

Lifting the Veil: Reading and Preaching Jesus' Bible through Christ and for Christ¹

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The summer of 2005 I moved to Minneapolis to begin my first full-time teaching post as an Old Testament (OT) professor. Upon my request (and with some help from Tom Schreiner), John Piper agreed to have lunch with me, during which I shared with him and Justin Taylor, his assistant at the time, how much a passion for God's glory had captured me and how eager I was to proclaim the beauties and bigness of God from the initial three-fourths of the Christian Bible. After listening for a while, Pastor John asked Justin if he had any reflections, and Justin offered a single statement that shook me to the core and that God used to reorient my affections and to set me on a path of discovery and awe that I am still treading today. He said, "I hear a lot about the glory of God and very little about Jesus."

As a Christian, did my hermeneutical approach and ministry practice align with the truth that God created *all things* (including the OT) by the Son, through the Son, and *for the Son* (Col 1:16) and that “*all the promises of God find their Yes in [the Son of God, Jesus Christ]*” (2 Cor 1:20)? Could I, who like Paul was a teacher of Jesus’ Bible, say with the apostle, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2; cf. 1:23)? Did I approach Abraham as one who saw and rejoiced in Jesus’ day (John 8:56), even if from afar (Heb 11:13; cf. Matt 13:17), and did I affirm that Moses, in his writings, wrote of the divine Son (John 5:46–47; cf. 5:39)? Did I grasp that to “understand the [OT] Scriptures” means that in them I should find a unified message declaring the saving work of the Messiah and the mission he would spark (Luke 24:45–46; cf. Acts 26:22–23)? Did I truly believe that “God foretold by the mouth of *all the prophets that his Christ would suffer*” (Acts 3:18; cf. 3:24), and did I recognize that they were all carefully searching and inquiring about the person and time of Christ’s sufferings and subsequent glories and yet “were serving not themselves” but us (1 Pet 1:10–12; cf. Acts 10:43; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11)? Did I affirm that Paul and Timothy’s sacred writings could only make others wise for salvation—past, present, and future—when linked to faith *in Christ* (2 Tim 3:15), and Did the principles guiding my interpretation of the OT affirm that there were “mysteries” kept secret there that only the lens of Christ’s coming could unlock (Rom 16:25–26; cf. Isa 29:18; Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9) and that, because of this, the apostolic teaching provides a necessary grid for properly grasping all that God wants us to gain from the OT (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20)? In short, did I interpret and preach old covenant materials in a way that embraces that “only through Christ” does God *lift the veil*, allowing us to fully understand and appropriate their significance (2 Cor 3:14–15)?

I am grateful to the three evangelical “fathers” (1 Tim 5:1) who have served us in the main articles of this volume. And I now humbly offer this critique of their proposals on how best to proclaim the divine Son from Jesus’ Bible. My reflections will first address the guiding hermeneutical principles, and then I will engage the various discussions of Genesis 15:1–6.

GUIDING HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

All three authors helpfully define most of their terms and supply the hermeneutical principles grounding their respective approaches. Both Poythress and Block rightly affirm that preachers bear authority only as mouthpieces of God, which means that, while they may be creative in presentation, they must stay tethered to the biblical text in both interpretation and proclamation. As we will see, however, Block's view of tethering is much more limited than Poythress's, but it is the latter's view that more faithfully accounts for authorial intent, canonical context, and the interpretive patterns of the biblical authors themselves.

Vern Poythress on Method

Poythress argues for Christocentric interpretation and Christocentric preaching, which he carries down to "every word in every verse" (p. 66, n. 5). Such an approach is necessary because the Trinitarian God is revealing himself in the whole of Scripture and because the realities of Scripture (all written post-fall to sinners) and of redemptive history (of which Scripture both testifies to and discloses) are expressions of the grace purchased through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Poythress supplies four reasons why the church must keep Christ central in its whole life, including its OT preaching. First, the pattern of the apostles was Christ-centered preaching of OT texts (e.g., Acts 2:33; 1 Cor 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15). Second, a Christ-centered gospel is all that can save (Rom 1:16), and it was this message that characterized both Jesus's (Mark 1:15) and the apostles' proclamation (Rom 1:1–3; 1 Cor 15:1–8; Col 1:28). Third, both justification and sanctification demand focusing on union and communion with Christ (e.g., 2 Cor 3:18; Col 2:3). Why would we, therefore, seek to preach anything else? Fourth, the NT identifies that the OT is centrally about Christ (Luke 24:25–27, 44–49; John 5:39, 45–46; Rom 1:1–3; 2 Cor 1:20; Hebrews; 1 Pet 1:10–12).

Poythress importantly stresses that a proper magnifying of Christ in OT preaching will only happen when one respects the varied thematic and rhetorical distinctives of each passage, the overall unity of Scripture and doctrine, and the redemptive story's progression and climax in

the person of Jesus. So there is “a spectrum of ways through which this [Christ] centrality is wisely expressed and maintained” (p. 48). Drawing from this multi-perspectival approach to the biblical text, Poythress offers eight different ways one can faithfully proclaim the divine Son in an OT passage, all of which I find both helpful and reflected in the interpretive patterns of the biblical authors themselves:² (1) tracking words, phrases, and larger linguistic textures; (2) assessing historical aspects both within the story and the setting of the day; (3) considering how the characters are analogous to Christ and us; (4) placing the passage on the redemptive-historical trajectory that climaxes in Christ; (5) reflecting on the portrait of God’s makeup and deeds; (6) looking for the symbols or types “that have meaning in their own historical location and also point forward to a final, climactic realization in Christ;” (7) celebrating Christ as fulfillment of earlier promises, examples, preparations, and the work of God; (8) examining the progression of specific themes that intersect your passage.

Poythress’s introductory homily on Genesis 15:1–6 was unnecessarily weak, focusing most on analogy (#3 above) rather than on the text’s place in redemptive history (#4) and the particular ways the promise and declaration of vv. 5–6 progress, integrate, and climax in Christ (#6, 7). Nevertheless, I find myself most closely aligned with Poythress’s own approach to seeing and preaching Christ in the OT.

