

Christ and The Prophets

- Prophets under the Old Covenant.
- False prophets.
- True religion.
- Sacrifice and the temple.
- Justice not sacrifice.
- True worship.
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The Old Testament prophets had three main functions:

1. To remind Israel concerning its covenant with God.
2. To speak on true religion from God's perspective.
3. To speak of Christ.

The Prophet's Mandate

The charter or mandate for these prophets was given in Deut 18:9-22. This passage also includes a section that speaks exclusively of Christ. In this passage God also gave the standard for the prophetic ministry:

1. The prophet must speak according to scripture. He must not lead Israel after other gods. (See also Is 8:20.)
2. His prophecy must come to pass. If his prophecy did not come to pass he was not sent by God. There was no compromise with this. They were to be stoned to death.

Prophets of the Old Covenant

The Old Covenant had its specific priesthood in Levi and also had its prophets. The priesthood represented man before God and the prophets represented God to man. The prophets of the Old Covenant were specific to that covenant. Not everything they said relates directly to us.

In reminding Israel of their covenant with God, the role of the prophets was to bring Israel back to its terms and conditions, to be faithful. At Sinai Moses took blood and sprinkled it upon the book of the law and on the people, binding them together (Ex 24:5-8, Heb 9:17-20). Israel was bound to those conditions.

The laws of the Old Covenant included the holy days and ritual cleansings. The prophets put Israel in remembrance of these. This role of the prophets does not relate to the New Covenant. These specific terms are not part of the New Covenant.

The prophets also spoke of the righteousness *which is by the law*. This also does not apply to us today. They were reminding Israel of the righteousness of their law, which none of us is able to fulfil. This is not pointing to the New Covenant, but to the law. In the New Covenant we have this as a fruit:

But if a man be just and do that which is lawful and right and has not eaten upon the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither has defiled his neighbour's wife, neither has come near to a menstruous woman,

And has not oppressed any, but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has spoiled none by violence, has given his bread to the hungry and has covered the naked with a garment;

He that has not given forth upon usury, neither has taken any increase, that has withdrawn his hand from iniquity, has executed true judgement between man and man, has walked in My statutes and has kept My judgements, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, says the Lord God. (Ezek 18:5-9).

See also Is 56:1-3, Is 56:3-7 and Is 58:12-14. Paul referred to this in Gal 3:12 saying "And the law is *not* of faith: but, the man that *does them* shall live *by them*." (Lev 18:5).

Next we look at how the prophets spoke to Israel about faith and the cultures around them. First, we look at how this relates to the prophetic ministry itself and then turn to more general issues on religion.

Prophecy

The *charismata* are a great blessing to the church, but also have potential for misuse. Paul said, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying. Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good." (1Thes 5:19-21), "Let the prophets speak two or three and let the other judge." (1 Cor 14:29). John said, "Test the spirits." (1 John 4:1). We discuss some pitfalls, without discouraging a bold use of the gifts in edifying the church.

False prophets prophesied for money. These included Balaam (Numbers 22). Ahab and Jezebel had many prophets who were hirelings (1 Kings 18:19). They were paid to say what Ahab wanted to hear. They "ate at Jezebel's table". This means they profit from their "art". *Jezebel* means they prostitute their gift with a worldly church. A spokesperson for God must not have a personal motive.

The apostles said that there would be false prophets in our day, which would operate just like Balaam (2 Pet 2:1, Jude). He "prophesied for reward". This is common. The "ministry" demands so much money that we may be tempted to prophesy commercially. It also draws attention to us as ministers. We can then become a bit like fortune tellers.

This can also be a problem when we bear the title of *prophet*. People invite us to conferences because we will prophesy and this can put pressure on us to do something even if God has not spoken. This can turn into crowd pleasing. We end up with a *ministry of prophecy*, rather than a ministry of the gospel. We also end up with prophecies that miss the mark.

Some teach the *art* of prophecy: how to see visions at will, or create *words* in the spirit, believing that speaking them will release power. If they do not come to pass it is said that the hearers lack faith. We do not believe this is genuine *charismata*. We can prophesy from our own spirit without God speaking. This is fine when it is general encouragement, like preaching, but when people take *personal prophecy* as a word from God it can throw them off course.

Money is a potential pitfall. This was Balaam's trap. He prayed for a *word* because Balak had money (Numbers 22). Some may prophesy when a donor gives money into the ministry. Others may prophesy about nations, government changes, "judgements" in natural calamities, or the coming of the Lord. There have been a lot of prophecies given that have not come to pass. People are not held accountable.

The "prophets of God" blessed King Ahab before he went to war, so they could eat at his table (1st Kings 22). Ahab died in that battle. The true prophet was struck in the face, put in prison and fed bread and water. This was the *love offering* most of the Old Testament prophets received. Jeremiah was put into a septic tank. Isaiah was sawn in two down the middle.

Old Testament Cultures

Collecting money is often associated with prophesying. This has been justified by Saul. When he met Samuel, he said he must bring Samuel a gift (1 Sam 9:7). We should not follow many of the practices recorded in Judges, Samuel and Kings. These things were written for our admonition. The people often did things they learnt from the nations and cultures around them, which were not God's way.

We need to support ministry and men of God. But this is an area where we need to *watch and pray* for we can very easily be snared as Balaam. The incident with Saul shows paganism was rampant. They copied the Canaanites in their worship of God. God did not require Saul to give to Samuel. Giving to support ministry is good, but we do not give money *for* ministry. That is *Simony* (Acts 8:18).

Gifts corrupted Samuel's sons (1 Sam 8:3). This is one reason why Israel asked for a king. This happened to Eli's sons. They took the best of the offerings at the tabernacle and God judged them. Samuel saw this, but was not effective in preventing the same in his own household. It is a common snare in ministry. Though Samuel was a man of God, he contributed to Israel rejecting God.

Seeking prophecy can be a problem too. We are in danger then of what God said in Ezekiel 13, 14, 22:28, and Micah 3. He said if people come to a prophet with an idol in their heart, He will answer them according to that idol. He will give them what they want to hear. We have to be careful of this. If we have ambition in our hearts, we will very easily be led astray. We do not want to be deceived by flattery.

Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy and say to them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear the word of Lord. Thus says the Lord. Woe to the foolish prophets that follow their own spirits and have seen nothing. O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the desert. (Ezek 13:2-4).

