

# mp3/416/4 CHRIST THRU'THE OLD TESTAMENT.MP3

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 26 May 2016

Preacher: Brian Edwards

[ 0 : 00 ] Now let's get down to this evening and I'll put the light off so that you can see the board and can't see me. And this is really in many ways, just if you haven't been with us through the week, we began with evidence for the Bible, looking at the subject that's in the big book at the back there.

And then we dealt with the Bible, an authentic book, how it shows itself to be, in many cases an eyewitness account or written close to the account. And then thirdly we looked at the real Jesus. Did Jesus really live? Was he really a figure of history? And a lot more connected with that. And in many ways, as we come to the closing one this evening, we come to the best of all, because it's really Christ from beginning to end.

And it should help us to... I don't think I'm going to be saying anything that most of you here this evening are not already aware of, but I don't apologise for that. I'm always encouraged by the fact that both Paul and Peter reminded their readers that they'd heard all this before, but it was good for them to hear it again.

And it's good for us to hear it again as well. Christ throughout the Bible. So what are the Gospels, the four Gospels, all about? And the answer would be very simply, Jesus, of course.

[ 1 : 17 ] And what's the rest of the New Testament all about? And the answer is Jesus, of course, and how we are to be his disciples. So what is the Old Testament all about?

Well, there's many answers to that, of course, because it begins with creation, God's choice of Israel as his special people, how God cares and watches over those he chooses. But when you've said all of that, and there's a huge amount that we can learn and gain from the Old Testament, in Romans 15, 4, Paul says, everything written beforehand was written for our encouragement and our training.

But there's only really one big answer, and it's exactly the same. The Old Testament, as Barry has already hinted, is about Jesus. Now, just to illustrate that, think of the sermon of Peter at Pentecost. Notice how insistent Peter is that everything about Christ was rooted in the Old Testament prophets. This is in one sermon. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ was what God had foretold through all the prophets.

He was the Christ who had been appointed for you, even Jesus, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. Moses said, the Lord your God will raise up a prophet for you.

[ 2 : 29 ] Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets. And God said to Abraham, through your offspring, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.

That's in one sermon. Again and again and again, Peter found himself reiterating the fact that everything that is happening now at this time of the crucifixion and the resurrection and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, it's all there, he's saying.

Moses and the law and the prophets, it's all there. And Paul picked up the same thing in Pisidian Antioch. What God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus. And then interestingly, Paul goes on to quote from Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, and Psalm 16. And then in Thessalonica, Acts 17, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.

In Jerusalem on trial before Herod Agrippa, I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen. That the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

[ 3 : 39 ] And in Rome, right at the end of Acts 28, from morning till evening, he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the prophets.

And of course, it goes on and on like that in the letters, doesn't it? Just to take one, 1 Corinthians 15, what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

Clearly, the New Testament writers believe that Christ was to be found all through the Old Testament. But our question this evening is, but where? It's obvious that the second part of the Bible, what we call the New Testament, is all about Jesus Christ.

And those who became his disciples. A full one-third of the four Gospels is devoted to his birth, his death, and the resurrection. And the remainder is concerned with his life, the history of his followers, and the instructions that he gave them either in person or through his apostles.

And the rest of the New Testament describes how the Gospel of Jesus spread through the Roman world and beyond. And then in the various letters, how we should live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

[ 4 : 56 ] And the final book of the New Testament focuses on Jesus in his ascended glory and, of course, his ultimate triumph. But what about the Old Testament?

Well, the Old Testament, though full of history, is much more than a history book. It's the story of beginnings. The beginning of the universe, the world, the human race and relationships, the history of sin and its consequences, much, much more.

It goes on and on. The history of the beginnings. It tells us about God, his qualities, character, actions. But above all, it is about Christ.

And to miss this, as again Barry said right at the beginning, is to completely misunderstand what the Bible is all about. Because, think of it, in our 21st century Western society, are we really interested in the story of a wandering nomad called Abraham?

Or the fiery preaching of a prophet called Isaiah? Or the strange visions of a man called Daniel?

Does it matter how the Jews offered their sacrifices? Or what clothes the priests wore three millennia ago in the desert of Sinai?

[ 6 : 13 ] And unless we have an interest in religious symbolism or Semitic architecture, is there any real value in knowing the layout of the tabernacle? Or the construction of Solomon's temple?

