

Christ in the Pentateuch

Preface

Ian Flanders, the author of this material, is a regular contributor to Serving Today and a member of its production team. Given his experience as a missionary in France, he is also producer of a French language radio programme “Espérance Aujourd’hui” which is broadcast widely throughout French speaking Africa.

The apostle Paul writes in Philippians chapter 3, verse 10:
“I want to know Christ.”

Despite Paul’s already considerable knowledge and experience of Christ, he always wanted to know him better, to go further in his knowledge and to pursue excellence in and through Christ.

It is our desire that this booklet might contribute to your growing knowledge of Christ. As leaders and servants in Christ’s church, we are called to know him better, we are called to be Christ-centred, Christ-glorifying, Christ-satisfied and Christ-like.

May God, through the illuminating grace of his Spirit, allow us to grow ever further and deeper into a true knowledge of his Son, the Lord Jesus.

Ian Flanders
 January 2007

Chapter 1 – Introduction.

Readers of booklets produced by the “Serving Today” team may already be familiar with the two booklets entitled “Jesus our Example”, that I wrote some time ago. This title examined the question of just how Jesus can be considered an example for those involved in pastoral ministry and in what respect he should be considered a model that Christians should follow.

In this new series of booklets, I return to the all-important subject of Jesus Christ. I shall be looking this time, in greater depth, at his person and his work.

However, before doing so, I would like to make a few remarks concerning the booklets “Jesus our Example” and suggest that there are in fact dangers to be avoided in considering Jesus as our example. This is not to say that I want to withdraw all that I wrote on that subject. I still strongly believe that the content of “Jesus our Example” is of great value and should help us considerably in our ministry as church leaders. The dangers I want to mention are these:

Firstly, that we look upon Jesus and see him only as an example to follow, as nothing more than a model for ministry.

Secondly, that we begin to view this model, this example, in a legalistic way.

I shall now examine these dangers in greater detail:

The first risk is that we see Jesus as nothing more than an example. The problem can be that we limit Jesus to just that, an example and nothing more, when in fact he is an awful lot more than just an example. Jesus, as the Bible reveals, is the eternal Son of God, made man. This is an incredible mystery but as we study the relevant passages of the Bible we can but conclude that this is true. If Jesus is both man and God, he is extraordinary, he is special, he is far more than an example to be followed, he is to be worshipped and trusted! The Bible also reveals that Jesus is a Saviour. Again we will examine in detail what that means throughout this series of booklets. Notice though, that if Jesus is a Saviour he is more than an example. It can never be enough simply to follow him as a model, we need to be saved by him, every one of us, and every person in our congregations.

Jesus is to be worshipped as God and trusted as Saviour. This must come out very clearly in our preaching and teaching. We must never just say to our congregations: “follow the example of Jesus and you will be all right.”

The second danger is that it is possible to turn the ideas that come out of following Jesus as an example, into a new form of legalism.

Legalism is about making lists of many rules and regulations and about depending upon them, trusting in them, to make us acceptable before God. Therefore,

legalism can occur when we start thinking that we must follow Jesus in the details of how he behaved, in order to gain our way to heaven or in order to win God’s favour. We must never start thinking this way and we certainly must never give our congregations the impression that this type of thinking is true.

There is nothing that we can do to deserve God’s favour. If we have received it, it is unmerited and originates in his grace and mercy. He has chosen to bless us. He has chosen to provide for us a means of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no other way and we must be very careful to banish legalism from our teaching.

Having said this, it is necessary to remind ourselves just why there is value in studying Jesus as an example and value in following that example day by day. We follow Jesus not because we want to earn something from God but because we love him and want to honour him and glorify him. We follow Jesus because we recognise that he was perfect and that to strive after this perfection or maturity is the best way of saying thank you for the incomparable blessings that he has given us.

Why is study of the person and work of Jesus Christ so important?

There are many issues at stake. If you went out onto the street and asked passers by: “Who is Jesus?” Many might reply by saying: “A good man, a religious man”, or, as we

have mentioned: “Just a good example.” Others might say that he is: “A prophet” or: “A mystic.” Others might see him as: “A liar or deceiver.” We claim that, according to the Bible, he is the Son of God. Who is right?

Alternatively, if we were to ask: “What did Jesus come to achieve?” Some might reply that he came to change society, to show people how to live, or to challenge and overthrow the Roman occupier. Others may assert that he failed to achieve much because his life was shortened by his death upon the cross. For us, again according to the Bible, we affirm that Jesus came to save us. He came to provide a way back to God and that he achieved this through his death upon the cross.

If we do not have a true or correct understanding of who Jesus is and what he came to do then we can do ourselves a lot of harm and lead our congregations astray and into deep trouble.

At the end of the day, our eternal destiny depends on who we understand Jesus to be and on how we understand that we can be saved or reconciled to God. If we get things wrong and have a low or poor view of Christ and his work then we will deprive ourselves of the salvation he came to bring and deprive our listeners of the possibility of eternal life. It really is that serious. Our understanding of Christ is a question of life and of death!

If we believe things about Christ that are clearly wrong, then it is possible that we are not true believers. If we teach these things to others then we may be leading them astray and even preventing them from coming to a knowledge of Christ and of being saved. This is a very serious matter indeed and so it is essential that we do understand what the Bible teaches about Christ.

