

An Aerial View of the Old Testament, (Part 6)

Selected Scriptures

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Well tonight, we do come for the last time to our aerial survey of the Old Testament. We have flown over those wonderful books in the Old Testament at about 30,000 feet. And for five weeks now, we have worked our way through the Old Testament history.

I've divided the Old Testament into nine major movements or scenes beginning in the first 11 chapters of Genesis with universal dealings, the patriarchal period from Genesis 12 to 50, slavery in Egypt, Exodus 1, the exodus under Moses from Exodus 2 through the rest of the Pentateuch.

And then in Joshua, we discover the conquest and division of the land, and we are ushered into the period of the judges, that dark time when there was no king in Israel so every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

That dark period was followed by the highest period, the monarchy, especially the united monarchy when there were three kings, beginning with Saul and then David and his son Solomon. From that time, the kingdom was divided. There was a king in the north, a king in the south, and eventually came the destruction of the north and the Babylonian exile for the southern kingdom of Judah. And that was followed then by the restoration period where we looked last time. And the events of the restoration period are recorded in Ezra and Esther and Nehemiah. That's the summary of the history of the Old Testament.

But tonight, I want us to go beyond the history which we've examined in sort of a preliminary and cursory way over the last five weeks, and I want to ask why does the Old Testament exist? What message did it communicate to its original readers? What was the mind of God in terms of the Old Testament, and what message does it communicate to us today?

The poet George Herbert wrote, "Oh that I knew how all thy lights combine, and the configuration of Thy glory! Seeing not only how each verse doth shine, but all the constellations

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of the story.” Tonight, I want us to look at how all the lights of Old Testament history combine into one great constellation, a great unifying message of the Old Testament.

I suppose we should begin by asking can there even be such a unifying message. There are many today that reject the notion that there is a God-intended, unifying message to the Bible and to the Old Testament. I’ve told you before that the prevailing philosophy of postmodernism is sweeping across the college campuses and our young people today, and at its heart, postmodernism rejects what it calls metanarratives, that is unifying theories of universal meaning, a single universal world view.

And when that philosophy comes into the church, those who hold it believe that when you look at the Bible, when you look at the Old Testament, there are no overarching lessons or points, there’s no structure that we can grasp that unifies and unites history. For so called Christian postmodernists, their response is just to appreciate and enjoy the biblical narratives as distinct signposts, each pointing in a vague and uncertain way to some nebulous spiritual issue.

The problem with their view, as we’ll see before the night’s done, that the Bible itself presents a unified theme. So if there is one, what exactly is its unifying theme? Well first, you need to examine what your overall view of the Old Testament is. Sidney Greydanus, in his book on the Old Testament, says that there are essentially four views.

There is the view that the Old Testament is sub-Christian. This is primarily held by liberals who reject the supernatural, who look at the God of the Old Testament and see Him as somehow different from the God of the New Testament, they reject the God of anger and wrath, the God of Israel who had people destroyed, and they just sweep it away and say the Old Testament is sub-Christian.

A second view says that the Old Testament is non-Christian. I have a quote here by Leonard Thompson, who says, “The Hebrew Scriptures are a complete work and do not need the New Testament to complete them.” In other words, they stand alone; they don’t have any reference really to the Christian faith at all. They’re not sub-Christian, they’re non-Christian.

The third view is that the Old Testament is pre-Christian. This view I think is best presented by John Bright, who says the Old Testament is not of and by itself a Christian message. The Old Testament stands in discontinuity with the New because it speaks a B.C. Word, not an A.D. Word. To those who hold this view, the Old Testament is primarily a book directed only to Israel. Some old line classic dispensationalists took a view very similar, if not identical to this.

A fourth view, and the view that I personally espouse (and I hope before the night is done you will embrace as well), is that the Old Testament is Christian. The Old Testament is Christian. Sidney Greydanus writes, “The dilemma of how to get a Christian message out of a non-Christian or a pre-Christian book is a predicament of our own making. The Old Testament and the New are both parts of the Christian Bible.”

Turn to 2 Corinthians 3. Let me show you Paul’s very interesting comment here as he contrasts the old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, with the new covenant. Second Corinthians 3:14, speaking of Israel,

... the sons of Israel ... [verse 13 he says] ... their minds, [verse 14] were darkened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant, [he’s talking about the law, the portion of the Old Testament,] the same veil remains unlifted. [They don’t get it. Why?] because it is removed when you’re in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

You know what Paul is saying? He is saying that a Christian, one who has come to repent of their sins, to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, is better equipped to understand the true meaning and significance of the Old Testament than he was before or than one who has not come to that position. It is a Christian book.