And apart from those with a passion for genealogical records, is the family history of a young widow from Moab some 3,000 years ago so very significant for the rest of us?

You see how totally irrelevant the Old Testament is unless you really look at it with different glasses on and ask yourself, what is it about? If the Old Testament is just history, even history with a religious slant, then it'll only have marginal relevance in today's world.

And there's only one answer to the question. What is the Old Testament about? It's all about Jesus Christ. Now that doesn't mean it's about nothing else. But the big subject, all through the Old Testament, is Jesus Christ.

We've seen that with Peter and Paul. But Jesus said so also, didn't he? Remember the two walking miserably to Emmaus? And Jesus set up a Bible study for them, beginning with Moses and all the prophets.

[ 7 : 22 ] He explained to them in all the scriptures concerning himself. And shortly after that, in the locked room in Jerusalem, Jesus himself stood among them and continued with the Bible study, showing them the meaning of the Old Testament.

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. And for the Jew, as you know, the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms really covered the whole of the Old Testament.

Jesus gave his followers a rapid survey of the whole of the Hebrew scriptures and assured them that its chief purpose was, quote, concerning himself. The big story of the Old Testament is Christ. That word Christ or Messiah simply means the anointed one. And every Jew knew that the Hebrew scriptures were constantly pointing towards the coming of the Messiah.

Every sincere Jew was looking and longing for the Messiah. And all this means that when we read the Old Testament, we should be looking for Christ as well. Not just a promise of his coming, but a preparation for his coming.

[ 8 : 34 ] And because the Old Testament is all about Christ, it's God's unfolding story of salvation, how God planned to solve the problem of sin in the world. And what makes the Old Testament such

an important and exciting book is just that.

We must never, ever think of it. And we mustn't let our kids in the Sunday school or Bible class run away with the idea that the Old Testament is simply a collection of stories and biographies of great men and women who trusted God in the centuries before Christ came.

It's all that, but it's much more. We mustn't even let them think that it's just a revelation of how God deals with his people. It's all that, but it's much more. To help us follow through God's unfolding plan about Christ, there are three things to look for as you read the Old Testament.

You look for the promise, you look for the preparation, and you look for the people. You can put it in another way if you like. Prophecy, sacrifice, Israel.

And that sums up the Old Testament. Right at the beginning of the Bible, God made a promise, and that promise keeps coming into focus throughout the unfolding story that follows throughout the Old and New Testaments.

[ 9 : 44 ] I'm only going to be able to give you a kind of overview, an in-depth overview in little bits of it, but it's there everywhere. Start here. Where better to start? The promise and preparation in the garden.

God had created man and woman and placed them in a beautiful garden. It was a perfect world and a wonderful creation. Then Satan came onto the scene and tempted Adam and Eve into sin.

You know the story. And when they broke God's law, it was the end of their perfect relationship with God and the beginning of sin with all its miserable consequences. The graffiti of Satan was written all over the human race and all over planet Earth.

God, who is just as well as merciful, had to punish disobedience. And in Genesis 3, 14 to 19, we have a description of God's judgment upon the devil, upon the woman, and upon the man.

But even at this time, when the devil had vandalized God's creation and written his own graffiti across the life of Adam and Eve, God came in with a great promise of rescue.

[ 10 : 50 ] 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 bear with me if what I'm about to say is common knowledge to most of you here. But let me remind you, this is one of the most important verses in the Bible because the 39 books of the Old Testament reveal how God will keep that promise and the 27 books of the New Testament reveal how God has kept that promise.

In fact, we can't understand the Bible properly unless we understand that verse. It's not about snakes and men and women, but about Satan and Christ.

And although God is addressing a snake, that snake, as we all know, is the mouthpiece of the devil. God is speaking to Satan because he is the ultimate enemy of God. And as with Adam and Eve, the human race is deceived by the devil.

As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4.4, the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

[ 12 : 03 ] And back in Genesis 3.15, notice precisely what God is saying. There will be constant warfare between you, the devil, and the woman, Eve, and between your offspring, the devil's agents and angels or demons, and hers, her offspring, the human race.

But then there's that sudden, unexpected change in the verse. Instead of they will crush your head and you will strike their heel, God says he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

So the promise is not about hordes of demons against billions of men and women, but about the devil against one man. And what is more, we're told that although the devil will hurt this man, you will strike his heel, this man will finally destroy Satan.

