

Preaching Christ From Old Testament Historical Narrative Texts

The Centrality Of Christ In Preaching

Every serious-minded Reformed pastor wants to see his congregation grow in grace under his ministry. He wants to see the members develop in their understanding of the truth and in holy living. He wants to see the congregation strengthened in unity and in mutual service. He wants to see godly families and strong marriages. He wants to see children growing up into Christ, in fulfillment of God's covenant promise. He wants to see young people coming to spiritual maturity and taking their places actively in the congregation. He wants to see qualified men equipped to serve capably in the special offices. He wants to see outreach into the community, that results in members added from without, who are solid additions to the congregation. He wants to see sinners brought to repentance, the weak strengthened, the discouraged fortified, the sorrowing comforted, the despairing uplifted, the burdened relieved. In short, he wants to see a people united in the thankful worship of the Lord, both on the Lord's Day and in their day-to-day living in the world.

This earnest desire on the part of the serious-minded Reformed pastor, is coupled with the conviction that none of these things can be realized apart from the preaching of the gospel. Reformed pastors have a deep conviction of the primacy of preaching. They understand that God is pleased to use the preaching of the gospel for the salvation and the preservation in salvation of His people. With Paul they are persuaded that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," (Romans 10:17).

The Reformed pastor is bound to this high view of preaching by the Reformed confessions. Heidelberg Catechism, Q.A. 65 states: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." In complete agreement with the Heidelberg Catechism is the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.A. 155: "How is the word made effectual to salvation? The spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation."

But it ought also to be the conviction of the Reformed pastor that preaching that is God's means unto the salvation of His elect people, is the preaching of Christ. Preaching that brings to salvation, and keeps in salvation, is the preaching of the gospel. But the gospel is centrally the gospel of Christ. The gospel is the good news of what God has done, is doing, and will do in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ, therefore, must be preached. The serious-minded Reformed pastor must not only have a strong conviction of the primacy of preaching, but equally as strong a conviction of the centrality of Christ in the preaching of the gospel.

The Scriptures demand the centrality of Christ in the preaching of the gospel. Paul says in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." It was for this reason that Paul says in I Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The reason for this Christ-centeredness in his preaching was Paul's desire that the faith of his hearers "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," I Corinthians 2:5.

Since Christ is to be preached, the great endeavor of the Reformed pastor is to make Christ the center of his sermons. Whatever the text of his sermon, whatever the nature of the textual material, he must make Christ the focus of his preaching. The main point of the sermon must be connected to Christ, grounded in Christ, firmly established in the person and work of Christ.

This must be true, whether the sermon text is taken from the Old Testament or the New Testament. The Old Testament must be preached in such a way that what is preached looks forward to its fulfillment in the coming Jesus Christ. The New Testament must be preached as having been fulfilled in the finished work of Christ on Calvary's cross.

The challenge to make Christ the center of the sermon, is especially great when preaching on the Old Testament. History and experience, I believe, bear this out. This is not to imply that preaching Christ from the New Testament is an easy matter. Not at all; preaching Christ from the New Testament has its own challenges. It is not so easy, for instance, to preach the exhortations and commands of the New Testament as arising out of the good news of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Too often it happens that the exhortations and commands of the New Testament are preached, as Australian theologian Graeme Goldsworthy says, "as simple imperatives of Christian behavior; as naked law." [1] This ought not to be! The relationship between what is and what ought to be, that is, the relationship between the finished work of Christ and the task of the believers, is often well flagged in the text. Paul, for example, frequently indicates the relationship by using the word "therefore"; or a similar indicator of consequence.... How easy it is to ignore the "therefore"; and to see the injunctions and exhortations ... as standing alone, and not, as Paul expounds them, as the implications of the grace of God in Christ. [2]

