



# **SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY**

## **Discipleship Plan**

**Second Quarter – Pentateuch**  
**Part 4**

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## Second Quarter – Pentateuch Part 4

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## Lesson Thirteen: Offerings and the Sacrificial System - Part 1

**Primary Verses:** “These, then, are the regulations for the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the ordination offering, and the fellowship offering, which the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the Desert of Sinai.” Leviticus 7:37-38 (NIV)

**Teaching Text:** Leviticus 1-7

**Supporting Text:** Exodus 3:18-20, Exodus 4:22-23, Exodus 5:1-3

The perennial problem to the well-meaning Christian who wants to read the Bible in a year tends to be the book of Leviticus. Genesis and Exodus are long books but the stories and characters are fascinating and naturally hold our interest. However, many a Christian soldier has fallen on hard rocks in the seemingly tedious and archaic regulations of Leviticus. This may be a case of “poisoning the well,” seeing that most have been told that the Levitical system of sacrifices are rendered irrelevant since Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. Why should we expect people would have any interest in reading something irrelevant?

But this is a crippling error in our thinking. Hebrews 8:13 explicitly refers to the Old Covenant as “obsolete;” meaning it is no longer in use nor legally binding. But that doesn’t make it “irrelevant.” Consider marriage as an example of how a covenant changes previous agreements and obligation. A woman may have a social security card, a driver’s license, a passport, property deeds, etc. However, when her name changes, legally, due to marriage, after a certain grace period, all such documents with her maiden name are no longer in use. They are obsolete, but not irrelevant. Any privileges or learning gained through the process of attaining the old documents are still very much relevant to her under legal uses of the new documents. She may lose the right to access certain benefits *by* use of the former, but whatever she gained *through* the former is still useful in the latter document.

So it is with believers in Christ concerning the Levitical sacrifices. We gain absolutely nothing **by** them, but all that the Holy Spirit revealed **through** them is still in operation today. Virtually the entire book of Hebrews is dedicated to an examination of how the New Covenant is superior to and rightfully replaces the Old Covenant. And yet, without an appreciation and familiarity with the Old Covenant, you will hardly understand the blessings of the New Covenant. For this reason, if we are to truly see the splendor of God’s loving sacrifice in the New Testament, we must become more knowledgeable of the sacrifices that He commanded in the Old Testament.

**Questions to Consider:** There are five general types of sacrifice explained in Leviticus 1-7. What are the distinctions of each sacrifice? How does the role of the priest differ from sacrifice to sacrifice? What, if any, are the stated purposes of each sacrifice? How are these offerings connected to “worship?”

**Challenging the Class:** Prayerfully, the need for greater familiarity with the so-called “irrelevant” aspects of the Old Covenant has been made clear in this week’s lesson. What other areas of scripture have you been tempted to disregard and ignore? Repent and reject any such inklings to minimize God’s Word today!

## Lesson Fourteen: Offerings and the Sacrificial System - Part 2

**Primary Verses:** “For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” Hebrews 9:13-15 (ESV)

**Teaching Text:** Leviticus 1-7

**Supporting Text:** 1 Peter 1:18-20; John 6:48-51; Ephesians 2:13-15; Hebrews 13:10-12; Isaiah 53:10

Failure to familiarize ourselves with the sacrificial code in Leviticus puts us at a loss to truly see the scene as it must have been. In her very helpful book, “The Lamb of God,” Nancy Guthrie helps paint the picture:

*For us, sacrifice means giving something up or taking something on that costs us money or comfort or convenience. Sacrifice in the Bible, however, is the bloody reality of a bellowing animal being butchered on an altar. Imagine the sensory overload of this experience—the violent resistance of the animal, the spurting of blood, the feel of pulling the animal apart, the smell of its burning flesh and bones. Imagine the emotional and spiritual impact of offering this sacrifice, knowing that it was your sin that made this death necessary. And imagine the frustration in knowing that you’ll be back tomorrow or next week because you will sin again.*

**The Lamb of God (Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament), page 200**

The reoccurring costs of such sacrifices were great for the Israelites. We can see how many would have been tempted to present inferior offerings. But such practices could only occur with regularity because of corruption among priests who accepted “damaged goods” where God had commanded animals “without spot or blemish.” Ultimately, however, whether it was crooked priests/Levites or stingy people, failure to sacrifice according to God’s specific demands indicate a poor understanding of God’s deep offense concerning our sin.

