



Jesus in the Old Testament

Lesson 5

We've looked at the divinity, humanity, and incarnation of Christ. Now we are asking an important question: how does the Old Testament present and prepare the way for Jesus? Shortly after the resurrection, Jesus joined a couple of his disciples on a journey and struck up a conversation with them. They didn't realize who they were talking to and shared their grief over the events of the last few days. Jesus' response was to rebuke them for their unbelief and for not realizing that what had happened was necessary for God's plan – suffering followed by glory. Then we read a tantalizing statement: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Many a theologian has longed to overhear that conversation. What exactly did Jesus say? How did he connect go about this procedure? The Old Testament accounts for almost 2/3 of our Bible. That's a lot of material to work through, and somehow it points forward to Jesus. The question we will seek to answer in this lesson is how that works.

A lesson like this could easily become a whole series in and of itself. Indeed, one could take a lifetime chasing down some of the ideas we are putting forward in this lesson. For this reason, we will seek only to hit the highlights. The goal is to give you

categories to think about that will be helpful in the coming years as you seek to study Scripture.

What are some ways you can think of that the Old Testament points to Jesus?

The church for many years solved this problem through allegorization. An allegory takes a straightforward account and sees hidden and ultimately unrelated meanings embedded within. Thus, the story of creation is really a story about

I. The Prophecies of the Old Testament point forward to Jesus.

The most obvious category are the many, many prophecies concerning Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and enthronement. While this is an obvious place to begin, this category should not be overlooked as we think about the testimony of the Old Testament to Jesus.

A. Jesus' coming was prophesied (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14; Malachi 3:1).

What prophecies foretold the coming of Christ?

Three very clear Old Testament prophecies related to the coming of Christ include the virgin birth, the city wherein Christ would be born, and the fact that one would come who would prepare his way. All of these prophecies were fulfilled as the first few chapters of each of the gospels make clear (although Mark and John don't have infancy narratives, they do begin by describing the work of John the Baptist).

B. Jesus' death was prophesied (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22).

What prophecies foretold the death of Christ?

Two chapters in particular give us a strong glimpse at what the death of the Davidic Messiah would mean. The first one most believers are familiar with, and for good reason. Perhaps no other Old Testament passage clearly describes the atoning work of Christ on the cross than Isaiah 53. Written hundreds of years before Christ, this ancient poem describes the work of God's suffering servant who bears the penalty of the sins of others.

Another important and powerful Scriptural reference is Psalm 22. This psalm, originally relaying the words of David came to be applied to the ultimate Son of David with a shocking degree of accuracy. Not only did Christ call out the opening words of this Psalm on the cross, but other details throughout the psalm (casting lots for garments, pierced hands and feet) show that ultimately it was about Jesus.

C. Jesus' exaltation was prophesied (Numbers 24:17; Psalm 110:1).

What prophecies foretold the exaltation of Christ?

Ancient Jews would have been expecting a coming, conquering, reigning king when the Messiah showed up, and they would have thought that for good reason. The Old Testament predicts that the Christ will reign and rule over the nations. Balaam, the prophet for hire who still found himself blessing Israel, prophesied in the Spirit

that a great ruler would arise from Israel. Psalm 110 predicted that God would give the ultimate Davidic heir a kingdom in which all of his enemies would be defeated. These passages are just two among many more that predict the rise and reign of the Messiah.

II. The Promises of the Old Testament point forward to Jesus.

God made a lot of promises to a lot of people. Over and over he gave his Word that there were certain things he intended to accomplish. By the time we get to the end of the Old Testament, we are left perplexed as to whether or not God will accomplish all that he said he would. What we find in the New Testament is that God had a plan to fulfill every promise he made, and that plan was Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

[In a previous series, we worked through many of these passages before (see The Big Picture: A Study in Biblical Themes, <https://www.singlefocusindy.org/bigpicture.html>). For this reason, we will touch on these complicated sections more briefly]

A. The promise made in the garden (Genesis 3:15).

After the initial fall, God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent. What exactly this meant would become clearer over time, but in this simple promise God gave hope for humanity that the evil introduced into our world by the serpent would one day be undone by a very unique person.

B. The promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; cf 17:21).

Later, the seed of the woman became narrower. God takes one individual in a polytheistic culture and promises to bless him. God tells Abraham that there will be an offspring, a land, and a blessing to and through him for all the world. How exactly will this take place? The story of Abraham, as many people are aware, is the story of how he will get this promised seed which will inherit the land and through whom all the world will be blessed. By the end of the story, Abraham dies having had a son and watching him marry. But then the question remains, when will the rest of this promise come true?

C. The promise made to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Finally, God comes to a descendant of Abraham, a king named David, and narrows this seed promise one last time. From David will come an offspring, a Son, who will have an everlasting kingdom. We are told that his reign will never end and we are later informed that the whole world will in fact be ruled by him.

Through one person God had promised to bring forth a blessing for the nations, a mighty ruler to lead them, and one who can destroy what Satan has done. That's a lot for one person to do!