At the same time we can be true believers but still have an incomplete understanding or false view of Christ. This can affect the way we lead our lives, the way we relate to God, the way we feel about some of the experiences we go through.

Here are some examples:

If we believe that Christ was not truly, authentically man, in the person of Jesus, then we might think that he cannot really understand all that we go through. As we experience trials and temptations we might feel that he is unable to truly empathize and doubt that he cares or is willing to help us.

If, on the other hand, we have been led to believe that Christ was not fully God, we might doubt his power and ability to work in our lives and circumstances. We might think that it is not worthwhile addressing him in prayer.

So, what we believe about Christ will make a difference to our everyday lives, at a most practical level.

This teaching or doctrine is not just for intellectuals to debate; we cannot just pass it by and think it unimportant. It is important and it needs to be taught to our congregations in a way that they can understand it, in a way that does them good in their daily lives and helps them to become more mature in their faith. I trust that this series of booklets will help you to see what a difference having a right view of Christ makes to your daily walk and fellowship with God.

My method of study.

First and foremost we are going to be looking at the biblical texts, verses and passages of scripture which actually speak of Christ and give us some insight into his person and work. I intend to do that more or less chronologically, that is, looking at the revelation God gives concerning Christ as it unfolds through time. In this way I will build up an increasingly complete picture and understanding of who he was and why he came.

I will be looking at this unfolding revelation in three stages:

The Expectation

The Accomplishment

The Interpretation

The expectation speaks of the hope that God gave to Israel, and to the nations beyond, that one day someone special would appear on the scene as the Saviour King. This expectation, or hope, appears right from the earliest days of history and gradually becomes clearer, more focussed as

God gives revelation to his people, Israel. It has been recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. This revelation occurs in various ways but perhaps the clearest comes through the ministry of the prophets and I will be looking in more depth at the prophet Isaiah in particular. The writings of Isaiah are often known as the Gospel of the Old Testament. He gives us huge insight into this special person that God was planning to send.

Next comes the accomplishment. That refers to the actual life of Christ as recorded in the four gospels. We shall look together at the gospels and see what we can learn from them about the identity of Christ, that is, who he was, his nature, his person. The gospels also show us what he came to achieve and how he so perfectly accomplished that which the prophets had predicted of him. Who Jesus was and what he did corresponded exactly with the expectations that the Old Testament made of him.

Finally, we shall look at the interpretation. This refers to the revelation that the apostles received that enabled them to explain the meaning of the life of Christ, of his death and his resurrection. This is recorded in the letters that they wrote to the early churches. Most of these letters were written by the apostles Paul, Peter and John. We must understand all that they wrote concerning Christ if we are to have a true and complete picture of who he was and what he came to do.

In this booklet we will go right back to the beginnings of all things with the book of Genesis and the four books that

follow (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). These books together form the Pentateuch. We will discover that right from the earliest days God creates the expectation and hope that he would bring salvation to humanity through a unique and extraordinary person.

Chapter 2: The Serpent.

The first two chapters of Genesis teach us that God created all things, including the first people, Adam and Eve. We then learn in chapter three that Adam and Eve, having been tempted by Satan in the form of a snake, disobeyed God.

In this chapter I will consider the curses that God brought upon the world at this time, and also an important promise that he made.

Here is a reminder of the consequences of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. Their disobedience brought a loss of harmony and peace into the world and the start of decay, suffering and death:

Firstly, originally Adam and Eve lived in harmony with God, in perfect fellowship with him. This was lost; they were cast out of the garden and out of his presence.

Secondly, Adam and Eve originally knew a perfectly harmonious and loving relationship with each other. This too was lost; marriages and all human relationships would now be affected by conflict, disappointments and pain.

Thirdly, Adam and Eve had a harmonious relationship with the rest of creation. This also was lost; it would now take hard work to produce anything and men now struggle against the environment and suffer from all the trials that a cursed natural world brings upon them: diseases, earthquakes, things like that.

Fourthly, men would now know a running conflict with the snake, who represents Satan. The Bible speaks of enmity, and certainly Satan hates men and will do all he can to deceive them, tempt them and keep them from God and under his powerful sway.

Finally, whereas Adam and Eve originally knew nothing but life they would now, along with all men, and all living things, become familiar with death and would each one die themselves one day.

All these things can be gleaned from reading Genesis chapter 3 verses 14 to 24.

Adam and Eve's disobedience was a real disaster and everything that is so wrong in the world and our own lives can be traced back to that terrible moment. However, in the midst of these terrible curses, God made a promise to Adam and Eve. It occurs when God speaks to the snake, to Satan. He says in Genesis 3: 14-15: *"The Lord God said to the serpent. 'Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will*

eat dust all the days of your life. And 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.”

Now, it is not necessarily very easy to pick out where the promise actually occurs. Allow me to explain further. I set the scene by showing the disaster that befell humanity. I do not want to diminish our responsibility for sin, but in a way Satan was the first cause of all that happened because he tempted Adam and Eve. Satan is our enemy and if today we know suffering and death it is in part his responsibility. The verse we have just read brings both the hope and expectation that this enemy will one day be defeated. God says: *“he will crush your head”*; that means Satan will be destroyed.