This same principle from the Old Covenant still applies under the New Covenant. A person who will not come to Christ has a small view of how great his/her sin is before God. The same person has a very high view of his/her own works or worthiness before God when He has clearly stated, otherwise, in His Word. It is also clear that the inability to linger long on God’s great grace but instead, make boasts of our religious service is as common under the New Covenant as it was under the Old Covenant. In both cases, the remedy is the same: observe the sacrifice itself and see the goodness of God, Who has allowed the blood of another to substitute for your own. Isn’t that fuel enough to honor Him with humble obedience?

**Questions to Consider:** Consider the passages in the supporting text section. Can you see how these passages help highlight how Christ’s ministry fulfills the shadows set forth in the sacrifices described in Leviticus 1-7?

**Challenging the Class:** Imagine what else you would see/learn if you read the rest of Leviticus! Read it!

## Lesson Fifteen: The Report of the Lord

**Primary Verses:** “And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” Numbers 14:1-4 (KJV)

**Teaching Text:** Numbers 13-14

**Supporting Text:** Isaiah 53:1-4, John 12:37-38

Our understanding of Israel's forty years of wandering in the desert will be severely incomplete unless we remember one thing: the generation that left Egypt was largely intact and still alive at the point they first sent spies to explore the Promised Land. One of the truly sad moments in all of scripture takes place in the chapters we are studying this week. It is the height of unbelief that a people, for whom God acted miraculously to destroy the greatest nation on earth - Egypt, did not believe the same God would also honor His word by bringing them into the land He promised Abraham. Isn't it strange that everyone forgot their freedom wasn't earned by their own strength? Why were they so distracted by their own puny power that they could not remember the grace and divine strength that was sufficient for them less than two years ago?

Couldn't we ask the same of ourselves though? How many of us are guilty of the same forgetful fear that plagued Israel? Whether facing today's challenges or shivering at the haunting prospects of tomorrow, we falter in faith because we casually dismiss or sinfully disregard God's deliverance from yesterday. Perhaps we are equally at fault in our struggle against sin. When we question our resistance to the alluring power of sin, aren't we focused on our fleshly weakness? If only we would recall the Redeemer Who, when on the Cross, was mighty to save even in His dying! How could He not now deliver all who trust in Him seeing that He has an indestructible life and lives forever to make intercession for His own?

If the truth be told, God's people, in both Old and New Covenants, have failed whenever they have focused on their own weakness, rather than God's glory. And somehow the truth evades us - God's power is made perfect in weakness: first in Israel's weakness as a nation of slaves who defeated a superpower; and then in the apparent weakness of God's Son dying a criminal's death on two sticks of wood. Who could believe such a message?

**Questions to Consider:** Consider the instructions given in Numbers 13:1. Were the spies sent to discover whether they could overtake the Canaanites? Or were they simply to retrieve information about the land? Why did the Israelites believe the majority report of the spies rather than the minority report of the Lord? How does failure to understand God's instructions generally lead all of us into sin/doubt?

**Challenging the Class:** How often do you rehearse God's reliability when facing today's challenges?

## Lesson Sixteen: The Man Moses: Heart of Faith, Eager Hands, But Clay Feet

**Primary Verses:** “But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.”  
Deuteronomy 34:10-12 (KJV)

**Teaching Text:** Numbers 12 and 20:1-13

**Supporting Text:** Deuteronomy 32:48-52; Deuteronomy 34, Psalm 90, Hebrews 3:1-6

What can we say about Moses? Without trying, we could have dedicated a full year to studying his life alone, not to mention his writings. In the introduction to his book, “From Bondage to Liberty”, Anthony T. Selvaggio writes:

*“It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Moses to the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation. Arguably, Moses is the most significant Old Testament figure because of his unique role as mediator of the old covenant. Abraham and David were significant covenant figures, but in old covenant terms, only Moses could claim the role as God’s mediator. In this sense, Moses is the only parallel to Jesus Christ who is the mediator of the new and better covenant. The great Reformed biblical theologian Geerhardus Vos, in acknowledgement of Moses’ vital and unique role in God’s plan, stated that Moses ‘may be fitly called the redeemer of the Old Testament.’”*

As a leader, Israel would have to wait centuries for someone (David) to rival him. As one close to God, some could argue that David or Abraham were his equals. However, none of them saw God like Moses did nor were they used for the deliverance of a people quite like Moses was. Moses is unique among the prophets, too. Of course, all prophets functioned as mouthpieces for God. They were His spokespersons. But Moses was so highly regarded that God even spoke up for him in the controversy concerning Miriam and Aaron. Truly, he stands apart from any others we will see in the Old Testament.