There are a number of authors who make this point that the Old Testament is a Christian book. Gleason Archer writes, “The Old Testament presented the preparation of which the New

Testament was the fulfillment. It was the seed of which the achievement of Christ and the apostles was the glorious fruit.” Harrison in his introduction to the Old Testament writes, “It was the common belief of the fathers,” (and he’s just mentioned Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom and Augustine,) “that the Old Testament was in principle a Christian book.” So, church history supports this position. And I’ll share some more quotes in just a moment.

But the New Testament writers’ use of the Old Testament also supports the view that the Old Testament is at its heart a Christian book. There are only four New Testament books that have no reference to the Old Testament – Philemon, 1, 2, and 3 John. There are in Matthew 135 references to the Old Testament; in Luke, 140; in Acts, 169; in Romans, 103; in Hebrews, 115; in Revelation, 574 references to the Old Testament. The New Testament refers to Isaiah’s writings 308 times. The New Testament refers to Psalms 303 times. You see how there is this cross-pollenization that occurs. They did not see it as a book that had no relevance for the Christian communities to which they wrote.

So, when you see it as a Christian book, it changes your perspective on what its themes might be or what its major theme might be. The most commonly suggested Old Testament themes by those who embrace it as relevant to Christians, they would list these, these are some familiar ones. Maybe you’ve read these in various books, you’ve come across these. God, they would say, just God, generally, God and His person is the theme of the Old Testament. Others would say no, it’s God’s glory, others would say it’s the rule and sovereignty of God, it’s the kingdom of God, it’s the promised blessing of God, it’s Christ, or it’s redemption. That last one is probably the most common that’s suggested.

We do have a bit of a problem though. How do we determine the theme of the Old Testament? Well, I would suggest to you that the right method to determine the Old Testament’s unifying theme is to determine, or to examine I should say the New Testament’s inspired commentary on the Old Testament. Who better is able to tell us what the Old Testament is about than inspired New Testament authors and how they use it? All of those themes I just gave you are certainly important. They’re in there, God and His glory and His kingdom and His rule and all of those

things are part of the Old Testament. But when it comes to a central, unifying theme, who better to tell us than the inspired authors of the New Testament?

So, with that in mind, turn to Ephesians 3. Here, I'm not so much looking to prove to you that this is what the Old Testament taught as I want to lay a framework, a ground, a foundation for where we'll go for the rest of our study. In Ephesians 3:11, we read this. What God did (and we'll look at what He did in a moment) was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus.

The eternal purpose, you see that expression, God's "eternal purpose". The Greek word for "purpose" there means "plan or resolve". Notice in English as in Greek it is singular; God has one plan, one unified plan, one purpose. Literally translated, this expression is, "the purpose of the ages". While there may be different parts of the plan, the plan or purpose is wholly unified, the purpose of the ages. As Robert Reymond writes, "There was never a moment when God had a blank mind, or a time when God's plan with all its parts was not fully determined in His mind."

Now notice, that Paul says here in Ephesians 3:11, that God accomplished that one unified plan in Jesus Christ, which He [that is God the Father], carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. So the person of Jesus is at the galactic center of God's eternal plan. We saw that in Ephesians 1 just a few weeks ago. Ephesians 1:9, "the kind intention which God purposed in Christ, to sum up all things in Christ." That is the center of God's plan, but not just Christ in His person, but especially Christ in His work, His work of redeeming lost humanity. Look back at verses 8 - 10 now of Ephesians 3. Paul says,

To me, the least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ ... to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church....

God's wisdom made known through the church. Remember in chapter 1, we learned the church is a body of redeemed people. And bringing those people together in the church and redeeming

them, verse 11, was in accordance with, was in step with, the eternal unified plan which God had connected to Jesus Christ.

