

The Christian Approach to the Old Testament

F.F. Bruce

[p.3]

In speaking of the Christian approach to the Old Testament, I recognize that there are other ways in which these writings may be approached. There is, for example, the Jewish approach, which finds in them the first and normative stage of the Jewish religion, continued in the later stages of teaching which have taken written shape in the Mishnah, the Talmud, and so forth. There is, again, the Muslim approach which finds, in Old Testament and New Testament alike, earlier and imperfect stages of a process of divine revelation which reached perfection in Muhammad and the Qur'an. These are approaches which we cannot pursue for the simple reason that we are Christians, and not Jews or Muslims.

But there are other ways of approach which are more familiar to us and which we may freely follow up. For example, the Old Testament is a source of high value for our knowledge of the history of certain areas of the Near East in the closing millennia BC. It is also of great importance as containing all the surviving literature of the Hebrew nation from the centuries preceding and immediately following the Babylonian exile of the sixth century BC. Again, the student of religion will find in it an abundance of useful, contemporary information about the religious beliefs and practices of the Israelites and their neighbours in those days. A new book on the Old Testament,¹ recently published in America, includes chapters entitled 'The Critical Approach to the Old Testament', 'The Anthropological Approach to the

[p.4]

Old Testament', 'The Sociological Approach to the Old Testament'.

These avenues of approach are open to the Christian to explore, and some of us have engaged in a good deal of such exploration. But none of them, nor yet all of them together, can be equated with the Christian approach to the Old Testament, for they are explored by non-Christians as much as by Christians.

THE OLD TESTAMENT WITNESS TO CHRIST

What then is the specifically Christian approach to the Old Testament? It is the approach which sees this volume as the preparation of the gospel. It is the approach which sees the relation of the Old Testament to the New as that of promise to fulfilment. It is the approach which is laid open before us in the teaching of our Lord and His apostles.

When the New Testament makes reference to the Scriptures, it is almost always the Old Testament writings that are intended. Thus, for example, when Timothy is reminded that he has been acquainted with the 'sacred writings' from childhood, it is the sacred writings of the Old Testament that are meant, and it is these writings which, as Paul goes on to tell him, 'are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. iii. 5). That the way of salvation is made plain in the New Testament we know; but here it is affirmed that the Old Testament teaches it too. If we ask how it does so, we may find our answer in words spoken

¹ H. F. Hahn, *Old Testament in Modern Research* (Philadelphia, 1954).

by Peter in the house of Cornelius: 'To him [that is, to Christ] all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name' (Acts x. 43). It is by their witness to Christ that the Old Testament writings unfold the way of salvation

[p.5]

through faith in Him; it is by that same witness, we may add, that the same writings are 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. iii. 16f.). 'You search the scriptures,' said our Lord to His critics (again referring to the Old Testament), 'because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life' (Jn. v. 39, 40).

These words, 'it is they that bear witness to me', are crucial for our inquiry. The Christian approach to the Old Testament is bound up with its witness to Christ. Christ is the goal of the Old Testament. To change the figure, He is the key to the Old Testament; the Old Testament, that is to say, cannot be properly understood apart from Him.

Were our Lord's opponents wrong in thinking that in these writings they had eternal life? In one sense, no; the way of life is set forth clearly there. In another sense, yes; the way of life which the Old Testament sets forth is the way of life through faith in Christ; but they imagined that they could have life apart from Him through whom alone it could come—the One to whom the whole Old Testament bears witness.

That the New Testament bears witness to Christ is obvious. But the New Testament itself, amid all its witness to Christ, emphasizes that this witness is all of a piece with the witness borne to Him by the Old Testament. The two Testaments are like two parts of one sentence; both are necessary to complete the sense; either is imperfect without the other. And when we listen to the whole sentence pronounced by the two Testaments together, it is the sentence which proclaims God's saving grace in Christ. The apostles and evan-

[p.6]

gelists appeal to the Old Testament for confirmation of the gospel which they preach. But more than that, our Lord's own testimony to the Old Testament as the volume which found its fulfilment in Himself has, with rare exceptions, been decisive for the Church's attitude to these writings. It is by virtue of its witness to Him—and, we may add, His witness to it—that the Old Testament is rightly included in the canon of sacred Scripture. The Christian approach to the Old Testament is dictated by Christ's own approach to it. 'What was indispensable to the Redeemer must always be indispensable to the redeemed.'²

DIVINE REVELATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

How, then, does the Old Testament bear witness to Christ? First of all, it tells how God prepared the way for His coming. Our Lord did not appear on earth like a bolt from the blue in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, as a famous second-century heretic³ taught. He appeared as the fulfilment of a long process of divine activity on earth. The Old Testament

² G. A. Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* (London, 1901), p.11.

