

Paul wrote to the Galatians: “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified” (Gal 3:1). How did Paul portray Jesus as crucified? What visual aids did he use? How did he manage without Power Point? Look back just 3 verses to find the answer: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2: 19). Paul himself was the visual portrayal of Christ crucified. He was part of the fulfilment of Jesus, who himself was the fulfilment of the Scriptures.

Paul wrote these significant words to the Corinthians: “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, recognized and read by everyone. It is clear that you are Christ’s letter, produced by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God - not on stone tablets but on tablets that are hearts of flesh” (2 Cor 3: 2-4). No doubt Jeremiah’s prophecy of the New Covenant was on his mind as he wrote. These Corinthian believers, even with all their problems, were part of its fulfilment.

## Conclusion

We have looked at 3 levels in our relationship to the Scriptures. The first level of teaching the Scriptures is basically the level of the Old Covenant. This covenant was a marvellous start in God’s redemptive plan for the human race, and the Jewish people were highly privileged to be its beneficiaries. But God’s purposes extended far beyond the Jews and the covenant he had made with them. The Old Covenant was only a shadow of what was to come. The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are like a written plan for what was in the mind of God.

Jesus went far further. To him the Scriptures were an open book. He knew intuitively the mind of God, because he and the Father were one. When he looked into the Scriptures he saw his own reflection. He himself was the Word of God. The same Spirit that was in him was the Spirit that had inspired the Scriptures. When he returned to the Father he sent that same Spirit to his followers, so that they too could understand the Scriptures.

Finally Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures. But, we must add, not Jesus alone. He is the first fruit to God; but more fruit must follow. He is the Head; and the head must have a body. Together they will fulfil the Scriptures, both Old Testament and New. Paul saw God’s great plan for the reconciliation of the whole creation: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1: 19-20). When all creation has finally been reconciled to God the Scriptures will have been totally fulfilled.

# 3 Levels in Scripture

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

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death and resurrection was the full action of which Isaac was only a picture. Jesus fulfilled Isaac.

Joseph, like Isaac the much loved son of his father, was rejected by his brothers, thrown into the pit and then, after unjust accusation, prison in Egypt. He rose from his dungeon and was exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh. All power was given to him in Egypt, and effectively far beyond. Jesus, like Joseph, “**came to his own, and his own did not receive him**”. He also was unjustly accused, died and descended to the pit before ascending to the right hand of God and receiving all power in heaven and in earth. Jesus fulfilled Joseph.

Moses survived a death edict at his birth, while many other children were slaughtered. 40 years later he left the glory of the Egyptian palace to suffer with his people. Again 40 years later, through the power of God, he led his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. Like Moses Jesus left the glory of his Father’s house to suffer with his people on earth. He also survived a death edict at his birth. He went on to lead his people from slavery to sin and Satan to a glorious inheritance in a spiritual Promised Land. Jesus fulfilled Moses.

Isaac, Joseph and Moses are all clear pictures of Jesus. Melchizedek, Aaron, Samson, David and Solomon are also pictures of different aspects of Jesus. They are like portraits of him, always far less than the reality they portray, but nevertheless valuable in the light they bring. Jesus is the fulfilment of these saints, just as he fulfils the Law and the Prophets.

Can we also share in being the fulfilment of these saints? Can we be Isaacs, Josephs, Moses’s, Melchizedeks, Davids and Solomons? We can never repeat the once and for all sacrifice for sin that Jesus made for us on Calvary, but many other aspects of his life have no copyrights attached. “**As the Father has sent Me, so I send you**” he said. “**Anyone who believes in me will do the things I have been doing,**” he said. We may not be Isaacs, but he does call us to share his throne and his power like Joseph and David. He calls us to share his priesthood like Aaron and Melchizedek. He calls us to share his wisdom and his glory like Solomon. So, yes, we also by his grace may fulfil these great saints of old.

Paul’s words to the Ephesians shed further light on our theme: “**And God placed all things under his (Jesus’) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way**” (Eph 1: 22, 23). Jesus was the great fulfilment of all the Scriptures; yet he himself as head was incomplete without his body. He was the prototype and first fruits that indicated more were to follow. Just as he was the fulfilment of the Scriptures, so his body is the fulfilment of him.

replacement with the one great sacrifice that fulfilled them all and made them obsolete.

Can we also fulfil the sacrifices of the Old Testament? We cannot, as Jesus did, atone for the sins of others, but we can and must, in the words of Paul, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship” (Rome 12:1).