So, listen carefully, what I want you to get from Ephesians 3 is that the focus of God's eternal plan, centered in Christ, is the redemption of a fallen humanity for Himself. So, the eternal plan is at its heart redemptive, and it is that eternal plan of God to redeem sinners in Christ that is the unifying theme of the Old Testament. Gleason Archer puts it like this,

The Christian church regards the Old Testament as authoritative holy Scripture because its Founder and Savior so regarded it. His apostles understood the entire Hebrew Scripture to constitute a composite unity authored by God and setting forth, [here it is,] the divine will and plan for man's salvation. The New Testament showed that the Hebrew Scriptures constituted an organic unity focused upon a single great theme and setting forth a single, but all comprehensive program of (what?) redemption.

It's about God rescuing sinners in Christ. That's what the Bible's about. That's what the Old Testament is about.

Merrill Unger writes, speaking of the Old Testament,

Its central unifying theme is the person and work of Jesus Christ the Redeemer. [In his guide to the Bible, he puts it like this,] The theme of Scripture is human redemption. The principle character is the world's redeemer Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Everything in the Old Testament that precedes His incarnation points to this grand event and its outworking in human redemption.

But I like John MacArthur's explanation the best in his study Bible. He puts it like this,

To understand the Bible, it is essential to grasp the sweep of that history from creation to consummation. It's crucial to keep in focus the unifying theme of Scripture." [Here it is.] "The one constant theme unfolding throughout the whole

Bible is this. God for His own Glory has chosen to create and to gather to Himself a group of people to be the subjects of His eternal kingdom; to praise, honor, and serve Him forever, and through whom He will display His wisdom, power, mercy, grace and glory. To gather His chosen ones, God must first redeem them from sin. The Bible reveals God's plan for this redemption from its inception in eternity past to its completion in eternity future. All of the rest of the things you read – covenants, promises and epics – are all secondary to the one continuous plan of redemption. There is one God, the Bible has one Creator, it is one Book, it has one plan of grace recorded from initiation through execution to consummation. From predestination to glorification, the Bible is the story of God redeeming His chosen people for the praise of His glory. [It can't be said any better than that.]

Now, let me pull that together in a briefer statement for us. It's not better, but it's briefer, and hopefully it'll be something you can put your arms around. This is my own summary of the Old Testament's theme, and I'm going to take it apart and prove it to you in just a moment, so stick with me.

For His own glory, God accomplishes His eternal plan to redeem a people through His eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the theme of the Old Testament. Now for many of you, that comes as a shock because you don't think of Christ being that involved in the Old Testament, or being that much a part of its pages. I think by the time we're done tonight, you'll disagree with yourself and have come to embrace this.

For our study, I want to divide that one theme into its three basic parts. That theme I just gave you can be broken down into the person of Christ, the work of Christ and then the instruction of those who have been redeemed and need to grow now in likeness to God.

So, let's look first at the person of Christ. He is absolutely permeating Old Testament prophecy. Now most people would agree with this. When you go back to the very beginning of the Old

Testament, the first glimpse you get of Christ is at the fall. Right after Adam and Eve sin, we learn that the one who will ultimately deal with sin will be a human being. Genesis 3:15 says that the seed of the woman will bruise Satan's head. Immediately there was the understanding by Adam and Eve that there would be a human person, the seed of the woman, but an unusual person because you wouldn't ordinarily refer to the seed of the woman, so there were glimpses even in that of what we would learn later of the virgin birth; but at this point, simply the idea that a human person, an unusual human person, would be the one that would deal finally and ultimately with human sin.

When you get to Genesis 12, picture as we go through the Old Testament, the funnel of who this Redeemer is starts very large. And as the Old Testament goes through, it narrows and narrows and narrows until the only person on which it could fall is Jesus of Nazareth. It begins broad, a human being, but when you get to Genesis 12:1 - 3 and the Abrahamic Covenant, there we learn that the seed who will bring blessing upon all the nations will come through the descendants of one man, Abraham, and the nation that comes from him. So, we learn that this seed, this Redeemer, will come through Abraham and the nation that comes from him.

Then as we get to Genesis 49 (as Jacob is blessing his sons on his deathbed), he comes to Judah and he says to Judah, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." "Shiloh" literally means "the one whose right it is". The ruler's staff will not depart from Judah until the one to whom it belongs, the one to whom authority truly belongs comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. So, we learn that it will be one son of Jacob, one son, the tribe of Judah.

When we go on through the Old Testament, and let's go back to 2 Samuel 7:16. There is the Davidic Covenant, and in the Davidic Covenant we learn it narrows even more. Not just Judah, but one family in Judah, the family of David. He tells David, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." It's through you I'm going to send this One who will deal with sin and who will reign forever.

