

Written to Teach Us

The Relationship between the Old and New Testaments

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Unfortunately, to many Christians today, the Old Testament is something of a closed book. All too many Christians' only acquaintance with more than two-thirds of the Bible is limited to a few Sunday School Bible stories and maybe a few verses memorized for a Christmas program. Even more unfortunate is the fact that the majority of the visible Christian Church is doing little or nothing to correct this deficiency. The so-called "main line" Protestant churches have been so overcome with the historical-critical method that their primary interest in the Old Testament is to pick apart supposed "sources" and "redactors" and the *Sitz im Leben* of the writers. Sadly, in all their efforts, they miss the crucial message of the Old Testament Scriptures. On the other extreme, the fundamentalists' primary interest in the Old Testament seems to be to prove their millennialistic suppositions and their dispensational theology², hence they miss the clear Law and Gospel tension that is constantly present in the Old Testament account. Finally, for the Roman Catholic Church, the Old Testament poses a peculiar problem, since their theology generally holds that the Old Testament believer was not a believer in exactly the same sense that we are. Further, Rome's view of the Old Testament is clouded by its rather hazy subscription to the authority of the Scriptures in general, and by the peculiar role that they assign to the Gospels over and above all other parts of Scripture.

The result of all of this self-invented theology is that it is often difficult to find a comprehensive and reliable treatment of the relationship that exists between God's revelation of himself before the birth of Christ and after his death. God willing, this monograph will attempt to summarize certain of the key issues, since the topic itself is far too broad to be covered in just a few pages.

I. The Old Testament is the Word of God.

The natural starting place for this effort is what seems to us to be self-evident: the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Although this does seem self-evident to us, it is not so to many people. Already in the second century, Marcion argued that since God was a God of love, the vengeful God of the Old Testament could not be the same God as Christ and, therefore, the Old Testament should be eliminated completely from the canon (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 870, Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. I, pp. 94-96.) Likewise in our day, the historical-critical scholars (who deny plenary inspiration in any event) generally see the Old Testament as *Heilsgeschichte* -- the record of the pious interpretation of God's working in the world as it was compiled and edited by men of religious insight throughout the generations. As such, this view leads to the conclusion that the Old Testament is a work that is quite different from the New, and that seeing Christ in the Old Testament is a tortured interpretation foisted on it by the New Testament church. For the vast majority of biblical scholars today, seeing Christ in the Old Testament amounts to allegorizing or doing violence to the text.

We, however, hold to an entirely different point of view. For us, the Old Testament consists of the Word of God, given for believers of all time. We note carefully St. Paul's statement: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). It is significant that this passage immediately follows a quotation of the Old Testament (from Psalm 69:9), as if the apostle were justifying his usage of a Messianic text from the Old Testament. Clearly, for Paul, "everything that was written in the past" was first and foremost the Old Testament Scriptures as his usage of that very term "Scriptures" in the second half of the verse demonstrates. If we have

¹ This article was originally written for the Hermeneutics module of the Directed Self Study Program for the Colombian mission field.

² For a description of one type of dispensational theology, see Wilbert Gawrisch, "Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations," in *Our Great Heritage*, vol. 3, pp. 690 ff.

any doubt in our minds that for Paul, the Old Testament was the very Word of God, we need only flip through his letters in our Greek Bibles and note how many Old Testament quotations he used. (They're obvious, since the editors of the UBS text put them all in bold face type.) Paul literally lived and breathed the Old Testament Scriptures and he invariably relied on them to bolster every controversial point in his letters.

Nor is Paul alone in his usage of the Old Testament as Scripture, the very Word of God. The UBS text of the Greek New Testament lists more than three hundred direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New (pp. 897-900) and hundreds more Old Testament allusions and verbal parallels (pp. 901-911). Perhaps most significant of all is Jesus' own usage of the Old Testament as authoritative. We see, for example, Jesus refuting his opponents during Passion Week on the basis of the Old Testament Scriptures -- even using an exegetical point in Luke 20:37 (the fact that Exodus 3:6 calls God "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob") to prove the resurrection from the dead. Perhaps Jesus' most significant statement on the authority and the inspiration of the Old Testament is found in John 10:35, where he says, "the Scripture cannot be broken." Clearly, Christ had only the Old Testament Scriptures to work with during his life on this earth, and he considered them normative, the very Word of God.

In his ministry Christ repeatedly quoted the Old Testament and referred to events and people as though they were absolutely historical. He even pointed out mistaken emphases in the Jewish religion of the day. He reminded the Jews that circumcision was not from Moses (who wrote the law concerning circumcision) but from the patriarchs (since it was instituted long before Moses wrote the Law -- John 7:22), and that the coming Messiah would be David's Son and David's Lord, as Psalm 110:1 says (Luke 20:41-44). Jesus' reverent usage of the Scriptures always asserted and affirmed their authority.

To truly do justice to the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures, we would have to carefully consider all the classic passages (the *sedes doctrinae*) that teach inspiration in general and apply them to our topic. There would certainly be value in that, but it has already been done many times in the past (see for example, the collection of articles on Scripture in *Our Great Heritage*, vol. 1). However, it may be worth while to briefly consider two passages, 2 Peter 1:19-21 and Hebrews 1:1,2. In the first passage, the Apostle Peter remarks,

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

It is significant that Peter speaks of prophecy being given by God's will. In fact, Peter equates "the word of the prophets made more certain" with "[any] prophecy of Scripture." The "word of the prophets" (a clear reference to the Old Testament) is "made more certain" in the sense that the New Testament revelation of Christ has fulfilled and clarified that of the Old Testament.

The legitimacy of this understanding of St. Peter is dependent upon a specific understanding of the word "prophecy." The word has both a narrower and a wider sense in Scripture. The usual usage of the word "prophecy" in the Scriptures is to reveal God to God's people.³ In this sense and with this understanding, the Jews of Peter's day referred to the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings as the "former prophets" (although the amount of actual predictive prophecy in these books is rather minimal) and to the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the minor prophets as the "latter prophets." Even in the latter prophets (the books that we actually classify as "prophetic"), the message often focuses more on God's displeasure with his unrepentant people than on the many predictive prophecies which are present. In almost every case, the *theme* of "the word of the prophets" -- i.e., of the actual books that they wrote -- would focus more on God's relationship with his chosen people than on predicting the future.

Peter's point, quite clearly, is that all true prophecy comes from the Holy Spirit. This point applies, in

³ This is the exact opposite of the usual usage today. Generally speaking, we first think of prophecy in its predictive sense, and only secondarily, if at all, do we consider it in the wider sense of speaking about God.

this context, to both the Old Testament ("the word of the prophets," "prophecy of Scripture") and to the New Testament ("made more certain," "prophecy of Scripture"). Clearly, if "men from God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit," then we must regard the canonical books of the Old Testament as being inspired and authoritative for us today.

A very similar point can be made with Hebrews 1:1,2. There the writer simply says, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." Two significant points stand out. The first is that the writer specifically asserts that God spoke to the forefathers of the Jewish nation through the prophets. His comment is sufficiently general ("at many times and in various ways") that we are obligated to take it as referring to the entire Old Testament revelation. The other significant point is that these words of God are equated with the New Testament speaking of Christ. Obviously, the writer's point is the opposite, that Christ is equal to the prophets, because his Jewish audience was willing to accept the premise that the Old Testament was the Word of God. But for our purposes, we New Testament, gentile Christians can make the reverse application without doing violence to the text.

Clearly, this view of the Old Testament is predicated on an assumption of inspiration of the *New Testament*, as is obvious from the proof offered. For the believing child of God, the clear testimony of the Scriptures is sufficient. If Christ and Peter and Paul held the Old Testament to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God, then we too shall do the same. If the Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament writers as we have seen, then it is clear that the Old Testament cannot be dismissed as Marcion would have liked, because it seemed to him to relate the story of a different God. Nor can the modern approach, which reduces that Scripture to a mere record of pious insight, hold any value for our work in the largest part of the Bible.

The fact should not be ignored, however, that the Old Testament claims inspiration for itself. Cyril Spaude has pointed out that phrases such as "so the Lord says" and "the Word of the LORD came" occur over 2400 times in the Old Testament text (1300 of them in the "prophetic" books alone). He concludes, "What convincing support for the doctrine of verbal inspiration of the Scriptures!" (*Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* [in *The People's Bible* series] p. 6). His point is well taken. The Scriptures themselves claim to be the Word of God. It is true that very often these types of phrases accompany specific messages to specific people in specific situations (see, for example, Exodus 5:1-3; Numbers 17:1-12; 1 Kings 11:29-39; 19:9-18; 2 Kings 19:20-37). However, a great many of these references are to whole books (Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 1:1-3; Hosea 1:1; Obadiah 1; Micah 1:1, among others), as well as to the entire Mosaic covenant (Deuteronomy 4:1-2 and 5:1-5, confer also Isaiah 8:20). The fact that God so often certifies his speaking with these expressions authenticates the entire Old Testament record of his speaking as the Word of God.

The Word of God came, as the writer to the Hebrews says, in many different times and in many different ways in the Old Testament. These ways include theophanies,⁴ such as those experienced by Abraham (Gen. 18) and Moses (Exodus 3) and visions, like that of Jacob (Genesis 28:10-22) and Isaiah (1:1-2; 6:1-13) and Ezekiel (1:1-28; 2:9-3:9; etc.). At times, the text simply says that God spoke, without further elaboration (Genesis 22:1-2; 1 Samuel 10:22; Habakkuk 2:2 and many others). At other times, the Lord spoke through a medium, such as the Urim and Thummim⁵ (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65) or a burning bush (Exodus 3) or he appeared as the Glory of the LORD (Exodus 13:20-22; 14:23-25; 16:10-12 and many others). *How* God spoke is immaterial. Scripture asserts that he *did* speak to his people throughout history. He has given us an unimpeachable, inspired record of that speaking in the Old Testament.