Although preaching Christ from the New Testament has its unique challenges, the greater difficulty seems to be preaching Christ from the Old Testament. What Reformed pastors must be convinced of, is that it is not only possible to preach Christ from the Old Testament, but this is the only proper way to preach the Old Testament. Like the New Testament, the Old Testament is gospel. As gospel, the Old Testament is no less than the New Testament, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. This is what Christ Himself said to the unbelieving Jews in John 5:39: "Search the scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament Scriptures); for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." To the two travelers to Emmaus, Jesus said the same thing, according to Luke 24:27, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures (again, the Old Testament) the things concerning himself." The reason for the Old Testament Scripture's testimony concerning Christ is the preeminence of Christ in the Old Testament. Graeme Goldsworthy is correct in underscoring this important truth. We remember from our Christian standpoint that the original plan and purpose of God was the kingdom brought about through the suffering and death of his Son. We must never regard the gospel as an afterthought because things went wrong in Israel. The gospel was always God's forethought to everything, including creation, for how else can God have chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4)? It is important, then, to remind ourselves in sermon preparation, that the gospel is God's forethought to the entire historical process in the Old Testament. [3]

Included in the calling of the Reformed pastor to preach Christ from the Old Testament, is the calling to preach Christ from Old Testament history. I have chosen this to be the focus of my presentation. [4] I have done this because so much of the Old Testament is history. It has been estimated that seventy-five percent of the Old Testament consists of historical narrative. Not only is historical narrative the most prominent of the genres of Old Testament Scripture, but more than any other genre, it contains other forms of Biblical literature, such as law, psalm, wisdom, and prophecy. [5] At the same time, historical narrative is found in all the other genres of the Old Testament: in prophecy (e.g., Isaiah and Jeremiah), in the wisdom literature (e.g., Job), and in the Psalms (e.g., Psalms 78 and 106).

The Old Testament is built on historical narrative. From a certain point of view, the Old Testament is historical narrative. It is history recorded and explained-what happened and why it happened. The Old Testament opens up with the beginning of history in the creation of the heavens and the earth. And then it traces the progress of history: Adam, Noah, and the patriarchs, the bondage and exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the period of the monarchy and the divided kingdom, the captivity, and finally the restoration. Kenneth Matthews contends that the Old Testament consists basically of ...narrated events which are interpreted theologically by the authors and compilers of Israel's two canonical histories. The Primary History, consisting of Genesis through Kings in the Hebrew Bible, is a continuous account tracing the rise and fall of national Israel during which God formed a believing people. The Secondary History, which includes 1-2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, retells the story from a later vantage point and goes beyond the first history by recounting what happened to the faithful few who returned from Babylon.[6]

The Hebrew Old Testament does not categorize any books as historical. The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Nevertheless, in all three of the major divisions of the Hebrew canon, historical narrative can be found. In the Torah, especially Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers contain history. In the Prophets, history is prominent in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. In the Writings, primarily Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, Esther, and Daniel are historical in nature.

The prominence of historical narrative in the Old Testament Scripture, sadly is not often mirrored in preaching. Too often ministers shy away from preaching on Old Testament history. In evangelical pulpits today there appears to be a decided preference for New Testament material as opposed to Old Testament. When the Old Testament is preached, the historical narratives are avoided, or frequently preached wrongly. Some years ago, Peter Y. DeJong expressed his concern for what he perceived as a neglect of preaching on Old Testament history by Reformed ministers in North America. Today, we fear, sound preaching on Old Testament historical materials, is not a strong suit in the Reformed and Christian Reformed, the Protestant Reformed and the Netherlands Reformed congregations in Canada and the United States. [7]

Why is there so little preaching on the Old Testament? Undoubtedly, a number of reasons can be given. Preaching on the New Testament may simply be the preacher's personal preference. Because of the work involved in exegeting and preparing sermons on Old Testament history, a shortage of preparation time may be a factor. Or, neglect of Old Testament history may be due to the rigors of dealing with the Hebrew language.

Whatever the reason, if we preachers neglect to preach on Old Testament historical narrative, we are guilty of wrongdoing. We are guilty of robbing the church of a significant aspect of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), which we are pledged to preach. We are responsible for undercutting the church's conviction that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for edification and godliness. Most seriously, we are guilty of robbing God of His glory, for it is God, in the glory of His being and works, Who is revealed in Old Testament history.

