FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

BIBLIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Word of God

UNIT 9: THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lesson 20

CHRIST-CENTERED INTERPRETATION

Reading All of Scripture in Light of Its Center

Key Texts: John 5:39–40; Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; 2 Corinthians 1:20

> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*
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> **2 Timothy 3:16–17, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Lesson 19 introduced the grammatical-historical method as the foundational discipline of sound biblical interpretation: the commitment to reading each text according to its author's intent, in its historical context, and according to the conventions of its literary genre. Without this foundation, biblical interpretation degenerates into eisegesis: the interpreter's voice displacing the Author's. The grammatical-historical method is the protection against that displacement.

But the grammatical-historical method, as essential as it is, does not by itself produce a complete hermeneutic for the Christian reader. There is a dimension of biblical meaning that goes beyond (though never against) what the grammatical-historical method recovers: the Christological dimension. Jesus Himself taught that the entire Scripture (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) testifies to Him (John 5:39). He walked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus and, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). He told the Eleven that everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44). The risen Lord taught His disciples that the whole Old Testament is Christological witness.

This is not a claim that the Old Testament is secretly about Jesus in ways that bypass its historical meaning. It is a claim that the entire canonical story (the covenant promises, the redemptive-historical patterns, the types and shadows, the prophetic anticipations) is oriented toward Christ as its fulfillment. The Old Testament is not a collection of independent religious texts that happened to be adopted by the Christian church; it is the first movement of a single canonical symphony whose second movement is the New Testament and whose theme throughout is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This lesson develops the Christocentric dimension of biblical interpretation. We will examine the testimony of Jesus to the Old Testament's witness to Him, trace the three primary mechanisms by which that witness is structured (typology, promise-fulfillment, and the progressive unfolding of the covenant of grace), identify the dangers of doing Christocentric interpretation poorly (allegorizing, moralizing, and Christ-forced reading), and articulate the balance between a genuinely Christ-centered reading and the patient grammatical-historical work that every text deserves. We will close with a brief account of how Progressive Covenantalism, the theological framework of this series, shapes the hermeneutical task.

I. THE CHRISTOCENTRIC READING OF SCRIPTURE: CHRIST AS THE CENTER AND CLIMAX

The claim that Christ is the center and climax of all Scripture is not a Christian imposition on the Hebrew Bible; it is the explicit teaching of the One who fulfilled it. Jesus' testimony to the Christological character of the Old Testament is pervasive, authoritative, and specific.

A. John 5:39–40: The Scriptures Testify to Me

In His controversy with the Jewish leaders who were seeking to kill Him, Jesus makes a remarkable claim about the purpose of the Scriptures they prized:

> *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."*
>
> **John 5:39–40, NASB 1995**

The statement is arresting in its directness. The Scriptures testify about Jesus. They do not merely predict Him in isolated passages or point to Him in typological patterns that only the theologically sophisticated can trace; they testify to Him as their primary subject. The entire canonical deposit of the Old Testament, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings that the Jewish leaders were searching, is in its wholeness a witness to the One standing before them. The tragedy is that they were searching the witness without coming to the One to whom it witnesses.

The hermeneutical implication is direct: any reading of the Old Testament that does not ultimately arrive at the One to whom it testifies is an incomplete reading. The grammatical-historical method recovers what the human author said; the Christocentric reading traces where the canonical story goes. Both are essential, and neither is complete without the other.

B. Luke 24:25–27: The Emmaus Road Hermeneutic

The most extended and theologically rich account of Christ-centered interpretation in the Gospels is the road to Emmaus narrative:

> *"And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."*
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> **Luke 24:25–27, NASB 1995**

Several features of this passage deserve careful attention. First, Jesus rebukes the disciples not for failing to understand the resurrection (they simply had not expected it) but for being "slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken." The failure was hermeneutical: they had not understood that the prophets had spoken of a suffering and glorified Messiah. Second, Jesus' exposition of the Scripture is comprehensive: beginning with

Moses and all the prophets, the entire span of the canonical narrative. Third, the content of His exposition is specifically Christological: "the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

The Emmaus Road passage is not just a historical account of a unique post-resurrection appearance; it is a model for the church's ongoing reading of the Old Testament. The risen Christ is still teaching His disciples that the entire canonical story, from Moses through the prophets, is about Him. The church's reading of the Old Testament, to be faithful to the instruction of the risen Lord, must be oriented toward the same Christological destination.

