

# Christadelphian Bible Mission

## Christ in the Old Testament -Israel's True Messiah

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The Lord Jesus Christ is the central character of the New Testament scriptures. The opening words of the first gospel account, by Matthew, can be applied to the whole of the New Testament: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ" (Matthew 1:1). The four gospels are followed by the account of the preaching of Christ's apostles, and by the letters they wrote to believers in him throughout the Roman world in the first century AD.

But information about Jesus Christ is not confined to the New Testament. His coming was anticipated by men and women who lived before the New Testament books were written: "The people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John (the Baptist), whether he were the Christ, or not" (Luke 3:15).

### A Divine Watermark

This simple statement conceals a miracle. Yes, a miracle: something altogether beyond human achievement. And the miracle is this: there is throughout the Old Testament, on every page, a divine watermark revealing in advance the nature of Israel's coming Messiah. The Old Testament might appear to be just God's message to the Jewish people and an account of their history. But it is much more than this. There is something which is part of the very texture of the Old Testament and which cannot be removed without destroying the book as a whole. Simply stated, it is the fact that we have the life history of Jesus written centuries before he was born. In other words, you can read all about Jesus in the Old Testament.

It must be a matter of regret that all this information about Christ, revealed by the inspiration of God to His servants the prophets right from the dawn of human history, is so neglected. For Jesus himself, these scriptures explained the reason for his birth, the work he was to accomplish, and the glory in store for him, and for all who come to God through him. Our understanding of Christ will be diminished if we do not take account of the information presented about him in the Old Testament scriptures.

### Messiah

The word Messiah is part of everyday speech. Nowadays, it is used about men who have a powerful personality and a message to go with it. But the impact usually dies when they die and pass off the scene. Such usage is a mere distortion, a poor copy, of what the word Messiah means. It is a Hebrew word taken right out of the Old Testament. It means "anointed" which in Greek is *kristos*, our English word, Christ. In the Old Testament, Messiah was not an historical person. The word stood for the Promised One, the Coming King, the one "whose right it is" (see Ezekiel 21:25-27).

Messiah was the Great Deliverer for whom faithful Jews waited and longed. They and some of their neighbours talked about "when Messiah comes". One of the earliest disciples, after he had met Jesus, told a friend, "We have found Messiah", and the gospel writer who recorded the incident added a word of explanation, "which is, being interpreted, the Christ" (John 1:41). They were exciting times. Faithful Jews had been craning their necks to catch a glimpse of Messiah's time. They were constantly on the

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watch, yearning for the day. Messiah was the kernel of all Jewish hopes, the very essence of the great promises made by God as set down in the Old Testament. Jesus was that Messiah.

## The Evidence

The Old Testament described Jesus before he was born. No one but God could have foretold in such detail so many different kinds of things about Jesus. The Jews themselves had identified many of these Scriptures as foretelling Messiah. They were not brought to light until after Jesus came. They were plain for all to see. Some of them are so astonishing that we may feel they can only have been written after the events they speak about. Yet the evidence that they were written centuries before is altogether beyond doubt. Let us say it clearly: the birth, life, mission, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth were detailed in the old Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament, and read in Jewish synagogues at home and abroad, and faithfully preserved right down to our own times.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, some of them pre-dating the birth of Jesus by over 200 years contain, for example, copies of the prophet Isaiah with exactly the same prophecies as are known to us from our English Bible. The same is true of the Greek translations of the Old Testament: they too were made two or three centuries before Christ and are known to us by various manuscripts now in museums in different parts of the world. Thus the prophecies were known in Hebrew and Greek long before Jesus came. Therefore, it would simply be flying in the face of incontestable facts to say that these prophecies were 'inserted' after Jesus was born.

In any case, we must remember that the Jewish nation is not Christian, and they would never have allowed their Bible, the Old Testament, to be tampered with by Christian hands. To try to plead, as some have done, that the prophecies were added at a later date is only to admit how good they are! The only Bible available to Jesus was the one we know as the Old Testament. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century AD, lists the books in the Jewish Bible in his day and they are exactly the ones we have in our Old Testament. The Old Testament without doubt predates the time of Jesus.

## What Jesus Said

Jesus used the prophecies of the Old Testament as powerful evidences when he spoke to the apostles after he had risen from the dead. This is what he said: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44,45). Earlier, in the same chapter, we read: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

These are important and significant words. Jesus took the apostles back to the three constituent parts of the Old Testament - the books of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. He said that in those scriptures there were things about himself which were being fulfilled in his own life-story. "In all the scriptures" is how Jesus summed up the evidence. Describing some of these prophecies, Jesus said: "Moses wrote of me" (John 5:46). Moses lived about fifteen hundred years before Jesus!

After his resurrection, Jesus commanded the apostles to go out as his witnesses to preach the gospel every where. As part of their preaching of the gospel, they used as evidence those same Messianic prophecies: the history of Jesus written before it happened! And those same prophecies of the Old Testament were in use in the synagogues throughout the Mediterranean region.

