

THE MASTER PLAN — many books, one great message

- Half a million words recounting the history of two million people who, three thousand years ago, occupied a small plot of land measuring around one hundred and thirty miles by forty in an unremarkable part of the world. Is that all there is to the Bible?
- Forty different writers over fifteen hundred years. Some were kings and princes, others were priests and prophets, farmers and fishermen, civil servants and soldiers. A unique book that has one big theme running from its beginning to its end, and that subject unfolds with unerring accuracy.

What is the Bible all about?

- The New Testament is all about Jesus Christ and those who became his disciples. A preparation for the world-wide church.

The Old Testament is the story of beginnings, and it tells us about God – his character and ultimate plan for the world. It is a preparation for the coming Messiah.

Christ himself said so — Luke 24:27,44.

The word 'Christ' (or Messiah) means the Anointed One. Every Jew knew that the Hebrew Scriptures were constantly pointing towards him.

We must be careful to read Christ *out of* the Old Testament and not *into* it.

Because the Old Testament is all about Christ, it is God's unfolding story of salvation.

There are four things to look out for as we read the Old Testament:

We must watch for the Promise, the Prophet, the People and the Place

1. Look for the Promise

The word 'covenant' means a binding agreement, a definite promise.

There are four ingredients:

- The parties concerned — those who sign the agreement
- The promises made — the benefits of the agreement
- The penalties involved — the consequences of breaking the agreement
- The pictures to seal it — the legal documents.

God's great covenant with mankind is one-sided. Two parties involved — God and the human race— but God makes the promises and signs the covenant.

The Promise in the Garden

Genesis 3:15 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel' (Genesis 3:15).

Notice carefully instead of saying, '*They* will crush your head and you will strike *their* heel,' God says, '**He** will crush your head and you will strike **his** heel.' — who is this?

The thirty-nine books in the Old Testament are God revealing how he *will keep* his Promise, and the twenty-seven books in the New Testament are God revealing how he *has kept* his Promise. The snake is the mouthpiece of Satan.

Romans 16:20 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet'

1 John 3:8: 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work' .

Colossians 2:15: 'Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [the cross]'.

The Promise confirmed in Noah's day

- Genesis 6:18: 'I will establish my covenant with you.'

A new sign. Genesis 9:12–13: a rainbow. Because this part of the Promise is with 'every living creature'. Cf. Romans 8:21,22; 2 Peter 3:13.

The Promise to Abraham and his children

- Genesis 12:2–3, 7 God promised Abraham that from him would come a special people (the Jews) in a special land (Israel); later God added a special sign (circumcision, Genesis 17).

- Paul's play on words in Galatians 3:16.

But why circumcision as the sign? Colossians 2:11 and Philippians 3:3.

Christ came to destroy all that the devil had accomplished (the snake), to guarantee a new creation (the rainbow), and a new people with a heart for God (circumcision).

The next reference to this Promise is to **Jacob** (Israel) Genesis 49:10,11 'The sceptre will not depart from **Judah**, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.' And notice 'his donkey' and 'his robes washed in blood'.

The Promise to Moses

- Exodus 12:13 'The blood will be a sign for you'. The blood of a lamb is the new sign.

Priests and Levites. Ceremonies and sacrifice.

Ceremonial law—how the Jews were to worship. Moral law—how they were to live.

But the blood of animals can never really take away sin (Hebrews 10:11).

John 1:29 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'

Romans 3:25–26 God has sent his Son as a sacrifice to turn away the righteous anger of God against sin ('propitiation').

Sin forgiven but left unpunished until Christ came (v.25).

Three big steps: the Promise (with Adam and Eve), the covenant (with Abraham) and the law (with Moses).

The snake, the rainbow, the special people, the special land, circumcision, the Jewish ceremonies and shed blood, are all signposts that say, 'This way to the Promise'.

2. Look for the Prophet

Deuteronomy 18:15 'The Lord your God will raise up for you **a prophet** like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.' God's unfolding revelation of his Promise

The crowds concluded: 'Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world' (John 6:14).

Philip declared: 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law' (John 1:45).

Even the Samaritans knew that the Messiah would explain everything to them (John 4:25),

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

Peter and Stephen quoted Deuteronomy 18:15 and applied it to Christ (Acts 3:22–23; 7:37).

Surprise, surprise!

- Balaam in Numbers 24:17: 'I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel...'. Among the nations!

The Prophet confirmed by the Psalms and prophets.

- The New Testament quotes from the Psalms more than from any other Old Testament book.
eg Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 31, 45, 69, and 110. Cf. Luke 1:33 with Psalm 72
- Obadiah 17—850 BC
- Isaiah 53:3–7—750 BC.
- Micah 5:2—750 BC
- Jeremiah 23:5–6—650 BC
- Zechariah 3:8—520 BC
- Malachi 3:1; 4: 5-6—400 BC) John Baptist (Elijah) preparing for Christ (Mtt. 11:10–15; 16:13–14).