³ Marcion.

gives us the history of this process. After a brief account of the beginnings of human civilization in the Near East, it tells how God selected one man in order that His purpose of blessing for the world might be achieved in this man and his descendants. Most of the remainder of the Old Testament records the dealings of God with these descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel, until at last, many centuries later, the fulness of the time came and God sent forth His Son, Himself an Israelite by birth—but with His coming we have left the Old Testament

[p.7]

behind us and have entered into the New. Yet, so closely is the story of the preparation linked with the record of fulfilment, that we simply cannot understand the New Testament without some knowledge of what has gone before. This is one way in which the Old Testament bears witness to Christ.

But in addition to that, the story of God's preparation for the coming of Christ is a story which itself unfolds the saving principles which were fully revealed in Christ. The whole Bible sets forth the gospel of our redemption, and the Old Testament is much more than a preface to this gospel; it is itself the first part of the saving history. We must be grateful to a number of scholars in this land and overseas who have recently placed new emphasis on this forgotten fact. I may mention one book out of several—Dr. Norman Snaith's 1944 Fernley-Hartley Lecture on *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, in which it is maintained that these distinctive ideas provide the basis of New Testament teaching as well, and indeed of evangelical Christianity as a whole.

We remember the trumpet-note on which the Epistle to the Hebrews opens: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son' (Heb. i, 1f.).

These two clauses distinguish the preparatory and the final stages in one long process of revelation, but they make it plain that the revelation was one. What God said in His Son is recorded in the New Testament; what He said to the fathers through the prophets is recorded in the Old. And when we think of 'the prophets', we must remember that, in the Jewish nomenclature, the books of the prophets in the Old Testament include not only most of the books which we regard as prophetic in a narrower sense, but many of the historical books as well. This is important when we view the Old Testament

[p.8]

as the record of God's self-revelation in its preparatory stage.

For in the Old Testament we see God revealing Himself in two principal ways. He reveals Himself in His mighty acts of mercy and judgment; and He reveals Himself by the words of His servants the prophets who interpreted to their fellows the meaning of His acts. Outstanding among those mighty acts was the deliverance which God accomplished for His people Israel in the events of the Exodus. In the plagues of Egypt, the recession of the 'Red Sea', and the thunders of Sinai He showed Himself to be the Lord of nature and Lord of history; He showed Himself the mighty champion of His people and the righteous judge of their oppressors; but, above all, He showed Himself as a covenant-keeping God, for it was in

fulfilment of His solemn promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that He intervened thus for the redemption of their children.

But the people on whose behalf this intervention took place would have understood little or nothing of the significance of these events, or indeed of the identity and character of the God who made them come to pass, had another method of revelation not been immediately available in the words of Moses. For Moses, commissioned to be the spokesman of God to His people, was able to assure them that it was the God of their forefathers who was acting thus for their salvation, and that His purpose in doing so was that they might be His people, bound to Him in covenant unity. The mighty acts and the prophetic words were both necessary for the divine revelation, and both were provided together.

In this whole complex of revealing and redeeming deed and word at the Exodus we may recognize a pattern of divine action which repeats itself on other occasions in the course of the saving history recorded in the Bible, but

[p.9]

supremely in the saving work of Christ, in which that history reaches its culmination. (That is why so many of the Old Testament narratives lend themselves so aptly as illustrations of the Christian gospel.) But when we come to the work of Christ, deed and word coincide, for the One through whom the saving deed was done is also the spokesman of God—or indeed, the very self-expression of God—who unfolds the meaning and purpose of the saving deed. What was spoken in partial and piecemeal fashion in earlier times has now found perfect expression in Him—yet in such a way that we shall miss much of its point unless we pay attention to those earlier occurrences of the same redemptive pattern.

