

060305
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Understanding The Old Testament

I want to begin a series today that is going to take us back into the Old Testament, where we will be using the stories of God's dealing with Israel to come to a greater understanding of the reality of being in Christ.

Most of you have heard me say this like a broken record, but all of the Old Testament has one single purpose. Jason, how can you make it so simple? Because it is that simple and I'm not going to argue with you. I'm not saying that I understand it all. Or that it has become simple to my pea-brain. I am simply saying that it has one specific function. And that function is exactly what it is called – it is a testament. A testimony. It testifies of something.

All of the Old testament testifies of one single thing. And that thing is a Person. And that person is Christ. I have that on good authority.

Joh 5:39 You search the Scriptures, for you think in them you have everlasting life. And **they are the ones that testify of Me.** **Joh 5:40** And you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

Luk 24:27 And beginning from Moses, and from all the prophets, He explained to them the things about Himself in **all the Scriptures.**

And not only here, but several times in the book of Acts, the apostles clearly testify that all of the Law, Prophets, and Writings have born witness to what they are seeing – that is Christ's resurrected life, the gift of the indwelling Spirit of God – being given to men.

I remember when I once was reading from a book by the famous English preacher Charles Spurgeon and he said "if you have not found Jesus in every page of the Old Testament, go back and read it again.". I remember thinking that was a neat thing to say, but I had no idea what he was talking about.

I knew of a 20 or 30 Scriptures that seemed to be pointing to Christ. You know, Isaiah 53 – "punished for our transgressions", Psalm 22 "pierced his hands and his feet". And some others speaking of His virgin birth, his ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, how they ripped out his beard and rolled dice for his clothing.

But you see, my great misunderstanding in all of this was that I was looking for Old Testament Scriptures to be pointing to Jesus the Nazarene. Frankly, because I only knew Him according to the flesh (that is, as the Nazarene who lived in Palestine, and not the resurrected Son who lives in me)...because I only knew Him that way, I was looking for the testimony of Him in the manner in which I knew Him. Is that clear?

But you can't really see the testimony of Him in the Old Testament, if you don't know Him in the manner He is being testified about.

Let me try to explain that with a weird analogy. Lets say you are a caterpillar, and you go to the library to get a book on caterpillars. You pick one up and head back home to read it. Well, you got a book on caterpillars, but 98% of the book is about this weird thing called a butterfly. You don't even know what that is. I thought this book was about caterpillars! So you flip through it looking for the 2% that talks about the caterpillar stage, because frankly....you thought that's what this book is supposed to be about! That's the part that you can relate to. That's the part that you can understand. As for this butterfly stuff...who knows what that's all about.

The Old Testament is exactly like that. The entire book is about Christ, but very little is about Christ the caterpillar (if you'll allow me to refer to his time in the flesh in that way). Very little of it is about the life of the Nazarene in Palestine. And 99% of it is about the resurrected life of Christ in the soul of man. A resurrected spiritual life that has given birth to Zion. That has brought about a new creation. That has been the dawning of a great light. That has brought about an eternal dwelling place of the Lord.

And that is what the Law and the Prophets testify to – if you are able to hear it. If you have seen the reality in Him, then you'll recognize the testimony.

A very small fraction of the Old Testament is a testimony of the historical Son of Man. Nearly all of it is a testimony of the present reality of being IN HIM, growing up in Him, being conformed to His death, reigning in His life, coming into your eternal purpose in Him.

So its confusing if you're looking for the caterpillar section in a book that is really on butterflies. And you really don't understand most of it because it doesn't really testify to Christ the caterpillar – because His caterpillar stage was just a temporary means to an end. It was a means to take all of us into one giant cocoon and bring us out into His butterfly.

That sounds a little weird, but all that I'm trying to say is that you often can't understand what is being talked about, because its not really testifying to Christ the caterpillar, or you the caterpillar - You the "adamite". You're reading about wings and colors and flying...and its confusing because you know you're really just kinda brown and frumpy.

