

Copyright © 2019 Robert Thomas Buck

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

ESTABLISHING A DEFINITION OF AND DEFENSE FOR
EXPOSITORY PREACHING IN THE
BOOK OF HEBREWS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Robert Thomas Buck
May 2019

APPROVAL SHEET

ESTABLISHING A DEFINITION OF AND DEFENSE FOR
EXPOSITORY PREACHING IN THE
BOOK OF HEBREWS

Robert Thomas Buck

Read and Approved by:

Michael E. Pohlman (Faculty Supervisor)

William F. Cook III

Date _____

To our three children,
Dallas, Madison, and Jackson.
You are a blessing and a gift from God.

And to
My lovely wife,
Jennifer.

I am a better man because of God's gift of you to me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Thesis Statement	2
Different Types of Preaching.....	3
Definition of Expository Preaching	4
Defenses Offered for Expository Preaching	7
Historical Arguments in Defense of Expository Preaching	8
Theological Arguments in Defense of Expository Preaching	14
Biblical Arguments in Defense of Expository Preaching	23
Void in the Literature.....	25
2. A SURVEY OF VARIOUS BIBLICAL WRITER'S EXPOSITION	27
Old Testament Texts Used to Define and Defend Expository Preaching	27
Preaching in the Prophetic Age	29
An OT Example of Biblical Exposition	32
Conclusion	35
New Testament Texts Used to Define and Defend Expository Preaching	36
The Preaching of Jesus	37
Preaching in the Apostolic Era	43

Chapter	Page
3. AN EXAMINATION OF HEBREWS AS A MODEL OF EXPOSITION	58
The Literary Genre of Hebrews	59
The Structure of Hebrews	61
An Exegetical Examination of Hebrews 3:4–4:16	67
The Immediate Context of Hebrews 3:4–4:16	68
The Use of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:4–4:16	69
The Original Context and Meaning of Psalm 95:7-11.....	70
The Preacher's Exposition of Psalm 95:7-11	74
Conclusion	92
4. AN APPEAL TO EMULATE THE BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING	94
A Defense for Expository Preaching as the Biblical Pattern	95
Summary of the Results	96
Conclusions from the Results	99
A Modification of the Definition of Expository Preaching	102
Views of Christ-Centered Preaching	104
Christ-Centered Preaching in Hebrews	109
A Modified Definition	111
An Appeal to the Church and Preachers Today	112
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	114

PREFACE

In many ways, a thesis is the culmination of a life-long process of having learned and been discipled by faithful men and women in their Christian walk. Although my name is on this work, I would have never made it to completion without the support and love of many Christians in my life.

I am thankful for men who taught me to love and faithfully study the Scriptures. Dr. Stanley Toussaint, who has gone to be with the Lord, was one of the greatest influences in my life. The instruction he gave me while I attended Dallas Theological Seminary has made me the expositor I am today.

First Baptist Church of Lindale, Texas, has shouldered much of the burden for my completion of this work. The congregation graciously allowed me a six-week long writing sabbatical in 2017. I am incredibly grateful to the men who serve alongside me in the shepherding of this church: Ryan Taber, Andrew Pressley, Chris Dilley, and David Attebury. They have sacrificially allowed me the flexibility to finish the project.

I want to thank Michael Pohlman, my faculty supervisor, for his encouragement every step of the way. He helped me walk through the difficulty of the normal work of a thesis as well as walking with me through some dark days that transpired in the midst of it all. I will forever be grateful for his love and concern for me as person and not just another student with a project.

One of the greatest encouragements of my life has been my mother, Carolyn Buck. She taught me how to work hard at everything I do and to strive to become the best at whatever I do. She was excited when I entered the DMin program and has helped me make it to the very end. Above all, my mom taught me to love the Lord and encouraged me to grow in my knowledge of the Word of God. I could not ask for a greater blessing.

Our children are a blessing to my life ways that I cannot even begin to describe. Dallas, Madison, and Jackson are each a gift from God. There is nothing I want more than for each of them to live for Christ and his kingdom.

No one has stood by me in this journey more than my precious wife, Jennifer. In every way she makes me a better husband, a better father, a better pastor, a better man. When I wanted to give up, she would not let me. She never seeks accolades for the things she does, but the Buck home would be a shambles without her. There is no one I love more on this earth and cannot imagine life without her. Jennifer, “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all” (Prov 31:29).

My prayer is that this thesis will serve Christ’s kingdom well and will bring preachers to a greater commitment to preaching God’s Word as the sufficient authority for the church. Because we will stand before Christ one day to give an account, may all preachers commit themselves to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2).

Robert Thomas Buck

Lindale, Texas

May 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The pastor has many responsibilities, but none is more important than the high calling to “preach the Word,” as Paul commanded Timothy (2 Tim 4:2).¹ Since “all Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16), the preacher has the privilege to deliver to people the very words of God. In other words, God has spoken, what he has said has been recorded in the Bible, and the preacher has the task to stand and declare, “Thus says the Lord.” The preacher does not come to the pulpit to bring his own ideas, but to declare the message of another, namely, Almighty God. What a daunting task. One could not imagine a preacher ever desiring to put words into the mouth of God—to claim that the words he speaks are from God when they actually derive from his own mind. This means that the preacher must be certain that what he is saying in his sermon is truly what God has said. With even greater sobriety than a witness giving testimony before a court of law, the preacher should want his testimony to be “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” If this is to be the task and the heart of the preacher, it would be wise to consider how the preacher best fulfills his most solemn duty.

In light of this, the thought of the preacher must never be, “any old sermon will do.” The preacher—if he is to deliver what God has said—must understand the intent of the biblical writers who were not speaking for themselves but “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). Haddon Robinson says the first responsibility in this effort is to answer, “What did the biblical writer want to say to the

¹ All Scripture, unless otherwise noted, is quoted from the English Standard Version.

biblical reader? Why?”² These questions have produced an ongoing conversation regarding the type of preaching that is best suited to accomplish this goal.

Thesis

Expository preaching has increased in popularity, but is not necessarily viewed as preferable to other methods of proclamation of the Scriptures. In the past few decades, proponents of exposition (e.g., John Stott, Bryan Chapell, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Mark Dever, et al.) have argued that it is the only authentic form of Christian preaching. They base this arguments primarily upon theological defenses from Scripture (e.g., Deut 4:32-40) and biblical texts from narrative literature that describe the Bible being handled in an expositional manner (e.g., Neh 8:8). In addition, proponents of expository preaching have offered brief examinations of sermons recorded in the NT that would add weight to adopting exposition as the only authentic form of Christian preaching. This is particularly true in the sparse interaction with the book of Hebrews. Rather than establishing support for expositional preaching from brief descriptions found within biblical narrative, an examination of Hebrews would allow for a definition to be established from the most extensive sermon in all of Scripture.

This work will seek to demonstrate that NT sermons not only reinforce the argument for expository preaching as offered by Stott, Mohler, Dever, et al., but give clear examples of expository sermons found in Scripture. I will argue that the book of Hebrews exhibits the strongest evidence. The writer of Hebrews interprets the OT Scriptures and delivers the message in a way that can only be described as expositional. To state my thesis succinctly: a definition for expository preaching can be established directly from an examination of NT examples of preaching, which will serve to strengthen the defense for expository preaching.

² Haddon Robinson, “Convictions of Biblical Preaching,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 23.

To that end, an examination will be made of three NT sermons. The greatest attention will be given to the book of Hebrews. This study will establish that it is indeed a sermon and then demonstrated that the author's treatment of OT texts is truly expositional in nature.

First, I will interact with modern definitions for expository preaching, establish a working definition to be used throughout this work, and then explore the various defenses given for its priority over other styles of preaching. Second, various NT sermons will be examined to reveal their expositional use of OT texts in light of the adopted definition of expository preaching. Third, it will be argued that examples of sermons in the NT—with the greatest weight placed upon that of the book of Hebrews—demonstrate a consistent pattern of exposition. Fourth, conclusions will be drawn for the model expositional sermons, an argument will be presented for modern preaching to emulate the pattern of biblical expositors, and churches will be called upon to accept no other form of preaching but the biblical pattern.

Different Types of Preaching

Although opinions vary as to the exact number, Richard Mayhue sees three types of preaching: “topical, textual, and expository.”³ He writes,

Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that generally serves as a gateway into whatever subject the preacher chooses to address. . . . Expository preaching focuses predominantly on the text(s) under consideration along with its (their) context(s).⁴

Proponents of expository preaching argue for its exclusivity based on a variety of reasons. Some advocates give practical arguments in favor of the style. Michael Easley writes, “I remain convinced that expository preaching is the most effective way to

³ Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue (Dallas: Word, 1992), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

communicate God’s Word,” and argues that practicing the method is the best evidence that one is “committed to the authority of God’s Word.”⁵ Others seek to make a biblical case for the approach. Mike Bullmore makes a connection between “the gift the ascended Christ has given to the church in pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11) and the biblical injunction for pastors-teachers to ‘preach the word’ (2 Tim 4:2).”⁶ Mark Dever also champions expositional preaching and declares it to be the best teaching “that exposes God’s Word to God’s people.”⁷ He goes so far as to say, “the main role of any pastor, is expositional preaching.”⁸ To better understand and scrutinize these claims, expository preaching needs to be defined.

Definition of Expository Preaching

Various definitions are given for expository preaching, and not all are equally helpful. John McClure describes it as a “running commentary,”⁹ but Mayhue claims that it is “not a commentary running from word to word and verse to verse.”¹⁰ Harold Bryson contends that consecutive preaching through books of the Bible in a verse-by-verse fashion is what constitutes expository preaching,¹¹ but Bryan Chapell argues that while “preaching through Philippians will stimulate many fine expository messages,” preaching a series from “a sequence of texts in different books . . . can be handled expositionally.”¹²

⁵ Michael Easley, “Why Expository Preaching?,” in *The Moody Handbook of Preaching*, ed. John Koessler (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 30.

⁶ Mike Bullmore, “A Biblical Case for Expositional Preaching,” 9Marks, last modified February 25, 2010, <https://www.9marks.org/article/biblical-case-expositional-preaching/>.

⁷ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹ John S. McClure, “Expository Preaching,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimson and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 131.

¹⁰ Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” 10.

¹¹ Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 23.

¹² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed.

Others, like Andrew Blackwood, argue that, “an expository sermon means a textual treatment of a fairly long passage.”¹³ However, J. I. Packer writes, “We shall find it better to define ‘expository’ preaching in terms, not of the length of text, but of the preachers’ approach to it.”¹⁴ Obviously, there is not a consensus here.

While there are varying opinions on what specifically constitutes an expositional sermon, there are common themes that emerge from modern advocates that would be helpful to formulate a specific definition. Packer says the preacher committed to expository preaching is one who “preaches from a text, and in preaching labors to bring out of the text what is there.”¹⁵ If one takes the straightforward meaning of the term “exposition,” it is preaching that *exposes* the meaning of the biblical text. Therefore, the work of expository preaching begins with understanding what the text means.¹⁶ Simply put, “Discovering what God meant by what He said is the basis for expository preaching.”¹⁷ The preacher should never impose upon the Scriptural text any meaning that it does not bear nor use the text merely to support the general reflections from his own mind or elsewhere. As Chapell defined expository preaching, “In the most basic

(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 67.

¹³ Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Preparation of Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), 69.

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, “Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Ourselves,” in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ While lengthier, one would be remiss to not include Robinson’s well-known definition that still has force. “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.” Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21.

¹⁷ H. Wayne House and Daniel G. Garland, *God’s Message, Your Sermon: Discover, Develop, and Deliver What God Meant by What He Said* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 26. In addition, the reader should understand that much has been written explaining the methods by which the preacher can arrive at the original meaning of the biblical text. Although this work will not deal with that important task, David Helm’s book is a concise and recommended resource: David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today*, 9marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

sense it is what Augustine said we try to do, which is to say what God says.”¹⁸

Once the meaning of the text is discovered, the point of the text will then shape the sermon. Dever defines expository preaching as that which “takes for the point of the sermon the point of a particular passage of Scripture.”¹⁹ Similarly, Bullmore writes, “A sermon is expositional if its content and intent are controlled by the content and intent of a particular passage of Scripture.”²⁰ Therefore, the primary point of the Biblical text governs the content of the sermon. The preacher must then prepare his sermon to clearly declare this truth and evidence that it is derived from the text rather than simply the mind of the preacher.

Finally, some definitions specifically emphasize that an expositional sermon must be communicated in a way that enables the audience to understand the text and apply it. Albert Mohler writes, “expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible.”²¹ If a sermon does not clearly communicate the truth and apply it to the listeners, it becomes little more than a religious lecture. The purpose of a sermon is to bring the listeners to the place of submitting themselves to the central truth taught in a passage.

If these various elements are combined, expository preaching involves discovering the meaning of what God has said in the biblical text, preparing a sermon that is shaped by and reflects the point of the text, declaring that truth to the listeners in a way that helps them understand it, and applying the biblical text to their lives. Expositional

¹⁸ Michael Dudit, “What Is Expository Preaching? An Interview with Bryan Chapell,” *Preaching.com: Leading the Church, Proclaiming the Word*, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.preaching.com/resources/articles/what-is-expository-preaching-an-interview-with-bryan-chapell/>.

¹⁹ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 43.

²⁰ Mike Bullmore, “A Biblical Case for Expositional Preaching,” *9Marks*, February 25, 2010, <https://9marks.org/article/biblical-case-expositional-preaching/>.

²¹ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 66.

preaching involves four actions when handling a Scriptural text: discovering, preparing, declaring, and applying. Therefore, I suggest the following definition:

Expository preaching discovers the point of a biblical text, makes it the central point of the sermon, and declares that truth in a way that the listeners can both understand it and apply it to their lives.

While this definition contains no novel elements, its synthesis of the various definitions of the aforementioned proponents of expository preaching makes it unique. This precise definition for expository preaching allows for a broader approach regarding the method one might choose in preaching from week to week. Although it would certainly allow for consecutive preaching (e.g., preaching a six-month series through the book of Romans), it does not necessitate that one must do so. In addition, it establishes that consecutive preaching does not define the essence of expository preaching. For example, a pastor could preach through a book of the Bible but fail to discover, declare, and apply the central point of the text. Although one might argue that consecutive preaching is a preferred method for doing exposition well, the proposed definition does not preclude methods of preaching such as topical (e.g., a series on forgiveness) or lectionary (e.g., preaching Scripture texts related to the church season). It simply requires that the point of the sermon be governed by the point of the text at hand.

Having defined expository preaching in this way, the support for this view must be examined. Proponents of expository preaching—no matter what definition they may adopt—have put forth various defenses. Therefore, it would be wise to consider the common defenses given for expository preaching as the preferred method of teaching the Scriptures.

Defenses Offered for Expository Preaching

Many proponents of expository preaching defend it as the only suitable way for a preaching to handle the Scriptures.²² Some advocates are exceptionally strong in

²² Modern day voices who strongly advocate for expository preaching include Jerry Bridges,

rejecting all types of preaching other than expositional. Believing that expository preaching was declining, Merrill Unger warned, “Where such exposition and authoritative declaration of the Word of God are abandoned, Ichabod, the glory is departed, must be written over the preacher and over the pulpit from which he preaches.”²³ James Montgomery Boice shared similar concerns when he wrote about the waning of expository preaching. “These are not good days for the evangelical church, and anyone who takes a moment to evaluate the life and outlook of evangelical churches will understand that.”²⁴ It is likely that some might take issue with such strong indictments. Nevertheless, they would be wise to evaluate the arguments advanced to support these indictments and whether these arguments support the more specific definition of expository preaching offered above. There are essentially three major types of arguments that are given in defense of the priority of expository preaching that will be considered in this order: historical, theological, and biblical.

Historical Arguments in Defense of Expository Preaching

History does not overwhelmingly support an indisputable case for the exclusivity of expository preaching. The only work I have found that is exclusively devoted to the history of expository preaching is James Stitzinger’s journal article in *The Masters Seminary Journal*.²⁵ It is significant that the author immediately acknowledges

Joel R. Beeke, D. A. Carson, Bryan Chapell, Ligon Duncan, Sinclair Ferguson, David Helm, Erwin Lutzer, John MacArthur, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., J. I. Packer, John Piper, Philip Graham Ryken, and R. C. Sproul.

²³ Merrill F. Unger, “The Need of Expository Preaching in the Twentieth Century,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 111, (July-September 1954): 231.

²⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 19.

²⁵ James F. Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching,” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 3, no. 1 (1992): 5-32. Also see Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 2 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954); Ralph G. Turnbull, *A History of Preaching*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974); O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), for their indexed references to expository preaching.

that there are “a relatively small number of men who have committed themselves to this type of preaching.”²⁶ In addition, a large net is often cast when assigning a preacher to the category of an expositor. Those preachers that historians label “expositional” include those who preach a verse-by-verse commentary, who preach consecutively through books, who use a biblical text as the complete foundation of their sermon, and those who fit the definition of expository preaching as defined in this work. Therefore, although church history does not exhibit expositional preaching as an exclusive method, the broader scope for expositional preaching is well established in the history of the church. Since the NT period will be considered later in this work, the post-apostolic history of the church will be examined at this point.

One might expect to find a plethora of expositors in the early years of the Christian church (100-476), but this is not the case. This is not to say that the early church taught something other than the Scriptures or that they did not seek to closely follow the Scriptures. John Stott establishes that the writings of Justin Martyr, a second-century church father (125-190), indicated a firm commitment “to the reading and preaching of the Scriptures.”²⁷ During that same time, the Greek father Irenaeus stressed the importance of the church’s responsibility to “adhere to the apostles’ teaching.”²⁸ However, labeling the earliest Church Fathers as expositors would require a broad definition of expository preaching. In the third century (190-250), preachers treated the Scriptures even more loosely. Origen, for example, took an allegorical approach to the Scriptures and “never expressed concern for authorial intentions.”²⁹ These early examples

²⁶ Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching,” 5.

²⁷ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 19.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 74.

give rise to questioning a firm commitment to expositional preaching, especially as would be defined by this work.

If exposition was to be the preferred method of preaching, why is it not more prevalent in the earliest times after the apostles? Several defenses have been offered for the glaring absence during this period. Stitzinger argues that the “rapid deterioration of primitive Christianity has been well documented,” and a lack of expository preaching just gives further “evidence of this.”³⁰ Others suggest that the influence of Greek philosophy upon the Church Fathers led to the preacher being more concerned with rhetoric than with truth. Edwin Hatch claims that during this era “preachers preached not because they were bursting with truths which could not help finding expression, but because they were masters of fine phrases and lived in an age in which fine phrases had a value.”³¹

In the fourth century (325-460) men emerged who more clearly fit the broader category of expositors, John Chrysostom (347-407) and Augustine (354-430) two major examples. Although only some of his sermons could be described as exegetical, Augustine produced expositional work in the Psalms, 1 John, and the Gospels.³² Chrysostom was the best example of an expositor during this time as he “preached verse-by-verse and word-by-word expositions on many books of the Bible.”³³ The exposition of Chrysostom fits more closely with the definition offered by this work. David Larsen describes Chrysostom’s preaching as “the interpretation of a text from Scripture and its application to a particular congregation. Exegesis is, therefore, the starting point of his

³⁰ Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching,” 12.

³¹ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 113.

³² G. Wright Doyle, “Augustine’s Sermonic Method,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 39, (Spring 1977): 215.

³³ Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching,” 15.

preaching as exhortation is its conclusion.”³⁴ While not overly abundant with examples of exposition, a firm commitment to the teaching of the Scriptures is well founded in early church history along with preachers who would be classified expositors in a broad sense.

At best, expository preaching during the medieval period (476-1500) was scarce. Allegorical interpretation abounded during this period and infected the preaching of the church. Although there were gifted preachers from this age (e.g., Gregory the First, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas), their use of the Scriptures could not be rightly called expositional even in the broadest understanding. These were dark days for the church. Larsen writes, “The effective loss of the Bible and its truth with the related demise of biblical preaching spelled curtains for Christian vitality.”³⁵ Thankfully, God would raise up a new generation of preachers who would commit themselves to the faithful preaching of the Biblical text.

It was during the Reformation Period (1500-1648) that a more consistent pattern of expository preachers is found. This makes perfect sense considering the Reformers emphasis on a return to the centrality of the Scriptures. However, as with the early church period, the definition used to place a preacher in this category would often be quite broad. There are examples like Martin Luther—who produced several expositional commentaries; Ulrich Zwingli—who believed that in the church “the only preaching to be tolerated within its borders was such as was compatible with the text of the Bible”³⁶; and John Calvin—who carefully preached through the books of the Bible and explained Scripture “word by word.”³⁷ One profound reality is seen in Roland Bainton’s description of Luther’s intense study of the Scriptures and desire to be faithful

³⁴ Larsen, *The Company of Preachers*, 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁶ G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976), 103-4.

³⁷ Larsen, *The Company of Preachers*, 168.

to their clear meaning which attributed to his becoming a genuine believer.³⁸ Of all the Reformers, no one was more committed to the clear and consistent exposition of the Scriptures than Calvin. In his *Institutes*, he declared that the preacher's "whole task is limited to the ministry of God's Word, their whole wisdom to the knowledge of his Word: their whole eloquence, to its proclamation."³⁹ His commitment to the Scriptures was unrivaled and had a great effect upon both his contemporaries and those who followed him. Larsen writes that Calvin "gave the ablest, soundest, clearest expositions of Scripture that had been seen in one thousand years, and most of the Reformers worked in the same direction."⁴⁰ Furthermore, Calvin was not only concerned about the careful handling of the Biblical text, his sermons regularly moved to both application and exhortation for his listeners. Therefore, Calvin is yet another example of an expositor who is more closely aligned with the previously suggested definition.

In the modern period (1649-present) there are many preachers who followed in the footsteps of the those during the Reformation. Once again, a more generous definition of expositional preaching must be applied among those who would be classified as expository preachers. Puritans, like Richard Baxter (1615-1691), John Owen (1616-1683), and John Bunyan (1628-1688) would be historically and rightly labeled as expositors. However, some who are committed to expository preaching argue that they would not be models expository preachers emulate today.⁴¹ They would not even encourage preaching to imitate Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), who is considered to be one of the greatest preachers to have ever lived, and D. Martin Lloyd

³⁸ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 60-67.

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (1536; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 195.

⁴⁰ Larsen, *The Company of Preachers*, 168.

⁴¹ Derek Thomas, "Expository Preaching: Keeping Your Eye on the Text," in *Feed My Sheep*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002), 74-76.

Jones (1899-1981), who some tout to be the greatest expositor of the twentieth century.⁴² This is not to say that these men should not be classified as expositors. Each of these men were faithful to preach the Scriptures. However, the definition for expository preaching as defined in this work is not modeled as clearly by many of these great preachers.

When employing a more precise definition of exposition, there are many good examples of solid expositors that could be discussed in further detail. Men like John A. Broadus (1827-1895) who is described as an “expository preacher, basing his preaching on sound exegesis,”⁴³ Harry Allan Ironside (1876-1951), who “excelled in expository preaching,”⁴⁴ or Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895-1960), whose “strength was in Bible exposition.”⁴⁵ However, I believe that one of the best historical examples of a preacher, and one who most closely fits this work's definition of an expository preacher, is Charles Simeon (1759-1836). Simeon served as vicar of Holy Trinity parish church in Cambridge. Packer writes that Simeon believed the preacher's task “was, precisely, exposition, to bring out of the texts what God had put in them.”⁴⁶ Simeon declared, “I never preach unless I feel satisfied that I have the mind of God as regards the sense of the passage.”⁴⁷ If there was a “perfect model” of one who labored to discover the meaning of the text, shaped his sermon to reflect the point of the text, and applied that to his listeners in his preaching, it was Charles Simeon.⁴⁸

Although there are many historical examples of men committed to expository

⁴² Thomas, “Expository Preaching: Keeping Your Eye on the Text,” 76-78.

⁴³ Turnbull, *A History of Preaching*, 108.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁴⁶ Packer, “Expository Preaching,” 147.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ To further explore the model of Simeon, see David Helm’s work, *Expositional Preaching*. Helm is the leader of Charles Simeon Trust, which is committed to equipping pastors in the important task of expositional preaching. Three-day workshops are held all over the world for this purpose.

preaching, one can see that the pattern is neither consistent nor overwhelmingly preferred. There are significant and important examples of men whose preaching aligns with the definition in this work, but the lack of its overall predominance demands further support. At this point, the defense of expository preaching moves to theological arguments.

