

# Jesus Christ is the Center of it All<sup>a</sup>

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When I was growing up my family made the drive from Dunwoody North, Georgia, just outside of Atlanta, to Newark, Ohio, dozens of times. It is just over 600 miles and takes a whole day, which for a kid is longer than all of history combined. Both sets of grandparents were in Newark, and we traveled there every summer and every Christmas. The four of us would pile into our Chevy Nova with my brother and I sandwiched in the backseat amidst food for the road, books and games, pillows, and presents if it was the Christmas trip. We had thoughts along the way about the injustice of it all, the agony of our suffering, and the torture that a road trip is to young boys who cannot sit still for five minutes—much less a day of driving.

One thought, however, never crossed our minds. We never said, "You know, this is really long. Let's just stop here in Chattanooga. After all, a few hours is much more reasonable than a whole day of driving. Let's make this the end of our trip." Why did we never say that? Because the point of a trip is the destination, not the drive. The drive has some "value" and "meaning" in the time of conversation—and the character that is built by such difficulties! The real point of our drive, however, was to get to Newark. If we had stopped in Chattanooga, we would have had a drive together, but Chattanooga was only a stopping point along the way, not the end of the journey. Knoxville, Florence, Cincinnati, Columbus—these are all fine cities, but to us on this trip, they were simply landmarks along the

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<sup>a</sup> An excerpt from *A User's Guide to the Old Testament*, available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

way. They were not the destination. We would have missed the point if we had stopped our drive at any of these cities.

Our Bibles are like this. As we read the stories of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, and dozens of others, we are fascinated and challenged, encouraged and sobered. Yet, we will miss the point of them if we stop where they are and see any of them as "the destination." The Bible is a kind of journey, and it ends not in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament. The destination that gives meaning to the whole journey is Jesus Christ. Without a grasp on the place of Jesus in our Bibles, we will never understand our Old Testament.

As an example we can think of Genesis 1:1 that begins famously with, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The full depth of the statement is filled out only when we get to John's gospel in the New Testament: "In the beginning was the Word....Without him was not anything made that was made" (1:1, 3). Now we know that when "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1), he did this as Father and Son (John 1:1, 3). We know as well that Jesus holds all of creation together (Col. 1:17) and will ultimately receive the worship of all of creation (Rev. 5:13). Without seeing the end in Jesus Christ, we will lack a complete understanding of "the beginning." To borrow from our opening illustration, it is as if creation starts with a giant mile-marker: "4000 miles until Jesus Christ."

Seeing Christ as the goal of our Old Testament is not merely a function of the organization of our Bibles—the New Testament does follow the Old, after all. Rather, it is an essential part of the Bible's message. Jesus himself even taught his Old Testament in this way, and it will help us to look at two places where he does.

## **THE CENTER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IS JESUS**

Perhaps the most famous Bible study that ever occurred happened about two thousand years ago just outside of Jerusalem, when a

man named Cleopas and his friend were traveling to a village called Emmaus. After walking a ways they were joined by Jesus—Jesus recently resurrected from the dead! As their conversation progressed, it was clear they did not understand what had only recently happened. Jesus rebukes them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25). We then read a profound sentence: "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27). In other words, the Old Testament does not sprinkle a few references to Jesus throughout its hundreds of pages. Rather, "Moses and all the prophets" speak "things concerning" Jesus. If we miss it, we are "foolish ones" and deserve a rebuke!

These two men were not alone in their misunderstanding, however. After they join the other disciples in Jerusalem, Jesus appears to them and assures them that he was in fact resurrected. During this meeting "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (v. 45). The centerpiece of his instruction was his suffering and resurrection: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (vv. 46-48). Where was it "written" that all this must take place? It was in the Old Testament: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (v. 44).

So we see that "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" are united in their testimony that "the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations." We have not understood the Old Testament until we see this *Christological* (Christo-, *Christ*, -logical, *the study of, the word about*) dimension of its witness.

