Dennis E. Johnson

Him We Proclaim

Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures
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In Memory of
Edmund Prosper Clowney
(1917–2005)
Pastor, Preacher, Professor, Leader, Mentor,
Who showed us what it means to

Preach Christ from All the Scriptures,
To Marvel at the Savior’s Grace,
To Love His Church
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Introduction
Preaching the Bible Like Peter and Paul

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit . . . .” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37–38, 41)

And Paul went in [to the synagogue], as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. (Acts 17:2–4)

What preacher can read passages like these and not long to be able to preach the Bible like Peter and Paul? What an inestimable privilege to see God’s almighty Holy Spirit change people’s lives before your eyes through the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus! We read the biblical accounts of sermons that gave spiritual birth to thousands and similar stories from the later history of the church, and we long for God to move in such power and mercy in our time and through us.

We are aware that the early record reports apparent defeat as well as glowing victories: “Now when they heard these things they

1 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version—esv (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001). Citations marked “dej” are the author’s translation.
were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him [Stephen]” (Acts 7:54). “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (Acts 17:32–34).

We know that it is ours simply to plant and to water and that God alone can give growth and fruitfulness to the seed of his Word (1 Cor. 3:6; Col. 1:5–6; Acts 6:7). In our best moments, therefore, it is not merely the bountiful results of apostolic preaching that we seek but the apostles’ rich insights into Scripture’s multifaceted witness to the person and work of Christ. We long to preach “the whole Bible as Christian Scripture,” that is, to preach “Christ in all of Scripture.” 2 Perhaps we have heard such preaching done well and found our hearts stirred and surprised to behold the glory of the Savior in a text where we least expected to meet him, or we have heard such preaching attempted badly (even, perhaps, by ourselves) and come away feeling that the text itself was abused or ignored and its connection to Christ drawn in strained and implausible ways. You may even wonder whether it is legitimate to learn biblical hermeneutics and homiletics from the apostolic exemplars of the New Testament, because their inspiration by the Spirit of God gave them privileged access to revelatory resources not available to ordinary Christians and preachers.

Yet, the apostolic affirmation rings true: in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Therefore, the apostolic resolve makes perfect sense: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Whatever our biblical text and theme, if we want to impart God’s life-giving wisdom in its exposition, we can do nothing other than proclaim Christ, “the power of God and the wisdom of God . . . our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:24, 30).

But how? This book tries to answer that question, first by arguing in favor of uniting insights and disciplines the apostles displayed in harmonious unity but that sadly have become disconnected since

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2 Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Bible Theology to Expository Preaching (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Edmund P. Clowney, Preaching Christ in All of Scripture (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003). Emphases added.
then. Then it suggests perspectives and strategies to help ordinary Christians discover their Savior throughout Scripture and to equip ordinary preachers to proclaim this Savior convincingly and powerfully from the diverse panorama of Scripture’s genres and eras.

**Tragic Divorces**

“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:9). Jesus was speaking, of course, of the inviolable union of husband and wife in marriage as designed by God. Nevertheless, these words can be applied aptly to the major thrust of this book, which makes a case for imitating the interpretive and communicative methods employed by the apostles to proclaim Christ to the first-century Greco-Roman world as we minister in the twenty-first century. It advocates reuniting things wrongly separated between the apostles’ day and ours to the impoverishment of biblical hermeneutics and pastoral homiletics. Reforging these divinely established bonds will refocus biblical interpretation on Christ, the center of gravity who holds the Bible together and the key who unlocks Scripture’s meaning from Genesis to Revelation. Furthermore, the three reunions we will advocate will empower the proclamation of the gospel in a global postmodern culture that increasingly resembles the pluralism and relativism of the first-century Hellenistic environment into which the apostles first announced God’s good news.³

