

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE BIBLE

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STUDY FOUR: UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF FULFILMENT

A. THE WHOLE OLD TESTAMENT ANTICIPATES THE COMING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Old stands on tiptoe, eagerly looking forward to the coming of the New, in which its real meaning is unveiled. For this reason an ancient scholar stated:

'The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed.'

Task 1: Consider and discuss the meaning and significance of the following Bible quotes:

Luke 10:23-24: 'Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." '

Luke 24:25,27: 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. ... And beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.'

Luke 24:44-45: '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.'

John 5:39: 'You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.'

John 5:46 : 'If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.'

Ephesians 3:4-5: 'In reading this you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.'

Colossians 1:25-26: 'I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.'

Colossians 2:16,17: ' ... a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These things are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.'

Hebrews 1:1,2 : '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 ...'

1 Peter 1:10-12a : '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. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.'

From the above, and other Scriptures, we can conclude:

- The Old Testament was written with Jesus Christ in mind.
- The Old Testament was never intended to be complete or final in itself.
- The New Testament is the reality about which the Old Testament spoke in shadow and in symbol.
- The New Testament is the true meaning of the Old Testament as a whole, and of all the component parts of the Old Testament.
- To give the Old Testament and its individual parts ultimate significance apart from Christ is to misunderstand its God-given purpose.

B. THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT HAS PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

Prophecy is not limited to the spoken and written *predictive words* of the Old Testament that we normally understand as prophecy. Rather, prophecy pulsates through every part, filling every part, so that every part of the Old Testament speaks of, or looks forward to, Jesus Christ. In God's economy, no part of the Old Testament finds its purpose and goal within itself, because there is no part of the Old Testament that does not have Jesus Christ as its source, as its centre and as its goal. From beginning to end the entire scripture speaks of Christ; and from beginning to end Christ speaks in the entire scripture.

B.1 The New Testament records the fulfilment of the *predictive words* of the Old Testament

As we have seen in the previous study in relation to fulfilment of prophecy affirming the authority of the Scriptures, the Old Testament contains predictive words that are fulfilled in the New Testament. Some relate to the coming of Jesus Christ; some relate to the salvation he obtained through his death; some relate to the establishment of his new covenant of grace; some relate to the establishment of his church. The fulfilment of all of these predictive words is recorded either specifically or generally in the New Testament.

B.2 Historical events recorded in the Old Testament are prophetic of Jesus Christ

Although having their own reality in time and space, the historical narratives find their real meaning in the coming of Christ and his salvation. Through the acts of history God not only revealed his nature and purposes to the current generations, but also revealed in these majestic dramas played out in real life physical history the truths about the ultimate spiritual salvation he would bring to a sin-sick, sin-trapped world through his Son Jesus Christ.

Task 2: Discuss the two historical events below as prophetic history in which the salvation which we have in Christ is anticipated and portrayed.

Noah's Ark [Genesis 6-9]	The Exodus from Egypt [Exodus 1-14]

B.3 Individual Old Testament *people* are prophetic of Jesus Christ

A great range of Old Testament *people are prophetic of Christ* in one or more aspects of their character and/or actions. Some are prophetic *types* - they positively reveal the nature of the One who was to come. Some are prophetic *anti-types*: they are a negative image of Christ's character. As we look at these people our understanding of the nature and character of Christ increased.

Task 3: List characteristics of the people below that are prophetic of the person and work of Jesus Christ. One of them is an *anti-type*; be sure to identify him.

- Adam - the one man: Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:42-49; Hebrews 2:14-18
- Job - the righteous sufferer: Psalm 22; Isaiah 53
- Melchizedek - the priest: Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 6:20-7:28; Genesis 14:18-23
- Moses - the deliverer and prophet: Deuteronomy 18:14-15
- David - the king: Psalm 2, 24; Isaiah 11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15

B.4 Old Testament ritual is prophetic of Jesus Christ

The ritual and ceremony of the Old Testament is rich symbolism of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This prophetic identity and purpose is found in the people, practices and objects of the Hebrew religion. Each was specifically designed by God to proclaim and anticipate Christ in vivid physical images. From the New Testament perspective, having seen the real thing – Jesus Christ and the salvation he purchased – these ritual people, practices and objects are seen to have no ultimate significance in themselves, but to gain their significance solely from the One to whom they point us.

Task 4: Check out the symbol and reality in the Scriptures below. Discuss and/or comment on the message of Christ contained in the symbols.