A second place where Jesus speaks in this way is John 5. In this passage Jesus responds to the "Jews" who "were seeking all the more to kill him" (5:18). He does not rebuke them for

failing to hear *his* teaching, but for failing to hear the teaching of *Moses*:

*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope.<sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me (John 5:45-46).*

Moses "wrote of me," Jesus tells us. When Moses was writing of creation (Gen. 1-3), Abraham (Gen. 12-25), the Exodus (Ex. 1-18), and the Law (Leviticus-Deuteronomy), he was writing of Jesus. That means that those who have true ears to hear Moses will also have ears to hear the teaching of Jesus.

Luke 24 and John 5 illustrate the point that will be very clear as we work through this chapter: *Jesus is the center of the Old Testament*. He is the fulfillment of all the hopes of the Old Testament, the fulcrum on which all revelation turns, the flywheel that brings direction and progress and success to God's work of building his kingdom for his glory. Frank Gaebelien has expressed well this same point:

*The center of the Bible is the living Christ. Throughout its pages God the Holy Spirit who inspired it bears witness to the Person who unites all the manifold strands of history, prophecy, poetry, symbolism, and doctrine to bear witness to him and his saving work. Let us, therefore, rejoice that Christ is the center of the Bible, that in him alone it finds its living unity. Let us reverence the Bible as the only written revelation of God, the only completely truthful book, realizing that we reverence it most fully and honor it most highly when we see within its pages the Lord Jesus Christ and when we make him in*

*whom its unity is centered the center of our own life and service.*<sup>b</sup>

Gaebelein inspiringly sees Christ as "the Person who unites all the manifold strands" within the Bible. Whether we are reading "history, prophecy, poetry, symbolism, [or] doctrine," all that the Old Testament teaches is centered in Jesus Christ. Gaebelein also sees more. This "Person" that brings meaning and organization to the Bible, must also be "the center of our own life and service" as well. This "living unity" of the Bible is the "living unity" of our very lives.

The above makes it clear that Jesus is the center of the Old Testament, but now we want to see more specifically how this works.

## **EIGHT WAYS THE OLD TESTAMENT SPEAKS OF JESUS**

The list below owes much to a theologian named Sidney Greidanus and his book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (1999). Greidanus says that "Jesus Christ is the link between the Old Testament and the New. God's revelation reaches its climax in the New Testament—and this climax is not a new teaching or a new law, but a person, God's own Son."<sup>c</sup>

But how do we get from the Old Testament to the New without being arbitrary or inconsistent? He says that we look "for a clue, a feature, in the Old Testament text that warrants linking it with a particular New Testament event or one or more New Testament passages."<sup>d</sup> Thus, "the Old Testament itself witnesses to Christ incarnate," and that is why we say that "the ultimate form of

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<sup>b</sup> Gaebelein, Frank E, "The Unity of the Bible," *Revelation and the Bible*, Ed., Carl Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958), 401.

<sup>c</sup> (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 49.

<sup>d</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

interpreting the Old Testament is Messianic interpretation or Christocentric interpretation."<sup>e</sup> This is another way of saying that we will never understand the Old Testament until we see Jesus as the center of it.

Here is a list of eight ways that an Old Testament text might bear witness to Jesus Christ, the first seven being inspired by Greidanus. The list is not exhaustive but provides a starting point for seeing Jesus all throughout our Bibles.

## JESUS IS THE CENTER OF THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

Almost from the opening pages of the Bible we are made aware that humanity is in need of a Redeemer. As soon as Eve gives in to the temptation of the serpent and Adam joins her in that rebellion, there is the presence of shame and guilt, the expectation of death and judgment, and the need for a Redeemer to bring salvation. That Redeemer is prophesied in the *protoeuaggelion*, a word that combines Greek words meaning "first" (proto-) and "good news" (-euaggelion). The *protoeuaggelion* or "first good news" refers to Genesis 3:15: "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*"

How is this statement "the first good news"? We can think of two things here. Firstly, it promises that "your offspring and her offspring" will remain enemies. The serpent and the woman had collaborated in the first sin, but God is gracious and promises that this collaboration shall cease. From now on the serpent and humanity will remain antagonistic toward one another. He seeks only to "kill and steal and destroy" us (John 10:10), and our God-given conscience will keep us from sinning as much as we could.