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³ Postmodernity and postmodernism are notoriously slippery concepts. Generally speaking, postmodernism perceives itself as a reaction against the Enlightenment’s confidence in reason and it harbors deep suspicion toward any and all claims to be able to articulate absolute and universal truth or to provide a culture-transcending “metanarrative.” “In the Condition of Postmodernity, [David] Harvey observes that modernity rejected tradition and religious authority but held on to the hope that reason alone would lead us to truth. Postmoderns have given up on the illusion that reason alone will lead us to truth, but they have not recovered tradition and authority. Instead, they courageously celebrate and play amid our limitations and finitude, in a sort of cheerful nihilism” (Craig G. Bartholomew, “Postmodernity and Biblical Interpretation,” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, gen. ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 601). Bartholomew also cites J.-F. Lyotard’s definition of postmodernity as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Ibid., citing J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], xxiv). As in the religious and philosophical pluralism of the ancient Greco-Roman world, so also today increasing exposure to diverse cultures, each confident of its own metanarrative, fosters postmodern thinkers’ skepticism toward claims of objectivity or
To testify faithfully and effectively about Jesus the Christ in the twenty-first century, as the apostles did in the first, we need to reconcile three divorced “couples” whose “marriages” were made in heaven: we need to reunite Old Testament and New Testament, apostolic doctrine and apostolic hermeneutics, biblical interpretation and biblical proclamation.

**Reuniting Old and New Testaments**

We need to rediscover and appreciate with deeper levels of insight the bond between God’s partial and preparatory words of promise spoken through Israel’s prophets and his final word spoken in Jesus, the Son who is the Word (Heb. 1:1–2; John 1:1, 14). The contemporary sense of estrangement of the Old Testament from the New Testament is an anomaly in the history of the church. From the apostolic period through the Church Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Reformation, the church maintained a hearty confidence that God’s role as the primary author of Scripture, speaking his message infallibly through distinctive human voices, secures the harmony and unity of the Bible’s message from Genesis to Revelation. Admittedly, some like Marcion denied that the Lord who addressed Moses on Sinai is the Father of our Lord Jesus. The church, however, condemned such aberrant repudiation of the Old Testament as contradictory to the teaching of Jesus himself. Others failed to recognize the diversity within the Bible’s unity, especially the fact that the Messiah, in bringing Old Testament promises and institutions to fulfillment, also has transformed God’s covenantal modes of relating to his people. Nevertheless, despite such anomalies in relating the Old Testament to the New Testament, the heartbeat of the church as a whole has coincided with Augustine’s pithy maxim: “The old is in the new revealed, the new is in the old concealed.”

The eighteenth century “Enlightenment” (as its proponents viewed it) and its resulting historical critical hermeneutic began to

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drive a wedge between the Old Testament and the New—a division that continues to infect much biblical scholarship today. Enlightenment scholarship’s ostensible concerns were to liberate biblical exegesis from dogmatic tradition and to impose rational controls on interpreters’ imaginative creativity, of which patristic and medieval allegorism offered many extreme examples. Underlying the Enlightenment’s critique of its predecessors’ “dogmatic” and “unscientific” interpretation, however, lay a more insidious denial of the divine authorship that earlier Christian interpreters had assumed as grounds for expecting to discover a single, God-given purpose and message in biblical documents written and received over a time span of well over a millennium.  

Subsequently, dispensational theologians, for different reasons and offering different arguments, adopted a hermeneutic that drove another wedge between Old Testament and New. Reacting to historical criticism’s dismissal of the church’s pre-critical reading of its Scriptures as subjective and imprecise, dispensationalism believed that it could establish the objectivity of its reading of Scripture by treating symbolism with suspicion and preoccupying itself with establishing the text’s “literal” sense. Thus over the last three centuries, the theological substructure of apostolic hermeneutics and homiletics has been assaulted both by the “hostile fire” of Enlightenment criticism and by the “friendly fire” of Bible-believing students who sought to develop an objective hermeneutic sufficient to withstand the acidic rigors of Enlightenment doubt.