⁴ A "theophany" is an appearance of God to a human being.

⁵ The Urim and Thummim are somewhat of a mystery today. They clearly were a means of determining God's will for the people and are generally associated with the priesthood. They were worn on the breastplate of the high priest, and from the LXX rendering of 1 Samuel 14:41, it appears that they were stones giving a yes or no answer. It is generally assumed that they were some type of stone, but it is not known for certain. The Jewish understanding has often referred to the jewels of the breastplate themselves or to two stones with the Tetragrammeton inscribed upon them. (See *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5.)

II. The Central Message of the Old Testament is the coming of the promised Messiah.

The Old Testament is indeed the inspired, inerrant Word of God just as surely as the New. As such it is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. This is because the core of the Old Testament is Christ, as Christ himself says, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40). Jesus was addressing "the Jews" (v. 16), the term that John often uses to describe the united opposition that Jesus faced from the disparate groups among his people (although the description would seem to best fit the Pharisees). In condemning their unbelief, Christ clearly invokes the Old Testament. In the same context, Christ makes the very pointed statement, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me" (v.46). Jesus' point is unmistakable. We find it reiterated in the account of the Emmaus disciples. Luke 24:25-27 states, "'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Note that Jesus said "all that the prophets have spoken." Notice also that Jesus uses the familiar division of "Moses and the prophets," which Luke goes on to equate with "all the Scriptures." Once again, this is not just a reference to books like Isaiah and Jeremiah, but also to the "former prophets" -- Joshua, Judges, etc. Christ is the heart and soul of the Old Testament.

In the same chapter, Luke recounts the appearance of Christ to the disciples in the inner room. He concludes that account with the these words:

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (vss. 44-47)

One could hardly ask for a more clear statement of the Christocentricity of the Old Testament. Here we have the complete Jewish division of the Old Testament: Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (with the Psalms standing by metonymy for the *Khetubhim*, [the Writings, also known as the Hagiographa]), hence the entire Old Testament, as the following chart indicates:

The Jewish Divisions of the Old Testament Canon

<i>Pentateuch (Torah)</i>	<i>Prophets (Nebhi'im)</i>	<i>Writings (Kethubhim)</i>
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Proverbs
Leviticus	(1 & 2) Samuel	Job
Numbers	(1 & 2) Kings	Song of Songs
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Lamentations
	Ezekiel	Ecclesiastes
	The Twelve	Esther
	(Minor Prophets)	Daniel
		Ezra
		Nehemiah
		(1 & 2) Chronicles

In Luke 24:44-47, Christ specifically applies the entire Old Testament canon to himself. Again, we see the term "Scriptures" clearly referring to the Old Testament, clearly referenced as authoritative and true, and

unequivocally centered in the death, resurrection and proclamation of Jesus Christ.

To demonstrate the Christocentricity of the Old Testament from the New is certainly sufficient for us. However, the reality of that Christocentricity and its implications become all the more clear when we examine the Old Testament in detail. The most obvious place to begin is with messianic prophecy. The point was made earlier that prophecy is really talking about God. That is true in the wider sense of the term, but there is also a more narrow sense, that of *predictive* prophecy. Predictive prophecy is when God "pulls back the veil" (as one of my seminary professors liked to say) and reveals to us what the future holds. Predictive prophecy is an integral part of both the Old and New Testaments. For example, in Matthew 24 and 25, as well as in Revelation, 2 Thessalonians, 1 John and many other books of the New Testament, we have predictive prophecies of Christ's second coming. A quick perusal of the Gospels and Acts would reveal numerous other examples, including the words of the Angel to Zechariah and to Mary (Luke 1), Christ's many predictions of his own death (for example, Matthew 16:21), and the prophecies of Agabus (for example Acts 21:10-15).

Predictive prophecy is quite prevalent in the Old Testament. In fact, there is a great deal of predictive prophecy that is not directly messianic. For example, the prophet Nahum prophesied the destruction of Nineveh and the prophet Obadiah that of Edom in advance of the actual events. Likewise, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel all predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, although only Jeremiah was an eyewitness of the fulfillment. Indeed, in Deuteronomy 18:21, the test of a false prophet is whether his prophecy actually comes true.⁶

Among all the many different predictive prophecies of the Old Testament, the messianic prophecies most clearly demonstrate the Christocentricity of the Old Testament. As Jesus pointed out in Luke 24, these prophecies not only tell of his life and death and resurrection, they also look forward to the preaching of "repentance and the forgiveness of sins" to all nations, hence, to the New Testament era in which we are now living. We can classify these prophecies in three categories: direct rectilinear prophecy, typical prophecy and intermediately fulfilled prophecy. We will consider each category in further detail.

Direct Rectilinear Prophecy

Direct rectilinear prophecies often are those that are the most obvious and well known. They include many of the familiar Christmas story texts, as well as those that are familiar to us from the Passion history. As the name implies, direct rectilinear prophecies are specific statements of what will happen in the future. The prophet spells out the event, although often in a very poetic form and using prophetic symbolism. Often these prophecies are quoted in the New Testament in connection with their fulfillment. They are generally introduced with some variation on the words, "as it is written," although this is not a guarantee that we are dealing with a rectilinear prophecy. Examples of direct rectilinear prophecy include the prophecy of the Virgin's Son in Isaiah 7 and of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, the Bethlehem prophecy in Micah 5:2, and many, many others. We will consider the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9-13 as representative of this type of prophecy:

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
 Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
 See, your king comes to you,
 righteous and having salvation,
 gentle and riding on a donkey,
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
 I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
 and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
 and the battle bow will be broken.
 He will proclaim peace to the nations.

⁶ On the other hand, the words of Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony! If they [the mediums and spiritualists that Israel was consulting] do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn," indicate that the prophetic institution functioned in both the narrow and the broad sense of the term prophecy, since the Mosaic Law is also held up as a norm for true preaching and prophesying about God.

His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope;
even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.
I will bend Judah as I bend my bow
and fill it with Ephraim.
I will rouse your sons, O Zion,
against your sons, O Greece,
and make you like a warrior's sword.

This prophecy illustrates a number of common features of rectilinear prophecy. First it is identified as a prophecy in the New Testament with a specific fulfillment. Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 both apply verse 9 to Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is obviously an important point in identifying and interpreting Old Testament prophecies, however, it may not always hold true. Malachi 4:2 ("But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall") which is generally held by conservative commentators to be Messianic,⁷ is not specifically quoted in the New Testament (although Luke 1:78 may refer to it or, equally as likely, to Isaiah 9:2).

The second common feature illustrated by this prophecy is its sweeping view of the New Testament era (in keeping with Christ's words in Luke 24:47). Although the arrival of the Messianic King (in verse nine) is specifically applied to the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the verses which follow clearly take a wider view. They emphasize the purpose and the result of the King's arrival: to proclaim peace and the messianic kingdom. That proclamation, in turn, emphasizes the importance of the prophecy to its original audience. From a New Testament perspective, it is clear to us how and when this was accomplished. Christ's victory over sin and death, won at Calvary and the empty tomb, proclaim peace for the entire world. But that victory occurred *after* the triumphal entry. Although the kingdom is established now (cf. Ephesians 1:20-23), the complete fulfillment of this prophecy is eschatological -- it remains to be seen. The complete fulfillment really will occur when Christ returns. But from an Old Testament vantage point, the two comings of Christ are often linked together. This phenomenon is sometimes called "the prophetic perspective." It has been likened to seeing a mountain range in the distance. When you are still many miles away, all the peaks appear to be more or less equally distant. But when you reach the first ridge of mountains, you realize that some of the other peaks that you saw from a distance are still quite far off. The Old Testament prophets saw the New Testament era from a distance. They often move freely back and forth between the two comings of Christ and present various New Testament events in a topical and not a chronological fashion, because for them, it was all in the future.

The third feature that deserves our attention is the language of the prophecy itself. Like so many Old Testament prophecies, this one is couched in language the people would understand. It is, in a sense, figurative. For example, when the King comes, he will proclaim peace. He will take away war horses and chariots and break battle bows. The figure is one of world peace, but the fulfillment is one of the spiritual peace that Christ, the Prince of Peace, brings; the peace which the angels announced at Bethlehem, and which Christ commissioned us to carry to the ends of the earth. Likewise, Zechariah states that the kingdom will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. For the people living in Israel, this was quite clearly a reference to the universal nature of the King's rule. But it does not follow from the specific reference to "the River" (the Euphrates), that the kingdom will be headquartered in the geographical Near East. Rather, the Holy Spirit uses something very concrete to make the point. The Exiles who had recently returned from Babylon had to cross the Euphrates in the long journey home. They were still ruled by an emperor who was across the River. To say to such people that the Messiah-King would rule all that territory that they had just traversed and all the territory of the Persian Empire was a very vivid picture indeed.

Unfortunately, the prevalence of this kind of language and of similar pictures has led the Reformed and

⁷ See, for example, Theodore Laetsch, *Minor Prophets*, p.544.

Evangelicals to interpret these passages as referring to the millennium. In doing this, they violate one of the principal rules of the exegesis of figurative language: they try to account for all of the details. Likewise, they do not let the clear passages of Scripture (which rule out a millennialistic interpretation) decide the issue. A detailed presentation of the millennium is outside our scope; suffice it to say that all millennialistic arguments are based on figurative passages. There is no clear passage which states it, and there are many which militate against it.