## What Kind of Prophecy?

The Bible is an account of redemption, how God rescues men from sin and from death. The Bible begins with a record of Creation and of how sin and death came into the world in the Garden of Eden. The Bible ends with a description of the culmination of God's glorious plan, still in the future, by saying that:

"I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."  
(Revelation 21:3,4)

Jesus Christ is the bridge between Eden and the promised, glorious End. He is the means whereby God accomplishes His mission of mercy and salvation. The Old Testament prophecies about Jesus are part of that story God's Grand Plan of Redemption. The prophecies were revelations of how God would work out His saving will. Let us follow the steps in the Grand Plan, revealed long before Jesus was born.

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## Jesus the Man

The Old Testament foretold that Messiah would be a Jew, born in Bethlehem in the royal line of David the king, of the tribe of Judah. These are clear and detailed prophecies. Look at these examples:

"And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou (David) shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever." (2 Samuel 7:12,13)

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel: whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2)

These are promises of an illustrious son of David who would be born in Bethlehem. Solomon was the immediate successor - son of David, but he was not born in Bethlehem. He certainly built a temple for God, but his throne was not established for ever. Moreover, Micah's prophecy, about Messiah being born in Bethlehem, was written some two or three hundred years after the death of David. Messiah had still not come. About seven hundred years later Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem a few miles from Jerusalem in the land of Judah.

## Jesus, Son of God

The prophecies said Jesus was not only to be the son of David; he was also to be Son of God. This is variously described in the Old Testament:

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

"I will be his father, and he shall be my son." (1 Chronicles 17:13)

"He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." (Psalm 89:26,27)

"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." (Psalm 2:7)

Therefore Messiah would be a descendant of David but not of a Jewish father. As the New Testament later tells us, he had a virgin mother but no human father.

"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." (Matthew 1:22,23)

"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." (Romans 1:3)

Surprisingly, the very first promise of the virgin birth (Genesis 3:15) calls the promised Deliverer: "the seed of the woman", not the seed of the man. It was God, not man, who would provide the Redeemer: nevertheless, he would be born of a woman:

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman ..." (Galatians 4:4)

## The Forerunner

The public ministry of Jesus was preceded by the witness of John the Baptist who declared himself to be the one who ran ahead to prepare the way for Messiah the Lord by preaching in the wilderness. This too was made plain by the prophets:

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." (Malachi 3:1)

The message of John Baptist stirred the hearts of thousands of Jews to repentance and preparation. John told them to get ready for Messiah, and when Jesus came to the River Jordan where John was preaching and baptizing, one of John's disciples said:

"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth ..." (John 1:45)

## The Message of Jesus

The wonderful message of the Lord Jesus Christ came as comfort and healing to the minds of the ordinary people, and they said, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes"

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(Matthew 7:29). "They were astonished at his doctrine", and people of all kinds, high and low, rich and poor, sick and well, came to him and were cradled in his words of relief, care and salvation. But this was exactly what the Old Testament prophets had foretold of him:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me: because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." (Isaiah 61:1-2)

"The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." (Isaiah 50:4)

No wonder the gospel is called "glad tidings". People who had been locked in dead formalism and made afraid by their teachers and rulers found release and joy and hope - just as the prophets had promised. They caught the meaning of all this, and sick people repeatedly called Jesus, "the son of David", the one promised to David by God. He was their Messiah.

## Miracles

The good news Jesus brought was called "the glad tidings of the kingdom of God". He was the One who, at his second coming, would reign as king on David's throne. Meanwhile, his message was the royal law by which his disciples were being prepared for the kingdom. His miracles were not simply embroidery of his teaching. They were living attestations that he was Son of God as well as son of David, bringing them a foretaste of the kingdom age:

"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence: he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out. and streams in the desert." (Isaiah 35:3-6)

The people said they believed that his words and miracles proved that Jesus was the promised Messiah:

"Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?" (Matthew 12:22,23)

## Jesus the Rejected

Despite his wonderful words and compassionate miracles and his evident goodness, Christ was at the last rejected by his own people. The rulers envied and hated him. The common people proved to be unreliable and were easily swayed by the hostility shown toward Jesus by their elders and religious rulers. This, too, was foretold long before Christ came:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3)

"Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth ..." (Isaiah 49:7)

"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:6)

"Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart: and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." (Psalm 69:19,20)

## Jesus the Crucified

The climax of the life of Jesus was his death by crucifixion. It is said that in times before Christ it was sometimes the practice to tie or nail certain criminals to a stake or tree after they had been put to death. Crucifixion of living persons appears to have come only with the Romans. It was unknown among the Jews. Yet, a thousand years before Jesus was born, his living crucifixion was clearly foretold:

"For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me." (Psalm 22:16,17)

Even the sharing of his clothes - which the New Testament describes as having been carried out by the soldiers - is clearly described:

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"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." (Psalm 22:18)

The mockery, scorn and biting derision of his enemies, and Christ's uncomplaining submission were prophesied:

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head." (Psalm 22:6,7)

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)

There are no more poignant words in the Bible than these which were written up to a thousand years before the event they describe. Their complete fulfilment in Christ is evidence that he was Messiah and that prophecies were the word of God. They could not be the word of anyone else.

