

Old Testament Arrangement, Background, and Theme

Overview of the entire Old Testament

The **Old Testament** is God's *self-revelation* of His own **nature** and His own **plan** of **salvation**. It also reveals the **nature** and **purpose** for the existence of **all created things**. Being **God's very Words**, it discloses to us that **God** is the **One** great **Reality** in the world, the **Creator** and **Sustainer** of **all** that is. It shows us how His creation of **time, space, and matter** are the **stage** on which **God** is **revealing** His own plans and purposes for humanity, who **exist** for the **display** of His own **glory** and **excellence** as **God**. As God's *self-revelation* we therefore learn much about **who God is** and **what He is like**. We learn what **God** in His **sovereign will** has decided to **reveal** to **us**, and yet many things remain unknown.

Deuteronomy 29:29 - 29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, **but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever**, that we may observe all the words of this law. NASB

If God had not **chosen** to **reveal Himself** to us, **He** would have remained **unknown**, but He has revealed Himself and the **Old Testament** gives us huge and **monumental revelations** about **who He is**. Therefore, we learn many things in many **different categories** about **God**, His **Creation**, His **attributes**, His **redemptive plans** and **purposes**. We also learn about **ourselves** including our **origins**, our **destiny** and the **purpose** and **reasons** why **we exist**. All of these things and many more are revealed, in some **large degree**, in the Old Testament.

Arrangement

Often times the **arrangement** of **OT books** are referred to in **groupings**. In the simplest form they are referred to as the **Law** and **Prophets**. An example would be **Jesus** speaking of the great commandment.

Matthew 22:36-40 - 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."** 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 **"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."** NASB

But **Jesus** would also refer to the **OT books** with another **group** added at times.

Luke 24:44-48 - 44 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." 45 Then He opened their minds to **understand the Scriptures** NASB Scholars have many different **groupings** of **OT books**, but it is important to understand that these groupings have a somewhat different **nature**, and therefore, serve **diverse purposes** of **God** in **revealing** His **Person**, His **Plan** and **Purposes**, and His **Glory**. In their most basic groups, we have:

Law – The Law includes **Genesis** thru **Deuteronomy**, the **Pentateuch** or **Torah**. These books were **written by Moses** and are the **basis** for all other **Biblical Revelation**. They tell us of the **One and only Living and True God**, who created all things **out of nothing**, for His **own purpose** and **glory**. They reveal through the **actual events** of **time**, how His **eternal plan** and **Decree** is unfolding through course of **human history**. **Genesis** covers the time between the **Creation** of **time** and **humanity**, through the lives of **Noah** and the **Flood**, and the **Patriarchs** Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, through the life of **Joseph** his favorite son. **Exodus** covers the time from **Israel** becoming a **multitude** to their Exodus from **slavery** in **Egypt**, and follows their desert migration to **Mount Sinai** and the **giving** of the **Law**, and the **assembly of the Tabernacle** and **inauguration** of the **Levitical Priesthood**. **Leviticus** through **Deuteronomy** covers the time from **Mount Sinai** and follows **Israel's wanderings** in the **desert** for **forty years** up to the **waters** of the **Jordan** at the edge of the **Promised Land**. **Abraham 200BC – Joshua 1400BC**