He will crush your head. I don't know about you, but I'd rather have my heel crushed than my head crushed. One is final forever. Satan will give a wound, but in return he will receive a crushing blow. And to discover just who this person is who will deliver the final knockout to Satan, we turn to Paul in Romans 16 and verse 20. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

[ 13 : 26 ] A clear reference to the promise, capital P. John makes the same claim. The reason the Son of God appears was to destroy the devil's work.

But how will he do that? Well, Paul has no doubt. Having disarmed principalities and powers, he, Christ, made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the cross.

But before Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, there's something else we must notice in Genesis 3 and verse 21. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed

them.

Now clearly that had to involve the death of an animal. And in the death of that animal, most likely a sheep or a lamb, God was teaching Adam and Eve the necessity of a sacrifice for the sin they had committed.

And you'll notice, it was God himself who provided the first sacrifice. And just in case you may think that this is reading too much into the account, stay with Genesis a bit longer.

[14:34] Come with me out of the garden. The tragic episode of Cain murdering his brother is, of course, well known. But why was Cain's offering of fruit and vegetables not acceptable to God, whereas Abel's offering from his flock was?

And we read that in Genesis 4. Cain was told, Genesis 4, 7, that he should have known what was right. So clearly he knew what was expected and he decided to ignore it.

When Abel brought, quote, fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock, it was an early echo of the instructions that would be given to Moses many centuries later in Leviticus 3, all the fat that covers the inner parts, the priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma.

All the fat is the Lord's. Do you see how it ties? Already the necessity for a sacrifice to atone, cover over, that's what the word atone means for sin, had been revealed as early as the time of Adam and his immediate offspring.

The death of the animal by shedding its blood was a solemn reminder, first that sin forfeits a life, and second, that forgiveness could only be by a substitute death.

[15:55] The animals killed in sacrifice were signposts, pointing to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Because an animal can never be a substitute for a human being, Hebrews 10 verse 4, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.

And later, of course, it's very evident that Noah was aware of the distinction between clean and unclean animals, these that could be used for food and sacrifice, and those that couldn't, Genesis 7.

This is something that God must have already revealed to him, and it was the reason why he was to take seven pairs of clean animals, because some would be used for sacrifice. And this is why it's made very clear from the fact that Noah's first act, when he bounced out onto dry land, was to build an altar and offer sacrifices to God.

The promise, God's covenant of the coming Messiah, and the preparation, the necessity for a blood sacrifice, are revealed so early in the history of the human race.

Significantly, the very first use in the Bible of the word covenant is found in Genesis 6.18, where God promised Noah, I will establish my covenant with you.

[17:14] The promise and its preparation didn't begin with Moses, but right from the beginning of the human race. Not only the promise and preparation, but the chosen people are also established early in the history of the human race.

Adam and Eve had other children. Chapter 5, verse 4 tell us that, but few are mentioned by name, and although Cain's descendants are given for five generations, they are soon passed over for another son of Adam and Eve, and his name, of course, is Seth.

Significantly, during the lifetime of Seth, we are told, quote, men began to call on the name of the Lord. And it is from the line of Seth that Noah came.

Noah had three sons, but again, it is one Shem who is singled out for special mention. And his line is traced down to Abraham. The promise is maintained unbroken to this point, and also the preparation is understood in the sacrifice of Abel and Noah.

And the people are identified in the continuous line from Adam, Seth, Noah, and Abraham. And this covenant continues through Abraham and his children.

[18:32] So that in Genesis 12, we're introduced to the man called Abraham. And God now took another step forward in unfolding his promise, because in Genesis 12, verses 2 and 3, God promised Abraham that from him would come a special people, the Jews, in a special land, Israel.

Why was God bothering so much with Abraham and his family? And the answer would be found in the verse, in Genesis 12 and verse 7, and 12 and verse 18.

To your offspring I will give this land, and through them all the nations of the earth will be blessed. That, of course, refers to the Jews who were all descended from Abraham.

But we mustn't forget that the same word offspring was there way back in Genesis 3.15. Your offspring and hers. And in Genesis 3.15, it was a reference to Christ, wasn't it?

So the promise to Abraham is much more than simply a reference to the Jewish nation. It, too, is pointing forward to the Messiah, Jesus. And if you doubt that, well, Paul understood it very clearly. [ 19 : 42 ] Writing to the Christians in Galatia, he set up a little play on words. You should be familiar with this, of course. You see, the word offspring, both in the Hebrew and like our English word, can be both singular and plural.