It is the purpose of my presentation to inspire the preachers here today to preach Old Testament history. If you have been, carry on. If you have not been, at least not with any frequency, my hope is that you will be given reason to re-evaluate your preaching, perhaps with the assistance of your elders. P.Y. DeJong to the contrary notwithstanding, the

Protestant Reformed Churches in America have a worthy tradition of writing and preaching on Old Testament history. An examination of our tradition bears this out. When one thinks of this tradition, names like Hoeksema (father and son), Ophoff, Vos, and Heys come to mind. I am sure that the Presbyterian tradition has its own worthies who excelled at preaching from the Old Testament. May our discussion today rekindle our resolve to maintain this tradition.

Pitfalls To Be Avoided

In preaching Old Testament history, there are a number of pitfalls to be avoided. I will be concerned in this paper to caution against two. I choose these two because I am convinced that they ever have been and are still today, the two besetting sins of sermons on Old Testament history. A historical survey of preaching would show the frequency with which even well-intentioned preachers fell into these two errors. And a critical evaluation of our own preaching, I believe, would yield the admission that we too, from time to time, if we have not fallen headlong into these errors, have at least not avoided them altogether.

The first pitfall is what Walter Kaiser identifies as the "dry-bones-history-and-grammar approach"; to preaching Old Testament historical narrative.[8] The history is retold. Attention is paid to the formal structure of the narrative. The grammar is treated. Textual critical information is taken into consideration. Perhaps the light of some archeological discovery is shone on the text. A lot of attention is paid to the details of the narrative. But that is as far as the sermon goes. The history is treated, but it is treated in such a way that it remains history, nothing more.

Kaiser writes: Nothing can be more discouraging and disheartening for contemporary believers, gathered to hear the Word of God, than to listen to a simple recounting or bare description of an Old Testament or Gospel narrative. This kind of preaching is nothing more than narrating a "B.C. story" or "first-century A.D. homily." This kind of preaching merely strings verses or events together. It does not attempt to come to terms with the truth taught by the writer in that narrative. It is, then, a poor excuse for expository preaching. [9]

Warning against this approach to preaching Old Testament historical narrative texts, Goldsworthy is correct when he writes: The story is never complete in itself, and belongs as part of the one big story of salvation culminating in Jesus Christ. Simply telling a story based on a piece of Old Testament historical narrative, however complete in itself, is not Christian preaching. [10]

This erroneous way of preaching Old Testament history, is aided and abetted by much that passes for modern Biblical scholarship. A large number of Old Testament commentaries that have been published in the last couple of decades, have not furnished preachers with the material needed for making sermons on Old Testament history. At best, they have majored in minors. This is not only true of commentaries that are written from a decidedly higher-critical point of view. Even many evangelical commentaries on the Old Testament, exhibit a preoccupation with literary-historical exegesis, so that the gospel in Old Testament history does not receive its due.

In his book, *The Modern Preacher And The Ancient Text*, Sidney Greidanus issues a call to preachers to preach texts and not bare facts. He points out that sometimes this preaching of the facts is motivated by the well-intentioned desire to "prove" the historicity of an account over against the challenge to its historicity by modern, liberal scholarship. He points out especially two bad consequences that result from this preaching of the facts rather than the text. One consequence is that "...by concentrating on 'the facts', the interpreter looks right through the text as if it were a transparent windowpane." [11] In other words, he looks past the gospel in the text. In the second place, "... preachers who try preaching facts run into the problem that they present 'objective facts' and then have difficulty making an application that does not appear to be tacked on." [12]

A second pitfall that needs to be avoided in preaching Old Testament historical narrative, is what is sometimes referred to as the exemplaristic or moralizing method. DeJong expresses his judgment in this regard. We have not escaped the snare of exemplaristic preaching with its moralizing, which dims the glory and grandeur of the historical passages in Scripture and may easily obscure the riches of God's sovereign grace in Christ, who by his Spirit and Word gathers, defends, and preserves the church called to life everlasting. [13]

