

Christ and His People

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in the book of
Isaiah

David Peterson



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*To Lesley, my wife,
in gratitude for our marriage
and partnership in the gospel.*

Introduction

The genesis of this book was a series of sermons preached in the chapel of Oak Hill Theological College, London. Staff and students had been engaged in ongoing discussion about a Christ-centred approach to the interpretation of the Old Testament. Questions were being asked about whether passages could have a different meaning for Old Testament believers and for Christians today, about appropriate ways of making a Christian application, and about the degree to which Old Testament believers could have had a trust in Christ and his work.

It seemed important to offer a model of how I would approach a critical part of Isaiah's prophecy, preaching it as the living word of God to a Christian congregation, while taking proper account of the original context in which the material was first delivered. Some of the material has subsequently been preached in ordinary church situations.

What follows is not a detailed commentary on these chapters. I list below the commentaries that I found most helpful in my preparation. I have also not simply given a written version of my

sermons. My views about preaching are briefly outlined in chapter 1. Even the best of commentaries give only hints about how to expound and apply Old Testament passages to Christians. They concentrate on textual and historical matters, and give broad indications of the theological issues involved in various contexts. When they offer guidance for Christian application of the material, it is often related to specific verses or themes, rather than to whole passages.

There are also books that explore the issue of preaching the Old Testament more theoretically. I have found the works of Sidney Greidanus and Graeme Goldsworthy particularly helpful and explain in my first chapter how I am indebted to their insights. These writers discuss particular problems related to different literary genres and offer brief examples of how to expound various passages from the Old Testament. However, they do not show how to deal with passages in detail or demonstrate how to unfold the message of a succession of chapters in a biblical book.

So this examination of key chapters in Isaiah's prophecy seeks to bridge the gap between commentaries, books about preaching and sermons. I have not always taken the application as far as I might in addressing a congregation, but have indicated directions I might take. Sometimes the application sections are longer because I challenge popular ways of approaching the text or because the unfolding of its message in the New Testament is complex and needs to be understood at different levels.

My hope is that this little book will be helpful to preachers and others who lead Bible studies or teach Scripture in other contexts. Some may find it helpful for devotional reading. My goal is to bring these passages to life as a model, hoping that some of the principles and conclusions might help with the interpretation of other Old Testament prophecies. Some may feel it impossible to preach large segments of Isaiah but may feel encouraged to take smaller bites than I have chosen. I am grateful for comments on various sections of my work received from Barry Webb, James Robson and Joel Edwards.

The new English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV) has been throughout and is the basis of the exposition. This is because of its quoted from normally more literal approach to the translation of the Hebrew. Where relevant, I have compared other translations such as the New International Version (NIV), and tried to explain significant differences.

Recommended commentaries

In the following chapters, these works will be referred to simply by the author's surname.

E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), chs. 1 – 18.

J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1 – 39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986)

J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993)

B. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996)

J. Goldingay, *Isaiah, New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001)

David Peterson

I Preaching Christ from the Old Testament

Many Christians find it difficult to discern the relevance of the Old Testament to their own life-situation. Even those who have been theologically trained may avoid the Old Testament in their teaching or give poor models of interpretation in the way they handle the text. Some hurry on from the literal, historical meaning to a spiritual sense, giving little indication of what the passage might have meant to those who first received it. The relevance of the text to contemporary life becomes the controlling agenda. A direct and personal application is what they are seeking.

Some use the Old Testament merely as a launching pad for expounding biblical themes. Doctrinal application becomes of paramount importance and the Bible's story-line is ignored. Some allegorize incidental features of the text in their desire to be relevant, but miss the central implications of the passage for an understanding of Christ and his work.

At the other extreme, there are those who have been influenced by certain traditions of Old Testament scholarship, who doubt that there is any unity in the Bible or any progressive revelation culminating

in the Lord Jesus Christ. They consider that a Christocentric interpretation of Old Testament texts is illegitimate or dangerous, imposing a grid over the text that distorts its meaning.

