

**Response to *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*
(Graeme Goldsworthy)**

by Alex Chediak

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” – Luke 24:27

“Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...” – Luke 24:44-45

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.... if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.” – John 5:39-40, 46

Executive summary

Graeme Goldsworthy presents a convincing case that the entire Bible is about Jesus Christ and that, consequentially, preachers must move from an Old Testament text, to Christ crucified and resurrected, and then to the twenty-first century hearer. He traces an accessible outline of redemptive history, moving from Abraham to David to Christ. He offers a compelling explanation of typology, showing how the theme of the kingdom of God reaches a climax in David, but then declines through Israel and Judah’s apostasy, indicating that the true King, David’s greater Son, was yet to arrive. Goldsworthy also offers a cogent synopsis on the role of law, which revealed man’s sin and was fulfilled in the perfect life and death of the God-man, Jesus Christ. His insight into how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ is helpful and relevant for today’s preachers and lay Bible readers.

Preaching Class

Pastor/Teacher: Dr. John Piper

Executive Pastoral Assistant: Mr. David Mathis

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An Explanation of Goldsworthy's Redemptive-Historical Approach to Scripture

Goldsworthy's thesis in Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture is that the entire Bible is the message of what God is doing to bring a lost people back to Himself through the substitutionary life and death of the God-man, Jesus Christ (II. Cor. 5:21; I Cor. 2:2; I Tim. 2:5). The first part of the book sets a framework by answering fundamental questions about how the Bible is put together and about the task of preaching. The second part applies this framework to specific genres of Scripture. I will sketch how Goldsworthy sees the motifs of the Old Testament to be related to Christ's death and resurrection, and then highlight some of his noteworthy themes: the relationship between biblical indicatives and imperatives, macro-typology, and the role of the Mosaic economy in redemptive history. Finally I will provide a brief response.

Salvation History in the Old Testament

The Old Testament reveals how the sin of Adam and Eve is a precursor not of immediate (deserved) judgment, but of God's plan of mercy and grace, first illustrated in God's clothing our original parents (Gen 3:21).¹ The narratives of Noah (Gen. 6:8-9:17) and Abraham (Gen. 12:1 and following) illustrate the sovereign work of God in saving a chosen people from among sinful humanity. The grace of God in delivering His people from Egypt (Exod. 20:2) is likewise the basis for the giving of the law: Israel is bonded to her God in the Mosaic covenant *because* God has graciously wrought deliverance from Egypt.

Starting with Abraham, the theme of God's kingdom progressively unfolds, reaching a climax in the Davidic era (and Solomon's construction of the temple, where God would dwell

¹ The fall was ordained, as was Christ's redemption (Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8).

with His people). However, after that came apostasy, resulting in the dividing of the kingdom, and a progressive decline of both Israel and Judah under judgment from various pagan regimes. The prophets in this era give a two-fold word of judgment: immediate national disaster as a consequence of Israel's covenant breaking, and (ultimate) universal judgment because of pervasive sin. Israel's decline is a demonstration not just of the fruit of human sin but also that, as glorious as David's reign was, the true kingdom of God had not yet broken into the world.

Yet the prophets also include words of hope, because salvation and judgment are inseparably bound in redemptive history. The prophetic hope, then, is a promise of a new nation consisting of a faithful remnant of the old apostate nation.² There would be a new exodus from exile and captivity (not from Egypt, but from the bondage of sin), and a new coming into the promised land (not a patch of earth in Palestine, but a "spiritual kingdom" wherein God's rule is felt and obeyed in the lives of His ransomed people), by a new people of God (consisting of men and women from every tribe, language, and nation—Rev. 5:9-10).³

After 400 years of silence, Christ comes on the scene to fulfill all that "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" spoke of Him (Luke 24:44-45).⁴ The New Testament is the more clear articulation of that to which the Old Testament merely pointed: That the covenant-keeping, merciful God of the Old Testament was to become a man in order to bear the penalty of His people's sin and thus reconcile them to God in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Phil. 2:6-11). The stories, imagery, and metaphors of the Old Testament ultimately bore witness to the centrally important "Christ event" (Luke 24:44-45). The kingdom of God "has come" and we

² The as-yet unrevealed mystery, however, is that a massive number of Gentiles would be grafted in and included within the "true spiritual Israel" (the faithful remnant from within ethnic Israel). See, for example, Ephesians 3:1-6.

³ This can be traced in the gospels and epistles. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was "not of this world" (John 20:10). Peter draws from Hos. 1:6, 9, 10, and 2:23 in noting that God had incorporated believing Jews and Gentiles into the church (I Pet. 2:9-10).

⁴ As a parallel: 400 years was also the duration of Israelite oppression under the Egyptians before their deliver, Moses, was raised up (Gen. 15:13; Exod. 12:40-41; Acts 7:6).

today are therefore among those “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (Jude 18, I Cor. 10:11, Heb. 1:2). The “last days” began with Christ’s ascension and will culminate in the Second Coming.

