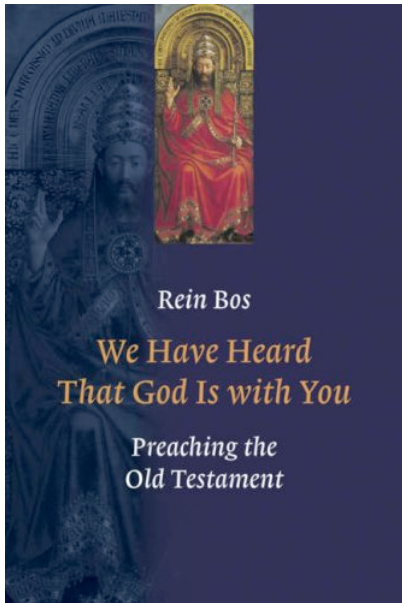


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Bos, Rein

We Have Heard That God Is with You: Preaching the Old Testament

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Rein Bos's *We Have Heard That God Is With You: Preaching the Old Testament* at first glance appears to be a book on preaching the Old Testament. However, the table of contents and detailed chapters reveal a text that deals both with the history of interpretation and with hermeneutics, with a conclusion that draws together his survey of interpretation and hermeneutical proposal into a palate of options in relation to preaching not just the Old Testament but a Bible that consists of both Old and New Testaments. In his own words, the book "deals with questions concerning the relation between the Old and New Testaments" (x). Further, his proposal "offers a creative 'hermeneutical grammar' to preach the Old Testament" (xi). In my evaluation, his proposal ends up being not so much a "how-to" on preaching the Old Testament as a hermeneutical proposal on how to generously read a Bible that has distinctly Jewish (Tanak) and Christian (New Testament) components (xiv).

The book is divided into four main sections. Chapters 1–7 detail "classical hermeneutical models" from the apostolic era to Karl Barth in the twentieth century (3–102). Chapters 8–11 give "the biblical theological background and ingredients of the presented model" (xii; 107–79). Chapters 12–15 "elaborate the new model" (xii; 185–315), while chapter 16 gives interpretive possibilities in relation to "Exodus 3, the songs of the servant of the

LORD in Deutero-Isaiah, and Psalm 22” (xii; 318–45). Two observations are necessary in relation to this outline. First, the actual distribution of the text demonstrates its almost entirely hermeneutical nature. Second, although the book is quite large, one is able to “listen” with relative ease as though the book were a well-prepared and delivered sermon.

Chapters 1–7 are meant to be read as the opening movement of the book outlining “The Old Testament in the Theory and Practice of Preaching,” with an emphasis on the key hermeneutical approaches and a closing positive and negative evaluation of each position. Chapter 1 (3–14) raises the key issue: a Bible with “Old” and “New” Testaments. On the one hand, “the church accepted the books of Moses and the prophets as ‘Holy Scriptures’” and, on the other hand, “also accepted certain writings of apostles and evangelists as authoritative” (8). He argues that the “question about how to connect the Old Testament with the testimony about Jesus Christ” has produced sharply disputed hermeneutical theories throughout the last two thousand years (9).

Chapter 2 (14–27) takes up the first of these theories dealing with (Christian) allegory. Bos recognizes that “[a]llegorical interpretation as a means of opening biblical texts has a long history” (15). It moves the reader from the “grammar and history of the text” to “the spiritual meaning” (15). as Examples given from both the Old and New Testaments are Ezek 23, 1 Cor 9:9, and Gal 4:21–23. Ezekiel 23 tells the reader “that the prophet is not just telling an ‘innocent’ story about two sisters” (17), while 1 Cor 9:9 demonstrates how “Paul spiritualizes the original, literal, and material meaning of the commandment of Moses [in Deut 25:4] and applies it to the relationship between congregation and minister and the minister’s service to the LORD” (17–18). Galatians 4:21–23 gives another example where “Paul sees a deeper sense in the story of the two sons of Abraham. He interprets this story in the light of the gospel of free grace that he was commissioned to proclaim. He himself says that ‘this is an allegory’ (4:21)” (18). On the positive side, allegory allows there to be “no distance between the text and the present situation, or between the there-and-then of the text and the here-and-now of the congregation” (23). On the negative side, allegory “is almost completely dependent on the person of the interpreter” (26), “turns the material character of God’s goodness and salvation into a spiritual affair” (27), and “runs the risk of disconnecting the Old Testament from Israel and the Jewish context” (27).