His heart yearned for God’s glory to be revealed, his hands were eager to honor God, but his walk with God was tarnished by sinful pride and presumption. Though he delivered Israel from the house of slavery, he was unable to usher them into their inheritance. His accomplishments certainly foreshadowed deliverance from sin but also leave us desperately searching for the Man Who can not only free us from sin, but grant us safe passage to and an eternal resting place in heaven itself.

**Questions to Consider:** If you could ask Moses himself, what do you think would be his five most memorable moments in life? What might his five lowest moments be?

**Challenging the Class:** If we are reading scripture the way Jesus wants us to, we should see how characters and stories from the Old Testament point to Him (John 5:40-47). Not so that we are excused from knowing and understanding the details the Old Testament. But to ensure we are *also* seeing Christ as we learn about the Law, Prophets, and Writings.

# The Glory of the Coming Lord

## Discovering Christ in the Old Testament

Edmund P. Clowney

**If God were to make reasonable promises: a spiritual high, a tax break, then a secular age might credit the word of the Almighty. But God promises a new nature, physical resurrection, a new heaven and earth, and eternal life.**

In southern California, where snow may be seen only on the peaks of the distant San Bernardino mountains, Santa Claus rides a sleigh, his illuminated plastic effigy following Rudolph's red nose across the roof tiles of a Spanish hacienda. Santa may also be found in malls and on public property, where political correctness has banned the crèche-unless, of course, the sheep and oxen are joined by Donner, Blitzen, Rudolf, the Lion King, Pocahontas, and Mickey Mouse. Yet in Vanity Fair Mall the faint background music still includes "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" and "O Come Let Us Adore Him."

Jesus the Christ, however, is not reduced to background music in our time. He was born in history; he now rules history as the risen Lord. His is not the "virtual reality" of digital entertainment nor the unreality of multicultural myths, but the first and final reality: the personal, living God incarnate. He is the Alpha and the Omega: the creating Word who has the last word, for when he comes again, we face not a jury but the Judge. Human history cannot contain his glory, but we need the depth dimension of Scripture history to reveal it.

On the first Easter morning, when Jesus walked, unrecognized, with Cleopas and a companion, he did not remove their doubts and fears by saying, "Cleopas!" as he had said "Mary!" in the garden. They needed to know more than the fact of the resurrection-they were walking away from the fact of the empty tomb and of the presence of angels reported by the women. They needed to understand its meaning: the glory of Jesus Christ that was gained through his suffering. What they foolishly failed to grasp was the message of Scripture.

Jesus, therefore, beginning with the books of Moses and the prophets, explained from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk 24:27). He was not willing to show Cleopas that he was somehow alive, since in a chance universe anything can happen. The good news is not that there was once a resurrection. The good news is "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3f).

We, too, need to know the fact of the resurrection in the context of its meaning. The teaching of Jesus that burned into the hearts of those two disciples has not been forever lost because Cleopas lacked a tape recorder. We have Christ's resurrection teaching during those forty days in the inspired New Testament. That is why the sure guide to our understanding of the Old Testament is the New Testament.

The Spirit of Christ spoke through the Old Testament prophets, promising the grace that has come to us (1 Pt 1:10-12). On Emmaus Road Jesus taught the message of the prophets and apostles: Christ's

sufferings and glory (Acts 17:2,3; 1 Pt 1:11; 1 Cor 15:3-5). His glory is the promised glory of the Lord who comes to save. The disciples perceived some of that glory, and for that reason could not understand how he could die like a criminal. Jesus had to show them that the glory of the coming Lord was the glory of the suffering Servant of Old Testament prophecy.