Thus says the Lord God. Every man of the house of Israel that sets up idols in his heart and puts a stumbling block of iniquity (his idol – covetousness) before his face and comes to a prophet, I the Lord will answer him that comes according to the multitude of his idols. That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart...(Ezek 14:4-5).

A common form of prophecy is empowered utterance of the gospel. It is *charismatic* preaching and teaching of the gospel, under the unction of the Holy Spirit. See Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* on *prophecy*. T.L. Osborn uses this in his talks on prophecy. Prophecy is also exhorting, edifying and comforting from the gospel (1 Cor 14:3).

There are many other forms of Spirit empowered prophetic utterance. There needs to be a bold expression of these within the church. The Holy Spirit brings many miracles to people through these as He moves by His own will. We do not teach the *how to* in this. It is according to the faith He gives. In all, we need a true calling and a faithful spirit. It says desire the best gifts, meaning *the reality* (1 Cor 12:31).

True Religion

A main task of the prophets of the Old Covenant was to reveal God's heart on true religion. We cannot look at the prophets without considering this part of their message, because it formed a major part of their ministry. Understanding this message is central to understating God and His ways. This message is very relevant today, because it deals with the very nature of man in religion, which has not changed.

The prophets spoke a lot on the nature of false religion. The nations that were in Canaan, before Israel entered, practiced false religion. The issue was not just the false gods they served, but the

whole mindset in which they served them. If we see the issue only to do with the graven images themselves and not about the whole world view, we miss the main part of what the prophets said.

The nations around Israel had a sacrifice/ritualistic approach to religion, which did not emphasise truth, justice and integrity. People thought that how they lived did not matter, so long as they could make it up through fulfilling the ritualistic appeasement worship required by the gods. Ritualism fosters corruption. It also fosters superstition and fear and thus brings into bondage.

Mindset Change

Israel never really changed this mindset. They never really got it out of their system. They came out of Egypt, but Egypt did not come out of them. Mindset change is so important. We can change to the right religion, to serve the true God, but still serve Him with our old mindset. Unless this mindset is also changed, it will bring us back to serving our old gods, whether these gods be witchcraft or materialism.

They feared the Lord and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they had carried away from thence. (2 Kings 17:33).

When Assyria carried Israel away from Samaria, they brought in foreign peoples to populate the land. Lions ate them and so they asked about the gods of that land so that they could appease them. They were told the Lord of Israel is the God of that land. So they feared (meaning they appeased by ritual) the Lord, but still walked in the ways of their own gods.

World view

A common mindset of religion is appeasement. This leads to ritual and spiritual warfare, rather than to love and truth. It leads to sacrifice: heathen type prayers that Jesus spoke of (Matt 6:7), fasting and sowing of seeds. It believes that personal cost and effort will bring deliverance. It does not lead to repentance, because payment is the focus, not change. This mindset hinders the transformation of people, families and nations.

We once visited Roman temple ruins in England. The museum authorities salvaged old prayers Romans inscribed on stones. They inscribed a prayer (all of which were either for healing, prosperity, promotion, or against an enemy) and then tied money to it and put it before the god. The similarity of this with practice today struck us. This was their only focus in "prayer". This is the mindset that the prophets of Israel faced.

No matter how much Christian doctrine we have, our cultural mindset (world view) will not change without new birth. We will go on believing in curses and in humans that change to animals and in witches that can fly. We will believe that this is the cause of our problems, rather than our stealing, lying and fornication. We will believe any lie told us by spiritists, because of our fear of death.

No teaching can change this mindset. No amount of "prayer" can change it. No Christian doctrine can change it. There is only one way a person can leave his culture behind and be renewed in the spirit of their mind – new birth. Only then do we love the truth more than a lie. Only then are we *crucified to the world*: our culture (Gal 6:14).

We have seen thousands of people trained diligently for many years in the word of God and found that this alone cannot renew the mind of a man. Only when we are touched in our heart by the Spirit of God and renewed in our inner man, will we not be bound by our culture. All people in all cultures are the same, because of the nature of man and the nature of religion.

The prophets pointed out the problem. Jesus Christ came to fix it by giving us a new heart. The prophets warned Israel not to follow the ways of the nations around them. This is where we are most likely to stray, by copying others.

When the Lord your God shall cut off the nations from before you, where you go to possess them and you succeed them and dwell in their land; take heed to yourself that you are not snared by following them, after they are destroyed from before you; and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. (Deut 12:29-30).

The issue here was not just the idols the heathen served, not just their evil practices of child sacrifice, but the root of their religious mindset. The issue with human nature is that we do not like being different. It makes us feel that there is something wrong with us, that we do not measure up. So we look at those around us and lean from them instead of learning from God. This was one of Israel's greatest problems.

This is why they wanted a king, to be like the nations. They started off worshipping God with the mind of the people around them, before eventually taking their idols as well. In Judges and throughout Kings they worshipped God on every green hill as the heathen did (1 Kings 14:21-24). God knew that in following these ways they would turn away from Him. He told them not to in His law, but Israel did not hear.

Moloch

The example of Moloch shows that God looks not only on the outward form of worship, i.e. whether we worship the true God outwardly, but He looks on who we worship in our heart. *Who or what* we worship in our heart is seen by our attitude, actions behaviour and life style. This was the prophet's message:

Have you offered to Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which you made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts. (Amos 5:25-27).

The Lord said through Amos that though the children of Israel sacrificed to God in the wilderness their sacrifices were not actually to God, but to the gods of their heart. They observed the ritual of worshipping God in the wilderness with the tabernacle, but in their heart their mindset had not changed. God saw this and said that though they carried His tabernacle they were not actually worshipping Him.

They did not literally build an altar to Moloch or Chiun in the wilderness, but it was in their hearts, as was proved later. Solomon set up an altar to Moloch in Jerusalem. What was in the heart eventually came out. The prophet Amos lived later when Israel had built the altar to Moloch, but he said that this was in Israel from the beginning. They always worshipped God as the nations around them worshipped their gods.

Sacrifice

The prophets then turned to what are some of the main issues in true worship. What is the true mindset that will honour God and protect us? The first part is to do with sacrifice. Though Solomon wrote many wise proverbs and prospered because of his father David, he did not understand God's

view of sacrifice. He did not understand that God did not delight in the temple in Jerusalem, but in the temple of His Son.

