

Jesus in the Old Testament

BY WALTER C. KAISER, JR., PH.D.,

President Emeritus

There is no finer teacher on whether Jesus is to be found in the pages of the Old Testament than the teaching of our Lord Jesus himself.

He it was who said in John 5:39, “You [Jewish people] diligently study the Scriptures [which at that time were the 39 books of the *Tanak*/Old Testament].... These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” That should settle the question.

But even more famously, Jesus rebuked Cleopas, and that other unnamed disciple, as they walked along the road to Emmaus on that first Easter Sunday, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Even King David predicted the resurrection of Jesus back in 1000 B.C. as he, too, saw what was ahead, namely, that Jesus would not be “abandon[ed] ... to the grave, nor [would he] let his Holy One see decay” (Ps 16:8-11; Acts 2:30-31). Therefore, it is not unexpected that we, too, should find Jesus present in the events and the predictions found in the Old Testament.

It is only right that we should find that Jesus was both actually present in the Old Testament and accurately predicted, and that he would come

first as our Savior, and then in a later second coming, would appear as the King supreme over all the earth. Such an unusual state of affairs is possible because he was, he is and he is the One to come. But sad to say, all too many miss both his real presence in the Old Testament narrative and the numerous predictions of both his first and second advents/comings. To remedy this, let us turn first to those places where he appeared in a Christophany in the Old Testament times. Then we will sample some of the numerous predictions of his comings.

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Dr. Gordon Hugenberger

Christ in the Old Testament

When Old Testament prophecies are studied by thoughtful honest readers, many of them seem disturbingly unconvincing! But, if we are willing to study them with care, they invariably become more relevant in their original contexts and intelligible by their original readers. They also become far more compelling as prophecies of Christ than we ever thought possible!

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OLD TESTAMENT APPEARANCES OF CHRIST

Jesus is first seen in the Old Testament as the person who appeared as “the Angel of the Lord” in his sudden confrontation with Sarah’s maidservant, Hagar (Gen 16:7). Thereafter, he continued to appear intermittently throughout the earlier books of the Old Testament. These

real occurrences, initiated by God, were characterized by the fact that they were convincing revelations of his person and work, as much as they were also transitory, fleeting, but audible and clearly visible appearances. He came temporally in the form of a human, much before his final incarnation as a babe in Bethlehem, yet this same “Angel of the LORD” is called and is addressed often as “the LORD/*Yahweh*” himself (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 19:1; etc.).

This “Angel of the LORD” was a title that stood for his office, but it did not describe his nature. The Hebrew word for “angel” (*mal'ak*) had the basic idea of one who was “sent,” a “messenger.” Of the 214 usages of the Hebrew term used for “angel,” about one-third of them refer to what is labeled by theologians as a “Christophany,” a temporary appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. It is certain, however, that this special angel of the Lord is divine, for Hagar “...gave this name to the LORD, who spoke with her [as the Angel of the LORD]: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ as she observed, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me’” (Gen 16:13).

Other instances of Jesus’ appearances in the Old Testament can be seen representatively in Genesis 22:11, 15, where it was the Angel of *Yahweh* who spoke from heaven to Abraham when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, and stopped him from proceeding. Again, it was the Angel of *Yahweh* who appeared to Moses in the flame of fire in Exodus 3:2. Throughout the dialogue at that burning bush, it was also declared that he was no one less than “*Yahweh*,” who spoke at that time, causing Moses to hide his face from him (Ex 3:6).

Later, it was the same Angel of the Lord who appeared to the wife of Manoah (Judges 13:2-25), mother of Samson, whom she reported to her

husband was indeed a “man of God” that had appeared to her. When Manoah asked for the “Angel of the LORD” to also appear to him as he had appeared to his wife, the Angel repeated the appearances and his conversations to him, after which he ascended in the flame of the altar (Judg 13:20), implying the sacrifice was in worship of the Lord himself! Moreover, this “Angel” is regarded as a “Redeemer,” who saves Israel from evil (Isa 63:9).

How can readers of the Old Testament doubt that these sample instances, along with a host of other such descriptions in the earlier Scriptures, were anything less than preincarnate appearances of our Lord Jesus in real flesh, even if it was in those days only a temporary infleshment/incarnation for the immediate needs of the people until he would come and take on flesh permanently? Oftentimes Jesus came to earth to help his people in their distress and their need for direction. The only examples of the Angel of *Yahweh* turning against Israel occur in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, where the Angel is the agent of God’s punishment of David, because he disobeyed God and conducted a national census.

OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTIONS OF THE COMING MESSIAH

In addition to the real presence of Jesus as the Angel of the Lord/God, J. Barton Payne listed some 574 verses in the Old Testament that had direct personal messianic foretellings. Payne found 127 personal messianic predictions involving some 348 verses that had any or all types of real and typological prophecies of Jesus’ first or second coming. This number was exceeded only by Alfred Edersheim, who noted that in some 558 rabbinic writings in pre-Christian times, there were some 456

separate Old Testament/Tanak passages used to refer to the Messiah or to messianic times!

In my own book, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, I was able to identify 65 direct predictions of Jesus' comings in the Old Testament. Few will dispute that there are at least six direct Messianic predictions in the Pentateuch: Genesis 3:15; 9:27; 12:2-3; 49:8-12; Numbers 24:15-19; and Deuteronomy 18:15-18.

Eve was promised in Genesis 3:15 that a male descendant from her line would crush the head of the serpent, i.e., the Devil himself, and win completely over evil, as the prince of evil, Satan, would be finally vanquished. Then in Genesis 9:27, God would come and live/dwell in the tents of Shem, the Semitic peoples. But which one of the Semites did God intend: the Arabs or the Jewish people? Abraham settled that question, for God called him to go from Ur of Mesopotamia to Israel, and he was to be a blessing for all the nations on earth in Genesis 12:3.

This promise could be narrowed down even further for the tribe of Judah. Son number four of Jacob would be the one God would invest with the scepter of ruling and the one from whom the line of Messiah would descend (Gen 49:8-12). In fact, this coming one from Judah would be "A star [that would] come out of Jacob, a scepter [that would] rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17). Moreover, the Messiah who would come would also be a "prophet" (Deut 18:15) as well as a "king" (Ps 72).

If the book of Job is to be placed in the period of the patriarchs (c. 2100 – 1800), as we believe he is to be placed, then there are four texts in Job

that should be added to the six in the Pentateuch. There Messiah is called an “angel” and a “Mediator” (Job 33:23-28).

Add to these 10 direct Messianic prophecies another five from the times both prior to and during the Davidic period. He is seen as the “Anointed” one in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and the “faithful Priest” in 1 Samuel 2:35-36. But the most outstanding text by far is the Davidic Covenant text found in 2 Samuel 7 (repeated in 1 Chron 17) and elaborated on in Psalm 132, which pointed to the dynasty/house of David as the place where God would originate his throne, dynasty and kingdom forever. The promise given to King David was so astounding that David cried out in 2 Samuel 7:19c that “This is the law/charter for [all] humanity.” In other words, God had just now conferred on David an enlargement of the promise he had originally made with the patriarchs.⁵

There is not enough space to relate how 11 Psalms celebrate the person and work of the coming Messiah, but even though he would be rejected (Ps 118), and betrayed (Pss 69, 109), die and be resurrected (Pss 22, 16), he would come as Conqueror and Enthroned Ruler (Pss 2, 110), as Planner and Groom (Pss 40, 45), and as Triumphant King (Pss 68, 72).

In addition to the previous 15 direct references to the coming Messiah, there are some 39 predictions of the Messiah in the Old Testament prophets. A sample of these announcements before they happened would include these facts. First, it was predicted that Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; cf. Mt 1:33). His birthplace would be Bethlehem (Mic 5:2; cf. Mt 2:1, 6), and John the Baptist would be his forerunner (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1; cf. Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4-6).

It was further announced ahead of time that Messiah would enter Jerusalem [what turned out to be Palm Sunday] in Triumph as the crowd shouted “Hosanna” (Zech 9:9-10; Ps 118:25-26; cf. Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9; Lk 19:38; Jh 12:13). But in less than a week, he would be betrayed [by one of his own disciples, Judas, as it turned out] (Ps 69:25; cf. Acts 1:20).

Messiah’s side would be pierced (Zech 12:10; cf. Jh 19:37), and he would suffer vicariously for the sins of the world (Isa 53:6, 9, 12; cf. I Pt 2:21-25; Rom 4:25). Even more dramatically accurate was the fact that Jesus would be killed with the “wicked” ones (Isa 53:9a, note the plural noun in Hebrew) [as he hung between two thieves], yet he would be buried with the rich one (Isa 53:9b, note its singular form in the Hebrew).

But that was not the end of the matter for the predictions about Jesus in the Old Testament, for Messiah would return to earth a second time (Daniel 7:13; cf Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27), and he would one day rule in the city of Jerusalem as King of kings, as the nations would go up to that city to be taught in his ways, never more to “train for war anymore” (Isa 2:3-4).

As far as the case for the Messiah in the Old Testament is concerned, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is one of strong continuity and a progressive revelation. The seminal seeds of the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus bloom and blossom in the New Testament even though the Old Testament often carried in seminal seed form much that eventually developed out of the Old. What a gracious,

revealing God, and what a wonderful gift of a Savior who has come to earth once, but who is due to return once more in all his fullness and glory!

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