

The Recent Search for Christ in the Old Testament*

Cristian G. Rata

Torch Trinity Graduate University, Korea

The search for Christ in the Old Testament gets its impetus from Asia, more precisely, from Jesus of Nazareth.¹ After all, it was Jesus who said in the gospel of John that the Scriptures bear witness about Him (Jn 5:39), and it was the Lord who reminds us that Moses wrote about Him (Jn 5:46). It was Jesus of Nazareth who rebuked his disciples on the road to Emmaus for being foolish and “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken,” and who began “with Moses and all the prophets” to interpret “to them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Lk 24:25-27). And it seems that his followers, especially Paul, Peter, and John – shared this Christ-centered reading of the Old Testament.²

Moving beyond the New Testament, we find many of the Church Fathers (and many of them were born in Asia), especially in their typological exegesis (in typological literature), constantly finding Christ in the Old Testament.³ The most famous representatives of this type of exegesis are undoubtedly the fathers who wrote (sometimes controversial) works against the Jews and the Gnostics (e.g., Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Novatian, St. Cyprian, and St. Zeno of Verona). A second class of works important for typology are the sacramental catechetical courses (see *De Baptismo* by Tertullian, *De Mysteriis* and *De Sacramentis* of St. Ambrose, the mystagogical lectures of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, etc.) and to these can be added some homilies that were delivered on the occasion of feasts (under the category of liturgical writings).⁴

1. The Middle East where Jesus was born is usually considered part of Asia, though the definition and history of the term ‘Asia’ is quiet complex.

2. For more on this see the analysis of David Murray below.

3. For the information in this paragraph see especially Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press).

4. See for example the *Homily on Easter* by Melito of Sardis, and many other homilies by St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nazianzus (on Easter and Pentecost), and St. Gregory of Nyssa on Christmas.

In this essay, however, my search for Christ in the Old Testament will focus on much more recent work. I will fast forward almost 2000 years after Christ and briefly present three very recent contributions (all from 2013) to this important issue.

The contributions of the following works will be briefly introduced:⁵

- 1) Iain M. Duguid's *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*⁶
- 2) *The Gospel Transformation Bible*⁷
- 3) David Murray's *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament*⁸

Iain M. Duguid's *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*

Iain Duguid's book is divided into three major sections (after a very brief introduction): the first asks about the central message of the Old Testament, the second tells us "how not to read the Old Testament," and the final one is titled: "Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament."⁹ Duguid starts his book by arguing with his readers that "[t]he Old Testament is for Christians too," and he also contends "that Christ is present *throughout* the Old Testament."¹⁰ Thus, he believes that Jesus "is there *on every page* as the central theme and storyline of the entire book."¹¹ If only the OT is rightly interpreted, it is about Jesus Christ. "More specifically, the OT focuses on and prepares for Christ's sufferings and the glories that will follow – that is, the gospel."¹² In fact, he claims that this is the perspective that the NT teaches us to take toward the OT.

5. To this could be added the works of Nancy Guthrie, but the lack of time and space, and the fact that most of her works are earlier than 2013, led to leaving her out of this analysis. Note also the Christ-Centered Exposition series edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida. This series started in 2013 and intends to cover all the books of the Bible. It is has pastors in view and seeks to exalt Jesus. For more information see www.christcenteredexposition.com (accessed January 9, 2015).

6. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013). Iain Duguid was recently appointed professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, USA.

7. This is a study bible edited by Brian Chappell in 2013. For more information see their website at gospeltransformationbible.org (accessed January 15, 2015)

8. Thomas Nelson published this book in 2013.

9. It also offers two useful sections for further reading: 1) Christ-centered Expositions of the OT, and 2) Christ-centered Studies of the OT.

10. See Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 53-54, Kindle.

11. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 55, Kindle.

12. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 57, Kindle.