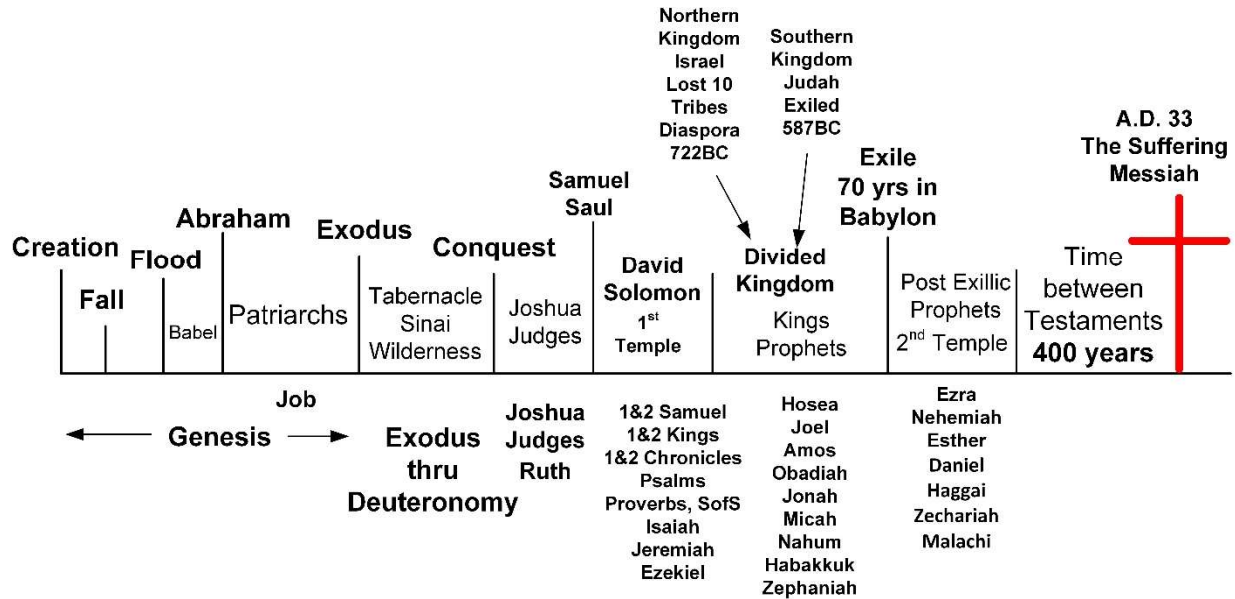
Prophets – The **Prophets** usually include the **Historical Books**, **Joshua** thru **2 Chronicles**, and the **Major** and **Minor Prophets**, **Isaiah** thru **Malachi**. These books chronicle the **life** and **times** of the **nation of Israel**, from the **Conquest** under **Joshua** to the **Kings**, the **Divided Kingdom**, the **Babylonian Exile** through to the **post-exilic prophets** and return to **Palestine**, such as **Haggai**, **Zechariah** and **Malachi**. **Conquest 1400BC – Exile/Malachi 600-430BC**

Writings – The writings usually include the **post-exilic historical** books of **Ezra** thru **Esther**, and the **Wisdom Literature**, **Job**, **Psalms**, **Proverbs** thru **Song of Songs**. **Psalms/Prov 1000-930BC – Post-exilic History/Prophets 570-430BC**

Chronology and Timeline

The **book order** does not necessarily exactly match in **linear time**. Consider the below timeline to see the arrangement of books and how they coincide with history.

Old Testament Timeline



Genre and Text Type

One other important consideration is that the **OT** books come with the variety different **categories of literature** and several different **types of text**. Knowing the **genre** and **type of text** can help with understanding, especially in difficult passages.

Genres

Genres are categories of literature that have **distinctive characteristics** and, as a result, **require** some particularized **reading strategies**. The **Bible** has **several** different **genres** within it, including: **Old Testament History, Prophetic Literature, Wisdom Literature, Apocalyptic Literature, Gospels and Acts, and Epistles**. The **genre** of a particular **Bible** passage is ordinarily identified by analysis of its general writing style, **tone**, form, structure, **literary technique**, content, design, and related **linguistic factors**; texts that exhibit a common set of literary features. In Biblical studies, **genres** are usually associated with **whole books** of the Bible, because each of its books comprises a complete **textual unit**; however, a book may be internally composed of a **variety of text types**, styles, forms, and so forth, and thus bear the characteristics of more than one genre. Example Exodus contains all **3 text types of narrative, discourse and poetry**.

- **Historical Narrative** – Text containing a **record** of actual events in **history**.