Initially God blessed the temple and Solomon for the sake of David. Solomon later turned the temple into an idol and brought judgement upon Israel. Ritual had overtaken faith. Solomon's wisdom on diplomacy and riches became greater to him than the wisdom of God. He networked by marrying foreign wives. God said that this would lead to compromise and it did (Deut 17:14-20). Solomon, following in David's successes, made Israel rich, but also brought Israel to ruin by his wisdom.

A King

Israel took a king like the nations around them. This king took them away from God. Israel wanted a champion to go before them (1 Sam 8:5-7, 19-22). They did not want to be near God (Ex 20:19). God told Samuel that Israel rejected Him by choosing a king. People often want a champion, a *man of God*, no matter if he is false. It somehow makes our worship of God easier, we think.

God warned Israel that this champion would not treat the people well. He would enrich himself and tax the people (1 Sam 8:11-18). But Israel ignored that. This is how Saul and the kings that followed treated Israel. Paul told the Corinthians this is how the false apostles treated them, "If they bring you into bondage, take from you, devour you, beat you and exalt themselves, you bear it..." (2 Cor 11:20). Paul's life was a complete contrast to these supermen.

This is why we need laws governing kings. Leaders of ministries also must be accountable to the law. People let them get away with all sorts of things, because they want a champion like the ministries around them. It is better to have God as our champion. He will not treat us like that. Having a leader is no compensation for knowing God yourself. But here we see one thing: Let us not want to be like the ministries around us. Let us ask God what He wants.

Saul

Saul is the personification of compromise. He was supposed to lead Israel in the ways of God, but allowed the people to lead him in their ways. God told Saul to kill all the livestock and people of the Amalekites. But Saul did not kill the king and he kept the best of the animals. Then he claimed he had obeyed the Lord. When Samuel asked about the animals, Saul answered:

But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. (1 Sam 15:21).

So Saul blamed the people he was supposed to be leading. Saul's other excuse was the he would sacrifice these fine animals to the Lord. This is appeasement, rather than obedience. He did not know God's heart. God did not want the sacrifice. He did not need the offering.

This thinking can make us believe that we have a better way than God. We have a plan that will enhance God's kingdom and name, although it is not really in line with His word. The results will look great. We can say, "God needs the money, or He needs this or that to save the world." If we will follow His plan the world will be reached. His plan is that we love and obey Him and live the life style He asks us to.

Obedience

So Samuel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gave us one of the greatest lessons in scripture. It so clearly describes true religion. Religion is not sacrifice, but obedience. It shows that though Saul was offering to the Lord, it was idolatry, walking in the ways of the nations around him.

And Samuel said, Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king. (1 Sam 15:22-23).

This passage also shows what witchcraft is. It is rebellion and manipulation. Saul tried to manipulate God with his offering. We learn this from a very young age, as children disobeying our parents. We learn how to manipulate them. This is witchcraft: an attempt to get our own way by manipulation. When we grow older we learn more fancy ways of doing it.

All witchcraft is manipulation, bluff, fear and rebellion. It has no authority. It is merely a work of the flesh (Gal 5:19-20). There is no supernatural power in witchcraft unless God allows it. On the other end of the stick, all manipulation, whether by Christian or non-Christian, is witchcraft: human nature.

God Provides

Abraham made a powerful statement when he was taking his son Isaac up the mountain. His son asked, "Father, I see the wood and the fire, but where is the sacrifice for the burnt offering?". Abraham answered, "My son, God shall provide for Himself a lamb for the offering." (Gen 22:18). This statement strikes at the centre of true worship.

In true faith God provides the offering that changes us. He provides the new heart by which we worship Him acceptably. This also strikes at the very heart of corruption. When we have an appeasement mindset it permeates our whole life and society. When we give to make a way for our self, corruption has already ruined the very fabric of our nation. This must be changed at the root: how we see God.

God is our keeper. We do not keep God with our gifts. He provides His Son as the offering. We do not provide for Him. He changes our heart. We do not change Him in prayer. This is acceptable religion to God. He does it for free and when our heart is changed we also freely give to others.

David

In some nations each year we have a *Thanksgiving Service* where people are made to give large amounts to show their gratefulness to God for that year. Thanksgiving is good, but straight out fundraising should be called what it is. Benson Idahosa preached the best thanksgiving message we heard, from David. David knew God had provided His Son:

I will take no bullock out of your house, nor he goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you. For the world is Mine and the fullness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats.

Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High. And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me. (Ps 50:9-15).

First, God said He did not need anything from us. This is how the pagans worshipped. He said that He is our helper. We need Him. He promised, "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you." For a price? No. Then He said what He wants. He wants a changed life. This text thunders in our heart. It is the essence of the gospel.

Pay your vows means keep your integrity with God. This is not asking for a gift, but speaking of our life style. "Live in truth and righteousness." At one point David too had this the wrong way around. He wanted to build a house for God. Nathan said fine. Then God sent Nathan back to David with another thundering prophecy:

When have I ever asked Israel to build Me a house? Do I need a house? Do I need you to care for Me? Is that why I called you? The heavens are not big enough to contain Me. How will you build a house I can use? Do you not you see yet that I am the Father and that I called you because I have a plan for you?

I took you from following the sheep and raised you up. Behold, I will build your house. I will raise up your seed (Christ) and He will build My house (the church). You just allow Me to do My will in you and let Me take care of My plans. (Paraphrased, see 2nd Samuel 7 and 1st Chronicles 17.)

What a difference between this and the way the pagans worshipped their useless gods, meeting all their needs. Look at ancestry worship. If you do not meet the need of the ancestors they curse you. You have to feed the idol each day. Do not bring this to God and worship Him that way. (These are not ancestors, but demons.) "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not be in want..." (Psalm 23). Sounds like David got it!

Isaiah

Hear the word of the Lord you rulers of Sodom (Jerusalem); give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me says the Lord? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to Me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot. Away with it, it is iniquity, even the solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates: they are a trouble to Me; I am weary of them.

And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you: yes, you shall make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Is 1:10-17).

This was the mindset of the nations, that Israel adopted. They saw religion as appeasing gods, keeping them happy, paying them a bribe, meetings their needs, as we get on with own lives, doing what we want. They tried to make their god more glorious than the nations around them by building them a greater temple. The gods needed them to do this, because they were impotent: they could not

do it for themselves. How is it that our mind can be so dumb, that we worship a god who cannot care for himself?

