

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

By

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CHAPTER EIGHT

CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE main purpose and supreme glory of the revelation of the Old Testament are summed up in the well-known words of our Lord: "**They are they which testify of Me.**"

Everything else, however important and necessary in itself, is subordinate to this one great end, the anticipation of and preparation for the Messiah, the Son of GOD, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of Man.

No study of the Old Testament can be complete which does not include and emphasize the spiritual element of the Divine revelation of the Messiah. In it we find both prophecy and preparation - prophecy of and preparation for the Messiah.

These two ideas are brought forward in several aspects, each needing separate study, and all combining to give the full picture of "CHRIST in the Old Testament."

CHRIST IN PROPHECY

As we saw in a former chapter, there is a thread of prophecy, of anticipation of Someone coming, from Genesis 3 to Malachi 4. The Old Testament is assuredly a book of prophecy, of hopes raised by the promises of GOD, and yet of prophecy mainly unfulfilled, of hopes unrealized. We can only suggest in merest outline some methods of exploring this wealth.

1. Consider the prophecies in their chronological order:-

- (a) The prophecies of Genesis.
- (b) The prophecies of the Exodus. (Exodus-Deuteronomy).
- (c) The prophecies of David's and Solomon's reigns.
- (d) The earlier prophets of Judah.
- (e) The prophets of Israel.
- (f) The later prophets of Judah.

- (g) The prophets of the Captivity (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel).
- (h) The prophets of the Return (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

Under these divisions the particular Messianic prophecies of each writer may be studied and the torch of hope seen to be handed on from one to another until we come to the last of the prophets, and then to the four centuries of silence.

2. Consider the prophecies in their details.

We should look for the contribution of each writer to the complete picture of the Messiah.

We may thus consider Him as:

- The Seed of the Woman,
- The Source of Blessing (Abraham),
- The Shiloh (Jacob),
- The Prophet (Moses),
- The Star (Balaam),
- The King (David),
- The Sufferer (Isaiah),
- The Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah),
- The Son of Man (Daniel),
- The Fellow of GOD (Zechariah),
- The Lord (Malachi).

These are but a few of the varied aspects, and each adds something to the Divine completeness of the representation. We should notice, too, how the prophecies commence with the broadest and most general reference to the Messiah as the Seed of the Woman, and how the subsequent additions give definiteness to the picture. His nation, His tribe, His family, His birthplace, His title, His date - all are gradually given.

And when we have gathered all these materials, let us pause to remember that these prophecies date, at the lowest, from three or four hundred years before the birth of the Lord JESUS in Bethlehem, while many date from six hundred to more than a thousand years before that event.

We are thus face to face with the element of prediction, of "history written beforehand" by the hand of GOD. This is part of that miraculous Divine element which gives to the Old Testament its character as a Divine revelation.

CHRIST IN RITUAL

We have already noticed that the Old Testament is a book wherein various religious ceremonies are prominent, ceremonies needing explanation, and not receiving their full interpretation within Old Testament times. Consider some of these:-

1. *The Sacrifices*. They were intended to reveal the true methods of approach to GOD, and, under various aspects, they emphasize reconciliation, consecration, and fellowship.

- (a) Study the beginnings of sacrifice in Genesis.
- (b) Consider their development under Moses.

The basis was the Passover Sacrifice of Redemption, and then followed the sacrifices of Leviticus 1-4. (See *Studies in Leviticus*, by Hubert Brooke).

2. *The Purifications*. These taught another aspect of religion, the need of purity in drawing near to GOD. They will bear the most careful study. The ritual of the cleansing of the leper is a striking instance.

3. *The Priesthood*. This brings before us the agents by which the people might draw near to GOD. (See for this and the former points Mr. Brooke's valuable little work).

4. *The Festivals*. These give the particular occasions on which the people could worship GOD. The daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, seventh year, jubilee year, and other services were all so many times of preparation for the worship in spirit and truth (John 4) of all times and places. **"Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast** (continual festival)" (Greek).

CHRIST IN PERSONAL TYPES

The question of Old Testament ritual is inextricably bound up with the people of the Old Testament, and consequently we have CHRIST not only prefigured in things, but also in persons.

This is usually called the study of the types of the Old Testament. A type has been defined as an illustration in a lower sphere of a truth belonging to a higher. There are various forms of illustration, such as type, prophecy, allegory, simile, symbol. Types are illustrations in facts and deeds, as contrasted with illustrations in words, fancies, and pictures.

In no study do we so much need "sanctified common sense" as in the study of the types.

So much fancifulness and absurdity have been shown by some writers that many are tempted to go to the other extreme and abandon the study altogether. But "abuse does not take away use," and we do not hesitate to say that, if prosecuted soberly and prayerfully, no study can be more fruitful.

The best way is to begin with those Old Testament subjects which are referred to in the New Testament as anticipatory of CHRIST. We have Divine and apostolic warrant for seeing this in the Manna, the Lamb, the Rock, the Brazen Serpent, and other similar instances. In the same category is the use made in Hebrews of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices.

When we leave the safe ground of the New Testament we must study with two important and connected truths in mind:

(1) *The great difference between primary interpretation and spiritual application.*

The primary meaning of a passage, i.e. what it was to those to whom it was addressed, is one thing, but our spiritual use of it may be quite another, and the latter was probably not in the writer's mind at all.

(2) *The great difference between a type and a coincidence.*

The former is an illustration Divinely given and intended. The latter is what we see in the narrative, but which was not necessarily purposed by GOD. For instance, Jonah's circumstances were typical of our Lord's burial and resurrection. This is a type. The story of Joseph, with its wonderful likeness to our Lord's history in its detail, may not have been intentional. This would be a coincidence.

With these safeguards let us consider some of the aspects of this truly wonderful field.

1. The personal types (or coincidences), e.g. Adam, Noah, Melchizedec, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David.
2. The facts of the history typically used, e.g. Jacob's ladder, the tabernacle, Canaan privilege, brazen serpent, manna, and many more.
3. The peculiar details of certain occurrences giving different aspects of teaching.

(a) The two birds (Leviticus 14); the two goats (Leviticus 16); suggesting the aspects of death and resurrection.

(b) The two priesthoods (Aaron and Melchizedec); the two leaders (Moses and Joshua); the two kingships (David and Solomon).

No one type is sufficient to anticipate the fullness of the person and work of CHRIST.

(c) The details of Joseph's history, e.g. beloved of father, hated of brethren, sold, suffering, exalted, feeding the world. Considered with care, the coincidences are remarkable.

On this subject we may refer our readers to *A Study at the Types*, by Miss A. R. Habershon *. We do not by any means endorse all its teaching, but there is much that is suggestive and helpful, and if read with a critical mind, it will provoke thought on this fruitful subject. A valuable and suggestive work, entitled *The Five Offerings and their Law*, by E. M. S. (Marshall Bros.) can be warmly recommended. Fairbairn's *Typology of Scripture* (two volumes) may also be mentioned for reference.

* This is posted on our website.

4. The appearances of the Angel of the Covenant are to be noted.

These are not strictly types, but actual anticipations of the Incarnation by the Second Person of the Trinity.

A careful study of such passages as Genesis 18, Joshua 5, and Judges 13 will show that the references are not to a created angel, but to an actual appearance of GOD in angelic form.

One additional caution may be added. The types are not to be regarded as our primary source of doctrine, but only used for the confirmation or illustration of doctrine deduced from clear statements of Scripture.

It will be seen from the above fragmentary sketch what a wonderful field we have to traverse. CHRIST is verily the substance and Subject of the Old Testament, and the more deeply we study the records of the Old Covenant, the more we shall be convinced that even there "**Christ is all and in all.**"

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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