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<sup>e</sup> Ibid., 55.

Secondly, there is "good news" in the promise that "he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The antagonism shall not last forever. Eventually the offspring of the woman shall crush the serpent, even though all the while the devil will pick and bite and devour. This is why Paul tells us in the New Testament that "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20). The "offspring" that shall destroy the devil is Jesus Christ. While we will join him in this final work of judgment (Rev. 19), it will be his power and glory that prevails.

Embedded in this "first good news" is the promise that God shall undo the work of corruption and destruction that happened in the Garden of Eden because of sin. This is the great work of "redemption" where God *redeems* (buys out of slavery) sinful men and women. At the center of this work of redemption is the person and work of Jesus Christ. God does not send Jesus at this point in history, however, but waits until the "fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4). Thousands of years after this first sin, the Son of God will be born the Son of Mary and will be named "Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The Old Testament keeps this promise of redemption alive in the history of Israel. Over time the promise will become more and more defined—though Jesus shattered all categories and expectations!

Along these lines we can think of the promise to Abraham that his offspring shall be a blessing to all nations: "In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). How shall "all nations" enjoy the "blessing" that God reserves for his people? It will happen through Jesus Christ who is that "offspring" (Gal. 3:16).

We can also think of the "offspring" that was promised to David. David follows Abraham by another thousand years and is promised a son who will "build a house for my name" (2 Sam. 7:13). Yet, God will also "establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Who will be this "Son of David" that shall be a king "forever"? Surely it is not Solomon or any of the kings that follow in his line! It is none other than Jesus Christ who is introduced in the first verse of the New Testament as, "Jesus Christ, the son of

David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1; cf. also Matt. 1:2-17; Rom. 1:1-4; Gal. 3:8-29; Col. 1:15-20).

Lastly, we can note that Jesus is the one who inaugurates a "new covenant," one that replaces the "old covenant." A new covenant is promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34,

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Before Jesus' crucifixion he says at the last supper, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). Just as blood was shed and sprinkled to inaugurate the covenant with Moses (Ex. 24:8), so blood will inaugurate the new covenant. The difference is that the blood will be Jesus' own blood. Once his blood is shed, the great promises spoken in Jeremiah 31:31-34 will begin to be realized in the people of God. God's law will now be written on our hearts, he shall be our God in a greater and fuller way, we will know him more intimately, and all of our sins will be forgiven. No longer will forgiveness be a promise; now it will be accomplished (Heb. 10:18). The great



development in God's relationship to his people that we read about in the New Testament can all be summarized in this "new covenant."

We will look more closely at this history of redemption in the next chapter.

## JESUS FULFILLS OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

The second way in which the Old Testament speaks of Jesus is probably the most familiar. The Old Testament speaks prophecies that we later find to be fulfilled by Jesus. There is overlap with the first topic, Jesus as the center of redemption history, but the prophecies surrounding Jesus refer to all kinds of details of his life and work. The apostles spent much time talking to their Jewish brothers and sisters about Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. When the sheer number and extent of his fulfillment was realized, people were often left without any doubt that he was indeed "the Christ," the Messiah, the promised one (at least, this was the means God used to save them). Their writings in the gospels and epistles of the New Testament contain hundreds of allusions to prophecies fulfilled. These prophecies come from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets—every part of the Old Testament. Here is a small sampling of what we find:

*Jesus is the "begotten" Son of God.* In Psalm 2:7 the psalmist writes, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." In Acts 13:33 Paul says that it is Jesus whom God has raised up and thus fulfilled his promises and this prophecy. In Hebrews 1:5 the author says that it is Jesus that Psalm 2:7 speaks of, not an angel. Jesus is unique and supreme and is the only one to fulfill Psalm 2:7 in the fullest sense.

*Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us."* In Matthew 1:22-23 the apostle is describing the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. As he does so, he says that "all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)." Matthew is citing Isaiah 7:14, a prophecy spoken

seven centuries before the birth of Christ. Likely the original setting saw a kind of fulfillment, maybe even an actual unmarried woman who would have a son with this name. The greater fulfillment is in Jesus who was literally, "God with us." Jesus is also born in Bethlehem as described by Matthew, thereby fulfilling yet another prophecy that is given in Micah 5:2, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

*Jesus is "the prophet" promised by Moses.* In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses spoke of another prophet "like me among you." John the Baptist is asked if he is "the Prophet" (John 1:25), but denies it. Instead in John 6:14 and 7:40 the people witness Jesus' miracles and teaching and affirm, "This really is the Prophet."

*Jesus is the one who "comes in the name of the Lord."* When Jesus enters Jerusalem in what we call the "triumphal entry," a week prior to being crucified by the same crowds, the cries that are lifted up enable us to see that Jesus is fulfilling a prophecy in this action. Psalm 118:26 reads, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!" The crowds that see Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey—fulfilling Zechariah 9:9!—cry out with the words of this psalm, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9).

*Jesus is the one to cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* Psalm 22 is one of the psalms rich in Messianic references. It rivals Isaiah 53 in terms of its vividness in describing the suffering of the cross. David writes the psalm out of his own experience, but it becomes clear that here is also a prophetic word fulfilled at the cross. He opens the psalm by saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1). Jesus will take up these words exactly on the cross in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34. Psalm 22:18 speaks of his clothing that was gambled away, a verse fulfilled in John 19:24. The psalm also speaks of being

able to "count all my bones" (v. 17). This verse is fulfilled by Jesus as the legs of those crucified with Jesus are broken and Jesus' are not (John 19:31-33).

*Jesus is Isaiah's Suffering Servant who takes on himself the sins of his people.* Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is one of five "Servant songs," prophecies that speak of the "Servant of the Lord" in various ways. The most famous of these is Isaiah 52:13-53:12, which presents vividly the suffering and work of Christ. Here we read, "He was wounded for our transgressions" (v. 5), and "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6). The result is that "many [will be] accounted righteous" (v. 11). We see here the general picture of "substitutionary atonement" (atonement by means of sacrificing a substitute) so evident in the New Testament, but there are also places that have Isaiah 53 explicitly in view. For instance, 1 Peter 2:24 says, "by his wounds you have been healed."

There are far too many other prophecies to catalog in an introductory work like this. A Bible with a good cross-referencing system is a good place to continue the study of such a topic (references listed in the middle or side of the text). Such Bibles typically indicate whether a verse is citing an Old Testament text, often times a prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament passage. Another clue is when a New Testament text uses phrases like, "for it is written" (e.g., Rom. 12:19) or, "to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet" (e.g., Matt. 2:15). Such phrases reveal the author's intention, which is often to connect an Old Testament prophecy to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

## JESUS IS THE "ANTITYPE" FOR MANY OLD TESTAMENT "TYPES"

A third way the Old Testament speaks of Jesus is called *typology*. Of the eight we discuss this is by far the most difficult to grasp. The term relates to connecting Jesus to certain people, things, or events in the Old Testament. When the person, thing, or event is discussed originally we do not necessarily have a clue that Jesus

will "fulfill" it. Yet, the New Testament helps us to see the connection and especially to see that Jesus in some way perfects the object. The technical term for the earlier object is a "type," and the later perfection of that type is called the "antitype." The word "type" comes from Romans 5:14 where Paul speaks of Adam as a "type (*Grk. tupos*) of the one who was to come." Perhaps some examples will help make this clearer.