True religion is not sacrifice, but justice and judgement. It is not ritual and trying to be spiritual, but truth and mercy. This is why Jesus came to end all sacrifice and put it away. It promotes false religion, which God hates. This is why in Isaiah 58 God condemned their fasting. He said that the *fast (meaning true religion)* that He has chosen is righteousness and caring for the needy.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah said whether we know God is shown by our life style. Doing what is right, turning from oppression and caring for others is the knowledge of God. He said exactly what Isaiah 58 said. Some were building big houses while others lacked, while they took their wealth unlawfully and did not care for their workers.

Woe to him that builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by wrong; that uses his neighbour's service without wages and gives him not for his work. That says, I will build me a wide house and large chambers and cut him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion. Shall you reign, because you clothe yourself in cedar?

Did not your father eat and drink and do judgement and justice and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him; was not this to know Me, says the Lord? But your eyes and your heart are full or covetousness and for to shed innocent blood and for oppression and for violence, to do it. (Jer 22:13-17).

The rebuke of the prophets was towards covetousness.

Justice, Not Sacrifice

Here is a classic passage of the prophets. God says He wants mercy and knowledge and not sacrifice. He does not want us to teach others about sacrifice. He wants us to teach them the knowledge of God so they can know how to live His way and be blessed with their family and nation. Righteous exalts a nation, not sacrifice. God wants our nation exalted.

They had a faithfulness that lasted like the *morning dew*. They always needed correction. They could not be trusted beyond five minutes, but would revert to their nature. This is because they lacked new birth. They were faithful when being watched, by faithless when no one was looking or checking.

...for your goodness is like a morning cloud and as the early dew it goes away. Therefore I have hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth...For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:4-6).

I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell (accept) in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your viols.

But let judgement run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream. (Amos 5:21-24).

What beautiful poetry these prophets wrote. They depicted a righteous and just nation, with courts and fair law and protection for all peoples, as one where waters ran like streams, nourishing the people. What a beautiful sound to the ears is a good report of faithfulness in the heart of the people, like the sound of a stream of water. But how bad is the sound of a evil report of corruption.

The pagan gods come to take your food and make you sacrifice (to steal, kill and destroy). God wants our children to grow up in a safe, peaceful society where they are cared for and loved. This is what true religion is for. It is not the devil that stops this, but the ways of the people. This must be stopped by the gospel.

Micah

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8).

Do justly: That is, walk in integrity, honesty and openness before God and man. Defend the cause of the just. Speak out when the unjust are punished. Speak out when truth is trodden down. Not just because it affects us, or to justify our self, but to stand for the truth and for others.

None calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth: they trust in vanity and speak lies; they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity. (Is 59:4).

And judgement is turned away backward and justice stands afar off: for truth is fallen in the street and equity cannot enter. Yes, truth fails; and he that departs from evil makes himself a prey: and the Lord saw it and it displeased Him that there was no judgement. (Is 59:14-15).

For I the Lord love judgement, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. (Is 61:8).

We are silent when these things go on, preaching on prosperity while the gospel is trodden under foot. Where is the voice of the church? "None calls for justice." What do we live for? What motivates us? Do we hide from truth to be acceptable, to maintain our professional opportunities, or are we faithful to the Lord who bought us with His own blood?

Mercy

Mercy means we believe in redemption. We do not judge by the law. God's very nature is one of forgiveness and love to transform our inner nature and the inner nature of others. Love must have a chance to work. Harshness is not the way of God. God's heart is seen in His dealings with Hosea. He leaves some in their sin and brings others out by mercy.

God called Hosea to take for his wife a prostitute (Hos 3:1-2). This pictured God's redemption of Israel. Though they prostituted themselves against God, He did not cast them off, but redeemed His elect from among them in mercy. This is how God dealt with our iniquity:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her...and I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in loving-kindness and in mercies...For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king...afterwards shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days. (Hos 2:14, 19, 3:4-5).

This is how Jesus dealt with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11).

The *latter days* refers to the latter days of the nation of Israel, still over 500 years away when Hosea spoke. It refers to the coming of Messiah to redeem Israel into the New Covenant, along with the Gentiles whom God called. It is speaking of the church, not a national salvation of Israel. From the context it is clear that he is speaking of the coming of redemption through Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

Righteousness

Mercy does not mean compromise and weakness. It does not mean that we have no backbone when it comes to justice and righteousness. Lack of judgement and discipline allows corruption to take over in any assembly. The leader must govern in righteousness, which means to endorse righteousness and correct iniquity.

God hates covetousness, which is enshrined in many doctrines in our current day:

Woe to him that covets an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil. (Hab 2:9).

He hates it when people prosper by corruption, by lying and by false doctrines:

Woe to him that builds a town with blood and establishes a city by iniquity. (Hab 2:12).

Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgement and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother; And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart (Zech 7:9-10).

We can see that all the prophets had the same message on justice, mercy and righteousness. This is what they said was true worship.

True Worship

True worship is how we live. Worship is what we do. Worship means we account God *worthy*. If we account Him worthy then we present *our self* to Him as a living sacrifice. This means we live in obedience to His word. Worship is what we do with our body.

We know how much we worship God by what we do with our body. We know how much we worship Him by whether or not we keep His commandments. We do not judge our love for God by our feelings, anointing, or blessings. We judge it by the way we live. We love God to the extent that we keep His commandments, no more and no less.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service

(worship). And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...(Rom 12:1-2).

We cannot love God with our heart alone and not with our body. Worship is how we live, with our whole being. God is worthy of our whole being, or He is not worthy to us at all. If we say God is worthy and do not live in holiness we are lying. The first response of true worship is holiness.

This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for His friends. You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you. (John 15:12-14).

Pure Religion

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27).

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as He which has called you is holy, so be holy in all manner of living; Because it is written, Be holy; for I am holy. (1 Pet 1:14-16).

And hereby we know that we know Him, because we keep His commandments. (1 John 2:3).

His commandments are not ritual or sacrifice, but love and truth. This is worship or true sacrifice. How dare people teach the traditions of men and the rituals of the Old Covenant for worship when God requires mercy, justice and knowledge that will help families grow up in the truth and goodness of God?

