteous legalism)?⁴⁴

Of course, those same questions (and many others) are effective in any kind of literature for either testament. However, those questions are the kind of thoughtful query of the text that moves the preacher into thoughtful, biblical application. And two issues really emerge: (1) the social and life context of the original hearers with bridges forged to the social context of the modern hearer; and (2) the sinful heart-problem addressed to the original hearer that finds itself embedded in the hearts of the modern hearer. By examining those two issues and fleshing them out, the preacher has a sturdy bridge to cross over to the application of the text.

Find a Hermeneutically Sound Way to Preach Christ from Prophetic Literature

Just as in narrative texts, so too Christ is to be preached from the Old Testament prophets. LaRondelle writes, "For the Apostle Paul the central truth of the Hebrew Bible was not about Israel and its national future, but about Messiah Jesus."⁴⁵ This admission is not merely a statement against dispensationalism but rather the acknowledgement that all the prophets testify to Christ as all the Old Testament does (John 5:39; Luke 24; 2 Tim 3:15; et. al.). Furthermore, the nature of prophetic literature

⁴⁴Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 404-05.

⁴⁵LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 6.

demands the preaching of Christ since, as Goldsworthy noted, the prophets spoke and wrote in the negative stage of Israel's progressive decline with their emphasis being on the eschatological renewal of God's promises. Since the prophet's message is often one of rebuke for sin and promise of restoration, Christ can be placed within this redemptive framework somewhat easily, because the cure for sin is Christ and the promises find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

In the previous section on preaching Christ from narratives, several questions/principles were noted to help the preacher not only discover Christ but proclaim him from the text. Those same principles can be used with prophetic literature as well. Nevertheless, the main instrument to preach Christ is the promise-fulfillment principle. Prophetic literature is by nature promissory, for judgment or salvation; and foundational to proclaiming promise-fulfillment texts is the reality that God will always keep his promises (2 Pet 3:9). The question remains, "How?"

Greidanus notes that the first rule to keep in mind when interpreting Old Testament promises is that "God usually fills up his promises progressively—in installments, as it were."⁴⁶ One of those installments will usually be Christ. Sometimes this fulfillment is directly stated in the New Testament, such as Jesus' declaration in Luke 4 of the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-4. When preaching from Isaiah 61, then, the preacher would certainly note that the immediate fulfillment of the text is the remnant's return from exile; but he would also note how Christ fulfills the text. While physical captives and prisoners were freed in the remnants return, no such incidents are recorded in the

⁴⁶Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 242.

gospels. Therefore, the Lord Jesus must have been referring to his redeeming work of setting his people free from their sins, spiritual redemption, or release from captivity.

Other times the fulfillment and statement will be more indirect. That is, it may be not directly referenced in the New Testament or cited by Christ or an Apostle.

Nevertheless the fulfillment is in Jesus. For example, in Isaiah's prophecy concerning Immanuel not only is there a direct fulfillment of this in Matthew's gospel with the birth of Christ (Matt 1:22-23), but certainly the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 and the church's future glorification with Christ in the new heavens and earth is the broader fulfillment of God's presence.

Promise-fulfillment is not the only way to preach Christ from the text. Again, the preacher can also simply look for the theocentric interpretation of the text and bridge it with a Christocentric sermon. In Isaiah 41:10, the prophet sounds the Lord's call to trust in him and not be afraid. How often does Christ speak of fearing not? How often does Christ's nature not resemble that of the Lord's presented here, as strong and compassionate? The unity and likeness of the Godhead gives the preacher a simple bridge from Yahweh/Elohim to Christ.

Similar to promise-fulfillment is the idea of continuity and theme. This is also similar to the theocentric-Christocentric bridge noted above. For example, when Isaiah tells of the Lord coming as ruler and shepherd (see Isa 40:10-11), not only can one see this fulfilled in Christ but one simply notes the continuity of the Godhead. Yahweh is a shepherd (Ps 23) and Christ is a shepherd (John 10). Yahweh is the ruler and Christ is the ruler. It is continuity and it is thematic consummation. The theme of king and

shepherd developed so well through Israel's monarchy, modeled after Yahweh himself, is consummated in Christ.

Conclusion

To summarize, faithful preaching of Old Testament narrative and prophetic texts begins with faithful exegesis and interpretation. It also includes understanding where and how the text fits within the story line of redemption. The right application of the text includes (to use a well-known metaphor) constructing a bridge between the world of the author and the New Testament church. The application of the text cannot remain fixed in the Old Covenant but neither can it move outside of the author's intent, and again, it too must account for the location of the story or prophecy within the storyline of redemption. At the same time this means the sermon must be faithfully Christocentric, without hermeneutical or homiletical gymnastics that "force" Christ into the passage. Faithful preaching will not "moralize" the text and neither will it shy away from preaching the law. Yet it will not bring the weight of the law down upon hearers without yoking the hearers to Christ. Faith and repentance will be called for. Warnings will be carefully declared and promises will be lovingly extended. All of this will be done with grace of God in Christ in view.

CHAPTER 4
ELEMENTS OF THE PREACHING PROJECT

Introduction

The ministry project began in April of 2011. The main component of the project was a series of sermons on the covenants of the Bible. The other components of the project were pre-project and post-project congregational surveys, a focus group that evaluated my preaching skills via sermon evaluation forms, a seminar on biblical theology and interpretation, and another, more in-depth, pre-seminar and post-seminar survey for the seminar attendees. Each component of the project was designed to help reach the intended goals for the project and measure the effectiveness of the project. The following timeline gives the exact dates for the project:

1. March 13 – Administered pre-project survey
2. April 10 – Began sermon series
3. April 15 – Conducted expository preaching seminar for focus group
4. May 1 – Administered pre-seminar survey and began seminar
5. June 12 – Ended sermon series
6. June 12 – Administered post-project survey
7. June 29 – Ended seminar series and administered post-seminar survey
8. July 1 – Met with expository preaching focus group

Pre-Project Survey

Since I wanted to evaluate where my congregation was in their understanding of the Old Testament and of the story of the gospel, I administered a pre-project survey¹ to the whole congregation. The survey consisted of two parts. The first part simply gathered some biographical data, such as education level, age, and church attendance. The second part of the survey used a five-point Likert scale to measure the congregation's attitudes and understanding of the Old Testament, as well as their understanding of the Old Covenant's relation to the New Covenant. The survey was emailed to the entire church body, and it was distributed prior to and after the Sunday morning worship services on March 27th, April 3rd, and April 10th. All the surveys were completed anonymously. A total of 41 people completed the survey.

Sermon Evaluation Focus Group

One of the goals for my project was to improve my skills as an expositor, especially in the genres of Old Testament narrative and prophecy. Therefore, I selected a group of 9 men in my congregation to assist me in evaluating my sermons.² Originally, I had planned simply to select a focus group made up of a cross-section of individuals from the congregation. However, I decided to use this group of men because of their knowledge of expositional preaching and maturity. Almost all of the men in this group meet with me on Friday mornings in a small-group book study. Since one of the books that we have studied is *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chappell, these men had a

¹A copy of this survey is located in Appendix 1.

²See Appendix 2 for the evaluation form, which is the form used in *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chappell. Originally I made up my own form but found this form later and discovered that it was much more comprehensive.

deeper and more competent understanding of expository preaching than others whom I could have enlisted from the congregation. The few men who did not actually read the book have previously demonstrated a biblical wisdom and maturity that I thought would be valuable in evaluating my sermons. Furthermore, all of these men, save one, have at some point filled the pulpit in our church or other churches, bringing some experience with them as they evaluated the sermons I preached.