Theological Arguments in Defense of Expository Preaching

It is a correct assertion that theology impacts methodology. Simply put, what one believes about God, about the nature of the church, and the nature of Scripture⁴⁹ should directly impact preaching. In other words, there should be a strong synergy between the practice of preaching and what the church believes about God, the church, and Scripture. A correct understanding of each of these areas would point to the necessity of expositional preaching.

The nature of God. What one believes about God should impact his preaching. As Stott writes, “The kind of God we believe in determines the kind of sermons we preach.”⁵⁰ One who simply reads the Bible from the beginning will quickly see a critical truth about God. In Genesis 1, one learns that God is one who speaks into his creation. In the first place, everything comes into existence by the very word of God. Then, after he creates man, the first thing God does is speak directly to him (Gen 2:16). Therefore, God immediately relates to those whom he created by communicating to them. Listening to and heeding the Word of God becomes the very basis by which God relates to man and how he is to live. Rejecting this truth is what ultimately led to the fall of man as God rebuked Adam in Genesis 3:11, saying, “Have you eaten of the tree of which I

⁴⁹ While there are other theological areas that could be considered, these three will become the focus following Stott’s emphasis in his classic work, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*.

⁵⁰ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 93.

commanded you not to eat?” Hearing what God has said, understanding what God has said, and obeying what God has said is the crux of rightly living as God’s created beings in this world.

God speaking to his people became the normal pattern, the phrase “the Word of the Lord came” being repeated over one hundred times throughout the OT. The OT prophets did not come with a message derived from their own minds, but a direct word from God. Therefore, not only in the beginning with Adam and Eve, but throughout the Bible, God revealed himself to his people by directly giving them his Word. If God has chosen to reveal himself in this way, nothing could be more important than to hear, understand, and obey what he has said. As Dever argues, “God will not be known if he does not speak, and we cannot know him if he has not spoken a word that we can rely on.”⁵¹ Without this, one cannot even experience salvation: “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Therefore, biblical preaching should not present the ideas of the preacher as he reflects upon the Scriptures, but expose to the people exactly what God has said as revealed in Scripture. If God has chosen to reveal himself and to transmit truth through the writings of his prophets, the responsibility of the preacher is to deliver to God’s people exactly what God has said as it was originally given and intended.

Not only is expositional preaching the most faithful to God’s communicative nature, it also is the most faithful to God’s commitment to his own glory. Throughout Scripture, God reveals that his chief purpose is to make his glory known. Wherever God acts, he makes it clear that the ultimate intention of his actions is to glorify himself. In his deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt and his overthrowing of Pharaoh in the process, God declared that it was all for his glory (Exod 14:4, 17, 18; Ps 106:8). God spoke through the prophet Isaiah that he has created man for his glory (Isa 43:7). God’s

⁵¹ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 51.

choice of Israel as a nation and believers of all ages were both for his glory (Jer 43:7; Eph 1:6). God commands that his glory be declared among the nations and he sent Christ into the world so that the Gentiles would praise him for his glory (Ps 96:3; Rom 15:9). Paul declares that the glory of God is at the very core of Christian living as God commands “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). Therefore, if God sees his glory as preeminent in every action he takes, should not the preaching of his Word also be fundamentally grounded in bringing him glory? In other words, if every Christian is to make God’s glory the supreme goal of even eating or drinking, surely the Christian pastor will find the glory of God to be paramount in his preaching of the Scriptures.

How then does the pastor best glorify God in his preaching? Since God has revealed himself in his Word, he has chosen for us to come to know his glory through the Scriptures. Therefore, the glory of God is at stake in the way the Scripture is handled. If one wrongly preaches the word, the glory of God will most certainly be skewed. If a preacher says something about God that he hasn’t revealed about himself, at best God’s glory will not be seen or at worst it will be completely distorted. If every act of God was meant to bring God glory, the preacher must be sure to preach with the same purpose and intention that God had when he originally revealed every detail. It is critical that the preacher is able to be reasonably certain that what he says about God is truly what God has said about himself. Only then can he have some level of confidence that God is truly being glorified in what he communicates from the pulpit. If God has chosen to reveal himself by communicating through the Scriptures and his greatest desire is to be glorified by what he has revealed, how dare the preacher say anything about God that is not clearly revealed in the inspired Word of God? However, if God has spoken, the preacher has both a responsibility and a mandate to explicitly communicate what God has plainly revealed about himself in the Bible.

No type of preaching better serves this purpose than that which is expositional.

No sermon is truly original in the sense that it is nothing more than preaching about God what has already been preached by God himself. Making this very point, D. A. Carson says, “When that Word is re-announced, there is a sense in which God who revealed himself by that Word in the past, is re-revealing himself by that same Word once again.”⁵² Therefore, if God’s people want to know who he is in all his glory, there is but one place that they can turn.

The nature of the church. Not only does Scripture reveal in Genesis 1 that God created the world by his Word, but it also informs us that he chose to create a people for himself in the same way. In Genesis 12, God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans by his Word. It was God who initiated the relationship with Abraham, which began by God speaking into his life. The calling came in the form of a promise that God would make him into a great nation and that all peoples would be blessed through him. God spoke and Abraham believed and obeyed, which became the basis of his justification (Gen 15:6). This began the pattern for God’s interactions with his people. Later when Abraham’s descendants were enslaved in Egypt, God raised up Moses to deliver his people from bondage. In Exodus 3:4, when Moses was shepherding his flock in the desert, God appeared to him in the form of a burning bush. But as amazing as that site must have been, the significance of the revelation was not found within the symbolism of the burning bush but in the reality that God spoke to Moses and gave him his Word. Once again, it was God who initiated the encounter and placed a call upon the life of Moses. God gave Moses clear instructions of what he was both to do and to say. God would give Moses the words to speak and then Moses was to communicate both to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh exactly what God had said. Moses was not called to be innovative with the message or to be a great orator, he was simply to be God’s reporter. God

⁵² Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 47.

promised Moses that he would return with the people to the very mountain on which he stood and there they would serve the Lord. No longer would they serve Pharaoh, but they would be God's people and he would be their God (Exod 6:7). In Exodus 20, when Moses and Israel finally arrive at Mt. Sinai, as God had promised, how do they become God's people and begin a life of serving him? God gave them his law and they become his people by accepting his law. It was by the very Word of God that the nation of Israel became the people of God.

Not only did Israel initially become God's people by means of his Word, they continued to live before God and relate to God directly through his Word. God continues to work with Israel in this manner as he "maintains and sustains it, directs and sanctifies it, reforms and renews it through the same Word."⁵³ God communicated through the prophet Moses that his word would be the very source of life for his people: "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut 8:3). And throughout the OT, God continued to send his prophets to the nation of Israel to give them his word so that they might know how to rightly live as his people in this world.

In the NT church, God continues to relate to his people in very much the same way. One difference is that God communicated his Word in the OT through his prophets and now his spokesmen are the apostles. Jesus Christ appointed his apostles to be his authorized representatives and they became his authoritative revelatory agents. The Lord Jesus told them that he would depart, but would continue to reveal his truth to them through the Holy Spirit and they would be his witnesses (John 14:26; 15:26-27). Like the prophets of the OT, the apostolic writings were inspired, as Peter wrote, "no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy

⁵³ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 109.

Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20-21). As the apostles wrote, the early church recognized their writings as having the same authority as the prophets of the OT. Peter wrote of the writings of Paul, “there are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16). Therefore, just as God’s people in the OT were to live and relate to God by means of his revealed Word, the NT church is created and built upon the continued revelation of the NT Apostles. As Ephesians 2:19-20 reads, “You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”

Since modern preachers are neither prophets of the OT nor apostles of the NT, they can only continue to give God’s people his Word through the means of preaching the Scriptures as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. Faithful exposition of the Scriptures is the job of today’s preacher to bring God’s people the Word of the Lord. While there may be many means by which a church might create a people, Dever rightly declares, “in the final analysis the people of God, the church of God, can only be created around the Word of God.”⁵⁴ If the church is built and sustained on the Word of God, the preacher must commit himself to the task of delivering to people exactly what God has said. If man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, the preacher cannot afford to give people his own ideas, but must be certain that he speaks to them the life-giving Word of God. Like Moses, the preacher is simply to report to the people what God has said. Therefore, expositional preaching is the only means of rightly carrying out this God-given task. It is the truth of God that is to be expounded. Much like one who testifies in a court of law, the preacher is to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But this begs the question, in the Scriptures do believers have confidence that they possess the words of the Lord?

⁵⁴ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 36.

The nature of Scripture. If God has chosen to reveal himself to his creatures by his spoken Word, and if he creates and sustains his chosen people by communicating his revealed will to them in the Scriptures, then believers must be confident that the Scriptures they possess are truly the revealed mind of God and not merely the thoughts of men. If Christians are to believe what has been asserted regarding the nature of God and the nature of the church, then the preacher must have the highest view of Scripture.

If the Bible were nothing more than the thoughts of men, then there would be no reason for exclusive commitment to expositional preaching. What difference would it make if the preacher were to stand and share his thoughts about God if he is explaining a book that is nothing more than some other men's thoughts about God? But if Scripture is the very words of God, one wonders why a preacher would consider delivering any other sermon than one that was expositional?

As stated earlier, Peter wrote that “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20-21). Likewise, Paul commanded young pastor Timothy to be “a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15) and to place his confidence solely in the Scriptures that are “breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16). Scripture is not simply a man-made document, but is the product of God putting his words into the minds and mouths of his prophets and apostles.

This theological conviction should compel the preacher to handle the Word in an expositional way. Derek Thomas wrote, “An expository ministry is the proper response to a God-breathed Scripture.”⁵⁵ John MacArthur's voice is even stronger: “The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preaching it expositionally.”⁵⁶ The

⁵⁵ Thomas, “Expository Preaching,” 74.

⁵⁶ John MacArthur, Jr., “The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching,” in

logic is simple and straightforward: if God has truly spoken through the biblical writers then believers need to “believe that God speaks through what he has spoken.”⁵⁷ The way that the congregation today hears God’s voice is when the preacher is careful to say what God has spoken, and the Scriptures alone contain the voice of God. John Stott argues that this is the conviction that is held by the apostles in their treatment of the Old Testament.

They introduce their quotations from the Old Testament with one or other of two formulas: Either “It stands written,” or “It says.” Paul could even ask the question “What does the Scripture say?” . . . How can you ask, “What does the Scripture say?” But the Scripture does speak. God speaks through what he has spoken.⁵⁸

Therefore, it is argued, if the preacher truly believes that all of Scripture is the inspired words of God, it should follow that he would both study the text and preach it in a way that reflects that theological commitment.⁵⁹ The only type of preaching that does this with such a level of devotion is expository.

One might argue, “But that was then, and this is now. We need to hear God speak today.” The answer to such an argument is that God’s Word is eternal, and God is speaking as much today through his revealed Word as when it was first written. This was certainly the view of the NT writers in their understanding of the OT.

Jesus himself had the highest view possible of the OT and saw it as applicable to his day and time as it was for its original audience. In Matthew 19, when asked by the Pharisees about divorce, Jesus answered them by saying, “Have you not read . . .” and then quoted Genesis 2:24 that had been written several thousand years earlier.

Later in the NT when Paul wrote the Corinthians regarding the issues they

Rediscovering Expository Preaching, ed. Richard L. Mayhue (Dallas: Word, 1992), 23.

⁵⁷ John R. W. Stott, “A Definition of Biblical Preaching,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 27.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁹ Some advocates would include a practical/pastoral defense at this point. Expository preaching displays before the congregants that the authority of Scripture is supreme for believer’s life. In addition, it models before the people how to rightly handle the Word of God for their own personal study.

faced, he pointed them to the book of Exodus and said, “now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did” (1 Cor 10:6). Maybe even more profound is the author’s use of OT texts in Hebrews. In Hebrews 3:7 he introduces a quote of Psalm 95 with the words, “as the Holy Spirit says.” What had been said thousands of years earlier was treated by the NT writer as if the Holy Spirit was presently speaking to the modern-day audience. Because God is eternal one would expect his Word to be eternal. God’s Word is for all his people of all time. This truth means that whatever point God was making to his people thousands of years ago is the same point that every believer needs to know and obey in every age.

With these theological points established, it could be argued that the only preaching that will honor God, serve his people, and relate rightly to the revealed Word of God is expositional. It is expository preaching that sets its goal to communicate exactly what God has said in the inspired Scripture to the people of God. Therefore, since believers derive their theology from Scripture, is that not enough evidence for the exclusivity of expositional preaching in the pulpit? In addition, with solid support from both church history and biblical theology, maybe the argument is settled. However, as strong as one may consider the historical and theological arguments to be supportive of the definition of expository preaching asserted earlier, it all seems for naught if one cannot point to examples of the practice of exposition in Scripture.

Is there sufficient evidence that preachers recorded in the Bible handled their own copies of the Scriptures in an expositional manner? If the Bible is the ultimate authority for the church and the only true source to guide the faith and practice of the church, then Christians must finally look to the Scriptures to settle this critical issue. It is only reasonable that if the theological convictions are true, a commitment to expository preaching would be found within the pages of Scripture itself.

Biblical Arguments in Defense of Expository Preaching

The most obvious question is whether examples of expository preaching are found within the Scriptures. At this point, it would be important to remember the definition being defended in this work. It is not being argued that expositional preaching is consecutive preaching, for example, but is preaching that begins with discovering the point of a biblical text, then makes that the central point of the sermon, and finally declares that truth in a way that the listener can both understand and apply it to his life.

While there are those who do not readily see examples in Scripture to support such a definition, several writers have put forth an affirmative argument. Some direct attention to the description of Jesus' teaching in the first movement of Luke's gospel as a sustained exposition of Isaiah 61:1-2.⁶⁰ Chapell uses the example of Jesus as he walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:27 reads, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Chapell clarifies that the word translated "explained" means "to unfold the meaning of something."⁶¹ This unfolding and explaining of the Scriptures "defines exposition's essentials."⁶² Going further, Chapell uses Nehemiah 8:5-8 to establish three elements of biblical exposition: "presentation of the Word . . . explanation of the Word . . . and exhortation based on the Word."⁶³ While Nehemiah 8:8 certainly supports the argument for expositional preaching, Chapell and other advocates for expository preaching point to more examples within Scripture.

I have discovered that Ezra is the biblical author most often appealed to as a model of exposition. While Nehemiah 8:5-8 gives a brief summary of Ezra's

⁶⁰ Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," 13.

⁶¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 86.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

commitment to the OT Scriptures, the book of Ezra provides more material for examination. Lawson calls Ezra 7:1-10 to be a “pattern for all preachers.”⁶⁴ Deuel shares his sentiment saying that “Ezra embodies an early and inspiring example for expositors of all ages” and “gives a complete picture of what an expositor should be and do.”⁶⁵ Lawson and Deuel both contend that Ezra 7:10, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel,” is the very commitment of the expositor.⁶⁶ Both men develop extensive arguments from Ezra to contend for a model of exposition in the Old Testament. This is helpful, but is there evidence found of preachers within the NT who could be considered expositors?

If the NT Scriptures give a picture of life in the early church, one should expect to find examples of commitment to exposition within its pages. Several proponents of expositional preaching have pointed to such examples. After Chapell argues for a pattern of exposition from Nehemiah 8:5-8, he then declares the OT pattern to “consistently reappear in New Testament practice.”⁶⁷ However, Chapell appears to merely assume exposition rather establish an argument for it. He makes the claim that the pattern reappears in the NT, but proceeds to briefly apply this to only two other NT passages. The groundwork laid for this argument is two and one-half pages.

Dever offers several NT examples of exposition. For example, Peter’s preaching at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 is a sermon where he “expounds portions of Joel, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110.”⁶⁸ In addition, Dever references Stephen’s sermon in Acts

⁶⁴ Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 83.

⁶⁵ David C. Deuel, “An Old Testament Pattern for Expository Preaching,” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 2, no. 2 (1991): 127.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.; Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 84.

⁶⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 45.

⁶⁸ Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 42.

7 along with the treatment of OT Scriptures in the book of Hebrews. However, these examinations are not in depth and only offer a few pages of discussion.

In Stott's classic work *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*, he defines and defends expositional preaching by pointing to both Jesus and NT apostles as examples. However, there are no lengthy examinations of any of those sermons preached in the NT.⁶⁹

This is not to say that there is no evidence found within the NT of expositional preaching or that the works of Chapell, Stott, Dever, Mohler and other proponents of expository preaching lack substance. The contributions of these men, along with others, has proved to be invaluable to understanding and championing expositional preaching. I seek to build upon their work and take it to the next level.

Void in the Literature

It is striking how little can be found in academic writing—even among those who are proponents of expository preaching—that labors to closely examine the biblical writers use of exposition. It is either assumed to be the practice of NT writers or relatively brief treatments are given of NT preachers to establish the case for exposition. My research has uncovered that a greater amount of material exists in defense of expositional preaching by pointing to historical and theological arguments. Therefore, a more thorough examination of a biblical argument appears to be in order.

One might suggest that there are not many examples of preaching within the NT to be able to offer extensive defenses for expository preaching. In other words, if there are very few NT examples of preaching, one should not expect lengthy discussions within the books that are arguing for expository preaching. Perhaps the historical and theological defenses simply carry more weight. However, I will contend that there is

⁶⁹ Stott, "A Definition of Biblical Preaching," 16-19.

significant evidence for expository preaching to be mined from the Scriptures.

Most of the biblical texts that are examined to establish a pattern for expositional preaching are found in narrative literature (e.g., Ezra 7–10, Neh 8, Luke 4, Acts 7). There is scant discussion or examination of the epistle of Hebrews in the defenses offered for expository preaching. This seems striking considering that many modern scholars believe Hebrews to be either a collection of sermons or one long sermon that would have been publicly read to a congregation. Lane writes, “Hebrews begins like a sermon.”⁷⁰ Further enhancing the argument for a biblical pattern of exposition, Gareth Lee Cockerill writes, “From the beginning to end this book is an expository 'sermon' that rests on careful Old Testament interpretation. The pastor quotes the OT, alludes to the OT, summarizes OT passages, recounts events from the lives of OT persons, and often echoes the idiom of the Greek OT.”⁷¹

Although some close examination of various biblical texts has been performed to better understand how specific biblical writers handle the Scriptures, significant work remains to be accomplished. This would especially be true in the book of Hebrews, which is definitely sermonic in nature. In light of this void, I intend to establish a definition of and defense for expositional preaching from an examination of several NT sermons that culminates in a careful study of preaching in the book of Hebrews.

⁷⁰ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1991), lxx.

⁷¹ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 18.

CHAPTER 2

A SURVEY OF VARIOUS BIBLICAL WRITERS’ EXPOSITION

Historical and theological defenses for expository preaching should be derived from a careful examination of Scripture. Therefore, if supporters correctly argue that exposition is either the best or most biblical way to preach, then it would seem likely to find clear examples of such preaching in God’s Word. However, some may resist or hesitate at the idea of elevating expository preaching as either the best or exclusive way of handling the Bible in the pulpit. Even those who encourage expository preaching often claim that clear biblical examples cannot support it.¹ On the other hand, some argue that a solid case can be made for expository preaching and point to multiple examples throughout Scripture.² Therefore, an overview of the various texts from both the Old and New Testaments that are used to define and defend expository preaching is needed.

Old Testament Texts Used to Define and Defend Expository Preaching

Before reviewing examples of preaching from within Scripture, it would be helpful to have a proper understanding of the differences between the preaching of then and the preaching of now. One of the earliest sermons within the OT is Moses’ charge to Israel found in Deuteronomy 31–33. While it is apparent that Moses’ sermon does not

¹ Greg R. Scharf, “Were the Apostles Expository Preachers? Old Testament Exposition in the Book of Acts,” *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 1 (2010): 65-93.

² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994); Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012); Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003); John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

expound any text, it could not be classified as anything other than a sermon to the people of God. The Deuteronomy sermon of Moses does not stand alone.

However, one cannot overlook the fact that recorded sermons in the OT do not fit within the modern understanding of exposition.³ Whether it be Joshua's sermon to the people before entering Canaan (Josh 23:2-16), King Solomon's message at the dedication of the temple (2 Chr 6:1-42), or the variety of methods found in the preaching of the prophets (Jer 19:1-13; Isa 14:4-23; Ezek 4:1-17), the many forms of OT preaching do not perfectly conform to modern-day exposition. Even when OT prophets referenced other Scripture, the quotations were not used as the basis for a discussion of that text. Instead, they often functioned to merely support their arguments (Mal 3:7; Zech 1:3).

Some conclude that the approach to preaching should be primarily modeled after the OT inductive model that focuses on the current circumstances or problems facing the listeners rather than the deductive method found in most expository preaching today. For example, Ralph and Greg Lewis argue that this approach follows "most preaching documented in the Bible and the style of the Bible itself as God's inductive communication with humankind."⁴ However, not everyone draws this conclusion.

In stark contrast, Mohler begins with an OT text (Deut 4:32-40) as his theological argument for expository preaching and declares, "According to the Bible, exposition is preaching. And preaching is exposition."⁵ Therefore, how does one respond to such diverse opinions and what is the modern preacher to conclude regarding the

³ This work is centered primarily upon preaching that expounds a text of Scripture and seeks to expose the meaning of that text. The point is not to say that critical elements within preaching that are found in examples of OT sermons are unimportant to or absent from expository preaching. For example, the exhortation that is found within the preaching in the OT or the call to respond in obedience to God's Word should be a part of all preaching, expository or otherwise.

⁴ Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1983), 163.

⁵ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 50.

preaching found within the OT?

Preaching in the Prophetic Age

First, the supposed absence of exposition in the OT should neither cast suspicion or aspersion upon expository preaching. The place one must begin is to understand that the writers in the OT were delivering revelation from God not merely expounding pre-existing revelation. Even the sermons from OT preachers referenced above were part of divine revelation. As 2 Peter 1:21 declares, they were men who “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, one could argue that they did not use a text because they were carried along by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were writing the text that now possessed in the bible. This could never be said of modern preachers.⁶ As Robert Allen writes regarding OT preachers, “Discovering that they did not build their sermon on the exegesis of previously existing Scripture should not affect methodology of contemporary sermon preparation because today’s preacher does not speak by inspiration.”⁷

Simply put, the modern preacher has a different starting point than most of the preachers found in the Bible. It is true that both ancient and modern preachers declare the Word of the Lord. However, ancient preachers received that word from direct revelation, while the sermon of the contemporary preacher solely depends upon the revelation “that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The fact that the canon is now closed and direct revelation has ceased, one should expect differences in much of the preaching found within Scripture and that behind pulpits in the church today.

⁶ This, of course, presupposes a closed canon of revealed Scripture. One’s view of Scripture is so intertwined with his view of preaching that the two necessarily cannot be separated.

⁷ Robert A. Allen, “The Expository Sermon—Cultural or Biblical?,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 213.

However, this does not mean that there are no examples in Scripture of preaching that is similar to our modern era.

Second, although much of the preaching in Scripture does not align with modern exposition, that does not preclude its presence within the Bible. Stitzinger has offered a helpful contribution to this discussion by identifying two primary forms of preaching in Scripture. He writes that preaching in the Bible can be described as either “revelatory preaching” or “explanatory preaching.”⁸ Understanding this distinction can bring clarity when comparing the preaching recorded in Scripture and the preaching in modern pulpits.

The sermons of those who were given the task of proclaiming God’s Word that was revealed to them as they spoke are what Stitzinger calls “revelatory preaching.” Therefore, Moses’s sermon in Deuteronomy 31–33 is direct revelation from God rather than the exposition of a text of Scripture previously revealed. The modern preacher cannot use this example of Moses as a model for his own preaching—in the sense of speaking without expounding a text of Scripture⁹—because he does not receive direct revelation from God. The task of today’s preacher is to expound upon and explain the meaning of existing revelation.