I have singled out the Exodus as outstanding among the mighty acts of God in Old Testament times; but the same lessons can be learned from other epochs of Old Testament history. We may think, for example, of the remarkable concentration of prophetic ministry around the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of the land of Israel. God was acting in judgment in these critical days, and at the same time He was showing the basic principles of His judgment in the visions and oracles of the great prophets. Thus, for example, the Assyrian invader was not to pursue his conquering way unchecked, whatever his own plans might be; he was but an instrument in the hand of Israel's God—'the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury!' (Is. x. 5). Nor was it only in the more disjointed times of His people's history that God made Himself known, but also by His overruling providence and guidance in quieter and less eventful days. Throughout the long centuries He was teaching them to look to Him as a righteous God and a Saviour, and from the record of His dealings with them we too may come to know Him thus, the more so as we live in the light of that redemption in which He has supremely displayed His saving power

[p.10]

and vindicated His righteousness in the sight of all nations. To this redemption prophets and righteous men in those earlier days looked forward, dimly desiring it from afar, uncertain of the manner and time of its accomplishment. Many of them associated the redemption with a figure pictured variously as a prophet (a second and greater Moses), a king (a second and greater David), an obedient and suffering servant of God, accomplishing a priestly work by offering up his life in sacrifice for the sins of others, and so forth. But what relation could

these various figures bear to one another? This was to remain a mystery throughout the time of preparation. When, however, the time of fulfilment came at last, the apostles of Christ, the new spokesmen of God, were left in no such doubt: 'This is that', they proclaimed, 'which was spoken by the prophet' (Acts ii. 16, AV). Christ by His saving work as Prophet and Priest and King had fulfilled the Old Testament promises before their eyes: To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name' (Acts x. 43).

MAN'S RESPONSE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

But the Old Testament is not only the record of God's revelation; it also records man's response to that revelation. This response might be friendly or hostile; it might manifest itself in words or in deeds.

1. The Response in Words

Let us think first of all of the response in words. Look, for example, at the book of Psalms. Here we find the believing response of men to whom the revelation of God had come home, and who had embraced this God as their God. Even when they found themselves surrounded by circumstances which threatened to overwhelm them, even

[p.11]

when they began to wonder whether God had forgotten to be gracious and had cast them off for ever, their faith rose in triumph over danger and doubt and expressed itself in language which the people of God ever since have found most apt to voice their highest and purest aspirations of prayer and worship.

One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to enquire in his temple....

And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies round about me;
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
Thou hast said, "Seek ye my face." My heart says to thee,
"Thy face, LORD, do I seek."
Hide not thy face from me....

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!
Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
yea, wait for the LORD!

(Psalm xxvii. 4, 6-9a, 13 f.).

Such was the psalmist's conviction of God's faithfulness, once his own doubts were dispelled in the divine presence, that he was able to encourage others also to put their trust in God. Here, it may be noted, is a good example of the difference between revelation and inspiration. They frequently go together (as, for instance, in the prophetic

[p.12]

oracles); but there the words of inspiration are the words in which a man of God responds to the revelation he has received. And because they are words of inspiration they serve to express our response to God as well, although we have come to know Him through His perfect revelation in Christ. Almost unconsciously when we sing the Psalms we fill the words with a deeper, Christian meaning. The man who has experienced the power of Christ to deliver him from the danger and loathsomeness of sin can put new meaning into the ancient words of Psalm xl. 2f. in which an Old Testament believer celebrated his deliverance from some great peril:

He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.

He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.

Which means that Christ is the fulfilment of the psalmists as He is of the prophets.

Or we may consider the book of Job in this light. We realize, of course, that we cannot simply quote some utterance of Job or his friends as if their words were God's words. When God enters into the controversy He rebukes the three friends because they have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has' (Jb. xlii. 7); even Job himself is described as one who 'darkens counsel by words without knowledge' (Jb. xxxviii. 2).⁴ Job and his friends respond to such knowledge of God as they

[p.13]

have received, but Job's knowledge of God is greatly deepened by his trials, and leads on occasion to wonderful outbursts of faith, which reach their climax in the words of xix. 25-27:

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then without my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

⁴ With apologies to those who deprecate this lumping together of the poem and its prose framework!