In preparation of the project, all the men in the focus group read a paper I wrote on expository preaching. This paper basically explains what expository preaching is, defends its primacy over topical preaching, and argues for its necessity for God's people. Additionally, I conducted a one-session seminar with this focus group on the basics of expository preaching.³ In this seminar, I first defined expository preaching. Then I discussed the various critical elements that must be present in an expositional sermon, such as a unifying theme, faithful application, a clear gospel presentation, and a coherent structure. Next, I talked about how a sermon was to be structured with an introduction, body, and conclusion with supporting elements like explanation, illustration, and application. I also tried to explain some of the dangers inherent in the application process, such as moralizing or spiritualizing a narrative text. Finally, I explained the delivery aspects of a good sermon.

I selected three sermons for these men to evaluate. Prior to the Sunday that they were to evaluate my sermon, I emailed them an electronic copy of the evaluation form, and on the day of the sermon I also had paper copies on hand. Once the men

³See Appendix 3 for the teaching outline used in this seminar.

completed the evaluation of my sermons, they turned the evaluations in to me. Of the men who participated in the seminar, all but one completed the evaluations.

Sermon Series

The core of this project was a sermon series on the covenants that I preached to the entire congregation. I preached these sermons during the Sunday morning services, starting in mid-April. The sermons were expositional, though some were not what I often think of as typical exposition.⁴ In each sermon I sought to illustrate how the Old Testament truths examined pointed to their greater New Testament realities, especially that of Jesus Christ. The key theme of the sermons was God's gracious re-creating a people for himself into his image through Jesus Christ.

Sermon 1

The sermon series began not with a look at any of the covenants, but with an examination of the creation account in Genesis 1-3. Titled "The Very Good and Bad Beginning," the sermon was basically an explanation of this progression: God made man in his image to reflect his glory; man reflected that glory well so long as he submitted to the good rule and word of the Lord; however, man sinned and the result was a great distortion or marring of that image leading to death and exile from God; thus salvation is God working through Jesus Christ, the perfect image and Son of God, to restore fallen humanity back to his perfect image and fellowship with himself. I applied the text to the congregation by exhorting them to center their lives on the good rule of God's Word, to

⁴Usually, I take a paragraph or pericope of Scripture, explain it, and then apply it. However, some of these sermons covered larger sections of text and thus there was less verse-by-verse explanation than a typical expository sermon.

pursue growth in Christ-likeness, and to be encouraged because God will finally restore all his people into his perfect image.

Sermon 2

The second sermon, titled “War and Peace,” also did not focus on any of the biblical covenants.⁵ This sermon was more of a continuation of the beginnings of the Bible and an unpacking of Genesis 3:15. The focus of the sermon was on the threefold promise given to the serpent. Therefore, the three levels of enmity were explained, traced in the Bible, and demonstrated to intersect with the modern listener. The main idea was once again to show that the plan of redemption is a working out of this promise. Namely, there are those who are God’s people who are being remade in God’s image as new creations who will mirror God’s glory to the world; and there are those who are Satan’s spiritual offspring who are not being remade in God’s image and oppose those who are; and salvation through Jesus makes the difference in these. Therefore, I exhorted the readers to recognize the spiritual war that is going on about them and inside them and that unbelievers need to be reconciled to God; furthermore, I explained to them that the only way to get from the losing side to the winning side is through the finished work of Jesus who won the battle for his people.

Sermon 3

Sermon 3, titled “Bad News/Good News,” was an expositional overview of Genesis 6-9. The sermon basically had two points: (1) God judges sinners; and (2) God rescues sinners. After a brief recap of the biblical story and themes that the sermon series

⁵Theologians are divided over whether there were original covenants established in Gen 1-3, such as the Covenant of Works or the Covenant of Redemption.

had already examined, I pointed out how the sinfulness of man had demonstrated itself in the text thus far, with particular emphasis on the two seeds of Genesis 4 and 5. Then, I explained that God's flood of judgment was actually an undoing of creation and pictured a greater judgment that is to come. However, I then explained that God does give grace, preserving his promise by saving a descendant of Adam and Eve from whom the Savior of the world would come. Moreover, I pointed out that this Savior would bear the flood of God's judgment upon himself so that believers would not have to. A call was given to gladly submit to the Lord Jesus by faith and be remade, or suffer the eternal flood of God's judgment, being undone forever in hell.

Sermon 4

The fourth sermon, "Promises, Promises," was an exposition of Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-17, and 17:8-17. Each text was briefly explained under two points: (1) God chose to bless Abraham by promising him a land, descendants, and more; (2) God confirmed those promises in a unilateral ceremony and with a sign. After noting how God made good on those promises and how God was reversing the effects of the curse, I focused on Jesus as the greater fulfillment of all those promises and how just as with Abraham, all of those promises come to us by grace through faith. I noted that once again we see that God is working out Genesis 3:15, remaking a people for himself, narrowing his people down to Abraham's descendants. I applied these truths by noting that God's people are those who are circumcised in the heart and trust in Jesus, sons of Abraham by faith, inviting all to trust in Christ.

Sermon 5

The fifth sermon, “God’s Covenant with Moses and Israel,” was an exposition of Exodus 19:1-6. The first half of the sermon consisted of two points: (1) God rescued the Israelites; and (2) therefore, the Israelites were to live for God. In explaining these points, I demonstrated how God kept his promises to Abraham and that God had narrowed the promised people of Genesis 3:15 down to the people of Abraham, the rescued people from Egypt, who were now living in a particular place in order to bless the world as a renewed humanity under God’s rule. After noting the failings of the Israelites to keep the covenant, I showed how Jesus was the true Israel, keeping the covenant, and dying for covenant-breakers as the ultimate holy one, priest, and blessing to the nations. Then I pointed out, using 1 Peter 2:9-12, how the church is the new Israel. I placed great emphasis on the missional or evangelistic nature of the community of faith, and that the church is now, in Jesus, a blessing to the nations, a renewed humanity, and the continued fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.

Sermon 6

Sermon 6, titled “The King’s Speech,” was an exposition of 2 Samuel 7:1-17, God’s covenant with David. The main ideas of the sermon were that God ruled his people through the king, and that God intended to bless his people and the world through the king. Obviously, these ideas were connected to the previous sermons, particularly the sermon on the Mosaic covenant, where the themes of blessing and rule were heavily emphasized. After pointing out the people’s rejection of God as king and the king’s failure to obey the law and bless the people, I illustrated how Jesus, the true king and son of David, blessed the world by dying for sinners and rules now in love. I called leaders,

including myself, to wield authority well and others to submit to God's loving rule, and for all to trust in Jesus when they rebel against God.

Sermon 7

The seventh sermon was an exposition of Jeremiah 31:31-34, the new covenant prophesied, entitled, "Out with the Old – In with the New." First, I showed that the main problem with the Old Covenant was not with the covenant itself or the Lord who gave it, but with the people's inability to keep it. Next, I explained the promises of the New Covenant as the life-changing relationship a believer has with Jesus via the new birth. I noted how this connected with the theme of the sermon series: God remakes a people for himself back into his image through the new birth. Then I briefly showed that this is all possible through the forgiveness of sins by Jesus' death. I appealed to the congregation by calling them to evaluate their relationship with God, to be born-again, and be encouraged by the good work that God is doing and going to do in their lives.