In his first chapter, “WHAT is the Central Message of the Old Testament?,” he argues that the reason we should expect to see Jesus in the Old Testament is simply because “this is how the NT teaches us to read it.” Thus, according to Jesus, the whole Old Testament is about Christ. We find here not “only *generally* a message about Jesus. More specifically, Jesus told his disciples [Luke 24] that the central focus of the entire Old Testament is his sufferings, his resurrection (and subsequent glories), and the proclamation of the gospel to all nations...”¹³

The implications of this reading of the OT are important as it demonstrates that the focus on the Gospel is the center of the *whole* Bible. Thus, for the Christian the Gospel is not only the starting point of the Christian life, but also the heartbeat, “the central focus to which we must constantly return,”¹⁴ as it is also a power by which God’s people are transformed into new creatures in the image of Christ.

It is important to realize that for Duguid the reading of the Bible should not be “merely educational but fundamentally doxological.” We should “be brought to see in a new way the glory of God in Jesus Christ” so that our hearts can be moved to praise and worship.¹⁵ Therefore, he also warns his readers of wrong readings by dedicating a section entitled “how not to read the OT.” He especially cautions us to avoid “allegorical moralism” (don’t go directly from the text to personal application until you understand the flow of the text and the significance of its original context) and allegorical interpretation – where references to Christ are found where “none was originally intended.”¹⁶

According to Duguid, “There is no place for the kind of allegorical speculation that takes a passage out of its original setting and completely ignores the human author’s intent. Yet we must also ask where this passage fits in the larger history of God’s dealings with His people and what the divine Author’s intent was in including it in our Bible.”¹⁷

13. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 89, Kindle.

14. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 111, Kindle.

15. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 136, Kindle.

16. See Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 165-70, Kindle.

17. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 190-91, Kindle. Note that for Duguid even though application is important, “the Gospel comes first. What is more, even after we have applied a passage rightly to ourselves in this way, we constantly need to return once again to the comfort of the Gospel’s focus on Christ, for even as believers we will never live up to the standard of perfect holiness that God demands.” See 195-97, Kindle.

Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament

Duguid makes his case for the Gospel as the central message of the Old Testament by arguing that “by itself the OT is incomplete, even defective.”¹⁸ Thus, from the very beginning, the OT was designed to belong with the NT as part of a single book, the Bible. This can be demonstrated by the “unfinished symphony feel” found in the shape of the Old Testament in both the Hebrew and Greek arrangements.

In the Bible we find “three primary means of receiving God’s revelation: through indirect special revelation (Israel’s history), through direct special revelation (the prophetic word), and through general revelation (which is by definition indirect).¹⁹ These genre divisions themselves point us forward to Jesus, for he exemplifies all three facets.”²⁰

Thus, Jesus is the one who reads history authoritatively,²¹ declares authoritatively God’s word to his people as a prophet, and is the “archetypal wise man” who lives all his life in the fear of the Lord.²² We can say that Jesus “fulfills in himself all three divisions of the OT: he is prophet, sage, and sacred historian, as well as prophet, priest, and king.”²³

*The Old Testament Story*²⁴

Two more valuable sections are provided in the book, one that shows that Jesus fulfills the storyline that starts with the message of creation in Old Testament and leads to the NT coming of Jesus (first and second). This chapter is very helpful as it follows the promised seed from Genesis 3:15 all the way to Jesus as the second Adam who tasted death in our place, so we can receive the righteousness that leads to life.

*Jesus, the New Israel*²⁵

Another section shows that Jesus was not merely the new Adam, he was also “the true son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1) and therefore the true Israel who recapitulated the history of Israel by succeeding where Israel failed, and fulfilling the law “for all who are in him.” More than

18. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 209, Kindle.

19. See for example wisdom literature and psalms.

20. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 293, Kindle.

21. Jesus is greater than David and the temple...and the history of Israel exists to provide examples for understanding the work of Jesus.

22. Even more than that, Jesus is the embodiment of wisdom.

23. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 314, Kindle.

24. For this section see Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 315-94, Kindle.

25. For this section see Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 395-487, Kindle.

that, Jesus was also “the new David: ‘Great David’s greater Son’,” who redeemed and shepherds his people after triumphing over his enemies through the weakness of the cross.