Sermons which essentially explain a previously received biblical text so that it can be rightly understood are classified by Stitzinger as “explanatory preaching.” Although he did not read or reference a text, Joshua’s sermon at Shechem is an example of expounding previous revelation (Josh 24:2-27). There Joshua recounts for the people of Israel all that God had done for them as they reached the edge of the land of Canaan. The exact details of his sermon are directly connected to the established revelation

⁸ James F. Stitzinger, “The History of Expository Preaching,” *The Masters Seminary Journal* 3, no. 1 (1992): 8.

⁹ It should again be duly noted that much can be learned about preaching from even sermons of those who were prophets receiving a direct revelation from God. One can learn and implement much from the tremendous clarity, boldness, exhortation, and call to obedience found within “revelatory preaching.”

recorded within the Pentateuch. Direct quotes from Moses' writings are found throughout Joshua's sermon. For example, in Joshua 24:13 he speaks of God giving the people of Israel "cities that you had not built," which comes directly from Deuteronomy 6:10. At the same time, the sermon was not purely an explanation of a biblical text, it was at least a mixture of new revelation (Josh 24:19) and expounding established revelation.

However, throughout the OT God's people need to have someone expound upon or explain in the present the body of revelation given to them in the past. This is exemplified during the reign of King Josiah when he gave the command to repair the house of the Lord (2 Kgs 22–23). In the midst of the repairs, the "Book of the Law" was found, brought, and read to King Josiah (22:8-11). Upon hearing it read, Josiah's response was one of brokenness due to the realization of Israel's failure to obey what God had previously commanded in his revealed Word. The king gathered the people and read to them the Word of God (23:1-2). Josiah then calls upon the people to respond to what they have heard and to commit themselves to "perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book" (23:3).

While there is no mention of a detailed explanation given in regard to the meaning of what was read from God's Word, it would seem likely that the text would have been expounded when one examines how the people applied what they heard.¹⁰ For example, Josiah set out to obliterate all the false worship that had invaded the lives of God's people. Either way, whether the texts read needed to be expounded or were self-evident, it was the reading of Scripture that brought about the reformation and revival within the land of Israel under the leadership of King Josiah. On that day, the people did not need nor received a new revelation from God, but acted upon the revelation that they

¹⁰ In 2 Kgs 23:3, the king calls upon the people in response to the proclamation of the Word of God to "perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book," and then it is said, "all the people joined in the covenant"; 2 Kgs 23:4-23 records the application of their commitment that included tearing down all other forms of pagan worship that had infiltrated the land (vv. 4-20), observing the Passover as commanded by God (vv. 21-23), and driving out the "mediums and the necromancers" that stood in opposition to God's Law.

had already received. Still yet, this narrative account does not provide a clear insight into exactly how the reading of God’s Word was explained on that day. If a stronger argument is to be made in the OT, further examination is needed.

An OT Example of Biblical Exposition

As one progresses through the OT narrative of Israel’s history, another revival occurred after their return from Babylonian exile. Once again, it was a recommitment to the Word of God revealed in the past that brought revival to God’s people in the present. Several modern proponents of expository preaching point to the ministry of Ezra to establish an OT argument for expository preaching. Chapell calls the account of Ezra “the best description of ancient exposition”¹¹ and Lawson declares Ezra to be “one biblical expositor who stands out as worthy of emulation.”¹² Therefore, an examination of Ezra 7:1-10 and Nehemiah 8:5-8 are critical in the debate surrounding expository preaching.

Ezra 7:1-10. In the book of Ezra, God raised up two men to lead the Israelites back to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra, a great revival occurred among God’s people. The pinnacle of revival came under the ministry of Ezra who led the people back to a restoration of God’s Word in their lives (Ezra 7–10). Chapter seven calls Ezra a “scribe skilled in the Law of Moses” (v. 6) and describes his personal commitment to the Scriptures that would be central to his ministry to God’s people: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel” (v. 10). Ezra was a priest who was completely devoted to studying, practicing, and teaching the Scriptures.

It should be noted that Ezra was not functioning in the role of prophet. He was not receiving direct revelation from God, but had committed himself to the careful study

¹¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 86.

¹² Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 83.

of God’s Word previously delivered to the people of Israel. Ezra dedicated his ministry to a careful study of God’s Word that would include “investigating its truths . . . striving to understand its meaning, and being concerned to grasp its message.”¹³ He then dedicated himself to living in obedience to the truths of Scripture with the ultimate goal of teaching God’s Word to the people of Israel. Therefore, the teaching ministry of Ezra is perhaps the closest OT example that is equivalent to the task of the preacher today. How did Ezra—who already possessed the previously revealed Word of God—handle the Scriptures when teaching Israel? Nehemiah 8:1-8 sheds greater light on that question.

Nehemiah 8:1-8. Verse one describes a solemn setting as the people of Israel “gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate” (v. 1). Ezra took the book of the Law of Moses and brought it before the people near the rebuilt temple. The description sounds much like what one would witness in many evangelical churches today as the pastor prepares to deliver his sermon. Ezra stepped forward with the Scriptures in hand (v. 2), stood on a wooden platform from which he would speak (v. 4), opened the Scriptures in the presence of the people (v. 5), prayed to the Lord as the people bowed their heads in worship (v. 6), and read the Scriptures (v. 8). The climax of this solemn moment is described in Nehemiah 8:8: “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” This “reading” appears to be more than a simple reciting of the text. The Hebrew word translated “read” is the same term used in Jonah 3:4 to describe Jonah’s preaching in Nineveh, which is why it “is also marked as a term for prophetic proclamation.”¹⁴ Therefore, this description is a passionate communication of the Word of God to the people of God by the messenger of God. Furthermore, not only was the text proclaimed,

¹³ Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

but Nehemiah also said that Ezra and the Levites “gave the sense” of what was read “so that the people understood the reading” (v. 8). This recounting of Ezra’s ministry gives the sense of a sermon. The Scriptures are read, explained, and the people are exhorted to understand and apply it to their lives. With conviction, Chapell declares this passage to be “the best description of ancient exposition,” and uses the three elements found in Nehemiah 8:8 (i.e., Word Presentation, Word Explanation, Word Exhortation) as the pattern for proper biblical exposition.¹⁵ However, not all would agree with Chapell’s definitive conclusion.

Some scholars view the language of verse eight to simply be translating the text so that the Jews who did not speak Hebrew could understand. Charles Fensham explains: “We must recognize that the Jews who spoke Aramaic needed someone to translate the Hebrew of the law for them in their own vernacular.”¹⁶ In other words, the Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity speaking Aramaic, and Ezra’s work was to merely translate the reading of the text rather than to teach its meaning.¹⁷ Therefore, the people were given the “sense” of what the translation into Aramaic would be so that the Israelites “understood” what the text said in their language.

While this interpretation of the text is quite possible, it does not appear to be the most probable. The emphasis of the passage seems to communicate far more than an understanding in one’s own language. It is stated six times in chapter eight that either the people “understood” or had “understanding” of what was being read (vv. 2-3, 7-8, 12-13). Rejecting the idea that the emphasis is nothing more than translation, H. G. M. Williamson writes, “this all leads to the climax of this portion of the chapter, that the

¹⁵ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 86. Lawson also argues for the description of Ezra’s ministry to be the pattern for preaching: See Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 92-97.

¹⁶ F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 217.

¹⁷ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 226.

people ‘understood the reading.’”¹⁸ Also, when the day concludes, it is said that the people went away “rejoicing, because they had understood the words declared to them” (v. 12). It seems unlikely that the people would have had this type of response to a mere translation of the text into their language.

Finally, when Nehemiah 8:8 is coupled with the description of Ezra’s ministry in Ezra 7:10, it is more plausible that the means by which Ezra was “giving the sense” of the text, so the “people understood,” was by teaching them the true meaning of the text. Ezra had devoted his life to studying the Law of the LORD and to teaching the people of Israel. As Derek Kidner concludes, the language used “could denote either that the reading was well articulated or that the law was read and expounded section by section. Either of these would be appropriate; probably both were true.”¹⁹

Conclusion

There is not a significant amount of material within the OT by which to establish a defense or to reach a precise definition of expository preaching. As stated, this should not necessarily be alarming since much of the OT was the receiving of direct revelation rather than expounding established Scripture. Therefore, the vast majority of proclamation in the OT fits in the category of revelatory preaching rather than explanatory preaching, which marks a significant difference from preaching today.

At the same time, Ezra stands as a shining example of a ministry that possessed the very tenets of biblical exposition. He began with a high view of Scripture, believing it to be the will of God. This is evidenced by the dedication of his life to study it, live in obedience to it, and teach its truths to God’s people. Furthermore, the weight of the

¹⁸ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1985), 291.

¹⁹ Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 116.

evidence indicates that his teaching helped others come to understand the meaning of the Scriptures that produced a joy and desire to continue to learn and study God's Word (Neh 8:8-13).

While the ministry of Ezra certainly bears the marks of one who would be labeled as an expositor today, it does not appear to be an open and shut case. If the example of Ezra were all there was, it would be difficult to reach a precise definition and an irrefutable defense for expository preaching. One deficiency is that this is simply a narrative that offers descriptions of Ezra's teaching, but does not present the specific instruction itself. Furthermore, as demonstrated, those descriptions are open to interpretation themselves.

If one possessed the actual content of Ezra's teaching and how he expounded the text he read, perhaps a stronger case could be made. The reality is there is no objective proof of how closely he stuck to the text and whether the meaning he gave to the text followed its original intent, which is a central principle of those who promote expository preaching. This exposes a weakness in trying to build a defense for and definition of expository preaching from a narrative passage that gives general descriptions of what the preacher did but doesn't give the content of the sermon itself. However, proponents of expository preaching do not hang the entire argument upon the peg of Ezra's ministry. They proceed to the NT to examine the issue further, which is where this study will advance as well.

New Testament Texts Used to Define and Defend Expository Preaching

As previously discussed, preachers today are not OT prophets and cannot emulate most of the preaching found in the OT. The vast majority of preaching recorded in the Hebrew text is "revelatory preaching." That is to say, the prophets were not preaching from an established text but were writing the text under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. With the NT, a similar problem arises. As Sidney Greidanus writes,

“Preachers today are neither Old Testament prophets nor New Testament apostles.”²⁰ The preacher today is not receiving a direct message from God but finds his message within the previously recorded pages of Scripture. Therefore, the same caution needs to be applied when examining the sermons of the NT as those of the OT. Nevertheless, various NT examples are given to defend and define expository preaching. The place to begin is with Jesus’ preaching.

The Preaching of Jesus

If caution is needed when examining the sermons of OT prophets and NT apostles, surely discretion needs to be employed concerning Jesus’ preaching. However, there is seemingly little care used in pointing to Jesus as a model for preachers today. For example, some claim that Jesus’ pattern was not to preach expository sermons that focused on a text of Scripture. Rather than starting with Scripture, Rick Ezell argues, “Jesus started with the interests of his students. . . . Like a good salesperson, Christ started with the needs of the customers, not the product to be sold. . . . Jesus still provides the best model for preaching.”²¹

That is shortsighted. The reality is Jesus always referred to Scripture as he taught and preached and was the basis for his entire ministry. Whether it be his encounter with the Devil (Luke 4:1-7) or his interaction with the Pharisees (Matt 12:3), Scripture was always front and center in the conversation. For example, when asked about divorce, Jesus referenced Genesis 2:24 as the basis for understanding the permanence of the marriage covenant. He repeatedly appealed to the OT Scriptures to make his points: “as the Scripture has said” (John 7:38), “Scripture must be fulfilled” (Luke 22:37), and “have

²⁰ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 7.

²¹ Rick Ezell, *Hitting a Moving Target: Preaching to the Changing Needs of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 85.

you not read this Scripture” (Mark 12:10). After his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus opened the Scriptures to explain to the bewildered disciples how the Messiah must suffer, die, and rise again (Luke 24:27-32).

Others point to Jesus’ unique use of parables as a model for today’s preacher. Calvin Miller writes, “Jesus’ own preaching seems to indicate that he told stories sandwiched in between the use of other forms of reasoning.”²² Pastor of Saddleback Community Church, Rick Warren, declares, “the Bible shows that storytelling was Jesus’ favorite technique when speaking to the crowd.”²³

However, while it is true that Jesus spent much of his ministry communicating in parables, he did not begin his preaching ministry in that way. When he first taught with a parable, even his disciples inquired about this new form of teaching (Matt 13:10). Jesus did not tell his disciples that he was now preaching in parables to provide greater clarity to his sermons or that he had discovered a new preaching tool to better contextualize the message for the crowds. In fact, it was just the opposite. Jesus declared, “This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matt 13:13). According to Jesus, he began using parables as partially an act of judgment upon unbelieving Israel. Because they had refused to receive him for who he was, the truth would be hidden from them in parables and given to those who had spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear.

Therefore, Jesus’ reasoning for speaking in parables was theological, not methodological. This is not to say the use of stories in sermons is wrong or that one must preach cold and unillustrated theological facts to his listeners. The point is that Scripture itself does not support a simplistic statement like, “Jesus preached by telling stories, and

²² Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 149.

²³ Rick Warren, “How to Preach Like Jesus (Part 3): Keep it Interesting and Simple,” [pastors.com](http://pastors.com/preach-like-jesus-3/), last modified July 24, 2015, <http://pastors.com/preach-like-jesus-3/>

modern preachers should follow that example.” One needs to think more deeply.

Consider Matthew’s account of the earlier days of Jesus’ ministry. The gospel writer records what might be the most famous sermon ever delivered, The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). There Jesus’ sermon is not one comprised of parables, but mostly the declaration of propositional truth. However, confusion can occur even at this point. Nowhere in this sermon does Jesus fully exposit any biblical text. Therefore, if Jesus preached sermons without doing an exposition of a text of Scripture, why can the modern preacher not follow his example? The most straightforward answer to this question is that no other human preacher is Jesus. His preaching should be expected to be unique because he was unique.

Jesus is in a class by himself. For example, no preacher today would ever presume to stand in his pulpit and say the words—that Jesus did in his Sermon on the Mount—”You have heard that it was said,” followed by a quote of Scripture, and then proclaim, “but I say to you.” If any preacher did that today, it should be the end of his preaching ministry.

Why was Jesus able to preach like that when today’s preacher cannot? Simply put, he was God. When Jesus preached, he did not just speak the Word of God, but because he was the Word of God (John 1:1), it could be rightly said that the words he spoke were the very words of God. Therefore, it should not be surprising that most of the recorded preaching of Jesus would be fundamentally “revelatory” as opposed to “explanatory.” This is not to say that Jesus, like an OT prophet, was receiving revelation from God, but that he was speaking revelation as God. In explaining why preachers today should not attempt to preach like Jesus, Herschel York has stated it well: “We must admit that Jesus, as the sovereign Creator of this universe, had intents, information, and ability that we do not have.”²⁴

²⁴ Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring*

However, this does not mean that there are no examples of Jesus' preaching or teaching that fit the category of biblical exposition. As mentioned earlier, Luke 24 recounts Jesus' exchange with two disciples on the Emmaus road who were confused by Jesus' death and the disappearance of his body from the tomb. Jesus addressed their confusion with what some call an example of exposition.

Luke writes, "And beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scripture the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Jesus expounded the Scriptures and interpreted the meaning of those texts for the disciples so that they could understand that the events of Jesus' death and resurrection were a fulfillment of God's prophetic Word. In line with the earlier discussion, the language employed by the text would classify this sermon as "explanatory," as opposed to "revelatory." For some, it is not a far stretch to view this to be equivalent to an expository sermon.²⁵ I agree with that assessment. However, based on nothing more than general descriptions of narrative in Luke 24:27, it seems difficult to be overly dogmatic to define Jesus as an expositor according to many modern definitions.

Perhaps the best example of a sermon by Jesus that most closely displays the characteristic of an expository sermon is found in Luke 4:16-28 when Jesus visited his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. The synagogue was at the center of Jewish worship in Jesus' day and the focus was on the "reading and exposition of Scripture."²⁶ Attending the synagogue on the Sabbath day was the routine for Jesus (Luke 4:16). Joel Green argues that Luke's language not only indicates Jesus' attendance at the synagogue on the Sabbath but "also that it was his habit to take the role of the one who read and expounded

Approach to Engaging Exposition (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 15.

²⁵ Dever and Gilbert, *Preach*, 42; Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 30.

²⁶ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 209.

the Scriptures.”²⁷ Even if this had not been the case before this particular day, it appears that it was at the least the beginning of a pattern of his ministry to be “preaching in the synagogues of Judea” (Luke 4:44). This would suggest the account given in Luke 4:16-21 is likely paradigmatic for Jesus’ attendance at the synagogue and would likely reflect how he normally taught in that setting.

On this particular Sabbath, as was the custom²⁸ for the one reading Scripture in the synagogue, Jesus stood up to read from the ancient scroll. Although Luke 4:17 says the scroll was given to him, it says Jesus “found the place where it was written,” which would indicate that he chose the text from which he would read and then expound. The pericope from which Jesus read was Isaiah 61:1-2, and after he read the text, he sat down as the crowd anxiously waited for him to speak. Luke gives what appears to be a brief statement from Jesus’ sermon: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21). Both the phrase “he began to say to them” (v. 21) and the description of the crowd’s response saying they “marveled at the gracious words” (v. 22) indicate Jesus said much more than what Luke recorded.²⁹ It is unlikely that Jesus only gave a one sentence exposition, but that the recorded statement of fulfillment was the climax of a lengthier exposition. Even so, is there indication that Jesus handled the OT text in a way that is consistent with expository preaching? This requires an examination of Isaiah 61.

The context surrounding Isaiah 61 is significant. In chapter 60, the prophet Isaiah described the future glory of Israel when the Messiah would come to deliver them from all oppression and make them a great nation that is a light to the world. At great length, Isaiah expounded the blessings that the people of God will enjoy when the

²⁷ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 209.

²⁸ For a more detailed description of specific elements of Sabbath synagogue worship in first-century Judaism, see Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 155.

²⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 412.

Messiah comes. All of these blessings would be accomplished when God sends the Servant/Messiah as pictured throughout Isaiah’s prophecy (42:1-9; 49:1-9; 50:4-9; 52:13–53:12). Chapter 61 opens with the voice of the Servant/Messiah—the Anointed One. Describing the setting, John Oswalt writes, “Having spoken in the preceding chapter of the blessings that the city of God will enjoy, the prophet now turns to speak of the one who will bring those blessings.”³⁰ In these verses, the Servant/Messiah speaks about himself and what would characterize his ministry.

When he comes, the Messiah would bring good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives. All of this ultimately points to spiritual blessings and not merely the material. The language of being poor, brokenhearted, and in captivity was not limited to the temporal, but directed toward “all who are distressed and in trouble for any reason, including sin.”³¹ To those who are broken, the Messiah will come with “good news!” God assigned him for these tasks, and he will come in the power of the Spirit to accomplish that for which he was sent. The people of Israel longed for the day when the words of Isaiah 61 would be fulfilled, which is exactly how they understood the text, as Klyne Snodgrass explains: “When people heard Isaiah 61, they understood it as a classic text describing end-time salvation.”³²

Therefore, when Jesus declared, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” he was making the bold assertion that he is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke. Even the reaction of the crowd indicated that Jesus was applying the passage according to the prophet Isaiah’s intended meaning, and how the people of Israel had interpreted it. The prophet Isaiah had declared that the Messiah would come to

³⁰ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*. Robert L. Hubbard, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 563-4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Klyne Snodgrass, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 47.

announce “good news,” that the people of Israel’s past circumstances would change, and a new period of history was about to begin.³³ Now on that Sabbath day, Jesus sat in a Nazareth synagogue and declared himself to be the Anointed One sent by God to bring all this to pass. The crowd was shocked because Jesus expounded the text and applied it to himself according to the precise original teaching of Isaiah.

Jesus took an established text of Scripture, read it, expounded its original meaning, pointed to himself as the fulfillment of the promises made by God, and applied it to his audience. Also, Jesus’ preaching led the people to a response, albeit one of rejection. Nonetheless, the crowd certainly understood what Jesus taught, the application he made, and were brought to a response.

Is this not consistent with expository preaching? Although I would answer that question affirmatively and see sufficient evidence to classify Jesus’ sermon as expositional, I concede that not all agree. Once again, so many gaps need to be filled because a complete text of Jesus’ sermon is not possessed, but merely a one-sentence summation in the midst of a narrative passage. For many, this is likely not compelling enough to declare Jesus to be an expositor nor bring them to accept the claim that all modern preachers should embrace expository preaching.

The next logical step would be to examine the preaching of those who followed Jesus. Mark writes in his gospel that Jesus “appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). Therefore, an understanding of the preaching of the apostolic era is in order.

Preaching in the Apostolic Era

In Acts 10:42, Peter declared that he and the other apostles were commissioned by Jesus to preach the gospel and declare him to be the one whom God appointed as final

³³ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 634.

judge of mankind. He added that their message of forgiveness of sins, which can only be found in Christ, was based on the witness of the OT prophets (Acts 10:43). Therefore, the apostles' preaching was deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures.

However, the preaching of the apostles is often used to criticize contemporary expository preaching. One criticism is that the apostolic example does not warrant it.³⁴ In other words, when the apostles used the OT texts, they often did so in ways that would be considered by some to be inconsistent with the principles of expository preaching. For example, Morna Hooker makes a bold claim about the preaching of the apostles:

A study of their methods of exegesis must surely make any twentieth-century preacher uncomfortable, for they tear passages out of context, use allegory or typology to give old stories new meanings, contradict the plain meaning of the text, find references to Christ in passages where the original authors certainly never intended any, and adapt or even alter the wording in order to make it yield the meaning they require. Often one is left exclaiming: whatever the passage from the Old Testament originally meant, it certainly was not this!³⁵

In Acts, Luke provides several samples of preaching in the early church. He records sermons by Peter (2:14-28; 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-43), Stephen (7:2-53), Philip (8:26-33), and Paul (13:16-41; 17:2-3; 22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 26:1-23; 28:25-28).³⁶ Plenty of allusions to or quotations of Scripture exist, as well as recounting of Israel's history, that are solely based on the OT text found in most of these sermons. However, Luke does not record one sermon where the preacher is described as quoting or reading Scripture and then simply giving a detailed explanation of the original meaning of the text.

³⁴ Scharf, "Were the Apostles Expository Preachers?," 65.

³⁵ Morna D. Hooker, "Beyond the Things That Are Written? Saint Paul's Use of Scripture," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 279.

³⁶ These examples have been chosen because they most closely fit to possessing the elements of a sermon. Luke records several other "speeches" that would scarcely be samples of preaching. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Preaching in the Apostolic and Subapostolic Age," in *Preaching in the Patristic Age*, ed. David G. Hunter (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 26.

There is no question that the apostles boldly preached Jesus as the Christ and used OT texts to defend their conclusions. They often cited passages to bolster their eyewitness accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus and evidenced a firm commitment, reverence, and dependence upon the OT Scriptures in their preaching. For example, when Paul went to minister in Thessalonica, it was his custom to go the synagogue where “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’” (Acts 17:2-3). However, can their preaching be described as expositional?

One advocate who is in favor of expository preaching, Greg Scharf, writes the following as he examines this question: “So, were the apostles expository preachers? If by that question we are asking whether they always selected a discernable thought unit from the OT and drove home to their first century listeners what the text’s human author intended to say to his initial hearers, the answer is ‘No.’”³⁷ Scharf’s recommendation is to allow for a broader understanding for defining expository preaching and offers several suggestions.³⁸

Others contend that although the sermons in Acts may not look exactly like those of a modern preacher, they are expositional. For example, Dever references Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 and says it “exposes the meaning of the biblical texts and exhorts the listeners to act on them.”³⁹

Therefore, what conclusion is to be drawn from the reality that the preaching of the apostles recorded in Acts often looks very different from modern sermons and is it a correct assessment to define it as expositional?⁴⁰ A closer look at a sermon recorded in

³⁷ Scharf, “Were the Apostles Expository Preachers?,” 89.

³⁸ Scharf, “Were the Apostles Expository Preachers?,” 88.

³⁹ Dever and Gilbert, *Preach*, 42.