### **The Lord Must Come**

The Bible is not only from God, it is about God. The Bible story is not the history of Israel, nor the biographies of saints whose lives may inspire us. It is God's story, the account of his saving work. God speaks his promises and acts to keep them. The initiative is always his. In the Garden of Eden, after the sin of Adam and Eve, the Lord came seeking them. God promised that the Son of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, even as his heel was struck (Gn 3:15). That promise is the rationale for human history. Had God spoken his word of judgment rather than his promise, human history would have ended at the foot of the tree in the Garden. God's plan to send Christ is the reason we have the Bible; indeed, the reason there is a human race.

What God promised in the Garden he prepared for in the unfolding history of his redemption. As human evil spread and deepened, God called Noah to spare him in the flood of judgment. The rainbow marked God's faithful promise. When the proud builders of Babel were scattered in clans and peoples, God called Abraham to begin a separate people through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.

God took the initiative by coming as well as calling. He came down the stairway of Jacob's dream to stand beside him (the reading in the margin). (1) Because the Lord stood there, Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not" (Gn 28:16). He called it Bethel, the House of God.

When God called Moses to the flame of his presence in the burning bush, he identified himself as "I AM," the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had come down to deliver their offspring from slavery in Egypt. "I AM" names the Sovereign. He speaks and it is done. Above all, God's word announces his presence: "I AM" means "I am here with you."

When God brought Israel to Mount Sinai, where he had appeared to Moses in the flaming bush, he made his covenant with them, sealed in blood. Yet, while Moses on the mountain was receiving God's plans for the tabernacle, impatient Israel concocted their own idolatrous worship. After the rebellion was put down, God proposed canceling the building of the tabernacle. In the Angel of his Presence he would go before them and lead them into the promised land, but he could not dwell in the midst of this sinful people. It was too dangerous for them (Ex 33:3). Instead he would meet with Moses at the door of another tent, at a safe distance, outside the camp.

Moses responded in dismay: if God's presence would not go among them, there was no reason to go to the promised land, for what was the point if the Lord would not be there in their midst? He pleaded to know the Angel of the Lord, and to be shown the glory of the Lord.

God heard Moses' prayer and revealed himself personally to Moses. Hidden in the crevice of a rock, Moses saw the back of the Lord as he passed by. Overwhelmed with the glory of the Lord, he heard

God's Name proclaimed: "Yahweh, Yahweh God [the I AM God], merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in grace and truth" (Ex 34:6).

Moses prayed in grateful acknowledgment of the presence of the Lord: "If now I have found favor in thy sight, O LORD, let the LORD, I pray thee, go in the midst of us; for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance" (Ex 34:9 ASV). Clinging to the promise, Moses actually asks God to go in their midst because they are a sinful people-yet not to destroy them, but to pardon their sin. With God present and sin pardoned, Moses seeks the supreme blessing: not merely that God give the land as their inheritance, but that he take them as his inheritance. That fellowship between the present Lord and his people is the heart of biblical religion. The tabernacle was built after all, the place of God's dwelling in the middle of the camp, with sacrifices and the priesthood to mediate approach to the Holy One. At the end of the Exodus account, the cloud of God's glory filled the tabernacle. God was among his people.

God gave Israel the land, and dwelt there in his temple at Jerusalem. But Solomon, who dedicated the temple, also launched Israel's apostasy. For one of his heathen wives, he built on the Mount of Olives a shrine to Chemosh, the god of Moab. Yet God had promised through Moses that after divine judgment had culminated in exile, God would gather his people and circumcise their hearts so that they would love him with all their heart and soul and life (Dt 30:6). The Psalms and the Prophets echo the promise of the blessing to come in the latter days. But the supreme blessing can only come with the coming of the Lord.

God must come because the condition of his people is so bad that only God can reverse it. Ezekiel describes his vision of the congregation of God in the valley (Ez 37:1-14). They are not alive but dead, reduced to dry bones on the valley floor. They are not even assembled as skeletons, but scattered. "Son of man, can these bones live?" asks the Lord. Ezekiel does not give the obvious answer, but replies, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."

The Lord tells Ezekiel to preach the promise of resurrection life to the dry bones. As he preaches, the roar of rattling bones fills the valley; assembled skeletons are covered with sinews and flesh. Ezekiel is told to preach again, promising the Spirit of life to lifeless bodies. As he preaches, breath enters them and they stand-a vast army!