This little book is very useful for understanding the heart of the Old Testament. Because here Duguid reminds us and demonstrates that at its apex, “the Old Testament gives us a glimpse in advance of who Jesus is. It gives us the categories of prophet, priest, and king that enable us to comprehend the ministry of the Messiah. In its many depths, the Old Testament shows us repeatedly why no one and nothing other than God himself in human form could possibly be the answer to our deepest need and provide us deliverance from our sins. The prophets, priests, and kings of the Old Testament all failed and fell short, just as we do. They all died without providing a ransom for our sins. In both of these ways, the Old Testament prepares us for the coming of Christ himself, giving us the understanding of our fallen human condition that is the necessary prerequisite to understanding and appreciating the answer that God gave to our sin in Christ.”²⁶

Any careful reader of this book will benefit from the insights of Duguid as he searches for and finds Jesus in the Old Testament. The sections on further reading at the end (on Christ-centered Expositions and Christ-centered Studies of the OT) will prove to be very valuable to anyone who wants to go deeper in this subject and discover how to apply these principles in practical ways – by teaching and/or preaching.

The Gospel Transformation Study Bible: Christ in All of Scripture. Grace for All of Life²⁷

The GTB (*Gospel Transformation Bible*) was produced with the conviction that “the Bible is a unified message of God’s grace culminating in Jesus,” and it was meant to be a “new tool to help readers see Christ in all of Scripture, and grace for all of life.” Its general editor is Bryan Chapell, a pastor-scholar well known for his Christ-centered approach to all of Scripture.

The editor makes it clear that this “is not a new way to study the Bible,” it is an approach that simply “honors our Lord’s own instruction to see the gospel in all Scripture, so that his love empowers the transformation of our lives from the inside out.” The *Gospel Transformation Bible* has “all-new book introductions and gospel-illuminating notes written by a team of over 50 outstanding pastors and scholars.” It outlines passage-by-passage God’s redemptive purposes of grace that echo

26. Duguid, *Is Jesus in the Old Testament?*, 496-98, Kindle.

27. Note that all of the information and citations for this section are from the introduction of the *Gospel Transformation Bible*, vii-xiii.

all through Scripture and culminate in Christ. The notes in the GTB “not only explain but also apply the text in a grace-centered way,” by focusing on heart transformation (rather than mere behavior modification). In other words the “points of application emphasize the *How*s and *Why*s of practical application to daily living—in short, how the gospel transforms us from the inside out.”

In my opinion, this study Bible is a great resource for pastors, teachers, and laypersons – as it strives to prove that Christ’s grace does not wait until NT times to make its first appearance, “but rather is the dawning light increasing throughout the Scripture toward the day the Savior came.” Their goal “is not to make Jesus appear magically in every text,” but rather to show where every text in the OT stands on the redemptive stage of history where Jesus in the culminating figure.

The contributors follow four categories (not meant to be exhaustive) of gospel explanation as they seek “to identify how God’s Word predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results from the person and/or the work of Christ.” Thus,

- 1) Some passages (like prophecies and messianic Psalms) clearly *predict* who Christ is and what he will do (e.g., Isaiah 9:6-7).
- 2) Other passages *prepare* God’s people to understand the grace that God must provide to redeem his people.... Thus while “many OT passages prepare God’s people to understand the grace of *his provision*, they also prepare the people to understand *their need*.”²⁸
- 3) Because grace is the key to understanding the purposes of God throughout the Bible (culminating in Christ), aspects of the gospel are reflected throughout the Scripture. Thus, on reading the Old Testament the reader should reflect on 2 questions:
 - a) What does this text *reflect* about the nature of God who provides redemption?
 - b) What does this text *reflect* about the nature of humanity that requires redemption?
- 4) Fourth, “we understand how God’s redemptive message appears in Scripture by those texts that are the *result* of Christ’s work on our behalf.... We obey as a *result* of our being God’s beloved, not to cause God to love us. His grace towards us precedes, enables, and motivates our efforts toward holiness.”²⁹

28. Thus, “grace does not spring up like a surprise jack-in-the-box in the NT. God’s people have been prepared for millennia to understand and receive the grace of Christ on their behalf.” The same belief is reflected in the work of David Murray below.