⁴⁰ Much has been written about the broader topic of the general use of OT texts by NT writers.

the book of Acts may give clearer insight to these questions. For that, one of the most well-known sermons in all of Acts will be examined—Peter’s sermon at Pentecost.

Peter’s use of OT texts in Acts 2:14-28. On the day of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples as Jesus promised just before his departure in Acts 1:9. As they were filled with the Spirit, they miraculously began to speak in tongues. Some were amazed at the disciples’ ability to speak in languages foreign to their Galilean roots, while others mocked what was happening and viewed the manifestation of the Spirit to be nothing more than an expression of drunkenness. At this point, Peter stood up and began to preach. His sermon used Joel 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110 to explain what happened that very day.

Peter addressed the crowd’s wrong interpretation of the events and declared that they were not witnessing people drunk with wine, but those who had received the pouring out of the Spirit as promised by God through the prophet Joel. The language that Peter used is unambiguous. He essentially said in verse 16, “this is that” (*touto estin*). Peter was emphatically saying to the crowd, “*this* Pentecost event you are witnessing is *that* which Joel prophesied.” This is nothing less than fulfillment language and begs the question, did Peter use Joel 2:28-32 in a manner consistent with biblical exposition or simply applied it to fit his purposes for the moment? Before examining how Peter connected the Pentecost event (the “this”) with the OT prophecy of Joel (the “that”), a brief review of the original context and meaning of Joel 2:28-32 is necessary.

While the scope of this study does not allow for discussion on this issue, one should be aware of the debate. Some scholars argue that because NT authors were inspired, they had the right to use the OT texts differently than the standards of modern preachers. See Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). Others reject the idea that the apostles employed a hermeneutic that cannot be followed today and contend that the contemporary preacher can exegete and do theology just as the apostles did. See G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus’ and the Apostles’ Exegetical Method,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 387-404. For essays from various views on this topic, see Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?*

The original context and meaning of Joel 2:28-32. In chapter one of Joel, the prophet calls Judah to a time of mourning in response to a devastating plague of locusts⁴¹ that had ravaged the nation. Although locust plagues were common in the land of Judah, Joel’s description of this particular plague is especially horrifying (1:4).

In response to this great tragedy, the people of Judah needed to turn to the Lord. Tragically, the very elements necessary to bring offerings to the Lord had been destroyed in the wake of the plague (1:9-10). What should ultimately cause the nation to mourn was not that they themselves did not have enough to eat or drink and faced starvation, but that they lacked what was required to worship Yahweh rightly. The priests did not have the required offerings to bring to the Lord (1:13). This meant that the nation could not correctly approach Yahweh at the very time she needed him the most. Therefore, Joel called upon the priests to lead in a solemn fast so they could cry in repentance to the Lord.⁴²

It is at this point that the dominant theme of “the day of the LORD” appears, which is frequently referenced in the OT—particularly in the Prophets. It refers to a future time of judgment that the Lord will carry out upon his enemies. Leslie Allen describes “the day of the LORD” as a “future period, when moral debts would be settled and Yahweh openly revealed to all as the upholder of right and justice and the victor over sin and violence.”⁴³ The people of Judah should readily know that a locust plague evidenced God’s judgment (Deut 28), and it had in the past been a harbinger of worse

⁴¹ Some scholars view this as a literal plague of locusts, while others understand it to be a metaphorical language used to describe a human army. That debate is irrelevant to the discussion at hand. The interpretation I adopt is that of a literal locust plague. For a thorough review of this question, see Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1989). and Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

⁴² In Israel’s history, such fasts had indicated national repentance (see 1 Sam 7:6; Neh 9:1-2; Jer 36:9)

⁴³ Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 61.

destruction in the future (Exod 10–11). Therefore, Joel saw that the locust plague pointed to something coming that was far worse. After he recapped the devastating results of their current crisis (1:16-20), Joel sounded the alarm to warn that the present tragedy pointed to a greater spiritual carnage that would come with the “day of the LORD” (2:1-11). He even employed the same language of a plague of locusts while he described it with far greater intensity. The real and present pain Judah felt could not even begin to compare with what awaited those who would suffer God’s ultimate judgment at the “day of the LORD.” The prophet Joel painted a picture of the nation standing on the brink of complete disaster unless it turned back to God in repentance.⁴⁴

In Joel 2:18, the prophet made a dramatic shift from judgment to blessing. If the people would sincerely repent, the Lord would be merciful and would work in a mighty way on behalf of his people that would be the cause of great rejoicing for the great things he has done (vv. 21-23). The blessings of restoration would far exceed the losses that had been suffered in the locust plague (v. 25), and a bumper harvest would be enjoyed by God’s people that would demonstrate his care for them. All of this served to remind Israel that they should put their hope and trust in none other than God (vv. 26-27). In addition, as wonderful as this promise from God was, a more significant day was coming when the material blessings would pale in comparison to the spiritual blessings that he would bestow upon his people. This is the context for Joel’s words in 2:28-32.

The blessings God had planned in the future for his people far exceeded even the restoration that he promised for them now if they would repent. Joel turned to address a future time when God promised to do a more exceptional work when he will pour out his Spirit upon his people. The prophet said, “And it shall come to pass afterward.” This is not a consecutive continuance of the blessings described in 2:18-27, but the word “afterward” is a “conjunctive formula that points to prophetic promises for a more distant

⁴⁴ Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 60.

time.”⁴⁵ In other words, while 2:18-27 speaks of the restoration of old damage, 2:28-32 addresses the inauguration of a new era in God’s dealings with his people.⁴⁶

There is a glorious day coming that will be like nothing God’s people had ever seen. It will not be exemplified in abundant crops, but the lavish outpouring of God’s Spirit. Previously, the Spirit of God was not given to all, liberally or otherwise. Sometimes it was bestowed upon certain individuals empowered by God, at specific times for specific tasks (e.g., Bezalel in Exod 35:30-31; Jephthah in Judg 11:29; Samson in Judg 14:6). Usually the Spirit was bestowed upon those who God appointed to lead the people, such as a prophet (1 Sam 10:6), a king (1 Sam 16:13-14), or ultimately the Messiah (Isa 11:2). In the past, God put his Spirit on particular individuals, but in the coming age God would pour out his Spirit upon all his people.⁴⁷

However, not only is a great day of blessing coming, but there is also a time of judgment foreseen that the prophet called “the great and awesome day of the LORD” (v. 31). The events of that day will be as dreadful for God’s enemies as the pouring out of the Spirit will be wonderful for God’s people. The coming judgment is described in the severest of apocalyptic terms—blood, fire, darkness—which are all symbols of God’s judgment presented throughout the OT. The descriptions of the coming judgment, even the images of the disfigurement of the sun and moon, would be terrifying to the ear.

Nevertheless, even with this coming judgment, a way of escape would be provided. The means of rescue was offered for “everyone who calls on the name of the LORD” (v. 32). The act of calling on the name of the Lord is pictured in the OT as

⁴⁵ Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 65.

⁴⁶ David Allan Hubbard, *Joel & Amos: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 68.

⁴⁷ The widespread dispersion of the Spirit would not have been utterly foreign to God’s people. The prophet Isaiah also spoke of a day when the Spirit of God would be “poured upon us” to create a new people of God (Isa 32:14-18). Moses desired that God would put his Spirit on all of his people (Num 11:29). Joel clarifies the fuller meaning of the dispersion of the Spirit. It will be bestowed not only upon religious or political leadership, but all God’s people regardless of status.

invoking his name, praying for his help, and expressing an allegiance that exemplified one belonged to him (Gen 12:8; 2 Kgs 5:11; Isa 44:5). Anyone who would repent and call upon the name of the Lord would be saved from this great judgment.

The order in Joel's prophetic word is clear. First, a day will come when God will pour out his Spirit upon all his people and give them a prophetic voice. That would be followed by the "great and awesome day of the LORD" when God's final judgment would come upon all of God's enemies. Finally, anyone could escape that final judgment if he would repent and give his full allegiance to the Lord. David Prior makes a connection between these two events. He writes that the giving of the Spirit was to "strengthen the people of God to take up a position of 'prophetic leadership' to warn the world that it is heading for an apocalyptic day of final reckoning."⁴⁸

In summary, Joel wrote to warn his audience about a coming day in which God would bring final judgment upon the world. The prophet compared this future devastating judgment to a horrific locust plague that had swept through the land leaving the people destitute. Joel warned the people that unless they turned back to Yahweh with wholehearted repentance, the devastating judgment would overtake them. If they repented, God would show mercy and restore his blessings to them abundantly. By their repentance, they would obtain a reprieve from that present day of judgment. There are only two options, blessing or judgment.

Ultimately, in the mind of the prophet⁴⁹, all of this pointed to a future time promised by God when he would give a greater blessing to his people—the pouring out of the Spirit. This would be followed by a far greater day of judgment, namely, "the great and awesome day of the LORD." Before that dreadful day, God would liberally pour out

⁴⁸ David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah, & Habakkuk: Listening to the Voice of God*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 76.

⁴⁹ Allen believes it was Joel's "experience of the awful plagues of locusts that give him his intrinsic conviction that the great and terrible day was near and impelled him to write about it." See Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 31.

his Spirit upon all his people and opportunity would be given for God's enemies to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved from the final great judgment. This is the context and meaning of Joel 2:28-32 that sets the stage for Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36.

Peter's sermon as an exposition of Joel 2:28-32. Some believe Peter had no intention of expounding the OT text, but referenced it to explain what the crowd witnessed in the disciples' speaking in other tongues. It was simply an example of "proof-texting."⁵⁰ However, Joel is not the only prophet who spoke of the coming of the Spirit in the last days. For example, Ezekiel prophesied about a day when God would put his Spirit within his people and not just select individuals (Ezek 36:27; 37:14). In addition, both Isaiah and Ezekiel used the same lavish language that spoke of a "pouring out" of God's Spirit in the future (Isa 44:3; Ezek 39:29). If Peter simply desired to grab an OT text to prove the event displayed at Pentecost was the pouring out of the Spirit as prophesied by OT prophets, would not Isaiah or Ezekiel have been equally forceful?

There appears to be a greater reason behind his decision to use the prophecy of Joel. It is striking that among the three texts in the OT that speak of the future outpouring of the Spirit, only Joel's account places it directly in the context of the coming judgment of the day of the Lord. If Peter only needed a proof-text to explain the manifestation of the Spirit at Pentecost, why did he choose Joel's prophecy and include the prophet's words of future judgment? I believe the passage in Joel perfectly fit the goals of Peter's sermon in a way that the writings of Ezekiel and Isaiah did not. When the whole of Peter's sermon is taken into consideration, it is more plausible that his particular use of

⁵⁰ R. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, "In Defense of Proof-Texting," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 3 (2011): 597. Many view "proof-texting" as the normal way NT writers use the OT. Barnabas Lindars writes, "The New Testament writers do not take an Old Testament book or passage, and sit down and ask, 'What does this mean?' . . . they employ the Old Testament in an ad hoc way, making recourse to it just when and how they find it helpful for their purposes." Barnabas Lindars, "The Place of the Old Testament in the Formation of New Testament Theology," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 143.

Joel was foundational to and shaped the argument of his sermon.

However, if Peter intended for his audience to understand what they witnessed was the fulfillment of Joel's entire prophecy as quoted, how is this to be understood? Where are the alarming earthly and heavenly manifestations—blood, fire, smoke, sun turned to darkness and the moon to blood—that are described in Acts 2:19-20? Even if one pointed to the “mighty rushing wind” and “tongues as of fire” that were present at the coming of the Spirit upon the disciples (vv. 2-3), it does not fully account for the other dreadful displays. Perhaps Peter saw the fulfillment displayed in the phenomena that accompanied the death of Jesus, which had transpired merely seven weeks earlier. There had been the shedding of Jesus' blood “on the earth below,” and most had likely either witnessed or heard of the darkening of the sun in the sky above on that Good Friday. As convenient as this interpretation might be, it still leaves too much unanswered.

Nothing in the text indicates Peter is equating what happened at the cross as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in some figurative sense. If anything, Peter was not looking back at the cross, but forward to what was coming. Ben Witherington writes, “more likely we should simply see verses 19-20 as references to the final eschatological events before the end, and thus we are being told that the coming of the Spirit is an eschatological event, indeed the inauguration of those end times, with more events to follow.”⁵¹ Peter's substitution, “in the last days,” for Joel's words, “it shall come to pass afterward,” gives indication that he views this event as the beginning of the end times.⁵²

As explained earlier, Joel pointed to a future eschatological time, and Peter clarified that with his explanatory alteration. In addition, even in Joel's original text, there is no intimation that the pouring out of the Spirit and the day of the Lord would happen

⁵¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 143.

⁵² I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inver-Varsity Press, 1980), 73.

simultaneously or in immediate succession. Linking the fulfillment of the events immediately together was neither in the mind of the prophet Joel or the apostle Peter. Even regarding the manifestation of the Spirit on that particular day, it should be evident that Peter was not implying the complete fulfillment of all that Joel had spoken. As F. F. Bruce observes, “Certainly the outpouring of the Spirit on 120 Jews could not in itself fulfill the prediction of such outpouring ‘on all flesh’; but it was the beginning of the fulfillment.”⁵³

Therefore, Peter’s point was not that every detail of Joel 2:28-32 came to pass at Pentecost, but that it began the Messianic era of which Joel prophesied. Those present at Pentecost were witnessing the pouring out of the Spirit, as Joel foretold. If they were witnessing this fulfillment, then the prophesied dreadful judgment was just as certain to follow. As Bock concludes, “What Peter is really saying here is that the coming of the Spirit is the beginning of ‘those days.’”⁵⁴

If Peter’s declaration was correct—that what was being witnessed was the outpouring of the Spirit—this could only be the work of the Messiah. The promises of the OT of the coming of the Spirit were rightly believed to be the work of the Messiah who would come with divine authority.⁵⁵ If the Messiah had come, then who is he and where is he? This is precisely what Peter intended to address in his sermon. Having announced that the age of the Messiah has begun, he moved to the story of Jesus.

Peter succinctly explained in Acts 2:22-24 that the crowd should know the identity of the Messiah. They knew full well of the miraculous ministry of Jesus—a ministry that was marked by “mighty works and wonders and signs” that had been

⁵³ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 61.

⁵⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 112.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

performed in their midst. These things were a demonstration by God and bore witness to the person of Jesus. The identity of Jesus had been placed on full display by God for all to see and they should have recognized him for who he was. Tragically, instead of receiving Jesus as the promised Messiah, they participated in having him crucified. However, God raised Jesus from the dead giving further attestation to his identity and fulfilling another OT Messianic prophecy.

In Acts 2:25-28, Peter turned to Psalm 16:8-11 to confirm his claim. This psalm of David was regarded even in Peter's day as ultimately speaking of the Messiah.⁵⁶ It becomes clear in Acts 2:27 that David was referencing someone other than himself, which becomes Peter's emphasis in Acts 2:29-31. Whoever this person was, he had been given a promise that God would not abandon his soul in Hades nor let the Lord's "Holy One see corruption." This was a promise of God's ultimate protection for his Holy One, which included the threat of death itself.

No one would claim David had been rescued from his grave, which was clearly marked and still contained his body (v. 29). Therefore, David must have spoken prophetically of someone greater than himself. That person was none other than the Messiah, the descendant of David, whom God had "sworn with an oath"⁵⁷ to come and sit eternally on the Davidic throne (v. 30). Peter declared that Jesus was the one of whom David spoke and whom God did not abandon in Hades nor allow his body to see corruption. God had raised this Jesus from the dead. Peter and his companions were all eyewitnesses⁵⁸ to this fact (vv. 31-32). Who is the Messiah? It is Jesus—the one whom Israel rejected and crucified, but God raised as the Scripture testified and the apostles witnessed.

⁵⁶ Marshall, *Acts*, 81.

⁵⁷ An allusion to Ps 132:11, where God made this solemn promise to David before his death.

⁵⁸ Although Peter claims that they are eyewitnesses to the resurrection, the absolute proof of Jesus' resurrection is rooted in Scripture.

This still leaves the question of the present location of the Messiah, which is what Peter addresses next in Acts 2:33. Jesus, the resurrected Christ, had been exalted and was sitting at the right hand of God. This position that Jesus has assumed is one of authority for he “has now become God’s right-hand man.”⁵⁹ As Messiah, Jesus was given authority by God to execute the promise made to the prophet Joel by pouring out the Spirit upon his people. Therefore, the events that Peter’s audience witnessed at Pentecost was the work of Jesus as Messiah.

This exaltation of the Messiah is also pictured in another psalm of David—Psalm 110:1—which Peter quoted in Acts 2:34-35. David did not ascend into heaven himself to sit at God’s right hand. In fact, as Ps 110:1 reads, God did not extend the invitation to David personally, but to David’s descendant whom he called “my Lord.” The quotation of this psalm adds another dimension to Jesus’ present activities as exalted Messiah. Not only was Jesus executing his authority by pouring out the Spirit, but he was also awaiting the day when his enemies would be made his footstool, which speaks of their total defeat. This is most certainly the language of future judgment, which fits perfectly with the second half of Joel’s prophecy as quoted by Peter. Jesus, as resurrected Messiah, was seated at the right hand of God, had poured out the Spirit as promised by God, and was awaiting the day when he would execute final judgment upon his enemies.

At this point, Peter gave the climactic proclamation in Acts 2:36, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made⁶⁰ him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” God demonstrated that Jesus, in both his resurrection and exaltation, is the Lord and Christ of which the Scriptures prophesied. This is the Jesus whom Peter’s audience rejected and crucified. If Jesus is Lord and Christ, and they were

⁵⁹ Marshall, *Acts*, 81.

⁶⁰ Bock argues that Peter’s use of the verb “make” means “that God has shown or established or brought about something by his action.” In other words, God has made Jesus’ identity evident in the actions of resurrecting and exalting Jesus. See Bock, *Acts*, 136.

witnessing the inauguration of the Messianic age in the pouring out of the Spirit, there were serious implications of that truth. They had effectively become the enemies of this Lord and Christ by their participation in his crucifixion.

This is what Peter stressed in the progression of his sermon. I would argue that the logic of his sermon depended upon rightly understanding Joel 2:28-32. The interpretation of Joel in its original intention became the force of the sermon and drove the people to the needed response to the truth that Jesus is Lord and Christ.⁶¹ The Messianic age had begun, and if the blessings of the Messiah had come in his pouring out of the Spirit, the judgments will also come upon his enemies at the day of the Lord.

Joel declared that the way of escape was to call upon the name of the Lord. Tragically, they have crucified the only one upon whom they could call. If they have rejected and crucified Jesus—the one God has made both Lord and Christ—and have made themselves enemies of God, what hope is there for them now? What possibly awaited them other than the judgment to come, which they rightly deserve? The eschatological clock is ticking, what must they do?

Peter's audience clearly understood both the implication and application of his sermon. They were cut to the heart and cried out in anguish asking, "What shall we do?" Therefore, Peter declared that the proper response was to repent and transfer their full allegiance to Jesus Christ by identifying with him through baptism. Consistent with the message of Joel, there were only two options: blessing or judgment. Peter's audience could either receive the Messiah's blessing in the outpouring of the Spirit or be resigned to the Messiah's judgment that was coming upon his enemies.

There is sufficient evidence that Peter's use of Joel 2:28-30 is an example of biblical exposition as defined earlier in this work. Peter's central point was the same as

⁶¹ Bock explains the title of "Lord" is in the "forward and emphatic position," which makes it the "key title." This would connect in the mind of the hearers the previous references to Lord in Ps 110:1 and Joel 2:32 as quoted by Peter. See Bock, *Acts*, 136..

that of the prophet Joel. The coming of the Messianic age would be marked by the outpouring of God's Spirit, and an opportunity would be given for God's enemies to call upon the name of the Lord to be saved from the final great judgment. What Joel had prophesied to come in the future, Peter declared was fulfilled on that Pentecost morning. Peter preached this truth in his sermon and used additional OT passages to help his audience understand how Jesus was the promised Messiah who was pouring out the Spirit from his exalted place at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Therefore, Peter applied this truth to those who had made themselves enemies of Jesus, urged them to repent, and plead with them to "save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40).

Although I am compelled to label Peter's sermon as expositional, one sermon does not prove this was the pattern of NT preaching. Also, even this example is not a complete sermon as indicated in Acts 2:40, which says, "with many other words he bore witness." Although there is significantly more detail than Jesus' sermon in Luke 4, Peter's message in Acts 2 is still most likely a brief summary of a much lengthier discourse.

This is also the case with the other sermons recorded in the book of Acts, and most are briefer than that of Peter's Pentecost message. In addition, the sermons reported in Acts are primarily evangelistic and are not representative of preaching that occurred in the gathering of a local church. It would be beneficial to have both a lengthier example of a sermon and one that was given to an existing congregation of believers in the early church. Thus, the next chapter examines the book of Hebrews.

CHAPTER 3
AN EXAMINATION OF HEBREWS AS A MODEL OF
EXPOSITION

Hebrews is one of the most elegant and profound books in the NT. Simultaneously, it is accompanied with a variety of challenging difficulties. There are perhaps few NT books more engulfed with scholarly debate. Its unknown author, unknown recipients, complex structure, and disturbing warning passages are but a few examples of the complexities surrounding the book of Hebrews. Nonetheless, Hebrews beckons the attention of the modern preacher as it has become the general consensus that the book is in essence a written sermon.¹

As already argued, the book of Acts is replete with examples of early preaching in the church age. However, the sermons in Acts are almost all evangelistic and are of little use for understanding the nature of sermons in an established church.² Hebrews 2:3-4 indicates that the audience consists of second-generation Christians. Therefore, if the nature of Hebrews is sermonic, the church could possess one of the earliest examples of Christian preaching in an established congregation of saints. The book of Hebrews would then offer tremendous insight into how the modern preacher should handle the Scriptures with his established congregation. However, as with other issues in the discussion of Hebrews, defining its literary genre is not without debate.

¹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 25.

² Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 3 (1984): 277.

The Literary Genre of Hebrews

In early Greek manuscripts,³ the book of Hebrews was included among Paul's letters. In some later manuscripts, it was placed after 2 Thessalonians and before the pastoral epistles. Although there was disagreement regarding its authorship, all indications are that the early church regarded Hebrews to be simply an epistle.⁴ By contrast, most modern evangelical scholars have come to classify Hebrews not merely as an epistle but possessing the characteristics of a sermon.⁵ One glaring difference from other epistles is that the book lacks the usual epistolary opening (i.e., no addressor or addressee, no greeting or thanksgiving, etc.). In fact, the opening sounds like a sermon with its majestic proclamation of the transcendent glory of the Son through whom the Father has once and for all spoken (Heb 1:1-4). The few epistolary elements that are in the book do not come until the end of the document (Heb 13:22-25).⁶ Simply put, Hebrews does not possess the qualities of a NT letter. On the other hand, there is additional solid evidence to support its homiletic nature. Five features have been identified within the composition.⁷

³ P⁴⁶ dated to the beginning of the third century.

⁴ William B. Lane, "Hebrews: A Sermon in Search of a Setting," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 28, no. 1 (1985): 13. For an excellent treatment of Hebrews in early church tradition, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 3-8.

⁵ So, Allen, *Hebrews*, 25; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1991), lxix-lxxv; Johnson, *Hebrews*, 9-15; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 11-15. Even commentators who argue that it is best for Hebrews to be regarded as an epistle acknowledge its homiletic features. So, Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 62.

⁶ Some view the presence of an epistolary ending of the book to be inconsistent with accepting the rest of the document as a sermon. So, Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 62. In response to that view, Andrew Lincoln writes, "once it is granted that the writer knows his addressees and is present by absence from delivering his homily in person, the epistolary conclusion makes good sense." See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 14.

⁷ While these five features are not an exhaustive list, all of them are shared by a variety of scholars (e.g., Allen, Cockerill, Johnson, Lane). While some scholars may point to additional evidence, I have chosen to focus on those that have a greater consensus among scholars who affirm Hebrews as a sermon.