We now need to ask ourselves, of whom does God speak when he says: *“he will crush your head”*? We learn that it is an offspring of the woman and that the defeat of Satan would be accomplished through considerable suffering as at the same time Satan would bruise the heel of this person. There are no further clues given at this stage as to the identity of this person who would be victorious over our enemy, just the expectation that one day someone would come and accomplish this feat.

However, as the Old Testament scriptures unfold, they give a clearer and clearer picture of who this special person would be. Then the New Testament makes clear that it is Jesus Christ who accomplished this exploit. The gospels

portray the struggle between Jesus and Satan. Satan manipulates men into nailing him upon the cross, hence the bruised heel, and the victory accomplished through suffering which is so evident in the events surrounding the cross. Then the apostles interpret the cross and the resurrection, amongst other things, as being a victory over Satan, the crushing of his head. Consider for example Colossians 2: 15: *“Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

Now, what are the implications of this victory? What does it mean for us?

If Satan is crushed, it implies that we can be delivered from the enmity and stranglehold that he has over us. Through faith in Christ we can be delivered from ignorance, error and spiritual blindness, also from the power of occult forces. Satan would want to keep us from God but through faith in the Victor, Jesus Christ, we can find fellowship with God once again.

Indeed, if Christ has reversed the curse at this one point then he will also reverse the curse in the other areas as well. In Christ we have the promise of the new heavens and the new earth where we will find harmony once more: harmony between God and man, harmony and peace between men, harmony with whatever that new world and heavens will consist of. This resurrection life will remain eternally unaffected by suffering, decay, death and Satan.

We can know today the first fruits or a foretaste of this deliverance but one day Christ will return to complete this reversal of the curses when he raises us up to resurrection life, to eternal life. Jesus Christ is the promised offspring of the woman who, through crushing Satan, would reverse the curses that have befallen humanity, at least for those who trust in him. We can see that even in such an apparently small or obscure promise, right from the start of history, God gave humanity tremendous hope.

Chapter 3: God's Blessing upon Abraham.

In this chapter I move on to consider the promises given to Abraham. They too are relevant to our subject; the expectation of Christ in the Pentateuch. These promises appear in Genesis 12: 2-3. *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and will make you a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

Remember that when God made this promise, Abraham and his wife had been unable to have children and were now quite old. The unfolding of the Old Testament shows how God fulfilled and accomplished these promises, against all the odds, even when everything seemed to be against them. Miraculously Abraham and his wife Sarah had a child of their own in their old age. Their descendants then multiplied and despite their very existence being

threatened in various times and ways they became a nation, Israel, with their own land and later a King.

So the Old Testament, as the story line proceeds, proves that God keeps his promises, but what of the promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's offspring?

This could be interpreted in one of two ways. Either the nation of Israel as a whole would be a blessing to all the nations, or that some particular and special descendant of Abraham would be a blessing to the nations. Well, the history of the Old Testament seems to bear out that Israel was never particularly concerned to make God known to the countries and peoples around them and certainly the expectation grows that the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled through one special person.

In Genesis chapter 3 the promise is that this special person would be a child of a woman. Now things become more precise and we learn that he would also be a descendant of Abraham, in other words an Israelite. Then, towards the end of Genesis things are narrowed down even further because chapter 49 verse 10 says: *"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."*

This verse suggests that the tribe of Judah would be the dominant royal line in the nation of Israel and also from out of this line, or tribe, would come a ruler to exceed all

rulers, a ruler who is the ultimate or predominant ruler, not only of Israel but also of all the nations. It speaks of this person being the ultimate source of authority, the one to whom the sceptre belongs.

We need to remember that in the Bible God is portrayed as the sovereign ruler and ultimate source of authority. This verse may just give a clue that this expected special King would be no mere mortal, not just an ordinary human being but in some way stamped with divinity, which is exactly the conclusion that the New Testament writers came to about Jesus Christ.

We must return now to the point I am making about Genesis narrowing down this person's identity from being a member of the human race, to a member of Israel, to a member of the tribe of Judah. The two genealogies found, one in the gospel of Matthew, the other in Luke, both confirm that whether you trace Jesus' ancestry back through Mary or Joseph, Jesus was indeed a member of the tribe of Judah. He fits in this respect the description given by Genesis.

If though, Abraham's descendant was going to be a blessing to the nations, it is necessary to ask just how the nations were to be blessed through this expected person, or as we learn from the other text quoted, this promised King.

The first thing to say is that if this ruler is to bless all nations he must be a benevolent and kind ruler and not a

cruel dictator. It is true that when God speaks to Abraham he does not really give any clues as to what the blessing actually refers to. I would just like to make two comments that should be helpful.

Firstly, to be blessed is to receive God's favour in some particular way. It is something positive and special that we receive from God and that is generally proof of his grace.

Secondly, the blessing in mind at this point in Genesis is probably related to the curses that preceded it and that I wrote about in the last chapter; the curses that appear in Genesis chapter 3. One curse was that men became separated from God and could no longer have fellowship with him. Well, obviously for Abraham this part of the curse had been reversed or rolled back because he very clearly knew God and had fellowship with him. Perhaps the promise made to Abraham refers to this very same blessing that God had granted to Abraham. Through a descendant of Abraham the blessing of renewed fellowship with God would be made available to every nation.