- **Wisdom Literature** – Text containing statements by **prophets** and the **wise** that offers teachings about **divinity** and **virtue**.
- **Prophetic Literature** – Text containing **revelations** from **God** communicated in visions, warnings, promises, admonitions, and predictions usually calling people to **repent** and conform to **divine commands** for obedience and **worship**.
- **Apocalyptic Literature** – Text of **prophetic genre** expressing its message through **visions** and **symbolism**. Parts of Joel, Zechariah and Isaiah 24-27, 33, Daniel 7-12.

Text Types

Text types are a slightly different idea from genres. **Text types** in literature form the basic **structure** and **styles** of **writing**. Genres are a bigger category and take into account things like content, place in history, form of literature, and rhetorical purpose. **Text types**, however, refer only to the **form** of the **text** in the passage.

- **Narrative** – Text that **tells a story** including setting, characters, plot, conflict and resolution. In the Bible, narrative contains a **record** of actual events in **history**.
- **Discourse** – Text that **instructs** and **explains** about simple or complex details with discussion and rhetoric common in speeches.
- **Poetry** – Text that expresses its message through rhythmical arrangement which purpose is to **stir** the **imagination** or and **emotion** common in song.

The Word of God

Since the **Bible** is **God's self-revelation** where He is disclosing to us things we could **not** have otherwise **known**, its character and nature is therefore **divine**. Although God does **ultimately reveal Himself** through the **Person** of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, who is Himself the **Word of God**, the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament are **God's very words** in written form. The Scriptures are **inspired by God** and given through **human authors** and are therefore *theopneustos* (Greek) or "**God-breathed.**" Paul speaks of the Old Testament explaining that it is **inspired** by **God**.

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

Verbal and **plenary** are terms used to define what we mean by **inspiration**. **Verbal** means that **every word in the original language** is inspired by God. **Plenary** means

that the **totality of scripture is inspired** including its concepts, numbers, names, and **every part** of the Scripture. Clearly Paul says here that **“all Scripture”** has come out of the **mouth of God**, that is, God's words were given through men **superintended by the Holy Spirit** so that their writings contain the very perfection and **inerrancy of God’s own Words**. And Peter says something very similar.

2 Peter 1:19-21 - 19 And so we have **the prophetic word made more sure**, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that **no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation**, 21 for **no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will**, but **men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God**. NASB

Let us therefore **heartily acknowledge** that when we **read** and **study** the **Old Testament**, we are studying **God’s very words**, and the **primary author** is the **Holy Spirit** of God Himself. Indeed, the **Scriptures** are the very Bread of Life for those who love and worship God.

Matthew 4:4 - But He answered and said, "It is written, **'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'**" NASB

Background, Theme and Meaning

Unity and Diversity in the Old Testament

Although the Old Testament is **very diverse** in its **historical narratives, wisdom** and **prophecy**, yet it is woven together with an amazing **unity**. Its 39 books and 32 authors, having been moved by God to write, carry a **central theme** through its entire corpus. Although there are **several themes** that can be traced through the OT, it all ultimately looks forward to **God’s Salvation** of **humanity** through the **Promised Messiah**, the Lord **Jesus Christ**. **Jesus** knew this about the **OT** and **explained this** to His disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:44-48 - 44 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." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus **it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day**; 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 "You are witnesses of these things. NASB

Thus, the **Old Testament** is a **story** that reveals **God's plan** of **salvation** through the course of **History**. The **Old Testament** is a **record of history**. His story! Therefore, it is specifically a **record of Salvation History** or **Redemptive History**. This accounts for the **Unity** that is in the **entire OT Narrative**, even as it is displayed in all its **Diversity**.

History of Salvation – Redemptive History

God has always had a **plan**, one which He has **decreed** should come to pass from **all eternity**.

Isaiah 46:9-10 - 9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, **10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';** NASB

After the **Old Testament** was accomplished and the **Promised Messiah** arrived, through **Jesus** and the **Apostles** in the **New Testament** Scriptures, God revealed the **mystery of His will** and **plan** from eternity, which was coming to **fulfilment in time** and **history** through **Christ**.