Elliott Johnson on Method

Johnson avoids some of the challenging questions by limiting his article to a proper reading and preaching of OT promises, all of which he terms “Christo-promises” in light of the way they stand as “intention-directed revelation,” caught up in a story climaxing in Christ, who both represents Israel and reverses and overcomes the curse. Johnson asserts that every *grammatical* interpretation of an OT promise will include the presence of Christ when understood “as progressively unfolding in *history*” (p. 36). While seeking to avoid “unwarranted reading” of the New Testament (NT) into the OT, Johnson nevertheless stresses the need to read every OT passage in light of “completed revelation” (p. 40). In employing a canonical interpretive approach, Johnson stretches the definition of grammatical-historical beyond its common usage. Nevertheless, he rightly recognizes

that faithful exposition demands assessing a passage's use of antecedent Scripture and its function and employment in the rest of Scripture. He also correctly affirms that, when we recognize how Jesus represents rather than replaces Israel, we grow to grasp how "all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor 1:20) and that only through him do they bear lasting relevance for the church (7:1).

Johnson asserts that "the basis of expository preaching" is the conviction that, while *the characters* hearing God's promise may not have understood all that he was predicting, *the author* surely did. Johnson is not clear whether he is referring here only to the divine author, or whether he would see the understanding of the human and divine authors as one. Scripture is clear that most old covenant members were hard hearted, blind, and deaf (Deut 29:4[3]; Isa 29:10–11; Rom 11:7–8) and that awakening would come to them only in a future new covenant age associated with the Messiah (Deut 30:8; Isa 29:18; 30:8; 2 Cor 3:14). The Bible is also clear that the human authors themselves definitely knew in part what they were writing, having searched and inquired carefully (likely into antecedent Scripture) in order to know "what person and time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Pet 1:11). Nevertheless, these same authors were writing for us, not themselves (1:12; cf. Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11); they only visualized from a distance what was coming (Matt 13:17; Heb 11:13); and some of what they saw still included mystery *to them* that would only be revealed through the actual appearing and work of Christ (Rom 16:25–26; cf. Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9). We must affirm, therefore, both the organic continuity between OT anticipation and NT realization and potential discontinuities between the nature of original understanding of OT human authors and the makeup of the fulfillment in Jesus. Johnson does not address the reality of discontinuities.³

Daniel Block on Method

Block's paper summarizes his plea for a Christotelic *reading* of Scripture and a Jesus-centered *proclamation*. Block's summary of how he finds Jesus in the OT is limited to three primary spheres. First, all expressions of Yahweh's character and work point to Jesus, whose name means "Yahweh

saves” and who embodies the very saving work of God in space and time. Block writes, “When I preach YHWH, I preach Jesus” (p. 11). Second, Block is willing to affirm “a disciplined Christocentric hermeneutic” (p. 13), but he applies it only to explicit or implicit messianic predictions, for “Christ” is commonly a technical term for the eschatological royal figure manifest in the person of Jesus in the NT era. Third, we find Jesus as the climax of the redemptive story that begins in Genesis and culminates in Revelation. Block notes, “Not every text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ as Messiah, but every text presents a vital part of that story of Jesus, ‘who is called the Christ’” (p. 14).

Block strongly disparages broader applications of a Christocentric hermeneutic, believing they encourage forms of “typologizing,” “allegorizing,” and “Christologizing” that are “illegitimate,” “foolish,” “cheap,” “trivial,” “bizarre,” “popular,” and “contemptuous” (pp. 11–12), that manifest “a low view of Scripture and a low Christology” (p. 11), that “say more about the interpreters’ ingenuity than the text itself” (p. 11), and that result in “anti-Semitism” (p. 32) and in “drowning out the voice of God and obscuring the true message” (p. 12). Those who interpret Scripture this way are “dishonest” and “fraudulent” (p. 18) and “have hijacked the Jewish Scriptures, and made every text about Christ” (p. 13). Using such strong language certainly cautions one from employing such methods. But when one queries what Block means by “typologizing,” “allegorizing,” and “Christologizing,” we find no explicit definitions, nor does he attach such abuses to specific contemporary scholars, whose methods we could analyze in greater detail.⁴ This leaves me wondering whom Block is actually battling.

Block does clarify that he is targeting those who find “no connection between the illocutions (intended meanings) of these two [human and divine] authors” and who often pay “no attention to what the divine and human authors originally intended” (p. 13). Perhaps he is overstating his case, but such a claim would automatically disqualify Poythress’s Christocentric hermeneutic from Block’s target. Indeed, rather than engaging in extreme forms of *sensus plenior* (fuller meaning), Poythress has stressed that God is never speaking less than the biblical authors were aware but is often speaking more and that we must see an organic link between all anticipation and fulfillment.⁵ We can say the same of Doug Moo, Greg

Beale, Darrell Bock, Peter Gentry, and Steve Wellum, among others, all of whom equally stress that later author's appropriations of antecedent texts always stand in alignment with and not in contradistinction to the original human author's intent.⁶ Beale's words are representative of this group: "The NT Scripture interprets the OT Scripture by expanding its meaning, seeing new implications in it and giving it new applications ... This expansion does not contravene the integrity of the earlier texts but rather develops them in a way which is consistent with the OT author's understanding of the way in which God interacts with his people which is the unifying factor between the Testaments."⁷

With respect to typology, Block strongly claims that we should not read characters like Joshua (p. 10), events like the exodus (pp. 10–11), or institutions like tabernacle worship and sacrifice (pp. 15–16) as originally looking forward to the work of Christ. Rather, "in the wise and all-knowing providence of God," they simply "provided the vocabulary with which Jesus and the apostles could later interpret Christ's work" (p. 14). Here Block seems to miss that, for later authors to use the vocabulary that earlier Scripture associates with particular characters, circumstances, and structures means that they believed God intended these portrayals to bear witness to the Christ event. That is, the OT stories themselves are the means by which we actually understand the significance of Jesus's person and work. As one of my students has highlighted:

The OT vocabulary is not mere ornamentation placed on an otherwise understandable and perceivable person. Rather, the OT vocabulary (types) becomes the only way that we can perceive the reality of Christ, and the only way that we are permitted to see him. Without this vocabulary, we have no words (indeed, no divine words!) to describe Jesus, and the Christ event is literally meaningless. Without the complex web of types, metaphors, and symbols that form the vocabulary of the OT, Christ is a none-thing—an indescribable essence that we cannot name. We must see the OT vocabulary as, at least partially, *constituting* the Christ event. And if we should see the OT as constituting the meaning of the Christ event, then we must see the OT as part of the revelation of the man Jesus Christ. We can debate how much the OT authors understood about that revelation, and that debate is worth having, but it must not continue to overshadow the true meaning of the OT, God's revelation of the Word.⁸

Along with the above, I believe that we must affirm that the OT human authors were often quite aware that their portraits of persons, events, and institutions were indeed pointing ahead to the person and work of the promised deliverer (Matt 13:17; John 5:39, 46–47; 8:56; Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 1:10–12) and yet that they did not always understand fully all that God intended (Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9; cf. Rom 16:25–26). As for someone like Joshua, we take no glory away from Yahweh in identifying this human figure as an agent through whom Yahweh led his people to victory and who supplied his people a type of rest that pointed ahead to something greater (Heb 4:8)—something the OT saints themselves *saw* and *longed for* (11:13–16). Similarly, Moses knew that the tabernacle and its worship were merely earthly replicas of a heavenly paradigm (παράδειγμα) or prototype (τύπος) (Exod 25:9, 40; cf. Heb 8:5; 9:23–24), and thus he would have also recognized that the earthly picture would be unnecessary when the heavenly reality came to earth as was promised, contingent on Israel’s perfect obedience (Lev 26:11–12; cf. Ezek 37:27). Furthermore, the NT stresses that events like the exodus and those in the wilderness years “were examples [τύποι] *for us*” (1 Cor 10:6), “written down *for our instruction*” (10:11). That is, from their inception the types bore a divinely wrought, forward-pointing, predictive nature, and this truth stands regardless of how often the OT authors recognized it or not.

Block writes, “Rather than reading the Scriptures backwards I read them forwards, interpreting Isaiah in the light of Moses, and Luke and Paul in the light of Moses and Isaiah ... Moses does not need to account to Paul, but Paul needs to account to Moses ... Later revelation cannot correct, annul, or contradict earlier revelation” (pp. 15–16). He later adds, “While we interpret later texts in the light of earlier texts, we may not force onto earlier texts meanings that were irrelevant to the original situation ... If we would preach Genesis 15:6, we must preach Genesis 15:6, and not some message that later biblical authors adopted and adapted for quite different polemical purposes” (p. 26). Does Block think the later authors were justified in handling antecedent Scripture as they did? If they were, why are Christians not legitimately allowed to follow their hermeneutical and homiletical methods?

Block does say that “when we preach evangelistically, we need to follow the paradigm and kerygma of the apostles and preach Jesus Christ

crucified and risen again” (p. 15). However, when our goals are something other than evangelism—e.g., “to bring about repentance, to reveal God, to encourage and guide believers in a life of godliness, to console those who grieve, and to present hope for the future by effecting transformation in the present”—we apparently do not need to follow the apostolic pattern (p. 15). I struggle in at least two ways with Block’s assertions. First, the church was guided by the apostles’ teaching and only through them by the OT prophetic word (Acts 2:42; Rom 16:25–26; Eph 2:20). For the early Christians, Jesus’s Bible gained its full significance only in the light of and through the lens of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. Thus, Paul, whose Bible was principally the OT, could declare, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). He could also affirm that “all the promises of God find their Yes *in him*” (2 Cor 1:20), which within the greater context of the book includes OT promises (cf. 7:1).⁹ Second, Block seems to limit “gospelizing” sermons to first-encounter experiences, but the effectiveness of all the other purposes he mentions are directly contingent on the pardon bound up in the gospel and the power and promises it produces. As one contemporary preacher has declared, “The only sin that we can defeat is forgiven sin.”¹⁰ That is, even mature Christians need a God who is one hundred percent for them already in order to find fuel for pursuing progress in sanctification. The good news that the reigning God saves and satisfies believing sinners through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection is the only message that brings salvation in all its tenses (Rom 1:16)—past justification (Eph 2:8), present sanctification (1 Cor 1:17), and future glorification (Rom 5:8). I agree with Block that “failure to mention Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins and whose resurrection gives us hope in life eternal in a sermon does not mean we have not preached a Christian sermon” (p. 15). But I believe that failure to read and preach the OT in this light and through this lens would. In my own exposition of Genesis 15:1–6 that follows, the reader will see that I focus less on Jesus’s death and resurrection and more on his perfect obedience and righteousness, which highlights this point. With Poythress, we must approach Christocentrism through a multi-perspectival approach, with Scripture’s Christotelic nature being *one* valid avenue for seeing and making much of the divine Son in the OT.

Block claims that the Christocentric hermeneutic is based on a wrong

interpretation of Luke 24:27, 44 that reads the evangelist to say that all the Scriptures speak of Christ rather than that those Scriptures that do speak of him he has come to fulfill. I agree with Block's reading of Luke 24:27, 44, but Poythress and others have identified that a Christological hermeneutic bears a far broader basis than these two verses. In addition to Poythress's comments (see above), I would add that Colossians 1:16 (all things were created *by, through, and for* the Son) necessitates that we interpret *all things* through a Christocentric grid, that 2 Corinthians 1:20 (all God's promises find their Yes in the Son) necessitates that we read *all promises* through the light and lens of Christ, and that Luke 24:45–47 declares that we have only "understood the Scriptures" if we see how they ultimately anticipate the Messiah and the mission he would spark (cf. Acts 26:22–23).