We come to Isaiah, and I'm just skipping across the tops of these, you know I took three weeks studying this one passage, Isaiah 7:14, so we're just kind of scooting across the tops here, but you'll get the idea. You come to Isaiah, we learn that this One will be born of a virgin and will be both human and divine at the same time as we saw in Isaiah 7:14. ... the Lord ... will give you a sign: ... a virgin shall be with child and bear a son. [So, he's going to be human, but His name will be called, "God among us", Immanuel. "Emanu-El", the Hebrew word,] "God among us". And according to Isaiah's prophecy later in his book, Isaiah 53, He will accomplish this redemption that's been promised, this permanent dealing with sin, by the sacrifice of Himself, by God crushing Him, by His bearing the penalty for our sin.

And by the time you get to the end of the Old Testament, we find out that not only will He come, will He be human, not only will He come through Abraham, not only will He come through Judah, not only will He come through the family of David, but He'll even, we even learn where He'll be born. He'll be born in Bethlehem.

By the time you're done, there is no one but Jesus Christ. By the way, I didn't include several other things. Daniel gives us the timing of His birth. There is so much that the Old Testament does to narrow down the window so that it can't be anyone but Jesus Christ.

So, the prophecy, definitely in the Old Testament, is permeated with Jesus Christ, but it's also accurate to say that Jesus permeates Old Testament history. You see what was unique about Bethlehem was that He became one of us. He became flesh, fully God taking on full humanity. But He had been here before. He had been here many times before in what theologians call Christophanies, that is, preincarnate appearances of Jesus Christ. He is a primary character, Jesus is, in Old Testament history. You ever thought about that? He is a primary character in Old Testament history. You say how?

Well we first meet Him in the very first verse of the Old Testament. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." And yet when we come to the New Testament, we're told that in John 1:3 that all things that came into being came into being by the Word that was made flesh and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being. First Corinthians

8:6, "... Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him." Colossians 1 says, "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created by Him and for Him." Hebrews 1:2, "... [God] has spoken to us by His Son ... through whom He made the world."

Jesus is in the very first verse of the Old Testament. But He also appears throughout the Old Testament history in a mysterious form. When you look at the rest of Old Testament history, how do we meet Christ? We meet him as what the Old Testament calls the angel of the Lord. By the way, it's always just like that, the angel of Yahweh, always the definite article, never the indefinite, never an angel, always the angel of Yahweh. Many who read the passages in which He appears assume that this is one of the created beings we call angels. But the Hebrew word that's translated angel can also refer to a messenger. In fact, as you see here, almost half of the times this Hebrew word occurs in the Old Testament, it's translated as messenger.

So, how do we know that the angel of the Lord, the angel of Yahweh, is Jesus Christ? Again, I'm just touching on this briefly, but here are a few arguments. First of all, He is called Yahweh or Jehovah in several passages. One example is Genesis 16. "Then Hagar called the name of the LORD who spoke to her." [And you back up a verse and it's the angel of the Lord speaking to her. So, the angel of the Lord is the Lord,] ... [and she] ... [says,] "You are a God who sees; I have remained alive here after seeing Him."

But while He's called Yahweh, He's also distinct from Yahweh. For example, in Zechariah 1, the angel of Yahweh answered and said, "Oh Yahweh, how long will You have no compassion for Jerusalem?" So, He's Yahweh, and yet He's speaking to Yahweh. We're left with only one conclusion, and that is that He must be the second person of the Trinity, the eternal son of God, because He's the only person of the Trinity revealed bodily in the New Testament. So, we can assume that He's the only one revealed bodily in the Old Testament. He no longer appears, the angel of the Lord, after the incarnation. Both He and Christ are sent by the Father, and we're told that no one has ever seen the Father. So, the process of elimination leads us to one person, Jesus Christ.

Throughout the history of the church, theologians and Bible scholars have identified the angel of the Lord as none other than Jesus Christ. And do you realize that this person, the angel of the Lord, permeates Old Testament history? Listen to Justin Martyr, writing at the very beginning of the second century A.D. He says,

Permit me further to show you from the book of Exodus how this same One who is both angel and God and Lord and man, and who is, who had appeared in human form to Abraham and Isaac, appeared in a flame of fire from the bush and conversed with Moses.

He said listen, we're talking about Jesus Christ. He's all through the story of Old Testament Israel.