Finally, I shall comment on how this promise was fulfilled in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Testament very clearly identifies Christ as being this descendant of Abraham who brings, through his cross and resurrection, the blessing of reconciliation with God, that is a putting right of a broken relationship between men and God, renewed fellowship with God. Jesus also brings

the hope that the other curses brought into the world at the time of the fall would be reversed. The blessing of God then includes the hope of resurrection to eternal life, which reverses the curse of death.

I must underline that this blessing in Christ is for all nations. Even during his earthly ministry, Jesus showed repeatedly that his mission was not restricted to Israel but he brought hope and new life to people from a wide variety of nations. Then, following his resurrection, Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the gospel to every nation (see Matthew 28: 18-20; Mark 16: 15; Luke 24: 45-48; Acts 1: 8). Finally the apostle Paul, for example when he wrote to the church in Rome, said in chapter 10, verses 12-14: *“There is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”*

Chapter 4: Sacrifices.

In this chapter I want to look once again into Genesis, the first book of the Bible. We have already seen that as this book unfolds an expectation is created that God would send someone special to reverse or undo the curses inflicted upon the creation at the fall. I want now to consider the clues given as to how this promised person would do that and to look at the place of sacrifices in the book of Genesis.

The first recorded occasion of a sacrifice being offered occurs when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Remember that they felt ashamed of their nakedness for the first time. Now, following the curses that the Lord placed upon his creation we read this, in Genesis 3: 21: *“The Lord made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”* In the midst then of curses raining down upon Adam and Eve, God graciously shows a glimpse of his way of providing a way back to him from the pathways of sin.

Now, this link between the clothing of Adam and Eve and a provision overcoming sin, needs explaining: Nakedness and shame seemed to go together. Therefore, in covering Adam and Eve’s nakedness God was also covering their shame. Notice that this involved the death of an animal in order that clothes could be made of their skins. This is the first record of anything dying in the scriptures. God sacrifices an animal in order to cover Adam’s sin.

This is not the last we hear of sacrifices in Genesis. How do things develop from there?

As we move on through Genesis all genuine relationship or fellowship between God and man seems to involve the need for sacrifice, and an acceptable sacrifice at that. Abel, the son of Adam, offered an animal sacrifice and this pleased God. His brother Cain only offered plants and this was not acceptable. On leaving the ark Noah offered animal sacrifices and again we hear that this pleased God.

The offering of sacrifices was a regular part of Abraham's worship as well.

So, what was the meaning or purpose of all these sacrifices?

There are few clues but it could have been the remembrance of the principal that God revealed to Adam and Eve. That is, in a cursed and sin stricken world, the only way that we can have any hope of genuine fellowship with God is through our shame being covered by a blood sacrifice.

There are though other occasions of sacrifices in Genesis that reveal other lessons and show that things are more complex. I would like to look at two of these occasions in the life of Abraham.

The first is in Genesis chapter 15. God reaffirms his promises to Abraham: the promise of him having an heir from his own flesh, and the promise of his descendants becoming a populous nation with its own land. Abraham asks how he can be sure that these promises will be fulfilled and God asks him to sacrifice some animals. God appeared in some form and passed through the sacrifices, and in this way entered into a covenant or formal agreement with Abraham. We can understand then that sacrifices were a way of establishing an agreement, a way of guaranteeing or sealing a promise.

The second sacrifice I want to mention is in chapter 22. The son promised to Abraham has been born and surprisingly God asks Abraham to sacrifice this son even though he has not yet any children of his own. This command seems to endanger the other promises that God has made. How will Abraham's descendants become a nation if his only son is killed?

We know that Abraham trusted God even in this strange situation and he was about to kill his son when a voice from heaven told him that the Lord had provided a ram that was found stuck in nearby bushes. Abraham was able to sacrifice this ram in the place of his son.

What is the meaning of all this?

Firstly, that the promises of God would be fulfilled through the provision of a substitute, a sacrifice. Secondly, that the curse or the penalty of death would be undone through God's provision of a substitute, a sacrifice. Abraham in a way received Isaac back from death uniquely because there was an animal to sacrifice in his place, one that God had provided.

Now, this booklet is supposed to be examining the person and work of Christ and I have not mentioned his name in this chapter yet. We need to ask in what way all this talk of sacrifices is relevant to our subject?

Remember we are looking at how the Old Testament creates certain expectations or hopes as to how the special person that God would send would accomplish his mission. We believe that these hopes were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. How are sacrifices relevant? I am sure that you are aware that the New Testament presents Jesus as the ultimate, once for all sacrifice, and his sacrifice fulfils all the roles of sacrifice that we find mentioned in Genesis.

Firstly, through Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross our shame, our sin, and our guilt is covered by the righteousness of Christ.

Secondly, the sacrifice of Christ is the unique basis on which we can have renewed fellowship with God. We cannot have a genuine relationship with God unless we trust in his sacrifice to bring us back to him.

Thirdly, it is through Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross that God has established a New Covenant with men. Jesus' sacrifice is God's testimony that he guarantees or seals the promises of this covenant.

Finally, just as for Abraham's son Isaac, Jesus' sacrifice undoes the curse of death for he took it upon himself, as our substitute. Yes, we will die one day, but this curse has lost its sting, it will not be permanent for we will be raised from death to eternal life.