The meaning of that vision appears in the prophecy that precedes it. Israel's hope is not gone: God promises to bring back his scattered people: "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean...I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez 36:25,26).

Not only is the condition of God's people so hopeless that only God can remedy it; the promises of God are so great that only God can fulfill them. No one ever disbelieved God because he promised too little. God promises the impossible. He promised to make a great nation of Abraham, but Abraham and Sarah were childless. The years went by, and when God again repeated his promise, Abraham, the man of faith, fell on his face and laughed. He was 100, Sarah was 90; God's promise

was absurd. "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" pleaded Abraham, who had arranged to restore God's credibility by having a son of Hagar, Sarah's handmaid.

When Sarah later heard the promise from the Angel of the Lord, she, too, laughed. Confronted by the Lord, she denied in embarrassment. But the Lord insisted. Her laughter went on record, for the Lord kept his promise, and Sarah laughed in joy, not unbelief. Her son was named, "Isaac"-"laughter" (Gn 17:17; 18:21; 21:6).

If God were to make reasonable promises: a spiritual high, a technique for relaxation, a tax break, then a secular age might credit the word of the Almighty. But God promises a new nature, physical resurrection, a new heaven and earth, and eternal life. Superlatives burst open as Old Testament prophets describe what God will do in the glorious future. Zechariah foresees a time when every pot in Jerusalem will be like a holy temple vessel, and when "Holiness to the LORD," once inscribed in gold in the High Priest's tiara, will be on the bridles of the horses-the ancient equivalent of bumper stickers. In that day the feeblest man in Jerusalem will be like King David, "and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them" (Zec 12:8).

### **The Servant Must Come**

God must come, and Isaiah promises his coming, leading a second exodus as he marches through the wilderness again (Is 40). But if God is to come in salvation and not judgment, there must be a final provision for sin, and fulfillment of the righteousness God requires. Not only must the Lord come; the Servant of the Lord must come: a prophet like Moses, but greater; a King like David, but holy (and wiser than Solomon); a priest free of the sinfulness of the line of Aaron. The Lord had promised such a Prophet, such a Priest-King. The prophets who spoke of the coming of the Lord, spoke also of the coming of the Lord's Anointed. Since the shepherds of God's people had clothed themselves with the wool of the flock and fed themselves on the meat, but failed in their task, God the Good Shepherd would come to search for the lost, and bind up the injured. "I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them." (Ez 34:24).

God's people lacked warriors to lead them, so God himself would put on his breastplate of righteousness and his helmet of salvation, and come to their rescue (Is 59:16,17). Yet God will deliver through his Servant, who will make satisfaction for their sins, and atone for their iniquities (Is 53). The coming Ruler on the throne of David bears divine names: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is 9:6).

The Book of Psalms was edited after Israel's return from exile to give hope to a people who were back in the land, but who had no king on David's throne. God's people are encouraged to wait and to praise, for God is coming; he has set his king on his holy hill of Zion; indeed, at God's right hand, for David's Son is the One he calls his Lord.

The whole New Testament is grounded in the claim that Jesus is the promised Christ, the Lord's Anointed and himself the Lord. John's Gospel should be read with one finger in the Old Testament. Does Proverbs personify Wisdom as God's attribute, the master workman with him in creation? (Prv

8:30). Then John tells us that Jesus is the Word of God, forever with the Father, through whom all things were made. He is not merely with God, he is God the Son.

Does God reveal himself as the I AM? When Jesus identifies himself with those words in Gethsemane, the soldiers who came to arrest him fall back in dread. When he said, "Before Abraham was, I Am," his enemies picked up stones to execute him for blasphemy, because he made himself equal with God (Jn 8:58).

God, promising the tabernacle, proclaimed himself as the Lord, "full of grace and truth" (Ex 34:6). John says, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14 NKJV). (2) We have received of that fullness, grace in the place of grace (v. 16). That is, the grace and truth that God proclaimed in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ (v. 17). Moses did not see God face to face, but "God the Only Begotten, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (v. 18 NIV margin).