Irenaeus, another of the church fathers, writing about the books of Moses, says,

The Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout His writings, at one time indeed speaking with Abraham when about to eat with him; at another time with Noah giving to him the dimensions of the ark; at another inquiring after Adam; at another bringing down judgment upon the Sodomites; and again when He becomes visible and directs Jacob on his journey and speaks with Moses from the bush.

Irenaeus is saying look, you want to see Jesus Christ? Just open up the Old Testament, He's there. He's a major character on the pages of the Old Testament. Tertullian, yet another of the church fathers,

It is the Son therefore who has been from the beginning administering judgment throwing down the haughty tower, [talking about the Tower of Babel,] dividing the tongues, punishing the whole world by the violence of waters, [the flood,] reigning upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone as the Lord from the Lord. For He is who was at all times came down to hold converse with men, from

Adam on to the patriarchs and the prophets in vision, in dream, in mirror, in dark saying, ever from the beginning laying the foundation of the course of His dispensations which He meant to follow out to the very last. Thus, [speaking of Christ] He was ever learning even as God to converse with men upon earth being no other than the Word which was to be made flesh. [Absolutely permeating the Old Testament.]

(Old Testament, I'm sorry,) Church history speaks with one voice on this. While it may have been clear in the past, there are many Christians today that believe to see Christ in the Old Testament is reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament. So, let's look at the testimony of Scripture, let's look at the inspired New Testament commentary on the Old Testament and see what it says.

I want to start with Jesus' own words, turn to John 5. John 5, Jesus' interchange here with His enemies, those who hated Him. He says in verse 39,

“You search the Scriptures.” [Now obviously here He's talking about the Old Testament Scriptures.] “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.” [You think you have learned how to enjoy eternal life in the Old Testament Scriptures.] “It is these,” [speaking of those Old Testament Scriptures,] “that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”

Down in verse 46, He says this, “For if you believed Moses,” [if you believed what Moses wrote in the first five books of the Old Testament,] “you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.” Jesus couldn't be any clearer, could He? Jesus rebukes the Jews for their rejection of Him based on the Old Testament's testimony.

You know what He says to them? Look, you think you understand the Old Testament, but if you really understood the Old Testament, you would see that it speaks of Me.

You see the same point back just a few pages at the end of Luke. Luke's gospel, chapter 24. Jesus is on the road to Emmaus with those two disciples after His resurrection. They're wondering what's going on. Notice verse 25. After they explain what has happened, and they're not really believing that He has been raised from the dead. ... He said to them, [and remember they don't know who this is at this point],

He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" [He says listen, you know what? I'm sorry guys, you really didn't have enough information in the Old Testament. I couldn't really expect you to believe or have any confidence in what's gone on because you can't read the Old Testament and get any of this stuff. You gotta wait till you get the New Testament. Is that what He says? No, He says ...] ... foolish ... and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

And then He goes on to explain it. Verse 26, "Was it not necessary," [based on what the prophets spoke] "for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter into His glory?" [He says listen, if you had the Old Testament, if you understood the Old Testament, then it was there. This is what it was about.] Verse 27, "Then beginning with Moses," [those are the first five books] "and with all the prophets," [that's shorthand in first century Judaism for the entire Old Testament. Moses and the prophets was a way of talking about the entire Scripture. He says], "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them," [He expounded to them] "the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. [He says listen guys, you missed it. How did you miss it? Let me show you what the Old Testament teaches. Let me show you how it points to Me.]

Down in verse 44, you have another appearance with His disciples. Same chapter, Luke 24:44,

Now He said to them, [to his disciples,] "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, ... [and] all things which were written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [He says listen, what's happened is in fulfillment of all that the Old Testament predicted

and said would happen.] Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written,” [here’s what’s in the Old Testament,] “that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Jesus said that’s what the Old Testament teaches. And if you don’t understand that, you don’t get it. You don’t understand what the Old Testament is about.

Perhaps nowhere is the Old Testament’s focus on Christ any more clearly stated than in the sermons of the apostles in the book of Acts. They tell us what the Old Testament is about. Let me just run through this very briefly, I’m not going to spend a lot of time here. I just want you to get the big picture. In Acts, we’ll skip to Acts 3:13. There Peter says, “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus....” Now to us, that doesn’t mean much, but if you’re a Jewish person, your mind immediately races back to the very clear passages in Isaiah that talk about the coming Redeemer as the servant of Yahweh. Peter was saying that’s who Jesus is, you didn’t see it? You didn’t understand? He goes on to say,

“And now, brethren,” [verse 17,] “I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Messiah would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.”