First, the writer of Hebrews characterizes his own writing as a “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22). The only other use of this phrase in the NT is in Acts 13:15 where Paul was invited to give a “word of exhortation” in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia. In response, Paul stood and delivered a biblical sermon (vv. 16-41). Lane contends that this phrase was an “idiomatic, fixed expression for a sermon in Jewish-hellenistic and early Christian circles.”⁸

Second, language is adopted that would intimately identify a speaker with his audience. The use of the first-person plural (“we/us/our”) and addressing the congregation as “brothers” was a technique that allowed the speaker to “identify with his hearers while also asserting authority.”⁹

Third, throughout Hebrews the writer chooses language of speaking and hearing as opposed to writing and reading: “of which we are speaking.” (2:5); “since you have become dull of hearing.” (5:11); “Though we speak in this way . . .” (6:9); “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of . . .” (11:32).

Fourth, there is alternation between exposition of Scripture and exhortation throughout the entire book. This serves to emphasize the speaker’s point while maintaining the attention of the listener.¹⁰

Fifth, the author skillfully employs a variety of rhetorical devices that effectively impacts the audience orally. The use of alliteration,¹¹ repetition,¹² *inclusio*,¹³

⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, lxx.

⁹ Johnson, *Hebrews*, 10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Note the writer chooses five Greek words that all share the “p” sound in the opening verse.

¹² For example, the word “better” is repeatedly used when emphasizing the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice to OT sacrifices, new covenant to the old covenant, and the heavenly tabernacle to the earthly tabernacle (Heb 1:4; 6:9; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:4, 16, 35, 40; 12:24).

¹³ These served as verbal cues to let the listener know when a particular topic was ending and a new one was beginning (e.g., “angels” in 2:5 and 2:16; “Melchizedek” in 5:10 and 6:20).

rhetorical questions,¹⁴ et al. suggests that the text was written for the ear. Many of the characteristics of Hebrews bear the marks of a well-crafted sermon. Even the illustrative imagery throughout the book has the sound of a memorable sermon: a ship missing a harbor (2:1), a double-edged sword piercing to one's innermost being (4:12), fields that produce either crops or weeds (6:7-8), and an anchor holding to the bottom of the sea (6:19).

In light of the evidence, it seems best to view Hebrews as a sermon with an epistolary postscript that was a brief personal note to the recipients. As Jonathan Griffiths concludes, "Hebrews was written to be read aloud to a group of listeners, but was sent from a distance; hence the blending of forms."¹⁵ This makes Hebrews the earliest surviving complete Christian sermon¹⁶ and should inspire modern preachers to closely examine it. A variety of issues need to be taken into consideration. Is Hebrews a single sermon or a series of sermons? What Scripture(s) is/are being expounded by the preacher? If a single sermon, how do the individual sections fit together as a whole? These questions require an examination of the structure of Hebrews.

The Structure of Hebrews

Determining the structure of Hebrews is no easy task, considering that there is no consensus among scholars.¹⁷ George Guthrie observes that ideas have been offered for the structure of Hebrews that range anywhere from two to well in excess of seven divisions and disagreement abounds even among those who agree on the same number of

¹⁴ See Heb 1:5; 14.

¹⁵ Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, ed. Mark Goodacre, Library of New Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 17.

¹⁶ Harold Attridge asserts, "Hebrews is the first complete primitive Christian sermon." Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 13-14.

¹⁷ Steve Stanley credits the difficulty of determining a structure for Hebrews "due in part to the author's ability to construct very smooth transitions, which tend to create inconspicuous section breaks, and the sheer complexity of the author's line of argumentation and hence his structuring of the book." Steve Stanley, "The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives," *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994): 246.

sections.¹⁸ In light of the vast diversity and the limited scope of this project, discussion will be limited to four categories that are most widely embraced and generally encompass the whole.¹⁹

A thematic analysis is chosen by some where the book is structured according to its prominent subjects. Here the commentator determines the predominant theme(s) of the writer and offers an outline that follows the development of the argument.²⁰ One problem with this approach is it depends on each commentator to determine the theme(s) that drive(s) the writer's discourse. The weakness of the thematic analysis becomes clear when one sees the great disparity that exists between even the commentators who hold this view.

Some follow a literary analysis that seeks to unlock Hebrews' structure by literary devices that are used by the author. The discussion surrounding this approach is most widely accredited to Albert Vanhoye in his published doctoral thesis.²¹ Various indicators such as *inclusios*,²² hook words,²³ alternation between exposition and

¹⁸ George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, Biblical Studies Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 21.

¹⁹ Dividing Hebrews like a Pauline epistle into two sections—doctrinal (1:1–10:18) followed by a paraenetic (10:19–13:25) has been a traditional approach. So, Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 58-59. However, it will not be discussed here as it has already been accepted that the genre of Hebrews is sermonic rather than an epistle. For a more complete survey of the various schemes to outline Hebrews' structure, see Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 21-41.

²⁰ Philip Hughes divides the book based on the theme of Christ's superiority. He offers an outline that points to Christ's Superiority to the Prophets (1:1-3), Angels (1:4–2:18), Moses (3:1–4:13), Aaron (4:14–10:18), and as a New and Living Way (10:19–12:29). See Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 3. Opposed to a single concept, F. F. Bruce divides the book into seven sections based on a different theme for each section. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), lxiii-lxiv.

²¹ Albert Vanhoye, *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. James Swetnam (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964). Using his literary analysis, he divides Hebrews into five main sections along with an introduction and conclusion. His approach has influenced a number of modern commentators. So, Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 55-57.

²² An *inclusio* frames a literary unit by using identical words or phrases at both the beginning and end of a particular topic.

²³ Hook words link one unit to another by repeating a word from the end of one section at the

exhortation, key terms, and chiasmic patterns are used to determine the divisions.

Although a literary analysis provides many helpful observations, James Swetnam argues in his critique of Vanhoye that “literary principles alone are not a sufficient basis for analyzing structure.”²⁴ The weakness of this approach is that it becomes so engulfed in the analysis of literary devices that there becomes an unnatural separation from the content of the text. The result is often greater distortion rather than clarification.²⁵

Another approach is a linguistic analysis that focuses on various aspects of a language such as word meanings, grammar, grouping of words in sentences and paragraphs. One more popular linguistic method has been advanced by George Guthrie that he calls a “text-linguistic” analysis that “seeks to understand the interplay of the units of text” while maintaining sensitivity to “literary and oratorical conventions of the first century.”²⁶ This perspective includes many similarities to aspects found in the aforementioned approaches (e.g., themes, grammar, *inclusios*, hook words, and other transitions). In fact, Guthrie acknowledges that his approach takes the strengths of the other approaches in order to formulate a more “effective methodology.”²⁷ Ultimately, he suggests a pattern of exposition and exhortation that overlap and come together throughout the entire composition. In his structure, the expositional sections focus on the theme of the superiority of Jesus, while the hortatory material seeks to challenge the listener to endure.²⁸ As helpful as Guthrie’s observations are, his method is so eclectic and outline is so complex that it does not make the text any more understandable.²⁹

beginning of the next section. (e.g., 10:39 “faith”—11:1 “faith”; 11:7 “heir”—11:8 “heir”)

²⁴ James Swetnam, “Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6,” *Biblica* 55 (1974): 385.

²⁵ For a more thorough critical evaluation of this approach, see David J. MacLeod, “The Literary Structure of the Book of Hebrews,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 582, (April-June 1989): 186-93.

²⁶ Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, xviii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁸ Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 146.

²⁹ For a careful evaluation of Guthrie’s analysis, see John R. Walters, “The Rhetorical

A final perspective, which could be called expositional analysis, contends that the author's argument is structured around several OT texts upon which the writer expounds. If Hebrews is a sermon, it would make sense to approach the structure of the book from the writer's use of Scripture. However, this is not nearly as simple as it might first appear. While the proponents of expositional analysis all agree that the major sections of Hebrews are controlled by the OT passages cited, they disagree on which ones are key. Caird proposes Psalms 8, 95, 110, and Jeremiah 31; Richard Longenecker adds to Caird a fifth exposition that includes the catena of verses in Hebrews 1; R. T. France expands on Longenecker with three more expositions that include Habakkuk 2:3c-4, Proverbs 3:11-12, and Exodus 19-20; and Steve Stanley proposes that Hebrews is fundamentally an exposition of Psalms 110 and 4.³⁰

One advocate of expositional analysis is Lawrence Wills, who moved the discussion forward in understanding the structure of Hebrews as a sermon. The foundation of his contribution is built upon the phrase, "word of exhortation," in Hebrews 13:22 that the writer uses to classify his work. Commentators have argued that this phrase came to be used in many Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian writings to reference a sermon.³¹ As mentioned earlier, the phrase was used in Acts 13:15 to designate Paul's synagogue sermon to a Jewish audience at Antioch of Pisidia. Later, in 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul instructs the young pastor of a Christian church to devote himself "to the public

Arrangement of Hebrews," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 51, no. 2 (1996): 67.

³⁰ George B. Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5, no. 1 (1959): 44-50; Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 174-85; R. T. France, "The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor," *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (1996): 257-60; Steve Stanley, "The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives," *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994): 253.

³¹ So, William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1991), 568; Harold W. Attridge, "Paraenesis in a Homily (Λόγος Παρακλήσεως): The Possible Location of, and Socialization in, the 'Epistle to the Hebrews.'" *Semeia* 50 (1990): 217; Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," 279.280.

reading of Scripture, to exhortation,³² to teaching.” Marshall contends that since each of these nouns possesses the definite article in the original Greek, they were “familiar, recognized activities in the congregational meeting.”³³ This has led both Marshall and Lane to conclude that the term “exhortation” in the context of 1 Timothy 4:13 likely designates the sermon in Christian worship.³⁴ After offering further evidence, Griffiths attests that there is good reason to believe that “word of exhortation” was a “recognized term for a sermon.”³⁵

Accepting that the phrase “word of exhortation” was essentially the term for a sermon, Wills analyzed Paul’s homily in Acts 13:15-41 and discovered a three-part pattern that he argued is often found in many of the early Christian and Hellenistic Jewish writings. Essentially, he identified a three-part pattern of exempla that consisted of “scriptural quotations, authoritative examples from past or present, or reasoned exposition of theological points,” a conclusion that explains the significance of the exempla to the listeners, and an exhortation.³⁶ He then examined other sermons within the NT and claims that they fit the same pattern of exempla, conclusion, and exhortation.³⁷ Even though they are not called a “word of exhortation,” he claims that the pattern fits nonetheless. Furthermore, Wills contended that this pattern could either stand alone or be used “repeatedly in cyclical fashion” for a lengthier sermon.³⁸ This is how he understands the structure of Hebrews—the “word of exhortation pattern” of exempla,

³² Same Greek word as used in Heb 13:22.

³³ I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ed. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield, International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 1999), 562.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 563; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 568.

³⁵ Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 20.

³⁶ Wills, “The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity,” 279.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 286-91. Of particular interest, Wills gives a good amount of attention of Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:14-40 that fits this same pattern.

³⁸ Wills, “The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity,” 280.

conclusion, and exhortation repeated throughout the book. He proposed the following cycle of the word of exhortation pattern: 1:5–2:4; 2:5–3:6; 3:7–4:1; 4:2–11 (allowing for a possible short cycle at 4:12–16); 8:1–10:25; 10:26–35; 11:1–12:3; and 12:4–16.³⁹

In a recent work, Jonathan Griffiths embraces Wills' threefold word of exhortation pattern and seeks to make a contribution to the structural debate in order to give a better understanding for how Hebrews is structured as a sermon.⁴⁰ He makes several modifications to Wills' proposal to assist in this effort.

First, Griffiths offers his own definition for each component of the expositional cycle. He defines the "exempla" as the "clear quotations, allusions or echoes of OT texts which form the primary exegetical focus of a given cycle."⁴¹ That is followed by an "explanation and application"⁴² where the writer offers comments on the OT passage and applies it to the readers' circumstance. This is followed by an "exhortation" that "calls the readers to action based on the exposition just given."⁴³

Second, Griffiths significantly alters the proposal of the "word of exhortation" pattern offered by Wills, leaving only the first cycle (1:5–2:4) intact. He bases his proposed structure breaks upon a variety of grammatical clues. Griffiths argues that every new cycle begins with the conjunction "for," the only exception being cycle 10. He also explains that both the "explanation and application" as well as the "exhortation" cycles have their own consistently unique grammatical indicators.⁴⁴ These markers led Griffiths

³⁹ Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," 281-83.

⁴⁰ Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 28-33.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28. Griffiths explains that although the Hebrews writer may weave other OT texts into this section, those other texts were not the "primary exegetical focus."

⁴² Griffiths altered Wills' designation of "conclusion" with "explanation and application" believing it gave greater clarity. See *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴ Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 30.

zto propose the following expositional cycles: 1:5–2:4; 2:5–3:3; 3:4-13; 3:14–4:1; 4:2-11; 4:12-16; 5:1–10:25; 10:26-35; 10:36–12:3; 12:4-17; and 12:18–13:19.

Griffiths proposed structure offers multiple strengths that I find compelling.⁴⁵ First, it is consistent with the many scholars who advocate for an expositional analysis of the book of Hebrews. Second, the grammatical clues used to make the various divisions offer a better correlation between the exposition and exhortation that alternates throughout the sermon as emphasized by Guthrie.⁴⁶ Third, this proposal illustrates how the OT texts are central to the shape and emphasis of the writer’s sermon. Griffiths concludes that the Scripture provides “the exempla that act as the basis of each exposition” for the writer of Hebrews.

Therefore, having argued that Hebrews is a sermon and adopted Griffiths’ proposal for its structure, the issue at hand is whether the preacher in Hebrews can be rightly categorized as an expositor. In other words, does his handling of the Scriptures fit with the definition of expository preaching that is being advanced by this work? This will require an examination of how he employs the OT Scripture in his sermon.

An Exegetical Examination of Hebrews 3:4–4:16

Griffiths proposes eleven cycles of exposition in Hebrews. Since a review of every cycle would be a monumental task, I examine the preacher’s use of Psalm 95:7-11. I follow Griffiths’ work by taking Hebrews 3:4–4:16 to contain four cycles of exposition and exhortation: 3:4-13, 3:14–4:1, 4:2-11, and 4:12-16.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 34-35.

⁴⁶ Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews*, 146.

⁴⁷ These cycles are treated together because they are all connected by the main OT text of Ps 95:7-11 and therefore flow together. In cycle three (3:4-13), the entire OT pericope is introduced as the exemplum. This is followed by the fourth cycle (3:14–4:1) where Ps 95:7 is the exemplum and the fifth cycle (4:2-11) where Ps 95:11 is the exemplum. Griffiths argues, “while each cycle functions as a distinct unit of exposition, cycles are generally bound closely with one another (and sometimes flow together seamlessly).” See Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 33.

The Immediate Context of Hebrews 3:4–4:16

The previous cycle (2:5–3:3) concluded with the preacher addressing his listeners for the first time, calling them “holy brothers, who share in a heavenly calling” (3:1). He reminded them of who they were as the people of God. They were set apart as God’s distinct people in this world and were called to share his eternal rest. By addressing them in this way, he prepares them for both the immediate exhortation and the stern warning that follows (3:12).

The recipients of Hebrews had come to faith in Christ but faced persecution that was tempting them to waver in their commitment to Christ.⁴⁸ Since Jesus had overcome sin and temptation, “he is able to help those who are being tempted” (2:17-18). Therefore, in Hebrews 3:1, the preacher exhorted his listeners to place their focus upon the superior faithfulness of Jesus, as “the apostle and high priest of our confession,” in comparison with that of Moses.⁴⁹ While Moses had been faithful in leading God’s house both as an apostle and high priest, Jesus’ faithfulness far exceeds that of Moses and is worthy of exceeding glory.

As faithful as Moses was as a leader in God’s house (i.e., God’s people)⁵⁰ under the Old Covenant (Num 12:7), Jesus deserved greater glory for his faithfulness as the builder of the house (3:3). This Jesus, whom the listeners had confessed, was able to help them as they faced the danger of compromising their commitment to him. The glory due to Christ should be an encouragement to these saints to remain faithful. This

⁴⁸ For a detailed treatment of the occasion of Hebrews, see Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 16-18.

⁴⁹ For explanation of how Moses was faithful to serve as God’s messenger (i.e., apostle) to the people and to intercede (i.e., high priest) to God on their behalf, see Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 91-92.

⁵⁰ The term “house/household” in 3:3-6 is used as a metaphor for God’s people, and is drawn from Num 12:7. This is made clear in 3:6 where the preacher tells his listeners, “we are his house.” See Johnson, *Hebrews*, 105.

exhortation is followed by the preacher proclaiming a warning to his listeners with an OT example of Israel's failure in the wilderness to continue in faithfulness to God.

The Use of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3:4–4:16

As the preacher began the third cycle of exposition, he continued with the metaphor of God's people as a house. He declared that while Moses was a faithful servant, Jesus was faithful as the son who is over all the household. The house that God was building (3:4), in which Moses faithfully served and Christ rules over as Son (3:5-6), was the people of God (i.e., "we are his house").

The critical question involved whether they were truly living as God's people. The determining factor was their response to the one through whom God spoke and who interceded on their behalf. The people of God had a responsibility to listen to Moses. When his authority was challenged by his own family, God reminded them that Moses was his chief servant over his house and failing to listen to him should be greatly feared (Num 12:7-9). If this was true with Moses, who was a mere servant in God's house, how much more should they listen to and obey Christ, who is the faithful son of the house?

Therefore, the preacher declared, "we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in hope" (3:6b). The point of this statement was to warn the listeners of the dangers of turning back, and to encourage them to stand firm in their faith in Christ. Therefore, he directed their attention to Psalm 95:7-11, which he would expound in the next few cycles of exposition.⁵¹

⁵¹ I differ slightly with Griffiths regarding his view of the exemplum in the third cycle of exposition (3:4-13). The words of Heb 3:5—"Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant,"—is a quotation of Num 12:7 (LXX). Griffiths argues that Num 12:7 is the exemplum in 3:4-13 and Ps 95:7-11 serves as the main exhortation. Although I concur that the text of the narrative in Num 12–14 is in the preacher's mind, Ps 95:7-11 governs his argument. As will be demonstrated, the narrative of Israel's rebellion described in Num 12–14 is the backdrop to Ps 95:7-11. Therefore, the psalm becomes the lens through which the narrative is viewed and functions as the controlling Scripture for the Hebrews preacher. Nevertheless, I agree that the narrative of Num 12–14 and Ps 95:7-11 is driving the preacher's argument in each of the cycles to be considered.

The Original Context and Meaning of Psalm 95:7-11

The Septuagint, which the Hebrews preacher used for his quotation, attributed Psalm 95 to David. It began with a call to worship (vv. 1-7a), followed by what seems to be an abrupt warning against hardening one's heart (vv. 7b-11). Marvin E. Tate observes that this has led some scholars to argue that Psalm 95 is "made up of two originally independent poems," but he concludes that "the majority in this century have treated the psalm as one literary unit."⁵²

In Psalm 95:1-7a, the psalmist opened with an exuberant call to worship that is fit for a king (vv. 1-2). God is worthy of great worship because he is "King above all gods" and the world that he created is "in his hands" (vv. 3-5). In light of this, the worshippers are called to bow before the Lord in reverent worship because he is not only the creator of the physical world, but he is also their "Maker" (v. 6). The act of creation of which the psalmist spoke is not merely that God created all living things, but specifically his creation of Israel as his people, "For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (v. 7a). Therefore, God is worthy to be praised as both creator of the world (vv. 1-5) and creator of Israel (vv. 6-7a).

In the second section of the psalm, which is the focus of the Hebrews pastor, there appears to be an abrupt change that moves from praise to warning. However, the transition for the psalmist is quite natural. He moved from the praise of the Lord as the creator of Israel to the responsibility they bore as his covenant people. In other words, the first section ended with the psalmist declaring that they are God's sheep and the second section is an urgent admonition for them to listen to God's voice as his people.

Psalm 95:7b-11 warned the worshippers of the danger of not listening to the voice of God by reminding them of the mistakes of their ancestors in the wilderness. Although they had seen the miraculous hand of God deliver them from Egypt and make

⁵² Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 2002), 498.

them a nation, they hardened their hearts toward God at Meribah (v.8) and put him to the test at Massah (v. 9).

Meribah is mentioned twice in the story of Israel's wilderness experience. Both instances involve the rebellion of the people due to a lack of water. The first instance occurs in Exodus 17 and the second in Numbers 20. However, the two names only appear together in Exodus 17:7, which reads, "And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'" The people of Israel had heard God's word of promise through Moses that he would provide for them, bring them safely into the land, and give them rest from their enemies. However, they hardened their hearts, refused to trust him, and questioned both his ability and faithfulness to keep his word.

Because of Israel's rebellion, Psalm 95:10-11 gave the details of the discipline God brought upon that generation. A problem arose because the words of discipline that the psalmist recited do not occur in Exodus 17 or Numbers 20 where the rebellions at Meribah were recorded. The context of the words in Psalm 95:10-11 are found in Numbers 14:20-35 where God responded to the rebellion of Israel after the majority of the spies brought back an unfavorable report about the land of Canaan. Since these verses serve as the height of the warning that involves the grave consequences for hardening one's heart and putting God to the test, it is likely that the Numbers passage is the specific event that the psalmist ultimately desired to highlight. Peter Enns suggests that because the rebellion at Meribah occurs both at the beginning and end of the generation, "Meribah/Massah forms a frame around virtually the entire wilderness rebellion period."⁵³ Therefore, these names not only reminded Israel of those particular individual acts of disobedience but were an overall summary of the wilderness journey in the mind

⁵³ Peter E. Enns, "Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1–4:13," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993), 266.

of the psalmist for the beginning, end, and everything in between.

In Numbers 14, Israel had finally arrived at the edge of the Promised Land. However, upon hearing the report of the spies, the people rebelled against God and longed for Egypt. They had seen God's powerful hand at work in bringing them out of Egypt and leading them safely through the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb reminded the people of God's promise and their need to trust him to give them the Promised Land (vv. 7-9). But the people rejected the word of the Lord and responded in violent rebellion (v. 10). The Lord's patience with Israel had reached its end. Although they had heard his voice, the Lord said they "had not obeyed my voice" (v. 22). The Lord had sworn to give Israel the Promised Land (v. 23) and he would not fail to keep his word. However, because this generation did not obey his voice, the Lord swore an oath that they would wander in the wilderness for forty years and die there (vv. 33-35). They would not enter the promised rest of the land of Canaan (v. 23).

The psalmist views this ancient story of Israel's past unbelief as a timeless warning to future generations. Hence, he declared to the worshippers in his present setting, "Today, if you hear his voice." By using the word "today," the psalmist indicated the past failures of Israel were a warning to worshippers at any time and in any place. Therefore, Allen Ross writes that the psalmist's reference is "not to a particular incident in history, but any time the psalm is read."⁵⁴ Just as their ancestors had received the word of the Lord, they also were hearing God speak in their own day. This created a sense of urgency as they faced the same danger of hardening their hearts, not responding in obedience, and failing to enter the promised rest of God.

If the warning is timeless, what about the discipline for the modern worshipper who fails to obey God's word? In the Numbers account, that generation failed to enter the

⁵⁴ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 90–150, Kregel Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 121.

Land of Canaan as a result of their failure to believe God's word of promise. Because of their unbelief, they forfeited the right to enjoy the rest God had sworn to give his people. But how did that apply to the worshippers in the psalmist's day? They were presently living in the Promised Land. If the "rest" referred to in verse 11 only referenced the physical rest of Canaan, then what is in danger of being lost in the context of Psalm 95?

There is good indication that the psalmist understood the consequence for failing to believe God's word to be as timeless as the warning. The "rest" that God promised Israel bore greater implications than mere entrance into Canaan. As Ross writes, "the land also meant receiving the blessing of God and enjoying the experience of his presence."⁵⁵ One exegetical indicator that the psalmist is speaking of a spiritual rest, rather than merely a physical one, is his use of the words "my rest." Gerhard Von Rad understands the psalmist to be speaking of a spiritual "rest" that is "a gift which Israel will find only by a wholly personal entering into its God."⁵⁶ It is a "rest" that belongs to God and has been available to his people since the time of creation, which is referred to in Genesis 2:2. Therefore, Enns concludes that this is "in keeping with the theme of the psalm and would provide a nice closure: it begins and ends with creation."⁵⁷ I will demonstrate that this is how the writer of Hebrews understood the notion of rest in Psalm 95.