*The Old Testament speaks of "bread from heaven" (manna) that fills our stomachs, but Jesus is the "bread of life" that brings eternal life* (Ex. 16; John 6). When Jesus gives what is called the "bread of life discourse" in John 6:26-58 he points back to the miracle of manna in the wilderness. God provided for Israel in the Exodus by sending manna from above every day for forty years. The miraculous provision meant life in a barren desert that otherwise offered little to the million people that left Egypt to go to Canaan. Jesus says that this miracle was from God, but it also had a fundamental limitation: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died" (John 6:49). Jesus as the "bread of life" promises much more than daily provision, he promises eternal life: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51).

*The Old Testaments speaks of a literal "rock" out of which was brought water, but Jesus is the spiritual rock that brings spiritual life to his people* (Ex. 17; 1 Cor. 10:4). When Paul is teaching the Corinthians about the wilderness generation he wants them to see that "these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did" (10:6). In this context he looks at the rock at "Massah and Meribah" (two terms meaning "testing and quarreling") in Exodus 17. The thirsty multitudes grumbled against Moses for wanting to kill them with thirst. God provided water by having Moses strike a rock "and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink" (17:6). This water provided for Israel for days at best. Christ our Rock is the foundation or cornerstone of our salvation. Out of this greater

Rock we also drink of water, but it is "living water" that means eternal life. The Exodus narrative provides no clue that Jesus would one day become a "Rock" that brings the water of eternal life, but the New Testament enables us to look back and see the connection.

*The Old Testament speaks of Israel as an unfaithful son but Jesus comes as the faithful Son.* Throughout the Old Testament Israel is treated as a son of God, though often an unfaithful one. Jesus is the "Son of God" who is instead faithful. One place this comes out is in the temptations of Jesus, the forty days when Jesus was tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Here we read of Jesus in the "wilderness" and tempted to disobey the Lord. He responds somewhat surprisingly by quoting three passages from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16; 6:13). The connection we are to make is with Israel wandering in the wilderness after they were delivered from Egypt. In the wilderness they grumbled, complained, worshiped idols, and tested God. Jesus is the Son who entered the wilderness and responded in a way that honored the Lord. In his hunger he knew that the Word of the Lord was his sustenance (citing Deut. 8:3); when facing compromise or the possibility of grumbling, he refused to test the Lord (citing Deut. 6:16); when facing the worship of anything other than God, he acknowledged that the Lord alone is to be our object of worship (citing Deut. 6:13). In this case the "type" is the entire nation of Israel, and the "antitype" is Jesus.

*The Old Testament speaks of Adam and his disobedience in the Garden of Eden that brings sin and death, but Jesus is the "last Adam" that offers perfect obedience and brings righteousness and eternal life.* The comparison between Adam and Christ is a significant one and appears in several texts of the New Testament. As we saw earlier Paul speaks of Adam explicitly as a "type of the one who was to come" (Rom. 5:14). That verse is found in one of the critical passages on the connection between Adam and Christ. Adam is seen as the one who disobeyed and in so doing brought sin and death on all humanity (5:12-14). His disobedience is called a "trespass" (vv. 15, 17), "sin" (v. 16), and

"disobedience" (v. 19). It resulted in the death of "many" (v. 15), "condemnation" (v. 16), and the reign of "death" (v. 19). Clearly, "death spread to all men because all sinned" in Adam (v. 12).

Jesus, however, brings "the grace of God and the free gift by...grace" (v. 15). He does this because of "one act of righteousness" (v. 18) or "the one man's obedience" (v. 19). The "type" Adam disobeyed and brought sin, death, and judgment to all that he represented. The "antitype" Christ obeyed and brought righteousness, life, and justification to all he represented. The common link in these passages is that one man affects the fate of multitudes depending on how he responds to God.