Even more recently, the atrocities inflicted on the Jewish people under Nazism, before and during World War II, and the West’s reaction in a salutary repudiation of anti-Semitism, together with new emphases on toleration amid religious pluralism have driven a third wedge between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. This wedge is visible in a growing discomfort with the New Testament authors’ many assertions and implications that the church, now composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, is the legitimate heir to the benefits (now magnified to eschatological dimensions) once promised to ancient Israel. Although the original apostles, Paul,

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5 See chapter 4 below.

6 These assaults and their legacy in contemporary hermeneutic and homiletic discussion, especially among evangelicals and confessional Protestants, will be analyzed more fully in chapter 4.
were themselves Jewish (as was Jesus, from whom they learned to interpret the Old Testament), the “supercessionism”7 articulated in their New Testament writings (for example, Matt. 21:43; Gal. 3:27–29; Phil. 3:2–3; Rev. 3:9) offends many today as insensitive, arrogant, and disrespectful of the religious tradition that gave birth to the church. The problem is further compounded by the church’s abuse of the Jewish people in the centuries between the apostles and Adolf Hitler,8 a shameful record that seems to prove that the New Testament’s theological “supercessionism” naturally breeds virulent and violent anti-Semitic behavior. The only remedy would seem to be for the church to avoid co-opting what it has traditionally called “the Old Testament,” as though it were the church’s book, and instead to allow the Hebrew Scriptures to remain thoroughly Jewish.

Anti-Semitic prejudice and religious pride should have no credibility for Christians who listen carefully to the apostles’ proclamation of Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel and the bestower of unmerited grace to Jew and Gentile alike. The same apostle who announces that Gentiles are now Abraham’s descendents through faith in Israel’s Messiah also puts Gentiles in their place in his great apostolic discourse on God’s mysterious ways with Israel and the nations (Romans 9–11):

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. (Rom. 11:17–18)

The same apostle laments with great pathos over the unbelief of his many kinfolk in Israel (9:1–3; 10:1) and expresses confidence that the sovereign mercy that could engraft pagan Gentiles can likewise reattach “natural branches” to the olive tree through which divine blessing flows (11:22–24). If, in fact, the insistence of Jesus and his apostles is true—that Israel’s ancient Scriptures are eschatologically directed to draw her hope forward to the arrival of her Divine

7 “Supercessionism” refers to the New Testament’s assertions and implications that the church is the legitimate heir to the benefits once promised ancient Israel.
Rescuer as a Suffering Servantheto suppress such insight for fear of seeming impolite or proud would be selfish cruelty toward the Jewish people, not compassionate respect! Despite these formidable trends working against an appreciation of the unity of Old Testament and New, the church’s historic conviction—that the two testaments (two covenants,9 described in the Hebrew Scriptures, e.g., Jer. 31:31–34) are two chapters in one grand, true story in which the triune God is the protagonist—still has articulate defenders. In fact, some recent trends in biblical studies even encourage greater attention to the unity of Scripture as the divine-human record of a single, consistent, progressive plan for the redemption and re-creation of the cosmos.

At the risk of omitting deserving names and titles, I mention here a sampling of twentieth and twenty-first century biblical scholars whose work deepens our understanding of the Christ-focused marriage of Old Testament promise and New Testament fulfillment: Geerhardus Vos,10 Herman N. Ridderbos,11 R. T. France,12 Meredith G. Kline,13 O. Palmer

9 English versions have traditionally been influenced by Jerome’s translation of the Greek diathēkē into the Latin testamentum, and Western theology has likewise understood the New Testament’s references to the new diathēkē as drawing the analogy to a last will and testament, with its stipulations enacted subsequent to the testator’s death. More recently increased understanding of covenant arrangements between living parties suggests that in all (or almost all) uses of diathēkē in the New Testament, its meaning is “covenant,” consistent with the use of diathēkē in the LXX to translate the Hebrew berit, e.g., John J. Hughes, “Hebrews ix 15ff. and Galatians iii 15ff. A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure,” Novum Testamentum 21 (1979): 27–96.


