

Christ-Centered Preaching

A Summary and Evaluation

Singapore Bible College Seminar by Dr. Jeffrey Arthurs in July 2014

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Uploaded by Dr. Rick Griffith • Singapore Bible College

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Leading Proponents

- Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text; Preaching Christ from Genesis*.
- Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*.
- Graham Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*.
- Timothy Keller, “Preaching to the Heart,” (Ockenga Lectures). Cf. Clowney and Keller, iTunes University lectures, “Preaching Christ to a Post-Modern World.”

Theology/Hermeneutics:

- Historical-Redemptive Hermeneutic—the entire Bible is one univocal document, unified by the depiction of God's saving the world in Christ. *All* portions of the Bible reveal something about Christ and redemption.
- Thus, all sermons should overtly and explicitly reveal something about Christ and his work of redemption.

Often Contrasted With . . .

- Moralistic Preaching: using biblical characters (esp. OT characters) as moral exemplars.
 - Note: This term, “moralistic preaching,” is *not* used by those who preach this way. It seems unfair to me.
- Principle-Driven Preaching.
 - Example: Sermon on Esther.

The Beauty Queen Who Saved a Nation (Sermon on Esther)

- While the book of Esther does not condone beauty pageants, we should not assume that God is “embarrassed, restrictive, or hostile toward feminine beauty and sexuality.” If you wind up in a situation where your physical beauty takes you to compromising situations, remember:
 - God may have brought you to such a place “for such a time as this.”
 - There are dangers in the secular world.
- It is unwise to attempt to destroy the people of Israel because God will defend the physical sons of Abraham. The Jews have a right to defend themselves, as do other nations.

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 - Example: Sermon on Esther.
- Principle-Driven Preaching.
- Theocentric Preaching.
 - Note: Christ-Centered proponents often say that if a sermon could be preached comfortably in a synagogue or mosque, it is not a Christian sermon. They say that “merely” preaching about God is deficient. The sermon should overtly refer to Christ.
 - Note: for a defense of theocentric preaching, see Ken Langley, “When Christ Replaces God at the Center of Preaching,” *JEHS* 9/1 (March 2009): 53-84.

Arthurs' Opinion

Pro

- I have been deeply edified by Christ-centered preaching.
- The Bible itself claims that Christ is a major theme.
- There is much pastoral wisdom in emphasizing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fact that all of us are continuously being converted. All of us need the gospel all the time.
- We must do more than simply say to people, "Just stop it."

Con

- The NT regularly uses OT characters as moral exemplars.
- The NT regularly presents Christ as our example of good behavior.

NT Use of OT Characters for Moral Exhortation

- 1 Cor. 10:11-12, “These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction. . . . Therefore, let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”
- James 5:16-18, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.”
- 1 John 3:12, “We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.”

NT Use of Christ (and Paul) for Moral Exhortation

- John 13:15, “I have given you an example that you also ought to do just as I have done.”
- Phil. 2:5-7, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ”
- 1 Peter 2:21, “To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”
- 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17, “Be imitators of me.”

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“Pericopal Theology”

- For a sophisticated and nuanced contrast to historical-redemptive hermeneutics, see:
Abraham Kuruvilla, “Preaching as Translation via Theology,” *JEHS* 9/1 (2009): 85-97.
- Kuruvilla argues how “the key hermeneutical entity governing the validity of application . . . is the theology of the pericope” rather than the theology of the meta-narrative.

