

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 2: THE PRE-EXISTENCE AND ETERNAL SONSHIP OF CHRIST

Lesson 5

Old Testament Christophanies and Messianic Prophecy

Christ Before the Manger — Appearances and Promises

The Whole Old Testament Is Moving Toward Him

Key Texts: Genesis 3:15; Genesis 16:7–13; Exodus 3:2–6; Joshua 5:13–15; Daniel 3:25; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Daniel 7:13–14; Micah 5:2

“He Shall Crush Your Head”

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament is not a collection of ancient religious literature that happens to be followed by a New Testament. It is a single, unified, progressive narrative, the story of the God who made the world, whose world was plunged into ruin by human sin, and who immediately set in motion a plan of redemption that would take two thousand years of covenant history, hundreds of prophetic utterances, and a thousand sacrificial offerings to bring to its appointed fulfillment. From the first promise of a coming Seed in Genesis 3:15 to the last vision of Daniel’s Son of Man receiving an everlasting kingdom in Daniel 7, the Old Testament is a book animated by a single question that it raises but cannot fully answer within its own pages: Who is the One who is coming?

This lesson addresses that question from two angles. The first is the angle of Christophanies, pre-incarnate appearances of the Son of God in the Old Testament, moments in which the eternal Word who would become flesh in the fullness of time appeared in visible, often human form to specific individuals within the history of Israel. The second is the angle of Messianic prophecy, the progressive, cumulative, increasingly detailed revelation of the coming Redeemer across the entire span of the Old Testament canon, from the Protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 to the Servant Songs of Isaiah, from the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 to the heavenly Son of Man of Daniel 7. Together, these two angles of the Old Testament witness to Christ constitute what Jesus Himself claimed in John 5:39: that the Scriptures “testify about Me” (NASB 1995).

The theological stakes of this lesson extend well beyond the academic questions of Old Testament exegesis. If the Old Testament does not genuinely witness to Christ, if the Christophanies are not actually appearances of the pre-incarnate Son, and if the Messianic prophecies are not genuine predictions of the one who came, then the New Testament’s claim that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament is false, and the hermeneutical principle that gave the first disciples and the apostles their distinctive reading of Israel’s Scriptures is merely wishful retrospection. This lesson argues, on the contrary, that the Old Testament witness to Christ is genuine, specific, and historically verified by the one who came, and that the recognition of this witness is essential to the church’s faithful reading of the whole Bible as the Word of God.

I. CHRISTOPHANIES: THE PRE-INCARNATE SON IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Angel of the Lord and Other Appearances of the Eternal Word Before Bethlehem

A. Defining the Christophany

A Christophany is a pre-incarnate appearance of the second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son who would later become incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, in a visible, perceptible form within the history recorded in the Old Testament. The term is derived from the Greek *Christos* (the Anointed One) and *phainein* (to appear, to be visible). Christophanies are to be distinguished both from theophanies in general (any visible manifestation of God, which might refer to any Person of the Trinity) and from angelophanies (appearances of created angels). The specific claim of Christophany theology is that in certain Old Testament appearances of God in human or quasi-human form, it is the pre-incarnate Son who is appearing, the one who, in the fullness of time, would assume the human nature He temporarily displayed in these anticipatory manifestations.

The theological basis for this identification rests on several converging lines of evidence. First, the New Testament explicitly identifies the pre-incarnate Christ as the agent of certain Old Testament divine acts: 1 Corinthians 10:4 identifies the rock that followed Israel in the wilderness as Christ; John 12:41 identifies the glory that Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6 as the glory of Christ; Jude 5 (in the oldest manuscript tradition) identifies the one who delivered Israel from Egypt as Jesus. Second, the pattern of appearances in human form that are simultaneously identified with YHWH and yet distinguished from YHWH fits the Trinitarian pattern of the New Testament, in which the Son is both fully God and personally distinct from the Father. Third, the theological logic of incarnation suggests that the eternal Son's assumption of human nature in the fullness of time was the permanent form of a pattern of condescending, mediatorial presence that had been expressed proleptically throughout the Old Testament period.

B. The Angel of the Lord: YHWH and Yet Distinct from YHWH

The most significant and theologically rich category of Christophany in the Old Testament is the appearances of the Angel of the Lord (מלאך יהוה, *mal'ak YHWH*). This figure appears throughout the Old Testament in a pattern that is consistent and theologically remarkable: He is initially identified as a messenger or angel (*mal'ak*), but the narrative immediately begins to identify Him with YHWH Himself, and the human recipients of the appearance respond with worship that would be inappropriate if directed toward a created angel. The pattern is unmistakable and demands explanation: who is this figure who is both a messenger sent from YHWH and YHWH Himself?