I remember once when I was maybe 20 years old I went to a Christian bookstore and I bought a book called "finding Jesus in the Old Testament"...or something like that. And basically it was picking out this or that story or phrase that talked about his earthly life. I remember being glad that there wasn't like 7 references to Him, there was more like 40 or 50. But, you see....there are countless thousands, millions, of testimonies of the reality of Christ as the resurrection. As the way, the truth, the life. And us in Him, Him in us, as a kingdom, an inheritance, a city, a spouse, a new creation, etc.

And the Old Testament is the testimony of Christ in this way. And that's the testimony of the cross, yes!...but not just the crucifixion. Not just a foretelling of an event. It all speaks of the cross. That's absolutely true. But not just the historical story. But the testifying to our death in Him, our burial in Him, and His resurrected life in us. That is really what all of the Old Testament points to – the reality of the cross. Again....NOT THE EVENT! Not just the event. But the eternal purpose of God

found in our death with Him, our burial, and now his resurrected life in us, His body. The body which we are. The verse that is on our bulletin every week "the church which is his body, the fulness of Him who fills all and all".

That is what the Old Testament testifies to. It's all about being a butterfly in Him. But if you don't understand the reality of butterflies, and how you went down with him into that cocoon...and now you're in Him – if you don't understand what and where you now are, there is no way on earth you're going to understand the book that testifies to that reality. That's what I'm trying to say about the Old Testament.

Let me say something that I think is probably backwards from the way that some people teach. You cannot understand the testimony in the Old Testament...until you have tasted some of the reality to which it points. Even if you memorize the Old Testament, you still have no idea what it's really talking about, until you've seen it in the Light of the one it testifies to.

It is only as you begin to see the reality in Christ, the reality of being in Christ, and Christ in you, and Christ as your life, that you can actually turn back to the testimony and really understand what it all is referring to. And then, yes, then you can better understand the reality by looking at the testimony. Yes, then the testimony can bring you into a greater understanding of the spiritual reality. But you have to first taste the reality. In other words, you must be born again or you will never see the kingdom of God. If you don't have that life LIVING in you, there is nothing for the testimony to testify about in you. There is nothing for the Spirit of Truth to witness to in you.

You see, even Paul...Pharisee of Pharisee...the top of the top, the cream of the Jewish crop...even he had no idea what his law and prophets were talking about until the Light of Christ appeared. And then, by golly, that man saw all things he had learned in the Old Testament speaking of this One. Then he could write the whole new testament saying, "remember when it says this....that's Jesus. Remember when it said that? That's Jesus too!"

Nicodemus, you'll never see anything of the Kingdom that you've studied until you're born again. Until your soul becomes the dominion of the King. And then...then you'll understand what the dominion of David pointed to. Then you'll understand what king Solomon was a type of. And then you'll see that a greater than Solomon is here.

But once you've come into Christ, once His life is in you, then the Spirit of God can use the written testimony to help you grow with respect to your view of reality. The Spirit of God will use the Old Testament then to proclaim, explain, make plain, the salvation that you have received.

How can I say this really plainly? You have received a new life – a salvation that is Christ Himself. You do not comprehend that salvation with the natural mind. It must be revealed to you by His Spirit. We've talked about that many times. But, one of the powerful ways that the Spirit of God causes you to know and to walk in the reality of new life is by helping your spiritual eyes open through the testimony in the Old Testament.

Now, some of you are probably like I used to be. Some of you don't even like to read the Old Testament. Well, apart from seeing it as a testimony of Christ your life,

it's a confusing and sometimes condemning thing to read. Not that it really is that, but read apart from the light of life, it certainly can be. Almost necessarily is.

I remember once when I was in the Middle East on a study tour for college credit, one of my professors said to me "I like the God of the New Testament. I can't stand the God of the Old Testament". Now, I knew enough at the time to know there was something wrong with that statement. But, if I was honest, I really didn't enjoy reading a lot of the Old Testament either.

Later on, but before I really started to understand the cross, I did enjoy reading the Old Testament, but only because I thought it was testifying to events that I was excited to see and be a part of. But that was just another way of misunderstanding it. That was just another way of missing the reality of Christ – the one truly being testified to.