16 Tremper Longman III, An Introduction to the Old Testament (with Raymond B. Dillard); Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel’s Worship (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2001); with Daniel G. Reid, God is a Warrior (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); How to Read Genesis (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); How to Read the Psalms (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988); How to Read Proverbs (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).
20 Moisés Silva, Has the Church Misread the Bible? The History of Interpretation in the Light of Current Issues (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); with Walter Kaiser, An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).
23 Christopher J. H. Wright, Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992).
25 Graeme Goldsworthy, According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991); The Goldsworthy Trilogy—Gospel and Kingdom, Gospel in Revelation, Gospel and Wisdom (Exeter: Paternoster, 2000);
In addition to the works of these scholars, who recognize Scripture’s divine authorship and therefore expect its message to exhibit theological coherence, fruitful insights into the connections between Old Testament and New Testament texts are emerging in critical circles as a result of interest in the biblical authors’ literary artistry in drawing intertextual allusions\textsuperscript{26} to earlier Scriptures.\textsuperscript{27} Although many participants in these discussions do not affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture, they often make insightful observations about the allusive employment of Old Testament wording or imagery by New Testament authors. Their studies therefore offer stimulating starting points for reflection on the hermeneutic substructure and rationale for the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament.

One major theme, to which this book will return repeatedly, therefore, is the unity of the Old Testament and the New in the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ and consequently, also, in the community composed of believing Jews and Gentiles that his Spirit is now assembling. This unity, I am persuaded, unlocks the whole of the Scriptures to the twenty-first century preacher and his hearers.


\textsuperscript{26} An “intertextual allusion” is a deliberate allusion (not a direct quotation) by the author of one text to a passage in another text that has significance for interpreting the author’s statement. For example, the reference in John 3:16 to “only Son” is a clear allusion to Isaac in Genesis 22:2, 12, and 16 (cf. Heb. 11:17) who, like Jesus, was offered to God as a sacrifice. (Likewise, “did not spare his own Son” in Romans 8:32 alludes to Genesis 22:16.) The interpretative importance of this is manifold. (1) Isaac is a type of Christ. (2) Like Christ, Isaac is a son of promise. (3) Like Christ, Isaac’s birth is supernatural. (4) Like Christ, Isaac is the only and beloved son. (5) Both Isaac and Jesus were “suffering sons.” Isaac suffered as a type of the Redeemer; Jesus was the Suffering Son who redeems. (6) Just as Abraham showed his love for and fear of God by his willingness to offer his beloved, only son, so God the Father shows his love for a fallen world by offering his beloved, only Son as an offering for sin. (7) Just as Abraham reasoned that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19), so God raised his Son, Jesus, from the dead.

\textsuperscript{27} Note, however, Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s critique that “intertextuality” in a postmodern frame of reference displaces authorial intention and definite textual meaning with subjective and politically controlled reader-centered interpretation. \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 121–22, 132–33.
Reuniting Apostolic Doctrine and Apostolic Hermeneutics

A second “couple” that has been sadly estranged consists in the *theological truths* articulated by the apostles, on the one hand, and the *interpretive methods* by which they grounded those truths in Scripture, on the other. This issue is posed provocatively in the question that New Testament scholar G. K. Beale selected as the title for his collection of essays debating the normativeness of the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old Testament: *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?*28 The authors of some essays in this collection would answer this question affirmatively: the apostles did indeed teach right doctrine, but they supported their doctrine by appeal to inappropriate Old Testament texts interpreted by illegitimate (or no longer plausible) methods.29 Other contributors argue that the flaws in the apostles’ hermeneutic also taint their theological conclusions. Beale himself, however, responds to his own question with a careful affirmation that the apostles not only taught true doctrine but also developed and supported their message from appropriate Old Testament passages that they interpreted through a credible hermeneutic that is worthy of our emulation today.30