Paul, like John the Baptist, had a similar amazing revelation. He wrote the words: “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5: 7). The Passover festival, solemnly observed by the Jews for centuries, had been fulfilled. It had been replaced with something better, and become redundant. What a message to his fellow countrymen! Were they hearing him right?

Clearly Jesus fulfilled the Passover, but equally clearly the Festival of Pentecost received its initial fulfilment when the Holy Spirit descended on the waiting believers 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead. Its continued fulfilment has occurred in the lives of countless believers from that time to this. The Festival of Tabernacles is also being fulfilled in these present days in the lives of those who are moving on with God. (See The Festivals of Israel.)

God commanded Moses to make a tabernacle in the wilderness where he would dwell among his people. Many writers have described how Jesus wonderfully fulfilled different aspects of this tabernacle, and of course God was in Jesus far more fully than he could ever be in a tabernacle. You can find many websites that expound this great truth.

Later the tabernacle was lost, and replaced by the temple in Jerusalem. The first temple was totally destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC and the second by the Romans in 70 AD. Why? Because God was building an indestructible temple, not made by human hands. You and I, if God dwells in us, are the real temple of God, and the fulfilment of those temples made with human hands.

### The People of the Scriptures

Many of the Old Testament saints prefigured Jesus. In different ways they were pictures of what he was going to be and do. He was their fulfilment. We will consider just a few.

Isaac was the much loved son of his father. He was born miraculously to a 90 year old mother, well past the natural age of childbirth. In picture he died and rose again when Abraham took him to Mt Moriah, fully intending to sacrifice him, and was stopped at the last moment by a voice from heaven. Jesus was sacrificed on the same mountain, but no voice from heaven saved him from his hour. His birth to a virgin mother was more miraculous than Isaac’s birth. His

## Introduction

Why did God give us the Scriptures, and what place should they have in our lives? Two often-quoted passages from the Old Testament appear to give us the answer:

1. God spoke these words to Joshua, “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Joshua 1: 8).

2. Similar words are found in Psalm 1 about the man who is blessed: “his delight is in the law of the Lord, and he meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever he does prospers” (Ps 1: 2, 3).

Do these passages tell us the place that the Scriptures should have in our lives? And was that the place the Scriptures had in the lives of the various characters of the Bible? Did later Old Testament saints live this way? And what about Jesus, Peter, Paul and John? Did they all meditate on the Scriptures day and night, and teach others to do so too?

When we turn through the pages of Scripture we find a definite progression. We find a difference between the Old and New Testaments which reflects the difference between the Old and New Covenants. The two verses quoted above reflect the position under the Old Covenant, and we find no equivalent passage anywhere in the New Testament. In fact, Jesus, Paul and Peter all pointed their hearers and readers beyond the Scriptures.

Jesus said to the Pharisees: “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” (John 5: 39, 40). He pointed beyond the Scriptures to himself.

Paul wrote, “Therefore the Law has become our pedagogue to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). The Greek word παιδαγωγος (paid-agogos) used here literally means a *leader of children* and originally referred to a slave who took children to and from their teacher. Paul’s words are almost an echo of what Jesus said.

Peter wrote, “And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19). Read Revelation

22:16 (I Jesus ... am ... the bright and morning star) to find out what or who the morning star is!

Jeremiah also looked beyond the Scriptures when he said: “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it” (31: 31, 33)

We will find 2 further levels in man’s relationship to the Scriptures beyond the relationship described in our two Old Testament passages. But first we must consider that level in more depth. We will call it the teaching level, though obviously it includes hearing and reading the Scriptures.

## Teaching the Scriptures

After the departure of Moses and Joshua for several centuries we find little reference to the Scriptures. However in the later years of Old Testament times we do find two scriptural revivals.

The first of these was in the reign of King Josiah, when Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord written by the hand of Moses (2 Chron 34: 14). A man named Shaphan took this book to King Josiah and read it to him. The king’s reaction was to tear his clothes in repentance. He said, “Great is the Lord’s wrath that is poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord in order to do everything written in this book”. Later we read that “the king made a covenant in the Lord’s presence to follow the Lord and to keep His commands, His decrees, and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul in order to carry out the words of the covenant written in this book.” He went on to purge the land of idolatry and restore the temple sacrifices and the keeping of the Passover, which had not been kept for centuries. Josiah ranks among the best of Israel’s kings.

