

THE OLD TESTAMENT FULFILLED IN CHRIST

by M. V. Pereira

For the Christian, one of the sweetest delights of the Old Testament is to see Christ prefigured. When we realize how certain people, places, rituals, and events point to Christ in various and diverse ways, it is marvelous. It is an implicit testimony that God is behind the writings of sacred Scripture, that it is the mind of God and not man that is ultimately responsible for them. Scripture is altogether trustworthy and true.

The Old Testament was written over a span of more than one thousand years, with over thirty penmen. The canon of the Old Testament was closed nearly five-hundred years before the coming of Jesus.

Now, there are over one-hundred predictive prophecies of the Old Testament fulfilled by Jesus and recorded in the New Testament. But this is not what is intended when Christ says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). The word “fulfill” is not restricted to predictive prophecy, that is not how Matthew has used it so far. The word essentially means “filling up to completion” with the idea of bringing something to its ultimate purpose and goal. As it is used by Matthew, the life, death, resurrection, and future reign of Christ includes fulfillment of the Old Testament as a whole. The respected Matthean scholar, R. T. France, argues persuasively that “fulfillment” best captures the overall theology and theme of Matthew’s Gospel. It includes the idea that Christ has fulfilled the Torah, the Prophets, and the wisdom writings of the Old Testament.

Think about what this means: God structures history in such a way that people, places, rituals, and events are created to prefigure Christ. He then records it and preserves it and has it retold over and over by His people from His Scripture.

Christ fulfills predictions, types, and eschatological hopes presented in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ—past, present, and future. When Jesus says, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18), He is indicating that the divine purpose in its entirety will be accomplished in and through Him.

In light of these things, it is reasonable to confidently assert that the Old Testament points to Christ—it is Christ-centered. This means that the Old Testament still stands, being fulfilled in Christ. It is now interpreted and readily useful through Christ's fulfillment.

Jesus Himself said, "For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment" (Luke 22:37). Notice He said, "fulfilled *in me*." On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained how every portion of the Old Testament in some way pointed to Him: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Later to His disciples, He said, "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" (Luke 24:44). Earlier in His ministry He told the Jewish authorities, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39). The Apostle Paul explicitly confirms that "all" of the promises of God, even as found in all of the Old Testament Scriptures, "find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Notice, fulfillment "in him." Christ fulfills the Old Testament in its predictions, types, and eschatological hope.

TYPES OF CHRIST

When we say "types" we are not allowing for allegory. Typology is not allegory. Allegory has to do with interpretation, whereas types have to do with illustration and application. Allegory says, "*This means that,*" as in a certain text conveying a certain concept rather than what it appears to be saying. Allegory is not concerned with historical, grammatical, and contextual realities.

In contrast, a type has significance for its own time and context, yet testifies to something greater than itself, pointing forward to a greater significance that is ultimately fulfilled in the reality of Christ. Understanding the Old Testament this way should be expected in light of how Matthew has used the concept of fulfillment so far (Matthew 1:20-23; 2:13-15; 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:13-16).

We also find this principle anticipated by the explanation that Peter gives concerning how the Old Testament Scriptures were written:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Peter 1:10-12).

In order to search and inquire carefully, the writers of the Old Testament must have known that what they were writing pointed beyond their understanding and time to realities greater, namely Christ. This is explicitly affirmed in Peter's statement, "It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you" (1 Peter 1:12). The writers of the Old Testament were serving not only the people in their historical context, but New Covenant Christians. How could that be unless

they had some prompted from the “Spirit of Christ in them” that the realities that they were then experiencing had deeper significance that was yet to be fulfilled in Christ.

ADAM

Moreover, “type” is a biblical word: “Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” (Romans 5:14). Adam was a type of Christ: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22), who is called “the last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

THE ROCK

The rock that Moses struck in the wilderness is another type that is explicitly identified. Paul writes, “and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). What significance can we glean from this type? Perhaps Psalm 105:41 will help: “He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.” Christ was struck (crucified) and by Him being opened, the living water of life gushed out through His death on the cross. Forgiveness and grace flowed through the desert of human depravity like a river, yielding abundant life.

