CHAPTER 1 — THE SCRIPTURES TESTIFY OF ME

Christ as the Key to Old Testament Scriptures

The Christian Question of Fulfillment

Christian interpretation begins with a historical claim: Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised to Israel. If that claim is true, then Christian reading of the Old Testament cannot remain exactly what it was before the incarnation, cross, resurrection, and ascension. The events do not destroy the earlier revelation; they disclose its goal. The New Testament therefore does not treat Jesus as one subject among many within Old Testament Scriptures. It repeatedly presents him as the one in whom the story reaches its decisive meaning.

This is already visible in the vocabulary of the Gospel. Jesus declares that he has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). Fulfillment is not negation. The law is not exposed as an error, nor are the prophets discarded as failed predictors. Rather, the Messiah brings to completion what God had been preparing. Catholic teaching summarizes the point by saying that the economy of the Old Testament was ordered toward preparing for and prophetically declaring Christ, while warning that the Old Testament retains its own intrinsic value as revelation.[2]

Beginning with Moses and All the Prophets

Luke 24 provides perhaps the clearest canonical picture of the Christian hermeneutic. The disciples on the road to Emmaus know the facts of Jesus' death and have heard the report of the empty tomb, yet they do not understand the event. Jesus' remedy is exegetical. Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interprets the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:25–27). Later, before the gathered

[2] Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 121–130, 577–580.

disciples, he names the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms and declares that what was written concerning him must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44–47). The movement is not from Christ away from Old Testament Scriptures but from Christ back through them, where their patterns and promises become intelligible in a new light.

The interpretive claim is comprehensive without requiring that every verse be a direct prediction. The Pentateuch contains persons, institutions, sacrifices, exodus patterns, covenant signs, and promises; the Prophets announce judgment, restoration, a coming king, a servant, a renewed covenant, and the outpouring of the Spirit; the Psalms give Israel a vocabulary of kingship, suffering, vindication, worship, and hope. Luke's Jesus teaches the disciples to see this whole scriptural economy as converging upon the Messiah's suffering, resurrection, and the proclamation of repentance to all nations.

“These Are They Which Testify of Me”

John's Gospel makes a parallel claim. Jesus tells his opponents that the Scriptures testify about him and that Moses wrote of him (John 5:39–46). The force of the passage is easily missed. Possession of the sacred text is not identical with apprehension of its goal. A reader may search Scripture diligently and still refuse the one to whom Scripture bears witness. The Christian claim is therefore not simply that Christ can be found somewhere in the Old Testament. It is that recognition of Christ belongs to the proper completion of Israel's scriptural hope.

John 8 sharpens the Abrahamic dimension: Abraham rejoiced that he would see Christ's day. Whatever precise exegetical account one gives of that statement, John's theological point is unmistakable. Jesus places his identity and mission within the promise given to the patriarch, while simultaneously claiming a priority that exceeds ordinary descent: 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58). Abraham is not displaced as irrelevant; Abraham's hope is located in relation to Christ.

Christ and Israel's Sacred Institutions

The same pattern appears in Jesus' treatment of Israel's institutions. He identifies his body with the temple that will be destroyed and raised (John 2:19–21). He presents himself as greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6), greater than Jonah (Matt. 12:41), and greater than Solomon (Matt. 12:42). He gives bread in the wilderness and then identifies himself as the true bread from heaven (John 6). At Passover he interprets the bread and cup around his approaching death. The institutions remain historically real, but their theological trajectories terminate in his person and work.

Eastern Orthodox catechetical teaching expresses this pattern with unusual clarity: Christ is described as the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, the completion of Moses' law, the fulfillment of the prophets, the great High Priest, the perfect sacrificial victim, and the new Passover. Catholic theology likewise teaches that the temple prefigures Christ's own mystery and that his body becomes the definitive temple of the new age. These claims arise from communions that disagree on many later questions; their agreement here demonstrates how deeply Christological fulfillment belongs to classical Christian grammar.[34]

Fulfillment as the Governing Principle

A Christological hermeneutic therefore asks a different question from a merely predictive scheme. It does not begin by asking which modern event can be matched to an ancient oracle. It first asks how Jesus and the apostles themselves reread the promises, institutions, and identities of Israel after the resurrection. The New Testament becomes the inspired interpretation of the Old Testament's telos.

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[3] Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 583–586, 593.

[4] Orthodox Church in America, The Orthodox Faith, vol. 1, Doctrine and Scripture, 'Incarnation.'

This does not authorize arbitrary allegory. The historical meaning of Old Testament Scriptures matters precisely because fulfillment depends upon continuity. Passover can prefigure Christ because there really was an exodus; Davidic kingship can reach its fullness in Christ because David and his covenant were real; temple imagery can culminate in Christ because the temple truly stood at the center of Israel's worship. Typology depends on history. It sees providential correspondences within one divine economy, not secret meanings detached from the text.

The governing principle for the chapters that follow can therefore be stated simply: the Christian question is not merely whether God's promises will be fulfilled, but how the apostolic writings identify their fulfillment in Christ. This principle will govern our treatment of Abraham, Israel, land, temple, priesthood, sacrifice, and kingdom.