C. Luke 24:44–47: The Fulfillment of All That Is Written

The pattern is reinforced in Jesus' subsequent appearance to the wider circle of disciples:

> *"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations.'"*
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> **Luke 24:44–47, NASB 1995**

Here Jesus explicitly identifies the threefold canonical structure of the Hebrew Bible (the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms/Writings) and claims that all of it testifies to His suffering, resurrection, and the proclamation of the gospel. The whole Old Testament, every division of it, is Christological witness. And He "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," suggesting that Christological reading of the Old Testament is not a natural capacity of the unaided human mind but a gift of the risen Christ to His disciples through the Spirit He sends.

II. TYPOLOGY: THE HISTORICAL PATTERN OF PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

The most important single mechanism by which the Old Testament witnesses to Christ is typology. A type is a divinely ordained historical pattern (a person, event, institution, or structure in earlier redemptive history) that prefigures and finds its fulfillment in a corresponding reality (the antitype) at a later, climactic stage of redemptive history, most fully in Christ. Typology is not allegory: it is grounded in the historical reality of both type and antitype, and its connections are disclosed by the New Testament's own interpretive guidance rather than by the interpreter's imagination.

A. The Theological Basis of Typology

Typology is possible because the same God governs all of redemptive history. The patterns that appear in the earlier stages of the canonical story are not coincidental; they reflect the providential ordering of a God who is working His redemptive purposes out across history in a consistent, progressive manner. The New Testament's identification of Old Testament types is not a creative imposition on the text; it is the disclosure of patterns that

God intentionally built into redemptive history, patterns that the original participants could recognize in outline but could not fully understand until the antitype arrived.

B. Major Types in Scripture

The New Testament identifies numerous Old Testament types and their Christological antitypes:

- **Adam:** The New Testament explicitly identifies Adam as "a type of Him who was to come" (Romans 5:14). As Adam's disobedience brought sin and death to the many, Christ's obedience brings righteousness and life (Romans 5:15–19; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49). The typological connection is established by the New Testament, not invented by the interpreter.
- **The Passover Lamb:** Paul explicitly calls Christ "our Passover… sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Passover lamb, whose blood protected Israel from judgment and whose death accompanied their redemption from Egypt, is a type of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; Revelation 5:6–12).
- **The High Priest:** The book of Hebrews develops at length the typological relationship between the Levitical high priest and Christ. The Levitical priesthood, with its entry into the Most Holy Place, its mediation between God and Israel, and its sacrificial system, is a type whose antitype is Christ, "a great high priest who has passed through the heavens" (Hebrews 4:14) and who offered "one sacrifice for sins for all time" (Hebrews 10:12).
- **The Temple:** Jesus Himself identifies His body as the true temple (John 2:19–21). The tabernacle and temple, God's dwelling place with His people, are types whose antitype is the incarnation, in which "the Word became flesh and dwelt [literally, tabernacled] among us" (John 1:14). The eschatological fulfillment is the new Jerusalem, in which there is no temple because God Himself and the Lamb are its temple (Revelation 21:22).
- **The Exodus:** The New Testament consistently interprets the exodus from Egypt as a type of the greater redemption accomplished in Christ. Jesus' transfiguration is described as the discussion of "His departure [Greek: exodus] which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Paul interprets the wilderness experience typologically: "these things happened as examples for us" (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

III. PROMISE-FULFILLMENT AND THE PROGRESSIVE UNFOLDING OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

The second primary mechanism by which the Old Testament witnesses to Christ is the pattern of promise and fulfillment: the specific verbal promises God made at various stages of redemptive history that find their "yes and amen" in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 1:20 is the hermeneutical key:

> *"For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us."*
>
> **2 Corinthians 1:20, NASB 1995**

Every promise God made in the Old Testament (every covenant commitment, every prophetic announcement of redemption and restoration, every declaration of God's ultimate saving intention for His people) is confirmed, fulfilled, and given its definitive "yes" in Christ. This is not merely a claim about explicit Messianic predictions; it is a claim about the entire structure of the Old Testament's covenantal promises.