Alright...well, I say all of this simply to begin a series where I would like to look at the Old Testament in order to better understand the reality of being in Christ. And I felt it was appropriate to begin all of that with a bit of a discussion on the Old Testament in general. Because if you don't see what the Old Testament is testifying to, you're going to make it testify to something. Does it testify to a bunch of future events? Does it testify to an angry God that is never pleased with people? Does it testify to a the history of a specific nationality? What is it testifying to?

Well, its testifying to Christ and the reality of our salvation in Him. And if you'll let it, if you'll seek Him in it, the entire Old Testament will proclaim to you the nature and reality of a salvation that you have received. It will proclaim to you the very butterfly who has become your life.

Let me take this discussion of the Old Testament a little further. Maybe that's all we'll get to this week. Let me try to give you a framework for understanding this huge chunk of your Bible as a testimony of Christ.

The Old Testament is divided up into the Law and the Prophets. Or sometimes it is divided up as Law, the Writings, and the Prophets, or the Law the Psalms and the Prophets.

But, in my brain, I generally think of it like this. There is a relatively short section in your Bible, from Adam to Abraham, where God was not really dealing with a specific people according to covenant. I know that he made a covenant with Noah not to flood the earth, but he wasn't really relating to a group of people in the earth through a covenantal relationship. And so there is this piece of the book of Genesis that deals with that time period – Genesis 1 – 11.

Then there is the historical record of God's dealing with the people of Israel. And this is a much bigger chunk of your Old Testament. Its from the time of Abraham up unto the coming of Christ. But its basically chapter 12 of Genesis on through 2nd Chronicles and into Ezra, Nehemiah, and Ester. All of this Scripture is recording God's dealing with Old Covenant Israel. It's the historical record of all of that.

Then begins Prophets, or the Psalms and Prophets. And that will bring you up through Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament.

So, in my brain, I see those basic divisions. And I see them that way because of how they testify to Christ. Here are three different ways that the Old Testament testifies to Christ. Here's basically the way I see it.

Genesis 1 – 11 is its own unique recorded history. All of it points to Christ, but not really through watching God deal in a covenant with a specific people. It points to Christ through specific stories and characters and judgments. In those short 11 chapters, you have stories like the two trees in the garden, the origin of the adamic man, Cain and Able, the flood of Noah, the Tower of Babel. And maybe a few others. And I think we have talked at length about all of those things and brought them into Christ.

- In fact, I think that all of those except the Tower of Babel, are in the foundation series. But we've talked about the Tower of Babel at length too.

We've spent some time gathering up all of that testimony (Gen 1-11) and showing that it was recorded solely for the purpose of testifying to Christ. And it certainly does do that.

And you have to realize that. A whole lot of things happened between Adam and Abraham that weren't recorded. A whole lot of things happened between Abraham and Moses that weren't recorded. A lot happened between Moses and David. Well, how did God decide what to tell people to write down? How did he decide what to record? Only that which testifies of Christ was recorded. It was recorded to be a testimony of Him. So all of the events, the stories, the judgments, the conquests, the kingdoms, the ceremonies, the deliverances that could be used by the Spirit of God to testify to the reality of Christ, the reality of salvation, true conquest, true kingdom, true judgment....these were recorded. They were purposed and recorded as a testimony.

Why didn't the Bible record that one time when Noah won that ping-pong tournament? Well, because it doesn't do anything towards proclaiming Christ.

So that's Genesis 1-11. A unique testimony of Christ through specific stories, characters, judgments, etc. Now Genesis 12 – Ester. All of this points to the reality of Christ, the reality of God having a people in Christ, in His Son **through a covenantal relationship with a specific people**. All of God's dealings in and with Old Covenant Israel is a gigantic purposefully woven tapestry, all testifying, through this covenant relationship, through this history, through these ceremonies and sacrifices and priesthood, through these wars – all testifying of God's dealing with you and I in Christ.

Now that may sound simplistic. Jason, how can you sum up all of God's dealing with Old Covenant Israel in one word – Jesus? Well, I'll happily go on record saying that God has never testified to anything else.