Sermon 8

The last sermon of the series, entitled "Jesus: The New Covenant," was a detailed exposition of Jeremiah 31:34 and Hebrews 8:12. After recapping the previous sermon, I pointed out that the writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah's entire prophecy; however, I noted that his focus is not on the new birth or life-changing nature of the New Covenant, but on the means by which the believer can be forgiven of his or her sins. Therefore, the focus of this sermon was the atoning work of Jesus, as I explained the phrases, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." I appealed to the listeners to put their complete faith in Jesus' perfect sacrifice for

them and apply the gospel to their lives. I did warn them against using grace as a license to sin, but my emphasis was on living in the good of Jesus' finished work.

Biblical Unity/Theology Seminar

The other major component of the project was an eight-week seminar I conducted on the unity of the Bible, essentially a biblical theology class. Originally, I was going to use a smaller focus group but found this too difficult to fit into the life of the congregation. So, I taught the seminar during our Sunday night and Wednesday night gatherings. The content of the seminar was a combination of fifty percent of my own material and fifty percent of the Biblical Theology core seminar taught at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC.⁶

The first class was an introduction to the concept of biblical theology and the unity of the Bible. I also wanted to teach the seminar participants some basics in interpretation as an answer to the question, "How can I make sure that I am understanding correctly the parts of the whole story I am reading?" So, the second session was an overview of the inductive Bible study method: observation, interpretation, and application. The third session was an overview of handling the different genres of the Bible, especially those genres of the Old Testament. The remaining sessions were devoted to looking at the following themes in the biblical narrative: creation, word, promise, fall, and sacrifice. The point of these sessions was to trace key themes through the whole Bible narrative and then derive doctrinal points from these storylines. I wanted to show church members that it is better to derive truth from the Bible not by mere

⁶A copy of one of the seminar handouts is located in Appendix 4. This core seminar is the basis and content of the book by Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

prooftexting but by understanding the whole storyline of the Bible from different angles. Also, I wanted to demonstrate to the participants how the Bible “fits” together though it is sixty-six books written by dozens of writers over millennia. Furthermore, I tried to explain how a chronological understanding of these themes through the Scriptures helps us formulate doctrinal truths carefully and apply the Scriptures to our lives in an exegetically responsible way.

In addition I asked the participants in this seminar to complete a separate survey.⁷ This seminar was somewhat different than the other survey. The questions here were not scaled but were open-ended. For example, Question #1 reads, “Please give your understanding of the role of the Law (basically the Ten Commandments) in the life of the Old Testament saint.” The survey also contained a pie chart, which asked participants to compare the attributes of the Old Testament God versus the New Testament God. Once again, I wanted to gauge the attitude of the participants toward the Old Testament, but I also wanted to delve further into their understanding of the Old Testament and the character and ways of God as he is presented in the Old Testament. Just like with the sermon series, I did a pre-seminar survey and a post-seminar survey. The post-seminar survey was exactly the same with the exception of a few extra questions that directly asked the participants how they felt they grew in their knowledge of the Old Testament, redemption, and their ability to handle the Old Testament Scriptures.

⁷See Appendix 5 for a copy of the post-seminar survey, which includes all the information of the pre-seminar survey but also includes the extra questions.

Post-Project Survey

At the conclusion of the sermon series, I administered another survey. This survey was given online via email and was distributed following the last sermon of the series on June 12th (and in subsequent weeks). This survey was the exact same as the survey given to the whole congregation at the beginning of the sermon series. The goal was to determine if there were any significant changes in the thinking of the congregation. Namely, I wanted to try to measure if the congregation had changed in their attitude toward the Old Testament and in their understanding of the story of redemption.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to teach the unity of the Bible by preaching the Old Testament covenants to the members of Harlan Baptist Church. The project was supplemented with a seminar and surveys, as well as a preaching evaluation group. The project began informally years ago when I completed an Old Testament Theology course and began to take shape during my Doctor of Ministry course on Old Testament Exposition. As I considered the role of biblical theology and the unity of the Bible in the life of the church, I felt that a series of sermons on the covenants of the Bible could provide a great overview of the redemptive message. Chapters 2 and 3 described the product of my research compiled for this project from theological and biblical resources. Chapter 4 described what the actual ministry project looked like and how it was implemented. This last chapter provides an overview and analysis of the data I collected, and provides an evaluation of all aspects of the project. I consider whether I reached my goals or not, and I reflect on what I have learned from the project.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of Sermon Series

The data gathered in this project consisted of a survey done with two groups. The first survey was a church-wide survey tied to the Sunday morning sermon series I

preached. Forty-one people completed the pre-project survey, but only 20 completed the post-project survey. Obviously, such a poor turn-around will yield a less accurate analysis of the data, since the goal was to measure the changes in response from the pre-project to the post-project surveys.

However, I was still able to glean some insight into the congregation from the data I did receive. One of the goals of the project was to increase the church's affinity and understanding of the Old Testament. So, some of the questions simply gauged their understanding, use, and enjoyment of the Old Testament. I assumed, based on data from the church in general and current trends in culture, that the congregation would be less inclined to the Old Testament to begin with and would not be reading it as much. I discovered that the congregation actually reads the Old Testament quite frequently and sees it to be just as valuable to their spiritual health as the New Testament. For example, question 1 states, "The Old Testament is as vital for spiritual growth as much as the New Testament." Approximately 90 percent of the congregation agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. The average response was 4.30 on the Likert scale. In the post-project survey, the results were almost identical. Question 2 states, "I enjoy reading and studying the Old Testament." According to the pre-project survey, approximately 77 percent of the congregation agreed or strongly agreed with that statement (a 3.98 average response on the Likert scale) and the post-project results were around 93 percent (4.18 average response on the Likert scale). So, the pre-project results were surprisingly high, and there was a 22 percent increase in the respondents' enjoyment of the Old Testament. Question 5 said, "I enjoy sermons from the Old Testament more than sermons from the New." The pre-project results indicated that most people were between disagreement or

undecided, with no one in agreement with that statement (2.49 average score on the Likert scale). There was hardly any difference in the post-project survey (2.69 average score on the Likert scale). So, once again, these results indicate a favorable attitude toward the Old Testament to begin with and none of that significantly changed. Based on those numbers and feedback I received from the congregation, it seems the project slightly helped with the attitude of the people toward the Old Testament, though their disposition toward the Old Testament was good to begin with. One could say that the sermon series encouraged the solid believers significantly but determining whether the majority or average church member was or was not helped would be almost impossible to measure from the data.

Another goal of the project was to help the congregation view the God of the Old Testament as the same as that of the New Testament rather than the stereotypical dichotomy many Christians have of a loving New Testament father versus an angry Old Testament king. Question 8 states, “The Old Testament communicates the wrath and justice of God more than the New Testament, which communicates more about God’s love.” The average response in the pre-project survey was 3.4 while the average response in the post-project survey was 2.56, a decrease of 24 percent. That decrease represents a success in terms of meeting this goal. I wanted the church to see the unity of the Bible, which certainly includes an unchanging God. I wanted them to know the God of the Old Testament as a God of steadfast love who, indeed, is also a God of justice, but still no different than the New Testament God. The results indicate that I did achieve some success on this issue. However, there seems to have been some confusion. Question 9 states that “the God of the Old Testament is different than the God of the New

Testament.” This is a more general question than the previous one but still seeks to measure the same issue. Yet, the results were right the opposite. The results indicate a 20 percent increase in agreement with this statement. This is clearly at odds with the results of question eight and with the goals of my project.

