

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Adult Education
The Old Testament in Christian Belief
12 April—17 May 2015
Session 6

To date in our study of the Old Testament in Christian we have considered:

- How was the Old Testament composed, and how did the canon of Scripture take its shape?
- What are the central themes of the Law, and as revealed in the early history of Israel?
- Who were the prophets?
- What is prophecy?
- What are the two dominant themes in all prophecy?
- How does narrative literature fit into revelation?
- What is Wisdom literature, and what are the central teachings of wisdom?
- Salvation History and Christian Typology: The relationship between what is revealed in the Old Testament and what is fulfilled in the New Testament.
- The psalms as prayer. How we pray by and through Jesus Christ in praying the psalms.

Now we are at the end of our course. The focus of this session is primarily to address questions, to discuss our own reactions to a careful interaction with the Old Testament, and how this encounter informs our faith as Christians. But we also want to discuss overarching thematic elements, recalling always that it is in God's holy word that He makes to us His most complete revelation of who He is and what His will is for us. Different thematic elements can be identified in each type of literature in the Old Testament, but for purposes of our study we will summarize the most prominent elements of revelation to include:

1. *The LORD is God of supreme love. He is self-giving. His people must love Him above all else.*
2. *God chooses His people and enters into a covenanted relationship with them.*
3. *God provides for His people.*
4. *God does not change. He is beyond our knowledge except in how He reveals Himself.*
5. *God reveals His Son as the source and summation of self-giving love in the testimony of His prophets.*
6. *God's will triumphs. As a Person He cannot be resisted.*
7. *Faith is contrasted with speculation and perplexity.*
8. *Wisdom is to be sought, but where may she be found?*
9. *The Promise-Plan of God.*

The LORD is God of supreme love: Jesus famously tells us that if we have seen Him we have seen the Father (Jn. 14.9). He is the supreme revelation of the God who is revealed in the Old Testament through a series of epiphanies in which His majesty, glory, and otherness are emphasized. God is truly other, truly beyond, in the O.T. The Hebrew scriptures emphasize God's transcendence, but love is, of course immanent—it is present. God is revealed to be the God of love because He is the God who *cares* and who wills that we care. He is not some supreme clock maker who sets up the universe and then leaves us to our own devices. We are intimate relationship with Him, and it is for this reason that Jesus summarizes the law by quoting Deuteronomy 6.4 and Leviticus 19.8.

The law is summarized as emphasizing our relationship with God: “[Y]ou shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6.4), and “... you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19.18). Failure to love God is expressed in failure to love our neighbor, and *vice versa*. Relationship is part of God's plan.

God chooses His people and enters into a covenanted relationship with them: Again, relationship is emphasized. God elects His people, and by and through Jesus Christ all are brought into this covenanted relationship with God.

God provides for His people: Despite being sojourners, small in number, and surrounded by those who would destroy them, in biblical times and in all ages, the Jews continue, and continue to witness to the reality that the LORD keeps His promises. In all times of persecution the holy mystery which is the Church would be scattered and destroyed but for God's providence.

God does not change. He is beyond our knowledge except in how He reveals Himself: Being made in God's “image and likeness” (Gen. 1.26) we strive to figure things out. Part of this likeness is in the intellect, in contemplation, and in abstracting knowledge from observation. And yet we cannot know God except in how He reveals Himself. We cannot question God for He is beyond our knowing, as He famously points out to Job: “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38.4 and *ff.*) Even the glimpse Peter and James and John receive in Jesus' transfiguration overwhelms them.

God reveals His Son as the source and summation of self-giving love: This statement reads, of course, very much like a statement from the New Testament. But from the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis (*see particularly* Gen. 22.8) through the “servant songs” of Isaiah (chs. 42, 49, 50), it is made clear that redemption is provided by the One who is of God Himself. Note, as well, that at Leviticus 17.11, in the midst of describing the blood sacrifices under the old covenant with His people, the LORD prohibits the consumption of blood. This is often glossed over (even when Leviticus is actually read!) as mere taboo, but the language makes clear that consumption of the blood is not prohibited because it is set aside for the LORD, but because it is *His*: “... the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I (myself) have given for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls ...”

God's will triumphs. As a Person He cannot be resisted: The testimony of the lives of the patriarchs and prophets makes this clear, and in the psalms this is made clear in the context of laments in which the psalmist prays that the attempted substitution of his own will shall not result in his alienation from God.

Faith is contrasted with speculation and perplexity: Again, we would love to “figure it all out,” but we can no more do this than could the sage who wrote Ecclesiastes. As made clear at Job 38-41, our questioning of God is pointless. But, as is made clear throughout all Scripture, our faith in Him is never repudiated.

Wisdom is to be sought, but where may she be found? The “wisdom of Solomon” is rightly proverbial, and yet Solomon falls from grace. The sage in Ecclesiastes seeks answers in all forms of enquiry, and yet concludes that each is “vanity,” pointless. We live in a culture in which we exalt human learning to the point of making technological progress into an idol. The all-too-real struggles for wisdom and insight portrayed throughout the Old Testament, coupled with the reality that the leaders of God’s people are themselves flawed characters, reminds us that wisdom may only be found in discerning God’s will and doing it!

The Promise-Plan of God: Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals Himself as a God of relationship and of promise. He is in relationship first with particular people, the patriarchs, and then with His elect people, the Jews. The covenanted relationship is cemented in the kingly reign of David, and is lived in the life of Wisdom. Despite this unfolding of God’s will, His people are unfaithful, and God sends His prophets to repeatedly remind of the covenant and of how they are to live as His people. The promise is then fulfilled for all time in the consummation of God’s plan, in the giving of His own Son, that all who confess Him may come within covenant relationship. God’s all encompassing promise of eternal life is fulfilled in His Son.

Our study of the Old Testament reveals that from the very beginning God looked upon all that He created and pronounced it good. This includes us! The revelations of the Old Testament remain as “relevant” today as in all times—they speak to who God is and what His will is for us, and we cannot properly understand the unfolding of God’s will in the New Testament without immersing ourselves in all that is revealed in the old.