

THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

**Message and Mission become almost
synonymous as God's people respond to
His love and leading.**

The principal task of God's people in the Old Testament was to worship and serve the Lord (Ex. 4:22, 23), and to present a right picture of God (Deut. 4:5-8). This picture, at the beginning of human history, had become distorted in the Garden of Eden. Sinfulness makes humans naturally afraid of God, and a twisted view of God worsens the situation. This is why the primary mission of the Old Testament Church was to present the correct character of God and His

loving and righteous acts. Only when people are attracted to God and are convinced of His unselfish love toward them personally and toward the world will they trust Him, enjoy His company, follow Him, and live gratefully according to His Word.

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The Content of the Message

What was in essence the message of the Old Testament Church?

1. *God is the Creator.* The message of the Old Testament people opened with a cornerstone proclamation: God is the Creator (Gen. 1:1). This marvelous confession was the bedrock of all their proclamations because on this premise and critical recognition (Heb. 11:3, 6) hung the rest of divine revelation. God's people do not try to prove God's existence and His creative activity; they simply assume it and boldly declare it.

The Creation account testifies to how God created humans in His image and in total dependency on Him. When the prophet Jonah, first missionary to the Assyrians, was asked by sailors who he was, he confessed that he worshiped "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9).¹ The theme of Creation permeates all biblical material, which is full of references to the God the Creator (e.g., Gen. 14:19-22).

For the Old Testament people of God, the doctrine of Creation was an article of faith on which their message depended. All their thinking was tied to Creation, and their essential doctrinal points could have been directly or indirectly traced to their Creation roots. Without the biblical doctrine of first things, the Creation and the Fall, there could be no doctrine of salvation or of escha-

tology (doctrine of last things like the second coming of Christ, the judgment, or the new earth).

The message of Creation is about life, and the essence of genuine life is about relationship. In the Creation stories, God is presented as the One who is transcendent and universal and who establishes relationships, because the purpose of the first Creation narrative (Gen. 1:1-2:4) is about establishing a close relationship between God and humans. The second Creation account (Gen. 2:4-25) is about building a relationship in the most nuclear human cell—marriage.

These two relationships, vertical and horizontal, are complementary and must always come in their described, ordered sequence so that human life can be meaningful, beautiful, and happy; and humans can develop all their potential. We were created in a total dependency upon God; therefore, only from Him can humans receive all they need for building deep bonds of lasting relationships.

First comes a cultivation of a loving relationship with God, then with one's marriage partner, and finally with other people. Trust is the foundation of these relationships. The people of the Old Testament were thus to present the living God and the God of relationships. This emphasis on the Creator helped the people of God to have a wall of de-

fense against the infiltration of idolatry (Isa. 40:18-28), which is the primary denial of God's creative power and His uniqueness (Isa. 44:6-11) and was a constant danger and an attractive alternative (humans are like a "factory" for fabricating idols—unfortunately, a very successful "factory").

Claus Westermann accurately observes that the biblical message about our Creator is always in the context of praises. One cannot understand God as the Creator without admiring and praising Him. This conjunction with the exaltation of God is vital—He is unique, alive, and no one is like Him, He is above all, and only He can create life. This is why He is worthy of our praise and adoration (see Ps. 8:1-9; 19:1-4).ⁱⁱ

2. *The Messiah will come.* The message of the Old Testament people gravitated around God's promise of the Seed, who would overcome the serpent (Satan) and bring victory over evil. This expectation was their theological center. This promise, given by the God the Creator and Judge in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. 3:15), was the foundational hope of the Old Testament people (Num. 24:17; Isa. 7:14). This hope focused on the victorious substitutionary death of the Messiah on their behalf and was incorporated into the sacrificial system with blood

playing the pivotal role, thus pointing to the death of the Lamb of God for sinners. The people of God bore witness to this expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and their eyes were fixed on the future fulfillment of this crucial promise (Isa. 11:1-9; Eze. 34:23).

