

## SEEING CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

*“In the Old Testament the New is concealed; in the New, the Old is revealed”*

*Augustine of Hippo*

*These hidden meanings of inspired Scriptures we track down as best we can, with varying degrees of success; and yet we all hold confidently to the firm belief that these historical events and the narrative of them have always some foreshadowing of things to come, and are always to be interpreted with reference to Christ and his Church, which is the City of God*

*See Luke 24: 25-26 and Romans 1 v 2*

### **Reasons for Preaching and Teaching Christ from the OT**

#### ***The OT is part of the Christian Canon***

The church has accepted these books as part of its canon. To accept a document as part of one's canon only to let this 'standard of faith' gather dust makes little sense. Paul instructs Timothy to "give attention to the public reading of scripture (the OT). Then we have the famous text in 2 Tim 3 v 16 "All scripture is God-breathed". Peter agrees with Paul that Christians are to use the OT see 1 Peter 1 v 12. See also the remarkable way that the first Christian martyr Stephen uses the Old Testament in his speech defending himself before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. His speech is recorded in such detail by Luke (the writer of Acts) as an example of the way in which the early Christians saw the unfolding revelation of God in the Old Testament finding its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth.

#### ***The Old Testament discloses the History of Redemption Leading to Christ.***

The OT discloses God's acts of redemption in a history that stretches from the creation to just prior to the coming of Christ. It reveals how God after the fall into sin, seeks to save his people and restore his kingdom (rule) on earth. We can liken redemptive history to a drama

with many acts. The first act shows God creating a beautiful kingdom where he will be honoured as King. The second act is about an attempted coup in the Kingdom where human beings join Satan and rebel against God. Act 2 is followed by countless acts in which God saves his people. A high point is the call of Abraham (Gen 12). Other high points are the exodus from Egypt, the rule of King David and the return of the exiles. But still the climax has not been reached. This comes in the NT with God sending his own Son to save the world. Just as you cannot understand the last act of a drama without knowing the earlier acts, so this climactic act of God cannot be understood without knowing the foregoing acts.

### ***The Old Testament Proclaims Truths Not found in the New Testament***

For example, only in the OT do we receive the comprehensive revelation of God as the sovereign creator, wholly other than his creation yet involved in it. Only in the OT do we learn that God created human beings in his image for fellowship with him and with each other, and with the mandate to develop and care for the earth. Only in the OT do we receive a picture of the human fall into sin, resulting in death, brokenness and enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. (Gen 3 v 15) Only in the Old Testament do we hear of God electing Abraham/Israel as a beachhead for restoring his kingdom on earth. Only in the OT do we find details of God's covenant with Israel. The OT is quite distinct from other world views such as polytheism, pantheism, Gnosticism, deism and atheism. The NT does not assume another worldview but simply assumes the one taught in the OT.

Besides these foundational teachings the OT offers a host of teachings which may or may not be echoed in the NT. The sovereignty of God over all nations ( Isaiah 10 & Habbakuk), the incomparability of God ( Isaiah 40:12-31) the problem of the suffering of God's people ( Job , Psalms), human responsibility for promoting social justice ( Deut 15 , Amos, Micah , Isaiah ) , the gift of sexual love ( Genesis 2: 18-25, Song of Songs), and a hopeful view of the new earth ( Isaiah 11:6-9 & 65:17-25 )

### ***The OT helps us to understand the NT***

The night before Jesus' death, he celebrated the Passover with his disciples. A strange thing happened. Matthew tells us that Jesus took a cup and said "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matt 26 v 28) We may hear these words so often that we do not find them strange anymore, but what is all this talk about "blood" and "covenant"? We would never know unless we knew the OT teaching about Passover and about God's covenant with his people and the blood sacrifices required to atone for their sins.

### ***The preaching of the Apostles***

Because Jesus is "present" in the OT as promise, the apostles can preach Christ from the OT. On the day of Pentecost, Peter uses *Joel, and Psalms 16 and 110* to proclaim Christ (Acts 2: 14-34). A few days later Peter is preaching in Solomon's Portico (Acts 3:11-26) and says "God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer" (v 18). Then he speaks of Jesus remaining in heaven "until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets" (v 21)

Later Philip encounters an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading from Isaiah 53 "*Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter ....*" but did not understand the passage "*Then Philip began to speak and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus*" (Acts 8 v 35)

Reporting on Paul's preaching in Thessalonica, Luke writes "On three Sabbath days he argued with them from the scriptures (OT) explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead and saying "This is the Messiah , Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you" ( Acts 17:2-3) see also verse 11

See also Paul in *1 Corinthians 15:3-4*. In their preaching, therefore the apostles followed their Master by preaching Christ from the OT. There was no doubt in their minds that the OT witnessed to Jesus.