Chapter 3 (28–43) treats the hermeneutic of (Christian) typology. Typology “sees in Old Testament places, persons, events, institutions, offices, or objects prefigurations of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ” (28). Typology is differentiated from allegory in that “typology wants to do justice to history and the literal meaning” (30–31), whereas “allegory is ahistorical” (30). Earlier prefigurations “give a foretaste of the ultimate salvation that God already had in mind at that moment but will be revealed in full glory

at a later moment” (31). The process is described in two steps. The starting point and frame of reference for typology is a specific historical context of persons and events that have their own material and historical value. In a second step of interpretation, typology looks for parallels between a particular event or person and a later fact in the course of history, especially those in relation to Jesus Christ (32). The strength of typology is identified in that it “wants to do justice to the concrete history, keeping God’s loyalty and faithfulness in the center of its consideration” (41). However, this focus is only transitory, where “the Old Testament becomes a temporary truth that would ultimately be replaced with the coming of Christ ... as the old is replaced by the new” (41).

Chapter 4 focuses on (Christian) “Promise and Fulfillment” as a hermeneutical key (44–58). At the center of this form of interpretation is Jesus Christ. Bos argues, “The preaching and proclamation based on this hermeneutical paradigm is primarily interested in the prospective and prophetic Christological character of the Old Testament and has less interest in the actual meaning of the promises for Israel as a nation” (49). The primary focus of the prophets is future and in particular “the birth, life, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (50). Positively, this form of interpretation emphasizes “the strength of God’s promises” and “stresses the abiding and steadfast loyalty of the LORD’s Word and words” (55). The downside is found in the oversimplification that the terms “promise and fulfillment” represent, specifically: (1) the Old Testament is full of more than promises; (2) promise and fulfillment are many times found already in the Old Testament text; (3) many quotes in the New Testament of the Old Testament are “not promises” in the strict sense; and (4) the New Testament is also full of “promises” that are yet to be fulfilled (55–56). To add to this list, prophets in the Old Testament were not just speaking to some future situation but “were honest and passionate preachers, called by God to proclaim justice and righteousness and to call for faith and repentance in their own particular situation and context” (57).

Chapter 5 (59–72) explores the hermeneutic of “Salvation History.” Bos understands this approach as going “as far back in history as church-father Irenaeus” (60). Scripture is understood in this hermeneutic “as a witness to the LORD’s redemptive steps in history” (61). He adds: “The history of salvation between creation and consummation is marked by some decisive moments, the so-called *kairoi*. These special moments are characterized by ‘progressive reduction,’ which means a progressive process of representation with a decreasing number of persons” (61). In this history it is Jesus Christ who “is the core and center of God’s acts on behalf of salvation for humans and the world” (63). Although the focus on “the progress of God’s salvific acts on behalf of humankind and creation in the course of history” are seen as a positive, this actually creates several necessary conclusions in relation to the Old Testament (69). The Old Testament becomes only an “introduction or preparation for the ultimate salvation in Christ” (64). In addition, the Old Testament

has then been surpassed by the testimony from “the evangelists and prophets” (65); further, Israel, who failed, is replaced by the church “in the post-Pentecost era” (67).