MANNA

Even manna, the bread from heaven, was a type of Christ. In Exodus 16:4, the Scripture says, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you.’” In light of this, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:48–51). Jesus has already explained the essence of this type, but there is still more to glean. Exodus 16:18 tells us that “whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.” This reminds us of the full sufficiency of Christ in our salvation, even in light of the great spiritual diversity of the redeemed. Those who have much of Christ are never in excess and those who have but little of Christ never lack. All who have Christ seek as much of Him as their capacity allows.

FIERY SERPENT ON A POLE

One of the most disturbing types of Christ is the fiery serpent on a pole. This type presents a graphic portrayal of Christ’s crucifixion, being made a curse (the serpent being a symbol of the curse) by being lifted up on a pole (the cross). Numbers 21 tells us the history: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live” (Numbers 21:8–9). Fifteen-hundred years later, the Lord Jesus identified this historical event as a type that points to Him, saying, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

One of the most dearly beloved figures of the Lord in the Old Testament is portrayed in the image of a shepherd. It was David, the shepherd, who penned the words of the most famous psalm, saying, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:1–3). About one-thousand years later, the Greater David, said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (John 10:11, 14). Such a statement would be an unmistakable claim, especially in view of His saying this while being worshiped by a healed blind man (John 9:38).

THE PRIESTHOOD AND TEMPLE

Certain types were copies and shadows of the true, heavenly reality that points to Christ. Hebrews labors extensively to help us understand that the priesthood, its sacrifices, and even the temple itself were all shadows of Christ, the greater reality. Hebrews 8:5 tells us, “They [priests] serve a **copy** and **shadow** of the heavenly things.” Later in Hebrews 9:23 we are told, “Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” This reminds us that the copies and shadows were not only not the substance, but that they were themselves in need of the substance in order for them to have any real significance. So Hebrews 10:1 plainly states, “For since the law has but a **shadow** of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.” Christ alone could do that.

RITUALS AND OBSERVANCES

Even the multiplied rituals and observances were pointers to Christ. Paul reminds us, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a **shadow** of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:16–17).

MYSTERY OF CHRIST

A mystery, biblically speaking, is something once concealed now revealed. Christ is the substance and great reality concealed in the Old and revealed in the New. This is what we are taught in a number of places: “that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19), “to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints” (Colossians 1:25–26). Even marriage is considered a “mystery” that points to Christ—a real institution of tremendous worth, yet a shadow of the greater reality of Christ and His church: “‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31–32). So important is the principle of understanding the principle of “God’s mystery” that Paul prays, “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, **which is Christ**” (Colossians 2:2).

POINTERS TO CHRIST IN EVERY BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Luke 24:27 tells us, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Christ] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Notice, that “in *all* the Scriptures” (emphasis added) there are things concerning Christ. Following are a few examples of those things concerning Christ found in “all” the Scriptures.

GENESIS

- Adam (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, 45)
- The seed of the woman (3:15; Galatians 3:16)
- Melchizedek (“righteous king”) of Salem (“peace”) (Hebrews 7:1-11)
- Isaac (21:12; 22:1-14)
- Joseph (37; 40)
 - He was hated without a cause
 - He was ridiculed
 - He was plotted against by His own
 - He was stripped of his robe
 - He was sold for silver by His own brothers
 - He was in punished with two guilty men

EXODUS

- The Passover (12:22-23)
- Passover lamb (John 1:29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7)
- The Exodus (Romans 6:2-3; 1 Corinthians 10:1-2)
- The Tabernacle (materials, colors, furniture, and arrangement) (24-27; John 1:14)
- The Priesthood (28-29; Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:11-12, 24-28)

LEVITICUS

- The Five Offerings (6-7)
 1. **Burnt**: total willing submission to the Father
 2. **Meal**: purity and sinless service
 3. **Peace**: reconciler for fellowship w/ God
 4. **Sin**: guilt-bearer
 5. **Trespass**: payment for the damage of sin (injury)
- The High Priest (16:1-5; Hebrews 2:17; 5:5; 9:11, 24)
- Seven Feasts (23-24)
 1. **Passover**: substitutionary death
 2. **Unleavened Bread**: holy walk
 3. **First Fruits**: Christ’s resurrection (rose on the day of First Fruits)
 4. **Pentecost**: Gift of the Holy Spirit after Christ’s ascension
 5. **Trumpets**: Second coming (Israel’s New Year)
 6. **Day of Atonement**: the scapegoat
 7. **Tabernacles**: Incarnation (God with Israel in the wilderness)