The Christophany interpretation answers the question by identifying the Angel of the Lord with the pre-incarnate Son: the one who is sent by the Father (and therefore distinct from the Father, as the Angel is distinct from YHWH) and who is simultaneously fully divine (and therefore identified with YHWH, as the Angel is identified with YHWH). Consider the paradigmatic instance in Genesis 16:7–13. The Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar in the wilderness and speaks to her with divine authority: “I will greatly multiply your descendants” (v. 10, NASB 1995), a promise only YHWH can make. The narrative concludes with Hagar calling “the name of the LORD who spoke to her” (v. 13, NASB 1995), identifying the Angel explicitly with YHWH. Yet this YHWH has been sent to Hagar, has come to her in a particular place and time, and is distinct from the YHWH who sent Him, a pattern perfectly

consistent with the Trinitarian theology of the New Testament, in which the Son is both fully God and the one sent by the Father.

C. Key Christophanic Passages

Genesis 22:11–18 presents the Angel of the Lord appearing to Abraham at the binding of Isaac, speaking in the first person with divine authority (“By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD”, v. 16, NASB 1995), and pronouncing a blessing that can only come from the one, true God. Exodus 3:2–6 records the appearance of the Angel of the Lord in the burning bush; the narrative immediately transitions from the Angel to YHWH Himself (“God called to him from the midst of the bush”, v. 4, NASB 1995), and the one who appears identifies Himself as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (v. 6, NASB 1995). Moses’ response, “he hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (v. 6, NASB 1995), confirms that he is in the presence of the divine, not merely a created messenger.

Judges 13:3–22 records the Angel of the Lord’s appearance to Manoah and his wife to announce the birth of Samson. When Manoah asks the Angel’s name, He replies: “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” (v. 18, NASB 1995), the Hebrew word translated “wonderful” (פלאי, pil’i) is the same root used in Isaiah 9:6 for the name of the coming Messianic King: “Wonderful Counselor.” Manoah and his wife respond with the terror appropriate to divine encounter: “We shall surely die, for we have seen God” (v. 22, NASB 1995). And Joshua 5:13–15 records the appearance of the “commander of the army of the LORD” to Joshua before the battle of Jericho, a figure before whom Joshua falls on his face in worship, and who commands Joshua to remove his sandals because the ground is holy, an exact parallel to the divine command at the burning bush.

The fourth figure in the furnace of Daniel 3:25 presents a particularly striking instance. Nebuchadnezzar, looking into the furnace into which he had thrown Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, declares: “I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods” (Daniel 3:25, NASB 1995). The pagan king’s description, “like a son of the gods”, is an unwitting testimony to the reality: the pre-incarnate Son of God walking in the fire with His suffering servants, a visible anticipation of the one who would later say, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NASB 1995).

“The LORD who spoke to her.” | “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.” | “The appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

GENESIS 16:13; JUDGES 13:22; DANIEL 3:25, NASB 1995

II. THE PROTOEVANGELIUM: THE FIRST PROMISE OF CHRIST

Genesis 3:15, The Seed That Will Crush the Serpent’s Head

A. The Promise in Its Context

The first promise of a coming Redeemer in all of Scripture appears in the darkest moment of the biblical narrative, in the immediate aftermath of the fall, when the Creator confronts the serpent who has led His image-bearers into rebellion. Genesis 3:15, traditionally called the Protoevangelium (“first gospel” from the Latin *proto*, “first,” and *evangelium*, “good news”), is God’s address to the serpent: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (NASB 1995).

The enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent establishes the great conflict that will run through the entire biblical narrative: the conflict between those who belong to God and those who belong to the evil one, between the line of promise and the line of opposition, between the covenant community and the forces arrayed against it. But the promise is not merely about a collective conflict; it narrows, with the shift to the singular pronoun “He,” to a specific individual who will deliver the decisive, crushing blow to the serpent. The Hebrew word for “bruise” or “crush” (שׁוּף, *shuph*) is the same in both clauses: the seed of the woman will crush the serpent’s head; the serpent will bruise the heel of the seed. The contrast is between a mortal wound (the head) and a temporary one (the heel), the seed of the woman will suffer, but the suffering will be the means of the serpent’s destruction.

B. The New Testament Fulfillment

The apostolic reading of Genesis 3:15 sees in this first promise the entire gospel in compressed form. Paul’s declaration in Romans 16:20, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (NASB 1995), deliberately echoes the language of Genesis 3:15, applying it to the eschatological victory of Christ in which believers share. Hebrews 2:14 makes the christological fulfillment explicit: “That through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” The cross is the heel-wound of Genesis 3:15, the suffering of the seed of the woman at the hands of the serpent’s power. The resurrection is the crushing of the head, the decisive, irreversible defeat of the serpent’s authority over the children of God.

The genius of the Protoevangelium as a summary of the gospel is its compression: in a single verse, God announces the conflict (enmity), the combatants (the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent), the outcome (the serpent’s head crushed), the cost (the wound to the heel of the seed), and the agent (He, a specific individual). The whole of redemptive history is the progressive unfolding of this first promise. Every subsequent covenant, every subsequent prophecy, every subsequent type and shadow is an elaboration of what was announced in this inaugural gospel declaration. And the one who stood in the darkness of Eden and made this promise is the eternal Son who, in the fullness of time, would be born of a woman, the seed of the woman, to accomplish what was promised here.

