

The Christian Story

... as seen through the Old Testament

Aaron Simms

SAMPLE PREVIEW

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Preface

Writing a book changes the author in the process. Each book I have written has changed me in some way, and this book is no exception. In fact, I think this book has changed me the most. I started the project with the idea that I wanted to paint the “big picture” of the Bible. Oftentimes we get so focused on specific verses, turns of phrase, and points of grammar that we lose sight of the larger point of the Bible. So, I wanted to write about this “larger point” to help readers of the Scriptures better see the whole story. This story I came to call the “Christian Story,” which I’ll explain more about in the introduction which follows.

I chose as my focus the Pentateuch and historical books of the Old Testament; that is, Genesis through Esther. I wanted to connect the events in these books to the larger narrative of God’s actions for His creation through Jesus Christ. Thus, I sought to connect the Old Testament with its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. I wanted to tell the Christian Story through the Old Testament. The other books of the Old Testament, Job through Malachi, provide additional color and insight to this Christian Story, but I have not examined them here in depth, due to space considerations as well as my desire to keep to the essentials of the Christian Story so as not to again get caught staring at the trees, rather than observing the whole forest.

I pray that I have succeeded in my goal, as much as is humanly possible, so as to help others better appreciate God’s actions for us and all creation through Jesus Christ. Indeed, I have developed this greater appreciation through the process of writing this book, and I pray that you will gain the same through the process of reading it.

Amen.

Easter 2014

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Definitions

There are a few terms I use throughout this book which are useful to define up-front. I have provided short descriptions of these terms below, with more justification for the definitions contained within the book itself. That is to say, I have not attempted to defend my definitions here; rather, the body of the rest of the book will provide additional details about each of these terms.

Christian Story: This is the central narrative of the Bible which ties together the Old and New Testaments. It is the true account of God's gracious actions for His creation through Christ.

Christ: This is the "anointed" one, or Messiah. He is the Savior first promised by God in Genesis, who came in the flesh in the incarnation, who died and rose, who ascended back into heaven, and who is returning in glory on the Last Day. The Christ has redeemed us from sin, death, and the devil and is restoring all creation to the perfection in which God originally created it. He is God's Word made flesh, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Church: This is the people of God gathered together by Him around His promise of the Christ. The Church spans both Old and New Testaments. It begins in Genesis and goes clear through to Revelation when all things are completed by Christ for his Church. Thus, both Old and New Testaments are united in Christ, and all people of all times and places are saved only by God's grace through faith in Christ.

Introduction

This book recounts the “Christian Story” as seen through the Old Testament, particularly the Pentateuch and the historical books. What I mean by “story,” is not to imply some sort of a fabrication, like a fictional novel. Rather, the Christian Story is the “big picture” of the Bible. It is the truth of God’s actions for His creation that is revealed and fulfilled in Jesus the Christ. It is a narrative which helps tie the entire Scriptures together. Thus, the “Christian Story” is simply the whole span of God’s actions in this world, from His initial act of creation in the beginning to His final act of restoration at the end. Accordingly, the Christian Story encompasses all of the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, beginning to end. I call this the “Christian Story” because it is more than just the “Biblical story” or “Scriptural story” since it is all centered in Jesus Christ.

This may come as a surprise; the fact that the entire Bible is about Jesus Christ. After all, we often tend to think of the Old Testament as dealing with God’s Law and the people of Israel, and the New Testament as dealing with God’s Gospel and Jesus Christ and his disciples. Yet, this common belief is incomplete. Both Law and Gospel are found throughout the two Testaments of the Bible, as is Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament the Messiah, the Christ, is a promise. God promises that He will send to us a Savior who is anointed (i.e. a “Messiah” or “Christ”) to bring salvation. All throughout the Old Testament God reaffirms this promise, then in the fullness of time God fulfills this promise by sending His own Son in the flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ promised from the beginning. In addition, Christ is also present throughout the Old Testament, starting from the first acts of creation as the Word through whom all things are created, and continuing as the “angel of the LORD” who comes to be with His people.

Thus, God’s promises of salvation find their fulfillment

in Jesus Christ. In order to give a promise, though, there must be a recipient of that promise who will believe it. Thus, God called together a people around this promise who had faith in His Word. In the Old Testament, this people is eventually called “Israel.” However, Israel is more than just those who share a common ancestor; indeed, not even those who shared the same bloodlines were necessarily part of Israel. That is because Israel is the Church. It is the Old Testament Church who is gathered by God around the promise of the coming Christ. Consequently, the New Testament Church shares the same faith as the Old; it is the new Israel, gathered by God around the promise of the Christ who has come.

Thus, the “Christian Story” is God’s revelation to us of Himself and His promises through Jesus the Christ. It begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. It encompasses the first act of creation by God all the way through to His final act of re-creation at the end. The Bible is the “Christian Story,” because it is centered around Jesus Christ. The same Christ who created all things comes in the flesh to redeem all things and is returning to completely restore all things. The story includes Christ and his people, the Church.