The fourth characteristic of interest to us in this passage is the equation of Israel with the New Testament church. This is so common in Old Testament messianic prophecy that it is almost a constant. Romans 9:6-8 states,

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

This passage clearly demonstrates the difference between physical descent and spiritual belonging. Paul begins by stating "not all who are descended from Israel *are* Israel." He then uses as an illustration the fact that the Ishmaelites and the Midianites were not reckoned as Abraham's spiritual offspring (i.e., heirs of the promise), even though they were physically descended from him. But his point is the same as that of Christ, when he said, "If you were Abraham's children ... then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does" (John 8:39-41)⁸. Jesus was not denying their physical, but their spiritual descent from Abraham, "the man of faith." Likewise, a careful comparison of 1 Peter 2:9 and Exodus 19:6 will illustrate that God calls the children of Israel and the New Testament church by nearly identical names. Compare "a royal priesthood" with "a kingdom of priests" as well as "a holy nation" in both verses. In the same vein, Galatians 3:7,8 clearly states, "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced in advance to Abraham, 'All nations will be blessed by you.'" The point, simply put, is that the Old Testament prophecies of the New Testament era consistently refer to the church, the true people of God, as "Israel" or "Judah." In our interpretations of the same, we need to beware of the convenient tendency of the Reformed to overlook the New Testament clarification of the Old Testament usage in order to bolster their millennialistic interpretations.

Typical Prophecy

The second category of messianic prophecies that we encounter in the Old Testament is usually called "typical prophecy" or simply "types of Christ." A type is an Old Testament figure or event that in some way pictures for us Christ and his work. These are extremely important prophecies, but they must be handled with extreme care. If the New Testament does not specifically refer to them as such, we should only declare an Old Testament event or person to be "typical" with the most extreme caution and in the face of a clear parallel.

Perhaps a positive and a negative example will help. In John 3:14,15, Christ himself refers to an Old Testament type. He says, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." The reference is to the bronze serpent of Numbers 21. In the Numbers account, God had sent poisonous snakes to punish the people for their latest round of grumbling, but, in his love and mercy, he provided a remedy. He instructed Moses to build a bronze snake and put it on a pole, and then promised to heal everyone who looked at it. We use the terminology *type* to refer to the Old Testament element. In this instance, the type is the bronze snake, which is lifted up for all to look at and be saved. The New Testament fulfillment is called the *antitype*. In this instance Christ, or more specifically, his crucifixion, is the antitype. The parallel between Christ and the bronze serpent is faith. Everyone who believed

⁸ See Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, where Christ denies that those who call themselves Jews are truly Jews. See also Revelation 5:9,10, where the elders in heaven point out that Christ as "purchased men from every tribe and language and people and nation" and has "made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

God's promise and looked at the bronze snake lived. Everyone who believes Christ's promise -- that he has been "lifted up" on the cross in our place -- lives eternally. This is a legitimate Old Testament type of Christ.

On the other hand, there are many Old Testament accounts which are not typical. In the libretto for the Oberammergau Passion Play, the murder of Amasa, commander of the army of Israel, by Joab, commander of the army of Judah (recorded in 2 Samuel 20:7-10), is considered to be typical of the betrayal of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane (*The Oberammergau Passion Play*, 1634-1984, p.58). This may well be an old tradition in the Catholic Church, and it certainly portrays the sin of betrayal and murder, but is it typical of Christ? There is no New Testament evidence that it is.

The danger that lurks behind this kind of interpretation is that of allegorizing. The events of 2 Samuel 20 are significant in the reign of King David, and thus to the salvation history of Israel (which we will consider presently), but in converting every Old Testament account into a type, we impose our own Christological interpretation on the text and run the risk of missing the significance of the text in its own context. The many legitimate types mentioned in the New Testament include the Flood (1 Peter 3:20-21), Jonah (Matthew 12:40; Luke 11:29-30), Melchizedek (Hebrews 7), the entrance into the promised land (Hebrews 4), the betrayal of David by Ahithophel (John 13:18) and many more. God has given us a wealth of Old Testament types to preach on; let us be content with that, and not scrounge around looking for more.

Intermediately Fulfilled Prophecy

The third category of prophecy is somewhat more difficult than the first two, because it is something of a cross between them. For lack of a better term, we will call it "intermediately fulfilled prophecy." Although this classification is not universally recognized (some simply consider this to be typical), I think an example will be sufficient to justify it as a distinct category of interpretation. An intermediately fulfilled prophecy is one in which there is an immediate, non-messianic fulfillment of the prophecy that then, in effect, serves as a type of the greater and more perfect fulfillment in Christ.

An example of this kind of prophecy is God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. In the first seven verses, David, now established as king over Israel, wishes to build the Temple. Without first consulting the Lord, Nathan the prophet tells him to proceed, whereupon God appears to Nathan and gives him a message. After pointing out that he has not specifically commanded this, the Lord continues:

8 Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. 10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning 11 and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

“‘The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: 12 When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. 15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’

I included the context of this prophecy to illustrate the double nature of the promise. It is a promise to David, and it has a double fulfillment. The first two verses deal exclusively with God's grace to David. Verses 10 and 11, however, begin to address a different situation. God promises to give his people rest from oppression and wickedness. We know from the subsequent history of Israel that there was rest in the time of Solomon (1 Kings. 4:20) -- at least during the first part of his reign. But the people were never really free from the oppression of

wicked men after that. Indeed, the entire history of the northern kingdom is a succession of evil kings, and even the southern kingdom suffered repeatedly from evil kings and foreign aggression. Already, we see that the prophecy looks forward to another fulfillment in Christ, as Hebrews 4 indicates.

More significantly, verses 11b through 13 seem to speak specifically of Solomon as the seed who will sit on David's throne and build the temple. Verse 14 also seems to refer to the syncretism of Solomon's later reign and the political problems it caused. Verse 16, is, however, the key verse: "Your house and your kingdom will be established forever." At face value, this has to be either messianic or God broke his word.

An objection has been advanced, however, on the basis of an exegetical point. In verse 16, God twice says "forever" in reference to the kingdom and throne of Solomon. The Hebrew here is *ad 'olam*, which literally means "for a long time." Although many modern translations regularly render it as "forever" or an equivalent expression, there are those who challenge that meaning in the messianic prophecies. In this prophecy, they would argue that the promise is merely that David would have an enduring dynasty, which is true (nearly five hundred years). However, that interpretation ignores the wider context of Scripture. One of the most telling commentaries on this promise to David is Psalm 72, written by Solomon himself. In that psalm, the "king" that Solomon speaks of in verse 1 is none other than the Messiah. Verse 17 applies the promise of Abraham ("All nations will be blessed through him" -- cf. Genesis 12:2-3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Galatians 3:8) to the king that is the subject of the psalm. The psalm describes the reign of the Messiah-King for us in terms of its universality (vv 8,11,15), prosperity (vv. 6-7, 16), grace (12-14), justice (vv 2,4,7) and most significantly, eternity (vv. 5, 17). It is significant that verse 17 uses *l'olam*, an equivalent of *ad 'olam*, to express "forever," and in the parallel defines the "long period of time" with the words "may it continue as long as the sun."

The fact that the promise to David is messianic is further demonstrable from the prophecy in Jeremiah 33:14-26. There God specifically renews this promise long after the death of both David and Solomon (David lived c. 1000 B.C., Jeremiah c. 586 B.C.), and despite the fact that Jeremiah has specifically prophesied the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Significantly, in verse 16, Jerusalem will be called "the LORD Our Righteousness," a reference to the work of Christ. (See the parallel in Jeremiah 23:5,6, where the King is called "the LORD Our Righteousness" and also Ezequiel 37:24,25.)

In Luke 1:32,33, the angel Gabriel says that Jesus "will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Clearly Christ is the fulfillment of the promise to David, and the angel is referring to the promises to both David, and Jeremiah. Equally clearly, Luke says that he will reign forever (*eis tous aionas*). This is, of course, the most significant proof that the promise to David looked past its intermediate fulfillment to Christ, but even the Old Testament usage of the prophecy shows that Solomon, Jeremiah and Ezequiel understood it that way. If we confer Peter's comments in Acts 2 (especially vv 30-33) on Psalms 16 and 110, we can safely conclude that even David himself understood the promise in this way.

The point for our consideration is that God made a double promise to David. He promised him a son who would rule in his place and build the temple. But the fulfillment of that promise signified that God would fulfill the inherent greater promise of a greater Son of David, who would sit on the throne of heaven and rule forever (Luke 1:32,33). Of special interest to us, Psalm 2:7 and 110:1 indicate that David himself did indeed understand this perfect fulfillment of this promise in the coming Christ. You could say, then, that Solomon was thus declared to be a type of Christ before he (Solomon) actually became king. This is an example of an intermediately fulfilled prophecy.

We could summarize the difference between the three categories of prophecy in this way: In rectilinear prophecy, the prophet sees an event and it is fulfilled. The prophet may use figures of speech and symbolical language to represent the event, but he speaks directly of the event, and the figures serve only to sharpen the picture. In typical prophecy, the prophet refers to a specific person or event (the type) that he usually knows or has experienced personally and the type looks forward to its fulfillment (the antitype). In intermediately fulfilled prophecy, the prophet sees and foretells an event. The prophecy is fulfilled in one sense before Christ in a typical fashion, and then is fulfilled in a greater sense in Christ.