You can have a handful of seeds and call it seed, a bag of seed. Or you can simply have one and call it seed. In Galatians 3.16, Paul wrote, the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. And then just to clarify it, the apostle Paul says, the scripture does not say, and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ.

So Paul, just in case we can't get it, Paul is interpreting those passages in Genesis for us and making it clear how we should understand it. Now that ought to be sufficiently clear.

The promise to Abraham was the same as that to Adam, to Noah, to Seth. It was the promise of Jesus Christ. And equally, Abraham was given an insight into the preparation.

[ 20 : 44 ] Genesis 15.8-21 describes God's response to Abraham when the patriarch asked how he could be sure that the promises of God would come to pass. And Abraham was ordered to prepare a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove, and a young pigeon for a sacrifice.

Now it may be too much to assume that Abraham understood the full significance of this multi-sacrifice, but God was undoubtedly preparing for the much fuller and deeper significance of sacrifice that would be given to Moses later.

And then after Abraham, of course, we come to Isaac. Isaac was possibly too young to appreciate the serious implications of the sacrifice when his father was ordered to offer a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, Genesis 22.

But we surely can assume that Abraham explained the meaning of it all, particularly when the ram was sacrificed in his place. Isaac must have understood sufficient of the necessity of sacrifice, because when God reaffirmed to Isaac the promises he'd made to Abraham, we are told in Genesis 26, Isaac built an altar.

Now we don't actually read of any sacrifices offered by Abraham's grandson Jacob, or Israel as he was later called. But the promise is renewed, quote, all peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring, Genesis 28, 14.

[ 22 : 08 ] And there's that word, offspring, again. Jacob, as you know, had 12 sons, but in the blessings he gave them all before they died, it was one in particular who was singled out to maintain the promise, Judah.

Judah became the father of the tribe that carried his name, and in the course of time, the tribe gave its name to all the Israelites, and their country became known as the land of Judah.

And the key verse in Genesis 49 is actually in verse 10. The scepter 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.

Notice once again the personal pronoun, he, his. And in the next two verses, he, his occurs at least another six times, just as we found in Genesis 3, 15.

So here we have a reference, not to the tribe of Judah, but to a particular person who's yet to come. And it's said of him that the scepter belongs to him.

[ 23 : 14 ] What on earth is a scepter? Well, a scepter was the ornate staff held by royalty that represented their power and authority. This is actually Xerxes, the Persian king and husband of Esther, holding his wonderful scepter.

It's not a walking stick, and we've painted it gold so that you can get the message. This actually was a gold scepter. In Genesis 49, the one who is promised through Judah will have rule and authority over the nations, a scepter.

The reference in Genesis 49 to his donkey and his robes washed in blood has a very obvious New Testament connection. And so far, we haven't even got out of the book of Genesis.

But I've deliberately spent so much time here because I want to show that the promise, the preparation and the people for the coming of Jesus Christ is not something that developed late on in the history of Israel.

It was there in the very earliest accounts of the human race. And these are not just occasional stories all thrown together to make interesting reason, reading or to tell us a little bit about God or ancient civilizations.

[ 24 : 26 ] In the Old Testament, we have a perfect plan as God unfolds the great promise he has made. And this is taken up in the New Testament as we've seen the writers understand exactly to whom it's all been pointing.

And now, in the time of Moses, the promise becomes even more clear. In the days of Jacob, whose name, remember, was changed to Israel, his family went to Egypt.

430 years after God confirmed his promise to Abraham, the Israelites were suffering bitterly in slavery in Egypt. But God hadn't forgotten them. That lovely verse in Exodus 2, God heard their groaning and he remembered what?

He remembered his covenant, his promise, capital P, with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. You see that reference to his covenant? His promise. This time, it was Moses to whom God confirmed the same promise.

But now the preparation becomes even more explicit and detailed. Exodus 12 tells the story of how the Israelites left Egypt one night and they were told that each family must take a male firstborn lamb, one year old, that was without any blemish.

[ 25 : 38 ] And the details were important. And the lamb was to be killed and some of the blood sprinkled on the doorpost on the homes of the Israelites. And during that terrible night, God's angel of death came to Egypt and killed the firstborn in every home, except where the angel of death saw the blood of the lamb on the doorpost.

And on these homes, he passed over and spared the family that offered the blood. God said to Moses and the people, the blood will be a sign for you.