Another area that the survey measured was the congregation’s understanding of the Old Testament, its relation to the New Testament, and the story of redemption. Questions 3, 7, 9, and 10 deal with this area of the congregation’s knowledge. Question 3, “The Old Testament is easier to understand than the New,” was a surprise. I expected this number to be higher but the average response was 2.34 with hardly any change from the project. Question 7 states, “The Old Testament saints were saved by law, but New Testament saints are saved by grace.” The average response was a 3.0, or undecided, with no significant change due to the project. Again, I expected more agreement with that statement and hoped for growth in disagreement. Question 10, “The New Covenant is a different covenant than the Old Covenant” had an average response of 3.54 and 4.12, pre- and post-project respectively. This increase shows a 16 percent growth in agreement with that statement. Question 11, “The New Covenant is a fulfillment of the Old Covenant,” had an average response of 3.8 and a slight increase to 4.06 post-project. The problem here is that I do not think my question was worded well. One could easily say the New Covenant was different than the Old Covenant simply by thinking of the names, without having any knowledge of the covenants themselves. Plus, anyone could probably guess that the New Covenant is a fulfillment of the Old Covenant. However, the issue is, “In what way?” My surveys did not measure their understanding of the fulfillment or knowledge of it. Also, based on my sermons, I did not emphasize the continuity of the

New Covenant with the Old Testament covenants as much as their differences. I wanted to do the latter and emphasize the continuity as well. I see this as an oversight in my sermon on the New Covenant.

One possibility that skewed the results of the surveys is that most of the people who completed the survey were very dedicated, avid readers of the Scripture and attenders in the church (according to the data). That is a good thing for the church, but the problem is that the people who are more likely to complete the survey are the people who are more likely to be dedicated to the Word. The point is that while this may be a majority (I hope) in the church, it is not a good cross-section of the whole church. Most of the people who completed the survey noted that their attendance at church was 2-3 times per week. Clearly, from my observation, this is not the majority of the church. So, it is possible that respondents did not answer truthfully or accurately. In any case, I do not think I received a clear cross-section of the people, in terms of their maturity and understanding. In other words, those who filled out the surveys seem to have been those who already had a fuller love and knowledge of the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole.

Another item bears mentioning. Just prior to the project, I taught a survey of the Old Testament for about half a year. In this survey, there was a heavy emphasis on seeing Christ in the books of the Old Testament, noting how the Old Testament foreshadows the New, and important texts from those books were covered, texts such as Genesis 3:15 and the covenantal texts. Therefore, some of the content of the sermons and seminar were a bit redundant to those who had been in that Old Testament survey class. Furthermore, this meant that those who completed the surveys and were in that class had

been exposed to much of the content previously. Thus, their answers may not have been indicative of the rest of the church.

Analysis of Seminar

The second group of data comes from the seminar portion of the project. The first part of the seminar survey consisted of ten open-ended questions. The nature of the questions was similar to the other survey, measuring attitudes and understanding of the Old Testament, the unity of the Bible, and the respondent's understanding of the whole redemptive story. Again, I was surprised by the pre-project answers. All of the respondents saw no difference between the nature of God in the two testaments but some saw a difference in the Lord's focus and ways. One respondent did note the typical belief that God seems harsher in the Old Testament than the New. Most all of the respondents demonstrated a good grasp of the role of the law in the Old Testament and New Testament believer and the relation between the two covenants. One interesting point was that most all the respondents felt the New Testament was more applicable and about Jesus, more so than the Old Testament. I suppose one could admit as much, but this, again, showed me the opportunity I have to demonstrate the applicable nature of the Old Testament and that its aim is Jesus, as well.

There were a few additional questions in the post-seminar survey directly asking what the respondent learned. A few of these questions proved helpful and did indicate that the seminar was effective. One person stated that the seminar helped her see that "the Bible is one story, a story about a covenant relationship between God and his children." Another response to the post-project seminar was the person grew "in their understanding of what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God." Responses

like this indicate that the seminar and sermon series was effective in helping the church grow in their understanding of the unity of the Bible and its central redemptive message.

The second part of the seminar survey was a pie chart in which the participants were to write down various attributes regarding the God of the Old Testament and then the God of the New Testament. Responses varied, but confirmed some of my suspicions about the way people view the Old Testament God. For example, almost all of the attributes listed for the Old Testament God were those emphasizing God's transcendence, holiness, and power. None of the respondents listed "savior" or "redeemer" for the God of the Old Testament—whereas, every survey, under the God of the New Testament, listed attributes that communicate God's nearness and salvation. Two of the surveys did not even list attributes for the God of the Old Testament, but those same two did for the God of the New Testament. The post-seminar surveys showed a slight growth in attitudes and understanding but nothing significant. Since this survey was not scaled, there was no measurable information to calculate.

Evaluation of Goals

My project had four goals. The first goal was to improve my own skills in preaching the Old Testament genres of narrative and prophetic literature. While I still have much room for improvement, this goal was achieved. My own work in chapter 3 reminded me of the concepts and principles involved in preaching an exegetically sound and God-centered sermon from the narrative and prophetic genres. However, since I had only one true prophetic text, Jeremiah 31:31-34, that I preached in the sermon series, and since this text is so clearly laid out in the New Testament, it is difficult to assess my improvement in the prophetic genre. Certainly I gained knowledge from my research on

the subject and from my own writing, but textual restrictions prevented me from practicing in this area. As for the sermon evaluations that were done, the marks and comments I received were very encouraging. I was made aware of weaknesses (in the areas of illustrating, conclusions, clear structure) that need improvement and strengths (delivery, application, explanation) that showed progress.

The second goal of this project was to lead members of Harlan Baptist Church to understand the Old Testament covenants, arming them with a greater knowledge of the truth of God's Word and the witness of God himself. I wanted members simply to know God and his Word better. I definitely think this goal was achieved. Based on the data from the surveys and the feedback I received from church members, the church grew in its understanding of God's character, particularly his purpose in salvation and his plan of salvation in Christ.

Another goal, similar in nature to the second one, was to lead people to see the unity between the Old and New Testaments so that members would not view the God and salvation of the Old Testament as different from Christ and the redemption of the New Testament. The idea was for the members at Harlan Baptist Church to develop a Theo/Christocentric-redemptive hermeneutic for understanding the Old Testament in place of a moralistic, self-help, example-driven reading of the Old Testament literature. The first part of this goal was met. The data shows and my conversations with people indicate that the church understands better than ever how the Bible all fits together and how the Bible tells one story, a story of man being restored into God's image through the work of Jesus. Furthermore, since redemption flows out of the character of God himself, the church grew in its belief that the God and salvation of the Old Testament is the same

as the New Testament. However, whether the church members actually developed the redemptive hermeneutic or not is difficult to know. One reason for this ambiguity is that the surveys used measured people's attitudes and understanding more than their skills. No doubt, many would say that they see Christ more in the Bible, but the next time they study an Old Testament narrative, will they resort back to merely moralizing the text, or will they see God's redemption in Jesus? It is difficult to say. Furthermore, the covenant texts are not the best for pointing out how people need to guard against moralizing the text. Most of the covenant texts lend themselves to be more redemptive and theological in nature as opposed to texts like David slaying Goliath or Joshua fighting the battle of Jericho. Miracle stories tend to turn into self-help applications. But narratives of God establishing covenants are more theological and redemptive. Therefore, I should have made this more of an emphasis in my seminars than I did.