You know what he says? He said listen, you were ignorant of it, but you shouldn’t have been, because He announced it beforehand, by the mouth of all the prophets that this is what was going to happen. And he goes on in verse 22, Christ is the Prophet like Moses, that Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:24,

“And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and *his* successors onward, announced these days.” [It permeated the Old Testament. Still in the same sermon, verse 25,] “It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham,” [here’s the

Genesis 12,] “AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED. For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways.”

What’s happened is exactly what God said would happen from the very first book in the Bible. How could you miss it?

Chapter 7, Stephen’s sermon. He says that they killed those who had previously announced the coming, he’s talking about the prophets here, those who wrote the Old Testament, “... They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become.” They announced it; they talked about it.

Chapter 10:43, Peter says, “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” Chapter 13:23, “From the descendants of this man, according to [the] promise [in the Old Testament], God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus.” [You see how they keep tying it right back to the Old Testament?]

In Acts 18, Apollos demonstrated by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. It’s the Old Testament. In Acts 26, and this one really is shocking, in Acts 26 listen to what Paul says. He says in what I am teaching, I am stating nothing. There’s nothing new in what I’m saying.

“[I’m] ... stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He ... [should] be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.” [Paul says my message is an Old Testament message.]

Acts 26, he goes on to say to Agrippa,

“For the king knows these matters, and I speak to him with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.”

You know what Paul is saying? He's saying anyone who believed the prophets of the Old Testament and compared their predictions with the factual historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth must acknowledge the truth of Christianity, that's what he was saying. Acts 28:23, Paul finishes up his ministry there in Rome trying to persuade them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and from the prophets.

I've belabored this, but I want you to get it. The Old Testament is a Christian book. Paul makes the same point in Romans 15. Jesus was and is the focus of the Old Testament, in its prophecy, in its history, in its presence from beginning to end, first as Creator walking with Adam in the cool of the day, sacrificing an animal that He would eventually become the perfect fulfillment of, leading His people Israel from Egypt. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, He, the Rock that followed them, was Christ, as the angel of the Lord throughout the Old Testament. Listen, He was there, He's the story, He's the main character. And everybody that had been taught by Christ, all the apostles knew it. And their ministry was filled with it.

So, let's move on to the second part, the work of Christ. We've talked about the person of Christ as one part of our theme. What about the work of Christ? In Romans 3:21, when Paul gets to the gospel, listen to what he says, I love this. When he finally gets to explaining the gospel, he says, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested," [but what I'm going to tell you, this righteousness that's a gift to you, that's given to you by faith in Jesus Christ, this righteousness notice, verse 21, was] "... witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." Again, that's shorthand for the Old Testament. Paul's saying I'm not making this stuff up. I'm not spinning this, you know, on my own. This is what the Old Testament taught.

And when he comes to chapter 4, in fact turn to Romans 4. I want you to see this. Romans 4, when he gets here, and he's talking about justification by faith alone, he uses two examples. And who are they? Well the first one is Abraham. Chapter 4:1, let's talk about Abraham, and he goes back in verse 3 to quote Genesis 15:6. You know what Paul is saying? He's saying listen, the gospel I'm preaching to you, this has always been the way (God,) man comes to God. It's the

way Abraham came to God. He was justified by faith alone, Abraham was a wicked idolater that God snatched.

Then he uses David, verse 7 or verse 6, “just as David also speaks to the blessing (on whom) on the man to whom the Lord credits righteousness apart from works.” And he quotes Psalm 32. He says listen, I’m telling you something that’s old news in one sense, but it’s new news in another because the One who made it possible has been here and He’s done it. But what I’m telling you is out of the Old Testament. The gospel I’m preaching to you, the work of Christ, was described and explained and believed in in the Old Testament. Oh, they didn’t understand all the fullness that you and I understand, but they understood there was a Redeemer coming as early as Genesis 3:15. They knew there was a person coming who would deal with sin.