III. THE PROGRESSIVE UNFOLDING OF MESSIANIC PROPHECY

From the Seed of Abraham to the Son of Man, The Cumulative Portrait of the Coming One

A. The Seed of Abraham: Genesis 12:1–3 and Galatians 3:16

The second great pillar of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament is the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12:1–3. God’s call to Abraham contains a promise of universal scope and cosmic significance: “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3, NASB 1995). The promise narrows progressively through the patriarchal narratives, from Abraham to Isaac (not Ishmael), from Isaac to Jacob (not Esau), from Jacob to Judah (Genesis 49:10), and eventually to David and his line (2 Samuel 7:12–16). The narrowing is not merely genealogical; it is redemptive-historical, tracking the covenant line through which the promised blessing will come to the nations.

Paul’s exegesis of Genesis 12:3 in Galatians 3:16 provides the decisive christological reading of the Abrahamic promise: “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ” (NASB 1995). Paul’s argument from the singular “seed” (זרע, *zera’* in Hebrew; σπέρμα, *sperma* in Greek) has been criticized as a grammatical sleight of hand, both Hebrew and Greek collective nouns regularly refer to a collective in the singular. But Paul’s point is not grammatical; it is theological. The Old Testament itself tracks the “seed” promise through an increasingly narrow genealogical line until it reaches a single individual in whom the entire promise is concentrated. That single individual, Paul declares under apostolic authority, is Christ. The blessing of Abraham comes to the nations in and through the one seed, Jesus Christ.

B. The Davidic King: 2 Samuel 7:12–16 and the Eternal Throne

The Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 represents the most specific and the most politically concrete of the Old Testament Messianic promises. God’s word to David through the prophet Nathan establishes a covenant that reaches beyond any merely human dynasty: “I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:12–13, NASB 1995). The promise of an eternal throne, “your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever” (v. 16, NASB 1995), exceeds anything that could be fulfilled by a merely human descendant of David. Human kingdoms end; human kings die. The covenant promise reaches beyond the whole succession of Davidic kings to one in whom the promise finds its ultimate and permanent fulfillment.

The New Testament opens with the declaration that Jesus is “the son of David” (Matthew 1:1) and closes with the vision of the one who holds “the key of David” (Revelation 3:7). The angel Gabriel

announces to Mary that “the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:32–33, NASB 1995), language that is unmistakably drawn from 2 Samuel 7. Peter’s Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:29–36) interprets the resurrection as the enthronement of the Davidic King on the eternal throne: David died and was buried, but the one of whom he spoke, the one whose soul was not abandoned to Hades and whose flesh did not see corruption, was raised and exalted to the right hand of God. The resurrection is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

C. The Virgin Birth Foretold: Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 7:14 is one of the most contested texts in all of Old Testament Messianic prophecy: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel” (NASB 1995). The Hebrew word translated “virgin” is עלמה (*‘almah*), which means a young woman of marriageable age, and which in its Old Testament usage consistently refers to an unmarried woman, a virgin. The Septuagint translators rendered it with the unambiguous Greek word παρθένος (*parthenos*), which does mean a virgin in the strict sense, and Matthew 1:23 cites the Septuagint reading as the fulfillment of the prophecy in the birth of Jesus.

The historical dimension of the prophecy, its immediate context in the Syro-Ephraimite crisis of Ahaz’s reign (Isaiah 7:1–12), has led critical scholars to argue that the prophecy has nothing to do with a virgin birth centuries later. The orthodox response is to recognize the prophetic pattern of multiple fulfillment: the prophecy has a near fulfillment in the historical context of Ahaz’s crisis and an ultimate fulfillment in the birth of Jesus, the one whose very name, Immanuel (עִמָּנוּאֵל, ‘God with us’), announces the full theological weight of the incarnation. The ultimate fulfillment does not negate the historical dimension; it discloses the depth of a prophecy that was always pointing, through and beyond its immediate context, to the one in whom God would be with His people in the most absolute and irreversible sense possible.

D. The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 52:13–53:12

The fourth and greatest Servant Song of Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13–53:12) is the most detailed, most theologically comprehensive, and most explicitly fulfilled of all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. It is cited more frequently in the New Testament than any other single Old Testament passage, and it provides the apostolic community with the primary interpretive framework for understanding the atoning significance of the cross. The Servant is introduced in Isaiah 52:13 with a declaration of ultimate exaltation (“My Servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted”, NASB 1995) that immediately plunges into a description of suffering and disfigurement so severe that “his appearance was marred more than any man” (v. 14, NASB 1995).

The penal substitutionary theology of Isaiah 53 is expressed with a clarity that makes it the most direct Old Testament anticipation of the New Testament’s doctrine of the atonement. “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried... But He was pierced through for our

transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:4–6, NASB 1995). The substitutionary logic is explicit: our griefs, our transgressions, our iniquities borne by the Servant; His suffering producing our healing, our peace, our forgiveness. Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–35 illustrates the apostolic hermeneutic: when asked “About whom does the prophet say this?” Philip “opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him” (v. 35, NASB 1995).