Related to the fourth goal mentioned above, the last goal of the project was to lead the members to apply the Old Testament to their lives, especially from the narrative genre. I made this a goal because I know how narratives can often be abused in the application process, yet I wanted the listeners to apply the Scriptures to their lives. The problem was that this goal was difficult to measure. Perhaps I should have had more questions specifically tied to this. Furthermore, the nature of my sermons was such that usually the response called for was that of trusting in Jesus, or growing in their understanding of the redemption story, or submitting to God's rule, rather than something a little more tangible like praying more or reading the Bible. I do not think this goal was achieved in any measurable way.

Evaluation of Process

One of the things I would change about the process would be my sermon evaluation focus group and the forms I used. I thought the change to using my Friday morning men's group was a great move since they had a lot of experience and knowledge regarding expository preaching. The seminar was very effective as was the paper I had them read. However, I missed a good opportunity with this group. One of my goals was to improve myself as an expositor, especially in the genres of narrative and prophecy. In hindsight, it would have been better to have conducted another session or two, or at least provided more material for the men to read, regarding interpreting and preaching from Old Testament narrative and prophecy and then devise an evaluation form that contained the right sort of questions or tools to measure my proficiency in these genres. Rather, the evaluations simply measured my proficiency in expository preaching as a whole, in general. So, I would have made the evaluations and class more specifically tied to the preaching of narrative and prophetic literature. The truth is, since this was one of my goals, I consider this a major oversight in my project. Indeed, I wish the evaluation forms would have had more areas for general comments and open-ended questions related to genre than merely scales evaluating my skills and content.

I would make several changes in my seminar group: (1) I would have made this a smaller class rather than the larger group setting. The smaller group is the way I originally planned to do it, but due to scheduling conflicts in the life of the church I had to use the larger group setting. Nevertheless, the larger group made it difficult to interact with the people in order to get a better feel for what they were learning, if their attitudes toward the Bible were changing, and if their understanding of the Scriptures and the

redemption story were growing. The survey could only do so much, and more verbal interaction would have been profitable; and that leads to another problem with the seminar. (2) The survey done by the seminar group simply led to confusion. Most of the people felt that since they had completed a survey already—the one regarding the Sunday morning sermons series—they did not need to do another. No matter how often I explained the difference, people still seemed confused. Therefore, hardly anyone did the seminar survey. Had I simply conducted the seminar with a controlled group, in a smaller, class-like setting, I believe I would not have had this problem. (3) Another mistake I made with the seminar group was a mistake in the content of the class. The sessions that I taught on the different themes of the Bible (creation, word, sacrifice, et. al.) went well and served their purpose. But the first three sessions contained entirely too much material, especially the session on genres. Sessions two and three ended up overwhelming the participants. I should have simply taught the first session just as I did and replaced sessions two and three with the same kind of material I taught in the last five sessions. Furthermore, I should have added a couple of classes with an emphasis on applying the Old Testament, and specifically pointing out the unity of God's character across the two Testaments.

If I had to do the project over again, I would find a different time of year. Due to the timing of my project approval, late spring and early summer became the time of the year to go forward with the project. At our church, for various reasons, we experience a huge drop-off in attendance and commitment during this time of year. The result was less participation in the seminar and the surveys. Indeed, I only had a few post-seminar surveys and half the post-project seminars turned in. It also meant scheduling conflicts

like Vacation Bible School and mission trips. These conflicts really made continuity impossible for the participants. In fact, there were times when I had to teach the seminar on Wednesday nights instead of Sunday nights only. Again, this mixing of times made continuity for the participants very difficult.

One final change I would make would be in regard to the survey, specifically the way I set up the Likert scale. At the top of the page I show the Likert scale, left to right, five (strongly agree) to one (strongly disagree). However, under each statement that follows, the Likert scale is reversed, left to right, one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). This may have caused respondents to accidentally reverse their answers if the persons were not carefully paying attention.

Theological Reflection

As I reflect upon the things I have learned in this project, a few things come to mind. First, I am absolutely convinced, more than ever, that it is necessary to preach the gospel and hold up Jesus in every sermon, whether in the New Testament or the Old. All preaching needs to be Christo/Theocentric. Not only does this feed the sheep's knowledge, but it also leads to their worship. The feedback I received from one of the ladies of our church when I preached on Christ as the means of God forgetting our sins was that she became "useless, unable to see because of the tears." When I started the doctoral program I heard a professor say that the goal of our preaching is not to hear people remark at how good the sermon was but how great our Savior is. Literally, I had people after some of the sermons speak of how great God truly was.

Not only should our sermons be Christo/Theocentric but biblical theology needs to be taught, from the pulpit, with Christ as the end. Of course, that does not mean

I have to literally teach a biblical theology seminar. But it does mean that I should make a concerted effort to show how the Bible ties together in one narrative with Christ as the point. My chairman of deacons told me that he knew the point of the Bible was Jesus, but he had never seen it so clearly as now. In fact, he said, “I get chills seeing how it all fits together, how it all points to Christ.” This comment was really encouraging to me. Not only was he theologically informed, but his affections for God were also stoked.

Of course, not all people were affected like this. Some will miss it and this misunderstanding is why God’s grace in salvation must be constantly explained. The reality is all men are legalists or licentious people at heart, like the younger and older brothers of the parable of the prodigal son. In most churches, there seems to be more older brother types, more legalist/moralists. Therefore, grace alone in Christ alone must be preached constantly. I was reminded of this when in the midst of the project an older woman of the church, after the sermon on the covenant with Noah, was expressing her incredulity at God’s wrath. Yet, it seems to me when I consider God’s grace toward sinners, what should amaze the church is not that God is wrathful toward sinners but that he actually loves sinners. When the gospel is preached in every sermon, from every text, my hope is that justification by works, whether actual or functional, will fade away, and that hearers will be stunned more and more by the love of God toward hell-deserving sinners.

This need for the gospel reinforces my commitment to teaching sound theology. Most churches have been fed a steady diet of moralistic, therapeutic sermons for the last fifty years or so. Such a diet has led to people who have a difficult time grasping the gospel of grace and turned the Bible into their own personal, self-help book;

yet, the gospel of grace and the grace of the gospel needs to be in the church's heart and soul. The gospel is the path to true worship and true community, a community and worship that is driven by grace and not self-improvement. Therefore, it is critical to teach God's attributes, man's fallen state, Jesus' redemption, and the church's position and privilege as saints.

Personal Reflection

One of the benefits of this project and through my whole course of study was the theological growth I experienced. Pastors often do not expose themselves to quality, meaty theological works. More time is spent on leadership materials or Christian-living books. Obviously, these are important. But pastors are theologians, first and foremost; and they have a need to feed themselves glorious truth that fans their flame and provokes careful thought. Often that kind of truth is found in difficult or more theologically-oriented works. This project forced me to do a lot of reading—most of it in the area of biblical and covenant theology. I cannot say that I retained all that I read. Nor can I say that I consider myself a first-rate covenant theologian (or systematic/biblical theologian for that matter), but I do think I grew in my understanding of God's covenant love and his redemptive work. Not only were many people blessed as they saw God's redemptive plan begin in seed form and grow to full fruit through the Scriptures, but I also benefited greatly in my own knowledge and, consequently, worship. It's a shame that such a project was required to provoke this type of careful, theological study, and hopefully, a new and life-long discipline has been born in my own life.