God has fulfilled His whole desire in eradicating the temple and ritual of the Old Covenant, by sending Jesus to fulfil the law and to live within us, giving us a new nature and writing His law upon our hearts. This is His law: not sacrifice, but faith that works through love.

Preachers who tell others that they must give or fast to get from God overturn the whole message of the prophets. Preachers should be giving the knowledge of God so others may live in His liberty and blessing. Instead of knowledge that delivers, bondage is perpetuated by the ideas of man, garnered from the nations around us.

Drive Out Corruption

God does not want us just observing Christian traditions, but He wants to change the whole way we live. Instead of bringing the corruption of gifts into our churches He wants us to speak out against bribery in society. Instead of looking to profit from corrupt leaders in society He wants us to show a better way of living.

Instead of adopting the ways of the occult in sacrifice, offerings and spiritual warfare, He wants us to live by the grace of Christ. Instead of impoverishing the flock by doctrines of covetousness, He wants us to teach God's people how to live fruitful lives. We are the light of the world. The world must see the change. But they often see that we are just like them. Judgement begins in the house of the Lord. We cannot complain about our nation's state if we are like this. Change starts at home.

The Prophets and Christ

We now move into the next section. The prophets showed God's will and the problem of the human heart and they also showed God's solution: the sending of His Son.

The prophets spoke a lot on the coming of Messiah. Most of the usual texts are well known and will not be dealt with here. Some of the usual texts are dealt with in other sections of this book. What we will be looking at more specifically here is the Old Testament in relation to the church of Jesus Christ.

The Church of Christ

The temple is an Old Testament shadow or type of the body of Christ, the church. It was where the presence of God was. God dwelt within the Holy of Holies, within the tabernacle that Israel made in the wilderness. Today God's people are His tabernacle, as He dwells within our heart (1 Cor 6:19).

When Israel came out of Egypt into the wilderness they were called to God. Sanctified means to be separated out to become God's possession. In the New Covenant, to be sanctified means to be a saint by new birth, a living member of the church.

In the wilderness Israel was called the *assembly*, or in the Greek Septuagint the *ecclesia* (Lev 8:4, Num 14:5). From this we derive *ecclesiology*, meaning the doctrine of the church. *Church* means the Assembly of God's people. In the Old Covenant God dwelt *with* the assembly. In the New Covenant He dwells *in* the hearts of those in His assembly.

The church existed in the Old Covenant in the sense that there was a fellowship of God's people. These were the elect, the "church within the church", the *ecclesia* or called out people, the remnant of Israel, the true Israel (Rom 9:6). This gives a true prophetic picture of the church. It is not just a public assembly, but an individual call of God.

The New Testament fulfilment of this Old Covenant picture of the church is well described in 1 Pet 2:4-12, Ephesians 2 and Hebrews 2. The whole Book of Hebrews portrays the relation between the Old Testament imagery regarding the *assembly* and the New Covenant church, drawing on the Old Testament Psalms as well as many of the prophets.

Saying, I will declare Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise to You. (Heb 2:12, Ps 22:22, 25).

See also Heb 2:13 and Is 8:18, where the *children* are the church. The prophets did not fully understand their statements, but they did know that these utterances related to the Messiah and His people. Their original utterances can be shown exegetically to refer to the church and are not just interpreted that way by the New Testament.

Shiloh

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and to Him shall the gathering (obedience) of the people be. (Gen 49:10).

It is clear that this *Shiloh* is Christ for the following reasons:

1. The Spirit of prophecy always put forward Christ as the one by whom these utterances were fulfilled. He is the Seed, the Prophet like Moses, the anointed King

that Hannah spoke of (1 Sam 2:10). All these are intended to point directly to the coming Messiah and the Hebrew people knew it.

2. Christ came from Judah.
3. The word *Shiloh* means “Him to whom it belongs”. It is not a place but a title.
4. The town of *Shiloh* of the Old Testament where the tabernacle was kept with Eli the high priest was not in Judah, but in the territory of Ephraim (1 Sam 1:3).
5. The Hebrew word for the town *Shiloh* is slightly different than that used in Gen 49:10. The place was so-called probably as a type for the presence of God in Christ that was anticipated, which the tabernacle there represented.
6. Judah had not received the sceptre when the town of *Shiloh* existed in Eli’s day. According to Gen 49:10 *Shiloh* was to come after Judah received the sceptre or rule in Israel.

Jerusalem

When Judah was later carried into captivity to Babylon, Jerusalem was destroyed by three attacks. First, Nebuchadnezzar came and took away the best of Jerusalem. He took the most educated of the Jews. This included Daniel and Ezekiel. After this the false prophets in Jerusalem prophesied peace and said all would be well and Babylon would not come back. They justified this assurance in two ways:

1. The temple was in Jerusalem and God would never destroy it. It had become an idol.
2. God had promised to David that there would never fail a king in his line upon his throne.

The rulers of Jerusalem were in effect saying, “Let sin continue that grace may abound.”. They believed that God would not judge their sin. But they misread God. God would fulfil His promises to David, but not necessarily through them, but through the Seed of promise, Christ.

Ezekiel wrote from Babylon to the rulers of Jerusalem to warn them Nebuchadnezzar was returning and would destroy the city, the temple and the throne. But that would be no problem, because God would fulfil His promise concerning the temple, city and throne in the person of His Son.

Thus says the Lord God; Remove the diadem and take off the crown...I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is; and I will give it Him. (Ezek 21:27).

God told the rulers that He was removing them from their throne in Jerusalem. *Overturn* means that God would overturn the city, the rulers and the temple. God said the crown would not be returned “until He came whose right it is”.

The word used here in the Hebrew is *Shiloh*. In Ezekiel *Shiloh* was translated into English, whereas in Gen 49:10 it was not translated into English. In both Ezekiel and Genesis *Shiloh* is used in the original Hebrew.

Ezekiel meant that the crown would be taken away from Jerusalem until the Son of David would come and the crown would be given to Him. God meant that the promises were not to the natural sinners of Jerusalem, but to His Seed, meaning Christ (Gal 3:16). This meant Jesus would be King over His people the church. Shiloh always refers to the church.

This is a clear statement that God's promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ.

The Gathering of the People

Gen 49:10 says, "To Him shall the gathering of the people be.". The word for gathering can also mean obedience. Obedience here does not refer to human works, but to the obedience that is worked in us by the covenant of grace. We obey because God has put it into our hearts to obey.