No doubt, when we hear these words sung in Handel's *Messiah*, or read in the service for the burial of the dead, we fill them with a far fuller significance than Job could, for we live in a day when Christ has 'abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. i. 10). But that is simply to say that Christ is the vindicator of Job's faith and the fulfilment of his quest: 'Oh, that I knew where I might find him' (Jb. xxiii. 3). Many years ago Dr. Campbell Morgan published a book entitled *The Answers of Jesus to Job*, in which he showed how many of the problems and questions raised by the experiences of Job had to remain without a satisfying answer until Christ came and suffered and triumphed.⁵

Probably there is no book in the Old Testament which questions all the accepted presuppositions of life (including religious life) so radically as the book of Ecclesiastes. As the author of this book pursues his quest and pronounces his verdict of utter vanity on everything under the sun, he voices many sentiments to which few, if any, of us will be disposed to preface the words 'Thus saith the LORD'. I know some Christians who are prepared to do so when he says that 'the dead know nothing' (Ec.

[p.14]

ix. 5); but even they stop short of accepting as a divine revelation the statement that 'there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil' (Ec. ii. 24). And yet, when we turn to the New Testament, Paul says that something very like this would be a sound philosophy of life if the dead are not raised' (1 Cor. xv. 32). Jews and Christians alike have been scandalized by the presence of this book in the sacred canon, even if at the end it does appear to view human life as lying between the poles of divine creation and divine judgment (xii. 1, 14) and therefore inculcates the fear of God and the keeping of His commandments as 'the whole duty of man' (xii. 13). But its place in the canon is well justified, for this book too bears its witness to Christ. When all the foundations are shaken and nothing seems secure, when scepticism in its most remorseless mood throws doubt on all that we have accepted as sure and tells us that life is

—a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing—

Christ comes with the one argument that can give us a rock beneath our feet. His answer to Ecclesiastes is as satisfying as His answer to Job. And I think that Paul had in mind the 'vanity'—frustration or futility, if you will—of which Ecclesiastes has so much to say when he wrote: The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom. viii. 20f.).

Since God reveals Himself as perfect Love, it is but natural that men's response to His revelation should take the form of love. So much is this true that human love,

[p.15]

and especially the love of a man for a woman, is taken up in the Bible as the great analogy of God's love for His people. That is in itself sufficient justification for the presence in the

⁵ More recently, Professor Jung has given us his *Answer to Job*; it is not so satisfying.

sacred canon of the Song of Songs, where the mutual love of man and woman is celebrated. Nor is it surprising that so many Christian saints have avowed their love to God and their devotion to Christ in language borrowed from this book, thus giving to its words an application beyond what the poet (or poets) envisaged.

But we must beware of making the devotional use of Holy Scripture a guide to its proper interpretation, and perhaps the Song of Songs has suffered more than most parts of the Bible from well-meaning but misguided attempts to treat it as an allegory. Allegorical interpretation, indeed, is almost always to be avoided in biblical exposition; very few parts of the Bible were intended to be understood in this manner. And allegorical interpretation is peculiarly liable to be abused, for (as Luther put it) it is 'a nose of wax' which the interpreter can mould into any shape he pleases. It is admirably suited for making the Bible mean what we would like it to mean. The arbitrariness of its application may be illustrated from two commentaries on the Song of Songs which adopt the allegorical method. (I shall do the commentators the kindness of leaving their names unmentioned.) In chapter vii. 4 the lover, enlarging on the charms of his beloved, says:

Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon,
overlooking Damascus.

One of the commentaries has this to say: 'A saved soul's nose is an elevated sense of discernment of that which is fragrant or evil, a watch-tower against danger. Continually, it is alert both to the sweet odour of Christ and likeness to Him and to the repulsive smell of sin.' (Which

[p.16]

is no doubt true, but it has nothing to do with the Song of Songs.) But the other commentator views the passage far otherwise. Here, to his mind, is Antichrist addressing the Scarlet Woman. And so he says: 'The nose that is like the tower of Lebanon is really "Babylon the great", foreshadowed fully in Gen. xi. 4.... But so intense is the sense of smell of this great organ, that the Holy Spirit names it as looking towards⁶ the object of its desires; and I should not be surprised if Antichrist were to present himself from or by way of Damascus.' (Which is equally irrelevant, and has not even the merit of being probably true in itself.) You may think that these examples are exceptionally ludicrous; let them serve to illustrate a way in which the Old Testament should *not* be approached!

