

**TO  
UNDERSTAND  
THE BIBLE  
LOOK  
FOR  
JESUS**



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THE BIBLE  
STUDENT'S GUIDE  
TO THE BIBLE'S  
CENTRAL THEME

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*Wipf and Stock Publishers*  
EUGENE, OREGON

Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 West 8th Avenue, Suite 3  
Eugene, Oregon 97401

To Understand the Bible Look for Jesus  
The Bible Student's Guide to the Bible's Central Theme  
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Copyright©1979 Geisler, Norman L.  
ISBN: 1-59244-045-2  
Publication date: September, 2002  
Previously published by Baker Book House, 1979.

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## PREFACE

This book grows out of the conviction that Christ is the key to the interpretation of the Bible, not only in that He is the fulfillment of Old Testament types and prophecies, but in that Christ is the thematic unity of the whole span of scriptural revelation. Christ claimed on several occasions to be the central message of the whole sweep of Old Testament Scripture (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Heb. 10:7; Matt. 5:17). This work is an attempt to take seriously the affirmation of Christ who said, "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

The Christ-centered approach to the Bible in these pages is not centered primarily in a study of the types, or even of the prophecies of the Old Testament, but rather it is an attempt to see Christ as the unity and unfolding message of the whole of Sacred Writ. Christ is presented as the tie between the Testaments, the content of the whole canon, and the unifying theme within each book of the Bible.

The emphasis here is upon the Christological unity of the Bible as it relates to the great sections and structure of Scripture. In a sense, this is a Christ-centered survey of the Bible.

There is no direct theological purpose of this book, but it does address theological questions, such as the inspiration of the Bible and the deity of Christ. However, these grow out of or relate to the central theme of the presentation of Christ as the clue to a correct interpretation of the Bible.

Other than the central thrust of this book, which is to suggest some Christ-centered approaches to the Scriptures, perhaps the most important question addressed is that of the relationship between Christ and Scripture as revelations of

God. It is contended here that the purpose of the propositional revelation of the Scripture is to present the person of the Saviour; the Bible is the instrument of God to convey the message of Christ and, therefore, the Bible should not be sought so much for its own sake, but should be searched for the purpose of finding Christ, for “to him all the prophets bear witness” (Acts 10:43).

# 1

## CHRIST IS THE KEY TO THE BIBLE

### CHRIST: THE KEY TO THE BIBLE'S INSPIRATION

The authority and integrity of Christ is at stake in the question of the Bible's inspiration. If the Bible is not the very Word of God, final and unbreakable, as Jesus claimed that it was, then one cannot place confidence in one of the central theological assertions of Christ, For it is beyond question that the Christ of the New Testament Gospels had, as one of the central emphases of His ministry, the categorical assertion of the divine authority of the Old Testament. And what Jesus claimed for the Old Testament, He promised for the New Testament.

### CHRIST'S CLAIMS ABOUT THE INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Jesus' day there were several ways of referring to the Old Testament as a whole, and most of these were employed by Jesus in affirming the divine inspiration of these sacred writings.

#### THE SCRIPTURES

Probably the most common way of referring to the Old Testament was to call them the "Scriptures." This term is used fifty times in the New Testament and takes on a technical meaning. In II Timothy 3:16, we read, "All scripture is *inspired* by God," and with this definition the rest of the New Testament concurs. The Scriptures are called "sacred" (II Tim. 3:15), and acknowledged to be the divine rule for human faith and practice (Rom. 15:4; II Tim. 3:16-17).

In this latter regard, Jesus' use of the Scriptures is very instructive. He challenged the religious leaders (Pharisees) of His day, asking, "Have you never read in the *scriptures* . . .?" (Matt. 21:42). To the question of the Sadducees, He replied, "You are wrong, because you know neither the *scriptures* nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). Jesus often referred to the necessity of the Scriptures being fulfilled (cf. Matt. 26:54, 56; John 13:18; 17:12). In Luke 24:44 Jesus affirmed that everything written about Himself in the Scriptures "must be fulfilled" (cf. v. 45). On numerous occasions, Christ used the word Scripture in the singular, without citing a specific passage from the Old Testament (cf. John 7:38, 42; 19:36; 20:9). Thus He used the phrase "as the scriptures say" in a somewhat similar fashion to the current expression "as the Bible says."

The Scriptures, for Jesus, were the definitive, divine disclosure to man. He said, "*Scripture* cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Such was the divine authority of the Old Testament writings for Christ—writings which were the rule of faith, which must be fulfilled, and which could not be broken.