Christ in Old Testament Motifs

Earlier, the point was made that the murder of Amasa is not typical. That does not mean, however, that it has no bearing on the New Testament other than as a part of the historical development of the children of Israel. In fact, this incident illustrates what we might call an Old Testament motif. The Old Testament is replete with themes that reflect the coming Messiah. Betrayal may be considered one of them, especially in God's condemnations of his people for faithlessness and betrayal of the Mt. Sinai covenant (for example, Isaiah 1:2-9).⁹ The primary purpose of Old Testament themes and motifs is found in the context of the writings themselves. They also serve as a literary tradition that is heavily drawn upon by subsequent writers in both the Old and New Testaments. One example is the motif of adultery representing spiritual unfaithfulness. Isaiah and Hosea both use it at about the time of the Assyrian captivity (eighth century B.C. -- see Isaiah 1:21 and Hosea chapters 1-5). Jeremiah (in chapters 2 and 3) and Ezekiel (16 and 23) both pick it up about the time of the Babylonian Captivity (sixth century B.C.) and Malachi uses it after the return from exile (2:10-16). The theme of adultery in the prophets generally is used figuratively to represent the idolatry of Israel. They were God's chosen people, but they turned away from him just as an adulterous woman turns away from her husband. This concept of God being "married" to his people is definitely a New Testament theme (see, for example, Ephesians 5:25-33, et.al.). But the concept of an adulterous woman turning away from God is also directly imitated in Revelation 17 and 18, which describe "the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries" (17:1-2). The prostitute of Revelation is not a reference to the spiritual adulteries of God's Old Testament people, but it is a picture of the apostasy of the New Testament church with the Antichrist in the last times (i.e. the New Testament era, cf. 1 John 4:1-5). In that sense, Revelation picks up an Old Testament motif. We wouldn't, however, say that the spiritual adultery of the Old Testament is prophetic or even necessarily typical of the adultery of the prostitute Babylon. (For a more detailed treatment of Revelation 17 and 18, see Siegbert Becker, *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song*.)

An excellent treatment of the many Old Testament themes with New Testament applications is John C. Lawrenz' article, "He Came in Fulfillment of Prophecy," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* vol. 91, number 3.

Christ in the Old Testament Covenant

Although it is self-evident that the messianic prophecies are central to our faith and to the proper use and interpretation of the Old Testament, they are by no means the only significant portion of the Old Testament. The true servant of the Word will recognize that the many chapters that are not specifically messianic are still part of God's revelation, and thus, a part of the whole counsel of God. They also, like all the Old Testament, center in Christ.

In addition to the predictive prophecy, an area of particular significance for the entire Old Testament record is the Mt. Sinai covenant. Again, this covenant demonstrates the Christocentricity of the Scriptures. This is a particularly important point because the Old Testament is dominated by the Mosaic covenant. Again and again it is referred to by the subsequent writers. The Mosaic covenant demonstrates the Christocentricity of the Old Testament in two ways: it is typical of the coming Christ and it prepares the way for the coming Christ.

A detailed description of the Mt. Sinai covenant is really the matter for an Old Testament isagogics course. However, a few pertinent observations are in order. In Colossians 2:16-17, St. Paul says, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." The reference to eating and drinking and new moon festivals is a reference to specific parts of the Mt. Sinai covenant. Paul says that these "are a shadow of the things that are to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." Therefore, we are not doing violence to the text when we see Christ in the Old Testament

⁹ Other examples of human treachery, such as Levi and Simeon's slaughter of Shechem (Genesis 34) or Jacob and Laban's deceptions (on both sides) and Saul's faithlessness to David, as well as to God, would also reflect this motif.

covenant. It was, in the truest sense of the word, typical.

The types of the Old Testament covenant center in the sacrifices. We see Christ declared the antitype in the many passages that call him a "sacrifice" and "a fragrant offering" (Ephesians 5:2), "a sin offering" (Romans. 8:3), or simply "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In the Old Testament covenant, the solution for sin was sacrifice, the offering of blood. The covenant portrayed Christ's blood cleansing us from all sin, when the blood of goats and lambs purified (cleansed) the physical implements for the tabernacle. The covenant portrayed the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ in the sin and guilt offerings which were made in the place of the people; in the Passover Lamb, whose blood saved the people from death; and in the Day of Atonement, on which the scapegoat carried their sins away from the people, and the priest came into the presence of God on the basis of the blood of a sacrificial goat. The Old Testament covenant also pictured the fellowship with God that Christ's sacrifice gives us in the fellowship offerings, which anticipate the Lord's Supper, and the festivals in their religious calendar. In all this, as we see throughout the book of Hebrews (especially in chapters 8-10), Christ is the center of the Mosaic covenant. Even a cursory reading of the Old Testament will show that the covenant is the very fabric of the Old Testament.

The typical nature of the covenant was not its only purpose. The Old Testament covenant was intended to prepare the way for Christ by introducing certain key concepts to the chosen people. In Galatians 3:24 Paul says, "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." In this chapter and the next, Paul is speaking of the Mosaic Law. He calls it here a *paidagogos*, a slave who is responsible for the care of children. The purpose of this slave is to lead us to Christ. That is why God gave the Old Testament covenant.

The central teaching of the Old Covenant was one of Law. In Leviticus 10:10, we read, "You must distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the unclean and the clean." In Leviticus 11:45, God says, "I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy." In Leviticus 19:2, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'" Throughout the book of Leviticus runs this refrain of being holy, of God making holy, of separating the holy from the profane. The central truth of the tabernacle, of the bloody sacrifices and of the ritual purifications was that the all-holy God cannot stand to be in the presence of sinners (cf. Psalm 5:4-6; Hebrews 9:22). Our iniquity separates us from God, just as Isaiah said (59:2). This concept was essential to prepare the people for the coming Christ, because this separation can be healed only by means of sacrifice. Only with blood, as the writer to the Hebrews has pointed out (Hebrews 9:7), could the Old Testament believer ever enter into the presence of God in a ceremonial sense. Only with Christ's blood can we ever truly enter into the presence of God.

Does this mean that the Old Testament believer was saved by works? Not at all. In Galatians 3 and Romans 4, St. Paul makes it very clear that Abraham was saved by faith in the promise of the coming Savior. That promise -- that prophecy -- was the gospel for the Old Testament believer as much as it is for us today. Significantly, the Ten Commandments begin with the words, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). The Mt. Sinai covenant was a Law covenant, a covenant in which Israel was expected to perform certain ceremonial acts, but it was predicated entirely upon an act of God's grace. He delivered them from Egypt, he chose them as his people, he gave them repeated promises of the Savior to come, and he prepared them with a covenant that served as a living and breathing object lesson in sin and its effects, so that when John said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" there was no mistaking the meaning.

It would really be impossible to explain the doctrine of justification without the Old Testament concept of sacrifice. Central to our forensic declaration of righteousness before God is a forensic concept of satisfaction. We hear the "not guilty" pronounced by the judge, not because he has chosen to ignore our sin, not simply because he loves us so much that he cannot bear to punish us, but because the penalty has been paid. God, the judge, demands satisfaction for sin. He demands a payment. We cannot make that satisfaction, that payment for our own sins. Only Christ could and only Christ did. The term *satisfactio vicaria*, vicarious satisfaction or atonement, is intelligible only in the context of our absolute separation from God, so clearly depicted in the Old

Testament ceremonial law, and God's demand for payment, repeatedly reenacted in the temple sacrifices.

As Lutherans who are firmly committed to accurately expounding the Word of God, we need to maintain this understanding of the Old Testament covenant and avoid any hint of "dispensational theology."¹⁰ The Old Testament is not a series of dispensations in which God offers different ways of salvation, as the Reformed and Evangelicals would have us believe. The Scriptures are clear, God has one plan of salvation for sinners: *sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura*.

At the risk of being misunderstood, we Lutherans would assert a kernel of truth in "dispensational theology." In Galatians 3, especially verses 17 and 18, Paul reminds us that the Law of Moses was *added* to God's covenant of faith to Abraham. In verse 19, he says, "What then was the purpose of the Law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come..." The Law of Moses was a temporary institution, addressed to a specific people for a specific time. It was in force until Christ, the promised Seed, came and fulfilled it. St. Paul repeatedly makes this point and it is essential for our understanding of the Old Testament. We cannot make a universal application of the Old Testament covenant to all people of all time. The Old Testament people of Israel possessed a special, ceremonial relationship with God -- that is to say, their relationship of faith was given a unique expression in the Mt. Sinai covenant. Likewise, God's immutable will for all people of all time was given a special expression in the moral law of the Mt. Sinai covenant, most specifically in the Ten Commandments. But on Mt. Sinai, God expressed only a specific, limited will in the civil and ceremonial laws that applied to only one people in a specific situation. We cannot view the history of the Old Testament people apart from the covenant, but we dare not apply that covenant beyond its scriptural bounds.

In this sense, the dogmatics notes that we use at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary refer to the "N.T. dispensation" (volume II, page two) in an implied contrast to the Old Testament dispensation. But for us, the term "dispensation" really means God's way of dealing with people. With this understanding, there are really only two "dispensations": the Law and the Gospel. Both are essential to the understanding of the Old and New Testaments.

Christ in the Historical Record of the Chosen People

Old Testament prophecy and the covenant center in Christ, the sacrificial lamb. This is blood theology. This is atonement. Without these concepts, we would be spiritually poorer. But the Old Testament centers in Christ in still another way. St. Paul sums up the value of Old Testament Bible history for us in Romans 9:4-5: "... Theirs [i.e., the nation of Israel's] is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." These verses really contain a summary of the history of the nation of Israel. They were descended from the patriarchs, they were adopted as God's chosen people, they received the covenants with Abraham and with Moses, they had the ceremonial law and the temple worship. Most important of all, they received God's promises of a coming savior and provided the human ancestry of Christ.