By the way, here in Romans 4, he uses both Abraham and David to show that the Old Testament taught justification by faith alone. That was absolutely contradictory to first century Judaism and what they taught. They had twisted the Bible to make it works-based, that their efforts, yes there was grace, yes there was faith, but their efforts and their merit and their righteousness contributed to their standing before God. (That was,) it’s contrary what he teaches here in Romans 4. It goes back to the Old Testament, it’s contrary to the teaching of Roman Catholicism, it’s contrary to the teaching of cults like Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons. It is always, in their theology, grace and faith plus either human merit or human accomplishment. It is always something; somehow you contribute to your standing before God. Paul calls that in Galatians 1 another gospel. He calls it a soul-damning gospel.

What the Old Testament taught, Paul says in Romans 4, is that man has always been justified on the basis of faith alone. He goes on in Romans 4 to say when God said that to Abraham, it wasn’t for his sake only that it was written. It was written for our sake as those who believe in Christ and it be credited to our account as righteousness.

In Romans 16 Paul makes the same point. The prophets witness this salvation that was to come in Jesus Christ, but I want to hasten on to Galatians 3. And I wish I had time to go through Galatians 3; we will at some point, let me just give you the big outline. In Galatians 3 Paul goes

back to the Old Testament. He talks about Abraham, he talks about the law, and listen to what he says. And I've just summarized it here.

He says first of all, the Abrahamic Covenant made back in chapter 12 of Genesis included the gospel message and the promise of the Messiah. He says the law, the Mosaic Law, was a temporary provision until the seed, that is, Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of the promise, had come. And that the law in its temporary state was a tutor to drive us to Christ, to help us see that we could never on our own merit a standing before God of righteousness. And that to belong to Christ is to inherit the spiritual promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. Do you see how it all connects? He's saying listen (this is part of what), this is what the Old Testament taught. And he's teaching to New Testament Christians in Galatians 3.

Peter in 1 Peter 1 tells us that the prophets understood that salvation would come through the Messiah; that they didn't know what person or time, but they knew that He would suffer, and they knew that He would experience glory, and they understood that the sufferings would come first and the glory would follow. They just didn't know who or when, but they understood the rest of it.

What I want you to see is that Christ and His atonement for sin and the basic gospel of justification by faith alone were at the heart of Old Testament revelation. And when the New Testament authors, when the apostles of Christ wanted to show people, they took them back to the Old Testament.

The third sort of part of our theme is once people have been redeemed, they need to be taught. The Old Testament accomplishes that as well, that's part of the reason it exists. Paul in Romans 15:4, says (whenever), "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction", he's talking about the Old Testament, "so that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." It was written for us, Paul says.

Some conservative scholars teach that for us to deduce spiritual lessons from the Old Testament text is inappropriate. They call it spiritualizing or moralizing. And it is true that Christians often

abuse the Old Testament and the original authorial intent by how they handle the Old Testament Scripture. But when it's done with respect to the context, it is not wrong to draw spiritual lessons from Old Testament history and Old Testament law.

Paul did it, Paul did it here in 1 Corinthians 9. He says,

For it is written in the Law of Moses. [Now remember he's writing to a bunch of Gentiles saved out of paganism in Corinth. And he says,] ... it is written in the Law of Moses," [this is the Old Testament,] "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." [And then he says you don't think God's ultimate concern was about the oxen, do you? Of course not.] ... for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*. [He uses it to make a spiritual point about supporting those who give their lives in ministry.]

First Corinthians 10:6, he gives the story from the wilderness wanderings, and he says, "Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved." First Corinthians 10:11, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." What I want you to see is that not only does the Old Testament feature and shine the searchlight upon Jesus Christ, not only does it teach the gospel that we embrace, but it also is useful for our edification and instruction, for our learning, for the development of us who have been redeemed.

So, the major unifying theme or message of the Old Testament is for His own glory, God accomplishes His eternal plan to redeem a people through His eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Christ and His redemption are the core of the Old Testament message, it's also appropriate as we look at the Old Testament to acknowledge that there are several subthemes there as well. And again, I rely on my dear friend and his study Bible. I don't think there is a better summary of these key supporting themes than he gave us when he wrote the study Bible.

He writes this, “Scripture is always teaching or illustrating these basic five points.” These are the main subthemes that support Christ and His redemption as the main theme.

The character and attributes of God is number one.

The tragedy of sin and disobedience to God’s holy standard is number two.

Number 3, the blessedness of faith and obedience to God’s standard.

Number four, the need for a Savior by whose righteousness and substitution sinners can be forgiven, declared just and transformed to obey God’s standard.

