

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE BIBLE

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STUDY FIVE: MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE

Martin Luther once said: *'To the unbeliever, the whole of the Bible is Law, even the Gospel; to the believer, the whole of the Bible is Gospel, even the Law.'*

To get the most out of the Bible we must constantly remember that the Bible is the one message from the one God. This is not to disregard the natural *distinction* that exists between the Old Testament and the New Testament, a distinction we have already seen in the study on fulfilment, but it is to avoid either setting up or assuming a *division* or a conflict between the two with two different Gods, two different messages, two different ways of salvation, and so on. There is not space in this study to identify every aspect of this unity – it contains some of the more significant.

SECTION ONE: MAINTAINING THE ESSENTIAL UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

A. THE ENTIRE BIBLE REVEALS THE SAME GOD

Task 1: Compare and comment on these passages that describe God as holy, creator and redeemer:

Old Testament	New Testament	Comment
Leviticus 11:44-45	Luke 1:35	
Joshua 24:19	Acts 3:14	
Psalms 99:1-9	Ephesians 4:30	
Isaiah 29:23	1 Peter 1:15,16	
Ezekiel 36:22	Revelation 4:8	
Genesis 1 and 2	John 1:1-4	
Job 38-42	Romans 11:36	
Psalms 19, 104	1 Corinthians 8:6	
Isaiah 40:12-28; 42:5; 45:5-12	Colossians 1:15-17	
Exodus 15:13	Romans 3:24	
Job 19:25	Galatians 3:13	
Psalms 78:35	Galatians 4:4-5	
Psalms 130:7-8	Titus 2:14	
Isaiah 43:14	1 Peter 1:18	
Isaiah 44:22	Revelation 5:9	

We could look at any other attribute or action of God and find that it is common to both the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps you could make this a personal study project.

B. THE ENTIRE BIBLE SPEAKS OF JESUS CHRIST

Refer back to Study Four on fulfilment, where we saw that Jesus Christ is the meaning of the Old Testament.

Task 2: As a quick personal or group brainstorm, see how many Old Testament symbols or prophecies of the person or work of Jesus Christ you can write in this box in one minute:

C. THE ENTIRE BIBLE PROGRESSIVELY REVEALS THE HISTORY OF THE ONE SALVATION

Task 3: Discuss the significance of the progress of God's revelation of his plan of salvation itemized below:

The increasingly focused identity of the Saviour:

Note the condensation – from the broad identity as the 'seed of the woman' to the specific identity as the Jesus Christ, the son of Mary.

- The Saviour belongs to the human race – Genesis 3:15
- The Saviour is a descendant of Abraham - Genesis 12:3; 22:18
- The Saviour is a descendant of Isaac – Genesis 17:15-19
- The Saviour is a descendant of Jacob – Genesis 25:23; 28:13-14
- The Saviour is a descendant of Judah – Genesis 49:8-11
- The Saviour is a descendant of David – 2 Samuel 7:12
- He is the child of the virgin – Isaiah 14
- He is the child of Mary – the Gospels
- He is Jesus Christ - the one perfect human – the last Adam – Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; Hebrews 2:18; 4:15.

The progressively revealed image of the Saviour as a substitutionary sacrifice:

- The animal skins used by God as a covering for Adam and Eve – Genesis 3:21
- The provision of a ram as a substitute for Isaac – Genesis 22:12-14
- The Passover lambs, slain as substitutes for the firstborn of Israel – Exodus 12-13
- The sacrificial lambs slain daily in tabernacle/temple as a sin offering – Leviticus 1-7
- The blood of the goat on the Day of Atonement, sprinkled on the Mercy Seat – Leviticus 16
- The prophecy of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 identifying substitutionary atonement through the death of the Servant of the Lord.
- John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' – John 1:29
- Jesus' teaching that he would personally give his life as 'a ransom for many' – Mark 10:45
- Extended teaching on the salvation obtained by the death of Christ our substitute – NT epistles.

The increasingly complex and comprehensive identity and role of the Saviour:

Task 4: From your knowledge of the Bible and from shared group discussion, record the testimony of both Old and New Testaments to the roles and identities of Christ listed below:

Identity/Role of Christ	Old Testament references	New Testament
King		
Servant		
Priest		
Sacrifice		
God		
Man		
Shepherd		
Sacrificial lamb		
Victor		
Victim		

D. THE ENTIRE BIBLE INDICATES THAT SALVATION IS BY GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH ALONE

Task 5: Check out these references and discover that salvation in the Old Testament was a gift of God's grace, and by faith not works, and discuss their similarity to the New Testament concept of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Identify NT verses emphasising faith and grace.