A. The Covenant Structure

The Old Testament's promises are organized within a series of covenants through which God progressively revealed and advanced His redemptive purposes: the Noahic covenant (universal preservation for the sake of redemption), the Abrahamic covenant (the covenant of promise: a people, a land, and a blessing to all nations through Abraham's offspring), the Mosaic covenant (the national covenant that defined Israel's life as the covenant community), the Davidic covenant (the promise of an eternal king from David's line), and the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34; the promise of a renewed relationship with God through the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of the heart).

Each covenant advanced the promise; each fulfilled the preceding covenant's trajectory while pointing beyond itself to the next; all found their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. The Abrahamic promise of a seed through whom all nations would be blessed is fulfilled in Christ (Galatians 3:16). The Davidic promise of an eternal king is fulfilled in the Son of David who sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3; Acts 2:30–36). The new covenant promise of forgiveness and heart-transformation is enacted through the shed blood of the new covenant (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6– 13).

B. The Prophetic Witness

The prophets of Israel's classical period (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Twelve) were the primary vehicles of the covenant promises that would be fulfilled in Christ. Their oracles are not isolated predictions but participants in the covenant story: they call the covenant community back to faithfulness, announce judgment for covenant violation, and proclaim the coming redemption through which God would fulfill His covenant promises in a new and definitive way.

Isaiah's Servant Songs (42:1–9; 49:1–6; 50:4-9; 52:13–53:12) announce the mission and suffering of the Servant of the LORD in terms that the New Testament identifies as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Micah's announcement that the ruler of Israel would come from Bethlehem (5:2) is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:6). Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming on the clouds to receive dominion, glory, and a kingdom (7:13–14) is claimed by Jesus as a description of His own vindication (Mark 14:62). The canonical reading of the prophets requires tracing these promise trajectories to their fulfillment in Christ.

IV. THE DANGERS OF CHRISTOCENTRIC INTERPRETATION DONE POORLY

The affirmation that Christ is the center and climax of all Scripture carries with it a real danger: the danger of doing Christocentric interpretation poorly. The history of Christian interpretation is littered with examples of

Christological readings that bypass the actual historical and theological content of the text in favor of a predetermined Christological destination. Three errors are particularly common.

A. Allegorizing

Allegorical interpretation finds hidden spiritual meanings beneath the literal surface of a text, without grounding those meanings in the text's historical context or its place in the canonical story. The great allegorists of the Christian tradition, such as Origen in the third century and Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth, found elaborate Christological meanings in details of Old Testament narratives that have no canonical warrant. Origen's allegorical interpretation of the Song of Solomon as a description of the soul's union with the divine Logos, or the medieval fourfold sense of Scripture that assigned allegorical, tropological (moral), and anagogical (eschatological) meanings to every text alongside the literal sense, produced readings that were often spiritually edifying but hermeneutically arbitrary.

The distinction between legitimate typology and illegitimate allegory is crucial. Typology is grounded in the historical reality of the type, disclosed by the New Testament's own interpretive guidance, and rooted in the canonical progression of redemptive history. Allegory is imposed by the interpreter's imagination, produces readings the text does not warrant, and does not respect the historical particularity of the biblical narrative. The test is simple: can the Christological connection be established from the canonical text itself, that is, from the New Testament's own interpretation of the Old, or does it depend entirely on the interpreter's ingenuity?

B. Moralizing

The opposite error from allegorizing is moralizing: reading the Old Testament as primarily a collection of moral examples rather than as a participant in the redemptive-historical narrative that culminates in Christ. The moralizing preacher reads the story of David and Goliath as a lesson about courage in the face of overwhelming odds. The story of Abraham's faith is reduced to an example of trusting God when the way forward is unclear. The story of Elijah on Mount Carmel becomes a lesson about bold spiritual confrontation.

These moral applications are not false; the biblical narratives do contain genuine moral instruction, and Scripture itself sometimes draws explicitly moral lessons from narrative events (1 Corinthians 10:6–11; Hebrews 11). The error is reduction: treating the text as if its primary purpose were moral instruction rather than redemptive-historical witness. David and Goliath is primarily a story about the LORD's deliverance of His people through His anointed king, a story that participates in the canonical narrative of the Davidic kingship that ultimately points to the Son of David who defeated the great enemy of God's people on the cross. The moral application is legitimate; the redemptive-historical function is primary.