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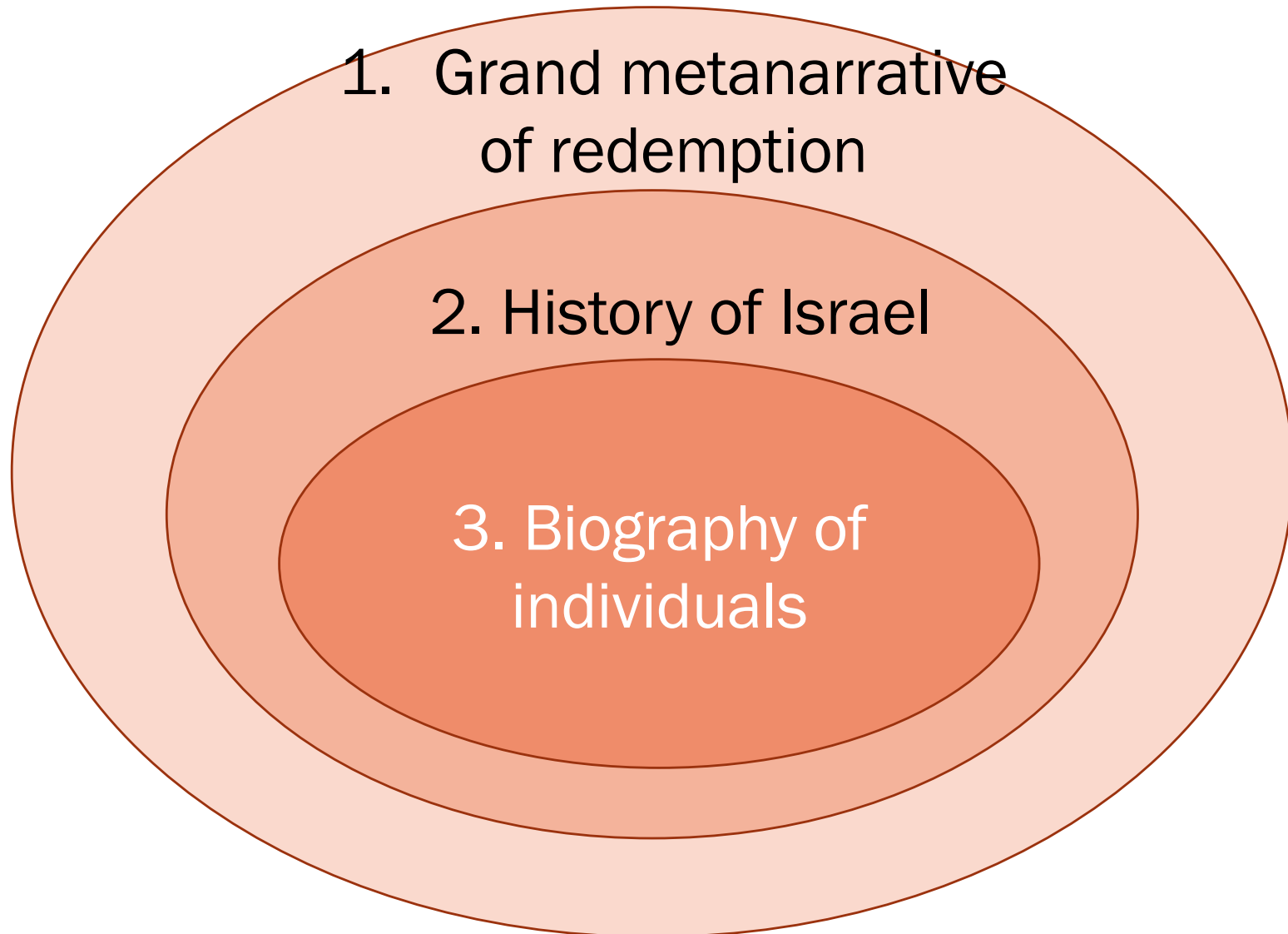
Con

- The NT regularly uses OT characters as moral exemplars
- The NT regularly presents Christ as our example of good behavior.
- We are committed to discerning and declaring the author's intention (as well as the Author's intention).
- We are committed to preaching Trinitarian theology, not Christo-monic theology.
- Preaching Christ from some OT texts feels awkward and formulaic. E.g. wisdom literature.

Arthurs' Practice

- Emphasize GRACE regularly and frequently.
- Ground the moral imperative in the theological indicative.
- Trinitarian.
- For OT narrative, follow Fee and Stuart's "three levels of meaning" (from *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*).