With the rest of the New Testament, John's Gospel proclaims that the Lord himself has come. John the Baptist preached the coming of the Lord from Isaiah 40. Isaiah promised God's coming, and John announced the One whose sandals he was not worthy to fasten: the Light that shines on everyone was coming into the world (Jn 1:9,23).

When Jesus told Nicodemus that "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5), Nicodemus did not recognize the passage to which Jesus alluded (see above, Ez 36:25-27). Jesus rebuked Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, for not understanding the promised new birth. Only when God intervenes, only when his sovereign Spirit moves, can stony hearts be made to beat and dead bones be given new life.

Nicodemus said that Jesus was a teacher come from God. Yet he did not know what it meant that Jesus had come from God, nor that Jesus could tell him heavenly things. In the Book of Proverbs, the wise man Agur makes a startling admission. He says that he is the stupidest man alive. "I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One" (Prv 30:3). But his wisdom consists in knowing that he doesn't know. For who does? "Who has gone up to heaven and come down?" he asks. The anchors on our news programs seem always ready to call in a reporter on the spot. But who can call in our man in heaven, to report on the latest word from the divine council? Who does know the Holy One? "What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!" (Prv 30:4).

Jesus answers Agur's question: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (Jn 3:13 NKJV). (3) The one who goes up to heaven is the Son of Man who has come down from heaven. Speaking earlier to Nathanael, Jesus had reminded him of the angels ascending and descending on the Lord as he stood beside Jacob at Bethel. So Nathanael, a true son of Jacob/Israel will see the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (Jn 1:51).

But how will Jesus ascend to heaven? He will be lifted up. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:14, 15).

Moses lifted a bronze serpent on a staff in the wilderness when the second generation of Israelites rebelled against God, and were judged by venomous serpents. When they cried to the Lord, he told Moses to lift up a bronze figure of a serpent; all who looked at it would be healed and live. The bronze snake was a symbol of the curse of death for sin. It was lifted up, not for adoration, but as a symbol of victory over the curse. As one might impale a snake on a spear and hold it up in triumph, so the bronze serpent was lifted up.

How can such a symbol represent the lifting up of the Son of Man to heaven? We have the answer in the words of Jesus: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (Jn 12:32). John explains, "This He said, signifying by what death He would die" (v.33; Jn 8:28). Nicodemus did not know how Jesus came from heaven, nor how he would return to heaven. Jesus must be lifted up on a cross. There he was made a curse for us; he was smitten by God, for the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all (Is 53:6). "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')" (Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:21).

The agonizing death of Christ does not remove his glory. Rather, by that death he is lifted up as Victor, crushing the head of the serpent. This is what God promised: "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted" (Is 52:13 NIV). But how will he be lifted up? In appalling suffering: "his form marred beyond human likeness-so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths..." (v. 14f). The suffering Servant of Isaiah triumphs because he poured out his life, bearing the sin of many (Is 53:12).

This is the glory of Jesus Christ that Peter saw in the Old Testament. Peter, who had said that Jesus must never go to the cross, came to understand that there Jesus saved him. He cites Isaiah 53 and summarizes: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pt 2:24 NIV). Peter saw the glory of the cross. Jesus whose sufferings he had witnessed, was his Lord and God. Encouraging Christians, he quotes Isaiah 8:12: "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." The antidote to the fear of men is the glory of the Lord himself. Isaiah continues, "The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread" (Is 8:13 NKJV). We "hallow" the Lord by acknowledging him to be God, set apart as the Holy One. But where the Greek Old Testament reads, "Hallow the LORD himself," Peter writes, "Hallow the Lord the Christ"! So does Peter, who had worshipped Jesus in his fishing boat, confess the glory of Christ his Lord: Hallowed be thy Name!

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1 [ [Back](#) ] The masculine pronominal suffix could refer to the stairway or to Jacob. That it does refer to Jacob is evident from the second appearance of the Lord to Jacob at Bethel (Gn 35:13; 28:13). There the same preposition and pronoun is used to describe God's going up from "upon him."

2 [ [Back](#) ] The word for "dwell" is really "tented," an illusion to the Old Testament tabernacle, the

issue in the passage John cites, Exodus 34:6.

3 [ [Back](#) ] While important manuscripts omit the last phrase, it may well be original. See verse 18.