C. Christ-Forced Interpretation

The third error is the one most common among those who are most enthusiastic about Christ-centered preaching: the tendency to jump to Christ too quickly, bypassing the patient grammatical-historical work that every text deserves. Christ-forced interpretation imposes a Christological reading on a text without attending to what the text actually says in its own historical and canonical context.

When a preacher reads the rainbow in Genesis 9 as a symbol of the cross, or finds the Trinity in every occurrence of the Hebrew plural, or interprets every Old Testament warrior battle as a type of spiritual warfare, she has

moved beyond the legitimate Christological connections that the canonical text establishes and into the territory of homiletical imagination. The problem is not that these connections are heretical; the problem is that they are unsupported. They do not arise from the text; they are imposed on it. The result is that the congregation does not learn to read their Bibles; they learn to watch their pastor perform hermeneutical gymnastics.

The corrective is the discipline that Lesson 19 established: begin with the grammatical-historical work. Understand what the text says in its own historical context, to its own original audience, in its own literary form. Then trace the canonical connections to Christ, not by ingenuity or imagination, but by following the canonical story where it actually goes, guided by the New Testament's own interpretation of the Old. The Christ-centered reading that is most faithful is the one that arises naturally from the text's own place in the canonical narrative.

V. THE BALANCE: CHRIST-CENTERED WITHOUT BEING CHRIST-FORCED

The challenge of Christocentric interpretation is to maintain the balance between two equally important commitments: the commitment to let each text speak in its own redemptive-historical context (the grammatical-historical foundation) and the commitment to read each text as a participant in the canonical story that culminates in Christ (the Christocentric horizon). Neither commitment can be abandoned without distorting the reading.

A. Every Text in Its Own Context First

The first principle of the balance is to do the grammatical-historical work first and thoroughly. Before asking "How does this text point to Christ?" the interpreter must ask "What does this text say, in its own historical and literary context, to its original audience?" The Christological reading must arise from and be consistent with the grammatical-historical reading; it cannot replace or bypass it.

This means that many Old Testament texts do not have a direct or immediate Christological reference. A passage about the administration of the Mosaic law, a wisdom saying about the consequences of laziness, and a prayer of lament from an individual Psalmist each have a literal meaning in their own canonical context that must be received on its own terms before any further canonical reflection is attempted. The Christological meaning is not identical to the immediate literal meaning; it is the fuller canonical significance that the text carries in light of its place in the redemptive-historical story.

B. Every Text Within the Canonical Story

The second principle is that no Old Testament text stands alone. Every text is part of a canonical whole: a story with a beginning (creation), a crisis (fall), a trajectory (redemption), and a destination (consummation). Every text has a place in that story, and its canonical significance is partly determined by its place. A text from the Mosaic covenant must be read in light of its position in the covenant structure and its relationship to the new covenant fulfillment. A prophetic oracle must be read in light of the promise it advances and the fulfillment toward which it points. A wisdom saying must be read in light of the One who is Wisdom incarnate.

The canonical reading does not replace the grammatical-historical reading; it completes it. The interpreter who has done her grammatical-historical work thoroughly is now equipped to ask: Where does this text fall in the canonical story? What covenant does it belong to? What promises does it advance? What patterns does it establish that the New Testament will identify as types? What does it contribute to the progressive revelation of God's redemptive purposes? These are the questions that move from exegesis to biblical theology and from biblical theology to the Christocentric horizon.

C. Following the New Testament's Lead

The safest and most reliable guide to Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament is the New Testament itself. When the New Testament authors identify a type, quote a prophecy as fulfilled, or trace a covenant promise to its Christological fulfillment, they are providing the canonical warrant for reading that Old Testament text Christologically. The interpreter's primary task is not to discover new Christological readings but to understand and receive the ones the New Testament has already disclosed.

This does not mean that the New Testament exhausts all the canonical connections in the Old Testament. The patterns of typology, the trajectories of promise, and the themes of the canonical story are richer than any explicit New Testament citation can fully unfold. But the New Testament provides the interpretive framework (the canonical hermeneutic) within which further Christological reading is disciplined and accountable. Staying close to the New Testament's own interpretive moves is the most reliable protection against the excesses of allegorizing and the overreach of Christ-forced interpretation.