We know that Jesus spent much time explaining to his disciples ‘what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself’ (Luke 24:27). Particularly in the period after his resurrection, he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures and proclaimed: ‘Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms’ (Luke 24:44). To his opponents he said: ‘You diligently search the Scripture because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life’ (John 5:39–40).

As disciples of Christ, following his lead, we should be constantly looking for ways in which the Old Testament testifies to him. The New Testament shows how the earliest Christians explored the Christological significance of a great range of Old Testament texts.¹ We are encouraged by their example to interpret the Old Testament in the light of its fulfilment, in a way that leads people to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Putting it another way, the Old Testament cannot simply be considered in isolation, in a purely historical sense, but we are challenged by Jesus and his apostles to discover its Christian significance.

This raises some big questions, however. How much did people in Old Testament times know about the Christ? How much were they expected to know at different stages in the unfolding of God’s plan of redemption? How should we interpret a passage with relevance to its original context, while putting Christ and his work in centre place? Should every biblical study or sermon on the Old Testament have a specifically Christological focus or outcome? Isn’t there a danger of reading things into the text that were never intended by the human authors? Isn’t there a danger that all Christocentric expositions of the Old Testament will sound more or less the same?

1. R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) is a good introduction to this topic.

Establishing some ground rules

Ever since New Testament times, there have been different ways in which Christians have interpreted and applied the Old Testament. Some methods have been carefully considered and argued, but others have been arbitrary or individual, and not well defended. Some have been driven by distinctive theological or philosophical agendas, rather than by the character and shape of Scripture itself. Is there any way to establish some ground rules for Christian preachers and teachers to follow?

Greidanus's approach

Sidney Greidanus has helpfully surveyed the work of key figures in church history, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their solutions to this problem.² He then establishes some New Testament principles for preaching Christ from the Old Testament, keeping in mind the results of his historical survey. The method he finally proposes 'falls somewhere between Calvin's theocentric method and Luther's christological method' and is called 'the christocentric method, or, more precisely, the redemptive-historical christocentric method'.³

Greidanus suggests a multiplex, rather than a single method of discerning the Christian significance of Old Testament texts. He actually proposes seven ways in which Christ can be preached from the Old Testament. There is some overlap between these methods and often they can be used in combination. In the chapters that follow, I will draw attention to the relevance of some of these principles for the interpretation of Isaiah 6 – 12. I list them below, with a brief description of what is meant in each case, but would urge those who want to think this issue through to read Greidanus for themselves.

2. S. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament. A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 69–176.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

1. *The way of redemptive-historical progression.* This is ‘the bedrock for preaching Christ from the Old Testament’. It means placing every passage in the broad context of redemptive history, which culminates in Christ and the ultimate rule of God over a restored and transformed creation. This involves understanding the point in redemptive history when the revelation is given and considering how the passage relates to what has gone before, as well as to what will follow in the unfolding plan of God.

2. *The way of promise-fulfilment.* Biblical prophecy is fulfilled progressively – in instalments, as it were. In interpreting the text, it is important to move from the promise of the Old Testament to the fulfilment in Christ and back again to the Old Testament text, to determine more clearly how the word was fulfilled, is being fulfilled and will be fulfilled.

3. *The way of typology.* Typology functions within Scripture because God is sovereign over redemptive history and acts in regular patterns. So New Testament writers discern analogies between God’s acts in Christ and his redemptive acts in the Old Testament. But typology involves more than analogy or drawing parallels. It implies development, escalation and consummation, sometimes also contrast (as with Adam and Christ in Romans 5). People and events in the Old Testament are regarded as shadows or prefigurations of what has now been realized in Christ.⁴

4. *The way of analogy.* Old Testament narrators frequently highlight the continuities in biblical history by ‘casting later events and persons more or less in the image of earlier events and persons’. New Testament writers also use analogy to establish ‘the continuity and progression in God’s dealings with Israel and through Christ with the Church’. They apply to Jesus and the church passages that speak about God acting in relation to his people Israel. Such passages are not specifically ‘messianic’ in their original context.