Confusingly, Block does say, "We may often grasp the Christological significance of a First Testament text only with hindsight" (p. 14). Would this not require reading backward rather than forward? Because Block uses "Christological" rather than "Christotelic," perhaps he is here referring to proclamation rather than interpretation (as he noted on p. 8). Later, however, when writing with respect to Genesis 15:1–6, he states that "with hindsight" the meaning of Jesus' name ("Yahweh saves") "provides the first clue to this text's *Christotelic* significance" (p. 19). For Block, "Christotelic" relates to something bound within the text itself and not just to preaching (p. 8), so I struggle to see how he is here not engaging in the very forward to backward reading that he elsewhere rejects. His claim that "the person who encounters Abraham in this text [Genesis 15:1–6] is none other than Jesus" is similar to how the author of Hebrews attributed Moses's reproach for *God's* sake as a reproach endured for *Christ* (Heb 11:26) and how Jude identified *Jesus* as Israel's deliverer at the exodus (Jude 5). While "Jesus" is the earthly name of the Christ and not the name of the pre-incarnate Son, the NT authors readily identified him with Yahweh, while never collapsing into Christomonism.

We must affirm that, while God disclosed much to the original authors, who searched and inquired carefully regarding the person and time of the Messiah (1 Pet 1:10–11), they were ultimately writing *not* for themselves but for us (1:12), and there were "mysteries" in the biblical text that neither they nor their readers fully understood (Rom 16:25–26). With respect to the readers, Yahweh declared through Moses that the majority of the

covenant community were deaf to God's Word and would only listen after their hearts were circumcised (Deut 30:6, 8; cf. 29:4[3]; Rom 2:29). Similarly, God noted through Isaiah that the majority in Israel would only grasp God's book in a future day after the substitutionary sacrifice of the Servant when God would teach all covenant members (Isa 29:11, 18; 30:8; 54:13; cf. John 6:44–46). As for the authors themselves, the Lord charged Jeremiah to write his words in a book for a future generation living after the exile and during the days of the new covenant who alone would fully understand his writings (Jer 30:1–3, 24–31:1, 33–34). And Yahweh told Daniel that, while he understood some of God's mysteries (Dan 2:27–28; 10:1), full disclosure would be granted to a future generation at the time of the end (12:8–9). Block writes that those practicing a Christological reading of the OT have “veiled the message of the inspired authors” (p. 18); however, with echoes of Moses in Deut 29:4[3], Paul would assert that a veil actually remains on the eyes of all who attempt to approach the old covenant materials as if the new covenant hasn't come: “For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away” (2 Cor 3:14).

Jesus comes to reveal “the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11), providing both light *and* lens for rightly grasping God's Word. In my view, we *must* read the OT *both* forwards and backwards—the OT authors themselves intended this. What was inscribed in each OT book was “for the time to come” (Isa 30:8) when those who were once “unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD” (30:9) would be superseded by those “taught by the LORD” (54:13). “In the latter days you will understand this” (Jer 30:24). At “the time of the end ... those who are wise shall understand” (Dan 12:10).

INTERPRETING AND PREACHING GENESIS 15:1–6

Block says of Genesis 15:1–6, “I see no hand here pointing to a future eschatological Messiah” (p. 30). He further writes: “The text offers no hint whatsoever” that either Abram or the human author believed “prefiguratively that Christ through the incarnation would become his heir” or that on this basis the Lord “reckoned it to him as righteousness” (p. 17). Significantly, Block agrees with me and others that Genesis 22:17–

18 is “a Christological text, for this would indeed involve a royal figure” (p. 23).¹¹ However, “the opposite is true in Genesis 15:1–6,” for whereas Abram’s focus was on “an *individual* heir, the aim of YHWH’s response was to get him to think in terms of an innumerable host of descendants” (p. 23). What Block fails to consider enough, however, is whether the wider context of Genesis ties together the promises of the one and the many and how that answer should inform our reading of Genesis 15:1–6.

The Messianic Context of Genesis 15:5

In Genesis 15:2–3, Abram raises two related issues that control 15:1–6 as a whole: offspring and inheritance. With an eye to the broader literary context of the book, Poythress stresses that God’s earlier promises to Abram of nationhood (Gen 12:2) and of the multiplication of his “offspring” (13:15–16) had already suggested that the patriarch’s “offspring is also the offspring of the woman” (p. 49). This passing reference is to the promise in Genesis 3:15 that a single, male offspring of the woman would crush the serpent’s head—a text Block never considers in relation to 15:1–6.¹² Similarly, Johnson rightly notes that the “selected line of offspring in the genealogies of Genesis 5:1–42 and 11:10–32 ... link the choice of Abram to Adam and Eve” (p. 38), and this connection must inform our reading of Genesis 15:1–6. Furthermore, Genesis 3:15 already identified that the “conflict with the serpent ... would ultimately be resolved by one offspring (he, him),” whom Paul later identified “with Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:16; 4:4) (pp. 40–41).

To these statements I would add the following observations with special attention given to the “offspring” promise in Genesis 15:5. First, from Genesis 3:15 forward, the book directly associates the promise of a single, male “offspring” deliverer with a global problem of curse due to human rebellion, the reality of which colors every narrative that follows. As Poythress states, “What makes the difference between the blessing described in Genesis 1:28 and the situation of frustration [i.e., no offspring] in Genesis 15:3” is “the obvious watershed ... the fall of Adam,” which places all of God’s favor toward Abram and in indeed all of redemptive history as a result of grace, made possible ultimately “only ... through Christ” (p. 61). Block does recognize that “the point of the

divine agenda for the chosen ancestor and his descendants was the removal of the curse from the world and its replacement with blessing” (p. 27). Nevertheless, with what appears to be mindful contrast to Paul’s use of Genesis 15:1–6 in Romans 4, Block says, “The issue in Genesis 15:1–6 is not personal salvation from sin, but the sustainability of YHWH’s plan of redemption and Abram’s role in it” (pp. 26–27). While Abram’s sin is not at the forefront of 15:1–6, we must recognize that his own experience of curse seen in his lack of children identifies him with Adam and creates the context for his looking to God in faith.