E. The Son of Man: Daniel 7:13–14

The vision of Daniel 7 brings the Messianic expectation of the Old Testament to its most exalted and most cosmic expression. In the vision, “one like a Son of Man” comes “with the clouds of heaven” to the “The Ancient of Days” and receives a dominion, glory, and kingdom that is universal, eternal, and indestructible: “His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14, NASB 1995). The figure is simultaneously human (“like a Son of Man”) and divine, He approaches the Ancient of Days (God) on the clouds of heaven, a mode of travel reserved in the Old Testament for YHWH Himself (Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1).

Jesus’ appropriation of the title “Son of Man” as His preferred self-designation throughout the Gospels is a deliberate claim to be the figure of Daniel 7. At the climactic moment of His trial before the Sanhedrin, when the high priest demands whether He is the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus replies: “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62, NASB 1995), a fusion of Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1 that constitutes the most explicit and the most consequential of all His messianic self-declarations. The Sanhedrin understood the claim perfectly, and condemned Him for blasphemy. The church confesses, on the contrary, that He was telling the truth: He is the Son of Man of Daniel’s vision, the one to whom all dominion and glory and kingdom have been given.

“He shall bruise you on the head.” | “But He was pierced through for our transgressions.” | “His dominion is an everlasting dominion.”

GENESIS 3:15; ISAIAH 53:5; DANIEL 7:14, NASB 1995

IV. THE HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE: A CHRISTOLOGICAL READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

How to Read the Old Testament as Testimony to Christ Without Allegorism or Reductionism

A. Christ as the Fulfillment, Not the Replacement

The recognition that the Old Testament witnesses to Christ in Christophanies and Messianic prophecy raises an urgent hermeneutical question: how do we read the Old Testament christologically without flattening it into a mere collection of predictive proof-texts or collapsing its genuine historical meaning into an allegorical system? The answer lies in the distinction between typology and allegory, and in the understanding of “fulfillment” that the New Testament itself employs.

Jesus declares in Matthew 5:17: “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill” (NASB 1995). The Greek word translated “fulfill” is πληρόω (plēroō), which means to fill up, to bring to its full intended meaning, to complete what was partial or anticipatory. Christ is not the replacement of the Old Testament but its completion. He does not render the Old Testament obsolete by fulfilling it; He reveals the depth of meaning that the Old Testament always contained but that could only be fully seen in retrospect, from the vantage point of His coming. The Exodus is still a historical event; it is also the typological pattern of the greater redemption. The Passover lamb is still a specific historical institution; it is also the shadow of the true Passover Lamb. The Davidic kingship is still a political and historical reality; it is also the anticipatory form of the eternal kingdom.

B. The Apostolic Hermeneutic

The christological reading of the Old Testament is not a later imposition on a prior tradition that originally meant something different; it is the hermeneutic of the apostles themselves, received from the risen Christ who “beginning with Moses and with all the prophets... explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27, NASB 1995). The hermeneutical principle is not that every passage of the Old Testament is directly about Christ in its primary, grammatical-historical sense, but that the entire Old Testament, rightly understood in its canonical shape and redemptive-historical movement, bears witness to Christ as its center, goal, and fulfillment.

This means that the faithful preacher of the Old Testament will do at least three things. First, he will interpret each passage in its own historical and literary context, attending to what the human author said and what his original audience would have understood. Second, he will trace the canonical connections, the way in which each passage fits into the larger redemptive-historical narrative of the Old Testament, participating in the progressive movement toward the promised Redeemer. Third, he will read each passage in the light of its New Testament fulfillment, not imposing a christological meaning that is foreign to the text, but disclosing the deeper christological significance that was always present but only partially visible before the fullness of time had come.

V. THE PROPHETIC TESTIMONY TO THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Isaiah 7:14 and the Sign That Points Beyond Its Immediate Context

Isaiah 7:14 deserves extended treatment both because of its importance for the New Testament's account of the birth of Jesus and because of the intensity of the exegetical debate it has generated. The context is the Syro-Ephraimite war (c. 734 BC), in which the kingdoms of Syria and northern Israel have formed a coalition against Judah. The Judahite king Ahaz, paralyzed by fear, refuses to ask God for a sign, and God responds by offering an unsolicited sign: a young woman ('almah) will conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel, and before the child is old enough to discern good from evil, the threatening kingdoms of Syria and Israel will be devastated.

The immediate referent of the sign, the child who will be born within the near-term historical horizon of Ahaz's crisis, has been variously identified as Isaiah's own son (Isaiah 8:3–4), Hezekiah (though the chronology makes this difficult), or an otherwise unnamed child born at the time. Whatever the near-term historical fulfillment, the theological logic of the sign exceeds its immediate context in two ways. First, the name "Immanuel" ("God with us") is too theologically loaded to be permanently exhausted by a merely historical child; it points toward a presence of God with His people that only the incarnation of the eternal Son can fully realize. Second, Matthew's authoritative apostolic interpretation, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, identifies the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 in the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary, and this apostolic identification carries decisive hermeneutical authority for the church's reading of the text.

