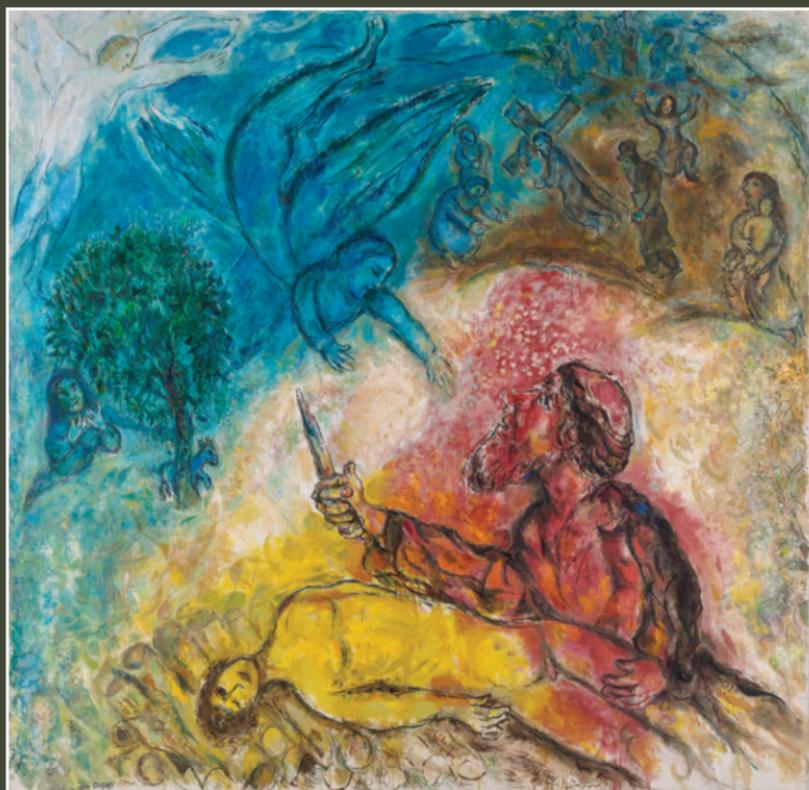


# Jesus through the Old Testament

Transform your Bible understanding



Graeme Goldsworthy

## **The Bible Reading Fellowship**

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**These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.**

COLOSSIANS 2:17

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## Foreword

I am so deeply grateful that I grew up going to Sunday school where I learned the stories of the Old Testament. I'm grateful that I was in Vacation Bible School every summer where we did things like make salt maps of the promised land and built the walls of Jericho out of Popsicle sticks. I am grateful for all of the history and doctrine I learned in my college Bible classes, for the personal challenges I got from reading Christian books over the years and for the expectation that God would speak to me and change me through his word that developed in the years I spent in an intensive weekly Bible study as an adult.

But as grateful as I am for all of those things, I realise that all of this immersion in the Bible left me with little to no understanding of how the Bible fits together as one story of God's outworking of his plan to redeem all things through Christ. I didn't know how to relate the curse and the promise given in Genesis 3 with everything that followed it. I couldn't have traced the story of Israel's exodus, entering the land, taking possession of the land, being exiled from the land and returning to the land. I couldn't have explained how the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament relates to the kingdom Jesus announced at his coming. I looked at Old Testament characters as examples to follow or eschew and never imagined that Christ was prefigured in some of them. I simply avoided the Old Testament prophets because they were unintelligible and, in my mind, not anything I could apply to my real life in the here and now.

Fortunately, the day came when I began to be introduced to the way of grasping the larger story and the themes of the Bible as is

introduced and explained in this book. When I discovered the teaching of Graeme Goldsworthy, the puzzle pieces began to fall into place. The Bible began to make sense to me in a new and profound way. More than that, Christ became more precious to me. Seeing who he is, and what he accomplished in his first coming, through the various angles of the Old Testament, added texture and colour.

How I wish I'd had a book like *Jesus through the Old Testament* long ago. I envy all who will become more thoroughly grounded in the contents, structure and meaning of the Bible much earlier than I was, through the pages of this book. As you work your way through it, you will be equipped to recognise important themes that run from beginning to end in the Bible. You'll see how the Old Testament points to a righteous life and the need for someone to provide it for us. Rather than approaching the Bible as a handbook for life, or as merely a source of inspiration, you'll become oriented to look for the progression of the kingdom of God as well as grasp the implications for living now as a glad subject of King Jesus.

If you have spent a lifetime in the Bible, but recognise there are still gaps in your understanding, this book will help to close some of those gaps. And if you are new to the Bible, this book will ground you in the basics so that your foundations will be firm and strong in the truth of God's revelation of himself and his plans and purposes in this world.

There could be no better guide than Graeme Goldsworthy for the pathway toward a firmer grasp on God's word. My prayer for you as you begin this book is that you will grow to love Christ more as you see him through all of the scriptures as a result of your study through this book.