Since the goal of salvation-history, Christ’s death and resurrection, has been accomplished, and since today’s hearers live in the “already, not yet” of the kingdom of God, several implications follow. First, it means that all the texts in the Bible “bear a discernible relationship to Christ and are primarily intended as a testimony to Christ.”⁵ Consequently, preachers must preach particular texts within their salvation-historical context so that the inter-textual relationships can be appreciated. Rather than seeking to only understand the individual characters in the Bible within their particular stories (e.g., Abram leaving his homeland or David slaying Goliath), preachers must help their people see how each story (or psalm, or prophecy) is part of a larger story which terminates on Jesus and his saving work. In other words, texts are to be related *first* to the person and work of Jesus Christ and *then* to the 21st century hearer on the basis of what the New Testament teaches about their relationship to Christ. (p. 113-114)

The Relationship Between Biblical Indicatives and Imperatives

Goldsworthy’s understanding of the “already, not yet” of God’s kingdom informs his perspective on how biblical indicatives relate to imperatives: *The obedience commanded in the imperatives is an obedience that flows from the finished work of Christ (indicative)*. The latter is the basis of our right standing with God whereas the former is the evidence of our being God’s children (I John 3:10). Goldsworthy relates the concept of “already saved” (because of Christ’s atoning death), “being saved” (because of the Holy Spirit bringing us into increasing conformity

⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, Eerdmans, © 2000, p. 113. Goldsworthy identifies this statement as his central thesis.

to Christ), and “awaiting salvation” (because of the coming consummation of Christ’s kingdom, when we will be forever free from the possibility of sinning) to three aspects of Christ’s work (pp. 92-94):

I. The gospel as the work of Christ for us – a reference to the once-for-all atoning death of Christ, whereby he propitiated the wrath of God by taking the punishment of God’s elect upon Himself. All prophecy has been fulfilled in the gospel event at Christ’s first coming.⁶ Thus, the end times have been inaugurated.

II. The fruit of the gospel as the work of Christ in us – a reference to regeneration and faith, whereby the Holy Spirit grants new hearts and opens eyes so that the elect repent of their sin and embrace Christ being united with him by faith, resulting in Christ’s righteousness being transferred to them. Thus, the end that has already come in Christ is now coming among the people of God as they live increasingly holy lives. Sanctification is not a legalistic fulfilling of law in order to positively contribute to our right standing before God. Rather, it is the fruit of already possessing right standing on the basis of Christ’s finished work.

III. The consummation of the gospel as the work of Christ with us – We live in the tension between what we already have in Christ, and what will be the reality *in ourselves* at his return. The faith-enabled assurance of being totally free from sin in the future (at Christ’s appearance) motivates us to holy living in the present (I John 3:2-3).

⁶ Though detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper due to space constraints, premillennialists would probably disagree with this statement, arguing that some prophecy (such as a massive revival of ethnic Israel) awaits the Second Coming (Rom. 11:25-32).

Typology

Goldsworthy's redemptive-historical approach recognizes typology in Scripture. He defines typology as "the recognition that within Scripture itself certain events, people, and institutions...bear a relationship to later events, people, or institutions." (p. 77) The earlier (type) foreshadows the latter (anti-type), and the latter completes some previously introduced motif. Goldsworthy contrasts typology with allegory: "while allegory sees mainly a superficial conceptual relationship between Old Testament events and the Christian gospel, typology sees the type as part of the theological process of revelation that leads to the antitype or fulfillment in the gospel." (p. 77)

Acknowledging that some have sought to find Christ in all the Scriptures via a "free association of ideas" (p. 110), Goldsworthy seeks to develop typological correspondence not simply between persons, events, and institutions, but also between whole epochs of revelation. For example, the theme of God's coming kingdom escalates from the time of Abraham to the Davidic era (Gen. 17:19, II Sam. 7) and is ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

The Mosaic Economy

Goldsworthy identifies Abraham, David/Solomon, and Jesus as the key reference points in salvation history, giving an interim role to Moses and the Law. The Law was given in the context of a covenant of grace: Salvation was to be secured through faith in the promises of God, not through imperfect obedience to the Law-Covenant.⁷ Rather, the law revealed the character of a holy God, and thereby (aided by the closely associated sacrificial system, Heb. 7:11) taught Israel that it fell short of God's standards and needed an unblemished sin-bearer,

⁷ Goldsworthy rightly notes: "legalism demeans the law by reducing its standards to the level of our competence. In fact, the law of God was not framed according to the sinful human ability to keep it, but as an expression of the perfect character of God." (p. 118-119)

which ultimately pointed to Christ. Christ came not only to die as a substitute, but also to live a perfect life on our behalf (Rom. 5:10).

A Response to Goldsworthy's Redemptive-Historical Approach

Goldsworthy's central thesis is thoroughly well defended. It makes eminent sense that the Bible is not a random collection of disparate stories of human heroes (e.g., David slaying Goliath), but rather one glorious, unified story of God's unfolding purpose to ransom a people from every tribe, language and nation (Rev. 5:9) – a story in which Yahweh is the true Hero. Rather, the heroes of Heb. 11 (for example) were called of God, and their faith in God's promises allowed them to be the instruments whereby God wrought victory – a victory that typified the ultimate triumph of Messiah Jesus over our true enemy (Satan) at the cross (Col. 2:14-15; Rev. 5:5).⁸ The balanced preacher will be able to draw applications from “character studies” while continually keeping the larger story of God's redemptive plan before his people.⁹

Goldsworthy's handling of the flow of biblical history is accessible and persuasive. The importance of the biblical imperatives flowing out of (and resulting from) the indicatives, the presence of typology, and the ultimate obsolescence of the Mosaic economy upon its fulfillment in Christ were all convincingly established.¹⁰ Commendably, Goldsworthy's biblical theology is informed by (rather than at odds with) systematic categories like justification and imputation.

Goldsworthy's applications of his redemptive-historical model in the latter half of the book were instructive. For example, he successfully relates Isaiah's missionary vision (Isa. 2:1-

⁸ To be technically accurate, our true enemy was God, whose wrath we justly deserved, and which wrath Christ willingly endured to reconcile us to God (Rom. 5:6-11).

⁹ One caution is that some might overreact to Goldsworthy and preach only to the “big story,” failing to glean valuable material from legitimate character analyses (e.g., Ezra, Nehemiah). Note that James, by way of exhortation, commends Job for his steadfastness (James 5:11) and Elijah for his faith (5:17).

¹⁰ “The New Testament basis for ethical decisions is no longer Moses on Sinai but Christ on Calvary. This is not to drive a wedge between the two, however, for they are related. Christ on Calvary embraces and completes the principles that lie behind the law of Moses.” (p. 96)

4) of nations flowing to worship God in His temple to Christ's death and resurrection. Firstly, Jesus' comment "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:17-22) both shows him to be the true temple and predicts his resurrection. After His ascension, the Holy Spirit comes (Acts 2) and Jews and Gentiles receive the Spirit and are incorporated into the church (e.g., Acts 2:41; Acts 11:17-18). As Goldsworthy insightfully observes: "the real temple is where Jesus is for he is the temple, the place where God and humankind meet, the place of reconciliation and of kingly rule. Jesus is in heaven, but he makes himself present among us by his Holy Spirit. Where the Spirit is, there the gospel is being preached and the people of God, both Jews and Gentiles, are brought into fellowship with God at the true temple...*The nations are coming to the temple wherever the gospel is preached and applied to human hearts by the Spirit of Jesus.*" (p. 175, emphasis mine)

Yet it would have been helpful for Goldsworthy to offer a more detailed explanation for how the temple reconstruction fit within the motif of religious decline (between Solomon and Jesus). *How* does potential (partial) temple restoration serve as a reminder that "their history is the context in which God has acted in the past and will act definitively in the future"? (p. 143)

Another instance where Goldsworthy falls short is in his explanation of Psalm 1. His observation that the passage is a "foreshadowing of the righteous...Jesus Christ" seems forced. Goldsworthy seems so eager to speak of Christ here that he misses the more approximate (and more likely) meaning: Jews are being exhorted to delight themselves in God's law, and to experience the blessings of obedience (as much of Proverbs commends). Of course, they cannot do so perfectly and must ultimately seek grace through faith in God's promised deliverance (in Christ). Nevertheless, God-fearers (e.g., David, Simeon) generally experienced blessings such as fruitfulness (Ps. 1:3) due to the Lord "knowing their way." (Ps. 1:5)

Lastly, Goldsworthy did not seem to apply his redemptive-historical approach to more difficult passages in the New Testament where the inspired writer provides a counter-intuitive commentary on an Old Testament text. For example, the author of Hebrews puts Psalm 40:6-8 on the lips of Christ (Heb. 10:5-7).¹¹ Why? How did he know to do that? And can we confidentially apply a similar hermeneutic when we preach from the Old Testament? Lack of understanding on how the New Testament employs the Old Testament is perhaps one reason why pastors don't include certain portions of Scripture in their sermon plans.

Conclusion

These minor critiques notwithstanding, Goldsworthy has done an outstanding job at showing (a) that the Bible is a book of Christ; (b) that it is imperative that preachers *see* Christ in all the Scriptures; and (c) that preachers *proclaim* Christ in all the Scriptures, avoiding the dangers of myopic, man-elevating, Christ-eclipsing character studies that fail to apply passages to Christ in their redemptive historical context. Goldsworthy's first section of organizational, definitional chapters lay a clear foundation, and the applications of his redemptive historical model to various genres of Scripture provide a helpful introduction to biblical theology for preachers and lay Bible-lovers alike.

¹¹ Granted, this example is further complicated because of the New Testament's employment of the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic Text.