29. The imperatives (what we are to do) are always a consequence of the

The GTB notes are very useful even for books that seem less practical like Leviticus.³⁰ Thus, most pages in Leviticus have a note and they deal with how the sacrifices in Leviticus point forward to the ultimate sacrifice Christ paid on the cross. The notes also emphasize the problem of sin (for which sacrifices were necessary), and there are notes that show how the Israelites were to be different from the other nations just as Christians are to be different from unbelievers today.

There are many features that make the GTB unique and highly recommended for Bible students. The following are just some of them:³¹

- 1) It's unique because it tries to show how all the major themes of the Scriptures are integrated and how all these themes ultimately point to or find their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2) It tries to show how each passage is a part of the flow of the gospel in the immediate context, but also in the overall thrust of redemptive history in the rest of the Bible.
- 3) It's unique in that it demonstrates how the good news of the gospel is evident in the Old Testament as in the New Testament.
- 4) It does a good job demonstrating how the message of the Bible about God's love promises, points to, and culminates in Jesus.
- 5) It's unique in showing how the finished work of Christ matters not only in relationship to our past and our future, but especially in the present. We need the power of the gospel to help us in all the difficult realities of life suffering, pain, decision making, identity issues, and so forth.
- 6) It demonstrates how the grace God pervades all of Scripture and empowers us to stand firm in the gospel over the attacks we face daily with the world, the flesh, and the Devil.
- 7) It's unique in that it helps you delight in finding Christ for yourself in the text, and seek to be transformed into his likeness out of gratitude for His amazing grace displayed time and again in the gospel. In other words the notes focus on information (knowledge) that transforms the heart (emotions and the will). It isn't about duty, so much as delight

indicatives (who we are by God's gracious provision).

30. See the useful review of Jason Chamberlain for this section, accessed July 29, 2014, http://www.amazon.com/Gospel-Transformation-Bible-Bibles-Crossway-ebook/product-reviews.B00FI1IV0/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1.

31. This agrees with and partly follows a fine review by David P. Craig, accessed July 29, 2014, http://www.amazon.com/Gospel-Transformation-Bible-Bibles-Crossway-ebook/product-reviews.B00FI1IV0/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1.

over who God is and what He has provided for us in the gospel of Christ.

Thus, the GTB is to be recommended as it will help students see better the types and promises of God in the Old Testament that are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It will also help one see more clearly the unfolding story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation. And it should also reach out to touch one's affections for Christ and the gospel to "re-ignite an excitement for the gospel" that will lead to missions.

More importantly, the GTB is to be recommended because it will help serious students "to see that all of the Scriptures are about Jesus." It should also help us to personally know God more intimately so that we may have our love for him rekindled.

Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament

According to one reviewer, "This book shows the glory of Christ, and is recommended especially for anyone previously intimidated by the Old Testament."³² Personally, I find it as an accessible guide for anyone who is interested in discovering and enjoying Jesus in the Old Testament. The book is divided into two parts: Part 1: My Road to Emmaus, and Part 2: Spiritual Heartburn.

Part 1 reflects David Murray's journey towards finding Christ in the OT. Murray says: "In the first part of the book, I tell the story of my own Emmaus road – how the Lord gradually taught me to see more and more of Jesus in the Old Testament." Thus, Murray "wanted to share not only the result of what Jesus has taught" him but also how he patiently led him there," a path that led to "spiritual heartburn."³³

Murray makes a case for finding Christ in the OT by starting with Jesus, then he looks at the teachings of Peter in 1 Peter 10:12, Paul's position in Galatians 3-4 and 2 Corinthians 3, and concludes this part of the book by examining the apostle John's theology of Christ in the OT.

At the end of his chapter on Jesus' answer, he passionately and convincingly confesses the following: "The more I pursued this line of Bible study, the more my heart also burned and leaped with joy as I discovered Jesus on every page. He wasn't just here and there – He was everywhere." Then he asks, "What is the Old Testament about? Jesus'

32. The review is by Vern S. Poythress. See D. P. Murray, *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), iv.

33. Murray, *Jesus on Every Page*, 2.

emphatic answer is “Me! Me! Me!”³⁴ And the same seems to be the case with those who knew him best: Peter, Paul, and John.