So, very briefly...

- When I read of God's deliverance out of Egypt through the red sea, I am meant to understand something of the nature of deliverance out of the old man, the old creation, by coming into Christ.
- When I read of the 40 years of unbelief and stiff-necked disobedience in the wilderness, I am meant to see something of our carnal minded blindness that

keeps us from entering into eternal purpose, and prevents the manifestation of Christ in the earth.

- When I read of the priesthood and the sacrifices and the holy of holies, I am meant to see something of how Jesus, our high priest, has brought us, in Himself, beyond the veil, into the Father. I'm in the Father, you're in me, I'm in you. All of that testifies to that spiritual reality.
- When I read of Joshua bringing Israel into the Land, I am meant to see something of a people crossing over into the reality of the New Covenant, where all flesh is cut off (the circumcision at Gilgal), and what is true of Christ our life, now begins to become my experience.
- And when I read of David, the king of Israel, conquering the land for the Seed of Abraham – I am meant to see something of Christ in us conquering every city in my soul that resists the reign of His Seed –the true Seed of Abraham according to Galatians 3:16.

Jason, you're reading too much into these stories. No! Far from it. I'm only just beginning to see why in the world God even recorded these stories. Its not fun history. Every interpretation of those stories that I just told you came directly from the mouths of the New Testament authors, the apostles, gathering up the dealings of God with Old Covenant Israel, and demonstrating it to be yes and amen in Christ. Summing all things up in Christ. I'm not stretching this. I'm barely scratching the surface of it.

Ok, so that is the part of your Bible that deals with the history of Old Covenant Israel, and God's dealing with them through a covenantal relationship.

Then there is the Psalms and the Prophets. And I link them together because of how I see their function. The Psalms and the prophets are those books in your Bible where the Spirit of God enabled men to see beyond the shadows – and peer into the spiritual substance in Christ. They saw by revelation something beyond the types and shadows of Christ that were being lived out by the community of Israel.

So in the history books – Christ is testified to through reading of God's dealings with this people. Watching God's dealing with this people. But in the prophetic books, Christ is testified to through men proclaiming the revelation of the one who is coming as the reality of all the types and shadows.

For instance:

- They saw a place to live that was far greater than earthly Palestine. Hebrews 11 says they saw a heavenly country. And they considered themselves strangers and pilgrims in the shadows.
- They saw beyond the thousands of animal sacrifices that Israel was required to do – and they wrote things like "you have no pleasure in the sacrifice of animals", or as David said in Psalm 51 "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, otherwise I would offer it". You see, here are the recordings of those who peered into the substance in Christ. They didn't inherit it. But they looked into it. And believed.
- They saw a dwelling place of God that could never be a tabernacle or a temple. In fact they saw that we would become that dwelling place. "Heaven *is* My throne, and earth the footstool of My feet. Where then *is* the house that you build for Me? And where then *is* the place of My rest? – but to this one I

will look". They see that God finds his dwelling place in one new man. In a new creation. In us, his living tabernacle, his living habitation.

So, again, let me just summarize. In my mind, I see God's testimony of Christ before dealing in the Old Covenant with Israel. Then I see God's testimony of Christ through his dealing in covenant with Israel. And then I see the testimony of Christ written by those who were allowed to look beyond shadows, by revelation, into something of the reality. And so, just as Jesus says "all of this speaks of me". And beginning with Moses, he began to explain to him all things written as testimonies of Him"

So, that's as far as we're going to get today. But what I want to begin to talk about is the story of the Israelites and their exodus out of Egypt, and the time in the wilderness. And specifically, I am going to be dealing with what is called the first Passover – where they painted the blood of the Lamb on the door of their house, and they went in to eat the lamb as the death angel killed the firstborn of Egypt.

Most of you are familiar with that story. For those of you who aren't, I would encourage you spend some time reading the book of Exodus this week. Don't worry about what every little thing means. Don't get lost in the details. Just familiarize yourself with the specifics of the story – because we're going to be attempting to gather up all of that and show it as reality in Christ.