Truth about the Messiah as the promised Man, His identity, and function was unfolded more fully during the ongoing time. The Pentateuch laid down the solid foundation for messianic expectations. First, God gave the promise about the Victorious Seed in Genesis 3:15, which is rightly called the "mother prophecy"ⁱⁱⁱ that gave a basis for all other messianic promises, and then Eve added her understanding of this statement in the hopeful words: "I have received a man that is the Lord"^{iv} (Gen. 4:1; personal translation); it means that according to her understanding, the Messiah would be divine.

Afterwards it was stated that God would "dwell in the tents of Shem" (9:27); He would come from Abraham's offspring, and through Him the blessing would be truly mediated to all the families of the earth (12:3). The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (49:10), and would act as a victorious king (Num. 24:17), but at the same time He would be a prophet (Deut. 18:18). This person would bear different titles like Seed, Shiloh, Scepter, Star, King, and

Prophet. Later in the Messianic Psalms, His mission was more defined; and in the figures of the Davidic King, the Servant of the Lord, and the Son of Man, these messianic expectations were brought to a climax. In addition, the prophetic material contained many messianic predictions and new titles for Him.

3. *God will establish His kingdom.* The message of the Old Testament people was about God's kingdom. On the one hand, they rejoiced over the gift of life with an emphasis on the present joy of the physical dimensions, because God's creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31); on the other hand, they pointed to the future where the Lord would be totally in control and sin would be no more (Isa. 24–27). God is the Sovereign Ruler of the whole universe; He reigns, knows the end from the very beginning, and will accomplish His purposes (Isa. 46:9, 10). He is the Director of human history (Dan. 2:21) and will bring it to its climax by establishing His kingdom (vs. 44;

7:27). God Himself (not humans by their political or religious achievements) will establish this kingdom on earth, and He will come personally to inaugurate it (2:45). The faithful people of God will inherit the kingdom of God (7:22, 27). God is the King and Restorer of the lost paradise (Ps. 24:7; Dan. 2:47). The resurrection of the dead will accompany this unique intervention of God in human history by establishing the kingdom of God (Isa. 26:19).

4. *Salvation/redemption comes from the Lord.* The biblical message revealed its straightforward paradigm—from Creation (Genesis 1–2) through de-creation (the Fall [chapter 3] and the Flood accounts [chapters 6–7]) to re-Creation (chapters 8–9; and fully in Revelation 21–22). It was a deliberate design and between Creation and the ultimate new creation lay the story of redemption, of how God deals with sin and how He will save those who believe in Him. God's people testify that God is their Savior and Re-

deemer (Isa. 44:6; 48:17), and that salvation comes from the Lord as a result of His grace. Righteousness is received from the Lord as a free gift through faith (Gen. 15:6; Isa. 61:10); otherwise, we are all sinful and our robes dirty (Ps. 51:4, 5). Only the Lord forgives transgressions, blots them out, and brings a solution to the sin problem. The people of the Old Testament proclaimed this essential truth about the kingdom of grace.

5. *God is the ultimate judge of all people.* An indispensable part of the message of the people of God in the Old Testament was that God is the Judge of humanity, of all nations and people, because He is the God of justice. This message lies at the heart of God's revelation and gave a profound paradigm to their thinking because next to the fundamental proclamation that God is the Creator, the Lord is presented as the Judge: in the Garden of Eden there was the first reference to a judgment trial (Gen. 3:8-24). Thus, from the

very beginning of divine revelation, God was repeatedly presented in that capacity, and judgment was understood as an integral part of His nature, His divine prerogative, and His very fundamental characteristic. News about divine judgment saturated biblical revelation (e.g., Isa. 35:4, 5; Dan. 7:22, 26). Abraham called God "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25).

Two biblical books carry the concept of judgment in their titles: the Book of Judges and the Book of Daniel. Prophets, as servants of the covenant, speak eloquently about God's impending and eschatological judgments. Additionally, wisdom literature paints a judgment picture.