VI. PROGRESSIVE COVENANTALISM AND HERMENEUTICS

Every interpreter brings a theological framework to the text: a set of prior convictions about the structure of redemptive history, the relationship between the covenants, and the continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments. These prior convictions shape what the interpreter sees and what she misses. It is important to be aware of one's own framework and to evaluate it by the canonical evidence rather than imposing it on the text.

Faithful to the Word operates within the framework of Progressive Covenantalism, a biblical-theological approach that traces the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes through the covenant structure of the canon and affirms both the real continuity and the significant discontinuity between the Mosaic and new covenants. Progressive Covenantalism is distinguished from the two major alternatives.

A. Progressive Covenantalism Distinguished from Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism reads the Bible as organized around distinct "dispensations" in which God relates to human beings in fundamentally different ways, maintaining a sharp distinction between God's purposes for national Israel and His purposes for the church. In most forms of dispensationalism, the promises made to Israel remain to be fulfilled for ethnic Israel in a future millennial kingdom, and the church is a parenthesis in the plan for Israel rather than the fulfillment of the covenant promises.

Progressive Covenantalism reads the New Testament's identification of the church as the heir of the covenant promises (the "Israel of God" [Galatians 6:16], the seed of Abraham [Galatians 3:29], the true circumcision [Philippians 3:3]) as the fulfillment, not the parenthetical interruption, of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. The covenantal promises made to Israel are not set aside or postponed; they are fulfilled in Christ and in the community of those who are in Christ, Jew and Gentile together.

B. Progressive Covenantalism Distinguished from Classic Covenant Theology

Classic Covenant Theology, particularly in its Presbyterian form, organizes redemptive history primarily around the covenant of works (with Adam) and the covenant of grace (administered in various forms across the testaments). It tends to emphasize the continuity between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant, often treating the Mosaic law as the same covenant of grace administered in different form. This continuity framework leads to positions like paedobaptism (infant baptism as the new covenant equivalent of circumcision) and theonomic ethics (the abiding civil authority of Old Testament law).

Progressive Covenantalism affirms more discontinuity between the Mosaic and new covenants than classic Covenant Theology typically does. The new covenant is genuinely new in ways that Jeremiah 31:31–34 specifies: a different relational dynamic ("I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it"), a different membership principle ("they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest"), and a different basis ("I will forgive their iniquity"). The Mosaic covenant, including its ceremonial, civil, and even parts of its moral administration, has been fulfilled and its shadow-form transcended in the better covenant mediated by Christ (Hebrews 8:6–13).

C. Hermeneutical Implications

Progressive Covenantalism shapes hermeneutics in several specific ways. It teaches the interpreter to trace the canonical story through its covenant stages, to identify the typological function of each covenant's institutions and practices, and to read Old Testament texts with careful attention to both their covenantal context and their new covenant fulfillment. It enables the interpreter to affirm the genuine theological content of every stage of the canonical story while recognizing that each stage is fulfilled, transformed, and in some respects superseded by what comes after.

For example: the food laws of Leviticus are read not as arbitrary cultic regulations but as covenant boundary markers that served the purpose of distinguishing Israel from the nations during the Mosaic administration and that find their fulfillment in the new covenant declaration that "nothing is unclean in itself" (Romans 14:14) and that the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been broken down in Christ (Ephesians 2:14). The typological function of the Levitical priesthood is acknowledged and the new covenant fulfillment in Christ as the final High Priest is traced. The canonical story is read as a whole, with Christ as its center and consummation.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

> *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."*
>
> **John 5:39–40**

> *"And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."*
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> **Luke 24:25–27**

> *"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures…"*
>
> **Luke 24:44–47**