These are simply some of the larger promises that we have been following. God made many promises to many people, and some of those have yet to come true.

What other promises do we read of in the Old Testament that will ultimately be fulfilled in Christ? (cf Hebrews 11:39-40)?

III. The Patterns of the Old Testament point forward to Jesus.

Often in our New Testament we will read the phrase “that it may be fulfilled which was spoken” followed by a quote from the Old Testament. This seems simple enough, the Old Testament predicted the Messiah would do such and such, and he did it. Simple, right? Until you look that passage up and realize that wasn’t necessarily what the original writer meant. So what’s going on? Is the New Testament reading the Old Testament as allegory?

What we have here is something scholars call “typology.” Typology is when certain patterns and pictures in the Old Testament are seen as pointing the way forward to Jesus. The New Testament makes these connections in several different ways. Here are a few examples.

A. Jesus is pictured as a better sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-10).

In Hebrews, Jesus is seen as the true sacrifice that can bring ultimate cleansing from sin. The previous sacrifices were a shadow, but now Jesus is the true reality to which the previous sacrifices pointed.

B. Jesus is pictured as the ultimate son of David (Psalm 22).

As we saw above, God promised David a son that would rule forever, and in Psalm 22 we find a moving picture of David undergoing intense suffering. This picture of the suffering Davidic figure was, as we also saw above, applied directly to Jesus. Jesus is the greater than

Solomon, the greater son of David that rules better than the best king of Israel.

C. Jesus is pictured as a new Melchizedek (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 7:3).

Melchizedek is a fascinating Old Testament figure about whom very little is said. He is, however, both a king and a priest, and he is the only believing king-priest we have until Jesus. For this reason, a very important Old Testament Psalm connects the kingship with the priesthood by predicting that a new Melchizedek would arise who would both rule and be high priest. This enigmatic Psalm pointed the way to Jesus, and is used in the New Testament more than another Old Testament passage ().

Can you think of other Old Testament examples of patterns or pictures that represent the life, ministry, and death of Jesus?

IV. The Problems of the Old Testament point forward to Jesus.

Finally, as we read through our Old Testament, we find ourselves disappointed over and over again by the problems being faced by God's people. We find the wickedness of man to be great and the heroes of the faith to be deeply flawed people. We leave the Old Testament feeling somewhat empty, excited about the promises of God but wondering what he's going to do to ultimately fix these problems people continue to find themselves in. The answer to all of these problems is, once again, in Jesus.

A. The need for a perfect prophet.

What is a prophet supposed to do?

Prophets represented God to the people. They go to people and bring fresh messages from the Lord or remind people of what God has already said. They seek to correct the erring ways of the people.

What problems did the Old Testament prophets run into?

Nobody listened to them! For the most part, the prophets were ignored and their messages, while true, were incomplete. Hebrews 1:1 describes how prophecy used to be partial, confusing, incomplete.

How is Jesus a better prophet?

Jesus is the prophet who brings us God's final message. God has spoken definitively through the life and work of Jesus, and Jesus has perfectly revealed to us the heart and character and mind of the Father. As a result, the message of Jesus has gone around the world bringing countless multitudes to saving faith in Christ!

B. The need for a perfect priest (Hebrews 10:1, 12).

What is a priest supposed to do?

Priests go before God on behalf of the people. They offer sacrifices to help people make right their sin before God.

What problems did the Old Testament priests run into?

The sacrifices were never enough. Every year, countless animals were slaughtered and yet next year just as many sacrifices would need to be made. The priest could provide a temporary relief, but they were unable to truly deal with the sin problem.

How is Jesus a better priest?

Jesus offers the final sacrifice that deals with the sin problem once and for all.

C. The need for a perfect king.

What is a king supposed to do?

Kings lead the people. Kings were supposed to lead the people in following God's laws, establishing his righteousness as the standard for everyone.

What problems did the Old Testament kings run into?

The Old Testament kings failed in bringing righteousness to the land. They neither followed the Lord with all their heart nor led their people in doing so.

How is Jesus a better king?

Jesus is the King who will reign in true justice and righteousness. He will set up a kingdom that will never be torn down.

For many years, Christians have struggled with how the Old and New Testament are connected, specifically what the Old Testament has to say about the central character of the Bible: Jesus. The prophecies directly related to Jesus and the promises he fulfills make sense, but what beyond that? Many felt the need to find a hidden reference to Jesus on every page. Did wood get mentioned in that verse? It must be really talking about the cross. A donkey was mentioned. Jesus rode into town on a donkey. This passage is really about Jesus. While often imaginative, this method can get out of control pretty quickly.

But when we step back and look at the big picture, things become a little clearer. We do see divinely intended patterns

and pictures that show us what Jesus will be like and what he will do. We also see problems that no one seems to be able to fix, from corrupt kings to overworked priests to ignored prophets. The whole story of the Old Testament is preparing us for the coming of Jesus in many ways, and the more you read with this type of a lens, the more you will come to see and cherish Jesus in the Old Testament.