Nancy Guthrie

**Part 1**

# Where's Jesus?

## 1

## Is the Old Testament a Christian book?

*Where's Wally?* is the first of a series of books by Martin Handford that most people will be familiar with.<sup>1</sup> In looking at a series of pictures, the trick is to spot the man in the red and white striped shirt and beanie amidst the most complicated and detailed mass of very small figures drawn with great care and precision. Looking for Jesus in the Old Testament is something like looking for Wally, only more complex. Wally can be found; he *is* there. But in the Old Testament, Jesus is not actually there in person as the Jesus we meet in the four Gospels.

Jesus of Nazareth comes along only after the Old Testament age finishes. So, if Jesus is there we need to understand *how* he is there. Before we even begin the search, there are many who would pose the question: 'Is the Old Testament really a Christian book?' You might be tempted to answer with a firm 'No' on the grounds that Jesus of Nazareth is nowhere mentioned by name in it. Others might reject it because it seems to focus on a very different religion from the Christianity we know. You may even regard Israel's religion as directly opposing the faith of the New Testament. One could easily feel that reading the Old Testament is rather like hitting your head against a brick wall; it feels good only when you stop. Bearing in mind that the Old Testament takes up about the first three-quarters of our Bible, dismissing it as irrelevant would save us a lot of time and effort.

## What does the New Testament say about the matter?

But, of course, there is no way we can simply ignore the Old Testament; not when we start to read the New Testament and discover that the Old Testament, usually referred to as 'the scriptures', was the only Bible possessed and regularly used by Jesus and his apostles. Not only that, but they were consistent in the way they kept referring to the Old Testament as a book about Jesus. Consider, for example, the different ways the four Gospels begin their Jesus-narratives by referring to some link with significant people or events in the Old Testament:

The Old Testament, usually referred to in the New Testament as 'the Scriptures', was the only Bible used by Jesus and the first Christians.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

MATTHEW 1:1

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet...

MARK 1:1-2

And the Lord God will give to him [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever.

LUKE 1:32-33

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The four Gospels all begin by linking Jesus with the Old Testament.

JOHN 1:1-3, 14

The significance of these passages lies in the assumption that we need to understand the link with the Old Testament in order to understand Jesus:

- Matthew introduces Jesus as descended from David and Abraham, two of the most important characters in the Old Testament narrative.
- Mark says the gospel of Jesus Christ begins with the Old Testament prophets.
- Luke links Jesus with a key aspect of the history of Israel: the throne of David.
- John recalls the Genesis account of creation but asserts that Jesus, the Word, was the creator of all things.

Now see how Jesus himself spoke of his connection to the Old Testament ('the scriptures'):

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that *everything written about me* in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

LUKE 24:44–45<sup>2</sup>

You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is *they that bear witness about me*, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

JOHN 5:39–40

There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; *for he wrote of me*.

JOHN 5:45–46

Consider also what Paul says:

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus...

ACTS 13:32-33

Paul... [who has been] set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.

ROMANS 1:1-3

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

ROMANS 3:21-22

That will do for the moment: we could go on with many more New Testament passages, but the point is that the New Testament bears witness to the fact that the Old Testament is about Jesus. *How* it is about him is the question to which I will try to give some answers in this book. Everywhere we look in the New Testament we find quotes from the Old Testament or allusions to it. One estimate is that there are some 1,600 such places in the New Testament where the Old Testament is recalled, either directly by quotes or indirectly by references to its teachings and ideas.

**The whole of the New Testament bears witness to the fact that the Old Testament is about Jesus.**

These considerations alone are enough to explain why it is that the Christian church, from the very beginning of its history, has taken the Old Testament as its own scriptures. The Old Testament was the only Bible the first Christians had until the New Testament was written and accepted. The process

**If Jesus is the fulfiller then there is a real sense in which he is present in all the promises and expectations of the Old Testament.**

of acceptance began with the apostles, but general acceptance of all 27 books of the New Testament may have been as late as the fifth century. However, the history of the church also shows us that a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament has always been, in various ways, a problem. So, from the beginning, Christians have struggled to make sense of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, it was never suggested by the church that we should abandon the Old Testament once the New Testament was received as scripture. The church has always acknowledged its sacred scriptures to consist of both Old and New Testaments.

Of course, it might be possible, without further reflection, to reduce the link between Jesus and the Old Testament simply to a historical one. It is claimed in the New Testament that Jesus is descended from the house of David of the Israelite tribe of Judah. However, that in itself does not establish any more of a relationship than one of lineage. There are millions of descendants from old Israel, but that does not make them the fulfillers of the Old Testament prophecies and promises. The significant point is that Jesus is proclaimed as the answer to all the expectations, prophetic predictions and divine promises of the Old Testament that are established by God himself. If this is the case, then there is a real sense in which Jesus is present in those promises and expectations. If Jesus is the fulfiller, it will help us greatly to understand exactly what it is that he fulfils.