Chapter 5: The New Moses.

We all know that Moses was an extremely important person in the history of Israel. Now, we read in the book of Deuteronomy, written by Moses soon before the Israelites entered the promised land, that the people should expect another prophet, like Moses, to appear at some stage in the future.

Deuteronomy 18: 15 - 18: *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire any more, or we will die. The LORD said to me: What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”*

We know that later, throughout the history of Israel, God sent many prophets. They were men who spoke God's word and message to the people, often in the face of great adversity. We can think of the great figures such as Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Others are less well known, such as Habakkuk and Haggai. Is this what the promise given through Moses is referring to?

It is quite probable that God was reaffirming, through Moses, that the Spirit of Prophecy would continue on after

the time of Moses. God would continue to speak to his people through prophets that he would choose and endow with his Spirit, enabling them to speak forth the very thought of God. However, the text leads me to believe that Israel should expect something above and beyond this line of prophets. Let me explain why.

First, the Lord says, through Moses, that he would raise up “a” prophet. The word “a” is singular, it refers to one prophet and not to a whole line or movement of prophets as actually was the case. The verse then must be referring to something different. I think God is saying that he would send a most excellent or ideal prophet; that is a prophet greater than, better than, more distinguished than all the others put together. There is also a second clue in the text that points in this direction.

Moses says that this singular prophet would be “like me”. That is, God is announcing that he would send someone with at least as much importance and significance as Moses, someone who would be similar to Moses in many ways. As much as the prophets such as Elijah and Jeremiah were great men of God who accomplished important ministries, they were not particularly similar in stature or role to Moses.

In what ways is Moses different from these other prophets? Firstly, Moses presided over the redemption of Israel from slavery. He was God’s human instrument bringing deliverance to the people. No other prophet had such a

redemptive, saving role. Secondly, Moses is the human intermediary through whom God establishes a Covenant with Israel. In many ways this was just the fulfilment and fleshing out of the covenant given to Abraham. Nevertheless, Moses has an extremely important covenantal role, which no other prophet had. Third, in the context of this Covenant, Moses was the instrument through whom God revealed the Law. No other prophet would have the role of Law-Giver.

The other Old Testament prophets resembled Moses in that they spoke forth God’s revealed Word, and in that they interceded for God’s people. However, I hope I have shown that Moses’ ministry went far beyond that.

So then, if Moses announced that another prophet “like me” would one day appear, we should expect someone who would accomplish rather more than the other Old Testament prophets. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament period there was this expectation that one day there would be a New Moses. This was an expectation that none of the other prophets fulfilled.

Now, my conclusion is that Jesus is the “prophet like me”, that he is the New Moses.

Please allow me to explain just how Jesus compares with Moses.

It is interesting to note that the evangelist Matthew seems to go to great lengths to prove to his mainly Jewish readers

that Jesus was the new Moses. He even, in chapter 2 of his gospel, establishes the parallel that just like Moses, Jesus went down into Egypt to later come out again. Throughout the gospel, Jesus clearly demonstrates that he is animated by the Spirit of Prophecy and speaks the Word of God. Now, in that he was just like all the other prophets. However, Jesus had a role that went beyond that of the prophets. It was similar to that of Moses, similar enough for him to be identified as the New Moses. However, in many ways he was greater than Moses, and his accomplishments, whilst resembling those of Moses, outweigh them in both scale and importance.

Let me explain this further.

Firstly, God revealed the Law through Moses. Now, whilst Jesus did not bring a New Law he did interpret the Law in an authoritative way. In a sense he showed himself to be above the Law, not in the sense that he did not have to obey it, but in the sense that he was able to explain its full and true meaning.

As I said, Matthew's gospel presents Jesus as the New Moses and many see the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus giving an authoritative interpretation of the Law, just as Moses brought the Law down from the mount of Sinai.

Even more important though are Jesus' roles; first as accomplishing a New Redemption and second in establishing a New Covenant. Both were achieved through

his sacrifice upon the cross and his resurrection. The Redemption that Jesus achieved through the cross is comparable to the Deliverance from Egypt that Moses brought to Israel. Just as this new age for Israel was marked by a New Covenant, so the new age heralded by the redemption that Jesus brings, brought with it the establishing of a New Covenant.

I will now, in the next two sections, explore these ideas further, showing that Jesus is similar to, but better than Moses.

Redemption.

In a general sense, the word redemption denotes the action of somebody who delivers another from slavery. It usually involves paying a price to set that person free. In the Bible then, this word redemption is used to speak of when God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. It is a word that speaks of God's saving grace and power.

So how did God redeem Israel from slavery? And what role did Moses play?

Moses was the human spokesperson and instrument through whom God brought redemption to Israel. However, at the same time this redemption was very much a display of God's power. You can read an account of what happened more fully in Exodus chapters 1 to 15. Here is a brief summary:

First, Moses went to speak with Pharaoh the King of Egypt to ask him to liberate all the Hebrew slaves. Of course, this Pharaoh was very cruel and just made life harder for the slaves. So Moses then announced to Pharaoh a series of plagues that would prove God's supremacy. Following each plague, which were real disasters, Pharaoh continued to refuse to free the slaves. This pattern continued until the last plague, when the Angel of Death passed and took the firstborn child from every family. At this time, each Hebrew family had to sacrifice a perfect lamb and place the blood over the doorway, in order that the Angel of Death would pass them by.