#### IT IS WRITTEN

Closely allied with the word Scriptures is the phrase "it is written," a phrase often used by Jesus to support the divine authority of His teaching. This phrase occurs some ninety-two times in the New Testament. It usually refers to a given passage; sometimes, however, the phrase takes on a broader significance and points to the Old Testament generally. For example, Jesus said, "How is it *written* of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?" (Mark 9:12). He probably is not referring here to a specific passage of the Old Testament but to a theme found throughout the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22; Isa. 53). On another occasion Jesus said, "*Everything that is written* of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31). Here the general nature of the phrase

is quite clear. In Luke 21:22, He said, "For these are the days of vengeance, to fulfil *all that is written.*"

Besides these general references to the Old Testament under the phrase "it is written," there are numerous individual citations which reveal that Jesus affirmed an authoritative collection of writings, divine in origin, and unimpeachable in their declarations. Compare, for example, the fact that (1) Jesus resisted Satan by three emphatic quotations of the Old Testament prefaced by "*it is written*" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). (2) Jesus cleansed the temple on the authority that "*It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'*" (Matt. 21:13). (3) He pronounced a woe on His betrayer, based on the fact that "it is written" (Matt. 26:24). (4) Jesus rebuked religious hypocrisy, with "*as it is written*" (quoting Isa. 29:13 in Mark 7:6). (5) He affirmed His own Messiahship from "the place *where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .'*" (Luke 4:17-18). (6) Jesus answered the lawyer's question on how to inherit eternal life by saying, "*What is written in the law?*" (Luke 10:26). (7) He based His own authority and identity with God on the basis of the fact that "*it is written in the prophets*" (John 6:45; cf. 10:34). (8) Jesus even affirmed the authority of what was *written* (in the Old Testament) despite the fact that the religious authorities of His day wished to kill Him for it (cf. Luke 20:16-17).

#### THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED

Another expression used by Jesus to refer to the authority of the Old Testament as a whole was "that it might be fulfilled." This is found thirty-three times in the New Testament. Although this statement is usually used to cite a given passage of the Old Testament, it is sometimes used in a more general way of the Old Testament as a whole. A good example of the latter comes from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17), where Jesus said, "I have come not to abolish them [the Law and the Prophets], *but to fulfil them.*" After His resurrection, Christ made a similar assertion that the

Law, Prophets, and Psalms “must be *fulfilled*” concerning Him (Luke 24:44). In Luke 21:22 Jesus looks to the future when “all that is written” *will be fulfilled*. In the gospel of Matthew alone this expression is used fifteen times. Jesus said He was baptized to *fulfill* all righteousness (Matt. 3:15); He came into this world to *fulfill* the Law and the Prophets, and He must die, otherwise “how then should the scriptures *be fulfilled*, that it must be so?” (Matt. 26:54).

#### THE LAW

The word *Law* is usually reserved for the first five books of the Old Testament, containing the law of Moses (cf. Luke 2:22; John 1:45). Sometimes, however, it refers to the whole Old Testament. In Matthew 5:18, for instance, Jesus said, “For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from *the law* until all is accomplished.” Not only does Jesus here clearly declare the final authority of the Law but He plainly identifies the “Law” with the “law and the prophets” (v. 17), that is, the entire Old Testament Scriptures are referred to simply as Law. There are other passages in which Christ asserts a divine authority for the Old Testament as the Law of God generally. In John 10:34, for example, Jesus said to the Jews, “Is it not written in your *law*?” having quoted Psalm 82:6 to them. Here the word Law is inclusive of the book of Psalms. Elsewhere, there are similar references by Jesus to “their law” (the Jew’s, John 15:25). Likewise, others in New Testament times spoke of the Old Testament as the *Law* of the Jews (cf. Acts 25:8; John 18:31; John 12:34).

#### THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

One of the most common names for the Old Testament was “the Law and the Prophets.” This phrase occurs about a dozen times in the New Testament. Jesus considered the “Law and Prophets” (1) to be the embodiment of true morality (Matt. 7:12), (2) to indicate the entire compass of the

Old Testament canon of Scriptures (Matt. 11:13), (3) and as that which He came to fulfill (Matt. 5:17).

#### WORD OF GOD

Another phrase which reflects the complete authority of the Old Testament Scriptures is "the Word of God." The New Testament uses this title several times of the whole Old Testament. In Romans 9:6, for example, Paul says, "Not as though the *word of God* had failed"; Hebrews 4:12 affirms that the "*word of God* is living and active" (cf. also II Cor. 4:2; Rev. 1:2). In John 10:35, Jesus, using the "word of God" in parallel with the "scripture," affirmed that it "cannot be broken." Mark 7:13 is even more emphatic, for here Jesus makes a clear distinction between the "tradition" of the Jews and "the word of God." Jesus charged them, saying, "So, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the *word of God*" (Matt. 15:6).

The above survey can leave no doubt that the Jesus of the Gospels affirmed over and over again, as one of the central emphases of His ministry, that the sacred writings of the Jewish Old Testament, designated as "Scriptures," "Law," "Law and Prophets," were the unbreakable, imperishable and unimpeachable "Word of God." Christ is the key to the inspiration of the Old Testament since He unquestionably affirmed it; one cannot assail the authority of the Old Testament without impugning the integrity of Christ.

#### CHRIST'S PROMISE ABOUT THE INSPIRATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The divine authority which Jesus claimed for the Old Testament He also promised for the New Testament. On several occasions Jesus promised His disciples that after His departure (ascension) the Holy Spirit would guide them in their utterances about Him. The New Testament Scriptures are a fulfillment of these promises. It is in this sense that Christ is also the key to the inspiration of the New Testament.