Symbol	Old Testament	New Testament Reality	Christ-centred Comment
Passover	Exodus 12 –13:16	Matthew 26:26-28	
	Leviticus 23:4-8	1 Cor 5:7	
Sacrifice	Leviticus 1-7	Ephesians 5:2	
		Hebrews 9:26; 10:12	
High Priest	Exodus 28-29;	Hebrews 4:14-	
	Leviticus 8-9	5:10; 6:20-7:28;	
Day of Atonement	Leviticus 16	Hebrews 9:23-	
		10:18	
Sabbath	Exodus 31:12-13	Colossians 2:16-	
	Ezekiel 20:12	17	
		Hebrews 3:7-4:13	
Year of Jubilee	Leviticus 25	Luke 4:19	
Ritual cleansing	Leviticus 11-15	John 13:10; 15:3;	
		1John 1:9	
The tabernacle	Exodus 25-27	Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:1-24;	

This prophetic symbolism extends to the clothing of the priests, the perfection of the animals used in sacrifices, and the details of the various feast days of Israel. The letter to the Hebrews stresses the inadequacy and inability of these ritual and ceremonial laws to save us:

'The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.' [10:1].

Only a shadow. What is the significance of a shadow? Its significance is the reality that casts the shadow. Its existence indicates the existence of a substantial reality. All of this ritual, all of this ceremony has only this significance: that there is a reality of which it speaks. That reality is Christ. Compared to him the rituals, the ceremonies, are as insubstantial as a shadow. Like signposts they point us to the real thing. They are all there to point us to Jesus Christ and the grand and glorious salvation he has obtained for us.

[When we look deeper into this shadow/reality concept we realize that any temporary effectiveness of the rituals had its source, not in the rituals themselves, but in the reality they anticipated: Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death. Thus, the blood of the original Passover lambs was effective only because of the eternal reality of the blood of Jesus Christ.]

B.5 The nation of Israel is a massive prophecy of

[1] *Israel, the chosen nation, is prophetic of Jesus Christ, the chosen One:*

- The nation constitutes the many descendents of Abraham: Christ is the One descendent through whom all the nations of the world are blessed. [Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16]
- The nation was to be his witness: Christ is the Faithful and true Witness, the One who is the Light of the World, bringing the light of the knowledge of God to all the nations of the earth. [Isaiah 43:10,12; Revelation 3:14; John 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6]
- The nation is the servant of the Lord: Christ is the ultimate Servant [Isaiah 41:8; 44:1; 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 52:13-53:12]
- The nation was chosen to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation: Christ is the chosen One, the great high priest and King over all, the Holy One of God. [Exodus 19:5,6; Matthew 12:16-21; Acts 3:14; Revelation 19:16]

[2] *Israel, the chosen nation, the people of God, is prophetic of the church – the worldwide people of God chosen in Christ :*

- The nation is the physical descendants of Abraham – born of his flesh: the church is the spiritual descendants of Abraham – born of the same faith as Abraham's (including all physical descendants who share the faith of Abraham). [Galatians 3:5-9]
- The nation inherited the physical blessings of Abraham – the promised land and many descendants: the church inherits his spiritual blessing – the declaration of righteousness. [Romans 4:1-29; Galatians 3:14]
- The nation's role was to demonstrate to the nations the power and greatness of their God: the church's role is to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. [Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Peter 2:9-12]
- The nation was a chosen people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation: the church is chosen of God, a royal priesthood and a holy nation. [1 Peter 2:9-10]

B.6 The Old Testament physical blessings are prophetic of the spiritual blessings of the New

The Old Testament speaks of concrete, physical realities. Just as the physical, tangible ritual objects speak of the spiritual reality of Christ and his salvation, so the physical blessings - prosperity, a large family and a long a long life – speak of the spiritual blessings that every genuine believer has in Christ –

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.' [Ephesians 1:3]

The blessings the Christian has 'in Christ' are not the blessings of health, wealth, large families and long life – even unbelievers enjoy these 'blessings'. Rather they are the spiritual blessings that come not from earth, but from the 'heavenly realms': the blessings Paul goes on to list in Ephesians 1:4-14 and to expand in 1:15 to 3:21; the 'mercies of God' which Paul described in detail in Romans 3:21 to 11:36.

B.7 The Old Testament Covenants all look forward to the New Covenant established by Christ.

There is no tension between the covenants of the Old Testament and the new covenant: they all find their fulfilment in Christ.

Task 5: Look at the covenants of the Old Testament listed below. Read the Scriptures. Discuss how each of these covenants finds its true meaning in Jesus Christ.

Old Covenant	Scriptures	Comment	Discuss these references
Noahic	Genesis 9:9-17	This covenant is a covenant of grace, preserving life on earth for the coming of Christ.	2 Peter 3:3-10
Abrahamic	Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-20; 17:1-8	This covenant anticipates the spiritual blessing brought by the one descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ.	John 8:56
Sinai	Exodus 24:1-19	This covenant, surrounding us by law and condemnation, both preserves life on earth for the coming of the Saviour, and, acquainting us with the reality of our sinfulness, leads us to the Saviour.	Romans 3:19,20; Galatians 3:24
Davidic	1 Samuel 7:12-17	This covenant promises that David's throne will be established forever.	John 18:36

Summary: An understanding of the concept of fulfilment protects us from misunderstanding the Old Testament, and enriches our understanding of the New Testament. It causes us to stand in awe of God's massive and eternal plan of salvation that was in his mind from before the foundation of the earth. As Paul stated: Christ is the key to all the wisdom and knowledge of God [Colossians 2:3].