The 'almah of Isaiah 7:14 is a young woman; the Septuagint's parthenos is a virgin. The historical child of Ahaz's day may have been born of a young woman in the ordinary sense; the ultimate fulfillment in Jesus is born of a virgin by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. The sign escalates from the near to the far, from the historically modest to the cosmically unprecedented, in the pattern that characterizes the deepest prophetic fulfillments of the Old Testament: the near fulfillment is real, but it is a shadow of the ultimate fulfillment that gives the near fulfillment its full theological significance. Immanuel, God with us. In the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary, God is with us not merely as a providential deliverer of a beleaguered kingdom, but as the incarnate Son, dwelling among us in the fullest and most permanent sense possible.

"Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

ISAIAH 7:14, NASB 1995

VI. DOXOLOGICAL CONCLUSION: THE WHOLE BIBLE IS ABOUT HIM

The two angels who appeared to the disciples after the ascension asked the question that the entire Old Testament asks from Genesis 3:15 onward: “Why do you stand looking into the sky?” (Acts 1:11, NASB 1995). The question is rhetorical; the answer is implied. The one they are looking for has already come. The Christophanies were the anticipatory appearances of the one who would come permanently and fully in the incarnation. The Messianic prophecies were the progressive, cumulative portrait of the one who came, born of a woman (Galatians 4:4), of the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), of the line of David (Romans 1:3), born of a virgin (Matthew 1:23), the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53), the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13), the one whose goings forth are from the days of eternity (Micah 5:2). He came. The promises found their Yes in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20).

The proper response to this recognition is not merely intellectual satisfaction but doxological wonder. The God who planted the first promise in the darkness of Eden, who nurtured and developed that promise across two thousand years of covenant history, who appeared proleptically in burning bush and fiery furnace and wrestling match and heavenly vision, this God did not abandon His people to the silence between the Testaments. He was at work, always at work, always moving toward the moment when “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14, NASB 1995). The Old Testament is not a different religion; it is the first act of the same drama, and Christ is the protagonist of both acts. Every Christophany is a grace; every prophecy is a mercy; and the fulfillment of all of them in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is the greatest demonstration of the faithfulness of God in all of history.

The preacher who has walked through this lesson is equipped not merely with a set of proof-texts for apologetic purposes but with a vision of the entire Bible as a unified testimony to Jesus Christ, a vision that should transform the way he reads the Old Testament, the way he preaches from it, and the way he leads his congregation into the inexhaustible riches of the whole counsel of God. Every bush that burns without being consumed whispers His name. Every angel who refuses worship points toward the one who deserves it. Every prophecy of a coming king, a suffering servant, a heavenly Son of Man is a thread in the tapestry that the Spirit was weaving across the centuries, preparing the world for the one of whom Moses and all the prophets spoke. He came. He shall come again. And the whole Bible is the story of both.

Key Texts: *Genesis 3:15; Genesis 16:7–13; Exodus 3:2–6; Joshua 5:13–15; Judges 13:3–22; Daniel 3:25; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Daniel 7:13–14; Micah 5:2; Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:27*

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Christophany	A pre-incarnate appearance of the second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son, in visible, often human form within the history recorded in the Old Testament. Distinguished from theophanies in general (any visible manifestation of God) and from angelophanies (appearances of created angels). The theological basis for identifying certain Old Testament divine appearances as Christophanies includes: (1) explicit New Testament identifications of the pre-incarnate Christ as the agent of certain Old Testament events; (2) the pattern of figures who are simultaneously identified with YHWH and yet distinct from YHWH, fitting the Trinitarian pattern of the New Testament; and (3) the theological logic of the incarnation as the permanent form of a pattern of mediatorial presence expressed proleptically in the Old Testament.
Angel of the Lord	The Hebrew <i>mal'ak YHWH</i> , a figure who appears throughout the Old Testament in a pattern consistently identifying Him with YHWH Himself while simultaneously distinguishing Him from YHWH as one sent from YHWH. Human recipients respond with worship appropriate to the divine, and the narrative freely alternates between calling this figure the 'Angel of the Lord' and calling Him 'the LORD.' The Christophany interpretation identifies this figure with the pre-incarnate Son: the one who is sent by the Father (and therefore distinct from the Father) and who is simultaneously fully divine (and therefore identified with YHWH). Key appearances include Genesis 16:7–13; 22:11–18; Exodus 3:2–6; Judges 6:11–23; 13:3–22; Joshua 5:13–15.
Protoevangelium	Latin: 'first gospel.' The term used for Genesis 3:15, the first promise of a coming Redeemer in Scripture, delivered by God to the serpent in the immediate aftermath of the fall: 'He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.' The Protoevangelium establishes the great conflict of redemptive history (the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent), identifies a specific individual who will deliver the decisive blow (the singular 'He'), and anticipates both the suffering of the Redeemer (the bruising of the heel, the cross) and His ultimate victory (the crushing of the head, the resurrection and the final defeat of Satan). The whole of subsequent Messianic prophecy is an elaboration of this first promise.
Messianic Prophecy	Old Testament predictions, promises, and anticipations of the coming Messiah (<i>משיח</i> , <i>mashiach</i> , 'the Anointed One'), the one who would fulfill the roles of prophet, priest, and king and accomplish the redemption that the covenant community awaited. Messianic prophecy is progressive and cumulative: each subsequent covenant and prophetic utterance adds detail, specificity, and depth to the portrait of the coming one begun in Genesis 3:15. The New Testament's consistent claim is that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of this