Three Levels of Meaning in OT Narrative

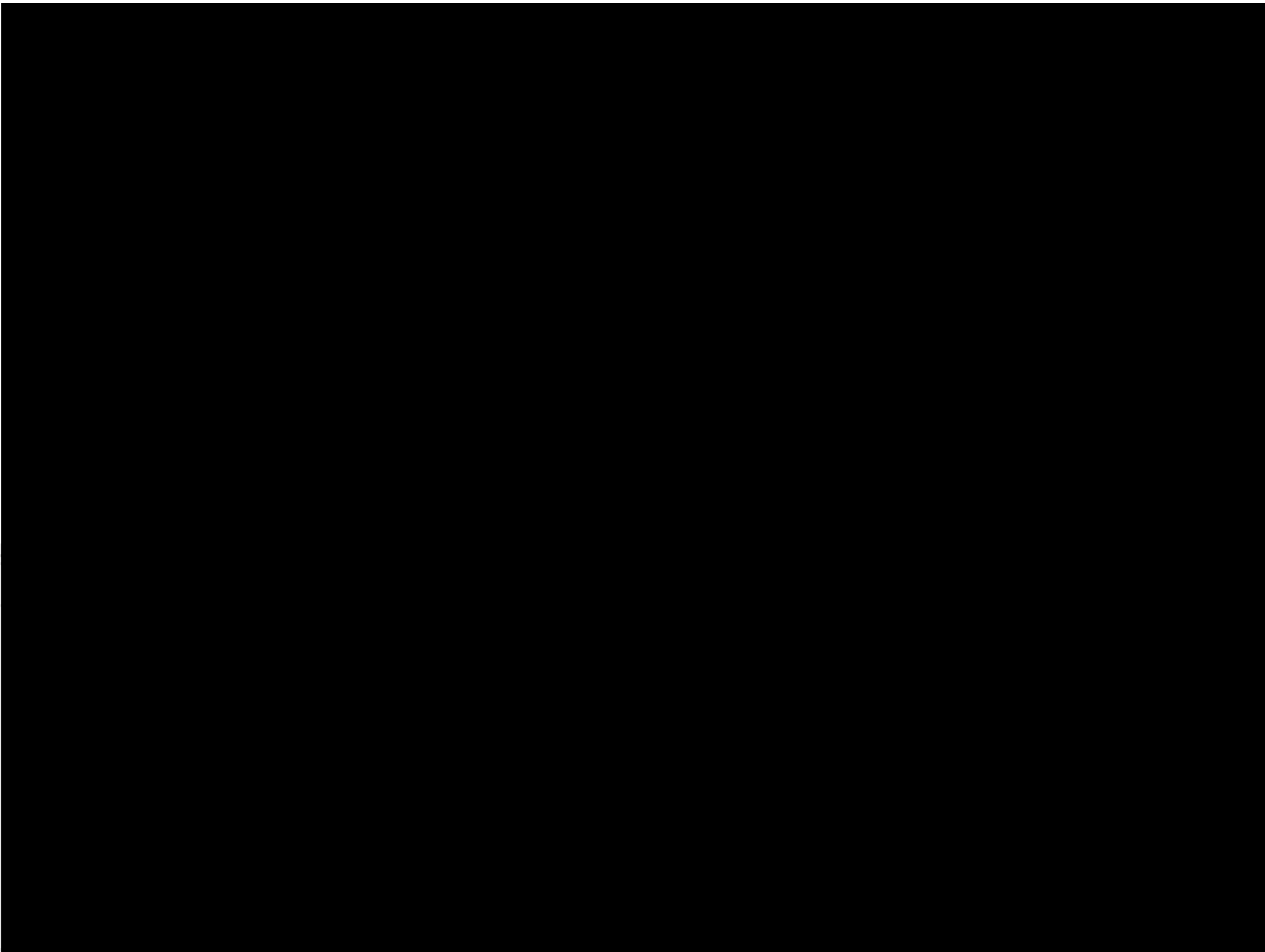


An Example from Arthurs' Sermon on Habakkuk 3:16-19

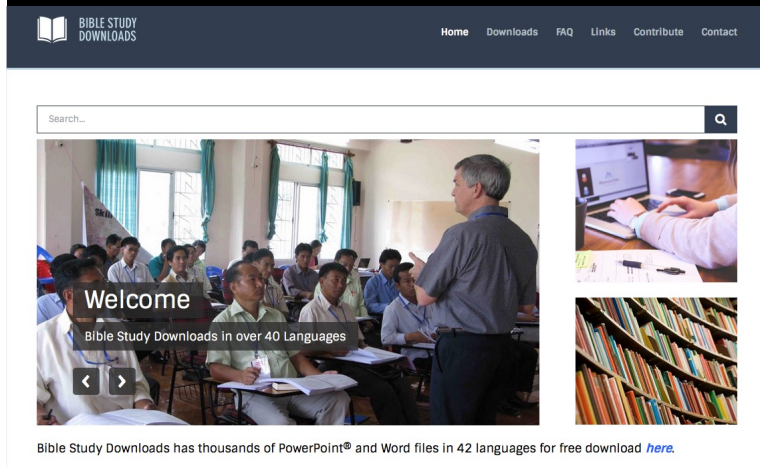
- **Level Two:** (History of Israel). Israel had become greedy and corrupt, so God prophesied that He would bring the Chaldeans to discipline Israel. Habakkuk lamented!
 - Parallel modern listeners' experience: we too lament at the ways of God.
- **Level Three:** (Personal biography to derive moral principles). By the end of the book, Habakkuk rejoices. How? He "repeats and remembers" the sovereign power and love of God seen in the exodus.
 - Parallel modern listeners' experience: we too can "repeat and remember."
- **Level One:** (History of redemption). Rejoicing is *doubly* possible for NT believers who remember not just the exodus, but our greater Moses and our greater deliverance. "The righteous one will live by his faith."

Ways to Preach Christ from the OT

- Direct prophecy about Christ.
- New Testament quotation of OT (e.g., “The righteous one will live by faith”; “I will make your enemies a footstool for your feet”).
- Historical-redemptive progression (e.g., Habakkuk remembered God’s redemption in the Exodus, and we have a greater redemption in Christ).
- Promise-fulfillment (e.g., “In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”)
- The text shows why Christ is needed (e.g., the kings of Israel failed).
- The text shows us a person who is like Christ (e.g., Boaz redeemed Naomi and Ruth).
- Longitudinal themes (e.g., Temple, priesthood, lamb, exodus).



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