This gathering or obedience is seen throughout the Old Testament in the *ecclesia* and remnant. Though Israel turned away from God, He reserved a people through grace who were His called out people (1 Kings 19:18). This is the doctrine of the church that goes through the whole of scripture.

Isaiah said, "The children you have given Me are for signs and wonders." (Is 8:18). According to Heb 2:13, Isaiah was referring to the church. This means that by the Holy Spirit Isaiah saw at least in part the glory of Christ and His church gathered to Him. Isaiah from chapter 40 onwards spoke of the multitudes bought into Christ's kingdom. David saw this and spoke of it throughout the Psalms when referring to Christ's assembly.

According to Dispensationalism the church was an *after thought* of God, when the Jews rejected Christ. They say that the church is merely a gap period, until the Jewish nation is saved. They say that the church is not the ultimate goal of God foretold by prophecy and typology in the Old Testament. They say that the church was not foreseen and expected in the Old Covenant. Yet the church of Jesus Christ is a major theme of all the prophets.

The church of today is not a parenthesis period. The church is the ongoing fulfilment of the Old Covenant shadow. It was always the plan of God's to be fulfilled through His Seed, Christ. The church has fulfilled God's promises to Israel and included in it the Gentiles. Glory to God!

Promise to David

In 1st Chronicles 17 we see so much of the heart and plan of God. David built himself a palace and thought he should also build a house for God. At first Nathan thought it was good, but God sent Nathan back to David with a correction. When the Lord explained to David that He did not need a house from David, He continued by promising to build a house for David, by raising up David's Seed after him.

He shall build Me an house and I will establish His throne forever. (1 Chron 17:12).

This was not referring to Solomon. Solomon's throne (kingdom) was not established forever. See also 1 Sam 2:35:

And I will raise Me up a faithful High Priest, that shall do according to all that is in My heart and in My mind; and I will build Him a sure house; and He shall walk before Mine Anointed forever.

Jesus said, "I will build My church...". This is the household of faith. Hebrews said that this house is the church (Heb 3:6). Stephen said that God does not dwell in temples of stone:

Howbeit the Most High dwells not in temples made with hands; as said the prophet (Nathan). (Acts 7:48).

Originally, Solomon knew that he was not the Son of David that Nathan referred to. The Holy Spirit was referring to the Seed of Promise, not the seed of the flesh. Solomon confessed that the house he built could not contain God (1 Kings 8:28).

The temple that Solomon built is not the fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy. God said He would build a house for David. The temple that Solomon built was not a house for David. But Jesus came as the Son of David and built David's house, which is the church, the household of God through faith.

So here we see a household not built by man, but by God. This is the church. We see that the church was always the heart of God from the beginning.

The Temple

Go and tell My servant David, Thus says the Lord, Shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house...but have walked in a tent in the wilderness...did I ever speak with any of the tribes of Israel...saying, Why have you not built Me a house of cedar? (2 Sam 7:5-7).

Here we see what the temple is in God's heart. He wanted a mobile tabernacle, not one of stone. This tabernacle represents a living (mobile) body, a church. *God never asked for and never wanted a temple.*

Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. (Heb 10:5).

It is clear therefore that the temple that Solomon built was not the fulfilment of God's promise to David. The house God promised to David was the house of his Seed Christ, the church.

In whom (Christ) you are also built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. (Eph 2:22).

And you also as living stones are built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ...which in times past were not a people...(1 Pet 2:5-10).

Pharisees Knew

Therefore, when Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" the Pharisees knew that He was speaking of His body (John 2:19). They were without excuse. Being scholars of the Old Testament they knew what God had said.

The Pharisees were *wilfully* ignorant. They had departed from Old Testament faith and scripture and had built themselves a religion of legalism called Judaism, which was a wilful departure from the heart of God revealed in scripture. Sin had blinded them to the clear mind of God.

Christianity is not a new religion added to the Old Testament. Judaism was the new religion, or the departure from the Old Testament. Christianity is the continuation or the fulfilment of the Old Testament. That is, Christianity in its biblical (Hebraic) form, rather than in its Hellenistic/Western form.

It was the rejection of the temple of stone in Jerusalem that outraged the Pharisees so much. When Jesus said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in their midst", He invalidated the temple in Jerusalem. This is why they crucified Him.

Dispensationalism Refuted

Dispensationalism claims that:

1. The church is not spoken of in the Old Testament.
2. It is the purpose of God that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt.

First, the Old Testament is full of prophetic references to the church, which is the whole reason why Christ came. Isaiah 40 to 66 is a complete picture of the church, the redeemed community of the Messiah from the nations of the world.

Secondly, the position of God on the temple once and always is this: He desires a people who are His so that He is our God and dwells within us. This is what Jesus explained in John chapters 14-17 that He came to do.

And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it (of the city of New Jerusalem, the church - Heb 12:22). (Rev 21:22).

This is the church, now.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was told to measure a temple. The measurements Ezekiel recorded do not match Solomon's temple, or the temple which was rebuilt after the return of the Jews from captivity, with Ezra and Nehemiah. The measurements also do not match those of the temple that king Herod built which was standing in Jesus' day.

According to Jesus in John 7 the temple of Ezekiel speaks only of the church. Ezekiel was following Isaiah and speaking of the New Covenant age. In chapter 21 he spoke of the coming Messiah, Shiloh. In chapters 36 and 37 he spoke of the new heart and gift of the Spirit to Israel, who are the people of God called from both the Jews and Gentiles.

The prophecy of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 spoke of God bringing Israel back from their captivity to Jerusalem, after which the Messiah would come to bring them into the New Covenant. In the days of the Intertestamental period Zadok's descendants were for a time priests in the rebuilt temple, as prophesied in Ezek 44:15.

"Zadok" also is a reference to Christ's coming. Zadok earlier served David's tabernacle at Hebron, which was a type of the New Covenant temple and priesthood of the believer. In David's tabernacle grace and praise were more in view than the law.

Zadok was a type of Christ, the faithful High Priest spoken of by Samuel (1 Sam 2:35). Ezekiel was looking forward to the New Covenant and the priesthood of Christ. All the prophets spoke of the re-gathering of Israel from their captivity when they would have a form of worship restored in Jerusalem, awaiting true worship in Spirit and in truth through the coming of Messiah (Amos 9:11-15).