> *"For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us."*
>
> **2 Corinthians 1:20**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Christ-Centered Interpretation	The hermeneutical approach that reads all of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, as a unified canonical narrative whose center and climax is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ-centered interpretation is grounded in Jesus' own testimony that the Scriptures testify to Him (John 5:39) and His post-resurrection exposition of the Old Testament as Christological witness (Luke 24:27, 44–47). It is not an interpretive technique imposed on the text but the recognition of the canonical structure the Spirit of Christ built into it.
Redemptive-Historical Interpretation	The approach to biblical interpretation that reads each text within the unfolding story of God's redemptive purposes in history, from creation through fall, through covenant and promise, to fulfillment in Christ, and toward eschatological consummation. Redemptive-historical interpretation insists that every biblical text has a place in this overarching story and that its meaning is enriched, not replaced, by understanding its position in the narrative arc.
Typology	The pattern of correspondence between earlier persons, events, institutions, or structures in redemptive history (types) and later realities that fulfill and transcend them (antitypes). Typology is not allegorical, it is grounded in the historical reality of both type and antitype. The type is a real historical entity whose divinely ordered significance points forward to its fulfillment in Christ. Adam is a type of Christ (Romans 5:14); the Passover lamb is a type of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7); the high priest is a type of Christ (Hebrews 4:14–16).
Promise-Fulfillment	The canonical pattern by which divine promises made at earlier stages of redemptive history are fulfilled at later stages, ultimately in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Promise-fulfillment is the primary structure of biblical theology: God makes covenant promises (to Abraham, to David, through the prophets), and those promises find their "yes and amen" in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). Understanding this pattern is essential for reading Old Testament texts in their canonical context.
Sensus Plenior	Latin for "fuller sense." The additional depth of meaning that God, as the ultimate Author of Scripture, intended in an Old Testament text beyond what the human author fully understood. The sensus plenior is revealed as redemptive history advances and as the New Testament discloses the Christological meaning of Old Testament texts. It does not contradict the human author's intended meaning but completes and fulfills it within the overarching divine purpose.
Allegory (Hermeneutical)	An interpretive method that finds hidden spiritual meanings beneath the literal surface of a text, without grounding those meanings in the text's historical context or the author's intent. Medieval allegorists (Origen, Bernard) found elaborate spiritual meanings in every detail of Old Testament narratives. Allegory differs from typology: typology is grounded in the historical reality of the type and requires the New Testament's own interpretive guidance; allegory is imposed by the interpreter's imagination and produces readings the text does not warrant.
Moralism	The hermeneutical error of reducing biblical narrative to a collection of moral examples, reading Old Testament stories primarily as illustrations of virtuous behavior to be imitated or vicious behavior to be avoided. Moralism severs the narratives from their redemptive-historical function, treating them as ethical instruction rather than as stages in the unfolding story of God's saving purposes. The stories of David, Abraham, and Moses are primarily about what God is doing in redemptive history, not primarily about human virtue or vice.
Progressive Covenantalism	A biblical-theological framework that traces the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes through a series of covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New) that progressively reveal and advance the covenant of grace ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Progressive Covenantalism is distinguished from both Dispensationalism (which maintains sharp

	discontinuities between Israel and the church) and Covenant Theology (which tends to flatten the discontinuities between the covenants). It shapes interpretation by identifying each text's place in the covenant structure and its relationship to the new covenant fulfillment.
The Emmaus Road Hermeneutic	Jesus' post-resurrection hermeneutical approach, described in Luke 24:25–27: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." This is not a claim that every Old Testament text has a simple, direct messianic prediction; it is the claim that the entire canonical story (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings in their entirety) is oriented toward Christ as its center and goal. Jesus reads the whole Old Testament as Christological witness.
Christ-Forced Interpretation	The hermeneutical error of imposing a Christological reading on a text that does not warrant it, jumping to Christ before doing the patient grammatical-historical work of understanding what the text says in its own context. Christ-forced interpretation is the abuse of Christ-centered interpretation: it bypasses the actual historical and theological content of the text in order to reach a predetermined Christological destination. The corrective is to read each text first in its own redemptive-historical context and to trace, rather than force, its connection to Christ.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the entire Bible, both Testaments and all sixty-six books, is a unified canonical story whose center and climax is Jesus Christ. This conviction is not a hermeneutical technique that we apply to the text; it is the theological reality that the text claims for itself, on the authority of the One who fulfilled it. The risen Christ is still teaching His disciples that "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." The faithful interpreter receives this teaching and reads Scripture accordingly.