The historical portions of the Old Testament are often poorly understood. We imagine that we somehow have a complete record of the Jewish nation, or that it is merely "dry history." Neither is true. First of all, the record is far from complete. Although the historical sections (including those in books like Isaiah and Jeremiah) may seem to present a dizzying amount of information and detail, we need to recall that the Old Testament covers, from the time of Moses to the time of Malachi, over one thousand years. Try writing a thousand years of European history in a book the length of the Old Testament! The history that God records for us is carefully selected. It represents what God considered to be important. For example, secular sources tell us that Omri, the father of Ahab, was a very significant king, while his son does not receive a great deal of attention. In the Bible, however, Omri's entire reign is covered in only ten verses (1 Kings 16:16-17; 21-28), while Ahab is the subject

¹⁰ Charles Scofield, the author of the notes in the Scofield Bible, defines a dispensation as "a period of time in which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." Quoted in Gawrisch, p. 691.

of several chapters of 1 Kings (16:29-22:40), as well as one in 2 Chronicles (chapter 18).

Why such a one sided treatment? Because the Bible isn't recording secular history. It is recording *prophetic* or *deuteronomistic* history. The Jewish divisions of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Writings) don't include a division called the Histories. The Jews considered Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings the former *prophets*. These books, as they correctly understood, are the history of the grace of God -- in other words, prophecy in the wider meaning of the term and in this sense, the history recorded in the Old Testament is *prophetic*. When I was a child, we used a book in Sunday School called *The Story of God's Love*. I have always treasured that title, although I must confess that I no longer have a copy of the book. God's love is what the record of the patriarchs and of the nation of Israel is all about. Just as Moses retells the history of his people in Deuteronomy, emphasizing the grace of God and the sin of the people, so the writers of the "historical books" record the grace of God and the sin of his faithless people. For this reason, we call this history *deuteronomistic*.

In the historic portions of the Old Testament, God traces for us the history of the coming Messiah. He does that through the record of the prophecies themselves. He also does it through the record of his people. They were the bearers of the promise of the coming Messiah. In the Old Testament, we see God dealing with the chosen people. They were not chosen to be saved by fulfilling the Mt. Sinai covenant, but they were chosen, by an act of God's grace, to fulfill the most important role any nation was ever destined to do. They bore, for nearly fifteen hundred years, the promise of the one Savior from sin.

To truly understand the Christocentricity of the Bible, we need to realize just how precarious (from a human point of view) that essential role was. Sin is the one universal constant of human existence and its solution was entrusted to a small, relatively weak people whom God himself described with words like "stiff-necked," "rebellious" and "faithless." The salvation of the world depended on a people who lived "in the cross hairs," so to speak, of the world powers of their day. Palestine was the land bridge for warring armies, and at least one king, Josiah, died as a result (2 Kings 23). Israel was constantly in danger from a succession of major and minor powers: Egypt, Philistia, Midian, Moab, Aram, Edom, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, and finally Rome. When we study the miraculous preservation of the nation of Israel, we are studying the story of God's love, because we are studying the preservation of the Gospel. Only God could do it. And he had to do it, because he had promised that the Messiah would be born from this people, from her ancient, royal line, in the city of their kings "when the time had fully come" (Galatians 4:4).

Clearly, the history of the Old Testament is the history of God's plan of salvation, painstakingly unfolded through the generations. It is also the history of the promises that God gave to those people. St. Paul points that out very clearly in Romans 3:2 where he answers the question (v.1), "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?" with the words, "Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God." By the grace of God, they preserved that trust and we have received a treasury of God's words in the Old Testament text painstakingly preserved by the Jewish people for thousands of years.

Perhaps we still might be tempted to feel that all of this history and prophecy has little practical application to the life of the New Testament Christian. St. Paul answers that objection as well, by pointing us again to Christ in the Old Testament. In Romans 5:20-21 he says, "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The Old Testament is the record of generations of people impacted by Law and Gospel. The Old Testament is full of real people with real flaws struggling to live lives of faith. It shows us unequivocally the effects of sin and turning away from God's outstretched hand in the lives of people like Saul and Ahab and Jezebel. It shows us in the life of Solomon how destructive it can be to share God's glory and honor with other "gods." It shows how dangerous pride can be via Nebuchadnezzar and how destructive to faith lack of compassion is in Jonah. It shows how sweet the mercy and love and forgiveness of God is in the lives of David and Abraham and Joseph. Where sin increased in the lives of these men and their people, God reached out, he called back, he exhorted and encouraged -- and even cajoled and mocked his people when they needed it.

All of which is to say that we must study the history. We must study it to understand the context of the

messianic prophecies. We must study it to see the preservation of the covenant people and the fulfillment of the promises. We must study it to understand the world that constituted "the fullness of time." We must study it to see real people reacting to the Law and Gospel message, and in those people to learn something about our own sinfulness and faith.

We must, however, exercise at least one caution. The Old Testament is rich in real people, and it is legitimate to apply their reactions to God's Word to our time. What we cannot do, however, is compare our nation to the nation of Israel. The proper comparison is between the New Testament Church and the nation of Israel. All too often, one gets the impression from reading material published by the Evangelicals that their goal is to recreate a theocracy in the modern world. They seem to believe that they can usher in the millennium by taking control of the secular political process and bending it to the Mt. Sinai covenant. They often fail to distinguish between moral and ceremonial law, and they are convinced that the promises of the Mt. Sinai covenant can be made to apply to a twentieth century nation. This is a mistaken notion. There is no biblical support for such a view.

The Preincarnate Christ in the Old Testament

The Old Testament points us to Christ in at least one other way: Christ himself actually appears there. This is to be expected, since Christ is co-eternal with God, and the Old Testament is the revelation of God. Christ appears in several different ways in the Old Testament. He appears in some ways that we don't often think of. The New Testament repeatedly calls the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of Christ" (see, among others, Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:9, Philippians 1:19 and especially 1 Peter 1:10-11). Whenever we see a reference to the Spirit in the Old Testament, it should remind us that the Triune God is the God of the Old Testament as well as the New, hence Christ is implicitly present. A similar phenomenon is illustrated by Colossians 1:15-17, "He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." The Old Testament is replete with references to God, the Creator and Preserver of all things. Every one of those references is a reference to Christ, because Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the Creator and Preserver God.

Likewise, we find Christ in the Old Testament in the names of God. A thorough discussion of all the implications of God's names in the Old Testament is outside the scope of this paper, but two specific examples merit mention. The first is the name *Elohim*. We usually associate this name with God's power as the Creator and Preserver, although it certainly has a wider range of usage than that. It is particularly interesting that this word is a plural form. It is a word that is used for both the true God and false gods. Many commentators and grammarians (see, for example, Gesenius-Kautzsch *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* and Waltke-O'Connor, *An Introduction to Hebrew Syntax*) have noted this fact and call it a plural of majesty, simply because they dismiss the concept of the Trinity in the Old Testament. Some, even like Waltke-O'Connor, have noted that in the biblical text, when *Elohim* refers to the true God, it nearly always takes both a singular verb and singular adjectives, although the word itself is plural in form. On the other hand, when it refers to heathen gods, it generally (though not always) takes plural adjectives and verbs, as we would expect in reference to a polytheistic notion of "gods." Even those who dismiss the Trinity as an Old Testament concept, do not attempt to deny Hebrew monotheism. For the Bible-believing Christian who accepts the Christocentricity of the Old Testament, the "plural of majesty" explanation leaves something to be desired. Perhaps it would be too much to say that *Elohim* teaches the Trinity, but it would be saying too little to neglect it as an indication of the Trinity, and therefore of Christ, in the Old Testament.

The other Old Testament name of God that points us to Christ is the Tetragrammaton, the name often translated as "Jehovah" or "the LORD" in modern versions. This is the name that God himself claims in Exodus 3 and 6. In Exodus 6, God asserts that the Patriarchs did not know him by that name, although in Genesis 28:13, God himself says to Jacob, "I am the LORD." To understand how both things could be true, we need to

understand what this name means. Exodus 34:6,7 says,

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'

The Tetragrammaton (so-called because it is composed of four letters in Hebrew) is the name that reveals God's essence (as he himself says, "I AM THAT I AM" -- Exodus 3:14). God's essence is love and justice. He forgives, he has compassion, yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. We often summarize all that this name means with the expression "the God of full and faithful love." One of my professors at the Seminary liked to call Exodus 34:6,7 the "John 3:16 of the Old Testament" because it is alluded to so often in the Old Testament. Every allusion reminds us of the true nature of God -- of the forgiveness that he won for us by satisfying his own justice. That is always a reference to Christ.¹¹ In Exodus, God was beginning his great work of salvation for his Old Testament people. In the life of the Patriarchs, this salvation of the people of God was still in the future. However, after the Exodus, the whole Old Testament would look back to this event as the birth of the nation of Israel and the beginning of God's intervention in behalf of his people. Thus, from the time of Moses on, the people "knew" God as the God of salvation in a way that the Patriarchs had not experienced.

Alongside these implicit references to Christ in the Old Testament, there are a number of explicit references. The most prominent of these are the references to the Angel of the LORD, or as it sometimes appears, the Angel of God, the Angel of the Covenant, or the Angel of the Presence.¹² In order to clearly understand this point, we must first understand that every reference to an angel (or even an angel of the LORD) in the Old Testament does not equate to the preincarnate Christ. There are numerous references to created angels in the Old Testament, as well as in the New. Interestingly enough, in the New Testament, the expression "the angel of the Lord" nearly always refers to a created angel¹³ (see for example, Luke 1:11 and 2:9). This is understandable, however, since Christ has already appeared in a much clearer form in the New Testament.