Chapter 8 of Nehemiah describes a similar occurrence. “When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had given Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law.” The people were deeply moved. We read in verse 7 that “all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law”. The particular consequence was that the people observed the Festival of Tabernacles which had not been observed since the days of Joshua, and “Ezra

and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled both by Jesus and his followers.

## The Moral Law

In addition to fulfilling prophecies Jesus fulfilled the law. Needless to say he perfectly obeyed the 10 commandments. His life was a perfect demonstration of the meaning of each commandment. He showed what it meant to have no false gods, to honour parents, not to steal, kill or commit adultery. He broke none of these commandments outwardly, and beyond that he broke none of them in his heart. His life was morally perfect. He totally fulfilled the moral law.

What about us? Can we fulfil the moral law? The answer is yes; that is exactly what Jeremiah said in his mind-blowing prophecy of the New Covenant: “Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ... I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it” (Jer 31: 31, 33). Paul echoed this when he wrote to the Romans: “so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). God gave the written law through Moses on Mt Sinai; but it had failed. Yes, good sound Bible teaching had failed. God’s specially chosen people had totally failed to keep the law he gave them. So Jeremiah prophesied of a people who would have the law written on their hearts. In other words their hearts would be changed so as no longer to be corrupt and lawless, but to keep the law automatically.

So the firstborn son fulfilled the moral law. The further sons and daughters of God that follow him are called to do the same.

## The Ceremonial Law

Jesus also fulfilled the ceremonial law; that is to say the many instructions in the Torah concerning sacrifices, festivals, the priesthood, the tabernacle etc.

When John the Baptist met Jesus he said, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1: 28). Familiarity with the words of the Bible and frequent ignorance of their context can blind us to the amazing impact they would have had on their first hearers. In those days everyone knew that lambs were sacrificed to take away sin. How could John then point to a human being and call him the Lamb of God? In fact he was having a revelation, which he himself may not have fully understood, that Jesus was the fulfilment of all the sacrifices of the Law of Moses. Jesus was the real Passover lamb. All the offerings of the Old Covenant were only shadows. Jesus was the fulfilment, the real thing; the ultimate offering to God. This was a staggeringly new thought. It implied the end of more than 1500 years of temple sacrifices, and their

each case Matthew quotes an OT scripture. People have counted over 300 Old Testament prophecies that Jesus fulfilled.

No one can seriously doubt that Jesus fulfilled many OT prophecies; but once again we must ask the question did Jesus uniquely fulfil these prophecies, or did God intend that we should also fulfil them?

Some OT prophecies are very specific and, at least at first sight, appear to have been uniquely fulfilled in Jesus. Zechariah predicted his triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Micah foresaw him as a king that would be born in Bethlehem. Psalm 22 describes the details of his crucifixion and distribution of his clothes, several centuries before the Romans invented crucifixion. (Jewish capital punishment was by stoning.) However, we must add that Peter, according to tradition, was also crucified along with many other early Christians. Others down the ages to this day have died for their faith or at least been metaphorically crucified!

Other prophecies apply primarily to Jesus, but their complete fulfilment includes his followers. In Gen 3:15 God said to the serpent: “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” Jesus struck a death blow to Satan when he died on the cross and rose victorious from the grave; but he had already said to his disciples, “See, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10: 19).

Let’s re-read Isaiah’s great prophecy of the suffering servant: “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Perhaps this is the most striking prophecy in all the Old Testament and its highest note of inspiration. How wonderfully Jesus fulfilled it. No one else could atone for our sin, but others like him have been despised and rejected and Paul could say: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for His body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24).

And what of Isaiah’s prophecy that Jesus read in the Nazareth synagogue? “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18). Jesus spent the next 3 years doing exactly those things; and he said to his disciples “Very truly I tell you, anyone who believes in me will do the things I have been doing,

read out of the book of the law of God every day, from the first day to the last” (Neh 8: 18).

Malachi ended the Old Testament with the instructions, “Remember the law of Moses My servant, statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel” (Mal 4: 4).

We see then that by the end of Old Testament times the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, particularly the books of Moses or the Torah, were firmly established in the minds of the Jewish people. Later they identified themselves as Am HaSefer (עם הספר), the “People of the Book”. Later still others, including Muslims and various Christian denominations, took this title for themselves.

Who in the New Testament followed in the footsteps of Josiah and Ezra and Malachi? Who continued their good work? We will look first at how Jesus viewed the Scriptures.