Thus, humans are accountable to God, and they are responsible for their work. The message of God's people is to call all to repentance, to come back to God, to respect, love and obey Him, and do what is right and good (Isa. 58:6-12). To understand His judgments means to know God better and comprehend His val-

ues and priorities. God actually invites us to apprehend His judgments in order to be able to deliberately declare that He is the God of love and justice, because His word and character were challenged and ridiculed from the beginning (3:1-5). The Hebrew root can also mean "go around to gossip or slander."^{iv}

How Was the Message of the Old Testament People Conveyed?

There were at least four main ways the message was carried by the Old Testament people to each successive generation and those who were interested to learn about the true God, His truth, and the plan of salvation:

1. *Through words: stories, teaching, and preaching.* The Old Testament people of God recounted God's mighty acts, His instructions, and His law to their children and other families (Deut. 6:6-9). They retold the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures—the accounts of Creation, Flood, patriarchs, Exodus, judges, kings, etc. (i.e., the plan of salvation in the form of stories). Parents had to provide appropriate answers to the inquiring questions of their children (Ex. 12:26, 27).

Another way believers in the Old Testament times proclaimed the truth about God was their usage of different designations for God—His different names and titles. There are nuances of meaning associated with

the names of the Deity. *Yahweh* (Gen. 2:4) is a personal, immanent, close God, the God of the covenant and His people; *Elohim* (1:1) is a transcendent God of all human beings, the powerful Creator; *El Shaddai* (17:1) is an omnipotent powerful God. The people of God also praised the Lord by stressing His attributes in different actions. They described the true God as being holy (Lev. 11:44), loving (Deut. 6:5), gracious (Joel 2:12), compassionate (Ps. 103:13), patient (vs. 8), faithful (Deut. 7:9), kind (Jer. 9:24); good (Ex. 33:19), knowing the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:9, 10), true (Jer. 10:10), just (Gen. 18:25), truthful (Ps. 31:5), forgiving (Ex. 34:6), merciful (Deut. 4:31), jealous (Ex. 20:5), powerful (Ps. 29:4), caring (Ex. 19:4), etc.

2. *Through the sanctuary services.* The spiritual life of the Old Testament people was concentrated around the sanctuary/temple, where God's presence resided (Ex. 25:8). All services in the sanctuary were an object lesson of God's plan of redemption. There God explained how He dealt with sin and revealed how He saved people. Sacrifices foretold the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus.

3. *Through the celebration of festivals.* The religious calendar of God's people during the Old Testament time commemorated the most important events from the story of re-

demption, pointed to divine interventions in human history, and thus facilitated a better understanding of God and His plans. The liturgical anchors were incorporated into the yearly cycle around the spring and fall festivals, in which three feasts were dominant and each Israelite had to attend them: the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The message in rituals helped people to become familiar with God's instructions, because repetition of religious activities in celebration of different festivals year after year was a powerful way to experience the message. Faith had to be lived tangibly and not only confessed.

4. *Through legislation.* Divine law, especially the Decalogue, is an expression of God's character because His law reveals who is God. The Legislator's imprint is seen in the different laws, codes, and precepts. God's law was a warrant of life; therefore it was a joy for the Old Testament people to meditate on God's instructions day and night (Ps. 1:2). By keeping the law of God, people proclaimed in tangible, everyday life the message of their God.

In addition, the practical message of the Old Testament people of God was also carried through songs, prayers, sign-actions, re-establishments of the covenant, and recitation of confessions of faith like the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9), the Decalogue,

or the Exodus story (Ex. 12:25-27) because these practices revealed the theology of God's people and their value system. Thus, truth became a part of their everyday lifestyle.

The Main Characteristics of the Message of the Old Testament People

The basic question is, What are the main characteristics of the Old Testament message? The message's content and how it was conveyed nuanced the characteristics of the truth that the people of God presented during Old Testament times.