Ephesians 1:9-12 - 9 He made known to us **the mystery of His will**, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with **a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.** In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to **His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. NASB

Time and **history** **culminate** in the **Person** and **Work of Jesus**, the **One Savior** of humanity that is **promised** in the **Old Testament**.

Galatians 4:4-5 - 4 But **when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.** NASB

Salvation was **accomplished** therefore in the **life and death** of **Jesus**, bringing Justification as He lived a **perfect life** of **obedience** to God (active obedience), **AND bearing the sins** of God's people as a **sacrifice of atonement** in His **death** (passive obedience), which **benefits** are **imputed** to all who **trust Him** with true **saving faith**. This reconciled believing humanity to God and made regeneration

possible, rendering sin and death powerless. This was **powerfully proved** by His **resurrection** from the **dead**.

Christ in the Old Testament

Since **God's plan** focuses on **Christ** and **His Work** of **Salvation**, it is natural that all the **promises** of **God** and **symbols** in the Old Testament **point forward** to **Him**. Many places in the Old Testament have **explicit promises** concerning the coming of God's **anointed** One, the **Messiah**. The first of which appears in **Genesis 3:15** which is referred to as the **"proto-evangel."**

Genesis 3:15 - 15 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

The **entire** Old Testament is **full** of **Messianic pointers** and **predictions**, not only in its **explicit statements**, but also in its **types** and **symbols**. The **OT** is **full** of **promises** which find their **fulfilment** in **Jesus** the **Messiah**. As Paul stated to the Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 1:20 - 20 For **as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes;** wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. NASB

Jesus Himself **stated** this **truth** as he walked on the **road to Emmaus** with His disciples.

Luke 24:25-27 - 25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in **all that the prophets have spoken!** 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning **with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.** NASB

This was not just a **few** scattered **Scriptures** concerning Jesus, but an examination of **"Moses"** (Pentateuch) and **"all the prophets."**

Luke 24:44 - 44 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."

Jesus was quoting from all the **major sections** (Law, Prophets, Psalms) of the Old Testament the **"things concerning Himself"** and **"all things that are written about me."** Jesus said of the **Old Testament**, **"these bear witness of me."**

John 5:39-40 - 39 "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; **and it is these that bear witness of Me;** 40 and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life. NASB

Types, Shadows, Promise and Fulfilment

The **entire** Old Testament, through its **covenants** and **promises**, its **types** and **symbols**, and its **pictures** of **salvation**, looks forward to the **actual accomplishment** of **salvation** that took place **once for all** in the **life, death**, and **resurrection** of **Jesus Christ**. It also includes **promises** and **prophecies** of yet future saving acts, as well as **warnings** of **future judgements** at the **Second Coming** of **Christ**.

Therefore, since **Christ** is **central** to God's **eternal plan**, when we **examine** the **OT**, we do it with a certain **Promise/Fulfilment** framework which **points forward** to God's faithful **fulfilment** of His **promises** in **Christ the Messiah**. There are many **types, shadows** and **symbols** of **Christ** in the Old Testament.

Colossians 2:16-17 - 16 Therefore let no one act as your judge **in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day, 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ**. NASB

Many of the **types** (Typological Prophecies) and **shadows** (Col 2:17, Hebrews 8:5, 10:1) are **promises** in and of themselves, even though they often include warnings and curses. We see **types, shadows** and **symbols** of these in the **Covenants** and in **different stories** and **motifs** of the Old Testament, which **reveal different aspects** of the **Gospel** or the **Christian Life**, including **very specific aspects** of the coming **Messiah's Person** or **Work**.

Covenants, Types, Shadows, Symbols

Adam – Adam is the **protégé** of the **man Christ Jesus**. Adam **failed** to fulfill God's command to have dominion in God's good world, but Christ, the **Last Adam**, in perfect obedience **fulfilled** all of **God's commands** and is now at His right-hand ruling, and will come again **exercising dominion** over all nations!