4. The Greek word *typos*, from which we get ‘typology’, can mean ‘pattern’, ‘model’ (cf. Acts 7:44; Rom. 5:14; Heb. 8:5) or ‘example’ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

5. *The way of longitudinal themes.* Various themes that are traced through the Old Testament, such as covenant, redemption, sacrifice and holiness, are picked up in the New Testament and reinterpreted in the light of Christ.

6. *The way of New Testament references.* Many New Testament references to Old Testament passages evidence the ways of promise-fulfilment, typology or longitudinal themes. Sometimes they suggest unexpected and productive links with Old Testament figures and events. Sometimes they use methods of interpretation that may not be normative for today, and Greidanus offers various cautions in this regard.⁵ This is a controversial issue, which necessitates a careful consideration of the way in which certain Old Testament texts are used in the New Testament.

7. *The way of contrast.* Preceding methods focus on the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, even though they recognize development and fulfilment in Christ. Sometimes, however, the New Testament notes major differences in the way God achieves his kingdom purposes or relates to his people in Christ. We need to understand the discontinuity that Christ brings.

Goldsworthy's approach

A different examination of this issue is offered by Graeme Goldsworthy. He takes a redemptive-historical approach to Scripture like Greidanus, but argues more emphatically that 'all texts in the whole Bible bear a discernible relationship to Christ and are primarily intended as testimony to Christ'.⁶ Old Testament passages should not be applied simply and directly to New Testament believers. First we must ask how the text applies to the

5. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, pp. 185–191.

6. G. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture. The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. 113.

person and work of Christ. Then we can begin to see how it applies to Christians through Christ or because of Christ.

This is such an important point that it needs to be explained more fully. The interpreter must first understand how an Old Testament text functions in its literary and historical context. But it is also important to determine its context within salvation history. In other words, what is going on theologically at this point in the Bible's story? The essential framework for establishing the structure and high points of salvation history is the gospel of Jesus and his apostles.⁷ The whole Bible must be understood in the light of God's final Word in Jesus Christ, which explains everything that leads up to it.

Goldsworthy speaks of different 'epochs' in the progress of salvation history. Characters or institutions in the text need to be examined 'for their theological function in the epoch to which they belong',⁸ before being related to Christ and his work. Goldsworthy describes those epochs in the following way.

- Genesis 4 – 11 is the prologue to salvation history.
- There is then a progressive revelation of salvation and the kingdom of God in the epoch from Abraham to David.
- In the epoch from Solomon to the end of the Old Testament, there is a progressive decline of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah under judgment. However, during this period the prophets speak of the coming salvation and kingdom of God as a more glorious 'recapitulation of what has happened in the past history of Israel'.⁹

7. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 98. The New Testament concentrates on certain parts of the Old Testament, 'but this does not relieve us of the task of seeking to understand the function of the less prominent parts' (p. 102).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

- In the New Testament epoch, Jesus Christ is declared to be the fulfiller of those expectations. ‘He is the solid reality of which the history and prophetic expressions are the foreshadowing.’¹⁰

Goldsworthy expounds a typology based on the principle that ‘people, events and institutions in the Old Testament correspond to, and foreshadow, other people, events or institutions that come later’.¹¹ The New Testament gives certain examples of such typology, encouraging us to look more widely for typological links when we are reading the Old Testament. However, Goldsworthy also discerns in the Bible what he calls ‘a macro-typology that is far-reaching in its application’.¹² There are correspondences between whole epochs of revelation. For example, the idea that God saves his people in order to rule over them and to make them a blessing to others is a common theme in each epoch. This is expressed in various ways in those epochs, culminating in the person and work of Christ.

