

Answering the Old Testament Problem

Part of the BibleProject's mission is to help people experience that the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. In the New Testament, it's easier to see this, as the gospels, epistles, and Revelation are all about Jesus. But it's not quite as clear in the Old Testament, although it is just as important to recognize. So let's go back to the beginning.

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

Humans were created in **the image** of God with the purpose of **dominion** over it. We accept image bearers as religious or spiritual language in today's culture, but in ancient times, only the kings had the image of the god, and that is what gave them authority to rule. God's mandate to Adam also tells him to multiply and fill the earth, essentially to fill the earth with imagers of God so that his glory may fill the earth. It does not take long after things go sideways for God to begin pointing to an answer:

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

After the fall, humanity is left with the problem of sin. We have no way to cleanse ourselves of that sin, and Job very rightly defines the problem:

Job 9:32-33

For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,
that we should come to trial together.
There is no arbiter between us,
who might lay his hand on us both.

But throughout the Old Testament, we see prophecies of the solution:

2 Samuel 7:12b-13

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Hosea 11:1

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

Isaiah 53:5-6

But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Jesus Embodying Israel's Story

Many aspects of Jesus' life embody or reflect Israel's story in some way. From the Old Testament perspective, these patterns almost become prophetic, pointing to Jesus.

As a child, Jesus fled to **Egypt** to escape Herod's **massacre of infants**.

- How did Israel end up in Egypt?
- Which other major Biblical figure was preserved from an infant massacre?

Jesus is baptized in the **Jordan** where God then identifies Him as "My beloved **Son**."

- What does God call Israel in Exodus 4:22?
- What body of water did the Israelites have to cross to leave the wilderness and enter the promised land?

Jesus spent **40 days** in the wilderness, where He faced **three temptations** and succeeded.

- What temptations did Israel face in the wilderness? Did they succeed?
- How long did Israel wander in the wilderness?

Jesus recruits **twelve disciples** to participate in His ministry, and gives the **Sermon on the Mount**.

- Where was the Law of Moses given to him?
- How many tribes of Israel were there?

There are many other parallels as well, but the conclusion is the same: **Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's purpose.**

Recognizing the Old Testament in the Gospels

Jesus came as an answer to a problem, a fulfillment of a promise, and the culmination of history. The gospels are powerful on their own, but they are not complete without the context of the problem, the promise, and the history.

1. **Direct Quotations** (Matthew 1:22-23)
2. **Fulfillment Formulae** (Matthew 2:15)
3. **Allusions / Echoes** (Matthew 4:2)
4. **Typology / Pattern** (Matthew 12:40)
5. **Midrash / Exposition** (Matthew 22:41-46)
6. **Pesher** (Luke 4:16-20)
7. **Thematic Motifs** (Matthew 3:16)

What does the word 'midrash' mean?

Midrash refers to both the writing and process of interpretive exposition by Jewish rabbis. It tends to focus on the deeper meaning of the text rather than what is explicitly stated.

What does the word 'pesher' mean?

Pesher is a Hebrew word meaning interpretation, and it is when a prophecy is reinterpreted or repurposed for the present moment, even if it may have already had a literal fulfillment.

Homework

Read Matthew 1-14

What verses include quotes from the Old Testament?

What examples do you see of Jesus reenacting Israel's journey?

What questions do you have from the reading?

Dive Deeper

If you want to keep studying on your own this week, check out these resources:

- Four Portraits, One Jesus *by Mark L. Strauss*
- A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New *by G. K. Beale*
- Get the handouts at DeeplyBiblical (<https://deeplybiblical.com/gospels/>)