Following the death of all the first born in Egypt, Pharaoh at last allowed the slaves to leave and Moses led them into the desert towards the promised land of Canaan. However, Pharaoh soon changed his mind and with his army pursued the Israelites, desiring to annihilate them in the desert. God intervened again in a miraculous way. He parted the waters of the Red sea in order to give the Israelites an escape route. As the Egyptians pursued them into this passage, the waters closed back and drowned the entire army. Israel was now free.

We must now consider in what ways the redemption brought by Christ is comparable and yet more excellent.

First, Christ brings deliverance or redemption from our natural state of slavery. Second, in Christ God displays his absolute supremacy and defeats those powers that held us

firmly as slaves. Third, in Christ we are saved from Death because he is our Passover.

There is a lot in these phrases that needs unpacking and explaining.

First we need to consider what we mean by our natural state of slavery. Today, slavery, as it was known by the Israelites and sadly by so many others throughout the centuries, has largely disappeared. But just as an aside, where this kind of slavery does still exist, in whatever form, Christians should be working to see it abolished.

The New Testament, however, speaks of us as being slaves of sin. That means that everyone inevitably does that which displeases and offends God. Sin's power is so natural within us that we are compelled to do wrong.

Nevertheless, the New Testament teaches us that Satan and the evil spirits make things worse. They are like slave-masters who hold us in the grip of their lies, and, through temptation, incite us to sin to an even greater extent. Satan can be compared to Pharaoh at the time of Moses. Finally, we are taught throughout the Bible that the consequence of sin is death.

Having understood this vivid picture of the human condition, that we are slaves of sin and Satan, in what ways is Christ our redeemer?

Let me address the issue of death first. Remember that the Israelites were sheltered from the Angel of Death at the time of their redemption. Death passed over their homes because they had sacrificed a perfect lamb. Every year since that event Israel has commemorated it with a meal called the Passover. Now, in the New Testament the apostle Paul says: "*For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.*" (1 Corinthians 5:7) This means that Christ is the perfect sacrifice and that all who trust in him will be delivered from the Angel of Death. Now, it is true that we will all die one day but what we need to understand is that all who trust in Christ will be raised up again to new life, resurrection life, which is eternal and in the perfect presence of God. We are thus redeemed from the worst consequence of our slavery to sin. As Paul says, for those who trust in Christ as their Passover sacrifice, death has lost its sting. (! Corinthians 15:54-55)

A second aspect of Christ's redemption is that just as God displayed his absolute supremacy over Pharaoh, and brought Israel out from under his oppression, so also Christ has utterly defeated Satan and he brings all who trust in him out from his tyranny. This can be of particular relevance to situations or cultures where many are held in fear and enslaved into sinful practices by the influence of demonic activity within idolatrous or superstitious religions. By trusting in Christ and his victory we can be brought out from, redeemed, liberated from such oppression and tyranny. When we are in Christ we are safe and secure and need no longer live in fear.

These important reminders show us just how Christ can be compared with Moses and yet at the same time surpasses him. We have seen that Christ redeems us from sin, Satan and death.

Covenant.

We have seen that at the time of Moses the expectation and hope arose that later in history there would be a New Moses who would be even greater and accomplish more than the Moses of the Pentateuch. In this section I am going to look at the idea of covenant.

A covenant is a formal agreement between two parties, a bit like a contract. It usually contains promises that one or both sides vow to keep and responsibilities that are expected to be fulfilled, again by one or both parties. In the ancient world, when a King took control of a town or a tribe or a people, he would often establish a covenant with them. In this covenant he would set out what he would promise to do for that people and also what he expected the people to do for him. There would also be curses or punishments prescribed should the covenant not be respected by one or the other.

Now, whilst our concern is to think about covenants between God and his people, the situation is quite similar. God is sovereign. He is King over the universe, but he establishes covenants with his people. That is, he commits himself to a special relationship with a certain people, he

makes them promises which he guarantees to keep and he lays down certain responsibilities which he expects his people to honour.

Remember that God made a covenant with Abraham. God chose Abraham and committed himself to be his God in a special way. God promised Abraham a son even though he and his wife were childless and sterile. He promised that his descendants would become numerous and a nation with its own land. Finally, he promised that through one of his descendants all peoples on the earth would be blessed.

I now need to explain how all this relates to Moses and then to Jesus.

At the start of the book of Exodus, Abraham's descendants have become numerous but they were not a nation. They were slaves in Egypt. Moses' role, under God, is to deliver them from Egypt and lead them to the threshold of the Promised Land, Canaan. Israel are to be prepared for nationhood on their own land. That is, the next stage in the fulfilment of God's covenant to Abraham is about to be fulfilled.

So, to mark this important step forwards God establishes a New Covenant with Israel. It was revealed to Moses on mount Sinai. This was a covenant that established how God would relate to Israel as a nation and as their King. There is a body of Law that God expects to be applied and obeyed. Israel's worship is regimented to reflect the way God expects the people to relate to him. There are

promises of blessing for obedience and warnings of curses for disobedience.