## Jesus and the Scriptures

Did Jesus teach his disciples the scriptures? The simple answer is no; the disciples already knew them well. Maybe not as well as the Pharisees did; but they had heard them read every Sabbath day from childhood in the synagogue. In fact Jesus assumed his audience knew the Scriptures and contrasted them with what he had to say: “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘Do not commit murder’ ... but I say to you ...” “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery’ ... but I say to you ...”

The scribes and Pharisees were the great Bible teachers in the time of Jesus, and to an extent he commended them. “The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it,” he said (Mat 23: 2, 3). But they were limited. They could teach the scriptures, but they could not go beyond the literal words. They could not open the Scriptures. Jesus went on to say, “But don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they teach. They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them.”

Unlike Ezra Jesus did not teach his disciples the Scriptures. In fact the Hebrew Scriptures feature very little in his teachings. He frequently spoke in parables that often were not understood. But after his resurrection we find a new development. As he walked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus we read that: “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24: 27). Afterwards they



said to each other: “Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us on the road, and while he **opened** the scriptures to us?” (24: 32) and in verse 45: “Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures”. Jesus did not **teach** the Scriptures; he **opened** the Scriptures.

Teaching the Scriptures is good; opening the Scriptures is better.

## Opening the Scriptures

Jesus opened a book on another occasion. I’ll quote the outline from Rev chapter 5: “I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals... And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. And I wept and wept, because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; ... And I saw ... a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God. And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne... And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals ..”

John wept and wept when he saw this book sealed with 7 seals. Human wisdom and understanding were utterly unable to open it. But the Lamb slain, having the Spirit of God that inspired the Scriptures was able to break the seals and open the book.

Saul, later to become Paul, was a Pharisee who taught and followed the Scriptures. He knew that people who blasphemed God should be stoned to death and so he faithfully supported those who stoned Stephen. He persecuted the followers of Jesus. Many Bible teachers have followed his example! Later, he met with Jesus on the Damascus road. Dramatic changes took place in his life, he was filled with the Spirit of God and became able to open the Scriptures. From childhood he had known the stories of Abraham and the patriarchs, the deliverance from Egypt and the history of the Jewish people. Now he could see entirely new meanings in them. His letters, especially to the Romans and the Galatians, told them the spiritual meanings of stories they had known all their lives, but never understood.

The writer to the Hebrews had a Jewish audience who were thoroughly familiar with the Tanakh or Old Testament as we call it. They knew all about Moses and Joshua and Melchizedek. They knew about the tabernacle and the temple sacrifices; but they knew nothing of the hidden meanings of what they had been taught from childhood. This writer was able to open wonderful new truth that they had never even dreamt existed.

I remember an intelligent young man in Nepal saying to a regular visiting speaker: “Other people tell us what the Bible says. You tell us what it means.” That is the difference between teaching the Scriptures and opening the Scriptures. This young man grew up in a Brahmin Hindu family, and had been turned out of his home 10 or 15 years before when he had come to Jesus. Like many people in many churches all round the world he had been taught the scriptures, but had hardly ever heard them being opened. Like many of us he probably had at first been delighted with what he heard, but that phase wore off as he began to hear the same things over and over again. Hearing the Scriptures opened brought him a new dimension of understanding.

Opening the Scriptures goes far beyond teaching the Scriptures; but Jesus himself went far beyond even that. He fulfilled the Scriptures!

Teaching the Scriptures is good; opening the Scriptures is better; fulfilling the Scriptures is best!

## Fulfilling the Scriptures

Jesus said: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to **fulfil**” (Matt 5:17). He came to fulfil the Scriptures. After reading a prophecy from Isaiah in the synagogue, he said, “Today this Scripture has been **fulfilled** in your hearing” (Luke 4: 21). Clearly Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures. But was he unique in fulfilling the Scriptures or did his followers continue the process? Are we also called to fulfil the Scriptures? The Scriptures are like a blueprint for a building, but is that building just the firstborn son of God or does it include the further sons and daughters that complete God’s vast family? We will look now at different ways in which Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets and ask if we or others can do the same. We will begin with the Prophets.

### The Prophecies of Scripture

Matthew recorded the words “I have not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them”. Throughout his gospel he illustrates them. In chapter 1:22-23 he writes: “This all happened in fulfilment of<sup>1</sup> what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel,” and he repeats almost the same phrase, in fulfilment of, a further 11 times in the following passages: 1:22-23, 2:15, 2:17-18, 2:23-24, 4:14-16, 8:17, 12:17-21, 13:14-15, 13:35, 21:4-5, 26:56, 27:9-10, and 27:35. In

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<sup>1</sup> my translation of ινα πληρωθη