Term	Definition
	cumulative prophetic expectation, not a fulfillment that reads meaning into the texts from outside, but the fulfillment that discloses the depth of meaning the texts always contained.
Typology	The hermeneutical principle by which certain persons, events, institutions, and offices in the Old Testament (types) are understood to prefigure or foreshadow corresponding realities in the New Testament (antitypes), most often centered on the person and work of Christ. Typology is grounded in the theological unity of the two Testaments: because the same God who governed the old covenant governs the new, and because the old covenant was always oriented toward the new, the institutions and persons of the old covenant bear a structural resemblance to their New Testament fulfillments that is the result of divine intentionality, not hermeneutical imagination. Distinguished from allegory: typology attends to the genuine historical meaning of the type, while allegory tends to abandon the historical referent in favor of a symbolic meaning.
Davidic Covenant	The covenant God established with David through the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 7:8–16), promising that David’s descendant would rule on an eternal throne: ‘Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.’ The Davidic covenant is the most politically concrete and dynastically specific of the Old Testament Messianic promises, and it provides the primary framework for the New Testament’s understanding of Jesus as the Son of David who reigns on an eternal throne. The promise of an eternal throne exceeds anything a merely human Davidic king could fulfill, pointing toward the one in whom the Davidic promise finds its ultimate and permanent realization: the risen and ascended Jesus, seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:29–36).
Suffering Servant	The figure of Isaiah’s four Servant Songs (Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) who suffers on behalf of others and whose suffering accomplishes their healing and reconciliation to God. The fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12) is the most theologically explicit, expressing penal substitutionary theology with remarkable clarity: the Servant bears the transgressions of others, is crushed for their iniquities, and by His wounds they are healed. The New Testament universally applies these texts to Jesus: Matthew 8:17; Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32–35; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 2:22–25. Isaiah 53 is the most frequently cited Old Testament chapter in the New Testament and the primary Old Testament source for the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.
Son of Man	The title drawn from Daniel 7:13–14, where ‘one like a Son of Man’ receives from the Ancient of Days an everlasting dominion, glory, and kingdom. The figure is simultaneously human (‘like a Son of Man’) and divine, He comes on the clouds of heaven, a mode associated with YHWH in the Old Testament. Jesus adopts this as His preferred self-designation throughout the Gospels,

Term	Definition
	<p>claiming the title most explicitly at His trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:62). The Son of Man title expresses both the genuine humanity of Christ (He is the true human being, the Second Adam, who recapitulates and fulfills human history) and His divine authority as the one to whom all dominion has been given by the Father.</p>
<p>'Almah / Parthenos</p>	<p>The Hebrew 'almah (עלמה) used in Isaiah 7:14 refers to a young woman of marriageable age; in all its Old Testament occurrences, the term consistently describes unmarried women, i.e., virgins. The Septuagint rendered 'almah with the unambiguous Greek parthenos (παρθένος), meaning 'virgin' in the strict sense. Matthew 1:23 cites the Septuagint reading as fulfilled in the virginal conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The debate over whether 'almah necessarily means 'virgin' in Isaiah 7:14 is legitimate; the apostolic interpretation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit identifies the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy as a genuine virginal conception, decisively settling the question of what the text ultimately points toward.</p>
<p>Multiple Fulfillment</p>	<p>The hermeneutical principle by which certain Old Testament prophecies have both a near historical fulfillment within the prophet's own timeframe and an ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. Multiple fulfillment is not a concession to the critics' claim that the prophecies are not predictive; it is the recognition that the prophetic word is dense and multilayered, addressing immediate historical realities while simultaneously pointing beyond them to the eschatological realities they typologically anticipate. Isaiah 7:14 is the paradigmatic example: the near fulfillment involves a child born in Ahaz's day; the ultimate fulfillment is the virginal conception and birth of Immanuel, the eternal Son made flesh.</p>

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the Old Testament is genuinely, specifically, and historically predictive of Jesus Christ, not in the sense that every passage has a direct, univocal reference to Him, but in the sense that the entire canon, rightly understood in its canonical shape and redemptive-historical movement, bears witness to Him as its center and fulfillment. The Christophanies are not merely ancient religious experiences that Christians have retrospectively interpreted as encounters with Christ; they are genuine pre-incarnate appearances of the eternal Son, grounded in the New Testament's own identification of Christ as the agent of certain Old Testament divine acts. The Messianic prophecies are not merely religious aspirations that coincidentally resemble the life of Jesus; they are specific, historically verified predictions whose fulfillment in Jesus constitutes one of the most powerful evidential confirmations of the divine origin of Scripture.

We must also believe that the christological reading of the Old Testament is not a hermeneutical imposition from without but the hermeneutical principle that the Old Testament itself demands and the risen Christ Himself established. Luke 24:27 is the charter of Christian Old Testament hermeneutics: the risen Christ "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets... explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." The preacher who does not read the Old Testament in this way is not being more faithful to the original intention of the text; he is being less faithful, because he is reading the text apart from the interpretive key that its divine Author intends.