I did discover, or at least was reminded of, an area of skill that I need to grow in: personal communication. When it comes to preaching, my communication skills are

fairly effective, based on the feedback I have received through the years. However, it has become increasingly aware to me that my I need to work on keeping people informed, explaining non-textual issues outside of a teaching situation, and simple general explanation of what I need from people. I do not think I communicated the project “as a whole” to my congregation very well. My explanation of the surveys and the seminar lacked clear instruction. People were confused about the surveys and the nature of the seminar. Simply put, communication is an area I need to work on in my ministry. It is often overlooked, but nonetheless important, and one I need to improve.

By far, the greatest lesson I learned from my project was an indirect one. In my project methodology class, Adam Greenway exhorted the class to persevere in the work of our project, warning us that taking time off, stopping, and then trying to restart is almost impossible to do. I started this program in January of 2004. Due to my being dismissed from the church in which I was doing my original project, it has taken me an extra three to four years to complete the project, during which time I was on interrupted status. Restarting the project and finishing it has proved Adam Greenway’s words. It has been arduous, not simply because doctoral work is difficult, but staying motivated over the span of almost eight years was nigh impossible. I definitely think it affected my work. I cannot say that I always gave it my best, especially when restarting after my three-year interruption. My motivation level simply was not what it was prior to being on interrupted status. It is only by God’s grace that I have finished this. I was encouraged when a fellow member of my original cohort group who finished his project long before I did noted that it took perseverance to do complete my degree. Completing a project like this, through three church changes, five children, the loss of my mother to cancer, and

two secular jobs has been an incredible test, and it has taught me much about enduring and not giving up. Good things happen to those who endure to the end. If anything, it has shown me how weak and needy I am. Praise God!

Conclusion

I can say that I believe my church has benefited from the project. Was it as much as I hoped? I don't know. If my church did not benefit, I definitely take most of the responsibility. But I know for sure that many of them grew in their grasp of the whole Bible, their attitude toward the Old Testament, and their love for Jesus. Could that have happened by my preaching any series or book from the Bible? Obviously, it could have. However, God used this project and through it he taught many people more about the great salvation of his people. He taught them how to study the Bible better. He taught them how the Bible ties together in one thread. And he taught them what to look for as they approach the Day when all things will be made new, including his people, especially his people.

I know that I too have grown through this project and program. This project forced me to learn how to preach the whole Bible and preach the Bible as a whole. It forced me to grow in preaching Christ from the Old Testament. This project reinforced my conviction that preachers need to show their congregation how the Bible fits together and how it all points to Jesus. I grew as a student of theology and as a student of my congregation. May the Lord bless this work!

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to enhance our church's understanding of the Bible. This research is being conducted by Pastor Brandon Pugh for purposes of project research and to evaluate the church. In this research, you will fill out the following questionnaire. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research. Thank you.

1. Circle the number of years you have been a Christian:

0-5 years 6-10 years 11-20 years 21-30 years 31-40 years 41+ years Not a
Christian

2. Check the box that best describes your education level:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate/professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Finished high school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completed Four-year college | <input type="checkbox"/> Some high school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completed Two-year college | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than high school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some college/technical | |

3. Check the box that describes best your age:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 | <input type="checkbox"/> 61+ |

4. Check the number of times you attend church services (worship, Sunday school, Wednesday night):

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 per month | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 per week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3-4 per month | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 per week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 per week | |

5. Check the box that best finishes the following sentence. (Note: if you have never read from the Old Testament, please mark “never.”)

I have read passages from the Old Testament within the last ...

- Week Month Year Five years Never

6. Check the box that best finishes the following sentence. (Note: If you have never read from the New Testament, please circle “never.”)

I have read passages from the New Testament within the last ...

- Week Month Year Five years Never

Using the following scale, please circle the number that best indicates your feelings in response to the statement.

5 = strongly agree 4 = agree 3 = undecided 2 = disagree 1 = strongly disagree

1. The Old Testament is as vital for spiritual growth as much as the New Testament.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I enjoy reading and studying the Old Testament.
1 2 3 4 5
3. The Old Testament is easier to understand than the New.
1 2 3 4 5
4. I have read the Old Testament in its entirety.
1 2 3 4 5
5. I enjoy sermons from the Old Testament more than sermons from the New.
1 2 3 4 5
6. I shy away from the Old Testament because I do not understand it.
1 2 3 4 5
7. The Old Testament saints were saved by law, but New Testament saints are saved by grace.
1 2 3 4 5

8. The Old Testament communicates the wrath and justice of God more than the New Testament, which communicates more about God's love.

1 2 3 4 5

9. The God of the Old Testament is different than the God of the New Testament.

1 2 3 4 5

10. The New Covenant is a different covenant than the Old Covenant.

1 2 3 4 5

11. The New Covenant is a fulfillment of the Old Covenant.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

Speaker: _____ Evaluation: _____ Date: _____

<p style="text-align: center;">Outline and Comment</p> <p>Scripture introduction and reading:</p> <p>Sermon introduction:</p> <p>Proposition (specific wording):</p> <p>Body (note main points and significant features of each):</p> <p>General comments:</p> <p>Content _____ Structure _____ Delivery _____ (S = Superior, E= Excellent, G = Good, N = Needs Work)</p> <p>Delivery Concerns (circle or comment):</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Volume</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Eye Contact</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Vocal variation</td> <td>Swaying or pacing</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Distracting mannerisms</td> <td>Use of Bible or notes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gestures</td> <td>Other _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pulpit use</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Introduction</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;"></td> <td style="text-align: center;">Yes</td> <td style="text-align: center;">No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Introduces an FCF derived from this text</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Arouses attention (usually with a human-interest account)</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> </table> <p>Proposition</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Weds principle and application</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Establishes this sermon's main theme</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Summarizes introduction in concept and terminology</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> </table> <p>Main Points</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Are Clear</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> </table>	Volume	Eye Contact	Vocal variation	Swaying or pacing	Distracting mannerisms	Use of Bible or notes	Gestures	Other _____	Pulpit use			Yes	No	Introduces an FCF derived from this text	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	Arouses attention (usually with a human-interest account)	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	Weds principle and application	1 2 3 4 5	Establishes this sermon's main theme	1 2 3 4 5	Summarizes introduction in concept and terminology	1 2 3 4 5	Are Clear	1 2 3 4 5	<p>Are universal truths in hortatory statements 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Are proportional and not coextensive 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Contain adequate and appropriate:</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Exposition (1/3)</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Illustration (1/3)</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Application (1/3)</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</td> </tr> </table> <p>Exegetical Support</p> <p>This sermon is what this text is about 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Problems and overall passage content are sufficiently handled 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Proofs are accurate, understandable, and support the points made 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>The context and genre of the passage are adequately considered 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>The exegesis is not belabored once the points are sufficiently proven 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>The exegesis seems designed to aid rather than to impress 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Application</p> <p>Is clear, helpful, and practical 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Is redemptive, not legalistic, in focus and motivation 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Accurately distinguishes a scriptural mandate from a good idea 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Is supported with sufficient biblical proof from this passage 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Illustrations</p> <p>Contain sufficient "lived-body" detail 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Truly strengthen the points of the sermon 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Are in appropriate proportion (number and length) to the sermon whole 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Conclusion Contains</p> <p>Summary 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Clear and compelling exhortation 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Climax 1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>A definite, purposed, pointed end 1 2 3 4 5</p>	Exposition (1/3)	1 2 3 4 5	Illustration (1/3)	1 2 3 4 5	Application (1/3)	1 2 3 4 5
Volume	Eye Contact																																	
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This form was taken from Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2005), 375. Used by Permission.