Abrahamic Covenant – The **foundational promise** for the **worldwide blessing** of **all nations** from God! It is a **unilateral covenant** not based on Abraham's obedience but solely on **God's faithfulness** and ability to fulfill.

Isaac – A portrait of the loving Father giving His promised Son as a sacrifice!

Genesis 24 – The Father's **chief servant** goes to a foreign land to find a bride for His Son and gives **her gifts** as she **betroths herself** to him! A portrait of God the Father sending the **Holy Spirit** into to the **Gentile world** to get a **bride** for Christ!

Joseph – The **despised brother** (Dad’s favorite) of the tribes becomes the **ruler** of the **world**. A portrait of Jesus and the **tribes of Israel**, how they **treated Him** and how He receives, **restores, blesses** and **forgives** them in the end.

Exodus -A type of deliverance from **Satan** and **slavery to sin** by God’s chosen **Deliverer** and **Mediator**, by God’s Mighty Hand.

Passover – A type of the **Lamb of God** whose blood saves from the **death angel**.

Sacrifices – Animal sacrifices which could **never take away sin** (Heb 10:4-10) prefigure the **final sacrifice** of **Christ**, which **took away sin** once for all.

Temple - The temple, as a **dwelling place** for **God**, prefigured Christ, who is the final dwelling place of God, and through whom **God** comes to be **with his people** as He is **“God with Us.”**

Moses – **Moses** is a **type of Christ** as a **Mediator** between God and man who brings God’s Word to His people.

Prophet, Priest, King – These **3 types** of **servants of God** in the OT **prefigure Christ** who **fulfills** all 3 of these **offices** in their **ultimate form**. He is the **Prophet** from **Heaven** bringing God’s **final Word** (Heb 1:1-3). He is our **Great High Priest** and final **eternal Mediator** between God and man (1 Tim 2:5-6). Christ is the great **King of Kings** and **Lord of Lords**, the ruler of the kings of the earth. (Eph 1:21-22, Rev 1:5, 19:16).

Davidic Covenant – God’s promise to King David of an **eternal King** from the line of **Judah**, one of **David’s sons** who will sit on **his throne** (2 Sam 7:16), who will also be **God’s Son** and **rule all nations** forever (Ps 2:6-9, 72:11, 89:26-27).

Psalms 22 and Isaiah 53 – The **suffering Servant** of the **Lord** who suffers at the hands of **wicked men**, who **dies** vicariously **in the place of** His people, who fulfills the **will** and **plan** of God.

There also many **appearances** of the **Person of Christ** in the **Old Testament** who often appears as the **“angel of the Lord.”** These are referred to as a **Theophany or Christophany**. Some examples would be, (Gen 3:8, 12:7, 16:7-11, 17:1, 18:1, 32:22-32, Ex 3:2, Num 22:21-35, Jud 2:4, 6:11, 13:3-21, 1 Kings 19:7, 1 Chr 21:15). One can see clearly that these are **divine appearances** when looking at the **context** of **Exodus chapter 3** at the **“burning bush.”** The Scripture says in **Ex 3:2** that the **“angel of the Lord”** appeared to Moses, and later in **Ex 3:16** that the **“God of your fathers”** has appeared to him.

Exodus 3:2 - 2 And **the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire** from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. NASB

Exodus 3:16 - 16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, **'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me,** saying," I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. NASB

Messianic Prophecies

Of course, the most obvious **pointers toward Christ the Messiah** are the many explicit Messianic Prophecies of **Jesus Christ** and **His ministry** in the **OT**.