This book explores this “Christian Story” by relating the events in the Old Testament back to this all-encompassing narrative. Thus, the Bible is not a series of discrete, separated stories or books with no relation to each other. Rather, the Bible is a unified account of God’s actions to create and restore His creation through Jesus Christ. I’ve attempted to bring out this sense of unity and context in the chapters which follow. There is a “Conclusion” chapter at the very end which ties up some loose ends by retelling the Christian Story in light of Christ’s Incarnation, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Ascension, and the Last Day when he returns.

The fundamentals of the “Christian Story” are this: In the beginning, God created all things good. Yet, Adam and Eve then brought sin, decay, death, and evil into the world. In response, God promised a savior who would restore His

creation. This promise begins in Genesis and is carried throughout the Old Testament, culminating in the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Christ came in fulfillment of God's promise and he is coming again to complete the restoration of all creation that he began with his death and resurrection. In between his ascension and return, Christ is still with us through Word and Sacrament, sending the Holy Spirit to us by virtue of his ascension back into heaven.

The story of the Old Testament is therefore the "Christian Story." In this book, then, I trace this story from Genesis through Esther, the Pentateuch and historical books of the Old Testament, to relate how God's Old Testament promises and actions for His people are fulfilled in Christ. For additional study, the reader may wish to consult the prophetic books of the Old Testament, since they help to fill in this story with additional details, as well as the wisdom books which relate how the world works in its present, fallen state. This book, however, focuses on the Pentateuch and historical books of the Old Testament (i.e. Genesis through Esther) since these provide the overall context for the story. My hope is that you will come away from reading this book with a new appreciation for the Old Testament and how it fits within the context of God's plans and actions through Jesus Christ for us and all of His creation. You will also see how God has incorporated you into this Christian Story.

In this book, when quoting from the Bible, I have followed the convention of using the word "LORD" in all capitals in the same way that our English translations of the Bible use the word (in this book I have quoted from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted). The word "LORD" is a stand-in for "Yahweh," meaning roughly "He who is" or "He who causes to be." So, when our English Bibles use "LORD," it means "Yahweh." This name for God is later explained in Exodus 3 when God reveals Himself to Moses. Suffice it to say at this point that God calls Himself, "I am who I am," and His people respond by calling Him "He who is and who causes to be" – Yahweh. So, I use

“LORD” when the Bible uses “LORD,” as well as in other places when I wish to emphasize the everlasting and creative aspects of who He is as Yahweh. In most places, though, when not quoting directly from the Bible I use “Lord” for the sake of clarity of reading, but this is actually a stand-in for “LORD.” This stand-in aspect of the name “Lord” is also why in the New Testament, calling Jesus “Lord” is a loaded term; it is the same as calling him Yahweh.

A theme which will be seen throughout this book is the understanding that our God Yahweh justifies us, or makes us right in His eyes, by what He Himself has done. He is not like the idols of the pagans who they sought to appease through works. Instead, Yahweh Himself provides for the atonement of our sins. He takes the guilt of our sins away from us so that we may live in His sight; for sinful man can not live in the presence of a holy God. Thus, God Himself atones for our sins through Jesus Christ so that we may live. This will become more evident throughout this book. Thus, the “lens” through which the entire Bible is seen is “justification by grace through faith for the sake of Christ.” That is to say, a holy LORD God has justified us (i.e. made us right) in His eyes purely out of His grace and mercy given us for the sake of Christ and received through faith. All of this, including our faith, is the work of God. The “Christian Story” is one of God doing this for people of all times and places through the Christ who was promised in the Old Testament, revealed in the New, is with us even now, and who is coming again to fully restore all creation.

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1 The Beginning

Genesis

In the first chapter of Genesis we read about how God created all things by speaking forth His Word. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” reads the very first verse. What God was doing before this happened we do not know, because our understanding of Him begins in Genesis 1. It is the beginning of our world, God’s creation, and the beginning of His self-revelation to us.

Then, throughout the rest of Genesis 1 we see God creating through the power of His Word. He speaks, and things are done. He says, “Let there be light” and there is light; He says, “Let there be an expanse...” and so there is. God speaks and it is done. In theological circles, we call this “performative speech.” This means simply “words that perform some action.” God’s Word is the truest and highest example of “performative speech.” However, in our own lives we also see examples of this. When a man and a woman are married and the pastor says that they are now husband and wife, it is done; they are now married due to this “performative speech.” Likewise, when a baby is born and his parents give him a name, it is done. When two people say that they love each other, their words act on each other. So, even in our own lives we can see how speech creates reality.

Throughout Genesis 1, then...

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The history of Christianity concerns the Christian religion, Christendom, and the Church with its various denominations, from the 1st century to the present. Christianity originated with the ministry of Jesus in the 1st century Roman province of Judea. According to the Gospels, Jesus was a Jewish teacher and healer who proclaimed the imminent kingdom of God and was crucified c. AD 30–33. His followers believed that he was then raised from the dead and exalted by God, and would return soon at the A short animated film narrating the Christian story of Easter. This short film will be relevant for teaching KS1 and Early and 1st Level Religious Studies.Â Teacher Notes. This could be used discuss whether Easter is a happy time or a sad time, or both. In groups pupils could create freeze frames of different parts of the story, showing clearly how the different characters (Jesus, Mary, the disciples) would have been feeling at that part of the story. Curriculum Notes.