Reference	Comment
Genesis 15:6	
Exodus 31:13	
Deuteronomy 7:7-8	
Psalms 32:1-2	
Psalms 130:1-4	
Ezekiel 16:1-14	

E. THE ENTIRE BIBLE COMMANDS AN OBEDIENT, GOD HONOURING LIFESTYLE; IT REVEALS GOD'S HATRED OF AND JUDGEMENT ON SIN, AND THE UTTER INCONGRUITY OF CLAIMING TO BE GOD'S PEOPLE WHILE REBELLING AGAINST HIS AUTHORITY

Task 6: Compare and comment on the few selected Scriptures below in relation to this unified Biblical teaching on sin, judgement and the lifestyle God commands of his people:

Old Testament	New Testament	Comment
Genesis 2:17	Romans 6:23	
Exodus 19:3-6	1 Peter 2:9-12	
Exodus 20:12-17	Matthew 5:17-6:34 Eph 4:25-5:5; 6:1-2	
Deut 6:4-6	Luke 10:27-28	
Isaiah 43:7	Ephesians 1:12; 2:10	
Isaiah 1:2-4	Romans 12:1-2 Ephesians 4:1	
Amos 5:7-15; 5:18-24	Matthew 7:21-23 1 John 2:9-11	

F. THE ENTIRE BIBLE MAINTAINS THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD, AND HE CAN BE APPROACHED ONLY ON HIS OWN TERMS

In both the Old and New Testaments it is God who sets the rules about how a person can approach him or worship him. It is not left up to our corporate or individual choice.

Task 7: Examples of this can be studied in Genesis 4; Leviticus 10; Isaiah 43-47; Jeremiah 7; John 14:1-14; Philippians 3. Think deeply about each of these passages, and identify God's exclusive right to set the rules for access into his presence and acceptable worship.

SECTION TWO: MAINTAINING THE REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Without reducing in any way the essential unity of the Scripture detailed in part above, it is necessary to recognize the real *distinction* between the Old and New Testaments. Note – *distinction*, not *division* or *conflict*.

A. THE DISTINCTION IN HISTORICAL TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCE

Obviously the two testaments are set in different historical time periods (indeed the Old Testament by itself spreads from the very beginning of time until just over 2000 years ago.) This distinction of time of necessity means that there will be different customs, different surrounding nations, different cultures, different political circumstances, and so on. Each book of the Bible has to be understood in the context of its historical setting. But these factors are just the vehicles of God's revelation.

B. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PROPHECY AND FULFILMENT

We have already looked at this in Study Four. The New Testament is adamant that the events of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and the establishment of the church, happen in direct fulfilment of the Old Testament.

This includes the next four distinctions:

C. PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL

Old Testament prophecies are frequently in the form of physical symbols, physically enacted rituals or ceremonies, or physical blessings experienced or promised to the people of Israel. These physical Old Testament realities point to the spiritual realities of the New Testament. While they were meaningful as physical realities to the people of the Old Testament, they are not to be carried over as physical realities for the Christian. For example, the fulfilment of God's promise to bring the Israelites into the 'promised land' of Canaan does not predict physical blessings to Christians, but rather predicts the spiritual blessing of the fullness and rest of salvation in Christ; and the OT references to long life and prosperity as blessings of God point forward to the New Testament fact that the believer has in Christ 'eternal life' and 'every spiritual blessing'.

D. INCOMPLETE REVELATION AND COMPLETE REVELATION

E. THE PURPOSE OF GOD VEILED AND THE PURPOSE OF GOD REVEALED

F. ANTICIPATION AND EXPECTATION AND REALIZATION AND FINALITY

The Old Testament was never intended to be the complete revelation of God. In itself it repeatedly pointed forward to the coming of Christ. It is not the last word: Jesus Christ is the last word. In him we see God. In him we understand salvation.

Things that in the Old Testament are veiled or hidden, difficult to understand, are 'out in the open' in the New Testament. Jesus came as the 'light of the world' to scatter the darkness of ignorance, to throw light upon the mysteries hidden in the Old Testament, to bring out the ultimate meaning of things understood only superficially before.

Thus the Old Testament stands on tiptoe anxiously looking for the coming of the New. The Old Testament is like a rose bud compared to the full-blown rose: it contains all that the New Testament is – but it can't be seen, it is a mystery, a secret – until the New comes and the beauty, the truth, the grandeur is out in the open for all to see.

Task 8: Discuss the verses below in relation to points B to F above:

Romans 16:25-27; 1 Corinthians 2:6-18; Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:1-12; Colossians 1:25-3:3; Hebrews 1:1; 1 Peter 1:10-12.