According to the **OT** (Promise), the **coming Messiah** (Fulfilment in **NT**) would:

- Be a descendant of Abraham (compare Gen. 22:18 with Gal. 3:16)
- Be a descendant of Jacob (compare Num. 24:17 with Lk. 3:23, 34)
- Be from the tribe of Judah (compare Gen. 49:10 with Lk. 3:23, 33)
- Be from the family of Jesse (compare Is. 11:1 with Lk. 3:23, 32)
- Be from the house of David (compare Jer. 23:5 with Lk. 3:23, 31)
- Be born at Bethlehem (compare Micah 5:2 with Matt. 2:1)
- Be the pre-existent one (compare Micah 5:2 with Col. 1:17)
- Be the Lord (compare Psalm 110:1 with Matt. 22:43-45)
- Be God with us (compare Isaiah 7:14 with Matt. 1:23)
- Be a prophet (compare Deut. 18:18 with Matt. 21:11)
- Be a priest (compare Psalm 110:4 with Heb. 3:1; 5-6)
- Be a king (compare Psalm 2:6 with Matt. 27:37)
- Be anointed by the Spirit (compare Is. 11:2 with Matt. 3:16, 17)
- Have a forerunner (compare Is. 40:3; Mal. 3:1 with Matt. 3:1,2)
- Begin His ministry in Galilee (compare Is. 9:1 with Matt. 4:12-17)
- Have a ministry of miracles (compare Is. 35:5,6 with Matt. 9:35)
- Bring healing and spiritual life (compare Is. 61:1-2 with Lk. 4:18).
- Enter Jerusalem on a donkey (compare Zech. 9:9 with Lk. 19:35-37)
- Be rejected by the Jews (compare Psalm 118:22 with 1 Pet. 2:7)
- Be silent before His accusers (compare Is. 53:7 with Matt. 27:12)
- Be wounded and bruised (compare Is. 53:5 with Matt. 27:26)
- Be smitten and spit upon (compare Is. 50:6 with Matt. 26:67)
- Be crucified with thieves (compare Is. 53:12 with Matt. 27:38)
- Have His garments divided (compare Ps. 22:18 with John 19:23,24)
- Have his side pierced (compare Zech. 12:10 with John 19:34)
- Be buried in a rich man's tomb (compare Is. 53:9 with Matt. 27:57ff)

- Come before Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed (compare Dan. 9:26 with Matt. 24:2)

Christ is **present** then in **many forms** in the **Old Testament** and we cannot fail to **understand** that the **entire Old Testament Scriptures** point forward in time to **Christ**, and find their **ultimate fulfilment** in Him. The Old Testament **Covenants** and **promises**, its **types** and **symbols**, and its **pictures of salvation**, all **look forward** to God's ultimate **self-revelation** in the **Person** and **Work** of **Christ**. He is the **fulfilment** of God's **eternal plan** of **salvation**, and Salvation History **culminates** in all that **Christ** is.

Acts 17:2-3 - 2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."** NASB

God's Attributes on Display

In the Old Testament one of the **themes** that is constantly present is **God's Sovereignty**, particularly how it is seen in His **Providence**. If God will control **promises** and **fulfilment** to **Israel**, He must **control all nations** and **history** itself. This is clear on the pages of the Old Testament. But many of **God's attributes** are in view including both **communicable** and **incommunicable attributes**. God does **everything He does** for the **manifestation** of **His own excellence** and **glory** as **God**. So as the Old Testament is God's **self-revelation**, the highest and **most important** revelation it gives us is a **vision** of **God Himself**. It shows us **who He is** and **what He is like!**

Therefore, we learn many things in many **different categories** about **God**, His **Creation**, His **attributes**, His **redemptive plans** and **purposes**. We also learn about **ourselves** including our **origins**, our **destiny** and the **purpose** and **reasons why we exist**. All of these things and many more are **revealed**, in some **large degree**, in the **Old Testament**. The unfolding of **God's eternal plan** in **Christ** through the pages of the **Old Testament** is **staggering**. Surely the **Almighty God** is the **One great reality** in the **world**, which **He created** for **His own purpose** and **plan**. He is the **Potentate** of **Time** and the **Captain** at the **Helm** of **History!** He is **worthy** to be **praised, honored** and **worshipped!**

Revelation 4:11 - 11 **"Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."** NASB