APPENDIX 3

EXPOSITORY PREACHING SEMINAR TEACHING OUTLINE

Basics of Expositional Preaching

What is an expositional sermon?

9 Marks website: “An expositional sermon is a sermon that takes the _____ of a passage of Scripture, makes it the _____ of the sermon, and _____ it to life today. In other words, an expositional sermon exposes the _____ of a passage of Scripture and shows its _____ to the lives of one’s hearers. This means that an expositional sermon does NOT ...

- Need to focus on just a verse or two.
- Need to present complex exegetical arguments or endless historical background.
- Need to be dry, lifeless, or removed from people’s lives.
- Confuse the primary point of a passage with any legitimate application of that passage (that is, use a verse to say what you want to say).”

Expository preaching is simply the presentation and explanation of a text of Scripture. This is a simple definition. On a more complex level exposition involves the _____ of a text, so that the point(s) of the text are the point(s) of the sermon, and these points are made with passion, _____, and _____ that _____ the audience and leads them to a _____ regarding what God desires of them.

What basic elements should be included in an expositional sermon?

A good expositional sermon should contain the following:

- A _____ or _____ that is directly derived from the text. The main point of the text should be the main point of the sermon. [*What?* What is the text saying? What is God saying through this text? What does this text mean? What does this text say about God and man?]
- Application that _____ the ancient world of the text to the modern world of the listener. [*Why or How?* Why does this matter? Why is this important? How can I change – trust and obey?]

- _____ . [How does this text point to Jesus? How does the obedience and death of Jesus affect my understanding and application of this text? Was the sermon God-centered? Was the framework “God-man-Christ-response” woven directly or indirectly into the text?]
- A _____ structure that helps the listener understand the text and the sermon. [How can I arrange this sermon to ease the “communication gap”? How can I arrange this sermon so that the point of the text and sermon is clear?]

What is the structure of an expositional sermon?

I. Intro

- Provoke interest in the subject
- Raise the need – FCF (Fallen Condition Focus)
- Link to the text
- State the point of the text/sermon

II. Body

- S – _____ the point
- A – _____ the point in the text
- V – _____ the point from the text
- E – _____ the point using illustration
- A – _____ the point

III. Conclusion

- Summation
- Exhortation
- Elevation
- Termination

How should an expositional sermon be delivered?

- With “undistracting” excellence
- With passion/earnestness/“force”
- With love/humility/respect
- With confidence/hope/faith

APPENDIX 4

SAMPLE TEACHING OUTLINE FROM SEMINAR

Biblical Theology – The Unity of the Bible

Session 2: How Do I Study the Bible?

INTRODUCTION

- How can we be sure that we're reading the story correctly?
- "Hermeneutics" = the science of interpretation
- Author's original intent?
- Exegesis = The disciplined attempt to find the author's original intent

OBSERVATION

Ask questions

- Who wrote it? Who said it? Who are the major characters? Who are the people mentioned? To whom is the author writing to? About whom is he speaking?
- What are the main events? What are the major ideas? What are the major teachings? What are these people like? What does he talk about most? What is the key word(s)? What's the general flow of argument in the text you're looking at? What's the big idea?
- When was it written? When did this event take place? When will it happen? When did he say it? When did he do it?
- Where was this done? Where was this said? Where will it happen?
- Why was this mentioned? What was so much or so little space devoted to this particular event or teaching? What was this reference mentioned? Why should they do this?
- How was it done? How did it happen? How is this truth illustrated?

Observe the Context

- What has happened so far?
- What is still to come?
- What is the main thrust of this book of the Bible?
- How does this fit within the larger argument of the book, or section of Scripture you're reading?
- Does the historical context (author, date, audience, and provenance), if known, throw light on your understanding of words or arguments?

- Is there a cultural context that you need to be aware of? E.g., what are Pharisees; what rights did women have in the Roman world.
- Are there issues of geography, politics or history that throw light on the meaning? E.g., where is Tarshish in relation to Nineveh?

Study the Grammar

- First, do some basic grammar! What is the verb? Is it passive or active? What is the direct object? Adjectives – describes the noun? Adverbs – describes the verbs? Participles?
- How are the sentences connected? (“nuts and bolts” – ‘therefore’ or ‘but’). Paying attention to the connections allows you to establish the detailed flow of thought. It helps you see contrasts, comparisons, conclusions, and more.

INTERPRETATION

Observation answers the question, “What does the author say?” Interpretation answers the question, “What does the author mean?”

- **Interpret Scripture literally.**
- **Interpret Scripture figuratively, literally.**
- **Interpret Scripture with other Scripture.**
 - Let clearer verses clear up unclear verses. Php 2:12-13 / Php 3:1ff
 - Let other verses unfold mysterious ones. (“Mystery” = “Gospel”) Here’s the thing: God does not usually exhaust an entire subject or truth in one book of the Bible or one verse.
 - Use cross-references / concordances / systematic theologies / topical lists

APPLICATION

Keep these questions in mind:

- What does this passage teach me about God?
- What does this passage teach me about salvation in Christ?
- What does this passage teach me about the church?
- Is there anything I need to change in my thinking?
- Is there any sin mentioned in the passage that I need to confess or forsake?
- Is there a command given that I should obey?
- Is there a promise made that I can apply to my current circumstances?

APPENDIX 5

POST-SEMINAR SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to enhance our church's understanding of the Bible. This research is being conducted by Pastor Brandon Pugh for purposes of project research and to evaluate the church. In this research, you will fill out the following questionnaire. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research. Thank you.

1. Please give your understanding of the role of the Law (basically the Ten Commandments) in the life of the Old Testament saint.

2. Please give your understanding of the role of the law in the life of the New Testament saint.

3. Do you see the God of the Old Testament differently than the God of the New Testament? Why or why not?

4. How is the God of the Old Testament different from the God of the New Testament?

5. How do you see the Old and New Covenants related?
6. Do you enjoy reading and studying the Old Testament? Why or why not?
7. Do you enjoy listening to sermons from the Old Testament? Why or why not?
8. Would you rather hear sermons from the New Testament? Why or why not?
9. How do you include the Old Testament in your Bible study?
10. Does your understanding or misunderstanding of the Old Testament hinder you from sharing the gospel with others? Why or why not?

In addition, please answer the following questions about the seminar.

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of this seminar? Please be specific.
2. How has your knowledge of the Old Testament changed through the seminar and sermons?