The Hebrew term *malach*, which we usually translate as "angel" is similar to the Greek term *angelos* in that its root meaning is "messenger" (*The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* vol. 1, p. 465). As such, it often refers to human messengers, ambassadors or prophets. Since created angels often serve the function of representing God to man, it is not surprising that they have this title in both testaments of Scripture. However, there are several special usages of the term that we identify with Christ on the basis of the texts themselves. The first usage of the term is in Genesis 16, where the Angel of the LORD prophesies to Hagar concerning the future of Ishmael. The text continues (v.13), "She gave this name to the LORD [the Tetragrammaton] who spoke to her: 'You are the God [*El*] who sees me'..." Moses equates the Tetragrammaton with the Angel of the LORD. Likewise, in chapter 22, when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven (v.11) and said (v.12), "Do not lay a hand on the boy ... Now *I* know that you fear God because you have not withheld from *me* your son, your only son." Here the Angel of the LORD asserts that he is God, since he is the one to whom Abraham was sacrificing (see v. 2).¹⁴ Perhaps the most significant appearance of Christ in this form is found in Exodus 3:2-7, in the account of the burning bush. Verse two states,

¹¹ However, it must be stated that in specific contexts, we may identify the Father or the Son, or even the Trinity as a whole, with the Tetragrammaton, depending on its usage.

¹² The Hebrew for the "Angel of the Presence" *malach piney* literal means "the angel of my face." The Old Testament often refers to God's face as a theophany (hence, "no man may see my face and live" -- Exodus 33:20, cf. also verse 15, where "your Presence" is in Hebrew "your face").

¹³ For an exception, compare Revelation 20:1-3 with Revelation 1:1,13,18. See also Wilbert Gawrisch, "Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations" in *Our Great Heritage*, vol. 3, and Siegbert Becker, *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song*, pp. 296ff.

¹⁴ It should be noted that non-Trinitarian groups point to verse 16 to deny this identification of the angel of the LORD with God on the basis of the Angel's statement, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD..." This does not really present a problem since it does not in and of itself negate the identification and since God often speaks of himself in the third person, see for example Exodus 19:20-22. It should also be noted that this is not the only, or even the most important, scriptural substantiation for the identification of the Angel of the LORD with the Preincarnate Christ.

"the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush." Verse 4: "God called to him from within the bush." Verse 6: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob..." Verse 7: "The LORD said..." It is clear in this text that the Angel of the LORD is none other than the God of the Old Testament.

There are numerous other appearances of Christ as the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament.¹⁵ They are concentrated in the Pentateuch (for example Gen. 31 and 48:15,16; Exodus 13 and 14), the former prophets (Joshua 5, Judges 6 and a very important appearance in Judges 13) and the late prophets (see, for example, Zechariah 3:1-4), although there is a reference in Isaiah 63:9.

When we compare these appearances with the prophecy of Malachi 3:1, we see the "messenger of the covenant" [Hebrew: *malach haberith* -- "angel/messenger of the covenant"] is none other than Christ, the second person of the Trinity. In Malachi 3, God promises to send his messenger (John the Baptist -- see 4:5,6; Matthew 17:10-13; Mark 1:1-4; 9:11-13) ahead of the Angel of the Covenant, who will come suddenly to his temple, and purify the priesthood. A comparison with Isaiah 40:3ff and Mark 1 force us to conclude that the Angel of the LORD is not simply a generic reference to God, but to Christ himself.

The question might well be raised, why does the Old Testament refer to Christ in this manner? Perhaps the best answer is given in Hebrews 1:1,2 and John 1:1-5. Both of these references point out the importance of Christ's prophetic office -- his ministry of the Word to us. The essence of Christ's work for us is the revelation of the true God and his plan of salvation. Christ is the perfect representative of the Father, and as such, the perfect messenger and ambassador -- in short, the perfect *malach*.

The Angel of the LORD is not Christ's only appearance in the Old Testament. Indeed, as we have seen, they are a great many Old Testament references to Christ -- more that we could mention. For the sake of brevity we will limit ourselves to only one more,¹⁶ found in Daniel 7. Strictly speaking, this is a prophecy, but it is important for our understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments because of its usage of the term "Son of Man." In this chapter, Daniel sees a vision that encompasses all the history of the world from his day until Judgment Day. In verses 13 and 14, "one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven" approached "the Ancient of Days" (i.e., God the Father, the eternal, unchangeable God) and is given all power and authority over the universe. This is, of course, a prophecy of the same event as Philippians 2:10f. What we are interested in here is the term "son of man." This is not the only occurrence of the term in the Old Testament. God uses it for Ezekiel throughout his book, as he also does for Daniel himself in 8:17. However, in this chapter it definitely refers to Christ (for a fuller treatment of this prophecy, see John C. Jeske, *Daniel*, in *The People's Bible* commentary series).

The expression "son of man" (*ben-adam* in Hebrew and *bar-anash* in the Aramaic of Daniel 7) is in what is called the "construct" state of the Hebrew "construct-genitive" construction. In this case, the second noun "man" modifies the first "son,"¹⁷ just as in the Hebrew expression *har-qadosh* ("hill of holiness"), "holiness" modifies "hill" and is thus regularly translated as "holy hill." The point seems to be in both Ezekiel and in Daniel that the "son of man" is a "human son," i.e., a human being. It is of course significant that Christ consistently refers to himself as "the Son of Man." The article that he regularly uses seems to be best understood as referring to that well-known Son of Man from Daniel, who is about to receive all authority in heaven and on earth, just as God foretold. In short, it seems that Christ, by picking up this term, is saying, "Don't let appearances deceive you. I am the Savior. I am the King." This understanding is further reinforced by Revelation 1, which records John's vision of Christ on Patmos. In verse 13, John says, "and among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash

¹⁵ For a more complete summary, see Laetsch, pp. 409-10.

¹⁶ Traditionally, the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:22-27) has also been taken as reflecting the Trinity, due to its three-fold construction (see Paul W. Kuske, Numbers pp. 60-64 and Keil-Delitzsch *The Pentateuch*, vol. III, pp. 40-2). The threefold cry of the angels in Isaiah 6:3 is also traditionally taken as trinitarian.

¹⁷ The Hebrew often uses the construct-genitive construction with the word son to emphasize a quality. The expression a "son of wickedness (belial)" is especially common, as is also "son of (number) years" for age, but there are others. For instance, "son of death" in 2 Samuel 12:5, for "deserving of death" or possibly, "condemned to death."

around his chest." The reference is to Daniel 7:9.

Christ is the center of the Old Testament. We see him in the three types of messianic prophecy. We see him also prefigured in the Mosaic covenant. We see him as the focus of the plan of salvation in all its details in the history of the Old Testament people and we see him in his preincarnate appearances in the pages of the Old Testament. All of this makes clear the truth and the importance of Paul's assertion that everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the encouragement and inspiration of the Scriptures we might have hope.

III. The Old Testament is in complete harmony with the New

The fact that the Old and New Testaments present a single theology means that they present one way of salvation. The Old Testament believer and the New Testament believer both look to Christ for their salvation. It may seem repetitive to assert this point again, but it is all important, especially in view of the forces arrayed against us. Today, the Reformed, the Roman Catholic and the Jewish faiths all misunderstand this point. They all, in one way or another, tend to view the covenant and its demands as somehow enabling the Jewish people to earn their salvation as the children of Abraham. At best, this is mistaken. The most we can say is that *if* the Old Testament Jews would have kept the Mt. Sinai covenant, they would have continued to experience the temporal blessings that God so often attached to it. But God's commands do not imply the ability to fulfill those commands. The Law was just as much a mirror in the Old Testament as it is in the New.

Those who misread the old covenant, imagining that it somehow was a plan of salvation by works, simply do not understand the message of that covenant. St. Paul points to passages like Genesis 15:6 ("Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness") and asserts that there was always only one way of salvation (see Galatians 3:6 and Romans 4:1-4). Even a casual reading of the epistle to the Hebrews shows that the entire Mosaic covenant was a shadow (to use Paul's words) of the reality that Christ would bring, and that as such, it was an imperfect shadow. The writer calls the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant "external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Hebrews 9:10). He makes the point that the blood of sacrificial animals can make a person outwardly clean, but it is only the blood of Christ that can make us spiritually clean (9:13,14).

The principle of Christocentricity demands that we understand the entire Old Testament as pointing to Christ as the one way of salvation. Throughout the Old Testament, we see a clear Law/Gospel tension. Look, for example, in Ezekiel 33, where God points out that Ezekiel is a watchman for the house of Israel. His duty is to warn his people of the coming wrath so that they might avoid it. In that context, God says (v. 11) , "As surely as I live declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they would turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O Israel?" The Lord goes on to underline repentance as the solution to sin. Likewise in Psalms 32 and 51, David clearly portrays the anguish that he feels over sin and his joy in the forgiveness, the salvation, that God has given him. David clearly sets forth the biblical concept of grace when he says, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man *whose sin the LORD does not count against him* and in whose spirit is no deceit" (Ps. 32:1,2). Sin and grace were central to the life of the Old Testament believer. The essence of grace is always the promise of God. That was what Abraham believed, and God credited that faith as righteousness. That was what Habakkuk had in mind when he contrasted the Babylonians in their pride and self worship, with the believer, and said simply, "but the righteous will live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4) That was what David had in mind when he said, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions" (Ps. 51:1) or again when he said, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11,12). The Old Testament believer looked to God's grace, his promise of forgiveness in Christ, for his salvation.

That does not mean, however, that the Old Testament believer necessarily had a New Testament clarity to his understanding. Peter speaks directly to this point, when he says, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets,

who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Peter 1:10,11). The prophets themselves had to "search intently" to understand the content of their message. Peter says not only were they proclaiming the grace of God by the Holy Spirit, but that they were actually pointing to "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." There can be no doubt that prophets looked forward to Christ, and yet they had to carefully search the revelation itself.