Second, Genesis 12:1–3 use two separate imperatives (“Go” in 12:1a; “And be a blessing” in 12:2d) to create two eras of promise associated with Abram’s inheritance: stage-one included an earthly kingdom associated with one people in the promised land (12:1–2c) (fulfilled, I believe, in the Mosaic covenant); stage-two entailed a multi-ethnic, global kingdom associated with the reversal of Babel (see “families” in 10:32 and 12:3) and with God’s blessing rather than curse (12:2d–3) (fulfilled ultimately in the new covenant through Christ; cf. 22:18).¹³ When Abram stresses that he has neither offspring nor biological heir (15:3), we must place both realities within the book’s vision of global reconciliation with God.

Third, God’s renaming of Abram (“exalted father”) to Abraham (“father of a multitude”) reaffirms, now in paternal language, the global scope of the patriarch’s future “fatherly” influence (17:4–5; cf. 12:3)—a paternal relationship over the nations that would apparently be based on election (through adoption) rather than on biology.¹⁴ As such, the greater context of Genesis calls us to use this broader paternal application when interpreting the book’s promise that the patriarch’s *offspring* would become “like the dust of the earth” (13:16; 28:14), “like the stars of heaven” (22:17; 26:4; cf. 15:5), and “like the sand of the seashore” (22:17; 32:12[13]). That is, regardless of whether one affirms Block’s unlikely insistence that “all Abram had on his mind was physical progeny” (p. 31), both the divine and human author of the book would have us understand that the ultimate referent extends beyond biology and that Scripture’s later allusions to the “dust-stars-sand”-promise in association with Israel as a nation were only initial (stage-one) fulfillments of a promise that would find broader, more world-wide realization in a multi-ethnic kingdom (stage-two) (Rom 4:18; cf. Isa 48:19; Hos 1:10).¹⁵

Fourth, whereas Block insists that Yahweh sought to get Abram to think about “an innumerable host of descendants” *rather than* on “an individual as his heir” (p. 23), I believe God’s declaration in Genesis 15:5 is actually addressing how the singular “offspring” will give rise to many. Block translates the last part of 15:5 as “This is how your seed will be” (thus giving “seed” a plural referent), but the clause $\text{כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ}$ more naturally reads, “Thus your seed will become,” with “offspring/seed” referring back to the singular “son” and “offspring” of 15:3–4. Furthermore, we know that God would establish his covenant with Isaac (17:19, 21), but when the Lord later pledges that “through Isaac shall your offspring be named” (21:12; cf. Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18) we see that the “offspring” in view is *not* Isaac but rather a later seed who would be associated with him. While the promise demanded that Isaac survive and father offspring, the promise itself pointed beyond Isaac to another male descendant—one that Genesis 22 specifically identifies as a royal figure who would possess his enemies’ gates (thus suggesting the expansion of his kingdom turf, Gen 22:17c; cf. 24:60; 26:3–4) and serve as a channel of curse-overcoming blessing to all nations (22:18).

Fifth, within the context of Genesis 22:17–8, the narrator invites us to link the anticipation of a single male descendant through whom the nations would be blessed (22:18) with the promise that Yahweh would, in allusion to Genesis 15:5, multiply Abraham’s offspring “as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore” (22:17b). Following the use of collective singular nouns elsewhere, Moses at times uses the number in pronouns to explicitly identify whether זַרְעֲךָ (“seed/offspring”) bears a singular (3:15; 22:17c–18; 24:60) or plural (17:8) referent.¹⁶ In light of the singular in 22:17c–18, we should view the same messianic figure as the assumed agent in those ambiguous channel-of-blessing-texts that include no pronouns (e.g., 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14). Block claims that “the plan making Abram a blessing to the entire world depended upon progeny [plural] who could scatter to the ends of the earth and thereby serve as agents of blessing” (p. 23). Indeed, he goes so far as to say that “the incredible contribution Israelites and their successors the Jews have made to the advance of civilization and culture” (p. 23) fulfills this anticipation. But such statements miss that in Genesis “blessing” stands in alignment with Yahweh and in direct contrast to sin and curse. The promise of global

blessing is about reconciliation between God and man, with cultural transformation being only a subsidiary result. Later Block affirms that Yahweh “determined to rescue his world from the ravages of sin, and is determined to use human beings—representatives of the Adamic race that is responsible for the problem—to accomplish that agenda” (p. 29). But how can those who are part of the problem serve as decisive agents in the solution? In contrast, Genesis portrays the decisive agent in the world’s salvation to be *not* a community but a person, not the many but the one, who will represent the nation and inherit all the promises God made to Abraham. We will now explore the importance of this point in relation to Genesis 15:6.

Justifying Faith in Genesis 15:6 and the Need for the Perfectly Obedient Messiah

“And [Abram] believed the LORD, and he counted it to [Abram] as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). In Romans 4, the apostle Paul identifies Abraham in Genesis 15:6 as a model of one “who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). We must now consider how the original context of Genesis envisions justifying faith and then reflect on what it means that God regarded the patriarch’s believing as righteousness.

Following the divine promise in Genesis 15:5 that Abram’s single offspring would multiply like the stars, we are told that the patriarch “believed in Yahweh” (וַיֵּאֱמֵן בַּיהוָה, 15:6), thus identifying that the man’s confidence was in God himself.¹⁷ That is, for Abram, there was an intimate tie between the desirability of the promise and the believability of the promise maker, and the latter took precedence in his faith. Block wants to define the Hiphil of אָמַן as “to demonstrate confidence in” (pp. 24–25), asserting, “While faith may be discussed as a disposition, it is never perceived in Scripture as a mystical quality nor primarily as an interior state. It is a jack-in-the-box that must be demonstrated in action observable to a watching world, and certainly to God” (p. 30). Significantly, Block’s statement about faith distinguishes the expression from its demonstration (“It [i.e., faith] . . . must be demonstrated”), which shows that Block’s own definition of faith misses the mark, defining the root as if it were the fruit. The Westminster divines were correct that faith “is not alone in the person

justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love” (Jas 2:17, 22–23, 26; Gal 5:6).¹⁸ Nevertheless, faith is itself not a work; it is less doing and more receiving (John 1:12; cf. 6:28–29) and being satisfied in all God is for us (6:35), ultimately in Christ. Both *HALOT* and *DCH* note that, absent of a Qal usage, the Hiphil of אָמַן means simply “to believe, trust,”¹⁹ and in the discussion that follows I will note the vital importance of this point for properly understanding the passage.