With regard to this sort of approach to preaching Old Testament historical narrative, Goldsworthy writes: ... the exemplary sermon is more inclined to lead us to ask, "How does this character (or event) testify to my existence?" By contrast, the redemptive-historical approach is more inclined to lead us to ask, "How does this event (or character) testify to Christ?" Let us never forget that our existence is only properly defined in terms of our being either in Christ or outside of Christ. If we really want to know how a text testifies to our existence, it must do so via its testimony to Christ. That is basic to any Christian sermon. [14]

In this connection, Goldsworthy offers a sharp but accurate criticism of the modern Sunday School that is worth repeating. While I certainly do not want to appear to be carping and critical of the multitude of faithful volunteers who prepare curricula and teach them in Sunday Schools, I get the impression that both tasks are often carried on with little or no understanding of the big picture of biblical revelation. Consequently, children are often taught a whole range of isolated Bible stories, each with its neat little application deemed appropriate to the respective age levels. So much of the application is thus moralizing legalism because it is severed from its links to the gospel of grace. By the time many of

these children reach their teenage years, they have had a belly full of morality; enough, they would think, to last them for the rest of their lives. They thus beat a retreat to live reasonably decent, but gospelless lives.[15]

Closely associated with the exemplaristic method, is the tendency to allegorizing. All kinds of "lessons" are drawn from the narrative that apply to Christians today, but many of these lessons are derived from strained exegesis that spiritualizes the details of the account. Long ago, Holwerda warned preachers of his generation against this pitfall.

There is quite a bit of preaching which truly tries to be "Christocentric," and yet is not. One can say many true and beautiful things about what God, in the coming of Christ, meant to Abraham, and then draw a parallel with what He is for us in the Christ who has come. But unintentionally ... you no longer ask what meaning or purpose Abraham, Elijah, etc., had for God's one, ever-increasing, progressive work in Christ; but the very opposite - what significance God in Christ had for them. Surely the Christian stands in the center here though that was not the intention.[16]

The danger of this erroneous way of preaching Old Testament history is illustrated in Walter Kaiser's *Toward An Exegetical Theology*. For all the value of this work, in my judgment, Kaiser falls into the snare of exemplaristic preaching. He does this when he advances as the key responsibility of the preacher, preaching on Old Testament historical narrative what he calls "principlizing." This is what he writes: "Principlizing a Biblical passage is ... that procedure which seeks to discover the enduring ethical, spiritual, doctrinal, and moral truths or principles which the writer himself set forth by the way in which he selected his details and arranged the contextual setting of his narrative. Principlization seeks to bridge the "then" of the text's narrative with the "now" needs of our day; yet it refuses to settle for cheap and quick solutions which confuse our own personal point of view (good or bad) with that of the inspired writer. [17]"

Don't misunderstand. I am not contending that there ought not to be application in sermons preached on Old Testament historical passages. There ought to be. Application that arises out of the text, and that speaks to Christians living in the 21st century. But what I am arguing, is that this is not the first or main calling of the preacher. To construe it as the preacher's main calling, is to cross the line into exemplaristic preaching.

Why are the two pitfalls of the "dry-bones-history-and-grammar" approach and the exemplaristic method to be avoided? The simple answer is: They do not preach Christ. For their differences, the two methods have this in common. They do not preach the gospel of God's sovereign grace in Jesus Christ as that gospel is set forth in historical narrative. The sad result is that sin-stricken sinners are sent home, without hearing the comfort of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

This becomes plain in Kaiser's application of his proposed method to preaching through the Book of Nehemiah. He offers the following sermon titles for such a series:

- The Primacy of Prayer in Any Undertaking in Life (Neh. 1).
- The Significance of Setting Goals (Neh. 2).
- The Principles of Successful Leadership (Neh. 3).
- The Way to Meet Opposition to God's Work (Neh. 4-6).
- The Way to Encourage Spiritual Renewal (Neh. 8).
- The Importance of Learning from History (Neh. 9).
- The Necessity of Preserving the Gains Made in the Work of God (Neh. 10-13). [18]

The question begs to be asked: "Where is Christ here?" The clear note of the gospel is missing entirely. And although it is certainly conceivable that the cross of Christ would be brought into these sermons, the sermon themes make plain that the cross is not at the heart of any of the messages.