NUMBERS

- Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4)
- Manna (John 6:31-33)
- Bronze Serpent on the stake: pictured as cursed (24:4-9; John 3:14)

DEUTERONOMY

- Moses (18:15; John 1:17; Acts 7:37)
 - Prophet
 - Deliverer
 - Lawgiver
 - Mediator

JOSHUA

- Joshua ("Yahweh is Salvation"): triumphant leader to take possession of the promised land (Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Hebrews 2:10)
- Commander of the army of the Lord (5:13-15)

JUDGES

- Righteous Judge (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 4:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- Defender of the people (Revelation 5:5; 17:14)

RUTH

- Kinsman-Redeemer
 - Related by blood (3:9; Deuteronomy 25:5, 7-10; John 1:14; Romans 1:3; Hebrews 2:14-15)
 - Able to pay the price (2:1; 1 Peter 1:18-19)
 - Willing to redeem (3:11; Matthew 20:28; John 10:15; Hebrews 10:7)
 - Be free himself (John 8:32-36; Romans 8:2)

1 & 2 SAMUEL

- Samuel
 - New age
 - Prophet, priest, ruler
- David (13:14; Romans 1:3; Revelation 22:16)
 - Born in Bethlehem
 - Shepherd
 - Man after God's own heart
 - King of Israel

1 & 2 KINGS

- Solomon: wisdom, glory, wealth, fame (Matthew 12:42)

1 & 2 CHRONICLES

- Monarch (Genesis 49:10)
- Temple (Matthew 12:6; John 2:19; Revelation 21:22)
- Messiah (book anticipates the coming King through the line of David that remains)

EZRA

- Lead the return to promise
- Restore the Word of God

NEHEMIAH

- Nehemiah: gives up his high position to identify with the plight of His people, to fulfill the mission of restoration
- Anticipated: everything is restored but the king (temple, city, and covenant are renewed)

ESTHER

- Esther: advocate for her people; willingly places herself in the place of death for her people
- Overcomes satanic schemes that threaten God's people

JOB

- Resurrection Redeemer (19:25-27)
- Righteous Sufferer (Hebrews 4:15)

PSALMS

- He is the Greater David and "Anointed King" (2; 45; 72; Luke 1:32; Romans 1:3-4)
- He is the One who is declared to be the Son of God (2:7; Matthew 3:17; Romans 1:4)
- He is the One who comes in the name of the Lord (118:26; Matthew 21:9)
- He is the One hated without a cause (35:19; John 15:25)
- He is the One who comes to do God's will (40:7-8; Hebrews 10:7)
- He is the One who has zeal for God's house (69:9; John 2:17)
- He is the One betrayed by a friend (41:9; Luke 22:47)
- He is the One who is the chief cornerstone (118:22; Matthew 21:42)
- He is the One who is a priest like Melchizedek (110:4; Hebrews 5:6)
- He is the One accused by false witnesses (35:11; Mark 14:57)
- His hands and feet were pierced (22:16; John 20:25, 27)
- He is the One scorned and mocked (22:7-8; Luke 23:35)
- He is the One who is given vinegar to drink (69:21; Matthew 27:34)
- His executors will cast lots for His garments (22:18; Matthew 27:35-36)
- He is the One who prays for His enemies (109:4; Luke 23:34)
- He is the One forsaken by God in His hour of need (22:1; Matthew 27:46)
- He is the One of whom not one of His bones was broken (34:20; John 19:32-33, 36)
- He is the King that will not see corruption (16:10; Acts 2:31; 13:35)
- His is the throne that will be forever (45:6; Hebrews 1:8)
- He is the One who rules with a rod (2:9; Revelation 2:27; 19:15)
- He is the One who will reign over His enemies (110:1; Matthew 22:44)
- All things will be put under His feet (8:6; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 2:8)
- He is the One who is at God's right hand (68:18; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33)