So what was Abram trusting God for? First, he was *trusting God to accomplish something in, through, and for him that he could not accomplish on his own*. His faith was a response to his recognition of his own inability and his deep confidence in God’s ability. At one level, Block recognizes this fact when he draws attention to Abram’s potential frustration and accusation in 15:2–3. Furthermore, both Poythress and Johnson draw attention to how the mention of both Sarai’s barrenness (11:30) and Abram’s lack of a biological son as his heir (15:3–4) emphasize Abram’s personal powerlessness to bring about the fulfillment of God’s promises. Nature was stacked against the patriarch, directly calling readers to question whether he could indeed become a great nation (12:1–2b) and have an offspring that would become a blessed multitude made up of some from all the families of the earth (12:2c–3; 15:5). That Sarah later laughed when the angel of Yahweh told her she would bear a son (18:13–15) only highlights that the fulfillment of God’s promise would take a miracle. For us to enjoy a justifying faith like Abram’s demands that we embrace that what God calls of us is impossible without his help (cf. Rom 4:18–22; Heb 11:11).

Second, within the broader scope of the book’s messianic promises in Genesis 3:15; 22:17b–18; 24:60; and 49:8–10, we see that Abram’s justifying faith was specifically in relation to his *trusting God to bring the promised offspring through whom all evil would be demolished, the curse of sin reversed, and lasting life with God restored to the world at large*. While Abram was clearly trusting God before Genesis 15 (see Heb 11:8), the narrator withheld the language of “believing” until Genesis 15:6, likely in order to associate faith directly with the book’s offspring promise and to identify that, for sinful humans infected and affected by the fall of Adam, believing (and not doing) supplies the only ultimate ground for standing right before God in this age.²⁰

We next learn that, of Abram's believing, God "counted it to him as righteousness" (וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה). Block reads this to mean that the patriarch's "present act of faith was a righteous act" (p. 28) and that "Abram/Abraham proved his righteousness by faith" (p. 29). This is one possible reading of the text, and Block supports it by paralleling Genesis 15:6 with two important texts in Deuteronomy.²¹

Deut 6:25. And it will be righteousness for us [וַיִּצְדַּקְהָ תְהִיָּה לָנוּ], if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.

Deut 24:12–13. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness for you [וְיִלְדָּה תְהִיָּה צְדָקָה] before the LORD your God.

In Block's discussion, he correctly stresses that Scripture uses the term "righteousness" to "refer not simply to a status or state, but to behavior in accord with an established standard" (p. 27). More specifically, in my assessment, all forty-two other occurrences of the צדק word group in the Pentateuch appear to speak of aligning with or doing what is right in God's world.²² The language of "righteousness" is about the orientation of one's life with right order through character or behavior.

While I agree with Block's understanding of the term "righteousness," I think that he has misinterpreted Genesis 15:6, and in doing so he diminishes glory due the Righteous One, the perfectly obedient Son of God. First, I have already noted that the context of Genesis 15:6 emphasizes Abram's *inability* rather than ability, and it is this powerlessness to generate the fulfillment of the offspring promise that sets the very context for justifying faith. If "righteousness" by nature focuses on behavior and doing as Block rightly argues, Abraham's faith is itself *not* a righteous act.²³

Second, Block seems to assume that God is "accounting" or "crediting" Abraham for something that is true in him (i.e., faith = a righteous act). Thus, using nearly the same language at Genesis 15:6, we are told that God counted Phinehas' zeal against the sexually immoral for *what it was*—*a righteous act*: "Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him as righteousness [וַתִּחְשַׁב לּוֹ לְצְדָקָה] from generation to generation forever" (Ps 106:30–31). However, Scripture also

uses the verb **חשב** with respect to “reckoning” *what is not*. For example, Leah and Rachel claim that their father Laban “reckons” them as strangers (“Are we not regarded [נִחְשָׁבִים] by him as foreigners,” Gen 31:15), and the sage declares that a person who receives a blessing at the wrong time can view it as a curse (“Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, *will be counted* [תִּחְשָׁב] as cursing,” Prov 27:14). I suggest the context of Genesis 15:6 supports reading the meaning of **חשב** in this latter way—as God imputing to Abraham something that was by nature *not* his own: “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”²⁴ In this vein, Brian Vickers writes regarding what is going on in Genesis 15:6:

“Because Abraham believes the promise for an heir, God counts Abraham as holding the same status or position as that of a person who has done everything right according to God’s standards.... The status or description typically reserved for actions is here counted to Abraham on the basis of faith. Abraham’s faith is counted to him as something that it inherently is not, righteousness ... What might usually be declared over a person who did what is right in God’s sight is declared upon Abraham through faith.”²⁵

In my view, this reading more faithfully accounts for the focus in the text on the patriarch’s inability. Furthermore, it seems to align better with Paul’s reading, when he wrote (Rom 4:2–5): “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” We must, in Carson’s words, see that “when faith is imputed to Abraham as righteousness, it is *unmerited*, it is all of grace, because it is nothing more than believing God and his gracious promise.”²⁶ Abraham’s righteousness was what systematicians call an “*alien* righteousness”—one that is credited to the ungodly apart from behavior. And because we know that “he who justifies the wicked” is “an abomination to the LORD” (Prov 17:15), Yahweh could have only counted Abram’s faith as righteousness in the light of the coming Son’s penal-substitutionary work. Thus, Abram by faith received from God by declaration what he did *not* have in himself.