I would stress though that it was a covenant of grace. God chose Israel not because they were a great bunch of people, nor because they were morally superior. God's choice was based on grace, and faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham. Equally, within the way the covenant worked there was so much evidence of God's grace, mercy and faithfulness. The whole system of sacrifices and offerings showed that God was ready to forgive sin and purify from wrong doing in such a way that a meaningful relationship with him could be maintained.

Now, I have previously declared that the Lord Jesus was the New Moses who surpasses the old. We can say that Jesus brought a New Covenant, but in what way does it complete or surpass the one introduced through Moses?

Jesus himself says that he establishes a New Covenant, for example in Matthew 26: 28: "*Jesus took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you. This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins.'*"

This was as Jesus took his last meal with his disciples, just before he was arrested and crucified.

Notice that I mentioned earlier, that under Moses' covenant, forgiveness of sin and fellowship with God were

maintained by respecting whole lists of sacrifices, purification laws, offerings and special feast days. Now, what Jesus says here is quite staggering. He is saying that under the New Covenant that he is introducing, forgiveness of sin and fellowship with God will be on the basis of his blood and no longer that of the blood of animal sacrifices. He is saying that if we want to be purified of sin, if we want to be reconciled with God, and if we want to walk in fellowship with God then we must trust in him, the Lord Jesus and nothing else.

It is the understanding of the New Testament writers that this New Covenant is like the reality to which all that preceded it was like shadowy pointers. Jesus really does fulfil and surpass all that Moses brought in. Jesus asserts that he is the true blood sacrifice that turns away God's wrath from the sinner. Jesus alone is the true offering that satisfies God, and the New Covenant, or the new contract that God establishes through Jesus, is that he will be the faithful forgiving God of all who trust in Jesus.

Notice that I say that this New Covenant was for ALL who trust in Jesus whereas the covenant introduced through Moses was just for the nation of Israel. The wording is quite deliberate. This is another area where the New Covenant under Jesus surpasses the Old. It is greater and better in that anyone from any nation, tribe, or people can participate in it. This is the last step in the fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham.

Remember God's promise to Abraham that one of his descendants would be a blessing to all peoples. Well, Jesus is that descendant and he is a blessing to all people and all nations because the Covenant he introduces is not restricted to any particular religious or political group. It is open to anyone who will trust in Jesus' blood sacrifice.

I have mentioned that in a covenant there were usually clauses outlining the promises and responsibilities of each party. Is this the case in the New Covenant?

In Acts 2:38 Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost says: *“Repent and be baptised, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

What does God promise? Forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. What do we need to do? Repent and be baptised. Repentance means allowing Jesus to be our King, to rule over our lives, rather than stubbornly ruling our own lives. Believer's baptism is a rite by which God and man both pledge to fulfil their covenant commitments.

Chapter 6: Christ in the Pentateuch - Summary.

In this booklet we have been looking through the first books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch and showing how they create expectations and hopes that would later be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus. In this chapter I want simply to give a summary of what we have learnt so far.

The Bible starts by quickly introducing us to a big problem. Adam and Eve, and the entire human race, lost their place in paradise. With this loss, they inherited conflict, broken relationships, suffering and death. Given the scale and tragedy of this problem it is pertinent to ask the question: Is it possible to regain paradise? And how?

Is it possible to be reconciled to God and walk in fellowship with him? Is it possible to escape the grip of sin and Satan's tyranny? Is it possible to escape death? Will we be ever free from conflict and suffering?

The Pentateuch starts to answer these questions and it gives clues as to what God would do to redress the situation.

The curses that God pronounced when Adam and Eve disobeyed will be reversed or lifted, but not immediately. It would take time as God accomplishes his purposes through a long period of history. We have seen in the Pentateuch that there is that hope of a restored relationship with God, with each other and with creation; hope also of escape from sin, Satan and death.

We have seen so many strands or threads of ideas that it is difficult to summarise, but here is an attempt.

First, the Pentateuch leads us to expect that this great reversal of fortunes would come to pass through the intervention of one supreme, pre-eminent person. He is

described variously as: "the one who crushes the serpents head", "the descendant of Abraham who would bring blessing to all nations", "the ruler from Judah who would govern all nations", "a prophet like Moses". As we have sought to understand the meaning of all these clues, we have come to the conclusion that the Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled each one of them.

Secondly, we have seen that the Pentateuch prefigures the reversal of the curse. In it we can see an outline of the salvation that this ultimate, supreme ruler would bring. We can describe it as redemption or deliverance from one set of conditions, and of being brought into a gracious covenant with the living God. Just as God, through Moses delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and then established a new covenant with them, so Jesus-Christ is our deliverer, redeeming us from sin and Satan and reconciling us to God that we might walk in fellowship with him.

Thirdly, just as revelation and redemption are progressive, or step by step for Israel in the Pentateuch, our redemption in Christ is also step by step. Let me explain myself a little more. Remember that a period of time elapsed between Israel coming out of Egypt and them entering the Promised Land. They had already received many blessings, their covenant God continued to bless them and their final destination was guaranteed. However, they had not actually got there. Now, for those of us who have been redeemed by Christ, we have received so much but we await so much more. We have been forgiven and reconciled to God; our

glorious and blessed future is secure and guaranteed. However, we still await the full, final and complete reversal of the curses. We await our resurrection from the dead and the restoration of the heavens and the earth. Then, and only then, we will know no longer the effects of the curse, in our relationships, and in our bodies. This final future redemption is absolutely guaranteed by Christ our redeemer, but we are waiting for it just as Israel had to wait to enter the promised land.