We echo the worthwhile comments of DeJong: "Of all the sermons ... none requires more effort on the part of the preacher, than Gospel proclamation rooted in Old Testament historical materials. Anyone acquainted with the Word can learn how to tell its stories with a degree of skill. Nor is it at all difficult to distill from many of its pericopes, some moral lesson or devotional inspiration. But this is a far cry from opening up the riches of God's revelation in Christ Jesus, which is the sum and substance of the Old as well as the New Testament. [19]" *Proper Preaching Of Old Testament Historical Narrative Texts*

Proper preaching of Old Testament historical narrative requires the use of the Christocentric or Redemptive-Historical method. For our purposes, these are two different names for basically the same method. This method aims to identify and set forth the cross of Jesus Christ which is at the heart of all Old Testament history. We concur with Van't Veer:

Here then is our mutual starting point. It is our prejudice of faith. In Old and New Testament, we have God's revelation in Christ Jesus, and therefore every sermon must be Christological. [20]

Van't Veer expresses agreement with a certain Prof. T. Hoekstra who wrote: "Let it be shown in every sermon, what is the connection between the Word of God that was chosen as a text, and the central part of revelation. Even from the part of the circle that is farthest removed, there is a way to the center, and this must be shown. For a sermon without Christ is not a sermon, is not a service of the Word. [21]"

To preach Christ-this is the great task of the faithful minister. To this task belongs his preaching on the Old Testament, and especially now his preaching on Old Testament history.

In his very worthwhile book, *Preaching Christ From The Old Testament*, Sidney Greidanus offers seven ways for the minister to preach Christ from Old Testament historical narrative. He speaks of these as the "many roads (that) lead from the Old Testament to Christ"; These seven roads are:

- The Way of Redemptive-Historical Progression
- The Way of Promise-Fulfillment
- The Way of Typology
- The Way of Analogy
- The Way of Longitudinal Themes
- The Way of New Testament References
- The Way of Contrast[22]

It is worth our while to describe briefly each of these ways.

The way of redemptive-historical progression "...links Christ to Old Testament redemptive events which find their climax in him." [23] Greidanus describes the redemptive-historical method in this way: "Redemptive-historical interpretation seeks to understand an Old Testament passage first in its own historical-cultural context. 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. It is at this point that the questions concerning Jesus Christ, the center, emerge. [24]"

A second way to preach Christ from the Old Testament, is the way of promise-fulfillment. Writes Greidanus, "The way of promise-fulfillment is embedded in redemptive history, for God gives his promises at one stage of redemptive history and brings them to fulfillment in subsequent stages." [25] Van't Veer agrees with this approach to preaching Old Testament history, at the same time indicating its relevance to the New Testament congregation. The difference between the two Testaments is further indicated (according to Luke 4) as one of promise and fulfillment. But what does fulfillment mean in this instance? "Fulfillment" may never be interpreted to mean that the promise is now ended. That would be true if the fulfillment of the promise was not in itself a promise, and indeed a reinforced promise. The apostles and believers of the present time are conscious of their solidarity with the believers of the Old Covenant in the matter of expectation. We continue to be a waiting, hoping church. "Fulfillment" means: the promise is being fulfilled. Not: the promise as promise is past, conquered, and that which was promised has taken its place. But precisely the opposite: the promise is now in full force. Therefore the difference between the Old and New Testament, is that at first there was the promise, and now the full and reinforced promise.... The fulfillment, as we constantly understand it, will be at Christ's return. [26]"