When we come to the application of an Old Testament text, the point of contact with our contemporary situation is first and foremost the Lord Jesus Christ. So, for example, passages about the role and significance of the tabernacle or temple in the plan of God cannot be applied simply and directly to the church. Christ himself is pre-eminently the ‘place’ to meet with God and see his glory (cf. John 1:14; 2:19–22). Jesus replaces the temple at Jerusalem as the source of life and renewal for the world and he himself is the promised centre for the ingathering of the nations (cf. John 12:32). Temple imagery can be applied to Christians only because they are joined to Christ by faith. We have been ‘built together into a

10. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

dwelling place for God' by the Spirit poured out by Christ (cf. Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:6–18).¹³

Greidanus and Goldsworthy compared

Once again, I would urge those who want to think this issue through to read Goldsworthy for themselves and compare his approach with that of Greidanus. I find myself very much influenced by the gospel-driven approach of Goldsworthy. This mirrors the apostolic preaching in Acts, which I briefly discuss at the end of this chapter, and the Christocentric use of the Old Testament elsewhere in the New Testament. I particularly appreciate his insistence that the interpretation of an Old Testament text must proceed theologically, via the application it has to Christ.

Goldsworthy's insistence that the theme of the Bible as a whole is the kingdom of God assures me that, when I am reading about God fulfilling his purpose for Israel, or Israelites being challenged to respond to such initiatives, or judged for not responding, I am in touch with kingdom structures of thought. There is ultimately an application to Christ and his people from all such passages. The gospel is the hermeneutical key to unlock the meaning of Scripture as a whole.

However, we must avoid the kind of reductionism or oversimplification that makes a limited range of applications from Old Testament texts. The aim is not just to preach the gospel from every passage. We have much to learn about the character and purpose of God as a foundation for understanding the gospel and its application to our lives. 'The biblical prophetic books contain more than eschatology, and preaching from the prophets can involve us in a wide range of perspectives and topics.'¹⁴ Furthermore, the theology of the kingdom of God allows me to have a theocentric approach to the Old Testament that does not

13. Cf. D. G. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), pp. 93–102, 200–205.

14. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, p. 167.

always move immediately to a Christological resolution. The challenge is not to read Christ into the Old Testament but to show how characters, institutions and events prepare for, anticipate and illuminate the significance of Christ and his work.

Greidanus offers several routes to New Testament application, though the way of redemptive-historical progression is clearly foundational for him. He offers a more complex and eclectic approach than Goldsworthy, opening up some exciting and varied lines of interpretation. In the expositions that follow, I explore some of the pathways to application he suggests. The problem with Greidanus's approach is determining which 'way' to follow and deciding which line of interpretation should take priority. He does not show us the link between these perspectives, other than to say that they centre on Christ. I also think he is over-cautious in the matter of typology, ruling out the typological application of persons, institutions or events in the Old Testament that are not symbolic in the narrative in which they are found.¹⁵

Here I believe the macro-typology propounded by Goldsworthy is particularly helpful. This reveals more clearly the underlying unity of Scripture, the structure of redemptive history and the way all things are summed up in Christ. As I have tested various options suggested by Greidanus, I have found myself finally guided by the gospel-driven approach of Goldsworthy.

Isaiah 6 – 12

Isaiah 6 – 12 is critical for understanding the book of Isaiah and the prophetic epoch which prepares for the coming of the messianic salvation. Certain passages, such as Isaiah 9:6–7, speak so obviously

15. E.g., Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, p. 258. He is right to say that the link of redness between Rahab's cord and Christ's blood is spurious. But the cord symbolized something, for by its display Rahab and her family were saved. We are justified in asking, from a Christological or gospel perspective, what this might represent for us.

about the Lord Jesus Christ. But what do we do with the earlier verses in this chapter and their unusual claims? What do we make of the surrounding chapters and how do we fit that particular prophecy into the wider context of Isaiah's predictions? How do we proceed from the prophet's call in Isaiah 6 to Christ? How do we relate the warnings of judgment in Isaiah 9:8 – 10:34 to Christ?