And number five, the coming glorious end of redemptive history in the Lord Savior’s earthly kingdom and the subsequent eternal reign and glory of God in Christ.

When you look at the Old Testament as well as the New for that matter, you see Christ and redemption as the main theme. And these support it and undergird it and help us to understand it. Let me close with some important conclusions from all that we’ve learned from the Old Testament.

Number one, the fact that Christ is the central figure of both the Old and New Testaments immediately raises the value of the entire Old Testament for us. Jesus (remember), said the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Me. It is not our right to neglect the Old Testament because Jesus said it’s about Me. That’s not to say Jesus is in every verse, it’s not to say He’s in every chapter, it’s to say that He permeates it. No more than casting your hook in a fish hatchery will catch you a fish every time, but you’ll catch one most times. The same thing is true with Christ in the Old Testament.

Secondly, as Christians, understanding the central theme of the Old Testament validates our use of, and there’s some overlap here, but our use of and the benefit we receive from the Old Testament. Understanding they go together helps, and that brings us to the third point here.

There is a consistency and a continuity between the testaments. Jesus was there in the Old Testament, and He's in the New, and now He's continuing to do His work through His Spirit in the world today.

Number four, Christ has been and will always be the mediator between God and man. You go all the way back to Genesis, and who was it that walked with Adam in the cool of the day? Who was it that slew the animal to clothe Adam and Eve? It was the second person of the Trinity who would one day become that sacrifice. That's why He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me." First Timothy 2:5, "there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

And finally, it demands, what we have learned of the Old Testament and its theme absolutely demands that we be students of the Old Testament. I want you to turn with me as we close to 2 Timothy 3. Second Timothy 3, because what I like about this passage is it identifies for us all three parts of that unifying theme and connects them to the Old Testament. Notice first of all in verse 15. Let's go back to verse 14, he says,

You however, [speaking to Timothy,] continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ... that from childhood you have known the sacred writings.... [He's talking about the Old Testament here. From childhood, Timothy, you have known the Old Testament. And the Old Testament is] able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

There it is - the atonement, salvation, justification by faith alone. It's in the Old Testament. The person of Christ is here. Notice he says it is that "faith which is in Christ Jesus". The sacred Scriptures have pointed you to that, Timothy. You see the atonement. You see the work of Christ. You see the person of Christ in the Old Testament.

And then he moves on to the teaching for the redeemed, for believers. Verse 16, very familiar verses,

All Scripture, [remember folks at this point he's talking primarily about the Old Testament, but it of course includes the New,] All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, [for the ultimate purpose] that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Listen, the entire Bible will do that for you, but so will the Old Testament. That was Paul's primary point to Timothy at the point he wrote this. Do you believe that? Have you treated the Old Testament with the respect and the honor that it deserves? Do you see it as a sub-Christian book or a pre-Christian book or a non-Christian book? I hope you agree, based on what Jesus and the apostles taught, that it is a thoroughly Christian book. There's Christ, there's the work of Christ, and there's what we need to know to grow as those who have been redeemed.

Well, it's been an aerial view, but I hope you have your arms a little better (as a result of our six weeks), around the Old Testament.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we've studied tonight, it's reminded us that Jesus and His apostles took us back to the Old Testament. And there, as well as in the New Testament, we find revealed for us the eternal Son of God as the one mediator between God and man, the one person able to bring us into right relationship with God. There we see His great work, that He would bruise the head of the serpent; that He would destroy the works of the devil; that He would eventually offer Himself; that He would allow himself to be crushed by You, not for His own sins, but for ours.

Father, we thank You for the work and person of Jesus Christ. We see now, Father, why the cross is the center point of the Bible, of history, of everything. Father, thank You that we have

Your eternal, ever-settled Word in our hands, and I pray that You would help us to be changed by it.

Father, I pray for Christians here tonight who know You. Give them a fresh love and appreciation for Your Word, all of it. Father, help them to enjoy and benefit from the Old Testament, not without Christ, but fully permeated by Christ. And Father, I pray that you would make us students of Your Book.

And Father, I pray that you would work in the hearts of those who are here tonight who are relying on something other than the righteousness of Jesus Christ as their hope. Father, strip away their self-righteousness, strip away the blinders. The god of this world has blinded their minds, and I pray that the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ would shine in their hearts. We pray that You would do that work tonight because only You can, even as we've seen from Ephesians.

We pray it in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen.