

How God spoke to us in the Past:

Tonight's question: What is the single purpose of God's revelation to us through Scripture?

It takes the entire Bible to show us how we can become the complete expression of Jesus Christ in the world, and it takes the work of the Holy Spirit in interpreting this Scripture to us. Tonight we will take a rapid look at the contribution the Old Testament plays in producing that maturity which is the aim of all God has done.

[Read Luke 24: 13-32] This story occurred on the day of the resurrection of Jesus. We need to put ourselves into the shoes of these men for a moment. The hearts of these men were filled with sorrow as they contemplated the events of that week culminating in the death of Jesus. They hardly knew which way to turn or what to do. *Just think of the emotional drain experienced by the sudden death of someone you were close to, or someone famous like Princess Diana, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks...*

Their reaction afterwards is very important. They spoke of how their hearts burned and were moved in them as Jesus expounded the Scriptures to them. *What was it that caused that wonderful, strange feeling?*

It was nothing more nor less than the exposition of the Old Testament in the power and clarity of the *Holy Spirit*. No incident in all the Bible explains the specific purpose of the Old Testament more adequately than this story: **Luke 24:27**.

This is what the Old Testament is for: It is a book designed to *prepare* the heart for the reception of that which satisfies. This is what these disciples discovered on the road to Emmaus. The Old Testament is deliberately an incomplete book; it never was intended to be complete!

If we were to read the whole of the Old Testament as though we had never read it before, and took note of all the predictions of Someone who is coming, we would find that the predictions begin in the early chapters of Genesis, and grow in detail and degree of anticipation through the books of the Prophets, all describing One who is coming. But when we finished our reading at Malachi, we would still not know who.

Therefore the Old Testament is a book of *unfulfilled prophecy*.

Now if we read through the Old Testament again, taking note this time of all the sacrifices, we will see the stream of blood begins in Genesis and flows in increasing volume all through the course to Malachi - and the continual emphasis will be on the need of sacrifice.

We will see that the Old Testament is a book of *unexplained sacrifices*.

If we read through the Old Testament again, this time noticing the desires and longings of its prominent characters, we would see the longing they express for something more than what life was offering them. **[Read Hebrews 11:10]** There is the continual crying out of thirsty souls, longing after something which has not yet been realized.

And therefore Old Testament is a book filled with *unsatisfied desires*.

We will find no answer to the *prophecies* or the *sacrifices* or the *desires* in the Old Testament, but the minute you open the New Testament and you read about Jesus Christ, you discover that He is the one who fulfils the prophecy, the one who explains the sacrifice, the one who satisfies the desire.

However we cannot fully appreciate this until we have first been awakened by what the Old Testament has to say!

In “*God's Perfect Will*”, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan divides the Old Testament into three major divisions. He describes them as “A sigh for a priest, a cry for a king, and a quest for a prophet.”

- The first five books of the Bible - Genesis to Deuteronomy - are a sigh for a priest - an plea for the ministry of one who can be a priest to stand between man and God.
- The “Historical” books - Joshua through to Esther - a cry for a king. They contain the longing of the human heart for a voice of authority.
- The “Teaching” books of the Old Testament - from Job to Malachi - are a quest for a prophet - looking for one who can understand human life, comment on current events, and predict what is to come, to encourage us.

When we open the New Testament, we find all this fulfilled in one person - Jesus Christ - the Priest, the King, and the Prophet.

It should be clear to us that the nature of the Old Testament is to *prepare* us for something. The letter to the Hebrews in the New testament explains this very clearly in **Hebrews 1:1-2a**. In these 2 verses the two Testaments are laid side by side, and we should see that the completion of the Old is found in the New. In the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews says that God spoke to us in many different ways:

- In Genesis we have the simple but awesome account of the story of creation, of the fall of man, and of the flood - very simply expressed!
- Then there is the straightforward stories of the lives of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- Afterwards we hear the thunderings of the Law in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
- There is the drama of the historical books, the songs of the Psalms, and the beautiful language of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.
- Proverbs presents a practical, everyday “common sense” wisdom.
- The Song of Solomon, Ruth, and Esther are books of delicate tenderness.
- There is the marvellous, mysterious language of Daniel and Ezekiel and all their strange visions.

All these different ways are all God speaking, but it is not complete - there is nothing in the Old Testament which can stand complete and of itself. It is all intended as

preparation.

When you come to the New Testament, all these many voices from the Old Testament merge into one voice, the voice of the Son of God.

The Old Testament, in its incompleteness, is almost as though God spoke in *syllables* and *short phrases* to us that were never quite connected or complete. But in the New Testament, these syllables and phrases become one expression of the Son of God.

This is what the Old Testament is: it is a repeating in syllables, sometimes almost impossible to understand in themselves, but when merged together, the whole produces meaning, preparing us for that marvellous expression of the fullness that was given to us in God's Son.

(Next time: Why do we need the Old Testament, if we have the New?)