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

Let the Christophanies fill you with a sense of the patience and the condescension of God. The eternal Son who upholds all things by the word of His power appeared to Hagar in the wilderness, to Abraham on Mount Moriah, to Moses in the burning bush, to Joshua before the walls of Jericho, to the three Hebrew men in the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar. He was not distant; He was present. He was not silent; He was speaking. And every one of these appearances was a foretaste of the definitive, permanent, incarnate presence that would come in the fullness of time. The God who appeared to Hagar in her abandonment is the same God who appears to us in our abandonment, and He has done so, finally and fully, in the flesh of His eternal Son.

Desire a preaching and teaching ministry of the Old Testament that is genuinely christological, not artificially forced, not allegorically imposed, but organically and redemptive-historically grounded. The congregation that hears the Old Testament read as a genuinely messianic document, that sees the Protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, the Son of Man in Daniel 7, the eternal King in 2 Samuel 7, is a congregation that understands the entire Bible as one story with one hero. Let that vision animate your preparation of every sermon from the Old Testament.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read Graeme Goldsworthy's *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* as your primary methodological guide for christological Old Testament preaching. Goldsworthy provides the most accessible and theologically sound treatment of the hermeneutical principles that should govern the preacher's movement from any Old Testament text to Christ. Supplement it with Edmund Clowney's *The Unfolding Mystery* and Sidney Greidanus's *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* for additional methodological resources.
- Work through Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in its Hebrew original or in a thorough commentary. This is the single most important Old Testament text for understanding the atonement, and the preacher who has worked through it carefully will find it illuminating every subsequent engagement with the New Testament's doctrine of the cross. John Oswalt's commentary in the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* series provides both exegetical rigor and theological depth.
- Develop a clear, teachable explanation of the Christophany tradition for your congregation. Most ordinary believers have never heard of Christophanies and are unaware that the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is a significant theological figure. A Sunday School series or a mid-week study walking through the major Christophanic passages, Genesis 16, Exodus 3, Judges 13, Joshua 5, Daniel 3, will equip your congregation with a richer and more unified understanding of the whole Bible.
- Engage the critical debates about Isaiah 7:14 and Daniel 7:13–14 with confidence and scholarly competence. Both texts are flashpoints in the ongoing debate between evangelical and critical Old Testament scholarship. The preacher who has worked through the exegetical issues, the meaning of 'almah, the date and context of Daniel 7, the hermeneutics of multiple fulfillment, can address the questions his congregation will encounter from critical sources with both intellectual integrity and pastoral clarity.
- Preach through the Servant Songs of Isaiah (Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52–53) as a standalone series, or integrate them into a series on the atonement. The four Servant Songs together provide a comprehensive and deeply moving portrait of the person and work of Christ that is, in many ways, more emotionally accessible than the more doctrinal treatments of the New Testament. The congregation that has sat with Isaiah 53, 'He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities', has encountered the gospel at a depth that no merely systematic presentation can fully replicate.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. Before studying this lesson, how did you typically approach the Old Testament in your preaching and devotional reading? Did you read it primarily as the background to the New Testament, as a source of moral and spiritual instruction in its own right, or as a genuinely christological document pointing toward Christ? How has this lesson affected or challenged that approach?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

2. Read Genesis 16:7–13 and Exodus 3:1–6 carefully. In each passage, identify the specific points at which the Angel of the Lord is distinguished from YHWH and the points at which He is identified with YHWH. How do the human recipients respond to this figure? What does the pattern of distinction-within-identification suggest about the identity of this figure in light of New Testament Trinitarian theology?

3. Read Genesis 3:14–15 in its context. Who is the speaker, who is being addressed, and what is the content of the promise? Identify the specific elements of the promise that point beyond the immediate historical context to an ultimate fulfillment: the singular 'He,' the language of crushing and bruising, the enmity between two 'seeds.' How does Hebrews 2:14 illuminate the New Testament understanding of the fulfillment of this promise?

4. Read Isaiah 53:1–12 carefully and slowly. List every specific claim the prophet makes about the Servant's suffering, its cause, and its effect. Pay particular attention to the substitutionary language in verses 4–6 ('He bore our griefs,' 'He was pierced for our transgressions,' 'the iniquity of us all fell on Him'). How does the prophet describe the Servant's ultimate vindication? What does 1 Peter 2:24–25 add to our understanding of the New Testament fulfillment of this passage?

5. Read Daniel 7:9–14 and Mark 14:60–64. Identify the specific language from Daniel 7:13 that Jesus employs in His answer to the high priest at Mark 14:62, and explain the christological claim He is making. Why does the high priest respond by accusing Jesus of blasphemy? What does this response reveal about the high priest's understanding of what Jesus was claiming?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

6. The lesson identifies the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament as the pre-incarnate Son of God, arguing that the pattern of identification-within-distinction fits the Trinitarian theology of the New Testament. Some scholars resist this identification, arguing that the Angel of the Lord is simply a divine messenger who speaks with divine authority but is not to be identified with any particular

Person of the Trinity. Evaluate the arguments on both sides. What is the strongest evidence for the Christophany interpretation, and what is the strongest objection to it?