1 Corinthians 15:42-49 also speaks of Adam and Christ. In this passage Paul calls Adam the "first man" and Jesus the "last man" (15:45). All are in Adam, but some are also in Christ. All born to Adam "the man of dust...have...the image of the man of dust." Those who are born to Christ shall "also bear the image of the man of heaven" (15:49). The "type" produces men of dust, but the "antitype" produces men of heaven.

A third passage that seems to compare Adam to Christ is Mark 14:32-42, the temptation of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Adam was placed in a garden and given the temptation of the serpent. While the serpent was "cunning" it was Adam who was being tested. He, of course, failed his test and brought a curse on creation, and sin and death on humanity (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12-14).

This picture is duplicated in the life of Christ when he was tempted in the Garden of Gethsemane. Anticipating the cross that is now so imminent, Jesus is tempted even "to the point of shedding [his] blood" (Heb. 12:4). He passes the test, however, and our salvation is the result. The "type" was tempted by Satan in a garden and failed. The "antitype" was tempted by Satan in a garden and passed!

*The Old Testament speaks of numerous sacrifices that needed to be offered repeatedly, but Jesus is "the Lamb of God" that was offered "once and for all" for the sin of the world. For*

this example we look not at any single object, but the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In calling Jesus "Lamb of God" he had in mind the offering that Jesus would provide (and become), but also the connection between his blood and the blood offered in the Old Testament. We can think of Abraham's offering of the ram in Genesis 22 and the occasional sacrifices of the patriarchs (Gen. 9; 35:1), but towering above these early sacrifices is the first Passover in Egypt. In Exodus 12-13 we read of each household killing a "lamb" and taking some of its blood to "put...on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses" (12:7). The Lord says that "when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt" (12:13). The blood of the sacrifice means escape from the wrath of God. For this reason Paul rightly calls Jesus, "Christ, our Passover Lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7). When we are marked by the blood of Jesus, God sees this and his wrath passes over us.

Jesus as "the Lamb of God" connects also to the sacrifices of atonement prescribed in the Law of Moses. Leviticus 16 describes the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the highest of such sacrifices. During this ceremony two goats are offered up. The first goat is killed and its blood scattered throughout the altar itself and even inside of "the Holy Place." The second goat is the source of our phrase, scapegoat, because the high priest "confesses over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins," and then this goat is led away into the wilderness to die away from the people (16:20-22). All of this is done "that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins" (16:34). In the book of Hebrews the author connects the work of Jesus to this Day of Atonement (chaps. 9-10). He says that at best such offerings can only remind us of sin and never remove it (10:1-4). In the case of Jesus, however, his greater sacrifice brings actual forgiveness, and, "where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (10:18).

In these two examples Jesus is connected to the earlier sacrifice, the Passover Lamb and the goats in the Day of Atonement, respectively. The Old Testament "type" in this case is the sacrifice offered for sin and the "antitype" is Jesus who offers the sacrifice that is sufficient for all sin for all time.

This way of reading the Old Testament helps us to connect many actions, people, and events to Jesus. The key is to see some aspect of the Old Testament "type" (person, event, thing) and how it connects to the New Testament "antitype."

## JESUS USES THE OLD TESTAMENT IN HIS TEACHING

A fourth way that the Old Testament speaks of Jesus is the way that the Old Testament surfaces in his teaching. We will not spend as much time on this method because it is fairly straight-forward. An example of this is when the Pharisees challenge the disciples of Jesus with a question about their adherence to their traditions: "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" (Mark 7:5). Jesus responds to them by saying they are fulfilling the words of Isaiah 29:13, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:6-7). These words when Isaiah spoke them referred to Israel and her failing allegiance to her Lord. It is not Jesus fulfilling the prophecy this time, but in his teaching he connects the prophecy from Isaiah to the Pharisees he confronts.