Properly understood, we can say that Old Testament revelation was both limited and progressive. It was limited in the sense that it never had the full clarity of the New Testament. Without the gospels, it would be very difficult to *completely* reconcile the child of Isaiah 9 with the King in Zechariah 9 and the Servant in Isaiah 53. Without the New Testament, Genesis 3:15 would definitely assert that the Seed of the Woman, the Savior, was going to crush the enemy, Satan, but how would be unclear. Likewise, the Old Testament covenant clearly taught the need for a real sacrifice to cancel sin, but it lacked the clarity of the New Testament revelation. This is not to say that the Old Testament was insufficient. Abraham's promise consisted primarily in the words, "through him all nations of the earth will be blessed." All Abraham needed was to trust God's promise. Isaiah didn't have to understand completely how the Child, the Prince of Peace, could be the Everlasting Father and the Mighty God. He simply had to trust that it would be.

The revelation is progressive in the same way. When the critics speak of the progressive nature of Israelite religion, they have in mind an evolution from a primitive animism, through a polytheistic phase to an "ethical monotheism." That is not what we mean. Rather, the Old Testament revelation is progressive in that Abraham didn't have any of the Bible. Without a doubt, he had the revelation that God had given him personally, and very possibly an oral recounting of the promise to Adam, but not much more. The patriarchs had everything they had learned from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, including the Shiloh prophecy (Genesis 49:8-12), and that had to be sufficient. Moses wrote five books, Joshua clearly comes shortly thereafter, and Judges somewhat after that. Yet, in his infinite wisdom, God did not ordain that the complete text of the Scriptures drop from heaven already written. Thus, over the centuries, little by little, God clarified his testimony about the coming Christ. Again, for the Old Testament believer, what was important was faith in what he knew, not what he didn't know.

Sometimes it is said that it is possible that God revealed more to Abraham or to Elijah or to the school of the prophets than is written down for us, and this amplified and clarified what was lacking. That is certainly possible, but it is only speculation. We do know that God gave the Old Testament over a period of centuries. In these writings, we can trace the progression of his revelation.

The basic point to be made is that fulfillment is clearer than prophecy, or as Paul said, the Old Testament contained a shadow, in Christ we have the fulfillment. Not that there is anything inherently imperfect in God's revelation, but in this life, we will never have the full picture of God. Luke 2 makes Isaiah 9 so much clearer, but Isaiah 9 was understandable -- if the reader "searched intently and with the greatest care." The Trinity may not be as clear in the Old Testament as it is in the New, but there is nothing in the Old Testament that rules it out and much that hints at it. The Old Testament anticipates the doctrines of the New; the New Testament clarifies the teaching of the Old.

In another sense, it can also be said that the Old Testament clarifies the New. We cannot come to a complete understanding of the New Testament until we are thoroughly acquainted with the Old. We would never know why John called Jesus "the Lamb of God" if we were ignorant of the sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant. In accordance with God's design, Christ was born in Bethlehem in Judea, to a people living under the Old Testament covenant. That is crucial to understanding the life and times of Christ. As St. Paul put it, "he was born under the Law to redeem those under the Law" (Galatians 4:4). John and Peter and Caiaphas and even Herod all lived in a culture that lived and breathed the Old Testament. Even Pilate is easier to understand if we consider that he was a gentile ruling the Jewish people, probably without a perfect understanding of all their strange laws and seemingly senseless prohibitions and insistence on their ancient traditions.

The Gospels aren't the only portion of Scripture that is clarified by the Old Testament. Who could read

and understand the book of Hebrews with no knowledge of the Mosaic Covenant? What sense would Romans or Galatians make, if we knew little or nothing of the Law? Certainly the basic thoughts would be clear, but much of the detail would escape us. The same could be said of Colossians, of James, of both epistles of Peter and certainly of Revelation. Paul was, finally, a Jew, as were all the apostles, and he was writing to a people whose only Scripture was the Old Testament. Hence, all the Epistles reflect the Old Testament. We cannot ignore the Old Testament, if we hope to ever master the New Testament revelation.

At times, it is asserted that the New Testament misuses or misquotes the Old. It is asserted that the quotations are "allegorized" or even altered to inject a New Testament meaning into them. This is simply not true, as a careful study of the Old and New Testament texts will show. It should be noted that very often the basis for such a remark is a desire to "prove" the assumption that God does not intervene in his creation, therefore the inspiration of the Scriptures (to say nothing of predictive prophecy) is, in and of itself, impossible. Hence, all messianic prophecies are reinterpreted to somehow refer to a hope of an improvement in Israel's condition, or possibly to a very vague, ill-defined messianic hope that really only evolved during the exile (according to the critics) and was adopted by the early Christian Church, and then adapted to their particular theology and preaching.

An example of this type of thinking is found in the ELCA dogmatics text, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. II pp. 488-491, where the author, Hans Schwarz, argues for a development of the concept of the Messiah. He says, "... the Old Testament does not know of a person, called Messiah, who is to bring about the eschatological salvation. Yet in the Old Testament the hope is already present for a Godprovided figure who will usher in the [ultimate salvation]." Schwarz traces the supposed development of the "figure" from a "retrospective glorification of David and the promise that was given to him through Nathan." This "figure" will restore the Davidic kingdom and glory. Schwarz postulates a development at the time of Isaiah (really, First Isaiah in his thinking) in which the Davidic kingdom will encompass the whole earth and all of nature. He asserts that the promises of Isaiah and Micah focus on a return from exile and "messianic peace and the greatness of the kingdom." After the exile, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are forced to reinterpret this hope in terms of rebuilding the temple, since this new Davidic kingdom has not come. Again, the hope is misplaced, in that Zerubbabel is thought to be the Messiah, and he does not renew the Davidic kingdom. The disappointment that he never becomes king leads to the description of the suffering servant in "Second Isaiah." Finally in the intertestamental period (to which the author attributes Daniel) the concept of the Messiah as it is held in the New Testament slowly emerges. All of this is in direct contradiction to the New Testament testimony. Such unbelief needs only be answered with the bare text of Scripture, and will not concern us here.

We will, however, take a moment to review the ways in which the New Testament quotes the Old. Before examining the ways, we should note that at least some of the difficulties that we face are primarily ones of translation between the Old and New Testament texts. The Old Testament was, of course, written primarily in Hebrew with certain sections in Aramaic. The New Testament was written entirely in Greek (although there are those who argue that Matthew was written in a now lost Aramaic version). The New Testament writers, therefore, faced the parallel difficulty that we sometimes face: rendering the text of the Scriptures in the language that people understand, as opposed to the original. They generally solved the problem in one of three ways: they translated from the Hebrew or Aramaic Scriptures directly; or they used the Septuagint; or they paraphrased the verse to reflect the sense, but not the exact wording of the reference they had in mind.

The practice sometimes employed by the New Testament writers of using their own translation of the Hebrew Scriptures is, of course, the easiest for us to understand. For this reason, their translation does not necessarily reflect the Greek of the Septuagint or other Greek translations of the Old Testament. It should also be noted that sometimes a "double translation" (i.e., Hebrew/Aramaic to Greek and then Greek to English, Spanish, German or some other modern language) may result in some inconsistency between the Old Testament and the New Testament reference in the modern language. This reflects the fact that Greek and Hebrew are very different languages whose vocabularies have different semantic values and whose grammar functions very differently, and is not an indication of "inconsistencies" or "contradictions" in the biblical text. The truth is that in any given language, almost anything can be translated in several different ways in almost any other language.

Still, under ordinary circumstances, a direct translation from the Hebrew should not present great difficulties for us.

Occasionally, we may be troubled by a discrepancy between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text, however. The Septuagint was originally prepared as a Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek. It appears to have been prepared between c. 250 B.C. and 150 B.C. by a variety of translators, some more competent than others. Initially, it was the favored translation of the Greek-speaking Jews, even in Palestine, but over time it was rejected by them because it did not agree fully with the Hebrew text and because it was accepted by the Christian Church as their official Bible (since the majority of the Christian Church was Greek speaking, especially after the first century). It was replaced by a variety of other translations (see Menahem Mansoor, *Jewish History and Thought: An Introduction* pp. 52-54). Since the Septuagint was, in fact, the accepted translation of the Old Testament during the first century, it is not unusual to find it quoted by the New Testament writers, even when it does not perfectly agree with the Hebrew or Aramaic text. This does not mean that the writers were either unaware of the differences or that they endorsed sloppy exegesis. Rather, they used the Bible as the people knew it, and if there were no great difficulties, they cited the accepted text. An example is found in Matthew 3:4, where Isaiah 40:3 is cited thus, "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" The Hebrew text reads, "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'"¹⁸ The primary differences between the two versions of the passage are the replacement of the Tetragrammaton in the Septuagint with the term *kurios* "Lord," in accord with Jewish tradition, and the fact that the Hebrew has the singular, relatively specific word "highway" which the Greek renders with the plural, more general "Paths."¹⁹ The differences are relatively minor, and do not in any way change the sense of the passage. Thus Matthew could quote it as it was known to the people without doing violence to its content.

In Matthew 2:6, we have an example of an ad sensum quotation of Micah 5:2. A comparison of the two verses is somewhat revealing:

Matthew

But you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among
the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.

Micah

But you Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among
the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me one
who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."

The first thing that one notices is that the original verse is somewhat longer, adding the phrase "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." This phrase is significant theologically, but its absence does not indicate an implicit denial on the part of the evangelist. Anytime we quote another writing, we must make decisions about how much to include and to exclude. Matthew, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, omits this phrase, although it certainly has value for us. The expression "Bethlehem Ephrathah" in the Hebrew text differentiates between the city near Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Zebulun, so Matthew's rendering "Bethlehem in Judah" catches the sense of the original. Today, we might do something like this: "But you Bethlehem [in the land of Judah] ... " Unfortunately, the original Hebrew and Greek texts were completely lacking in punctuation. If they didn't use periods, we can't reasonably expect parentheses.