It should be observed that Psalm 95 concludes not only with a warning but also with a word of implicit hope. Although God's judgment was final upon the wilderness generation—"They shall not enter my rest"—it does not mean that the audience of the psalmist had to repeat their mistake and receive their same judgment. If they would "hear

⁵⁵ Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 90–150*, 124.

⁵⁶ Gerhard Von Rad, "There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God: An Investigation of a Biblical Conception," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 99.

⁵⁷ Enns, "Creation and Re-Creation," 269.

his voice” (v. 7) and respond with obedient hearts (v. 8), they would be able to enter God’s rest that continues to remain as an open invitation to each generation. That which the wilderness generation was unable to enter, remained open to all who truly evidence that they are the people of God.

In summary, the central point of the psalmist is this: the people of God hear and obey his word, and will enter into his eternal rest; but those who do not rightly respond to his word will not enter his rest. In order to teach this truth, the psalmist in Psalm 95 called upon the people of his day to worship the Lord as the creator of the world (he made it) and the creator of Israel (he made us). However, worship is more than words. As the people of God, they must hearken to the voice of God in obedience. Failure to do this results in grave consequences.

They should learn from the wilderness generation of Israel who persistently refused to believe the word of God. The events of Meribah and Massah marked the consistent pattern of their entire wilderness journey. The height of their rebellion was displayed in Numbers 14 where they refused to believe the Lord’s word and enter the land of Canaan. Rather than evidencing to be genuine, God said they were “a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways” (Ps 95:10). They rejected God; therefore, God rejected them and forbade their entry into his promised rest. The psalmist warned the worshippers of his day that if they failed to obey the word of the Lord they would suffer the same fate. They would be in danger of losing the blessing of the spiritual rest that is still available to all the true people of God in every age. This is exactly where the Hebrews writer picks up his own argument in Hebrews 3:6b.

The Preacher’s Exposition of Psalm 95:7-11

There is a strong correlation between the argumentation in Hebrews 3:3-6 by the preacher and that of the psalmists in the flow of Psalm 95:1-7a. The psalmist declared to his listeners, “we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand,” and then

immediately issued a clarion call to respond in obedience to the voice of the Lord. If they failed to listen to the Lord, they would suffer the same fate as those who failed to do so in the past. He pointed to Israel's rebellion against Moses and how they failed to receive the rest that God had promised to give his people. The psalmist warned the worshippers in his time that if they did not listen to the voice of God "today," they would forfeit the promise of God's rest that still stands.

In similar fashion, the Hebrews preacher declared in verse 6 that "we are his house" (i.e., God's people), with an important qualification: continuance in the faith that they have received in Christ is the real test. Giving into the temptation to turn back from their commitment to Christ would be a fatal error. As a faithful servant in God's house, rejecting Moses was a serious thing. However, to reject Jesus—the actual son of God's house—was far more serious and came with even graver consequences. This definitively placed you outside the "house." The preacher feared for his listeners and was compelled to issue a stern warning. Bruce observes, "they have everything to gain by standing fast, and everything to lose by slipping back."⁵⁸ Apparently, the pastor saw his hearers facing the same situation as the "today" of the psalmist's audience. Therefore, in order to fortify his warning, the preacher turned to an exposition of Psalm 95:7b-11 that extends through four cycles of exemplum, explanation, and exhortation.

Third expositional cycle: Hebrews 3:4-13. The overwhelming concern of the preacher in Hebrews is his desire for his listeners to persevere in their faith. This needed warning is nothing new for God's people in any age. Therefore, the pastor pointed his audience to Psalm 95:7-11, where the psalmist warned the people of his day of the unfaithfulness of the wilderness generation at Kadesh-Barnea.

The Hebrews preacher introduced the OT quotation with, "Therefore, as the

⁵⁸ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 95.

Holy Spirit says.” The use of the present tense (“says”) instead of the past tense (“said”) clearly indicates that he believes God is directly speaking through this psalm to the hearers of the present as much as those of the past. Therefore, they need to heed the timeless warning of Psalm 95:7-11, which the pastor quoted in Hebrews 3:7-11.⁵⁹

After quoting the psalm, the preacher expounded and directly applied the psalmist’s words of warning to his hearers in verses 12 and 13. His exposition centered upon the words “today,” “heart,” and “harden.” As Philip Hughes writes, “The lessons implicit in the preceding quotation from Psalm 95 are now driven home with great plainness.”⁶⁰ The pastor urged his audience to take care lest they followed the path and suffered the fate of the rebellious wilderness generation. The preacher simply identified their sin as “unbelief.” This is clearly indicated by the wording of the original text (i.e., “evil heart of unbelief”) and the repetition in verse 19 where the preacher declared “they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”

The Hebrews pastor made the same application to his audience that the psalmist did to his. The psalmist portrayed the behavior of the wilderness generation to be a pattern of unbelief, which reached its climax when they refused to enter the land that God had promised. This led to their ultimate demise and served as a warning to God’s people in the psalmist’s day. In turn, the Hebrews pastor saw the same danger for his listeners. Every generation of believers should take heed of the spiritual danger of unbelief, because it will lead them to “fall away from the living God” (3:12). Cockerill writes, “Thus ‘to fall away from the living God’ is to act in such a way that one definitely rejects the reality of his power and the validity of his promises.”⁶¹ Refusing to believe

⁵⁹ The author of Hebrews follows the LXX in his quotation. English translations of the Hebrew OT retain “Meribah” and “Massah” by transliterating the Hebrew terms. The LXX does not transliterate the terms but translates them in accordance with their respective meaning—“rebellion” and “testing.” For further discussion, see Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 175-78.

⁶⁰ Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 144.

⁶¹ Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 184.

God will inevitably lead to turning away from him. The Israelites “fell away from the living God” when they turned their hearts back to Egypt. The Hebrews pastor warned his listeners that they will fare no better if they turned back. Therefore, F. F. Bruce declares, “just as Christ is greater in glory than Moses (v. 3), so the loss incurred in rejecting Christ is greater even than that incurred in rejecting Moses.”⁶²

In light of this ominous danger, the preacher gave his listeners in verse 13 the preventative measures needed to avoid falling victim to a pattern of unbelief. It is evident that he did not consider it too late for his listeners because he addressed them in verse 12 as “brothers” and his warning is clearly to be viewed as preventative—“lest there be in any of you... leading you to fall away from the living God.” Nevertheless, immediate action needed to be taken “as long as it is called ‘today’” (v. 13)

Therefore, he called upon them to “exhort one another every day” (v. 13), in order to avoid the dangers of developing an evil heart that is gripped by unbelief. God’s people should exhort one another daily to listen to the Word of God. As Bruce writes, “each succeeding day is a fresh ‘Today’ in which they may heed the psalmist’s warning to hear the voice of God and render him heart-obedience.”⁶³ This daily exhortation is necessary to prevent them from developing hearts that become hardened by the “deceitfulness of sin.” In this context, sin is deceitful because it blinds them to the progressive hardening that takes place in their hearts when they fail to hear and to heed God’s word. Psalm 95 brought to remembrance how the wilderness generation made it a habit to resist the word of the Lord until it finally led to their ultimate rebellion and judgment from God. When Joshua and Caleb called upon them to believe his promised word, their hearts were fully hardened, and they rejected the word of the Lord.

⁶² F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts, rev. ed.*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 99.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 100.

In this exposition of Psalm 95, the point of the Hebrews preacher is exactly that of the psalmist. The pastor sought to give the same warning to the people of his day to be careful to avoid following in the footsteps of the wilderness generation that forfeited their right to be called “the people of God” because of their unbelief. Therefore, in his exposition, he clarified the nature of the wilderness generation’s sin, explained how his listeners might avoid the same downfall, and called them to take immediate action. Just as the psalmist commanded Israel to listen to God’s voice and not harden their hearts, the Hebrews preacher called upon God’s people in his day to exhort one another in this same way. What the wilderness generation failed to do, this NT community of believers should be careful to do for one another. Daily exhortation is needed, because perseverance is the only thing that offers genuine assurance that we are God’s people. To be confident in anything less than perseverance is to be deceived. The pastor addressed this next.

Fourth expositional cycle: Hebrews 3:14–4:1. Nothing is more important for a Christian than to possess the confidence that he has a genuine relationship with Christ. The Hebrews pastor continued to place the focus of his exposition on Jesus and desired for his listeners to know that they have “come to share in Christ.” In 3:4-6, he borrowed the imagery of a “house” from Numbers 12:7 to characterize the people of God. While Moses was a servant in God’s house, the preacher declared Jesus to be superior as the “son of the house” (v. 6). Next he used a more intimate picture of what it means to be the people of God in this age. One’s relationship to the son of the house determined whether he was actually in the house. But this required more than mere initial faith in Jesus. Perseverance demonstrates true union to Christ (v. 14). Therefore, in order to help his listeners grasp this truth, the preacher continued his exposition of Psalm 95:7-11, with a specific focus in this cycle placed upon verse 7.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Griffiths views this use of OT texts in this way as the pattern for the Hebrews preacher. “While each cycle functions as a distinct unit of exposition, cycles are generally bound closely with one another . . . Ps. 95:7-11 functions as the main exhortation in cycle 3 at Heb. 3:7-11, but then Ps. 95:7

In the first expositional cycle (3:4-13), the preacher addressed the behavior that his audience must avoid. He warned of the dangers of sinful unbelief that would deceive them into thinking they are okay while their hearts progressively harden. In this cycle, the pastor reintroduced Psalm 95:7 to once again highlight the sense of urgency for his listeners. This time his intent was to shift the perspective of his listeners to identify with the experience of the wilderness generation. From a certain perspective, there was good reason to believe they were God's people. They had been redeemed by God from Egypt; they had heard God speak and received his promise; and they had seen God's hand at work for them as he provided for their every need in the wilderness. However, their identity as God's people was not ultimately determined by all they had received from God, but by how they responded to his voice and the mighty works of his hand.

Therefore, the preacher drew his listeners into the experience of the wilderness generation by asking a series of rhetorical questions in verses 16-18. Donald Guthrie calls this "a fascinating example of New Testament exegesis."⁶⁵ The pastor assumes they are familiar with the story and will be able to readily answer from their memories.

The first two questions in verse 16 focus on the identity of the rebellious hearers, "For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?" The preacher stressed that "all" who had left Egypt had heard God's voice, yet they "all" rebelled. Of course, Joshua and Caleb were not included in the number, but he wanted his listeners to feel the sheer mass of the rebellion and intended for this to be alarming. They had all witnessed and experienced the redemptive and providential work of God. They had heard God promise that he would give them rest in the land. However, they persisted in their rebellion.

The final three questions in verses 17 to 18 emphasized God's response to the

reemerges as the exemplum in cycle 4 at Heb. 3.15." See Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 33.

⁶⁵ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 112.

rebellion of the wilderness generation. As Cockerill writes, “God, not the wilderness generation, is the subject of these verses.”⁶⁶ The awful consequences of rebelling against God are vividly pictured by his frightening response. First, in verse 17, their sin provoked the anger of God. Therefore, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years until each and every one of them received from God the due judgment for their sin—death. The preacher directed their eyes to the fallen corpses in the wilderness as he painted a vivid mental picture akin to bodies strewn across a battlefield. Second, in verse 18, God determined once and for all to exclude this generation from entering the rest that he had promised. Their persistent rebellion climaxed at Kadesh when they refused to obey God and enter Canaan. Drawing from the words of the psalmist, the Hebrews preacher declared that God made an oath that this disobedient people would never enter his divine rest. This climactic act of disobedience invoked the irreversible wrath of God.

After the preacher completed his series of rhetorical questions, he stated in verse 19 why the wilderness generation was unable to enter God’s rest. After declaring that they “rebelled” against God, “sinned” against God, and “disobeyed” God, the pastor described the totality of their behavior with a single word, “unbelief.”⁶⁷ To disobey God’s word is nothing less than a lack of belief in his word. Therefore, their final act of unbelief led to the final oath of God’s judgment.

Finally, in Hebrews 4:1, the pastor concluded this cycle of exposition with an exhortation of severe caution. While the previous exhortation was to daily encourage one another to continue to hear and heed God’s voice (3:13), this exhortation focused upon what is at stake for his listeners if they failed to do so. This reality, that they could actually miss God’s promised rest for his people, should produce a fear for every

⁶⁶ Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 192.

⁶⁷ Although the psalmist does not reference this word, it is found in the story that serves as the backdrop for Ps 95 where God says to Moses in Num 14:11, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?”

believer.

Although not expressed in most English translations, the first words in the original text are, “Therefore, let us fear.” The pastor intended his words to have a chilling and sobering effect on his listeners.⁶⁸ At this point, he united himself with his audience by including himself in the exhortation with the use of the first-person plural form the verb “fear.” They had much in common with the wilderness generation. They, too, had all witnessed God’s work of redemptive grace for his people; they had heard God speak through his word; they considered themselves to be the people of God; and they stood between the blessing of redemption and the promise of rest that God offers to all who share in Christ. However, Psalm 95:7-11 taught that hearing God speak and seeing God’s mighty hand at work are not enough to keep them spiritually safe. The fact that it is possible for those who think they are God’s people to fail to reach his eternal rest should put the fear of God in every generation.

Nevertheless, the Hebrews preacher also saw hope in the psalmist’s words. The call to fear was not only the right response to the perilous danger that he just described but was also proper in light of the opportunity that remained. He declared, “the promise of entering his rest still stands.”⁶⁹ A proper fear of God not only alerts us to the dangers that can be missed due to our unbelief but also motivates us to pursue the blessings that are gained by genuine belief. The Hebrews preacher had the same desire for his listeners as the psalmist had for his, i.e., to avoid the besetting sin of the wilderness generation, persevere as God’s people, and enter his divine rest. As sure as there was judgment for the unbelief of the wilderness generation, the promise of God’s rest was still open for all who responded with belief. This reverent fear demanded a firm belief that God’s promise

⁶⁸ Ps 95 has the same sense of sobriety as the psalmist concludes his song with God’s wrathful words, “They shall not enter my rest” (v. 11).

⁶⁹ This references the words of Ps 95:11, which becomes the focus of the next expositional cycle.

of rest remained open for all who believe, which became the focus of the fifth expositional cycle of the Hebrews preacher.

Fifth expositional cycle: Hebrews 4:2-11. The Hebrews preacher concluded the expositional cycle at 4:1 with an exhortation for his listeners “to fear.” As explained above, the pastor desired these words to have both a sobering and hopeful effect. Throughout this cycle he interwove hope for those who persevere in belief, along with the danger of falling for those who persist in unbelief. The preacher sought to persuade his listeners that the promise of entering God’s rest still stood open, but they must be vigilant to not repeat the sin of the wilderness generation.

Therefore, he declared, “For good news came to us just as to them” (v. 2). Once again, the preacher associated himself with his listeners and entered with them into the Numbers story that served as the backdrop for Psalm 95. They all should be reminded of the similarities they share with the wilderness generation and where they must differ to avoid that generation’s failure.

The similarity is that “good news” had been declared to both groups. While the content of the message differed somewhat, God had sent a word of good news in both cases. For the wilderness generation, “the message they heard” became of no value to them. Griffiths argues that the words of the Hebrews preacher, based on an examination of their usage elsewhere in the NT, could be construed as, “the preached word did not benefit them.”⁷⁰ Just like the Hebrews preacher and his hearers, the wilderness generation heard a “word of good news” preached to them. In the context of Numbers, it was Joshua and Caleb who proclaimed the good news of the land and the hope of possessing it (Num 13:30; 14:6-9). In a real sense, their message was not a new one, but was traced all the way back to Abraham (Gen 12:7). The necessary response was to continue to believe

⁷⁰ Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 73.

God's word and enter God's promised rest of Canaan.

Sadly, they heard the good news, but they did not benefit from what they heard "because they were not united by faith with those who listened" (v. 2). Joshua and Caleb had heard the word of good news and continued to believe God by faith. However, rather than uniting themselves by faith with the message of good news that Joshua and Caleb declared, the wilderness generation joined with the spies who brought back a negative response of despair and unbelief (Num 13:31-33; 14:10). The same word of good news came to all, but it received two different responses. The dividing line between these two groups was differentiated by faith and unbelief. Therefore, the wilderness generation failed to enter the promised rest of God.

Clearly, hearing a message of good news does not guarantee that those who hear it will receive what is promised. The preacher fired the warning shot that rung in the ears of his listeners who had also received a message of good news preached to them. They should be warned that hearing the gospel by itself does not bring salvation. Rather, three things are bound together for a confident hope: the good news, hearing, and persistent faith. Anything less leads to spiritual disaster. But along with this warning, the preacher immediately offered a word of hope.

As seen throughout his sermon, the pastor believed better things for his people. The difference between the wilderness generation and the hope he has for his listeners is found in the words, "For we who have believed" (v. 3). The preacher declared that those who have believed the good news from God will enter "that rest," which the wilderness generation did not receive. In other words, while the journey and fate of the wilderness generation was over, those who continue in belief are able to enter the rest that generation failed to enter.

If one is to understand the preacher's words, the rest that the wilderness generation failed to enter must be far more than the promised physical rest of Canaan that was readily in view in the Numbers narrative. That obviously cannot be the type of rest to

which the Hebrews preacher referenced to his contemporary audience. The pastor determined to demonstrate that the ultimate rest to which he referred was an eternal and spiritual rest given by God. He sought to prove this truth through an exposition of Psalm 95:11. As Lane writes, “the demonstration that God’s rest still remains open is achieved exegetically.”⁷¹

In verses 3-5, the preacher directed his listeners to the words of Psalm 95:11, “As I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter my rest.” The pastor drew his concept of rest from these words, which are not only a warning about God’s wrath, but a promise of a rest that remained available. His exegetical focus is fixed upon the words, “my rest,” which he argued is more than something God bestows. Rather, when the psalmist spoke of “my rest,” it was ultimately the rest that God himself enjoys and provides for his people.

The preacher set forth the argument that the physical rest in the land of Canaan, which God denied to the wilderness generation, pointed to the spiritual rest that God himself entered into on the seventh day of creation. He argued that this is the psalmist’s notion of “rest” by carefully weaving together Psalm 95:11 and Genesis 2:2.⁷² After quoting Psalm 95:11, he immediately made an allusion to Genesis 2:2 with the words, “his works were finished from the foundation of the world” (v. 3), followed by the direct quote, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” To complete the connection, he repeated the final line of the psalmist, “And again in this passage he said, ‘They shall not enter my rest’” (v. 5).

⁷¹ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 99.

⁷² The Hebrews preacher does not arbitrarily join Ps 95:11 with Gen 2:2 because both use the term “rest.” His exegetical work necessitates the connection because of the specific reference in Ps 95:11 where God speaks of “my” rest. The one place in Scripture that speaks of God’s personal rest is in the creation account of Genesis. A perfect example of Scripture being used to interpret Scripture. As Cockerill writes, “The association is intrinsic: if one wanted to understand what God meant when he said, “my rest,” one must go to the place in Scripture that describes God’s resting.” See Cockerill, *The Epistles to the Hebrews*, 207.

By making this connection, the preacher demonstrated that the psalmist had a “rest” in view that was beyond the scope of the land promised to the nation of Israel. That spiritual and eternal rest was established by God at the culmination of creation and was the ultimate rest that the wilderness generation was prohibited from entering (v. 6). Since God’s rest began then and was never said to have been finished, Bruce declares that it “may be shared by those who respond to his overtures with faith and obedience.”⁷³ This means that the invitation to enter God’s rest continues to be open today, which is exactly what the Hebrews preacher demonstrated from the words of the psalmist.

In verses 6-10, the preacher proclaimed that God’s promise of eternal rest remained available for his people to enter. Guthrie views this as a theological necessity, “since the Israelites never entered (i.e., those who formerly received the good news), someone else must, if God’s promise is not to be rendered void.”⁷⁴ The only hindrance was disobedience, as displayed in the example of the wilderness generation (v. 6). The means of escaping their awful fate was to listen to the voice of God “today.” God established his eternal rest so that his people could enter it.

This compelled the preacher to declare in verse 7 that this reality was made manifest when the psalmist announced to the people of his day, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” The pastor reintroduced Psalm 95:7 in order to establish that the psalmist’s command to “not harden your hearts” was directly tied to the lingering invitation to God’s rest, which was spoken of in the final words of Psalm 95. The Hebrews preacher establishes that the psalmist was not speaking of physical rest and would assuage any doubts that lingered about the kind of rest that was in the psalmist’s mind.

First, he introduced David’s name with this psalm. By mentioning David, his

⁷³ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 106.

⁷⁴ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 117.

point was not primarily to assign him as the author as much as it was placing the psalm in its historical context. Thus he said, “saying through David so long afterword” (v. 7). In other words, God’s offer of rest in Psalm 95 was long after the failure of the wilderness generation, and many generations had come to pass since. Second, how could the call to enter God’s rest in Psalm 95 simply be physical entrance into Canaan? Israel had entered and lived in the land nearly four centuries by the time this psalm was composed. Hence, the preacher declared, “if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on” (v. 8). The historical context of the psalm supported the underlying meaning of the psalmist’s reference to God’s rest.

Therefore, the preacher declared the only possible exegetical conclusion: “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (v. 9).⁷⁵ Similar to the experience of the wilderness generation, the audience of the Hebrews preacher stood in history between the work of redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross and entrance into the eternal rest that belongs to God. Every generation is offered this promise of rest, which is received by all who both hear the good news and also persevere by faith. Thus, the preacher proclaimed, “whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his” (v. 10). God did not enter his rest until he had completed all his works and the same is true for those who desire to share his rest. Rather than turn back, the Hebrews preacher encouraged his listeners to press on in the work of obedient faith. Hughes explains, “the labors from which the people of God rest in the heavenly sabbath are the toilings, trials, and tribulations of their present pilgrimage.”⁷⁶ The ultimate motivation is the eternal hope of God’s rest, which is where the presence of God resides. As Griffith concludes, “entering God’s rest involves not simply ‘being as God is’ (i.e., at

⁷⁵ As Guthrie notes, the word the Hebrew preacher uses here does not occur elsewhere. He writes, “It may have been coined by this writer, for it effectively differentiates between the spiritual king of rest and the Canaan rest (the psalm has the word *katapasusis*).” Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 119.

⁷⁶ Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 161-62.

rest), but being where he is as well.” Therefore, the preacher held forth to his audience the glorious promise of sharing unbroken fellowship with God as the ultimate goal.

This grand motivation became the basis for the pastor’s exhortation in this cycle of exposition. If the exegetical conclusions are true, what his audience chose “today” in response to the preaching of the word is critical. They should be motivated to make every effort to enter God’s promised rest. As throughout this cycle, the preacher once again interwove hope with warning. They must “strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” as the wilderness generation did (v. 11). The preacher’s exhortation of 4:1 for his hearers to “fear” lest they failed to reach God’s rest, is followed in 4:11 with an exhortation to “strive” in their pursuit to enter his rest. The fear of what could be lost is met with the desire to strive for the glory of what is to be gained. But lest his listeners wondered what it meant to “strive to enter that rest,” the preacher delivered the grand conclusion of his exposition of Psalm 95:7-11.

Sixth expositional cycle: Hebrews 4:12-16. Unlike the previous three cycles of exposition, neither Psalm 95 nor any other Scripture is quoted here. Among scholars who treat Hebrews as a sermon, there is debate over the specific Scripture the preacher has in mind in these verses.⁷⁷ However, Cockerill understands Psalm 95:7-11 to be the continued connection based upon the preacher’s focus of the word of God and the fate of the wilderness generation who failed to listen.⁷⁸ There are good textual reasons for this conclusion.

First, the focus in verses 12 and 13 on the “word of God” gives strong

⁷⁷ So, for example, Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, 81 (he proposes Jdgs 3 as the exemplum where Ehud was sent by God to give a message to the Moabite king, Eglon, which resulted in Ehud thrusting a double-edged dagger into Eglon’s belly); Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 102 (he considers the preacher’s mention of sword to be a connection to Num 14:43 where Israel was judged by God for their rebellion and they fell by the sword of the Amalekites and Canaanites).

⁷⁸ Cockerill, *The Epistles to the Hebrews*, 215-16.

indication that Psalm 95:7-11 continues to function in the Hebrews preacher's flow of thought. The psalmist's words, "Today, if you hear his voice," are quoted three different times by the preacher, including the final quote in the previous expositional cycle. For both the psalmist and the Hebrews pastor, the "voice of God" is the "word of God," and one's response had eternal consequences. Second, as previously discussed, the psalmist concluded his song with a warning of judgment and an implicit promise of hope regarding "God's rest." Likewise, the preacher concluded with a final warning followed by a hope that was even more explicit. Third, as will be explained, Jesus is pictured in verse 14 as being in the presence of God (i.e., "passed through the heavens" and "throne of grace"), which is directly tied to the promise of eternal rest. Therefore, it is likely that Hebrews 4:12-16 functioned as the grand conclusion of the pastor's exposition of Psalm 95:7-11.

The preacher concluded this portion of his sermon by expounding his exhortation for his listeners to "strive to enter" God's rest (v. 11). However, this is not a type of self-effort, merit-based works system that earned them the right to enter God's rest. Entrance was based on having an attentive reverence for the word of God and an active dependence upon the person and work of Jesus.

In verses 12 and 13, the preacher issued a sober warning to his listeners about the awe-inspiring power of the word of God. It served to both expose the condition of their hearts and established that they stood accountable before God in its judgments. This should erase any doubts that lingered in them regarding why they must "today" heed the voice of God in his word.

First, they needed an attentive reverence for the word of God because of its living power to expose the true condition of their hearts (v. 12). The preacher declared God's word to be "living and active," which reflected the very nature of the God who spoke it. It is effective and able to accomplish its purpose, therefore, they would be wise to "hear his voice." The pastor described it as "sharper than any two-edged sword" that is

“piercing” and “discerning.” Hughes writes, “This means that as the instrument of God’s mighty acts it is more powerful and penetrating than the keenest instrument devised by man.”⁷⁹ Simply put, God’s word is able to cut one open and expose to him all that is truly going on in his heart (i.e., “thoughts and intentions”). The preacher’s bottom line is that his listeners must hear the word of God and allow it to have its full effect in their lives. It will expose their sin for what it is and cut right to the chase. No one knows what is truly in his own heart unless the word of God exposes it.

Second, they needed an attentive reverence for the word of God because he is the one who wields its power and sees into the depths of their hearts (v. 13). “God’s word so accurately and penetratingly exposes what is in the human heart because the God who speaks his word already knows what is there.”⁸⁰ The preacher declared to his listeners that they cannot hide from God what he clearly sees and reveals to them through his word. Their sinful condition is laid bare and they will stand before his presence in judgment to be held accountable. As Lane warns, “those who remain insensitive to the voice of God in Scripture discover that God’s word is also a lethal weapon.”⁸¹

The word of warning from the preacher is clear. An attentive reverence for the word of God is necessary because it exposed their hearts, rightly judged them, held them accountable for how they responded to it. Once again, the preacher warned of the hardness of heart that resulted in judgment. But this terrifying prospect is followed by a comforting hope that is found in Christ. The Word of God not only exposed the sinful conditions of their hearts, it revealed to them the one who enabled them to persevere. Therefore, striving to enter God’s rest not only required an attentive reverence for the Word of God but also an active dependence on the person and work of Jesus.

⁷⁹ Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 164.

⁸⁰ Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 217.

⁸¹ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 102.

In verses 14-16, the preacher gave the final exhortations of his exposition of Psalm 95:7-11 and directed his listeners to the high priestly ministry of Jesus who resides in the heavenly sanctuary. Their response to both the Word of God and the Son of God were vital in their striving to enter God's rest. Therefore, the preacher gave his listeners two exhortations that centered on Jesus.

In his first exhortation, the preacher declared, "let us hold fast our confession," which centers upon Jesus as our high priest (vv. 14-15). The "confession," to which they were to "hold fast," is focused upon the person and work of Christ. Immediately preceding his exposition of Psalm 95:7-11, the pastor spoke of this "confession" about Jesus at the conclusion of the second expositional cycle in Hebrews 2:17-3:1. Jesus is

a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.

There is a close correspondence between this passage and Hebrews 4:14-16. The Hebrews preacher proclaimed to his listeners that the ability to persevere did not reside in themselves but in Christ Jesus. As their great high priest, Jesus must be their focus because he has made propitiation for their sins (2:17); he himself endured temptation and is able to assist them in their hour of testing (2:18); and he has "passed through the heavens" (4:14). Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and their great high priest, has secured their salvation along with the hope of entering his eternal rest. He was the antidote to any fear of falling away. Rather than giving in to the temptation to withdraw, the preacher commanded his hearers to "hold fast" to what they confessed to be true about the person and work of Jesus.

The phrase, "passed through the heavens," is significant in the preacher's exposition of Psalm 95:7-11 and connection with the "rest" of God. As previously discussed, enjoying God's rest is directly tied to being in God's presence. While the Aaronic high priest had limited entrance into the presence of God in the earthly

sanctuary, Jesus had entered into the actual presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary and was seated at his right hand (Heb 1:3). Therefore, as the Son of God, Jesus was the only means of entering the presence of God and was both qualified and able to secure for the preacher's listeners the eternal rest promised for his people.

The preacher dispelled any concern in verse 15 that Jesus' transcendence made him too remote for their need. The ability of Jesus to identify with them had not ceased now that he had passed into the heavenly sanctuary. While verse 14 emphasized the heavenly ministry of Jesus, verse 15 elaborated upon the experience of the incarnate life of Jesus. Prior to passing through the heavens, he had passed through their experiences. The preacher explained that they have a high priest who was able to identify and sympathize with them in all the trials and temptations that they faced because he was exposed to all those struggles. Furthermore, he did not merely survive the testing, the preacher declared that Jesus was completely victorious over all the temptations that he faced. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, lived in complete obedience to the Word of God and never sinned. Therefore, the preacher concluded, Jesus is able to not only understand their struggles, but to also give them victory for the trials and temptations that they faced.

In his final exhortation, the pastor declared, "let us then with confidence draw near" and then focused upon what Jesus was able to provide for his listeners as their high priest (v. 16). Not only was Jesus pictured as the way to enter God's presence, but he was also the means of entrance. Instead of giving into the temptation to draw back and abandon their confession, the pastor urged his listeners to draw near with confidence to the "throne of grace" so they might receive what they needed in order to persevere. By faith, they now entered the presence of God in prayer for the enabling power needed, so that they will one day enter his heavenly presence in eternal rest. Rather than judgment, they might receive the mercy and grace necessary for every temptation or trial they faced. Cockerill writes, "Through God's 'mercy' the faithful are forgiven and released from their sins. . . . God's 'grace' provides the power to overcome temptation and to live

faithfully in all the circumstances of life.”⁸²

In summary, the Hebrews preacher gave a stern warning about the powerful Word of God that both exposed them and stood in judgment upon them (vv. 12, 13). Like the psalmist to his audience, the pastor warned his listeners about their need to pay careful attention to the Word of God. The wilderness generation refused to listen, and God’s Word pronounced judgment upon them. However, this word of warning was concluded with a word of hope. While the hope of God’s rest remaining open was merely implicit in the final words of the psalmist, the hope offered by the Hebrews preacher was extremely explicit. It was specifically fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. The pastor pointed his listeners to Jesus as the one who accomplished everything needed to bring God’s people safely home into God’s eternal rest. As their high priest, he had passed into the presence of God and was able to sympathize with their weaknesses, having been tempted himself. However, he was completely victorious over every temptation and was the source of all they needed so they can withstand any temptation they faced. Therefore, they must hold fast to their confession of the person and work of Jesus and draw near to the throne of God, so they might receive the mercy and grace in their time of need. What a great encouragement this was to press on and persevere!

Conclusion

In chapter two of this work, the use of Isaiah 61:1-2 by Jesus in his Luke 4 sermon was shown to be consistent with the proposed definition of expository preaching. This was followed by an examination of Peter’s lengthier discourse in Acts 2:14-26. Sufficient evidence was offered to demonstrate Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-30 was an example of biblical exposition. However, both of these sermons were brief summaries recorded by Luke. Therefore, in order to test whether expositional preaching is a

⁸² Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 228.

consistent pattern in the NT, I called for a lengthier example of a NT sermon to be evaluated. Since Hebrews is the lengthiest sermon that is recorded in the NT, a study of his use of an OT text was undertaken.

In this chapter, a careful study of both Psalm 95:7-11 and the preacher's use of that OT text in Hebrews 3:4-4:16 demonstrated the Hebrews sermon to be consistent with biblical exposition as defined earlier in this work. The evidence demonstrated the conclusion that the Hebrews preacher had discovered the point of Psalm 95:7-11, made it the central point of his sermon, and declared that truth so that his listeners could understand and apply it to their lives. The Hebrews text leaves no doubt that Psalm 95:7-11 was controlling the flow of the preacher's sermon.

In the first three cycles of exposition, he directly quoted the text, explained its meaning, and then exhorted his listeners to an obedient response. In the final cycle, although no direct quote was offered, the concepts and emphasis of the psalm continued to direct his explanation and final exhortations for his listeners. Furthermore, the main point of Psalm 95:7-11 governed this portion of the sermon of the Hebrews pastor. He followed the psalmist's emphasis that the eternal rest of God remained open to all who would hear and obey God's Word—demonstrating that they truly were the people of God.⁸³

We have now studied three sermons in the NT in order to understand each preacher's usage of OT texts. I will present in the final chapter, based upon my examination, a definition of expositional preaching derived from these examples and offer a defense for following this pattern of preaching.

⁸³ One critical distinction, however, is that the Hebrews preacher finds the fulfillment of the OT psalm to be Jesus Christ. Therefore, the application for the NT listeners of this OT psalm is rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This will be highlighted in this work's final chapter.

CHAPTER 4

AN APPEAL TO EMULATE THE BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

In his letter to young pastor Timothy, Paul instructed him about the seriousness of handling Scripture. Paul wrote, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). A clear implication is that there is an accurate way to administer the Word of God. No preacher has a right to self-determine how he will utilize the Scriptures. Paul then raised the stakes when he declared to Timothy, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the Word.” (2 Tim 4:1-2). In light of the eschatological implications, there can be no issue of greater importance for the preacher or the church than to understand what it means to “rightly handle the word of truth” and to “preach the Word.”

Therefore, I argued for examining Scripture for how it portrays the word of truth being handled and the God’s Word being preached. If a definition of preaching is to be established and a method of preaching is to be practiced, the final authority should not simply be based upon a popular homiletical book, a personal preference, or examples from church history. Fundamentally, it should be derived from Scripture. Therefore, I will present a defense for expository preaching—as defined at the beginning of this work—to be the model that should be followed today, establish a modified definition for expository preaching based specifically upon the NT texts examined in this study, and argue for the church to desire and support such preaching.

A Defense for Expository Preaching as the Biblical Pattern

In chapter 1 of this work, I identified common themes that are prevalent among modern proponents who seek to define expository preaching. These components of an expositional sermon include the task of working to discover the original meaning of the text (J. I. Packer and Bryan Chapell), making the point and intention of the text to be the point and intention of the sermon (Mark Dever and Mike Bullmore), and applying that truth to the listeners (Albert Mohler, Jr.). Therefore, I synthesized these elements to comprise the following definition:

Expository preaching discovers the point of a biblical text, makes it the central point of the sermon, and declares that truth in a way that the listeners can both understand it and apply it to their lives.

I presented three defenses that are given as support for this type of preaching. First were historical arguments, which analyzed sermons throughout church history to provide examples of preachers who preached Scripture consistent with the expository method. While there were many preachers who could be labeled as expositors, the pattern of expository preaching was found to be neither consistent nor overwhelmingly preferred.

Next, theological arguments were explored. The conclusion was that a correct biblical theology—what the bible teaches about the nature of God,¹ the nature of the church,² and the nature of Scripture³—will lead to a commitment to expository preaching. In light of these truths, I suggested one should expect to find preaching modeled in Scripture that would be consistent with expository preaching.

In my research, I found the greater amount of material that defended expository preaching, as defined above, was based upon historical and theological

¹ God chose to reveal himself by communicating who he is through the Scriptures.

² From the beginning, God's people have been created and sustained by the Word of God.

³ If the Bible is God's revelation of himself through the inspired biblical writers, then the church only hears his voice when the preacher says what God has spoken.

arguments. Far less attention was given to a close examination of examples of preaching recorded in Scripture.

Of the biblical examples given, the description of Ezra's preaching that is recorded in Nehemiah 8:5-8 was by far the most prevalent.⁴ That narrative describes Ezra's preaching as reading the text, giving the sense of the text, and helping the people understand the text. Although the actual words spoken by Ezra were not documented, the description of how he preached was consistent with expository preaching as defined.

However, descriptions from a narrative seem hardly sufficient to definitively establish either a definition or pattern of expository preaching. Therefore, I sought to analyze various NT texts that went beyond mere descriptions and recorded the actual content of a sermon. My intent was to further test the proposed definition for expository preaching in order to strengthen the defense that it should be the pattern followed by every preacher.

Summary of the Results

The emphasis of the study was placed upon three different NT sermons. Those inspected were Jesus' message from Isaiah 61:1-2 that is recorded in Luke 4:21, Peter's preaching of Joel 2:28-32 that is described in Acts 2:14-28, and the use of Psalm 95:7-11 from the sermon in Hebrews 3:4-4:16. Although both Jesus' and Peter's sermons had been used as models of expository preaching, they each had received only brief examinations. In addition, Hebrews had received little attention as a sermon and virtually no close scrutiny of the preacher's use of Scripture. Each of these were inspected more closely with the bulk of consideration given to the Hebrews sermon.

First, Jesus' sermon in Luke 4:16-30 was tested in accordance with the proposed definition. Luke wrote that Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1-2 and then recorded a

⁴ Presented in the works of Bryan Chapell, Mark Dever, John Piper, Steve Lawson, et al.

brief statement from the sermon: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Although the narrative only gives a one-sentence fragment of Jesus’ sermon, the point of Isaiah 61:1-2 was clearly the point that Jesus made to the crowd on that Sabbath day. The prophet Isaiah described the future glory of Israel when the Messiah would come to deliver them as a nation and expounded the blessings that he would bring to God’s people when he came. When Jesus declared this Scripture to be fulfilled in the hearing of the gathered worshippers, he was claiming to be the one whom the prophet Isaiah had promised. In addition, Jesus preached this truth so that the crowd understood his meaning and were motivated to respond—albeit negatively (Luke 4:23-27). Even with Luke’s brief account, Jesus’ sermon was consistent with each component of biblical exposition. However, with little more than a one-sentence summation recorded in a narrative passage, it was determined that the study of a lengthier sermon was needed.

Second, Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:14-28 was examined. When the crowd at Pentecost witnessed the apostles speaking in tongues, they wrongly concluded that the apostles were drunk. But Peter declared that this display was the result of the pouring out of the Spirit as prophesied in Joel 2:28-32. The central point of Joel’s message concerned a time of blessing and judgment that was coming in the future for Israel in relation to the Messianic era. Joel prophesied that there would first come a day when God would pour out his Spirit upon all his people. That would be followed by the “great and awesome day of the LORD” when God’s final judgment would come upon his enemies. The only means of escaping that final judgment was to repent and give their full allegiance to the Lord.

Peter’s central point was precisely the same as the prophet Joel. Peter declared that the Messianic age—marked by the outpouring of God’s Spirit—had come. He referenced Psalms 16 and 110 to substantiate that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah and they must call upon the name of the Lord in order to be saved from the coming day of judgment. Peter announced that the blessing Joel had prophesied to take place in the

future was being fulfilled on that day of Pentecost, which meant the day of judgment was sure to follow. Therefore, Peter made direct application of this prophetic truth and called upon his listeners to “repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).

It was concluded that Peter’s message was also consistent with the proposed definition for an expository sermon. Peter took the point of Joel’s message, made it the point of his sermon, and gave direct application to his listeners. Nevertheless, although there is far more detail than Jesus’ message in Luke 4, it is still a summary of a lengthier discourse (Acts 2:40). In addition, the sermon—like the others recorded in Acts—was not to an established congregation but primarily evangelistic. Therefore, a study in the book of Hebrews was embarked upon to research a sermon that was both of greater length and to an established congregation. This could provide greater insight for the modern preacher for how to handle the Scripture with his existing church and what it means to “preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:2).

Therefore, the final test of the proposed definition of expository preaching was applied to the book of Hebrews. While Luke and Acts are both narratives that record condensed sermons, evidence was given that identified Hebrews as an actual sermon that provided greater detail. The study was built upon Griffiths’ work, who argues that the Hebrews sermon consists of eleven expositional cycles.⁵ Cycles three through six were selected in order to determine the preacher’s treatment of Psalm 95:7-11.

In that OT context, the psalmist warned the people of Israel of their need to hear and obey God’s voice “today” in order to have confidence that they will enter his eternal rest in the future. He warned that failure to do so would result in grave consequences as evidenced by the wilderness generation of Israel who had refused to

⁵ Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Hebrews and Divine Speech*, ed. Mark Goodacre, Library of New Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 29-30.

believe the Word of God in their own day (Num 14:20-35). The psalmist concluded his message by offering both a warning and a hope. If the worshippers followed the rebellious path of the wilderness generation, they would suffer the same fate of God's wrath. However, the hope of God's rest remained available to all the true people of God in every age who would respond in obedience to God's voice.

The Hebrews preacher quoted from Psalm 95 throughout the examined cycles and stood at the center of his exposition. Like the psalmist, he addressed those who were part of God's people but needed to be warned of the danger of rebellion. The pastor saw his hearers facing the same situation as the "today" of the psalmist's audience. Therefore, he carefully explained Psalm 95:7-11 to call them to submit in full obedience to the Word of God. Not only did the point of the psalmist govern the argument of the preacher's sermon, but he also peppered his exposition with the language drawn from the OT passage (e.g., "today," "heart," "harden," "enter," and "rest"). The exposition even concluded in Hebrews 4:12-16 in a manner consistent with the climax of Psalm 95. The preacher issued both a warning and a hope of blessing.

The study of the Hebrews sermon confirmed that it was closely governed by the intention of Psalm 95:7-11. The Hebrews preacher maintained the central point of the original text, declared that truth in a way that the listeners could understand, and made direct application to their lives.

Having completed the results of this study, even if one accepts that each of these NT sermons were in accordance with the adopted definition of an expository sermon, the question stands regarding whether this should be the model for preaching today. Must every sermon be expositional? What conclusions can be drawn as to whether expository preaching is the pattern in Scripture that should be followed?

Conclusions from the Results

I believe the findings provided in the examination of these NT sermons make a

compelling case for the exclusive practice of expository preaching as originally defined.⁶

The following conclusions offer good reason for this claim:

The descriptions of preaching in Scripture are consistent with expository preaching. The explicit details of preaching in the OT and the NT sermons surveyed in this study evidence a pattern of reading, explaining, and applying the biblical text. The narrative accounts of the preaching of Ezra, Jesus, and Peter describe each of them as standing before their audience, quoting Scripture, expounding its meaning, and exhorting the listeners to action.

The actual content of summarized sermons recorded in the NT are consistent with expository preaching. Although there is good reason to define and defend expository preaching from the descriptions given in narrative accounts, the case is strengthened when the sermons themselves are more closely evaluated. Expository preaching is more than merely expounding a text, it demands that the original point of that biblical text must superintend the preacher's sermon. This was proven to be the case with the small fragment of Jesus' sermon from Isaiah 61:1-2 and the slightly larger summary of Peter's message from Joel 2:28-32. With both of these sermons, there was solid evidence that the point of the original text was governing the point of the preacher in his own message.

The only full-length sermon we possess in the NT is consistent with expository preaching. While every other sermon in the NT is either a brief snippet or short summary of the original, the book of Hebrews is akin to possessing the full manuscript of a sermon preached in the early church. Furthermore, the sermon offers special insight into preaching that was directed to an established congregation and

⁶ Consecutive preaching through books of the Bible is not the argument being made, but for sermons that are in accordance with the definition of expository preaching as defined by this work.

contains the greatest detail of how the preacher explained the original OT text. The inspection of the largest ancient sermon in all of Scripture demonstrated the preacher's use of the OT was completely consistent with expository preaching.⁷

In a real sense, all three arguments that are often made for expository preaching—historical, theological, and biblical model—are present in the book of Hebrews. Historically, it is the oldest sermon ever preached to an established church. Theologically, the preacher's view of Scripture is made evident. He introduced the quotation from Psalm 95 with the words, "as the Holy Spirit says." By using the present tense, there is clear indication that he believes God is directly speaking through this psalm to the hearers of his day as much as those of the past. He understood God to be revealing his mind in the Scriptures and believed that God's people hear his voice through them. Finally, the Hebrews pastor's biblical model for preaching was expositional in nature. The study demonstrated that the shape and intent of his sermon was completely controlled by the original intent of the psalmist, he carefully declared the truth in a way that his listeners could understand the original meaning of the OT text, and directly applied it to their lives.

I concede that any one of these arguments in isolation is not a strong enough defense to establish expository preaching as the biblical pattern that should be exclusively followed. In addition, I admit that this study has not exhaustively examined every sermon found in the NT. There is more work that could and should be done to continue to champion expository preaching.

However, I contend the combination of the above arguments, along with the careful evaluation of the three NT sermons in this work, have made a convincing case for

⁷ Admittedly, this work did not perform an exhaustive examination of the book of Hebrews. However, four of the eleven cycles of exposition, as proposed by Griffiths, were considered. In addition, Ps 95:7-11 was the lengthiest treatment of any OT text in the sermon. Therefore, I contend this to be sufficient to make a judgment of the preacher's use of the OT. Nevertheless, a complete review of the Hebrews sermon would be encouraged to further advance this conversation.

a pattern of expository preaching. This study presented a greater in-depth analysis of Jesus' and Peter's use of the OT texts in their sermons than previously offered by other proponents of expository preaching. Furthermore, nowhere else has a close examination of Hebrews as a sermon been undertaken in order to demonstrate that the preacher's use of the OT is compatible with expository preaching. Every sermon examined was fully in accordance with the definition given for expository preaching. Therefore, with the amount of evidence from the results of this study, not only is there good reason to view expository preaching as the exclusive model for the church today, the burden of proof seems to lie upon those who would want to argue otherwise.

There is a final significant contribution that can be made from this study's conclusions in the desire to establish a definition of expository preaching that proceeds from actual sermons recorded in Scripture. In the final analysis of the results, I observed a striking difference that must be addressed between the OT texts and the application that is made by each of the sermons in the NT context.

For example, there is a distinct difference between the message of the psalmist in Psalm 95:7-11 and that of the Hebrews preacher. While the sermon in Hebrews concludes its treatment of Psalm 95 with the same theme of "entering rest," the preacher's application for his audience directed them somewhere that the psalmist did not explicitly point—namely Jesus in the heavens (Heb 4:14-16). The preacher declared that they should "strive to enter that rest" (4:11), and then proclaimed that their ability to accomplish this did not reside in themselves but in their high priest, Jesus, the Son of God (4:14). This revealed a critical distinction that causes me to recommend a modification to the definition of expository preaching.

A Modification of the Definition of Expository Preaching

In each of the NT sermons studied in this work, the ultimate and final emphasis of each exposition was focused on Jesus. In the exposition of Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus pointed

to himself as the one whom the prophet Isaiah promised. The sermon was not complete until the text was applied directly to the person of Jesus and invoked a response from the listeners. Although it was a response of rejection, the crowd still rightly understood Jesus' application of the prophecy to himself, which evoked reaction.

In Peter's exposition of Joel 2:28-32, he presented Jesus as the fulfillment of that OT prophecy. The pouring out of the Spirit, as prophesied by Joel, marked the beginning of the Messianic era. Peter then demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah whom they had rejected and crucified (Acts 2:22-23). God, however, raised Jesus from the dead and he is now seated at God's right hand (Acts 2:24-35). As the exalted Messiah, Jesus had the authority to execute both the blessing prophesied by Joel (i.e., the pouring out the Spirit upon his people) and the judgment of God's enemies announced by the prophet (i.e., the dreadful day of the Lord). Peter presented Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT text and the application for his listeners was grounded in who Jesus was as the Messiah—in both his present work of blessing and future work of judgment. Therefore, the sermon was not finished until the listeners were called to rightly respond to Jesus by repenting and being baptized into his name (Acts 2:38).