Another example of this is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Throughout this sermon Jesus is referring to the Old Testament and at times bringing clarification on certain understandings. He says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment'" (Matt. 5:21). He then proceeds to connect our sins of anger to this sin of murder: They are apples from the same tree. The important point for us is that he is using the Old Testament as the source of his teaching. He starts with the text and then explains



a new dimension of that text, in this case the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13).

For this type of reference, we are helped by an increasing knowledge of the New Testament and by a good cross-reference Bible. In my Bible at Isaiah 29:13 (referred to above), the cross-reference says, "Cited Matt. 15:8, 9; Mark 7:6, 7." When it says, "cited," I want especially to take note, because it means the Old Testament verse is quoted by the New Testament author. My question at this point should be, "How is it used?" This will help me properly connect the verse to Jesus.

## JESUS RE-LIVES OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

A fifth way of seeing Jesus in the pages of the Old Testament is in the way that Jesus *re-lives Old Testament history*. There are times when Jesus is not exactly fulfilling something in the Old Testament like a type or a prophecy, but he is almost reliving an earlier event. In Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus is tempted by the devil in "the wilderness." He fasts completely for "forty days and forty nights" (v. 1). As the devil tempts him, he will respond with three quotations from the last book of Moses, Deuteronomy. All of this means that Matthew wants us to connect the temptation of Jesus to a similar episode in Israel's history, her own journey out of Egypt into "the wilderness." In this example, Jesus is the antitype of the type, Israel, but he is also re-living the events himself.

A second example is in John 6 where Jesus feeds the five thousand and then walks across the Sea of Capernaum (6:1-21). After this Jesus will speak of the manna that fell in the desert, and point to himself as, "the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (6:35). We are again reminded of Israel in the wilderness, especially the crossing of the Red Sea and the provision of manna that follows (Ex. 14-16). Jesus is surely the "antitype" of manna itself, calling himself "the bread of life," yet he is also *re-living the crossing of the Red Sea and the miracle of manna*.

As with other methods of connecting the Old Testament to Jesus, here we are looking for some clue in the New Testament description that awakens a memory of an Old Testament event. Sometimes it is a word or phrase ("wilderness" and "bread" in the above examples); sometimes it is the mere similarity between the two events.

## JESUS CONTINUES/COMPLETES OLD TESTAMENT THEMES

A sixth way the Old Testament speaks of Jesus is by the use of themes that create a kind of thread that lead us to Christ. A word or concept might be used throughout the Old Testament, and then Jesus is presented as part of that thread of teaching. When it appears in Jesus we find that he becomes the preeminent example and perfect representation of the idea.

For instance, the Old Testament alludes to the idea of "shepherd" frequently. In Genesis 29:24 God is called "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel." Leaders in Israel are often referred to as "shepherds" of the people (Num. 27:17). As the idea progresses we can think of David famously referring to God as "my shepherd" in Psalm 23:1. David himself is said to have been taken from his own flocks to lead Israel: "He shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand" (Ps. 78:72). Later in Israel's history, the priests and prophets of Israel who proved unfaithful are compared to shepherds who feed themselves instead of their flocks (Ezek. 34). There are more references to the Lord as the shepherd of the people of God, but these help us see what we mean (e.g., Isa. 40:11; Zech. 13:7). All of these serve as the backdrop to Jesus saying,

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)*

We can see how knowing the Old Testament references mentioned above helps us fill out what Jesus means here. It is a theme that Jesus continues and increases and not the fulfillment of a specific prophecy or type.

A second example could be a concept like "wisdom." There is a kind of literature called wisdom literature in the Old Testament which includes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. In this writing we realize that wisdom is a way of living by "the fear of the Lord" in all areas of our lives (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). In Proverbs 8 "Wisdom" is even presented as a person who co-created the world with God. In Isaiah 11:2 we read of someone to come who shall possess "the Spirit of wisdom" in a way unprecedented in history—a prophecy that comes after the ministry of Solomon has come and gone. With such passages in our minds, we can read Matthew 12:42 with fresh eyes. There Jesus speaks of the reverence people have for Solomon, but "something greater than Solomon is here." Further, in Jesus is hid "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). These inform our understanding of Jesus being called the *logos* by John in the opening of his gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus comes not just possessing wisdom, but as God's wisdom incarnate, not just teaching the word of God, but as the Word of God incarnate.