This is why in Acts the apostles spoke of the restoration of the tabernacle of David and not of Solomon's temple, which was never God's purpose (Acts 15:16). So although Ezekiel's word of instruction served as a shadow for the Intertestamental period after the return from captivity, it had its fulfilment in Christ and in the New Covenant. It was Christ alone who would provide the real restoration from captivity for Israel.

All Ezekiel's measurements of the temple have a symbolic purpose in relating to true worship in Spirit and in truth in Messiah's kingdom. Just as the tabernacle of Moses was a type fulfilled by the work of Christ, so Ezekiel's temple was a prophetic word relating to the work of Christ, as Jesus said. Ezekiel's prophecy was to encourage the Jews during the Intertestamental period, but was not fulfilled until Christ came.

Cyrus

Isaiah called King Cyrus the Lord's servant (anointed) who would deliver Israel from their captivity in Babylon and restore them to Jerusalem. He was a type of Christ, for Cyrus could not truly deliver Israel. Though they returned to Jerusalem they were still in their sins and would be taken into captivity again.

Only Christ could be the Anointed, the true Servant of the Lord who would follow after Cyrus had restored Jerusalem, and then He would then bring the true restoration in the New Covenant. Jesus is the one and only Restorer and Deliverer of Israel. Israel is not restored by His Second Coming. They are restored by His death for their sin and resurrection from the dead. Those who have faith in the gospel are restored by the New Covenant.

Ezekiel's Return

Ezekiel prophesied of a return of Israel to the Promised Land (see especially Ezekiel 36). Ezekiel prophesied this while Israel was in captivity in Babylon and the surrounding nations. Some have claimed that prophecies like Ezekiel's have a double fulfilment. There is nothing in the context of Ezekiel that speaks of a double fulfilment. These prophecies mean:

1. After 70 years in captivity in Babylon God would restore the captivity to Jerusalem as Jeremiah prophesied would happen (Jer 29:10).
2. Some of the Jews scattered to Babylon and to all the nations would be re-gathered.
3. The words "nations" in this context meant all the provinces of the known empires of that day, according to plain biblical usage in that time.
4. The return from captivity included Jews from Babylon and a remnant from all the tribes of Israel scattered earlier through many nations by Assyria. (The Jews also included a remnant from all the tribes of Israel, who returned to Jerusalem when Jeroboam sinned in setting up the idol.)

Therefore, the Dispensationalist's claim that the return from Babylon was not a return from "all nations" as the prophets said it would be is false. The return was from all the nations of the relevant world in that day, from the north, south, east and west.

Jeremiah's Return

When Jeremiah spoke of the return of Israel from Babylon after 70 years he used the same language. He spoke of "all nations". We see from the context that he is speaking of one thing only: the return

from Babylon and all the nations of the relevant world at that time, which has been fulfilled. Jeremiah did not speak of a second return to the land.

For thus says the Lord, That after 70 years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place... And I will be found of you, says the Lord: and I will turn away your captivity and I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places whither I have driven you, says the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive. (Jer 29:10, 14).

The prophesied return spoken of by Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others meant that they would be returned to their land, which would have its fulfilment in Christ and the New Covenant when the Messiah would come. The prophets showed that Christ was ultimately that land and that they would dwell in this land (Christ) eternally through the New Covenant.

There is no other return spoken of by the prophets or by the New Testament, but the restoration to God through the New Covenant in Christ. This is Israel's restoration spoken of by all the prophets. The prophets and the New Testament do not say that Israel shall be restored as a nation a second time before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Haggai

Haggai and Zechariah prophesied after God had returned Israel from their captivity in Babylon and from all the nations. These two prophets encouraged the Jews, who had been discouraged from rebuilding by the enemies Sanballat and Tobiah (Ezra 5:1).

Haggai encouraged Israel saying the glory of the latter house shall be greater than the former house (Hag 2:9). This was not literally fulfilled in their day. The temple they rebuilt in Zerubbabel's day was very poor compared to the glory of Solomon's temple. Later King Herod improved the temple, but even then it was never as great as the temple that Solomon built.

But the true glory of it was much greater, because Jesus came to this temple that Herod completed and walked in it, which He did not do in Solomon's temple. This is the point!

So the temple that Haggai was really referring to was the church. The Jews who returned after the captivity would not have understood this fully then. They were discouraged by the poor temple they saw being rebuilt in those early days. So Haggai encouraged them by speaking of the glory of Christ and the New Covenant that was ahead.

This is why they had returned to Jerusalem, to prepare for the coming of Messiah. They should not be feeble:

For thus says the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations and the desire of the nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory...(Hag 2:6-7).

According to Heb 12:26 this prophecy of Haggai related to the bringing in of the New Covenant in Christ. Haggai said the same thing here as Isaiah said: the Gentiles would be included in Israel in their restoration through Christ in the gospel age.

Zerubbabel was the governor in Jerusalem when the captivity was restored from Babylon in those days. Because Zerubbabel was in the lineage of David and was governor, Haggai used him to speak

of the coming of Christ. Haggai speaks of the day when all nations would be overthrown, including Israel, when God would make Christ the signet ring, or chosen Seed, who would establish His kingdom and church.

In that day, says the Lord of hosts, will I take you, O Zerubbabel, My Servant...and will make you as a signet: for I have chosen You...(Hag 2:23).

This verse speaks of the fulfilment of the promise to David through Christ. Zerubbabel's grandfather Coniah was an evil king. God had said even if Coniah was a signet ring on His right hand He would throw him away due to his evil heart (Jer 22:24). Now in Christ God has made David's descendant His signet ring, giving us redemption in Him. Zerubbabel was used to represent Christ.

In the day when God would make Christ His signet ring all nations would come against Israel, according to Joel 3 and Zechariah 14. The nations were all those that were part of the Roman Empire that then covered the known world. This was the time of the *latter days*, hundreds of years after the time in which the prophets spoke. It was fulfilled in the days when the church was born, as stated by Peter (Acts 2:16-21).

Zechariah

Zechariah continues the theme of the temple, the church and the one who rules over it, the Messiah. The whole idea of the return of the captivity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem was to await the coming of Messiah. The encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah to those who had returned from the captivity was that although the rebuilt temple had no glory compared to Solomon's temple, Christ would come to it and this was what their work was for, a far *better* restoration.