The exegesis of Psalm 95:7-11 by the preacher in Hebrews also culminated in pointing to Jesus Christ. This raises an important issue. One might naturally expect Jesus' sermon from Isaiah and Peter's message from Joel to focus upon Christ. After all, they are both considered to be Messianic in nature. In Isaiah 61:1-2, the words recorded are considered the voice of the Messiah describing the blessings he came to bring.⁸ Likewise, Joel 2:28-32 is connected with both the coming blessing and judgment that will be executed by the Messiah.⁹ However, Psalm 95 is not categorized as Messianic in nature.¹⁰

⁸ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 563-64.

⁹ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 93.

¹⁰ A Messianic psalm is one that contains "predictions or foreshadowings of Christ." See

Yet the Hebrews preacher applied the passage directly to the person and work of Jesus Christ in accordance with his role as high priest. While Psalm 95:11 merely ended with an open invitation that still stood to enter God’s eternal rest, the Hebrews pastor called upon his listeners to specifically look to Jesus Christ for the “mercy and grace” (Heb 4:16) needed to be able to “strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:14).

This draws attention to an ongoing discussion among proponents of expository preaching. Should Christ be preached from every biblical text and is this essential to what it means to preach an expositional sermon?

Views of Christ-Centered Expository Preaching

Although Chapell does not include it in an official definition of expository preaching, he argues that “expository preaching is Christ-centered preaching.”¹¹ Furthermore, he writes, “Christ-centered preaching rightly understood does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ.”¹²

Some proponents of expository preaching recommend caution in this area.¹³ Walter Kaiser warns about Chapell’s claim and writes that the preacher “must not prematurely infuse New Testament values and meanings back into the Old Testament in order to sanctify it before I independently establish, on purely Old Testament grounds, the legitimate meaning of the Old Testament text.”¹⁴ This is a wise warning, and it

Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 32.

¹¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 280.

¹² *Ibid.*, 279.

¹³ The discussion surrounding the topic of Christ-centered preaching is quite extensive, and the scope of this work does not allow the time needed to properly explore this topic. The reader is encouraged to do further reading on this topic, and I will offer a brief defense for the view, which is primarily driven by the sermons examined and not ultimately upon any scholarly work.

¹⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Majesty of God in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker

appears from the Hebrews sermon that the preacher was faithful to the meaning of the OT text. He fully preached the original point of the Psalm 95 passage and made his ultimate application rooted in Christ.

Dale Ralph Davis, who also favors expository preaching, seems to be more hesitant in his approach to preaching Christ from the OT. He writes, “I do not feel compelled to make every Old Testament passage point to Christ in some way because I do not think Christ himself requires it.”¹⁵ However, it is striking that in the three sermons examined by this work, including one preached by Jesus, each reaches its climax with direct application that is centered upon Christ. More importantly, Luke 24:27 seems to directly support that Christ modeled this in his own handling of the Scriptures with the disciples on the Emmaus road: “And beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

One proponent of expository preaching who fully rejects this interpretation of Luke 24:27 and the Christ-centered preaching model is Abraham Kuruvilla. He writes, “it is hard to defend a stance that locates Christ in every word, verse, and story, without the interpreter engaging in some hermeneutical acrobatics.”¹⁶ Further, he argues, “Jesus is not finding himself in all the texts of Scripture, but rather finding just those texts that concern himself in all the major divisions of Scripture.”¹⁷ However, that statement itself is somewhat of a hermeneutical acrobatic move since it requires reading into the text something far more restrictive than what it clearly states. I could not find anyone who claims that Jesus went through the entire OT in that one sitting with the Emmaus road

Academic, 2007), 19.

¹⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh: How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 134-35.

¹⁶ Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 248.

¹⁷ Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 250.

disciples and demonstrated to them where he is found in every passage. The essential assertion is that Christ placed himself at the center of interpreting the OT Scripture.¹⁸

Kuruvilla also takes aim at the attempt to make a defense for Christ-centered preaching with Paul's pronouncement in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." He contends, "Paul himself did not preach Christ in every sermon recorded in Scripture. At least in the one delivered on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-31, and, perhaps, in his defense in Acts 14:8-18), neither Jesus nor the cross is mentioned."¹⁹ Although his observation is correct, he fails to call attention to the fact that all the sermons in Acts are summations and not complete recounts. Nevertheless, there is good indication that Paul likely mentioned Christ and the cross in his sermon on Mars Hill.

Luke records Paul saying in Acts 17:31 that God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Paul speaks of the resurrection, which necessarily implies a death, so it seems likely that he also mentioned how he died. It appears that Luke is choosing to record the part of Paul's sermon that focused on the resurrection of Christ because that was the issue that evoked differing responses from the audience: "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this'" (17:32). Furthermore, Luke records that some of that crowd ended up joining Paul and believing (17:34). Surely no one would

¹⁸ I personally attended a meeting at a gathering of The Evangelical Homiletics Society where Kuruvilla shared some of his concerns regarding Christ-centered preaching. A sermon was read of a popular pastor preaching the story of King Solomon's wisdom in his ruling between two women both claiming to be the mother of a child. The pastor declared that Christ was found in that story in the woman who was willing to sacrifice her newborn so that the child could live. He argued that such a display of self-sacrifice was where the connection to Christ could be found in the passage. First, the point of the passage is not "self-sacrifice," but the great wisdom of Solomon that had been granted to him by God. Second, Christ-centered preaching is not trying to determine which character in a story is the one who best represents Christ. If what Kuruvilla is reacting against is someone trying to play a version of "Where's Waldo" with Jesus in the OT, I share that concern.

¹⁹ Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 251.

argue that their belief was placed in no more than the abbreviated account of Paul's sermon as recorded by Luke, which spoke of nothing more than "a man" who was "resurrected." I believe Kuruvilla overplays his hand in this argument.

The alternative Kuruvilla gives is what he labels "Christiconic interpretation." His hermeneutical method views the moral commands in Scripture to portray an aspect of Christ's image that points to a "facet of Christlikeness."²⁰ Therefore, he does not consider it necessary to point to the work of Christ in the preaching of every passage because he contends that simply preaching the divine demands, "pericope by pericope, one gradually becomes more Christlike."²¹ To argue this claim, Kuruvilla declares, "This is the purpose of preaching: 'We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.' (Col 1:28)."²² But is Paul's message in Colossians consistent with Kuruvilla's proposed approach?

After Paul made his statement in Colossians 1:28, he did not immediately proceed to give "divine demands" that his readers should obey that would lead them to a greater "Christlikeness." It is not until chapter three in Colossians that he issued a list of commands. If Colossians 1:28 is the purpose of preaching, and I agree that it is, then Paul modeled his practice starting in Colossians 2:8 with a pattern of admonishment and teaching that extended into 3:4.

After explaining to the Colossians in 2:6-7 about their need to be "established in the faith" so they might live in obedience (i.e., "so walk in him"), he gave his first admonishment: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not

²⁰ Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 260.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 262. Note that Kuruvilla does not deny the need for the Holy Spirit to perform the work of transformation, but that it is unnecessary to point to Christ or the cross in the preaching of every text. *Ibid.*, 264.

²² *Ibid.*, 262.

according to Christ” (2:8). Then he offered the teaching in connection with that admonishment in Colossians 2:9-15:

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Clearly the person and work of Christ is at the center of Paul’s teaching and is necessary for the believers at Colossae to more fully understand in order to be able to live obedient lives. Paul continued this Christ-centered pattern of warning and teaching through the end of this section (Col 2:16-23).

Finally, he commanded them to fix their eyes on the resurrected and ascended Christ in all his glory (Col 3:1-4). Paul’s focus on the person and work of Christ became the foundation upon which all of the forthcoming commands would stand. The believer’s ability to obey the Christlike commands given in chapter three was completely dependent upon turning from everything else and growing in a deeper understanding of the person and work of Christ. In other words, you cannot get from Colossians 1:28 to the commands starting in 3:5 without traveling the Christ-centered road of Colossians 2:8–3:4. Therefore, rather than Colossians serving as a legitimate defense of “Christiconic Interpretation,” Paul presented a perfect example of a Christ-centered model.

Although Kuruvilla’s scholarly work is impressive and deserves a proper hearing, I find it unconvincing and not consistent even with the Scripture he uses to support his arguments. Ultimately, a major reason that possibly led to Kuruvilla’s flawed outcome is he makes a critical error at the outset by limiting the scope of his sermon examples to those in Acts. He writes, “the sermons we have in the NT are but few in

number, and all of them without exception, are evangelistic.”²³ The limit of his study was too narrow, and he apparently did not consider or examine Hebrews as a sermon to discover how that preacher emphasizes Christ in his exposition.

John Piper, who is an advocate for Christ-centered preaching, makes an important clarification that moves the discussion forward in a helpful direction. Perhaps some resist the idea of the concept of preaching Christ in every sermon because they believe this simply means ending every sermon with a brief recitation of the basics of the gospel. Piper argues that ending every sermon with a “rehearsal of what Christ did on the cross” will tend to “dull the expectations of the people with a predictable homiletical path.”²⁴ Furthermore, he says, “It tends to weaken the seriousness of biblical imperatives on how to live the Christian life by inserting the substitutionary atonement at critical moments when the emphasis should be falling on the urgency of obedience.”²⁵ This critical distinction is reflected in the Hebrews sermon.

Christ-Centered Preaching in Hebrews

At the point of application in his sermon, the Hebrews preacher gave the command, “strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11). This was consistent with the original intention of the conclusion of Psalm 95. However, he did not end his treatment of Psalm 95:7-11 with a command of personal self-effort. To only tell his listeners to “strive to enter that rest” would be little more than moralism. Therefore, he concluded his exposition of the psalm by declaring that entrance was based upon an attentive reverence for the Word of God and an active dependence on the person and work of Jesus. The connection that the preacher makes to Christ did not directly point to his substitutionary

²³ Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 246.

²⁴ John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 232.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

atonement—although that would certainly be included in the “confession” to which believers are to “hold fast” (4:14). Rather, the pastor directed the focus to Christ’s function as high priest as the ascended Messiah (4:15-16). Jesus’ heavenly high priestly ministry is the guarantee that God’s people would one day enter God’s eternal rest as they look to him for the mercy and grace that they need to enter. The Hebrews writer could offer a hope that was not yet available to the psalmist’s audience.

I agree with Piper that every sermon should not end by merely rehearsing Christ’s saving work on the cross. Piper offers a clarifying question that he asks himself with every passage that he preaches: “What did Christ do on the cross in regard to the reality of this particular sermon text?”²⁶ His point is the preacher should ask himself what Christ did on the cross that makes it possible for his listeners to apply any particular sermon text to their lives.

However, in light of the sermons studied in this work, I would slightly broaden Piper’s question to the following: “What aspect of the person and work of Christ impacts the reality of this particular sermon text?” This question goes beyond Christ’s work upon the cross. For example, it would expand it to his function as high priest, which was the direction the Hebrews preacher pointed with his application.²⁷ Christ’s current function as high priest was more connected with his ascension than simply his work upon the cross. This is not to say that the person and work of Jesus can be understood isolated from his death on the cross. For example, his ascension was directly related to that obedient work (Phil 2:8-9). Everything about Jesus’ person and work is directly related to his

²⁶ Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*, 232.

²⁷ The Hebrews preacher not only makes application in connection with Jesus’ function as high priest, he also points his listeners to the life of Christ in his application (i.e., “one who in every respect have been tempted as we are, yet without sin). Furthermore, there is clear evidence that this is his pattern. At the conclusion of the second cycle of exposition (Heb 2:14-18), the preacher also roots his application in the person and work of Christ. The aspects he focuses upon there are the incarnation of Christ (i.e., “therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things . . . he had to be made like his brothers in every respect”) and the death of Christ (i.e., “through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death . . . to make propitiation for the sins of the people”).

accomplishment at Mt. Calvary.

However, when one thinks about making application of a biblical text, there might be a particular aspect of Jesus' person and work that would make a better connection. The Hebrews preacher could have said that Jesus' death on the cross secured the believer's ability to enter God's rest, and that would have been perfectly true. But he gave the application to "strive to enter that rest" and chose to root the listener's ability to obey in connection with a particular aspect of the person and work of Jesus Christ, namely his high priestly work as the ascended Messiah. As previously argued, the "eternal rest" in Scripture was directly related to the presence of God, where Christ now resides as our high priest.

Therefore, that is exactly where the listeners of the Hebrews preacher needed to look to find the mercy and grace they needed to obey the command. That is not to say the preacher could not work back to the cross to help the listener understand how Christ's ascension is directly connected to what he accomplished in his death. However, one should think more broadly than just what happened at Mt. Calvary and should expand his thinking to all that has resulted from that glorious work of Christ.²⁸

A Modified Definition

I am compelled by the evidence presented in this work that an expository sermon is not complete until it has been finally applied in a way that points ultimately to Jesus Christ. In all three instances, the application was rooted in the person and work of Christ. Even where the original OT text did not necessarily make a clear connection to the coming Messiah, the preacher demonstrated how it was ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

²⁸ 1 John 3:2-3 is a perfect example of tying obedience to a work of Christ that is beyond his work on the cross. There the emphasis for obedience is placed upon the Return of Christ: "Beloved we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

The Hebrews sermon, which was preached to an existing congregation of believers, gives even further clarity for how this is best accomplished for today's preacher. The application must finally land upon Jesus Christ and be rooted in the aspect of his person and work that is most fitting for any particular sermon text. A further examination of Hebrews reveals the preacher continually directs his listeners back to Jesus. Each and every exposition, points to Christ and his saving power. Therefore, the following modification is offered for the original definition given for expository preaching:

Expository preaching discovers the point of a biblical text, makes it the central point of the sermon, declares that truth in a way that the listeners can understand, and makes application to their lives that is rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

NT expositional preaching is fundamentally Christ-centered. The exposition is not complete until Christ has been exalted and his gospel is given as the ultimate answer. It makes sense that Christ should be the center of every sermon, as Mohler observes, "Every single text of Scripture points to Christ. . . . From Moses to the prophets, He is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, and every story in the Bible ends with Him."²⁹

An Appeal to the Church and Preachers Today

The goal of this study was to establish a definition for expository preaching that was derived from an examination of actual sermons recorded in Scripture and to make a defense that this model should be followed today. Many books have been written to defend expository preaching and, as already referenced, many do not accept it as the pattern for preaching that should be adopted in churches today. Therefore, I certainly do not expect that this work will settle the argument once and for all.

However, I do hope to have advanced the conversation in such a way that will persuade everyone to consider the merits of expository preaching, to persuade some who

²⁹ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 248.

have resisted to adopt it as the only form of true biblical preaching, and to encourage those already practicing biblical exposition to stand firm in their commitment.

What the church needs today is preachers who long to preach God's Word and congregants who long to hear God's Word preached. If Christians desire to hear God speak, the only means they have to hear his voice is through the proper preaching of the Scripture. The preacher only has two options: preach his own ideas and look for a text to support his sermon or preach God's ideas by drawing the original meaning from the text and allow that alone to shape his sermon. The preacher either preaches his ideas or God's ideas, but he cannot do both. This is a serious matter; to alter the meaning of the text is to alter the very voice of God

Only expository preaching accomplishes the task of allowing God's voice to be heard, understood, and rightly applied. No other preaching should be accepted. As the Hebrews pastor rightly understood, God still speaks today and what he said to his people in the ancient texts is the same thing he is saying today—"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says" (Heb 3:7). Finally, since God now speaks ultimately through his Son (Heb 1:1-2), the preaching of the Word must always lead to Christ. If preachers are to preach sermons as modeled in Scripture, they must follow the pattern of preaching Christ from every text.

May Paul's final charge to Timothy ring in every preacher's ears: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:1-2).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Allen, David L. *Hebrews*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010.
- Allen, Leslie C. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- Attridge, Harold W. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989.
- Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950.
- Beale, G. K. *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.
- Beale, G. K., and D. A. Carson. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Blackwood, Andrew W. *The Preparation of Sermons*. Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948.
- Bock, Darrell. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- _____. *Luke 1:1–9:50*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001.
- Breneman, Mervin. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. Rev. ed. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- _____. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Bryson, Harold T. *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. 1536. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.

- Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012.
- Dargan, Edwin Charles. *A History of Preaching*. 2 vols. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *The Word Became Fresh: How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006.
- Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Dever, Mark, and Greg Gilbert. *Preach: Theology Meets Practice*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012.
- Edwards, O. C. *A History of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004.
- Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Ezell, Rick. *Hitting a Moving Target: Preaching to the Changing Needs of Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999.
- Fensham, F. Charles. *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.
- Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Greidanus, Sidney. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Griffiths, Jonathan I. *Hebrews and Divine Speech*. Library of New Testament Studies. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014.
- Guthrie, Donald. *Hebrews*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.
- Guthrie, George H. *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*. Biblical Studies Library. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.
- Hatch, Edwin. *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages Upon the Christian Church*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1914.
- Helm, David. *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today*. 9marks: Building Healthy Churches. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.
- House, H. Wayne, and Daniel G. Garland. *God's Message, Your Sermon: Discover, Develop, and Deliver What God Meant by What He Said*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

- Hubbard, David Allan. *Joel & Amos: An Introduction & Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989.
- Hughes, Philip E. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews: A Commentary*. The New Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *The Majesty of God in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Kidner, Derek. *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981.
- _____. *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008.
- Kuruvilla, Abraham. *Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013.
- Lane, William L. *Hebrews 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1991.
- _____. *Hebrews 9-13*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1991.
- Larsen, David L. *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998.
- Lawson, Steven J. *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003.
- Lewis, Ralph L., and Gregg Lewis. *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1983.
- Longenecker, Richard. *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.
- Marshall, I. H. *Acts*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980.
- _____. *The Pastoral Epistles*. International Critical Commentary. London: T & T Clark, 1999.
- Meyer, Jason C. *Preaching: A Biblical Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- Miller, Calvin. *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.
- Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008.
- Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

- Piper, John. *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Potter, G. R. *Zwingli*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976.
- Prior, David. *The Message of Joel, Micah, & Habakkuk: Listening to the Voice of God. The Bible Speaks Today*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998.
- Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Ross, Allen P. *A Commentary on the Psalms: 90–150*. Kregel Exegetical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016.
- Smith, Gary V. *Isaiah 40–66*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009.
- Stein, Robert H. *Luke*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993.
- Stott, John R. W. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea–Jonah*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1989.
- Tate, Marvin E. *Psalms 101–150*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 2002.
- Turnbull, Ralph G. *A History of Preaching*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974.
- Vanhoye, Albert. *A Structured Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Translated by James Swetnam. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964.
- Williamson, H. G. M. *Ezra, Nehemiah*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1985.
- Witherington, Ben, III. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Wolff, Hans Walter. *Joel and Amos*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.
- York, Hershael W., and Bert Decker. *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003.

Articles

- Allen, R. Michael, and Scott R. Swain. “In Defense of Proof-Texting.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 3 (2011): 589-606.
- Allen, Robert A. “The Expository Sermon—Cultural or Biblical?” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 177-85.

- Attridge, Harold W. "Paraenesis in a Homily (Λόγος Παρακλήσεως): The Possible Location of, and Socialization in, the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'." *Semeia* 50 (1990): 211-26.
- Beale, G. K. "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method." In *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by G. K. Beale, 387-404. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- Caird, George B. "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews." *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5, no. 1 (1959): 44-51.
- Deuel, David C. "An Old Testament Pattern for Expository Preaching." *The Masters Seminary Journal* 2, no. 2 (1991): 125-38.
- _____. "Suggestions for Expositional Preaching of Old Testament Narrative." *Master's Seminary* 2, no. 1 (1991): 45-60.
- Doyle, G. Wright. "Augustine's Sermonic Method." *Westminster Theological Journal* 39 (Spring 1977): 214-35.
- Easley, Michael. "Why Expository Preaching?" In *The Moody Handbook of Preaching*, edited by John Koessler, 27-38. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008.
- Enns, Peter E. "Creation and Re-Creation: Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3:1-4:13." *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 255-80.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. "Preaching in the Apostolic and Subapostolic Age." In *Preaching in the Patristic Age*, edited by David G. Hunter, 22-34. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.
- France, R. T. "The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor." *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (1996): 245-76.
- Hooker, Morna D. "Beyond the Things That Are Written? Saint Paul's Use of Scripture." In *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by G. K. Beale, 279-94. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- Lane, William B. "Hebrews: A Sermon in Search of a Setting." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 28, no. 1 (1985): 13-18.
- Lindars, Barnabas. "The Place of the Old Testament in the Formation of New Testament Theology." In *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by G. K. Beale, 137-45. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- MacArthur, John, Jr. "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching." In *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, edited by Richard L. Mayhue, 22-35. Dallas: Word, 1992.
- MacLeod, David J. "The Literary Structure of the Book of Hebrews." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 582, (April-June 1989): 185-97.

- Mayhue, Richard L. "Rediscovering Expository Preaching." In *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, edited by Richard L. Mayhue, 3-21. Dallas: Word, 1992.
- Packer, J. I. "Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Ourselves." In *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, edited by Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson, 140-56. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007.
- Rad, Gerhard Von. "There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God: An Investigation of a Biblical Conception." Translated by E. W. Trueman Dicken. In *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, 93-109. London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966.
- Robinson, Haddon. "Convictions of Biblical Preaching." In *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, 23-24. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Scharf, Greg R. "Were the Apostles Expository Preachers? Old Testament Exposition in the Book of Acts." *Trinity Journal* 31, no. 1 (2010): 65-93.
- Snodgrass, Klyne. "The Use of the Old Testament in the New." In *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by G. K. Beale, 29-51. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- Stanley, Steve. "The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives." *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994): 245-71.
- Stitzinger, James F. "The History of Expository Preaching." *The Masters Seminary Journal* 3, no. 1 (1992): 5-32.
- Stott, John R. W. "A Definition of Biblical Preaching." In *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, 24-29. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Swetnam, James. "Form and Content in Hebrews 1-6." *Biblica* 55 (1974): 368-85.
- Thomas, Derek. "Expository Preaching: Keeping Your Eye on the Text." In *Feed My Sheep*, edited by Don Kistler, 61-93. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002.
- Unger, Merrill F. "The Need of Expository Preaching in the Twentieth Century." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 111, (July-September 1954): 229-41.
- Walters, John R. "The Rhetorical Arrangement of Hebrews." *The Asbury Theological Journal* 51, no. 2 (1996): 59-70.
- Wills, Lawrence. "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity." *Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 3 (1984): 277-99.

ABSTRACT

ESTABLISHING A DEFINITION OF AND DEFENSE FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Robert Thomas Buck, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michael E. Pohlman

The thesis of this work is that a definition for expository preaching can be established directly from an examination of NT examples of preaching, which will serve to strengthen a commitment to expositional sermons.

Chapter 1 establishes a working definition for expository preaching by synthesizing elements that proponents claim must be present to constitute authentic expository preaching. This definition functions to test examples of various NT sermons.

Chapter 2 examines Luke 4:16-21 and Acts 2:14-36 to reveal their use of OT texts in light of the adopted definition of expository preaching.

Chapter 3 develops the argument that the book of Hebrews is a complete sermon and examines the author's exposition of Psalm 95:7-1. It is a perfect model of expository preaching.

Chapter 4 analyzes the results and offers a significant modification of the working definition of expository preaching. The conclusion is made that a definition for expository preaching can be derived solely from an examination of NT sermons and a defense can be established that this model for preaching should be exclusively followed today.

VITA

Robert Thomas Buck

EDUCATION

B.A., Moody Bible Institute, 2007

Th.M., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Youth Pastor, Westside Baptist Church, New Port Richey, Florida, 1987-1989

Youth Pastor, Rosehill Baptist Church, Garland, Texas, 1991-1993

Senior Pastor, Riverside Baptist Church, New Port Richey, Florida, 1994-2006

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Lindale, Texas, 2006-

ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

The Evangelical Homiletical Society