An important 'text plot'

New Testament writers appear to have been particularly influenced by certain blocks of Old Testament material in explaining the person and work of Christ. There is reason to believe that Jesus himself directed the minds of his first followers to such contexts or 'text plots', so that they might 'find illumination upon the meaning of his mission and destiny'.¹⁶

Isaiah 6 – 12 is one of those text plots, because quotations from these chapters are found in many New Testament books. The following chart lists direct citations, but does not take into account allusions such as 'the root of David' (Rev. 5:5; 22:16; cf. Is. 11:1, 10) or verbal links between the visions in Isaiah 6 and the Revelation to John.

Direct quotations from Isaiah 6 – 12

Isaiah 6:9–10 in Matthew 13:14–15 (cf. Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10); John 12:40;
Acts 28:26–27

Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23

Isaiah 8:14 in 1 Peter 2:8 (cf. Romans 9:32–33)

Isaiah 8:17–18 in Hebrews 2:13

Isaiah 9:1–2 in Matthew 4:15–16

Isaiah 10:22–23 in Romans 9:27–28

Isaiah 11:10 in Romans 15:12

16. C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), p. 110. Dodd included Isaiah 6:1–9:7; 11:1–10 among what he called 'Scriptures of the New Israel'.

Tracing the way those quotations are used by New Testament writers will be a particularly fruitful way of understanding how to apply Isaiah's prophecies today. But a proper understanding of the context from which they come will enable us to make further connections. Indeed, Isaiah 6 – 12 gives us a framework for understanding God's purposes for the world, as the prophet views the present and the future in the light of God's dealings with Israel in the past.

The perspective of these chapters

Isaiah 6 – 12 belongs to the epoch from Solomon to the end of the Old Testament, when there is a progressive decline of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah under judgment. However, during this period the prophets speak of the coming salvation and kingdom of God as a more glorious recapitulation of what has happened in the past.

Isaiah proclaims a terrible divine judgment on the divided kingdom of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians. His immediate concern is with events in the eighth century BC. There is a particular focus on the failure of the kings in Jerusalem descended from David. Their commission was to rule in a way that enabled Israel to fulfil its destiny as the covenant people of God. Into this gloomy picture Isaiah shines a ray of hope. This hope is related to the Assyrian crisis but, from a New Testament perspective, incorporates events associated with the first and second comings of Christ. This is so because of the central importance of the Messiah to these chapters.

Isaiah promises that God will enable a remnant of Israel to survive, to be the nucleus of his renewed people. The re-establishment of God's purposes for Israel and the nations will be linked to the arrival of the new king from David's line. His rule will be different from any before: it will be eternal and will be characterized by wisdom, righteousness, justice and peace. Indeed, his rule will bring about the reversal of all the evil consequences of humanity's rebellion against God, establishing a new creation.

At one level, these chapters echo some of the messages emerging from other prophetic ministries in ancient Israel.¹⁷ Amos 9:11–15, for example, contains some of the same ideas in a more embryonic form:

‘In that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen,
and repair its breaches,
and raise up its ruins,
and rebuild it as in the days of old,
that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name,
declares the LORD who does this.

‘Behold the days are coming,’ declares the LORD,
‘when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper,
and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.
I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
I will plant them on their land,
and they shall never again be uprooted
out of the land that I have given them,
says the LORD your God.

At another level, Isaiah provides much more detail and exposes the plan of God more extensively. These chapters mark an important

17. Cf. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, G. J. Wenham (eds.), *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

new stage in the revelation of God's redemptive purpose and demonstrate the centrality of the Messiah to its accomplishment. Christians who want to understand how the Bible fits together need to have a good understanding of these critical prophecies.