One of the poetical books of the Old Testament expresses the response of the people of God to the terrors of His judgment. The book of Lamentations embodies the faith and hope of those who have learned to humble themselves under God's mighty hand, and so striking are its affinities at times with the portraiture of the Suffering Servant of the book of Isaiah that it is not surprising that its language has traditionally been applied to the passion of our Lord: 'Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?' (La. i. 12).⁷

I have dwelt on these poetical and wisdom books of the Old Testament more particularly because it is in them pre-eminently that we find this response which, like the revelation which evokes it, reaches forward to Christ and finds its answer in Him.

⁶ AV has 'which looketh toward Damascus'.

⁷ See N. K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (London, 1954).

2. The Response in Deeds

But the response of men to whom the word of God came

[p.17]

took the form of deeds as well as words. The narrative parts of the Old Testament provide a broad canvas on which the revealed character of God is portrayed in His dealings with men, more particularly with His people Israel. As we have seen, this distinctive feature of Old Testament history as the record of God's revelation is emphasized by the fact that several of the historical books (to be precise, those of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) are included among 'the prophets' in the Hebrew Bible. But while they record God's revelation, they record at the same time men's response to His revelation, a response which was often unbelieving and disobedient.

Why is there so much historical narrative in the Old Testament?

Firstly, because the biblical revelation is a historical revelation. God's mighty acts are historical events; His prophets are historical characters. So, in the consummation of the ages, the Son of God appeared on earth as a historical character, and His redemptive work is a historical event, accomplished once for all at a fixed time and place. That is why, when we recite the saving events in the Creeds, we are careful to date them 'under Pontius Pilate'. But the record of a progressive revelation in history must inevitably provide the historical setting within which the revelation was given. The Old Testament therefore provides us with an outline of ancient Near Eastern history, but an outline sketched from a unique viewpoint—the viewpoint of God's redeeming purpose which culminated in Christ. From this viewpoint the course of pre-Christian history finds its significance and its goal in Christ, and thus bears witness to Him. This is true even of the genealogical tables which form the skeleton round which so much Old Testament history is constructed. As isolated tables they would be purely secular records, such as could be paralleled from the

[p.18]

archives of any nation. But within the biblical context they emphasize that the line from which the Saviour was to come was included in the general registers. Sooner or later these lists peter out, so far as the biblical record is concerned; one, however, is carried forward from the Old Testament into the New, and proves to be the one into which Christ was born.

Secondly, the historical narrative of the Old Testament, even when no special divine activity is being recorded, shows the very unfaithfulness and forgetfulness of the people of God serving as a foil to His faithfulness and remembrance of His undertakings to them. This particular lesson is perhaps exemplified most of all in the book of Esther. In this book, as you know, the name of God does not appear, and its absence from the book reflects the absence of God Himself from the conscious lives of the characters; He is not in all their thoughts. Yet it calls for no special insight to see the providence of God overruling the whole course of events in this book, as (to quote the latest commentator on Esther) 'we see him rescuing his chosen instrument [Israel] from the hands of evil men, despite their perversity of heart, and restoring them that they may yet be his instrument for the redemption of the world.'⁸ In Esther, as in the

⁸ G. A. F. Knight, *'Torch' Bible Commentaries: Esther*, etc. (London, 1955). p. 17.

other narrative portions of the Old Testament, the very record or setting of the revelation is itself a form of revelation.

Thirdly, the experiences of the people of God in Old Testament days have their practical lessons for the people of God today. Not only does the Bible unfold a recurrent pattern of divine revelation and redemption, as has been said, but also a recurrent pattern of human response—often a very unworthy response. But many of the things recorded are recorded as examples to be avoided, rather