1. *Revelational.* The message of the Old Testament people was revelational; this means that it was revealed by the Lord to human instruments who transmit the message (Jer. 1:2; 2 Peter 1:20, 21). The message is thus not of human invention, and in reality it is a self-revelation of God stated sometimes directly, but mainly indirectly (e.g., Isa. 7:7; 37:6). In other words, the message of the Hebrew Scriptures comes from above, from an outside source. One can know the God of the Old Testament only on the basis of God's revelation (Amos 3:7). The people of God can know God because He has made Himself known to them! Revelation is a verb ("to reveal") and is used in the passive forms ("it was revealed"; "it has been uncovered") in order to demonstrate the dynamics of the process of revelation that was

given by God to prophets or other writers.

Old Testament people lived by what God said about Himself, from what He revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:6, 7). This self-revelation of God was the backbone of the biblical message and theology; it is the golden thread of the Old Testament, and the rest of the Old Testament explained what it means and was a commentary on it (e.g., Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17).

2. *Theological.* The message of the Old Testament people was theological in nature. The Hebrew Scripture not only come from God, they are also primarily a message about God. The nature of God's revelation is to present the right picture of God and genuinely testify about the character of the true living God and who He is. It means that the message of the Old Testament people is theocentric and must be presented from that perspective; the message is Messiah-centered (John 5:39, 40).

3. *Historical.* The message of the

Old Testament people is historical in nature. God speaks in time and space. Salvation history is factual, real, and is presented with a linear understanding of time, in contrast to a cyclical pagan understanding of time. In other words, the Old Testament message is rooted in history and actually happened (including Genesis 1-11). This is in sharp contrast with philosophical Greek Platonic or Gnostic thinking in which only the world of ideas is good, but not actual physical events in history. Preaching is good, but so is history.

4. *Relational.* The message of the Old Testament people is relational. The relationship with God is a faith relationship based on trust (Gen. 15:6). God's desire to build a personal relationship with His people is well explained: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Ex. 19:4, italics supplied).

True religion is about a personal, intimate, and close relationship with

God that is then manifested in right relationships with others (Lev. 19:18). The stress on relationship with God is attested to in different parts of the Hebrew Scriptures (Num. 15:41). God is always in search of humanity; He takes the first step. When Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to hide from God, but He was looking for them, calling them back (Gen. 3:9). This is the pattern of God's love for human beings.

The message of the Old Testament also stresses a love relationship, not only that God is love (Isa. 63:9), but also the human response to God needs to be motivated by love. The first and greatest commandment underlines this fact: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5).

This relationship is built on a covenant relationship. The formula "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7) is the heart of His covenantal promise and

speaks eloquently about the close relationship God wants to build with His followers. A covenant, a legal establishment of a relationship, is a means by which God expresses His faithfulness and care for His children and demonstrates His lasting will. He wants His people to maintain an exclusive and meaningful relationship with Him. Thus, the message of the Old Testament people was carried also by the re-establishment of the covenant of grace in which fundamental stipulations were incorporated in order that the people might maintain the right relationship with the Lord (Gen. 6; 9).

This relationship leads to a concrete community of faith. Individuals need to make their decisions for God (Eze. 14:14), but they also need to be integrated into the fellowship of faith in order to participate in the life of this community and holy congregation (Joshua 2). The Old Testament Church is a result of God's activity for humanity. The community of faith forms people who are called

by God to follow Him in faith and obedience.

5. *Monotheistic.* The message of the Old Testament people was monotheistic. The basic confession of faith of the people of the Old Testament, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" (Deut. 6:4), was their straightforward, fundamental, and unequivocal proclamation of monotheism. Any form of polytheism, pantheism, or henotheism was rejected. In a polytheistic society, this Hebrew monotheistic belief was a striking declaration. God is one, ultimate, and He is above all. The idea of the uniqueness of God is stressed several times in the Old Testament because He alone is the true God Creator, and besides Him there is none (e.g., Ex. 15:11; 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 44:6-24).