Chapter 6 (73–94), curiously, brings this hermeneutical survey to a conclusion with Karl Barth. In opposition to the prevailing “liberal” milieu of the early twentieth century, Bos outlines what he understands to be Barth’s view of the Bible:

Scripture is a book about God, not about the history of people’s feelings about God. Barth viewed the *subject matter* (*die Sache*) of Scripture not as historical events or the interpretation of those events by the biblical writers, but as the supra-historical Spirit of God who dwells outside the bounds of history and human contingencies. This emphasis on the fundamental *discontinuity* between God and humanity (as opposed to liberalism’s view of humanity’s basic harmony with God via inward religious feeling) became the basis for Barth’s new way of theology. (79)

However, with this said, “Christ is the true Word of God and decisive revelation of God” (79). Key to Barth’s view is that there is no distinction between God in the Old and New Testaments: “The God who speaks and acts in the Old Testament is the same God as the One who is revealed in Jesus Christ” (80). This is to say that “the ‘He’ of the Old Testament *is* Jesus Christ” (81). However, because both Testaments are “witnesses” and not actually revelation, “both witnesses have the same distance from Jesus Christ, the center of Revelation” (86). Bos argues that this “paradigm solved a lot of hermeneutical problems” but effectively flattens “the diversity within Scripture” (93).

Chapter 7 (95–103) draws together the critiques from the previous chapters in an attempt to distill what components will bring the discussion in relation to Jesus Christ, Israel, and the listener into a more profitable relationship. The key critique is that these previous models only offered one hermeneutical “key” (101). Beyond this consideration, Bos gives four “preconditions for a sound theological and hermeneutical model”: (1) Israel refers to both ancient and modern Jewish people; (2) the distinctive voice of the Old Testament should not only be used for christological or transitory purposes; (3) listeners should “become participants of the ‘God-event’ of the text”; and (4) the unity of God’s character should be respected “without equalizing the diversity of Scripture” (99–100). This leads to his multifaceted approach that has four components/keys: “*sensus Israeliticus*, *Christological sense*, *ecclesiological sense*, and *eschatological sense*” (100).

Chapters 8–11 in essence move from the discussion of hermeneutical *keys* to hermeneutical *methods* under the subtitle of “Hermeneutical Ingredients.” Chapter 8 (107–33) surveys these methods from the New Testament era through the Reformation.

Bos argues that Christians in the early centuries were primarily guided by “the so-called Rule of Faith (*regula fidei*)” with “an ‘overarching story’ in which the quest for meaning could take place” (111). However, theological interpretation took precedence through the schools in Antioch and Alexandria in the third and fourth centuries (112). Origen (A.D. 185–254) takes a leading role as a prominent teacher in Alexandria, essentially applying “the literary methods of his day, especially a careful word-by-word reading and explanation of classic texts such as Homer” (113). Origen’s hermeneutic begins with the actual text, but the real goal is the spiritual core: “The exterior of the words of the text is meant to serve the proclamation of this spiritual core of individual texts and the entire canon” (114). The Middle Ages have only “marginal changes” and are represented in people such as Athanasius, Jerome, Augustine, Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas (117). The result is the fourfold sense of Scripture: “The letter teaches what happened, the allegory what you have to believe, the moral sense what you have to do, and the anagogy what to strive at” (118). Bos explains that the paradigm only really shifts with the Reformation and Martin Luther’s rejection of some sort of “balanced view of the authority of Scripture and of the church” with the “motto *sola Scriptura*” (120). Key to this motto is the related themes of the “intrinsic clarity of Scripture” and “the coherence of Scripture as a whole” (121). Primary focus shifted from the fourfold sense of Scripture to the “plain meaning of the words of Scripture” (122). Calvin’s interpretation becomes the focus of analysis, where “there is in fact only one covenant and this covenant is spiritual in character and founded in Christ” (123). The two Testaments (like Barth’s position) are unified, and “Christ is therefore the hermeneutical lens through which both Old and New Testaments are read” (123). Calvin’s position, it is argued, understands a “unity and continuity in the people of God from the moment God created Adam and Eve” and further that there is an *ekklesia* in the Old Testament that “is not used for Israel as a whole but restricted to the small, faithful remnant” (125). With the advent of Christ, the elect “are also to be found among the gentiles,” effectively bringing the unique role of Israel to an end (125–26). The chapter closes by tracing a connection between the Renaissance, humanism, and the Enlightenment. He finds “explicit connections and parallels between the *ad fontes* of Humanism and the Renaissance on the one hand and the *sola Scriptura* of the Reformation on the other hand” (127). The Enlightenment is simply seen as one further step: “The Enlightenment is both the logical continuation and the inescapable consequence of the Renaissance and Humanism” (128). The primary hermeneutical shift that these movements represent is from “God as the principal Author” to “the human writer or editor” as the author; the literal meaning is not God’s but the original human authors’ (129). From this survey, Bos concludes that our dialogue partners for interpretation should not simply be modern biblical scholarship, because “church fathers, reformers, and present-day biblical scholars are equal conversation partners in the discourse about meaning and interpretation” (132). As such, he argues that a

hermeneutical model should include: a balance between the interior and exterior aspects of Scripture; use of modern biblical scholarship but allowance for the “kerygmatic interior of Scripture”; a multidimensional reading inspired by “patristic reading of Scripture”; a continued place “for Israel of the books of Moses and the prophets”; and the unity of God in both Testaments (132–33).

Chapter 9, “Biblical Theology” (134–50), underscores Bos’s conclusion in relation to a multidimensional approach through his own evaluation of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament. His study reveals four distinct uses: texts are used the same in both contexts; texts are recontextualized with a christological meaning; texts are recontextualized to interpret situations in the early church; and texts are recontextualized with a distinct eschatological interpretation (137).

Chapter 10 (151–65) takes up the issue of the literal meaning of scripture. Bos makes clear that sermon preparation begins “with a verbal analysis of a particular passage of Scripture text” (152). This first step seeks to identify the “literal sense,” which begs the question of what is the literal sense. Three basic options are outlined. The first approach restricts the “literal sense” to its literary and historical background and tries to dig therefore as far as possible into the genesis of the text. A second approach formulates the “literal sense” in terms of the kerygmatic contents or subject matter of a particular text as part of the canon as a whole. The third track locates the “literal sense” in the contemporary interpretative community, the interplay between reader and context (152–53). Bos concludes that the first position (critical scholarship) misses “the kerygmatic contents and contemporary relevance” of the text (164). The second position (conservative scholarship) leads to a “meaning that is restricted to its one-dimensional exterior” (164). The third position (Christian communities) runs the risk of having “an exclusively Christian literal sense without taking Israel into account” (165).

Chapter 11 (166–81) draws the analysis of the opening ten chapters into Bos’s own hermeneutical/preaching proposal. The hermeneutic is multidimensional because this is what his innerbiblical study yielded; this strategy is “of homiletical importance because they can actually facilitate the practice of preaching” (167). Influenced by the fourfold sense of scripture, he also offers his own fourfold method. The *sensus Israeliticus* is understood as “the ‘primary’ or ‘original’ meaning from a theological point of view” (169). He defines Israel in four ways: “It can refer to a *people* descended from the patriarchs and matriarchs, to a *religion* founded on the covenant established between the Lord and the patriarchs and renewed and extended to the whole people at Sinai, to a *land* promised by God to this people so that they would have a place in which to live in relationship with God and in accordance with the covenant, and to a *nation* in the region of the Middle East” (170). The christological sense understands the text of the Old

Testament to carry multiple possibilities, whether addressed to Jesus, spoken by Jesus, or spoken about Jesus. In this case “a preacher has to verify whether the Old Testament text has enough theological capacity to bear (one of) these possible connections between the Old Testament and Jesus Christ” (174). The ecclesiological sense “listens” to the Old Testament to hear what it may have to say to the church (174). The eschatological sense clings to the promises of God and looks to “a restoration of existence in this world” as well as the one to come (177–78). These are not meant to be steps, where one interpretation leads to the next, but rather “the preacher returns each time to the words of the text” (180).

Chapters 12–15 unfold these four dimensions in greater detail. Chapter 12 (185–213) in unpacking the *sensus Israeliticus* makes a clear case for including a multifaceted consideration of Israel, especially Jewish interpretation, in interpreting the Old Testament. Chapter 13 (214–48) especially addresses whether an Old Testament passage can “carry” a christological Sense. Chapter 14 (249–87) delivers a strong challenge to let the actual wording of the Old Testament in the ecclesiological sense speak to sin, guilt, innocence, social engagement, and the like. In this sense “Scripture reads and interprets us,” and “the witness of Moses and the prophets break through our lines of defense and open the inside of our lives” (287). Chapter 15 (288–317) reinforces Bos’s earlier point that the eschatological sense includes a present as well as a future hope. He states, “The eschatological dimension of preaching nurtures the love for life and the living” (315).

Chapter sixteen (318–46) brings the book to its conclusion by unfolding these four dimensions in relation to Exod 3, the Servant of the Lord passages (Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), and Ps 22. It is only in the closing statement of this final chapter that sermon preparation is dealt with directly. Bos notes: “Sermon preparation is a complex process and a melting pot of several disciplines: exegesis, biblical theology, systematic theology, rhetoric, psychology, pastoral care, and education” (342). Sermon development “has to do with the person and personality of a particular preacher, with his or her gifts and talents, with limitations and shortcomings, with areas of interest and blind spots” (343). Finally, Bos elaborates that the process described in his book is not a proposed sermon outline but instead “has a heuristic function for getting the multidimensional character of the text into view; it enables the interpreter to listen to the four-voiced choir singing in the text as part of the canon as a whole” (344).

Bos has synthesized a wide body of information into a readable and reasonably sized text. His arguments are clearly defined and interspersed with helpful illustrations that make the reading experience enjoyable as well as elucidate the issue at hand. Although many volumes have been written in recent times dealing with all of these subjects, this text should be welcomed by a wide variety of readers.

However, a few concerns rise to the surface as one carefully reads through the text. The opening seven chapters dealing with hermeneutical keys create the impression that somehow single-approach hermeneutics dominated in the history of the church, when chapters 8–11 make it abundantly clear that this is a rather recent development. Further, chapters 1–7 leave the reader with the feeling that these hermeneutics were Christian modes of interpretation that were somehow overused or even abused for Christian purposes. Although Bos does mention a few Jewish uses of these methods, there is the sense that postbiblical Jewish uses are somehow more legitimate than Christian uses in relation to the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, respectively. Against such a perspective, Michael Fishbane demonstrates that Judaism and Christianity reflect methodology already present in the development of the Hebrew Bible (*Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985]) and that medieval rabbinic exegesis heavily used a fourfold approach (“The Teacher and the Hermeneutical Task: A Reinterpretation of Medieval Exegesis,” *JAAR* 43 [1975]: 709–21).

With this said, I do agree that relevant Jewish interpretation should be considered when preaching Old (and New!) Testament passages and, further, that Bos’s fourfold sense offers a needed corrective to supersessionist Christian perspectives. A call for multidirectional reading between the Testaments is to be applauded based on the obvious role the Old Testament played in the development of the New and, further, the impact adding the New Testament has on the already developing interpretive trajectory of the whole Bible. Although Bos’s fourfold approach sounds medieval, it is based on relevant research and cultural developments. Some may be uncomfortable with the polyphonic possibilities given to the interpretation of the biblical text, but Bos’s whole proposal is actually against the overindulgence of this concept, especially through *sensus Israeliticus*.

This book, like its proposal, is useful on multiple fronts. It gives an excellent survey of interpretive movements within the church, offers its own hermeneutical principles related to this history, and demonstrates multivoiced possibilities in relation to preaching the Old Testament within the church.