Yet another way of preaching Old Testament historical narrative identified by Greidanus is the way of typology. As promise-fulfillment functions within redemptive history because God makes and fulfills his promises in redemptive history, so typology functions within redemptive history because God acts in redemptive history in regular patterns. God accomplishes his redemptive plan not only progressively from promise to fulfillment but also uniformly through similarity of redemptive acts. The New Testament writers are able, therefore, to discern analogies between God's present acts in Christ and his redemptive acts in the Old Testament. [27]"

In connection with this method of preaching Old Testament history, Greidanus issues a warning against "typologizing," the exegetical sin of making a type, rather than discovering a Biblical type. The rule must be followed that an event or person is a type, because the Scriptures themselves make it a type. [28]"

The fourth method of preaching Christ from the Old Testament, is described by Greidanus as the way of analogy. We can describe the way of analogy for preaching Christ from the Old Testament, as the move from what God was for Israel to what God through Christ is for the New Testament church. In distinction from the analogy of typology, the analogy here lies between the relationship of God to Israel and that of Christ to the church. This relationship allows for different emphases. [29]"

In addition to analogy, Greidanus speaks of preaching Christ from the Old Testament by means of longitudinal themes. The Bible discloses the gradual development of themes because God progressively reveals more of himself and his will as he works out his redemptive plan in history. We see this development of themes already in the Old Testament itself. For example, some of the Psalms celebrate the victories of the present or future kings. But during the exile, when there is no Davidic king, the prophets extend this theme of victory from the royal king to the coming Messiah king.[30]"

Yet another way of preaching Christ from Old Testament historical narrative, is the way of New Testament references. This is not really a distinct method, but ought to be used to reinforce the other methods. Many New Testament references consist of the ways of promise-fulfillment, typology, or longitudinal themes. If preachers had failed to discover

these ways by themselves, these New Testament references are a good corrective of oversights. If preachers had already discovered any of these ways, the New Testament references serve not only as confirmation but can often be used as stepping stones in the sermon to make the point for the congregation.[31]

Last, Greidanus speaks of the way of contrast as a valid way of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Because of the progression in the histories of redemption and revelation, it should not come as a surprise that the message of an Old Testament text will sometimes stand in contrast to that of the New Testament.[32]

Greidanus goes on to speak of the way of contrast as the most appropriate way to preach those passages which concern the civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. By His coming, Christ has fulfilled and abolished the Old Testament laws, as for example circumcision. As an example of one who frequently used the way of contrast in preaching Old Testament history, Greidanus makes reference to Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

In evaluating Greidanus' seven ways to preach Christ from the Old Testament, it ought to be plain that there is significant overlap between the various methods. The distinctions are not so scientifically precise that the use of any one method rules out a collaborative use of one or more of the other methods. In fact, the seven ways of preaching Christ from the Old Testament are quite closely related.

As helpful as Greidanus' suggestions are, the shortcoming of his proposals is that he does not set forth a single, unifying principle for preaching Christ from the Old Testament. That principle, I would suggest, is the covenant. Proper preaching of Old Testament history is covenantal preaching. All the methods put forward by Greidanus may be used, but THE way of preaching the Old Testament, and now particularly Old Testament history, is from the viewpoint of God's covenant. That covenant God realizes in time and history. Throughout history, and now particularly throughout the history of the Old Testament, God's covenant is established and maintained. As history progresses, God reveals more and more of the richness and beauty of His covenant. It is from the viewpoint of the covenant that Old Testament history must be preached.

The Old Testament itself demands that this is the way it is to be preached. The opening chapter of the Bible, reveals the God Who is a covenant God in Himself, establishing His covenant with His creature, man. In that covenant, Adam enjoyed God's friendship and fellowship in the Garden. After the violation of the covenant by man's fall into sin, Genesis 3:15, the "prot evangel" or "mother promise" reveals God's will to maintain His covenant with His people in Christ Jesus. The whole of Old Testament history is the record of God's faithfulness to the covenant and His fulfillment of the covenant promise to save His people in the Mediator of the covenant. It is, at the same time, the record of Satan's efforts to frustrate God's covenant purpose, to destroy the covenant people, and to prevent the realization of the covenant in the coming of Christ. That is the perspective on Old Testament history, that a passage like Revelation 12 gives us.