PROVERBS

- He is our wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:3)

ECCLESIASTES

- Vanity of life without Christ (3:11; John 3:16)
- Only ultimate satisfaction, joy, and true wisdom (John 10:9-10)

SONG OF SOLOMON

- Romance is righteous; and righteousness portrayed as romance
- The King who came from heaven and sought out His bride
- Bride: Israel and Church

ISAIAH

- The One who sits on the throne, who's glory fills the earth (6:1; John 12:41)
- Born of a virgin (7:14; Matthew 1:22-23)
- Prince of peace (9:6; Luke 2:11; Ephesians 2:14-18)
- Suffering Servant (42; 53)

JEREMIAH

- Coming Shepherd (23:1-8)
- Righteous Branch (23:5-6)
- New Covenant maker (31:31-34)

LAMENTATIONS

- Jeremiah: weeping prophet (Matthew 23:37-38)
- Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 16:14)

EZEKIEL

- Tender twig that becomes a stately cedar (17:22-24)
- Coming King who has the right to rule (21:26-27)
- True Shepherd who will deliver and feed His flock (34:11-31)

DANIEL

- Great Stone who will crush the kingdoms of the world (2:34-35)
- "Son of Man" who is given dominion by the Ancient of the Days (7:13-14)
- Messiah who will be cut off from the living (murdered) (9:25-26)

HOSEA

- The Faithful Husband married to the backsliding bride (1-3)
- The Son who was called out of Egypt (11:1; Matthew 2:15)

JOEL

- Joel: "God judges" (Romans 2:16)
- The Baptizer of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21; Matthew 3:11)

AMOS

- Both judge with all authority and the only one with power to restore (1-9)
- Our burden bearer (9:11-15)

OBADIAH

- Savior (17-20)
- Possessor of the kingdom (21)

JONAH

- Jonah
 - Great foreign missionary (Luke 19:10; John 3:17)
 - Death, burial, resurrection (Matthew 12:39-41)

MICAH

- The babe born in Bethlehem (5:2)
- Eternal (from everlasting) (5:2)
- The One who reigns over the whole world (2:12-13; 4:1-8; 5:4-5)

NAHUM

- Avengers of the Lord's elect (1:12-13)
- Strength and shield (2:3)

HABAKKUK

- God's Evangelist: hope of salvation in the midst of unrighteousness
- Pleading for revival (3:2)

ZEPHANIAH

- Day of the Lord (visitation from God) (1:15; Matthew 24:29)
- He will gather His people and reign in victory (1:3; Matthew 13:41)

HAGGAI

- Restorer of God's glory (2:7)
- True Temple (2:9)
- Zerubbabel: joins two lines together (2:23)

ZECHARIAH

- Two comings:
 - Servant / Man – humble, mounted on a donkey (9:9-10)
 - King / God – righteous King to judge (11:6)
- Righteous Branch (3:8; 6:12-13)
- King-Priest (6:13)
- Smitten Shepherd who was abandoned (13:7)
- Sold for 30 pieces of silver (11:4-13)
- Pierced (12:10)
- Cleansing fountain (13:1)

MALACHI

- Clear the way before the Lord 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3; 11:10-14)
- The Son of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings (4:2)

The fingerprints of Christ are all over the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Of course most of these types are partial and imperfect, dimly lit and shadowy figures, yet still types. Bernard once said, "I hear not Moses for he is slow of speech, the lips of Isaiah are unclean, Jeremiah cannot speak because he is a child, and all the prophets are dumb; Himself, himself of whom they speak, let him speak." Christ doesn't fulfill the OT by *teaching* it, *explaining* it, or *obeying* it. It was not merely fulfillment of predictions, but fulfillment of *all*—non-prediction, law, persons, events, and sacred figures—that Jesus meant when He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). Christ fulfills the OT not primarily in the things He said or did, *but in who He is*. Christ fulfills the OT in being its substance and full realization. The Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ in its past, present, and future realities. It all points to Him!

Solus Christus