Having established that we can find Christ in the OT, part two focuses on “ten simple ways” to seek and find Jesus in the OT. Note that unlike other books that focus on a few ways (e.g. typology, narrative, prophecy) of interpreting the OT with Jesus in view, David Murray “tried to gather in one place ten different ways of discovering and enjoying Jesus in the OT.”³⁵

The following are the 10 different ways that Murray provides:

- 1) Discovering Jesus in the Creation [Christ’s Planet]
- 2) Discovering Jesus in the OT Characters [Christ’s People]
- 3) Discovering Jesus in His Old Testament Appearances [Christ’s Presence]
- 4) Discovering Jesus in OT Law [Christ’s Precepts]
- 5) Discovering Jesus in OT History [Christ’s Past]
- 6) Discovering Jesus in the OT Prophets [Christ’s Prophets]
- 7) Discovering Jesus in the OT Types [Christ’s Pictures]
- 8) Discovering Jesus in the OT Covenants [Christ’s Promises]
- 9) Discovering Jesus in the OT Proverbs [Christ’s Proverbs]
- 10) Discovering Jesus in the OT Poems [Christ’s Poems – Psalms and Song of Songs]

My favorite passage from Murray’s book is worth quoting in full as it gives a good glimpse of the “Christo-centric” vision and approach of the author:³⁶

Remember, Old Testament believers read their Bible to find out about the Savior, just as we do. What then did they find out about Him in the book of Proverbs? If they expected a Creator from Genesis; an Emancipator from Exodus; a Priest and a Sacrifice from Leviticus; a Guide from Numbers; a Covenanter from Deuteronomy; a Captain from Joshua; a Judge from Judges; a Redeemer from Ruth; a King from Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles; a Rebuilder from Ezra and Nehemiah; an Innocent Sufferer from Job; and a Worship Leader from Psalms, what did they expect from reading Proverbs? They expected Mr. Wisdom. The book of Proverbs showed them their ignorance, error, and folly and

34. Murray, *Jesus on Every Page*, 17.

35. Murray, *Jesus on Every Page*, 2.

36. Murray, *Jesus on Every Page*, 180-81.

made them cry out for the wisdom of God that's portrayed in various ways in it.

Conclusion

It is important to point out that none of these three books replace the earlier scholarly approaches of Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802-1869)³⁷ and Patrick Fairbairn (1805-1874).³⁸ The serious scholar who is interested in solid exegesis and sustained arguments for finding Christ in the Old Testament will have to invest the time and effort necessary to engage with these writers. In my opinion, it remains a desideratum for something comparable in scope and depth to be produced in the 21st century.³⁹

However, all three of these books⁴⁰ are excellent resources to get one started on the road to Emmaus – the road to spiritual heartburn. They are also much needed in today's church as David Murray is probably correct when he says that "Perhaps the greatest reason for so little interest in the OT is that there has been so much Christ-less teaching from the OT. At a popular level, OT preaching has often degenerated into mere moralism.... At an academic level, there seems to be a determination to downplay or even remove any possibility of Christ-centeredness in the OT."⁴¹

While all of these writings that search for Jesus in the OT come from the Western world, I hope that, as one born in Eastern Europe (somewhat between the West and the East), I am able through this article to serve as a small mediator to bring the search for Jesus in the OT back to Asia where it all started. It would certainly be exciting to see more Christo-centric teaching and preaching in Asian universities and

37. I am referring to *Christologie des Alten Testaments* published in German (1828-1835). For a hard to find translation in English, see Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark, 1975). A more recent abridged translation is available from Kregel (1970).

38. See his *Typology of Scripture*, first issued in 1845-47 in Scotland. I had access to Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 2 volumes in one (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989). David Murray refers to this work frequently in his book. He does the lay audience a great service by trying to reduce this massive work "to about ten" pages. See Murray, *Jesus on Every Page*, 137ff.

39. Of course this has to be done by taking into consideration and by incorporating the latest advances in Biblical scholarship.

40. For a "top 50" list of books about Christ in the Old Testament see David Murray's website, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://headhearhand.org/blog/2013/09/06/top-50-books-on-christ-in-the-old-testament/>.

41. Murray, *Jesus on Every Page*, 7-8.

churches. After all, this is the only teaching that has transformed and can transform lives.