We must also believe that the Christocentric reading of the Old Testament does not bypass or replace its grammatical-historical meaning but fulfills and completes it. The literal sense of the text (what the human author said in his historical context) is the necessary foundation. The canonical sense (what that text means in the light of the whole story and its Christological fulfillment) is the necessary completion. Both together constitute the full, faithful reading that Jesus modeled on the road to Emmaus.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The Christocentric reading of Scripture should produce in us a burning heart, the burning heart of the Emmaus disciples who said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32, NASB 1995). To encounter Christ in the Old Testament is to encounter the living God at the intersection of history and fulfillment, of promise and reality: to see the Passover lamb as the Lamb of God, to read Isaiah 53 as the suffering of the Servant who bore our iniquities, to recognize in the Davidic king the One who sits forever on David's throne. It is one of the most deeply satisfying experiences available to the Christian reader of Scripture.

Let this lesson also produce in you a deeper love for the Old Testament as the first movement of the canonical symphony. The Christian who does not read and love the Old Testament has not yet fully received the Bible that Jesus endorsed. The burning heart begins with the patient, faithful, grammatical-historical engagement with every part of the canon, and then opens in wonder to see how it all converges on the One who said "It is these that testify about Me."

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

1. Read the Old Testament with Christological expectation. When you read the Psalms, ask: How does this royal psalm participate in the Davidic covenant that finds its fulfillment in the Son of David? When you read the prophets, ask: What promise is this oracle advancing, and where does it arrive in the canonical story? When you read the law, ask: What covenant boundary marker or typological pattern is being established here, and how does Christ fulfill and transform it?

2. Study the New Testament's use of the Old. The most reliable guide to Christocentric interpretation is the New Testament's own quotation and application of the Old. Keep a record of the Old Testament texts quoted in the New Testament and study the context of both the quotation and the source. How does the New Testament author understand the Old Testament text? What does he see in it that it was pointing toward? This exercise will train your hermeneutical instincts more effectively than any theoretical discussion.

3. Distinguish typology from allegory in your teaching and preaching. When you preach a Christological connection from an Old Testament text, be able to show your congregation why that connection is canonical rather than imaginative. Can you point to a New Testament text that establishes or confirms the connection? Can you trace the canonical logic that connects the type to the antitype? If the connection depends entirely on your ingenuity, it is probably allegory, not typology.

4. Resist the moralistic reading of Old Testament narrative. When you encounter the temptation to reduce an Old Testament story to a lesson about human virtue or courage or faithfulness, ask: What is God doing in this story? What stage of the redemptive narrative is being advanced? How does this story participate in the canonical movement toward Christ? The moral application will often follow naturally from the redemptive-historical reading; but the redemptive-historical reading must come first.

5. Teach biblical theology alongside systematic theology. The Christocentric reading of Scripture is the domain of biblical theology, the discipline that traces the unfolding of the canonical story across the redemptive-historical arc. Invest in resources that develop your biblical-theological understanding: Graeme Goldsworthy, Sidney Greidanus, T. Desmond Alexander, and Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum (Kingdom through Covenant) are among the best guides in this field. The systematic theology we have been studying in this series must be grounded in and informed by the biblical-theological reading of the canonical story.

D. *For Every Season of Life*

For the believer who finds the Old Testament difficult or irrelevant: The Emmaus Road disciples found the Old Testament frustrating and confusing until the risen Christ opened their minds to understand it. Bring the same prayer to your reading: "Lord, open my mind to understand the Scriptures." And then approach the Old Testament with the conviction that the One who said "It is these that testify about Me" has left His fingerprints on every book, and that finding them is one of the great adventures of the Christian reader's life.

For the preacher developing an expository preaching ministry on the Old Testament: The most powerful preaching from the Old Testament is neither purely exegetical (stopping at what the human author said) nor purely homiletical (jumping directly to moral application) but genuinely biblical-theological: doing the grammatical-historical work thoroughly, then tracing the canonical connections faithfully, and arriving at Christ not by force but by following the text where it actually leads. Let the Emmaus Road model shape your preaching: beginning with Moses and all the prophets, explain the things concerning Christ in all the Scriptures. Your congregation will find that the Old Testament comes alive when they understand its place in the canonical story that culminates in the One they love.