This is the unifying principle of all Old Testament history. Every event and every person mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures can only be understood properly in light of this principle. This is the way Old Testament history must be preached. The question that the preacher must face is: "How is this particular incident connected to the revelation of God's covenant? How does this incident reveal the covenant God?" This method will assure that the gospel is preached from Old Testament history. And this method will lend itself to ready application to the New Testament church and believer.

Some Practical Suggestions

By way of conclusion, let me offer some practical suggestions for preaching Old Testament historical narrative. First, some practical suggestions for exegesis. Let me recommend the following steps when dealing with any given passage.

- Interpret the text.
- Relate the text to its immediate context.
- Relate the passage to the preceding and foregoing narratives. The succession of narratives is meaningful.
- Relate the passage to the context of the book in which it appears.
- Relate the passage to the context of the Old Testament as a whole.
- Relate the passage to the New Testament, especially direct references to the text or part of the text in the New Testament.

As far as preaching Old Testament history is concerned, the following practical suggestions may be made.

- Tell the story. Tell it in as interesting a way as possible. Of more than one of our ministers, it has been said that when he preached on a certain Old Testament historical figure, you thought it was Moses or Elijah himself in the pulpit. Let that be said of us.
- Give the meaning. Draw the lines sharply from the text to Christ. Make plain how the text stands related to the revelation of the covenant of God, that is, the gospel.
- Make the application. Indicate the way or ways that the text applies to Christians today, living in a different dispensation of the covenant, but living in the one, everlasting covenant of God.

In Amos 8:11, the prophet warns of God's judgment over His people that will take the form of a famine of hearing the word of the Lord. Not a famine of hearing sermons, but a famine of hearing the word of the Lord. As John teaches in John 1, Christ is the Word of the Lord. Wherever Christ is not present in the preaching, there is a famine of the Word. May God in His grace spare us that famine! May we continue to proclaim, and may God's people continue to hear through us the Word of the Lord, that is, Christ in our preaching of Old Testament history!

By Rev. Ron Cammenga

- FOOTNOTES
1. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching The Whole Bible As Christian Scripture* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. xiv.
 2. Goldsworthy, *Preaching The Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. xiv.
 3. Goldsworthy, *Preaching The Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 141.
 4. It goes without saying that the possibility of preaching Christ from Old Testament historical narrative texts rests on the presupposition that the history contained in the Old Testament is real, reliable history, inasmuch as it is part of the canon of the infallibly inspired Scriptures. This is the presupposition of this paper.
 5. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher And The Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 189.
 6. Kenneth A. Matthews, "Preaching Historical Narrative," in *Reclaiming The Prophetic Mantle*, George L. Klein, ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 19.
 7. Peter Y. DeJong, in the "Introduction" to M.B. Van't Veer, *Christological Preaching on Historical Materials of the Old Testament*, trans. John Piersma (Orange City, IA: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, n.d.), p. iv.
 8. Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 201.
 9. Kaiser, *Towards An Exegetical Theology*, p. 197.
 10. Goldsworthy, *Preaching The Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 150.
 11. Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher And The Ancient Text*, p. 196.
 12. Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher And The Ancient Text*, p. 196.
 13. Peter Y. DeJong, in the "Introduction" to *The History Of Redemption In The Preaching Of The Gospel*, by Benne Holwerda, trans. John Piersma (Orange City, IA: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, n.d.), p. iii.
 14. Goldsworthy, *Preaching The Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 151.
 15. Goldsworthy, *Preaching The Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 151.
 16. Holwerda, *The History Of Redemption In The Preaching Of The Gospel*, p. 12.
 17. Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, p. 198.
 18. Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, p. 207.
 19. DeJong, "Introduction" to *Christological Preaching On Historical Materials Of The Old Testament*, p. i.
 20. Van't Veer, *Christological Preaching On Historical Materials Of The Old Testament*, p. 19.
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