The blood of a lamb is the sign. But it wasn't new, was it? That's not where it started. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they all offered sacrifices.

And now with Moses. And the deeper meaning of these sacrifices would become clear. And from the time of Moses, throughout the rest of the Old Testament, you know it, thousands upon thousands of sacrificial animals were slaughtered.

A special group of people called priests offered these sacrifices on behalf of the Jews. And God gave detailed instructions about the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness.

[ 26 : 51 ] And later, the temple in Jerusalem. And all the detailed ceremonies that formed the religion of Israel. But this wasn't play-acting. It was God's way of teaching the people then, and us, that obtaining forgiveness is no light thing.

It may be free, but it is costly. A life has to be taken. Remember what we said earlier. The animals killed in sacrifice were signposts pointing to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Because an animal can never be a substitute for human beings. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Now this is absolutely crucial for us to understand.

Every animal that was slaughtered was intended as a picture for the coming of the Messiah, who would be the ultimate and perfect Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

John the Baptist made the connection right at the start of his ministry. Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And Paul, even more precise, God presented him, Jesus, as a propitiation through faith in his blood.

[ 28 : 03 ] He did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. And he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

I want to pause there for a moment but I understand I don't need to because you had a great sermon by Roger Carswell on Sunday if you were here on propitiation. Good on him. The word propitiation refers to turning away the just anger of God against our sin.

You know that many of our Bible translators have a problem with that word because it's not a common word today. We don't use the word propitiate or propitiation very much. The problem is although most English words have got a fairly adequate synonym another word you can put in its place there isn't a really adequate synonym for the word propitiation.

It's pretty unique. And you'll notice that whatever it is, this propitiation it's something that God does. God, says Paul, presented him, Jesus, as a propitiation.

If I were to spend and I must not allow myself to do it but it was a common word in the first century. Paul wasn't introducing a strange word to them but he gave an incredibly important twist to it.

[ 29 : 22 ] You see, our task was to propitiate the gods. You probably know that the first Olympics that were about 700 BC they were to propitiate the gods. They were all sitting up in Olympus and watching and we're doing all the running and the jumping and the wrestling and so on down here.

And that's to propitiate the gods in the frame of mind because they were all a bit grumpy really. And the five times the word is used in the New Testament the writers turn it completely the other way around.

It is God who provides the propitiation. That was brand spanking new. Nobody ever thought like that. But I want you to notice also you see that Paul does something else.

All through the Old Testament sins had been forgiven, right? They had never been punished as they deserve. All the sacrifices were only pictures, signposts for the coming of Christ.

No animal had ever really taken the place of a human being. Every sacrifice, every lamb, every pigeon, every goat, every bullet was waiting for the ultimate final sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 29 ] And you can see where all the preparation was pointing. At last, on the cross, sin was punished and the justice of God was demonstrated so that we who have faith can be justified, declared not guilty.

And you'll see how Paul puts it there. In his mercy, forbearance, holding back the punishment that was justly our desert, he left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

You've got to understand this. The sacrifices did not punish the sin. They simply pointed on because no animal could take the place of a human being.

Isn't that plain? Isn't that how the Old Testament has been preparing all the way for the coming of Jesus, the promise, the preparation, the people? But this promise, remember, never forget, was right back there in Genesis 3.15 and it continued on into the prophets as well.

So let's briefly, and it will be briefly, come to that lot, the promise confirmed by the Psalms and the prophets. You know, the New Testament quotes the Psalms more than any other Old Testament book on well over 70 different occasions.

[ 31 : 37 ] Some Psalms are what we call Messianic Psalms. They are prophecies pointing forward to the coming of God's great promise. Sometimes the New Testament identifies the deeper significance of the Psalm for us.

I guess that's perhaps clearest in Psalm 22 where the opening verse, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Doesn't really need any comment and the rest of the Psalm outlines so much in detail what happened on Golgotha.

Gradually, the prophecies become more and more clear. His birth will be from a virgin conception. His birthplace will be identified as Bethlehem in Judea. His final entry into Jerusalem will be clearly recognized.

His death on the cross and its aftermath will be on behalf of others. And see how this magnificent passage in Isaiah sums it up, written 700 years before Christ was born, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, punishment that brought us peace was upon him.

There it is, propitiation. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity as all, propitiation. For the transgressions of my people was he stricken, propitiation.