I suggested at the outset that looking for Jesus in the Old Testament is more challenging than looking for Wally. I must now qualify that by saying that the greater difficulty exists for those who ignore the testimony of the New Testament. If we allow Jesus, the apostles and the other New Testament authors to guide us, we *will* find Jesus revealed in the Old Testament. It may not be in the way we expected, but he is there nevertheless.

## Some false trails to avoid

There are some pitfalls to be avoided in our attempts to make use of the Old Testament in a consistently Christian way. And, as it is said, 'forewarned is forearmed'. Throughout the history of the Christian church, many unsatisfactory approaches have been tried and some of these are still around today. This is not the place to review the history of Old Testament interpretation, but we can avoid some of the less helpful approaches to the matter if we are aware of such pitfalls. Here are some possibilities to think about – but remember, the main purpose of this book is to propose some positive steps you can take towards a sound use of the Old Testament. The following approaches should be avoided:

### **1 The Old Testament is totally irrelevant to a Christian, so let's concentrate on the New Testament.**

We can easily find ourselves taking this view by default. If we consider the Old Testament largely uninteresting, or difficult to understand, compared to the specifically Christian content of the New Testament, we could end up simply neglecting it. We may pay lip service to the idea that the whole Bible is God's word, but in reality we use only the New Testament. In practice, we will have jettisoned the Old Testament almost entirely.

### **2 The Old Testament is opposed to the New Testament because it deals with a failed programme of salvation through keeping the law.**

This is a fatal misunderstanding. In the New Testament, there is a great deal about the good works we should do as believers. Most Christians recognise that such good works are the *fruit* of our free justification through faith, not the *cause* of it. There is a common misunderstanding of the Old Testament that the law of Moses is a programme of salvation by works of the law. We should be clear about

the religion of the Old Testament: it *does not* set out a programme of salvation by works. It is not that God tried one way of salvation with Israel which failed, and so he had to devise another programme in the gospel. Both the New Testament and the Old Testament present a programme of salvation by grace through faith. The distinction is that, in the Old Testament, it is faith in the promises of God that are eventually fulfilled in Christ.

The Old Testament is *not* a failed programme of salvation by works that God had to replace with the gospel.

### **3 The Old Testament provides the examples of many godly people to imitate, and many evil people to avoid. Therefore, the moral example in the Old Testament is its only benefit.**

There is no doubt that there are lots of godly and ungodly characters in the Old Testament. The problem is that using Old Testament characters only as examples often overlooks their behaviour in the wider context of what God is doing. *God is the principal character in the Old Testament*; our primary concern should be the acts of God, not the acts of human characters. None of the Old Testament characters are totally pure in what they do and say, neither are most totally evil. Thus, using these characters only as examples misses the bigger issue of their part in the progressive revelation of God's kingdom and of the way of salvation. If we focus exclusively on the human characters, we will overlook the fact that the main character in the narrative is not some Israelite hero (or anti-hero) but God himself.

The main character in the Old Testament is God, not some human person or persons.

To summarise:

- Some Christians see the Old Testament as plainly irrelevant.
- Some see the Old Testament as valuable for the moral examples, good or bad, of the characters in the narrative. That is, the Old Testament comes to be a book about ourselves.

- We have already seen that the New Testament understands the Old Testament as primarily a book about Christ. If we are to avoid the pitfalls, we need to develop a way of reading that reflects the New Testament's testimony to the Old Testament as a book about Christ.

In the next chapter, I will go on to consider what is involved in coming to a Christian mind on the Old Testament.

### **Key note**

Jesus, the apostles, the New Testament writers and the early Christians all accepted the Old Testament as a book about Jesus Christ.

Take a moment to reflect...

- When you read the Old Testament, or hear it being read, do you ever ask yourself about how it points to Christ?
- When you read the New Testament, or hear it being read, do you ever reflect on the references to the Old Testament and why they are there?
- Have you ever wondered why our Bible includes the Old Testament?

**Tip:** Read Luke 24 and notice the links made between the resurrection of Jesus and the Old Testament.

## Confident in the Old Testament?

Enjoying reading it?

Happy to preach from it?

In this engaging book, Graeme Goldsworthy reflects with clarity and practical insight on reading and using the Old Testament, showing us how Jesus is central to the Old Testament's message and encouraging us to reinstate it as essential and transformative to our lives, churches and mission in today's world. The author asks essential questions: where is Jesus in the whole biblical storyline? How does the kingdom of God relate to him? In what way is he central to the divine revelation? This is a must-read for those who wish to transform their biblical understanding.

**Graeme Goldsworthy** is an Australian Anglican and a well-known Old Testament scholar. Formerly a parish minister, he lectured on the Old Testament, biblical theology and hermeneutics at Moore Theological College in Sydney. He is the author of several books including *According to Plan*, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, *Gospel and Kingdom*, *The Gospel in Revelation* and *Gospel and Wisdom*.

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