For the theologian or student of Scripture wrestling with the relationship between the Testaments: The question of continuity and discontinuity between the covenants is one of the most theologically productive questions in biblical studies, and it has practical implications for ecclesiology, ethics, and eschatology that are among the most contested in evangelical Christianity. Engage this question with the same rigor, humility, and canonical seriousness that every other hermeneutical question deserves. Let the canonical text, read grammatical-historically and in its full redemptive-historical context, drive your theological conclusions, rather than letting your theological system drive your reading of the text.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Think of a time when you encountered an Old Testament text that seemed completely disconnected from the New Testament and from Jesus Christ. What was the text? After studying this lesson, can you trace any canonical connections between that text and the redemptive story that culminates in Christ?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read John 5:37–40. What specific charges does Jesus level against the Jewish leaders? What does He say the Scriptures do in relation to Him? What is the ultimate purpose of the Scriptures, and what are the leaders missing by not receiving it?
3. Read Luke 24:13–35. What was the hermeneutical failure of the Emmaus disciples (verses 25–26)? What did Jesus do in response, and what was the scope of His exposition? What was the disciples' experiential response (verse 32)?
4. Read Hebrews 10:1–14. How does the author of Hebrews describe the relationship between the Levitical sacrificial system and Christ's sacrifice? What specific language does he use that identifies the sacrificial system as a type? What does the contrast between repeated sacrifices and Christ's "one sacrifice for all time" communicate about the nature of typology?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. Explain the difference between typology and allegory. Why is the distinction important for a faithful Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament? What safeguards does the requirement of "canonical warrant" provide?
6. The lesson identifies moralizing as a failure of Christocentric interpretation. Why is reducing Old Testament narrative to moral examples a hermeneutical error, even when the moral applications drawn are true? What is being missed, and what is the consequence for the congregation's reading of the text?
7. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says that all the promises of God find their "yes" in Christ. Apply this to one specific Old Testament covenant promise: trace the promise from its original covenantal context, through its development across the canonical story, to its fulfillment in Christ. Which promise did you choose, and what does the canonical trajectory reveal?
8. The lesson argues that Progressive Covenantalism occupies a middle position between Dispensationalism and classic Covenant Theology. What is the key disagreement with each? How do these different frameworks lead to different readings of specific Old Testament texts?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. The lesson distinguishes between "Christ-centered" and "Christ-forced" interpretation. Evaluate a specific piece of preaching or teaching you have encountered that was enthusiastically Christocentric. Was it Christ-centered (following the canonical connections faithfully) or Christ-forced (imposing Christological readings the text does not warrant)? What made the difference?
10. The lesson argues that the most reliable guide to Christocentric interpretation is the New Testament's own use of the Old. Choose a New Testament quotation or allusion to the Old Testament (not one already discussed in this lesson) and study both its source and its New Testament context. What canonical

connection does the New Testament author see in the Old Testament text? Is it typological, promise-fulfillment, or something else?

11. Read Luke 24:44–48. Jesus says the risen Christ must be proclaimed "to all the nations." How does Christ-centered interpretation of the whole canonical story ground the church's missionary mandate? What is the relationship between reading the Bible Christocentrically and engaging in global gospel proclamation?
12. This lesson completes Unit 9: The Interpretation of Scripture. Looking back over Lessons 19 and 20, how would you now describe the relationship between the grammatical-historical method and the Christocentric reading? Are they in tension, or are they complementary? Which is the foundation, and which is the completion?

Prayer Focus

Spend time in prayer as a group, asking the risen Christ to do for you what He did for the Emmaus disciples and the gathered eleven: to open your minds to understand the Scriptures, to show you the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures, and to make your hearts burn within you as He explains the canonical story that has always been about Him. Thank Him for the Old Testament as the faithful witness to His coming: for the types that prefigured Him, the promises that announced Him, and the prophets who yearned for what we now possess. Ask the Spirit who inspired the whole canonical story to illumine it for you as you read it, so that every part of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, becomes a window through which you see more clearly the One who said, "It is these that testify about Me."

This lesson concludes Unit 9: The Interpretation of Scripture. In two lessons, we have established the grammatical-historical method as the foundational discipline of sound interpretation (Lesson 19) and the Christocentric reading of the canonical story as its necessary completion (Lesson 20). In Unit 10, we turn from how to read Scripture to what Scripture does: the living and active power of the Word in the life of the believer and the church.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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