Third, this understanding is further supported by the broader biblical context, some of which Block points to but the whole of which ought to impact our understanding of Genesis 15:1–6 more than Block perceives. Specifically, Genesis 12:2d–3 makes the fulfillment of the ultimate promise of Abram serving as a channel of blessing to the world contingent on the patriarch (or his representative) being a blessing.²⁷ Furthermore, 18:19 adds that only by Abraham's children "doing righteousness and justice" would Yahweh "bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Without obedience, the curse would not and could not be overcome by blessing. Significantly, while Noah, after finding grace in Yahweh's eyes, is tagged "righteous" (Gen 6:8–9), we are also told that all those who came off the ark continued to be evil at their core (8:21; cf. 6:5). Indeed, the Pentateuch's overwhelming message is that God's people were not and indeed could not be perfectly righteous. Their innate stubbornness and uncircumcised hearts rendered them unrighteous and spiritually disabled (Deut 9:4–6; 10:16; 29:4[3]), and this fact would result in their destruction (4:25–28; 31:16–17, 27–29). Moses would have affirmed Paul's words when he described such people as "ungodly" (Rom 4:5) and when he noted that they were part of a covenant that bore a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor 3:7, 9).

Within this framework, God's "righteousness" (רְדִיפָה / δίκαιος) as a standard was what Israel was to *pursue* (רָדַף / διώκω) (Deut 16:20), and he would regard perfect commandment keeping as righteousness (הִקְדִּיפָה, 6:25). Paul rightly noted, however, "that Gentiles *who did not pursue righteousness* [τὰ μὴ διώκοντα δικαιοσύνην] have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel *who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness* [διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης] did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works" (Rom 9:30–32). The ultimate *telos* of the law-covenant was Christ for righteousness to all who believe (10:5). God intended that the law disclose and multiply sin (Rom 3:20; 5:20; Gal 3:19), so as to show everyone their need to receive from God by declaration the right standing that no one could himself earn.

On this, Johnson rightly notes that, because Abram's imperfect "obedience did not fulfill God's promise," the promise's certainty "*necessarily implies* that there will be an ultimate descendant through whom

the promise will be fulfilled” (p. 39). He adds, “The *promise* of God assured what in the commitment would be fulfilled. The *law* of God was added to identify the descendant who would be willing and able to obey and thus the one chosen by God to use as the partner (Gal 3:23, 24)” (p. 39). He also notes, “The Mosaic law would only be effective in the intended purpose (Exod 19:5, 6), if some partner were willing and able to obey fully . . . The law was never expected to be fulfilled through a fallen people. Rather, the law was expected to be a schoolmaster to reveal Israel’s Messiah (Gal 3:24). Thus, Jesus did not *replace* Israel, but *represented* Israel in her partnership with God” (p. 42).²⁸

The old covenant was set up such that “righteousness” was *goal*, not *ground*. Christ fulfills the perfect obedience demanded in the law (Rom 5:18–19; Phil 2:8–9), and by this he fulfills the call to “be a blessing” set forth in God’s original directives to Abram (Gen 12:2d).²⁹ And the natural result was the overflow of justification of life for all who believe (Rom 5:18). When we believe God, trusting him to accomplish for us what we cannot do on our own and to do so ultimately through his promised offspring, he justifies the inept, unable, and powerless ungodly ones, counting our sin to Christ (2 Cor 5:20) and crediting Christ’s righteousness/perfect obedience to us (Rom 8:4; cf. 5:18–19). By this he in turn empowers us to be who we could not be on our own (6:17, 22). The only ones who can practice “righteousness” are those who are already declared “righteous” (1 John 3:7).

Moses was able to portray Abraham as a covenant keeper who “obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen 26:5; cf. 22:18) only because the patriarch experienced a preceding divine grace (cf. 6:8–9) wherein, having been declared right with God (15:6), he was then empowered to walk in his ways, giving sustained evidences of justifying faith. It is from and only from this perspective that James, speaking with respect to Abraham’s offering up of Isaac, identified the patriarch’s act as a *fulfillment* of God’s earlier declaration: “You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (Jas 2:21–24; cf. Rom 4:20–22). Only those who are “of faith . . . are the sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:8), and because “the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring . . . who

is Christ" (3:16), "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (3:29; cf. Rom 4:13, 24–25).

CONCLUSION

A Christocentric hermeneutic that reads the OT both forwards and backwards most faithfully aligns with the nature of Scripture as divine revelation and with the explicit statements and approaches of the biblical authors themselves. We must affirm Block's insistence that the entire OT story climaxes in Jesus. To him all Scripture points, and from him all fulfillment comes. Nevertheless, we must not restrict ourselves to a Christotelic reading in order to faithfully magnify the divine Son in the initial three-fourths of the Christian Scriptures. Instead, we must follow Poythress's practice of a multi-perspectival approach that recognizes that all things, including the OT, find their source and goal in the divine Son (Col 1:16). Furthermore, we must affirm with Johnson that *all* the promises of the OT point in some way to Christ and through him find their significance for the church (2 Cor 1:20). We know that the OT remained a closed book for most OT readers (Deut 29:4[3]; Isa 29:10–11), and we also know that, even for the OT human authors themselves, there remained mysteries that only Christ's coming clarifies (Rom 16:25–26; cf. Jer 30:24; Dan 12:8–9). We must, therefore, approach the OT in a way that affirms that "only through Christ" does God lift the veil from our hearts, allowing us to more fully and faithfully read and preach Jesus's Bible as Christian Scripture (2 Cor 3:14).