7. The lesson argues that Paul's exegesis in Galatians 3:16, reading the singular 'seed' of Genesis 12:7 as a reference to Christ, is not a grammatical sleight of hand but a theological argument rooted in the progressive narrowing of the covenant promise through the Old Testament. Trace the narrowing of the 'seed' promise from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Judah to David in the Old Testament narrative. How does this canonical pattern support Paul's christological reading?

8. The lesson introduces the hermeneutical principle of 'multiple fulfillment' in connection with Isaiah 7:14, the idea that a prophecy can have both a near historical fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Evaluate this principle. Is it exegetically defensible, or does it risk making the Old Testament mean whatever the interpreter wants it to mean? What controls or guidelines would you propose for the legitimate use of the multiple fulfillment principle?

9. The lesson distinguishes between typology (which attends to the genuine historical meaning of the type) and allegory (which tends to abandon the historical referent in favor of a symbolic meaning). Using one of the Christophanic passages or Messianic prophecies studied in this lesson, demonstrate the difference between a typological and an allegorical reading. What is gained and what is lost in each approach?

10. The lesson claims that the christological reading of the Old Testament is not imposed from without but is demanded by the Old Testament itself and established by the risen Christ in Luke 24:27. Do you agree? What implications does this claim have for the way the church reads, preaches, and teaches the Old Testament? Is it possible to read the Old Testament faithfully without reading it christologically?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson recommends developing a clear, teachable explanation of the Christophany tradition for your congregation. How would you introduce the concept of a Christophany to a congregation that has never encountered the term? What passage would you choose as your primary illustration, and why? How would you explain the theological significance of the Christophanic pattern for the congregation's understanding of the whole Bible?

12. The lesson argues that Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the single most important Old Testament text for understanding the atonement. When did you last preach or teach from this passage? If you were to plan a sermon or a series on the Servant Songs, how would you structure it? What specific themes from Isaiah 53 do you find most neglected in contemporary evangelical preaching, and how would you address that neglect?

13. The lesson describes the Protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 as the entire gospel in compressed form. How would you preach this verse as a complete christological and soteriological statement, not merely as an introductory data-point in a larger series on redemptive history, but as a fully sufficient summary of the gospel that can bear the full weight of the good news? What connections to the New Testament would you draw, and how would you make them accessible to a general congregation?

14. This lesson completes Unit 2 of the Christology series, on the Pre-Existence and Eternal Sonship of Christ. Looking back over Lessons 3, 4, and 5 together, the eternal pre-existence of the Son, the eternal generation of the Son, and the Old Testament witness to the Son, what single truth has most transformed your understanding of who Christ is before Bethlehem? How does that truth change the way you approach the incarnation, which begins in Lesson 6?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of Luke 24:13–35, the road to Emmaus, the most vivid and the most moving account in all the Gospels of what it looks like when the risen Christ opens the Old Testament to the eyes of those who have been unable to see it. Read the passage as a group, attending especially to verse 27: "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." Pause on that phrase. Beginning with Moses. With all the prophets. Things concerning Himself. In all the Scriptures. This is the risen Christ establishing the christological hermeneutic that should govern the church's reading of the whole Bible. And notice that when He does so, the disciples' hearts "were burning within" them (v. 32, NASB 1995). The christological reading of the Old Testament is not an academic exercise; it is a fire.

Spend time in adoration of the patient, faithful, promise-keeping God who planted the first gospel in the darkness of Genesis 3 and did not rest until it had blossomed into full flower in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of His eternal Son. Adore Him for the Christophanies, for the fact that He did not leave His people without His presence during the long centuries of the old covenant, but appeared to them in burning bush and fiery furnace and wrestling match and heavenly vision, always the same Son who would one day come permanently and fully in the flesh. Adore Him for the prophecies, for the extraordinary, specific, historically verified testimony of the prophets who spoke of the one who would come, centuries before He came, with a precision that only the God who governs history could have inspired.

Pray for the gift of christological eyes to read the whole Bible. Ask God, by His Spirit, to open the Scriptures to you as the risen Christ opened them to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, so that every burning bush you encounter in your reading reminds you of the one who appeared in it; every Passover lamb reminds you of the one it prefigured; every Suffering Servant reminds you of the one who bore your griefs and your iniquities; every heavenly Son of Man reminds you of the one to whom all dominion has been given. Ask for hearts that burn within you when the Scriptures are opened, because you are seeing Him in them.

Pray also for the Messianic Jewish community, for Jewish believers in Jesus who live at the intersection of the two testaments with unique intensity, and for Jewish people who have not yet recognized in Jesus the fulfillment of the promises made to their fathers. The promises were spoken to Israel; the fulfillment came through Israel; and the invitation to receive the fulfillment remains open to every Israelite who will say with the early disciples: "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41, NASB 1995). Pray that God would open the eyes of Jewish people everywhere to see in Jesus of Nazareth the one of whom Moses and all the prophets spoke.

Close with a meditative reading of Isaiah 9:6–7, standing together before the most comprehensive Messianic announcement in all of the Old Testament:

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

ISAIAH 9:6–7, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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