Tracing biblical themes like this helps us appreciate the way that Jesus is the fullest and greatest expression of many concepts and ideas important throughout the Bible.

## JESUS IS THE GOOD EXAMPLE TO CONTRAST WITH THE BAD EXAMPLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The final two ways that the Old Testament speaks of Christ might better be described as ways that the Old Testament *prepares* us for Christ. Thus, in this seventh approach, an Old Testament text points to Christ by presenting Christ as the positive example that

contrasts the negative example we read about. We have alluded to this idea before by showing that Christ is the "last Adam" who obeyed, unlike the "first Adam" who disobeyed (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-21). Jesus is the faithful Son that contrasts with the unfaithful son of Israel (Matt. 4:1-11; Ex. 16-17). We might also think of a figure like Samson in Judges 13-16 who lived a self-indulgent life by the immense strength given to him by the Lord. He foolishly surrendered his great strength, however, until a last moment of triumph and faith. In contrast to him we find Jesus who displays exactly what is needed all the time. He is both "gentle" (Matt. 11:28-30) and filled with a zeal that overturned tables with a whip (John 2:13f). When tempted to use his power for his own agenda, Jesus instead chooses the path of surrender and obedience (Matt. 4:1-11).

There are many useful heroes in the Old Testament. They display qualities truly worthy of emulation, and we are meant to see that. In almost every case, however, we find the great exception: The person is heroic *except for a fatal flaw that proved disastrous*. These examples can remind us of the perfection of Christ who lacked nothing in terms of his character, knowledge, wisdom, or holiness. Even when it came to displays of power he lacked nothing: the dead were raised, he crossed lakes on foot, the blind gained their sight, lepers were healed, and the crippled gained their abilities. Only Jesus is great *without exception*.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT DEMONSTRATES OUR NEED FOR JESUS

Related to the negative examples we find in the Old Testament is our eighth way that the Old Testament speaks of Jesus Christ, namely, that at times what is emphasized is our *need* for Jesus. In such passages what we see presented is the human condition in high-definition. Whether it is David's lust or Saul's impudence or Samson's recklessness or Israel's idolatry, we are not seeing the remote story of a forgotten people who seem to bear no

resemblance to us. Instead, it is as if we are standing in front of a mirror that reflects back to us not simply whether our hair is in decent shape or our pants wrinkled; we are seeing our wandering and wretched heart. We thought it was history we were reading, but really it was biography, *our biography*. The great cry of the Old Testament is, "*Where will we find the real answer?*" The answer seemed to be at Mt. Sinai, but the golden calf proved that to be false. It seemed to be Canaan, but generations of idolatry unraveled that dream. It seemed to be King David, but Solomon's reign undid that delusion. The centuries and people and events are all pointing to that question: "*Where will we find the REAL answer?*"

The New Testament introduces The Answer. It is not a new set of laws or a new institution like the tabernacle or priesthood. It is a Person, Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus does not merely say, "do this and this." Instead he says, "Come to me" (Matt. 11:28). It is Jesus alone that is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

## **SO MUCH MORE TO SAY**

There is so much more we could say about the way the Old Testament points to the glory of God in Christ. Certainly the eight ways above could be supplemented by other ways of connecting the Old Testament to Jesus. Let the list above be a starting point, so we can begin to train our eyes to see the brilliance of Christ within these ancient texts. We do not want to be like those blind Pharisees who saw only Moses, but missed that Moses was speaking of Jesus! (John 5:46). Instead we want to be those who read our Old Testaments in a complete fashion, aware of what the passage would have meant to its original audience, but also aware that it is speaking of Jesus and our job is to discover how.