[ 32 : 47 ] Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer propitiation. And there are scores and scores of passages we could turn to to show the preparation for the coming of Christ.

From the dawn of the human race until the very moment when Christ's child was born in Bethlehem, God had been preparing for that great moment. And a hundred years on from Isaiah, another great prophet, Jeremiah, continued the same theme.

And notice here, if you glance down that lovely passage, notice that the seed now becomes a branch. Isaiah had already referred to the promise in terms of the branch.

These prophecies, and there are so many more like them, point forward like signposts to the coming of Christ the Messiah. Wherever we read one of the book prophets, we should watch for the promise.

Some have calculated that there are more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament that refer to Christ and that 29 of them were fulfilled in the final 24 hours of his life.

[ 33 : 50 ] I have no way of guaranteeing those figures. I haven't done the checking myself. Here are a few just to illustrate the point. You just glance at them, I'm not going to read them. The only

way to avoid the obvious conclusion of these detailed prophecies is to assume that they were either added to our Old Testament years after the death of Christ, but that's a conclusion that even the most extreme critics of the Bible don't offer.

That's a non-starter because all these prophecies are found in the Hebrew Scriptures that long preceded the birth of Christ. We could, of course, assume that the stories of Christ were invented to fit the prophecies, but since the Gospels were all completed well before the end of the first century, it would be impossible to suggest, for example, that someone invented the idea of Christ being born in Bethlehem and riding to Jerusalem on a donkey.

All that could be so easily checked. So following the promise, the preparation, and the people makes the Old Testament such an exciting part of our Bible. For example, it actually explains the stories of Ruth and Esther, those two lovely women, in our Bible.

Why are they there? In the first case, God shows that he was caring for the ancestral line of the Messiah in probably the darkest period of Israel's history, and in the second, he was protecting his people Israel from a planned extermination by Persia.

That's how you understand the whole of the Old Testament and the whole of the history of the empires of the Middle East and beyond, the ancient Near East. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Macedonia, Greece, Rome, all God's preparation for the coming of Christ.

[ 35 : 33 ] Why is it so important? Why do we care about this incredible preparation for the coming of Jesus 2,000 years ago? And the most straightforward answer is that sin, disobedience to and rebellion against God, messed up the heart of the human race and all of God's beautiful creation right from the start.

And we urgently need to know how sin can ultimately be defeated and how we can be reconciled to our Creator. Now I know and you know that the vast majority of people in this sad, sad world couldn't care less about that.

But that is the most important thing. So before I close, I want to show you the purpose of the cross and how this was accomplished. First of all, the purpose of the cross was to show us what God is like.

I much prefer to start there. From the time of Adam and Abel, God's plan of a sacrifice to atone for human sin was a clear evidence. Although he is a God of righteous judgment who hates sin, he's also a God of compassionate forgiveness who loves sinners.

When God was prepared to send his only son as a sacrifice for sin, he could show in no more or vivid, powerful way his compassion for a fallen world. God so loved the world that he gave his son.

[ 36 : 58 ] And never forget who he was. According to Hebrews 1 and verse 3, the son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

You can literally translate that and I wish more translations did. He is the exact character of the actual reality of God himself. No mistaking who Jesus is.

There's no greater display of the love and compassion and holiness of God than Jesus Christ on the cross. Secondly, the cross shows us what sin is like.

The great detail that God revealed to Israel governing their sacrifices, the serious penalties for breaching those details, was God's way of reminding the people how serious sin is.

Don't take it lightly. The shed blood and the death of the sacrificial animal was a stark reminder of how seriously God takes sin and how terrible is his judgment against it.

[ 37 : 53 ] And it was, of course, all a preparation and signpost for the final and complete sacrifice of Christ. As the filthiness of a soiled garment is shown up against the pure whiteness of snow, so the perfect life of Christ reveals to the human race how far short of God's glory it falls.

Those who suggest that the gospel shouldn't present men and women as sinful beyond repair forget that when anyone understands who Jesus really is that's exactly how they feel.

When Peter reminded us that he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree it reminds us at the same time how serious sin is. And then thirdly the cross destroys the work of Satan.

You recall the promise in Genesis 3.15 I will put enmity between you and the woman between your offspring and hers he will crush your head and you will strike his heel. The apostle John understood this the reason the son of God appeared was he said to destroy the work of the devil.

Paul saw it the same way having disarmed the powers and authorities he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross. And throughout his life on earth that's what he was doing.