3. How has your attraction to the Old Testament improved through the seminar and sermons?

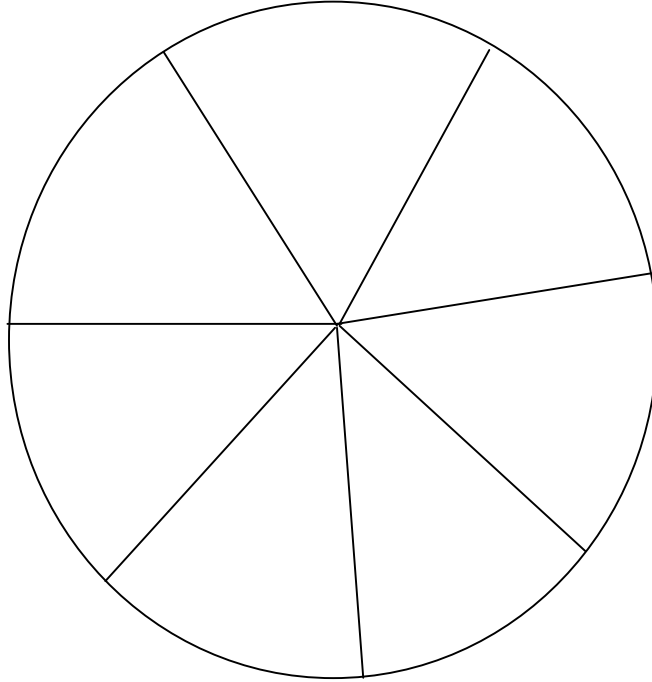
4. How has your knowledge of biblical interpretation improved through this seminar?

5. How has your understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament improved through the sermons and seminar?

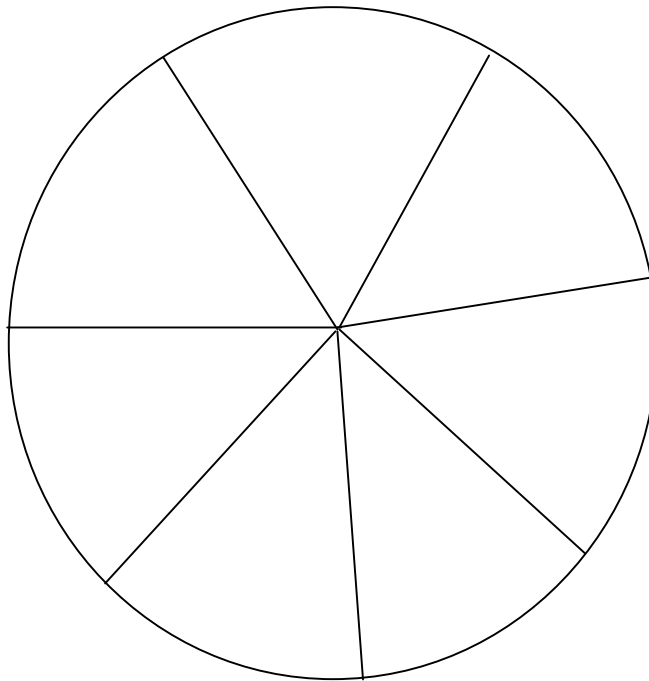
6. Has your understanding of God's plan of redemption through the whole Bible changed through the sermons and the seminar? How?

7. Has your understanding of the Bible as a unified whole been improved through the sermons and the seminar? How?

Please fill out the following pie chart. Write in the spaces provided attributes/descriptions/characteristics of God that you can think of from the Old Testament.



Write in the spaces provided attributes/descriptions/characteristics of God that you can think of from the New Testament.



APPENDIX 6

SURVEY RESULTS

Table A1. Pre-project and post-project results

Possible Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Question #	Percentage of Respondents					Average Response
1. The Old Testament is vital for spiritual growth as much as the New Testament.						
Pre	2.40	2.40	4.90	39.0	51.2	4.34
Post	0.00	12.5	0.00	31.3	62.5	4.35
% Change						+0.23%
2. I enjoy reading and studying the Old Testament.						
Pre	2.40	12.2	9.80	36.6	39.0	3.98
Post	0.00	0.00	12.5	56.3	37.5	4.18
% Change						+5.02%
3. The Old Testament is easier to understand than the New.						
Pre	4.90	61.0	24.4	9.80	0.00	2.34
Post	0.00	81.25	12.5	6.30	0.00	2.29
% Change						-2.14%
4. I have read the Old Testament in its entirety.						
Pre	17.1	17.1	7.30	22.0	36.6	3.44
Post	6.30	12.5	12.5	12.5	56.3	4.00
% Change						+16.3%
5. I enjoy sermons from the Old Testament more than sermons from the New.						
Pre	7.30	36.6	56.1	0.00	0.00	2.49
Post	0.00	37.5	62.5	0.00	0.00	2.65
% Change						+6.43%

Table A1–Continued. Pre-project and post-project results

Possible Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Question #	Percentage of Respondents					Average Response
6. I shy away from the Old Testament because I don't understand it.						
Pre	36.6	41.5	14.6	4.90	0.00	1.98
Post	25.0	37.5	25.0	12.5	0.00	2.29
% Change						+14.6%
7. The Old Testament saints were saved by law but New Testament saints are saved by grace.						
Pre	26.8	4.90	22.0	34.1	12.2	2.97
Post	18.8	25.0	6.30	37.5	12.5	3.00
% Change						+1.01%
8. The Old Testament communicates the wrath and justice of God more than the New Testament, which communicates more about God's love.						
Pre	4.90	26.8	7.30	48.7	12.2	3.37
Post	6.30	37.5	12.5	25.0	12.5	2.56
% Change						-24.0%
9. The God of the Old Testament is different than the God of the New Testament.						
Pre	78.0	12.2	2.40	4.90	2.40	1.41
Post	81.2	12.5	0.00	0.00	6.30	1.70
% Change						+20.6%
10. The New Covenant is a difference covenant than the Old Covenant.						
Pre	9.80	9.80	17.1	43.9	19.5	3.54
Post	0.00	12.5	6.30	37.5	43.8	4.12
% Change						+16.4%
11. The New Covenant is a fulfillment of the Old Covenant.						
Pre	9.80	4.90	17.1	31.7	36.6	3.80
Post	6.30	12.5	0.00	25.0	50.0	4.06
% Change						+6.84%

Note: Since the number of post-project respondents was half that of the pre-project respondents the only percentage difference that was measured was that of the average response.

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE THROUGH PREACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS AT HARLAN BAPTIST CHURCH HARLAN, KENTUCKY

Brandon Lee Pugh, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011
Faculty Supervisor: Chad O. Brand

This project is an attempt to teach Harlan Baptist Church (Kentucky) the unity of the Bible using the Old Testament covenants. Chapter 1 provides an introduction for the entire project. It is the basis, the context, and the objective for teaching the unity of the Scriptures and the story of redemption.

Chapter 2 is an exegetical and theological analysis of the Old Testament covenants and the New Covenant from the significant covenant texts of the Bible.

Chapter 3 is an examination of preaching Old Testament narrative and prophetic literature in a faithful and Christocentric way.

Chapter 4 describes the preaching project and seminar used in an effort to grow as an expositor and teach the church the unity of the Bible.

Chapter 5 summarizes and evaluates the information and data gathered from the project.

VITA

Brandon Lee Pugh

PERSONAL:

Born: August 2, 1971 in Sheffield, Alabama
Parents: Billy and Brenda Pugh
Married: Tracy Leigh Byrd, October 14, 1995

EDUCATIONAL:

Advanced Diploma, Good Hope High School, Cullman, Alabama
B.S. Civil Engineering, University of Alabama in Huntsville, 1995
M.Div., The New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001

MINISTERIAL:

Youth Minister, Good Hope Baptist Church, Cullman, Alabama, 1997-1999
Associate Pastor, Youth and Education, New Hope Baptist Church, Cullman,
Alabama, 1999-2003
Pastor, Hayneville Baptist Church in Hayneville, Alabama, 2003-2005
Pastor, Covenant Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, 2005-2008
Pastor, Harlan Baptist Church, Harlan, Kentucky, 2008-