Issue: "O Come Let Us Adore Him: The Person and Work of Christ"

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# Meeting Jesus at an Old Testament Feast

by *John R. Sittema*

The default sin of the human heart is to put ourselves first. “It really is all about me!” was once a funny t-shirt slogan; it has now become a way of life. Unless preachers and Bible teachers are careful, the way we handle Scripture can actually feed this beast. We rush to application, consumed by the question, “How is this relevant to me?”

But the Bible is theocentric, not anthropocentric. It is more concerned to trace God’s ways — His character, purposes, and His cosmic redemptive plan (“For God so loved the cosmos”) — than it is to give modern believers character-building resource material (“be courageous like Daniel; lead like Nehemiah; with the faith of Abraham”).

We must start by remembering the overarching plot of Scripture. The Bible is remarkable: sixty-six books, dozens of human authors, fifteen hundred years in the making, various types of literature. But its grand diversity is held together by a golden thread, a single plot in three movements — creation, fall, redemption — that is unveiled in its first few pages. This plot establishes the crucial backstory to the coming of Jesus Christ. A backstory introduces characters, establishes relationships, and defines key terms. In this case, the Old Testament introduces Jesus, defines His work as Messiah, and establishes the theological framework for understanding God’s redemption.

A brief glance at two Old Testament festivals is illustrative. The first is Passover, the familiar feast that anchored the exodus. Some of its features (the angel of death, blood on doorposts, a meal eaten in haste) are well known parts of the story. Others are not. What matters is that all are shadows of the coming Christ.

Jesus ministered in a Jewish context, keeping the Passover with His disciples. But He took pains to show that the customs were more than context; they defined Him.

The Torah required selected lambs to be put on public display for four days (Ex. 12:3–6) to verify that they were without blemish. Jesus, following the triumphal entry, presented Himself in the temple for that exact period, for that very purpose. He submitted to testing by the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and scribes (Mark 12:13), tried before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, He proved spotless.

“This is my body” and “this cup is a new covenant in my blood” are Lord’s Supper keystones, but they were spoken during the Passover Seder. The meal — and the true exodus — are found in Jesus.

Passover was both a family and a communal feast. The lamb chosen “for the nation” was staked out in the temple courtyard on Passover at 9 a.m., and slaughtered publicly at 3 p.m. So was Jesus — nailed to the cross at 9 a.m., He died at 3 p.m., just as the four-footed beast died in a liturgy that concluded, “It is finished!”

Why are such details important? Because the point of Jesus’ death — contra pop theology’s selfish twist — is not merely how much physical pain He endured for me. It is, rather, what God accomplished by His death. The answer is found in Passover imagery. The Passover story (Ex. 12:2)

began with strange words: “This month shall be for you...the first month of the year.” With Passover, God reset Israel’s calendar. Her old life as slaves was ending, a new life as sons beginning. Jesus’ death announced the same, but on a grander scale. Paul declares, “We have been united with him in a death like his” (Rom. 6:5). But he also exults, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). Death with a capital “D” — not only personal physical death, but sin’s devastating reign over the first Adam’s world (Rom. 5:12–21) — was defeated in the cross of Christ.

If death’s reign was defeated in the cross, where dawns the new? It bursts forth in Jesus’ resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits. This feast’s Old Testament roots were agricultural: early sheaves were brought to the tabernacle to share God’s bounty with the poor and aliens. But the feast always tilted Israel forward, rehearsing the day when all of life would be “very good” again as it once had been.

Paul uses festal language to explain this (1 Cor. 15:20). As Jesus’ death conquered death, so, too — as the second Adam — His resurrection dawned a new creation, a kingdom of grace (Rom. 5:21). Christ is the “firstfruits” of this new world. Raised with Him, we, too, who “have the firstfruits of the Spirit” (8:23), are the firstfruits of the new creation (James 1:18).

Thus the Old Testament Feast of Firstfruits is the ground of a vigorous and practical New Testament eschatology (view of the age to come).

These are only two brief examples; there are many more feasts, countless temple practices, and narrative stories that serve to rehearse the redemption that would come in Jesus. A gospel shaped by the rich Old Testament backstory is evangelistically more compelling, for it honors the cohesive unity of Scripture. And such a gospel produces disciples with a healthier self-image: they resist the default sin of putting themselves first and learn to deny themselves and follow Him.

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