Just as Zerubbabel was a type of Christ, so too was Joshua, the high priest in Jerusalem after the return from Babylon. Israel had been in Babylon because of judgement. They had broken the law. When God returned them to Jerusalem Satan stood to oppose them claiming that by the law they should not return. They were still guilty. God answered showing that He was doing this through Messiah, not by law. This would be a temple of grace, not of law (Zech 4:6, 7).

And He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke you, O Satan; even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?

Now Joshua was clothed in filthy garments and stood before the angel. And He answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And to him He said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from you and I will clothe you with a change of raiment...

Hear now Joshua the high priest and your fellows that sit before you; for they are men wondered at; for, behold, I will bring forth My Servant the BRANCH. For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua...I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day...In that day shall you call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree. (Zech 3:1-10).

This passage shows several things:

1. It shows what spiritual warfare is. Once Joshua's clothes were cleansed Satan was unable to oppose him. That is, once we are made righteous by the New Covenant Satan's opposition is defeated.
2. The stone laid before Joshua was a sacrifice stone common in those days. Animals were killed for sacrifice on the stone. By presenting the stone, God was telling Joshua that He would provide the sacrifice for Joshua's sin and for the sin of the whole land.
3. This sacrifice was the Messiah, the Branch, meaning the stem or branch of Jesse's household, the Seed of David. He would take away the sin of that land in one day, just as Daniel said (Dan 9:24).
4. *Every man sitting under his fig tree* (i.e. is secure in the land) is a symbolic picture of the redemption under the New Covenant, as it is in all the prophets. This redemption (Christ) is our land. The day that Jesus takes away our sins is the day we inherit our land.
5. This is the clothing Rev 19:8 speaks of, given to the bride through the gospel.

Note this again, "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day...In that day shall you call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree." Statements about Israel dwelling permanently in the land represent our redemption, the fulfilment, security and victory in Christ.

Such statements are found throughout the prophets. They do not mean that Israel as a nation will forever be settled in Canaan. They speak of Christ who gives us eternal rest. This point is clearly outlined in another chapter of this book, showing in particular from the book of Hebrews that this is the mind of the prophets. In chapter six Zechariah continues the Messianic theme:

Then take silver and gold and make crowns and set them upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest; and speak to him, saying, Behold the man whose name is the BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of this place and He shall build the temple of the Lord.

Even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne and the council of peace shall be between them both. (Zech 6:11-13).

This passage shows the following:

1. Joshua was the priest but he was also crowned king. Joshua was not actually made king, but this was acted out only as a prophecy of the Messiah.
2. God shall bring forth the Branch, which is the Messiah and He shall build the temple and bear the glory.
3. Here we see the fulfilment of the promises to David, that a king shall not fail from his seed and that He shall build the house of God.
4. In Christ we see the joining of the offices of priest and king in one person. This was not allowed under the law, but the two offices have peace (are together) in Christ, as they were in Melchizedek.

The prophets clearly taught that the return of Israel to Jerusalem from Babylon was for the purpose of the coming of Messiah who would take away our sin and build the temple or household of faith. This household would consist of Jews and Gentiles, of all those redeemed under the New Covenant.

In the light of all this it is clear that the church was one of the main foci of the Old Testament. The church was a major theme of all the prophets from Jacob in Gen 49:10, to the wilderness, to Nathan in 2nd Samuel 7 and throughout all the Major and Minor Prophets. This was the whole purpose of the coming of Christ from the beginning.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, your King comes to you; He is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass. (Zech 9:9).

Jesus fulfilled this when He rode into Jerusalem.

And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for Him. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem...(Zech 12:10-11).

Some of Israel would be restored through grace and others would mourn because of what they did to Christ. This refers to both the New Covenant and the judgement that fell upon Jerusalem and the surrounding nations in "that day" after Christ had risen, 70 A.D.

On the destruction of Jerusalem a Jewish writer Terentius Rufus said, "An officer in the army of Titus, with a ploughshare tore up the foundations of the temple", to fulfil Mic 3:12, "Zion shall be ploughed as a field.". Is there a non-Christian Jew today who does not interpret the prophesied return from captivity as referring only to the return from Babylon and all the nations in those days? In that day the New Covenant was established:

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David (the gift of the Spirit) and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness...And one shall say, What are these wounds in Your hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends. (Zech 13:1, 6).

And His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives...And it shall be in that day that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem...And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. (Zech 14:4, 8, 9).

Jesus stood upon the Mount of Olives when He came. His sacrifice allowed living waters to go out to all nations. He reigns over the heathen today, as Psalm 2 says. The rest of Zechariah 14 shows the calamity that was to befall the Jews and the surrounding nations and the safety in the New Jerusalem for those in the Messiah. This is all fulfilled in the kingdom of Christ.

Malachi

The last of the Minor Prophets is Malachi.

Behold I send My messenger and he shall prepare the way before Me; and the Lord whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant...behold He shall come says the Lord. But who shall abide the day of His coming?...And I will come near to you in judgement...(Mal 3:1, 2, 5).

Here we see the coming of John the Baptist, the messenger (Is 40:3), the coming of Christ to the temple in Jerusalem, to announce the New Covenant and the judgement that would accompany the end of the Old Covenant era. These scriptures cannot refer to Christ's Second Coming. They refer to

the New Covenant established in His first coming. Jesus stood in the temple when He came. It was in the days of John the Baptist.

Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. (Mal 4:5).

This was the last word of the prophets before the 400 silent years of the Intertestamental period. The next prophet Israel would hear would be John the Baptist with the exact same message, "Repent or go into the day of fire." (Mal 4:1). Jesus said that John was Elijah, that is, the one Malachi spoke of that would come in the spirit and power of Elijah (Matt 11:14).

When these scriptures are taken out of their Hebrew context and misapplied to a future fulfilment and a Second Coming, this is foreign to biblical intent. Jesus did not do this. The New Testament did not do this. The prophets are all to be taken in context, as speaking of the end of the Old Covenant and the coming of Christ to establish the New Covenant.

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the prophets. Jesus is in the prophets, speaking of Himself before His incarnation and then He fulfilled them exactly. Just as Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58). It is all about Him. Dispensationalism has twisted these texts from the clear meaning.