

# The Big Picture of Scripture

## Lesson 2: Christ is the Interpreter and Interpretation of the Old Testament

### I. Recap

- A. The meaning of the entire universe is found in the *gospel* of Jesus Christ, Col 1.16; Jn 1.1-3, 14, 18. The gospel is God's forethought and blueprint for creation. When God created *Adam* in the *Garden in fellowship with Himself*, He was declaring the End from the beginning. In other words, if we can imagine God drawing up plans for the universe before He created it, and if we could examine these plans, we wouldn't see Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but Jesus Christ in the gospel.
- B. That means everything in the OT before Christ finds its meaning in Him. The OT can only be understood in its relationship to the gospel-event of the person and work of Jesus because the OT is *God's word about Christ in preparation for Christ*, Lk 24.25-27, 44-47.
- C. The Christ of the NT is the determinative key and light by which the OT is to be understood and interpreted because *Christ* is God's last Word to us, Heb 1.1-2, *Christ* is the end of all the saving acts of God in Israel's history, Rom 1.1-4; Lk 3.21-38, *Christ* fulfills all OT prophecy, Acts 3.11-26; 1Pet 1.10-11, and *Christ* fulfills all God's promises, 2Cor 1.20.

### II. Hence the NT not only *interprets* the OT but definitively teaches us *how* to interpret it.

- A. If Jesus gives the OT meaning then we need the OT to understand what He says about Himself, Mt 26.24; Jn 8.58; 13.18; 15.25; 17.12. Jesus drives us back to the OT to examine it with *Christian eyes*, teaching us that it all leads back to Him. The first question to ask of the OT, then, is not "How does it apply to me?" but rather, "How does it point to Christ?"
- B. \*In doing biblical theology, we don't start at Genesis 1 and work our way forward until we discover where it's all leading. Rather, we begin with Christ, who directs us to read the OT in light of the gospel. Thus, the gospel interprets the OT by showing us its goal and meaning while the OT increases our understanding of the gospel by showing us what Christ fulfills.
  - 1. A proper study of the OT begins with the gospel and goes back to every point in the OT with the prior knowledge that it's a book about Christ that finds its goal in Christ, and then follows the progress of revelation until it leads us to its fulfillment in the gospel.
- C. This is why a character study approach to the OT (e.g., the life of Joseph, the of Moses, the life of Elijah, etc.) can't be the end-all of OT study. It's good as far as it goes, but if the characters are no more than examples for us, then we've missed the whole point of the history of salvation.
  - 1. The unifying theme of biblical history is *Christ* and we haven't reached the primary meaning of a Bible passage or Bible character if we haven't connected it to Christ, because our primary concern should be the acts of God, not the acts of human characters. God is the primary Actor in salvation history, not man, Isa 46.8-11; Eph 1.11-12.
  - 2. Understanding this enables us to reckon upon the uniqueness of the historical and theological significance of the characters and events in the narrative and not think of them merely as moral examples.
  - 3. *For example*, does God appearing to Jacob in a dream teach us to look for God to reveal Himself to us in our dreams? How does the gospel illuminate what God is doing in Gen 28? Is it true that if God took care of baby Moses in Ex 2, He'll take care of us? How does the gospel show us how to interpret that event? Is David meant to serve as an example of how to slay the giants in our own lives? How does the gospel tell us that we're supposed to identify with the soldiers on the sidelines instead of with David? How does the gospel tell us that

David's actions are uniquely historical and theological because they're uniquely *Christological*?

4. If we're to avoid arbitrary interpretations of the OT, we need some understanding of what governs the right approach to the *meaning* of the Bible. We need some understanding of what unifies the 66 books and 2 testaments of the Bible as the self-revelation of God.
5. The *gospel* is that unifying message. The *gospel* is the *fixed point of reference in history* for the understanding of the whole range of biblical revelation from creation to new creation.
  - a) Every text must not only be related to its immediate context but to the entire plan of redemption revealed in the entire Bible. Since the OT is God's Word about Christ, then the *gospel-event of Christ* teaches us that the real context of any Bible text is the whole Bible. Every text serves the purpose of the entire text: to reveal the person and work of Jesus Christ, who restores and regenerates all things, Col 1.15-17; Eph 1.9-10.
  - b) Bible study, especially the study of the OT, can't be approached with a blank slate. It must be approached with a fixed set of *gospel* presuppositions and *gospel* doctrines that come to us from God's finished revelation in Christ because He's *the Word of God* and therefore the Mediator of *all God's Word* to us, Jn 1.1-2, 14, 18.
6. This raises another important point. Historical events don't interpret themselves. Together they make up the medium of God's *progressive revelation* and the gospel event is simply the occurrence in history of something that was long since revealed.
  - a) According to the NT, Jesus is *the Word* that explains all other words. He comes to fulfill what was promised and, in doing so, shows that the promises were *all* but shadows of the fulfillment that He is.
  - b) That means it's not at all self-evident how any given OT promise or type will be fulfilled. Are we looking for another Jewish Temple to be built in Jerusalem? Are we looking for a plot of land in the Middle East? Are we looking for a return to sacrifices under an enthroned descendant of David? If Christ is the end-goal who gives meaning to all that came before Him, then Christ *has revealed in Himself* what *fulfillment* of the OT looks like. *He* is the revelation of God shadowed forth in the OT, Jn 5.39; Col 2.17; Heb 1.1-4; 10.1-7.

III. More than that, God's revelation in Christ gives us His interpretation of *every fact in existence*.

- A. Jesus Christ in His life, death, and resurrection is *the* fixed point of reference for the understanding of *the whole of reality*. Christ is God's End-point which determines the purpose of creation *and* the details of redemptive history.
- B. Jesus doesn't simply fulfill history, *He is* the final and fullest revelation of what history is all about. In Christ, God reserves His greatest revelation until the point of fulfillment because Christ is the most important and fullest revelation of all, 1Jn 3.2.
- C. This means that the form and content of the fulfillment far exceeds the form and content of the promises themselves. The very act of fulfilling the OT promises is itself the most important revelation of all. And one aspect of this final revelation in Christ is to make clear that it does in fact fulfill the expectations, Mk 1.14-15. This is not a self-evident fact. It wasn't self-evident that Jesus was the fulfillment of the OT promises, Jn 1.46; 6.42. Christ had to reveal this, Jn 1.47-51; Mt 16.15-17; 11.25-28; Lk 24.25-27.
- D. This means the NT takes priority over the OT and interprets it. Jesus Himself is the Word that explains all other words; and in Him we learn that the OT is fulfilled, not *literally*, but *Christologically*. Thus, a method of interpretation that demands the OT promises be fulfilled literally doesn't fit with the biblical evidence.