[ 39 : 04 ] That's why in the life of Jesus we have more direct confrontations with the devil than we would expect in normal situations. His cross his resurrection his final ascension destroyed Satan's authority in the life of all who are the children of God.

If you are a Christian tonight my friend Satan's work has ultimately been destroyed. You and I may not feel like that because there's an awful lot of corners yet to be chipped on but Satan is a finished enemy ultimately.

He cannot ever snatch you from Christ's hands. And fourthly that leads me to say the cross redeems the people of God. Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people for his own possession.

Peter expressed a new relationship with God this way you're a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Once you were not a people now you are the people of God. Once you were not received mercy now you have received mercy. How is it possible for a rebel sinner to become a holy nation a people belonging to God only through what Christ did accomplishing on the cross.

[ 40 : 25 ] So let me draw to a close by linking that lovely verse in Isaiah 53 to its fulfillment in the death of Christ. He was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was upon him the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all and for the transgressions of my people was he stricken yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.

And to focus on how this was achieved I want to roll together a number of New Testament verses Jesus our Lord was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification but Christ died once for all for our sins once for all the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. and you'll notice in that last sentence the phrase a curse of the law. It was that very word at the time of the fall in Genesis 3.14 God said to Satan in the guise of a snake cursed are you.

The word means to lay something under a curse a judgment a penalty by breaking a law or an agreement and in various forms the word occurs over 170 times in the Old Testament and mostly with reference to God.

[ 42 : 02 ] And whenever it's used by God or of God it refers to the result of sin and the punishment that follows. That must have been in Paul's mind in Galatians 3 and verse 13.

It's as if God said I will show you my justice by showing you how I hate sin but if I show it in you you will be cursed crushed utterly destroyed so to spare the sinner I will turn my anger against my son who was without sin and therefore had no need to die and I'll do it justly by putting all your sin to his account.

However scandalous the theme of Christ taking our blame and punishment may be and it is in the minds of many it's clearly the longed for promise under the old covenant and the fulfilled conviction of the new.

What else could Paul have meant when he claimed the sins committed beforehand were left unpunished passed over to demonstrate his justice at the present time.

The death of Christ was the ultimate demonstration of the justice of God and God's justice and love are inseparable. The penalty we deserved fell on him.

[ 43 : 18 ] You know throughout the Old Testament God adorned his promises of forgiveness with vivid picture after picture metaphor after picture metaphor to convince his people that it wasn't just a mere passing mood or a kind of transient warm feeling but that forgiveness is final and some of the phrases that are used in the Old Testament.

This is how he will treat their sin. He will replace their scarlet sins with the white snow. He will cut them out and never again bring them to mind. He'll sweep them away like a dissolving cloud or mist. He'll tread them into the ground without trace and cast them into the depths of the sea and he'll remove their transgressions as far as the east is from the west and when you come to the New Testament the pictures are no less powerful.

Whatever is accomplished for our salvation it will be through the cross and that is the message from the Bible from the very beginning to the very end.

Or as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15 what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures he was buried that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

[ 44 : 29 ] Let's open it up if you've got any comments or questions in a moment but let me pray first we can't stop just there. Sovereign Lord Holy Father God and Creator King of Kings Lord of Lords what a magnificent record of rescue from the very moment when our first parents defied the will of God and so tragically wandered away from him lost fellowship lost communion lost the beauty of the walk with God in the cool of the evening from that very moment when Satan seemed to have it all his own way when his was the triumph you stepped in and promised the Messiah.

Thank you for that great promise and thank you Father that little by little throughout the history of the human race through your people Israel you have made it more and more clear and thank you for the beautiful jigsaw the beautiful montage in scripture of the promise being fulfilled of the preparation being more and more clear and the people easy to identify and then when everything was ready you sent Jesus into this world Jesus thank you for coming thank you for taking my sin thank you for taking my guilt so that all the things I have ever done that can soak into my mind and hurt my soul and of which I am ashamed in the sight of a holy God are forgiven are blotted out are cast behind your back are remembered no more are dissolved like the mist on a sunny day and all because

Jesus took my guilt my sin in my place thank you Lord oh Lord hear our cry for the members of our family for the members of our colleagues for the members of our street for the members of our town our village our nation oh who know nothing of this open their eyes show them Jesus and bring hundreds of thousands to Christ amen if I could mention