As we shall see in chapters 4 and 5, Beale’s conclusions are not universally endorsed even by evangelical biblical scholars who affirm the theological authority of the Scriptures. As additional resources and research have exposed similarities between the New Testament’s interpretation of Old Testament texts and hermeneutic methods employed widely in Second Temple Judaism31 (both mainstream rabbinism and fringe sects such as the Qumran community), some scholars have argued that the apostolic hermeneutic was rhetorically

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31 Second Temple Judaism (STJ) refers to the period between the construction of the second Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 515 B.C. and its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. STJ was a time of theological development (e.g., angelology), literary production (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls), and the growth of various movements and sects (e.g., Pharisees) in Judaism.
and persuasively effective in its ancient time and place but is not to be emulated in our intellectual milieu. Interpretive devices that were credible to first-century audiences no longer are seen as cogent or persuasive today, at least in the Academy and its biblical studies guilds. To convey the gospel in our time as effectively as the apostles did in theirs requires not that we reproduce their exegetical strategies but that our reading of the Old Testament be controlled by presuppositions and methods widely recognized across the spectrum of contemporary Old and New Testament studies.

Others who embrace apostolic doctrine are reluctant to emulate apostolic hermeneutics for another reason. They point to the history of unbridled embellishment exemplified in the allegorical excesses of the patristic School of Alexandria and the medieval church, and they applaud the Protestant Reformation’s efforts to bring sanity and restraint to biblical interpretation through its insistence that each passage has a “single sense” that is discovered through attention to linguistic features. In view of the church’s embarrassing track record of outlandishly and imaginatively twisting Scripture, the fact that Jesus, the Divine Son, and the apostles, speaking and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sometimes made surprising typological connections between Old Testament events and the Messiah cannot justify attempts of later, non-inspired preachers to make similar links.


33 Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) 1:9: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), ch. 2) identifies the factors to be considered in deriving Scripture’s meaning from Scripture itself as: its language, the circumstances in which it was set down, comparison with like and unlike passages, and conformity with Scripture’s over-arching purposes, namely God’s glory and human salvation. See chapter 4.

34 For example, the bronze serpent raised by Moses in the desert as a prefiguration of the crucified Son of Man (John 3:14), or the water-supplying rock in the wilderness as “Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4).
Both of these objections to the argument that allegiance to apostolic doctrine should entail humble imitation of apostolic hermeneutics are weighty and worthy of serious answers.35 For the present, be “forewarned” that I shall try to make a persuasive case that preachers who believe in the gospel revealed through the apostles should proclaim that gospel in the light of Christ’s fulfillment of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (Luke 24:44–47).

**Reuniting Biblical Interpretation and Biblical Proclamation**

A third breach in what was once an intimate alliance concerns the relationship between the disciplines of biblical scholarship on the one hand and the churchly task of gospel preaching on the other. The roots of this estrangement are diverse, complex, and difficult to identify exhaustively.

The Reformation challenged the hegemony of church tradition over biblical interpretation and formulated a concept of vocation that legitimized and dignified occupations outside of ecclesiastical structures, including scholarship and education. Thus the long-standing legacy of ecclesiastically controlled biblical scholarship, which included patristic catechetical schools, medieval cathedral schools, the preservation of learning in monasteries, and the early European universities, could in principle receive competition from educational institutions that initially were no less committed to Christian convictions but were not directly under church authority nor aimed exclusively at ministerial preparation.

The rise of the Enlightenment, with its suspicion and contempt for the distorting influences of church dogma, coincided with the rise of the modern research university. As the objective pursuit of truth through experimentation unbiased by presupposition came to be viewed as the apex of intellectual certainty, the usefulness of biblical research to the church came to be treated, at least tacitly, as incidental, and sometimes as a distraction from the aims of “pure” scholarship. Meanwhile, the explosion of knowledge seemed to demand that scholars direct their energies into increasingly narrow specializations.

Even within the narrower parameters of the university divinity school and the theological seminary, institutions originally founded

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35 See chapter 6.