## Jesus the Redeemer

The suffering and shame of Christ were full of redemptive purpose. He suffered for our forgiveness and salvation. The Old Testament words could not be clearer:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:4-6)

These things were not amazing coincidences or chance happenings; they were part of the Great Plan of God, of which Christ is the pivotal centre.

## Christ is Risen

Of course, it might be said of some of the evidence so far outlined, that Jesus simply set about to act out the sayings of the Old Testament and thereby claim to be Messiah. In other words, that Jesus engineered his life to make it seem like the fulfilment of prophecy. To argue in this way is a policy of desperation. Not only has it a very hollow ring, but it does not explain the miracles Christ performed. More than that, such a theory does not account for his rejection and crucifixion which at the very least would then require the connivance of those who rejected him and the cooperation of the soldiers who crucified him.

This is a most unlikely possibility. In any case, such an argument collapses completely in the light of his resurrection from the dead. This wonderful miracle was entirely out of his hands and, moreover, was not expected by his disciples.

His resurrection - the final miracle which crowned everything that had gone before - came to them as a joyful surprise. And it too was foretold in the Old Testament:

"Therefore I will look unto the LORD: I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. (Micah 7:7,8)

"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell: neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:10,11)

The words "soul" and "hell" are the usual Hebrew words for 'a person' and 'the grave'. Not only was Messiah to be raised from the dead, his body would not be contaminated by corruption during the time he was in the grave!

This evidence from the Psalms forms the cornerstone of the preaching of the apostles. It could not apply to anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking about the words from Psalm 16, as quoted above, the apostle Peter on Pentecost day said:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." (Acts 2:29-32)

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## The Ascension

After forty days or so, the risen Christ ascended to heaven. Yes, you may have guessed it: this too was made known long ago in the Old Testament. How could so wonderful an event be foretold? It was so unusual. Yet, this is what the scripture said:

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. (Psalm 16:11)

"The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." (Psalm 110:1)

This was the crowning glory of the evidence. It completes the Old Testament trail that led to Jesus of Nazareth. It both sealed the certainty that Jesus was Son of God and it proved the Old Testament scripture to be the totally reliable word of God. That Jesus had ascended to heaven and was seated at God's right hand: that was the final evidence that Christ was Messiah.

## Yet there is more!

There is one further piece to the story: an intriguing and altogether fitting burst of promise and light. It has been part of the Christian faith from the start. Jesus Christ is coming back to earth to reign as King. This too is all in the Old Testament:

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11)

This we have read; but there is an added promise in the other verse we quoted: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." The Psalmist goes on to say:

"The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." (Psalm 110:2)

No wonder that Psalm 110:1 is the most quoted verse from the Old Testament to appear in the New! Read how this verse was applied by the apostle Peter:

"Whom (Jesus) the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21)

The Jesus who ascended to heaven is the Christ who is coming to reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. He who wore the crown of thorns will wear the crown of glory. He will reign as King over all the earth. This is beyond doubt. Those promises will be fulfilled as surely as the prophecies about his first coming were fulfilled in him.

## What difference does it make?

In the light of these things, where do we stand? We are at the crossroads, the point of decision. Either we accept the testimony we have read as convincing, and therefore as a solid and sound foundation for our faith, or we turn away from the facts, without being able to refute them, to lead our own lives away from Christ. That is exactly what the nation of Jews contemporary with Jesus decided to do. And they were disastrously wrong. Jesus foretold to them that their rejection of him would bring an end to their existing nationhood in the land of Palestine, and the city of Jerusalem would be sacked and their temple destroyed.

To them this was incredible and quite unthinkable. Yet, it happened. The Romans besieged the city and finally over-ran it in AD 70. The havoc and carnage were terrible. Despite the Roman general's command that the temple should not be violated, his soldiers set it ablaze and left it in ruins.

God's words are always fulfilled. The gospel has now reached all parts of the earth. Christ has become a light to the Gentiles, as the Old Testament declared would be the case. It is for us in Gentile lands to answer the question of Pilate, the Roman governor, and to meet its challenge: "What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" He is the promised Saviour of mankind, and the coming King. There is no hope for any of us or for the world without him. Wise men from a Gentile country came to Jesus when he was born. Wise men have come to him ever since. Will you be one of them?

## Prophecy Fulfilled in our Day

The Old Testament is still being fulfilled. One of the greatest wonders of the twentieth century has been the return of the Jews to the land from which they were scattered, over nineteen hundred years ago. And the Bible said they would!

"Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock." (Jeremiah 31:10)

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"For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it." (Jeremiah 30:3)

Those prophecies are as clear and unambiguous as those about Christ. We all are witnesses to their truth. Everyone knows about the Jews as a nation in their own land. The Bible foretold it and God has fulfilled it. Therefore, it is absolutely certain that Christ will come back to be King on earth. Look at what the Old Testament has promised:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9:6,7)

## Finally ...

Will you be ready for the king when he comes? Wise men will. The Master comes to reign on earth. He will give eternal life to all who have believed these good things and have been baptized, and are waiting faithfully for him: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory. and all the holy angels with him. then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand. Come. ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:31-34)

Surely, this is worth believing. And it is true!

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