At first glance, the second and third clauses are somewhat more problematic. The concessive idea is the crux, which is evident if we compare the key phrases of Micah ("though you are small..."/"out of you will come...") with the key phrases of Matthew ("are by no means least..."/"for out of you will come..."). In both

¹⁸ Of course, there is no punctuation in either the original Hebrew or Greek texts (although the texts we use today generally have punctuation inserted by the editors), and any punctuation, including quotation marks, etc., is a matter of interpretation and open to question. Fortunately, language is such that the intended punctuation is usually quite obvious.

¹⁹ The Septuagint does, in fact, include the expression "for our God" which Matthew replaces with "him."

instances, the content is the same. Bethlehem was a small, politically unimportant place, and both versions assert that although that was true, it was of central significance to the plan of salvation. Likewise, the difference between "shepherd" (Matthew) and "ruler" (Micah) is easily explained. First of all, the prophets often call the kings of Israel shepherds (for example Ezekiel 34), so from a Jewish perspective, being a shepherd is a paraphrase of being a ruler. More importantly, in the Hebrew version, two verses after our text, Micah himself refers to the coming ruler as a shepherd. Matthew merely supplied a concept that is already present in the context of the original quote. The New Testament does indeed cite this verse quite freely, but it in no way changes its meaning.

This is important for us to realize. In our society, we accept that putting quotes around a statement means that we are getting word for word what the original stated, unless otherwise indicated. But that is not a fair comparison to what is actually happening. Often (although not always) the point of the writer is that the sense of his statement is the sense of the Old Testament verse that he has in mind, especially when he knows that his audience is familiar with the text and does not need a word for word quote. Occasionally, the writers are extremely careful to point out exact wording of Old Testament passages, but more often they are doing what we so often do in our preaching and witnessing: they are summarizing or explaining a very well known verse. How many times don't we say, "the Bible says the wages of sin is hell" or "the wages of sin is eternal death in hell forever" when we know perfectly well that Romans 6:23 says simply, "the wages of sin is death?" Are we misquoting the Scriptures? Not at all! We are simply given the meaning of the verse in its context. Rather than recite the entire sixth chapter of Romans, we summarize it, using the well known verse as the memory key. This is not to say that the writers somehow erred. In fact, it is to say the opposite. The writers rather used the inspired record, again under the inspiration of the Spirit, in a very natural way, but never do they change the meaning of any verse of the Old Testament.

Francis Pieper discusses this question at some length in the first volume of his *Christian Dogmatics* (pp. 247-251). He observes that "it is surprising to note the phenomenon, at first somewhat disturbing, that the words expressly quoted as the words of the Old Testament by the clauses 'as it is written,' 'as the Scripture hath said' frequently depart in form, and that quite considerably, from the exact reading in the Old Testament." Pieper goes on to examine the case of the Epistle to the Romans. He counts forty-seven Old Testament quotations, "only twenty-four of which can be classified as literal." After dismissing several possible explanations that, in the end, deny the word for word inspiration of the Scriptures, Pieper asserts, "There is but one explanation for this often bold manner of quoting the wording of the Old Testament in the New Testament." His explanation is, quite simply, the Old Testament is the Word of God, not the Word of Man. The Holy Spirit is speaking, and he possesses a freedom that you and I do not have. He is free to quote himself as he wishes, in the interest of the church. Manifestly, Pieper does not intend for us to understand by this that somehow the Holy Spirit altered the meaning of what he said in the past, as if the Scriptures were some kind of shell game, with God challenging us to find the right meaning among several hidden under shells. Rather, the Holy Spirit is free to clarify his own wording in the New Testament context. A careful examination will show that in every instance, the original meaning of the Old Testament verse is preserved in the New Testament citation, even if the reference is not a "quote" in the twentieth century usage of the term. Nowhere does the Holy Spirit bind himself to twentieth century convention, and we dare not either.

It is true that at times we struggle to understand the usage that the New Testament writers make of the Old. At first it may be difficult to understand why St. Paul make such prominent usage of Habakkuk 2:4b ("the righteous will live by his faith") in view of its immediate context. But a careful examination of that same context reveals that the point in Habakkuk is the difference in attitude between the believing child of God who will suffer through the Babylonian captivity trusting in the LORD, and the arrogant, Babylonians, who worship themselves and their own strength. With this in mind, we see that St. Paul is making a broad application of the truth that the Jews who tried to save themselves were no better off than those Babylonians who worshipped their own military might. Likewise, we would be no better off if we tried to justify ourselves before God. The context of Habakkuk 2:4 is essential for understanding the New Testament usage of the passage. This is generally true.

Another problem that sometimes is cited is the fact that occasionally New Testament writers will cite several different verses from several different books under one heading. Romans 3:10-18 gives an example. In verse 8 St. Paul says simply "as it is written" and proceeds to assemble a series of references into what appears to us to be one long quotation including verses from Psalms 5, 10, 14, 36, 51, 53, and 140, as well as Ecclesiastes 7 and Isaiah 59. It should be noted, however, that St. Paul never read the MLA style sheet, and nowhere claims that all of these verses are from the same source. Other problematic verses include Mark 1:2-3 where the evangelist cites Isaiah and then proceeds to append a quotation from Malachi to the Isaiah quote, and Matthew 2:23, which appears to be a play on words (see, Joh. Ylvisaker, *The Gospels: Synopsis, Harmony, Explanatory Notes*, p. 102, as well as Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book 2, chapter 9, p. 154, for a brief explanation.)

Again, addressing all the possible difficulties one may encounter in the Bible is outside our scope, but we must understand the realities that went into the writing of the New Testament. It can be quite disconcerting to discover that there are differences between the quotations in the New Testament and the actual text of the Old. However, that does not mean that the two versions are contradictory. It means rather that we need to make a careful study of what the differences are and why they are there. Generally, that will lead us to a better understanding of the context of both the quote and the original.

IV. The Old Testament has application to the life of the New Testament believer.

Someone still might be tempted to dismiss the Old Testament as not having any value for the New Testament *believer*. Even more likely in our circles, we might be tempted to feel that there simply isn't time to wade through all the details and to explain all that Jewish ceremony and symbolism to a modern audience with a television attention span. We might long for the days of Luther or Walther in which a pastor could preach on an Old Testament text at length without fear of "losing" his people. But neglecting the Old Testament would do both God's Word and God's people a disservice. It might be easier to use the Old Testament sparingly, if at all, but God's people deserve the whole counsel of God. Is it possible to be faithful to our calling and our people if we don't teach and preach on three-fifths of God's revelation to us?

The truth is that the Old Testament has much to say to the New Testament believer. If that were not so, then Paul and Peter and Christ would not have quoted and alluded to it so frequently. The Holy Spirit has embedded the Old Testament in the mosaic of the New. Without an understanding of the Old, we lose much of the New.

This is not to say that it is sufficient to study only those passages which are quoted in the New Testament. Although there are literally hundreds of Old Testament quotations and allusions, the value of the Old Testament for the New Testament believer is not limited to these quotations and allusions. When we carefully study and understand the Old Testament, it is engaging reading. In the historical sections, again and again we see human nature in conflict with the divine in ways that more than echo the twentieth century. Again and again we see human weakness triumphing over faith, and God triumphing over human weakness. The patriarchs, the "heroes of faith," at times rise to inspiring heights and at times struggle desperately with their sin. All of this has direct application to the life of the Christian today.

The Old Testament also is crucial in establishing points of doctrine. You may find that somewhat surprising, but it is true. Without the history of the fall into sin and God's promised salvation, what sense could we make of the New Testament? Or think of the doctrinal significance of creation or of Moses' assertion, "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one God" (Deuteronomy. 6:4). Without the summary of the Law as love for God and for our neighbor, how complete would our understanding of God's will be? The Psalms are rich in doctrinal assertions. Psalm 19:1 reminds us again of the natural knowledge of God, and Psalms 51 and 32 of the essential qualities of God's grace. It is true the New Testament is a more clear exposition of doctrine than the Old, but it is also true that without the Old Testament background, the New Testament would have to be far longer in order to accomplish that clarity.

The Bible is a truly remarkable work. It is God's revelation of himself to us for all time. The largest

portion of that revelation was written before Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. God speaks to us through that Old Testament Word. As pastors, as men called by God to proclaim the Gospel, we dare not neglect the largest part of his Word.

To return to our starting point, St. Paul reminds us that "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Hope is the point of the gospel. Peter says that by faith we have a new birth into a living hope and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (1 Peter 1:3,4). We have this hope, as he puts it, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Christian hope is eschatological, it looks forward to heaven. Christian hope is also soteriological, it looks back always to our justification and our reconciliation with God on the basis of Christ's sacrifices, as Romans 5 so clearly teaches when it begins, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." Paul's point very clearly is that this faith and hope is what strengthens us to face suffering and trial for the cross of Christ.

Christian hope is the purpose of the Old Testament. That's why God gave it, and to fail to proclaim it in all its fullness is to deny Christians the comfort of God's Word. Any Christian can see the obvious benefit from words like Isaiah 53:4-6. But every Christian also benefits from the story of Esther and the poetry of Lamentations and the prophecies of doom in Amos and Jeremiah. Every Christian needs the full counsel of God, and every word of the Old Testament was written to teach us so that we might better understand the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ fulfilled in the New Testament, but clearly portrayed and prepared for by the Old.

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