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 2. For a comparable list, see Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 481–89; cf. 365–67.
 3. See D.A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and New," in *The Paradoxes of Paul. Vol 2 of Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, 2 vols., *WUNT* 2/181 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 393–436; G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).
 4. The closest Block comes to identifying his antagonists is by linking the methodology to "a supposedly

- astute institution, the Gospel Coalition,” and to a passing comment on preaching Christ by “R. Albert Mohler,” Block’s former boss and The President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
5. See, for example, Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995); Vern S. Poythress, *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999); Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook for Biblical Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).
 6. E.g., Douglas J. Moo, “The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 175–211, 397–405; G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?,” *Themelios* 14.3 (1989): 89–96; G. K. Beale, “Did Jesus and the Apostles Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Revisiting the Debate Seventeen Years Later in the Light of Peter Enns’ Book, Inspiration and Incarnation,” *Themelios* 32.1 (2006): 18–43; Darrell L. Bock, “Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents,” in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 105–51; G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); G. K. Beale, “The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors: J. Gresham Machen Chair Installation Lecture,” *WTJ* 76 (2014): 263–93; G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014); Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, “The Problem of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 702–46; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (2nd ed.; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 107–58. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, *From Typology to Doxology: Paul’s Use of Isaiah and Job in Romans 11:34–35* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012); Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 39–68; Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Brent E. Parker, “Typology and Allegory: Is There a Distinction? A Brief Examination of Figural Reading,” *SBJT* 21.1 (2017): 57–83; Aubrey M. Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, “Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology,” *SBJT* 21.1 (2017): 11–34; DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 347–79; Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 230–59.
 7. Beale, “Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?” 394; cf. Beale, “The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors,” 283.
 8. Tyler Holley, person correspondence, Sept 13, 2018. Tyler is one of my ThM students at Bethlehem College & Seminary, and he is focusing his thesis on the nature and significance of typology.
 9. See Jason S. DeRouchie, “Is Every Promise ‘Yes’? Old Testament Promises and the Christian,” *Themelios* 42 (2017): 16–45.
 10. John Piper, “I Act the Miracle,” a sermon on Phil 2:12–13 presented at Bethlehem College & Seminary chapel, Feb 24, 2011; <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-act-the-miracle>.
 11. See T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ In Genesis,” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 363–67; Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16,” *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 36–49; Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 219–47; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective,” *JETS* 58.3 (2015): 445–85; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in Old Testament Perspective,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 7–38; cf. C. John Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?,” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 139–47.
 12. Block mentions Gen 3:15 once at p. 22 n. 23, but he does not relate it to his interpretation of Gen 15:1–6.
 13. For more on this, see DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets,” 459–60, 479–80; DeRouchie, “Father of a Multitude of Nations,” 13–14, 31–32; for a more detailed exegetical assessment, see DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 209–11, 247–50, 258–63, 315–17.
 14. DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets,” 457–61; DeRouchie, “Father of a

- Multitude of Nations,” 10–15.
15. “Dust” = 2 Chr 1:9; “stars” = Exod 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chr 27:23; Neh 9:23; Heb 11:12; “sand” = 2 Sam 17:11; 1 Kgs 4:20; Isa 10:22; Heb 11:12; cf. Rom 9:27.
 16. On this feature, see especially Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15),” 139–47 and Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ In Genesis,” 363–67.
 17. Williams and Beckman note how verbs like the Hiphil of וַיִּבְרָא can “take a prepositional phrase beginning with אֶל where English would use a direct object” (Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *William’s Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007], §244.
 18. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, §11.2.
 19. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. and trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994), s.v. וַיִּבְרָא; David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 9 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), s.v. וַיִּבְרָא.
 20. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Is It the Case That Christ Is the Same Object of Faith in the Old Testament? (Genesis 15:1–6),” *JETS* 55 (2012): 291–98; cf. E. Ray Clendenen, “Salvation by Faith or by Faithfulness in the Book of Habakkuk?” *BBR* 24 (2014): 505–13.
 21. Block’s reading appears to align with the common pattern in early Judaism, wherein Gen 15:6 is read in relation to Abraham’s obedience in Gen 22 and taken as evidence of his merit (see 1 Macc 2:51–52; Mek. 35b, 40b), Paul’s own reading in Rom 4 stands as a polemic against such a view. See D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates* (ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 56.
 22. There are four terms in the וַיִּבְרָא word group: (1) Verb וַיִּבְרָא (Qal, “to be right, just”; Niphal, “to be justified”; Piel, “to make someone appear upright, to declare as in the right”; Hiphil, “to obtain rights for, to declare as in the right, to treat as right; Hithpael, to prove oneself right); (2) ms noun וַיִּבְרָא (bears a collective meaning and points to the standard of “right order” in God’s world; (3) fs noun וַיִּבְרָא (denotes proof of uprightness or an act of justice, with the focus on proper behavior that aligns with right order); (4) adjective וַיִּבְרָא (“righteous, just, in the right, innocent”). Within the Pentateuch, the noun וַיִּבְרָא consistently means “proper or upright behavior” that is expected or performed, often explicitly in association with Yahweh (Gen 18:19; 30:33; Deut 6:25; 9:4–6; 24:13; 33:21).
 23. Carson is correct that, “In some broad sense, of course, God-commanded faith is in ‘conformity to the will of God,’ but in the context [of Gen 15:6 and Rom 4] this faith justifies the ungodly, that is, those who are not in conformity to the will of God” (Carson, “Vindication of Imputation,” 68). We find similar teaching in 2 Cor 5:19–21; Phil 3:8–9.
 24. Cf. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” 58.
 25. Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 58, 60–61.
 26. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” 60.
 27. For more on the relationship of human responsibility (imperative) and divine commitment (promise) in Gen 12:1–3, see DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 209–11; cf. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (NSBT 23; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 78–79; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 266–70.
 28. On this, Gentry and Wellum write: “The covenant will be fulfilled not by a faithful Father alone (i.e., Yahweh keeping his promises) but also by a faithful son (i.e., the obedience of the king to Yahweh’s Torah)” (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 449, 703). “God’s demand of complete obedience from his creatures ... is crucial in establishing the grounding to the active obedience of Christ. This is consistent with who God is as the standard of righteousness and justice. To demand anything less than full devotion and obedience from his creatures would be a denial of himself” (778). “Through the Bible’s unfolding covenants, it becomes clear that God must provide a [sic] greater than Israel, an obedient Son, who will keep the provisions of the covenant, who will not fail, and who will bring all God’s promises to pass, including the land promise, but in a greater way” (827).
 29. For more on this concept, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “From Condemnation to Righteousness: A Christian Reading of Deuteronomy,” *SBIT* 18.3 (2014): 108–13.