[p.19]

than as examples to be followed. Remember how repeatedly in the New Testament the rebellion of the people of Israel in the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt is used as a moral object-lesson for Christians. Most important of these New Testament passages is the opening part of the tenth Chapter of 1 Corinthians. ‘Now these things’, says Paul, ‘are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did... Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall’ (1 Cor. x. 6, 11 f.). The words ‘as a warning’ in the RSV of verse 11 (‘by way of example’ in the RV) represent one Greek adverb, *typikos*, which might be literally translated ‘typically’. What Paul is giving us, in fact, is the ‘typical’ teaching of these events. We have been treated to much ‘typical’ interpretation of the Old Testament narrative, and not least of the story of the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings and the settlement in Canaan. But we should do well to take a leaf out of Paul’s book; for his ‘typical’ interpretation takes the form of a stern warning that those who name the name of Christ must not be guilty of such idolatrous and rebellious and immoral conduct as is related of the Israelites, or else yet another recurrent pattern will unfold itself—the pattern of divine judgment. We have been taught that the Bible is the rule of conduct as well as the rule of faith; and there is much in the Old Testament which, when approached in the light of its witness to Christ, makes a very salutary contribution to the Christian’s rule of conduct.

* * * *

So then, whether it records divine revelation or human response, the Old Testament leads on to Christ and bears

[p.20]

witness to Him as its fulfiller. He is the ‘apostle and high priest of our Confession’ (Heb. iii. 1)—God’s perfect messenger to us and our perfect representative with God. If I have omitted all reference to the prominent element of law in the Old Testament, that is simply because this was so admirably treated by Professor Anderson in last year’s Presidential Address.⁹ But the New Testament affirms that, just as Christ is the fulfiller of Old Testament history and prophecy, poetry and wisdom, so also He is ‘the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified’ (Rom. x. 4). The law revealed both the majesty of God’s will and the bankruptcy of man’s response to it; but the New Testament tells how ‘God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might

⁹ J. N. D. Anderson, *Law and Grace* (I.V.F., 1954).

be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom. viii. 3 f.).

I have not dealt with many of the problems which the study of the Old Testament raises for the thoughtful Christian. I am well aware of them—the moral problems, the problems of literary and historical criticism, the problems raised by the progressive character of the biblical revelation, and so on. But these problems will be seen in their true proportion when they are subordinated to the primary function of the Old Testament, which is to bear witness to Christ. To approach the Old Testament in the light of Christ's fulfilment of all its parts is to approach it aright; this is the Christian approach to the Old Testament.

© 1955, 1959 *Religious & Theological Students Fellowship*. Reproduced by permission.

Prepared for the Web in March 2008 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

Together these primary elements define Seitz's approach to the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. Chapter I explores the canonical approach through the themes of history and revelation in Seitz's work. This chapter focuses particularly on his critique of historical-critical approaches to the Old Testament, Seitz's reading of the Exodus narrative, and the implications of this reading for Seitz's understanding of God's self-disclosure in light of Israel's election. Chapter II explores the canonical approach through the themes of canon and unity in Seitz's work. The Christian Church has always assigned to the Bible a unique place in theology and life. What is true of the Bible as a whole is equally true of that part of the Bible which is known as the Old Testament. Indeed, until the middle of the second century of the Christian era, the only Scriptures accepted as authoritative were those of the Old Testament. And though in the course of the centuries there have been some who denied to the Old Testament a rightful place in Christian thought and life, the Church as a whole has always upheld the judgment of the early Christians in making the Old Testament a part of the canon of Christian sacred writings. It is worthy of note that the Old Testament played an important part in the religious life of Jesus. Christians still look to the Old Testament scripture for moral and spiritual guidance (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But when there seems to be a conflict between Old Testament laws and New Testament principles, we must follow the New Testament because it represents the most recent and most perfect revelation from God (Hebrews 8:13, 2 Corinthians 3:1-18, Galatians 2:15-20). However, freedom from the Old Testament Law is not a license for Christians to relax their moral standards. The moral and ethical teachings of Jesus and His apostles call for even greater self-discipline than those of the Old Testame... "The Old Testament is precious and wonderful and useful for our Christian life today." Tweet. Share on Facebook. When the gospel spills over the banks to the Gentile world, and not just ethnic Israel (so that the Gentiles are now included in the Abrahamic people of God), that ethnocentricity and earthly, political, theocentric approach of the civil government in the Old Testament undergoes a dramatic change. The church today is not one ethnicity with an earthly homeland and its own form of civil government. When you read the Old Testament, there are promises upon promises upon promises made to God's people, and in Christ, they are yours. You're now grafted in "into the seed" because of Christ.