Some have calculated that there are more than three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament that refer to Christ, and that twenty-nine of them were fulfilled in the final twenty-four hours of his life. Here are a few to illustrate:

<i>OT reference</i>	<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>NT reference</i>
Isaiah 7:14	His virgin conception	Luke 1:27
Micah 5:2	The town of his birth	Matthew 2:6
Jeremiah 31:15	The massacre of the boys	Matthew 2:18
Zechariah 9:9	The triumphal entry	Matthew 21:5
Zechariah 13:7	He would be deserted by his disciples	Mark 14:50
Psalms 35:11	He would be falsely accused	Matt. 26:60
Isaiah 50:6	He would be brutally beaten	Matt. 26:67
Isaiah 53:7	He would not retaliate	Matt. 27:14
Isaiah 53:12	He would be executed with criminals	Matt. 27:38; Luke 23:32
Psalms 22:16; Zechariah 12:10	His hands and feet would be pierced	John 19:34
Psalms 34:20	Yet his bones would not be broken	John 19:33
Psalms 22:18	They would gamble for his clothes.	John 19:23-24

3. Look for the people

After **Adam**, Genesis 5 introduces us to a family who began to call upon God — **Seth**.

Noah, a descendant of Seth and Enoch, 'was a righteous man... and he walked with God' (6:9).

This family line — Adam, Seth, **Enoch**, **Noah**, and all the others in between — does not follow the line of the first-born son. God chose spiritual men, converted men.

Of Noah's three sons, God turns our attention to **Shem**.

From Shem came **Abraham** and it was with Abraham that God renewed his Promise.

God renewed this Promise to Abraham's son **Isaac**.

Isaac had twin sons, but Esau was the firstborn, yet it was **Jacob** whom God chose to continue the line leading to Christ. Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons, but the one God wants us to watch is **Judah**, although he was not the first-born. (Genesis 49:10–11).

Revelation 5:5, Christ is called the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah'.

In Egypt God's Promise depended upon him protecting his people. Moses led the people out of Egypt. The family from which the Promise would come is almost lost from sight.

Then **Rahab** a Canaanite prostitute (Matthew 1:5 Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25) and **Ruth** a Moabitess (**Boaz**) Ruth 4:18–22. — Gospel for the nations!

David eventually became king. After **Solomon**, the whole nation of the Jews divided. Two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remained loyal to the line of David and stayed in Jerusalem (**Rehoboam**). The breakaway kingdom was now called Israel, and the loyal part based on Jerusalem was called Judah. We must watch **the kings of Judah**; these are the special people, leading to Christ.

In 537 BC the tribe of Judah was quick to send men help rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5).

We watch the family of **Zerubbabel** son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2). According to Matthew 1:12, Christ was born from this family. Luke agreed with this (3:27), but from Zerubbabel onwards **Luke followed the line to Mary**, rather than Joseph.

Another attempt to exterminate the Jews in the time of Esther. Somewhere was the family of Zerubbabel which was to lead to Christ. Only Matthew gives us the list of this family (1:13–16) and concludes, 'of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ', the unbroken line from Adam and Seth is complete. The Promise is preserved in the family until Christ came.

4. Look for the Place

To Abraham, in addition to the Promise of a people, they would occupy 'This land' (Gen. 12:7). Reaffirmed to Moses (Ex.13:11). Then Joshua 1:1–4 'I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.' Judges was a period of backsliding, judgement, repentance and delivery but in **the Promised Land**. In time of David it looked as if Promise fulfilled for ever. But after Solomon, the nation divided. Ten tribes chose their own king, Jeroboam I with Samaria as capital (Israel). 722 BC defeated by Assyria.

Judah and Benjamin, in Jerusalem (Judah). Exiled by Babylon in 586 BC. Nehemiah reminded God of his promise of the Land. Neh.1:9 'I will gather them from there and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' The city and Temple were rebuilt in the time of Persian empire (Cyrus).

In AD 70 Jews rebelled against Rome and the city and temple destroyed. The Jews lost their land and Rome renamed Judea *Syria Palaestina* and in AD 135 Jerusalem became *Aelia Capitolina* in honour of Emperor Hadrian. After the Romans, Islam conquered Jerusalem c AD 635 and the Ottoman (Islam) empire held it (with brief interlude of the Crusades) until Jews returned as a nation on 14 May 1948.

This progressive unfolding of God's Promise of a Prophet through his People in a special Place is what Paul meant: 'When the time had fully come, God sent his Son...' (Galatians 4:4).

The harmony of Old and New Testaments

By looking at the plan of God to keep his Promise of a Prophet and a People in their own Place, we can see how unique is the story that is unfolded in the Bible.