Preaching 'the whole counsel of God'

The following chapters assume that systematic exposition of biblical passages is the best way to preach Scripture in the church today. There is less chance of verses being taken out of context or of doctrinal agendas controlling the interpretation of the text. Each week in a series brings a clearer understanding of the message of the book being studied. Congregations are taught how to handle the Bible for themselves and their general knowledge of Scripture and its themes is gradually built up. Systematic exposition of Scripture still allows for thematic preaching, with a doctrinal, evangelistic or ethical focus determined by the content of the passage in question.

My own approach to teaching the Bible in this way is first to discover the structure, flow and intention of a given passage within its immediate literary and historical context. In so doing, I try to put myself in the position of the people originally addressed and seek to understand what God was saying to them. However, it is also important to understand the significance of characters, institutions and events within the structure of the biblical revelation as a whole. My concern is always to understand the theological context and significance of a passage.

Guidelines from Acts

In this connection, it is interesting to reflect on the early Christian preaching recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Teaching about the way Scripture has been fulfilled in Christ was an important part of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel (e.g. 2:16–39; 8:30–35; 13:16–41; 17:2–3). But it was also essential for the nurturing and maturing of the church. Reflecting on his unusually lengthy period

of ministry in Ephesus, the apostle Paul uses various terms to describe what he did (20:18–32).

He firstly speaks about teaching ‘in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ’ (vv. 20–21). In other words, there was a clear proclamation of Jesus as Lord and Messiah, with an urgent appeal to turn to God and to trust in Jesus as the one sent to fulfil his plan for Israel and the nations. Another way of describing this is ‘to testify to the gospel of the grace of God’ (v. 24). However, the wider biblical framework of his teaching is more clearly revealed when he speaks of ‘proclaiming the kingdom’ (v. 25).

This was Jesus’ preferred way of speaking about the gospel and its implications (e.g. Mark 1:14–15; 4:11; 9:1; 10:14–15, 23, 25). In the early church, the kingdom of God continued to be a convenient short-hand way of summarizing the message proclaimed by his disciples (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Although the term ‘kingdom of God’ does not appear as such in the Old Testament, the concept of God’s rule or sovereignty over creation and human history is absolutely foundational.

- The rejection of God’s rule by the human race brought disastrous consequences (Gen. 3 – 11), but the rest of the Old Testament is about the way God acts to reverse that situation.
- God’s covenant initiative with Abraham holds the promise of salvation under the rule of God for Israel and the nations (Gen. 12:1–3).
- The outworking of God’s covenant promises in Israel’s history is the background for Isaiah’s words of judgment and his predictions about the future.
- The coming of the Messiah is decisive for the establishment of God’s rule over Israel and the nations in a renewed creation.

So Paul’s preaching of Christ and the facts of the gospel was set within the wider theological framework of ‘proclaiming the kingdom’. Another term, which probably describes this same

approach, is ‘declaring to you the whole counsel of God’ (Acts 20:27). The Greek word translated ‘counsel’ (*boulē*) suggests that he gave them an understanding of the plan or purpose of God as revealed in Scripture. This doubtless included an explanation of the big picture from particular texts, such as we see in Romans 9 – 11.

Proclaiming the kingdom from Isaiah 6 – 12

Preaching from a section of a prophetic book such as Isaiah 6 – 12 is a way of proclaiming the kingdom of God or teaching ‘the whole counsel of God’. Christians are introduced to a major biblical prophet and shown how God addressed his people at a particular point of crisis in their history. At the same time, it is possible to see from these chapters how God was preparing his people for the fulfilment of his plan for Israel and the whole world in the sending of the Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom. Here is a way of looking backwards and forwards, to see the outworking of God’s plan from beginning to end.

Application of such passages to Christ and his people enables us to hear the gospel being proclaimed and to receive the exhortation or appeal of God to respond in a variety of situations. There is a breadth of material in the prophetic literature that makes it possible to relate the gospel to a range of personal, social and political contexts in our own time. The inspiration, unity and authority of Scripture are practically demonstrated and pastorally experienced as these ancient texts are expounded in the light of God’s ultimate purpose for us in Christ.