Finally I would like to remind you of how the curses would be reversed and not just through whom they would be reversed. We find the theme of sacrifice weaving its threads throughout the Pentateuch. The most important idea behind all these sacrifices is that fellowship with God can only be restored and maintained through the offering of blood sacrifice. This is God's given way of successfully dealing with the problem of sin that separates us inevitably from him.

Then, the New Testament shows us that Christ's sacrifice upon the cross is the ultimate, once for all sacrifice, that reconciles those who trust in him, to God. This is why, today, we do not need to perform all the sacrifices and offerings that are described in the Pentateuch and that Israel carried out for so long. These sacrifices that appear so often in the Pentateuch are like signposts and Jesus is the final destination. Once you have arrived at your destination you no longer have a need for signposts. We need to take this illustration into account when we teach

and preach from the Pentateuch. This is a question I will develop further in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Preaching on Christ from the Pentateuch.

As we come to the end of this booklet, it is appropriate to give some advice on preaching about Christ from the Pentateuch.

A good starting point might be the text in Luke 24: 27. The resurrected Christ met two disciples on the way to Emmaus and it is said: "*And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.*" In other words, Jesus himself refers back to the Pentateuch and all the Old Testament in order to give his disciples a clearer understanding of the events that have just occurred. That is, he refers to the Pentateuch in order to explain and give meaning to his death and his resurrection.

When we preach from the Pentateuch we should be using it to give our hearers a deeper understanding of the person of Christ and what he came to do. Our preaching, even from the Pentateuch, should as much as possible lead us to Christ. The Pentateuch will help us to understand who he is, to understand the salvation he brought and to understand how we should respond to him.

Now in the text quoted above it says that Jesus explained from "*all the scriptures concerning himself.*" What does

this mean? Does every single verse have something to say about Christ?

We have, in my opinion, to be careful here. I think “all the scriptures” here means every part of scripture. Yes, we can say that every part of scripture can lead us to Christ but I would not say that absolutely every verse is equally useful in this respect. Christ shines more clearly from some texts rather than others and where we do not see him we should not try to force the text to speak of him.

This is easy to say but how can we actually know if a text in the Pentateuch can be used as a signpost to Christ or not?

Personally, I prefer to err on the side of caution. Now, let me give two thoughts that might help with this.

Firstly, when the New Testament writers actually pick up on a theme or an event found in the Pentateuch and then use it as a means of helping us to understand Christ then there is obviously a direct link which we can develop in our preaching. For instance, there is much in the New Testament about Abraham. Think of Romans chapter four or Paul’s letter to the Galatians. John’s gospel also speaks a lot of Abraham. So, when we preach from the life of Abraham we should not only use him as an example but also see what lessons the New Testament draws out and how that helps our understanding of the gospel and of Christ.

Furthermore, the New Testament will also help us to know whether certain aspects of the Old Testament apply to us directly or not. Let us take the issue of circumcision. It would be easy to conclude, if we only read the Old Testament, that we should circumcise new believers or our children. However, the New Testament makes clear that this is not to be the case. Christ brought a New Covenant that fulfils the Abrahamic covenant but also cancels certain aspects of it. Circumcision was a sign of belonging to Abraham’s covenant community, but under the New Covenant our signs of belonging are baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper.

The second piece of advice I would like to give in order to help decide whether a text in the Pentateuch can be used to speak of Christ or not, is the need to interpret any Bible text within the context of the big picture. That is, we need to relate the text to the unfolding story or revelation of what God has done, is doing, and will do in history. When we understand where an event or text comes within the narrative of the whole Bible we can better grasp how it relates to the overall theme of God’s purposes.

Now, the Pentateuch being the first five books of the Bible, introduces us to many themes that will be built upon and worked out in later parts of the Bible. We have spoken of many of these themes: creation, sin, judgement, redemption, sacrifice, covenant, Kingship

We can also look at the idea of promise and fulfilment. When we meet with a promise in the Pentateuch we need to ask when and how that promise was fulfilled later in the Bible. The promises made to Abraham are an example and we see them fulfilled one by one until the final aspect, that Abraham's descendant would be a blessing to all nations, was fulfilled in Christ.

What follows is an example of how you might apply all this to a particular Bible text.

Let us take Genesis 4 with the story of Cain's slaying of Abel. Now this occurs not so long after the fall of man into sin and God's cursing of the world. A first approach would be to see how this text develops what has gone before. We see the impact of sin on human relationships with each other and in their relationship with God and we meet the first death, a direct result of sin. Second, we meet afresh the need for sacrifice to cover sin and enable fellowship with God. Here there are direct parallels with Christ who is the perfect sacrifice that covers sin and reconciles men to God. Of many possible applications, we could say that just as Cain was judged for refusing to listen to God, acknowledge his sin and rely upon God given sacrifices, so all who refuse Christ and his sacrifice for us will be similarly judged.

Post-script.

Just as we have seen how the Pentateuch develops the idea that God would send a Redeemer King, in the next booklet

we will study the prophets and see how they take up this theme and take it further. We shall concentrate especially upon the prophecies of Isaiah.

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