6. *The Great Controversy/spiritual warfare framework.* The message of the Old Testament people is framed by the Great Controversy imagery. God is love, but His enemy Satan discredits Him and fights against Him (Job 1:6-12). Thus, the message of the Old Testament people explains the enmity between God and Satan, good and evil, truth and falsehood, light and darkness, and points to God's victory, because the death of the "the Suffering Servant" will be a victorious death (Isaiah 53). The results of this spiritual warfare will be decisive and lasting, because God fights only with moral power (and

not physical strength), i.e., with a pure arsenal of love, truth, justice, and freedom. God will prevail. He is the Victor, and He will establish His kingdom at the end of human history (Isa. 24:23).

7. *Eschatological.* The message of the Old Testament people was eschatological in scope. The eschatological nature of the message of the Old Testament time believers was well attested because the hope in the coming of the Promised Seed, the Messiah, was introduced in the midst of the darkness of the first apostasy of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15). This eschatological hope permeated the Old Testament from the Pentateuch to the end. The Old Testament Church was an eschatological community: the Messiah was expected and with Him also God's kingdom (Isaiah 24-27).

8. *Worship oriented.* True knowledge of God leads to gratitude and worship, which is a response to received grace and mercy, and about re-establishing a genuine relationship with an attitude toward God. Abram built altars and called on the name of the Lord as His witness (Gen. 12:8), and the worship of the Old Testament people was centered on the sanctuary, which was to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7).

On the basis of the story about Abel's and Cain's worship, God's people provided a very significant

insight into true and false worship and taught what are the crucial elements of a genuine approach to God. To know the answer to this issue, one need ask: Why did God accept the sacrifice of Abel but reject the worship of Cain? There are at least five hints in Gen 4:3-9 that give insight into the characteristics of authentic worship:

The kind of sacrifice. Abel's sacrifice was a bloody sacrifice, but Cain offered only vegetation. Thus, true worship must always be theocentric, in view of the coming Messiah, the Savior. (The symbolism of blood in an animal sacrifice plays a key role.)

The nature of sacrifice. Cain only brought something from the products of the land, but Abel offered the best of the best. True worship must be our best response to God's love—a submission of our entire life to Him, and not only a portion of it. Gratitude for His grace and goodness leads us to give the best—i.e., ourselves—to Him.

Genuine motivations. Genesis 4:4 and 5 underline that God looked first upon the persons (Cain and Abel) and then upon their sacrifices. God's interest is in people and not only upon what they are doing! He looks first upon our hearts in worship. True worship must be done from the unselfish heart, from true motives. Acceptable worship must always be authentic, sincere, and honest.

Willingness to obey. Cain played with God; he wanted to manipulate Him through his sacrifice. This is indicated by God's statement to Cain: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7, NIV). Cain wanted to do things in his own way without obedience, to manipulate God, to appease Him, but Abel was willing to listen and follow God's instructions. True worship must be connected with a willingness to obey. This is exactly the opposite of the pagan principle in worship.

Humble attitude. The whole story teaches that we can come to God as we are but not in any manner—only with a contrite spirit and humble heart (Isa. 57:15). A right attitude toward God and consequently toward humans is the key factor in worship.

9. *Ethical.* The message of the Old Testament people was ethical, calling for response. Their message was not philosophical and was not given in the form of a sophisticated tractate; it was an ethical call for right decisions and obedience. The God of the Old Testament people is a God of action. He expects His followers to act similarly and out of gratitude for His mighty acts to live according to His will. God's gracious salvific activity leads to obedience (Gen. 2:16, 17).

God called His people out of Egypt, intervened on their behalf, and then gave them the gift of the law. The Sabbath is a special sign of

that unique relationship between God and His people (Ex. 31:12, 13). In this way, God's people call others to obey His voice and follow Him. The prophet Isaiah predicted that people from other nations would come to the temple to learn about the true God and keep the Sabbath day holy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer eloquently explains: "In the Bible 'rest' really means more than 'having a rest.' It means . . . turning our eyes absolutely upon God's being God and toward worshiping him." God is entering into His rest, and He makes it possible for humans to rest. John Walton correctly states: "The divine Sabbath is seen as the cause of the human Sabbath."^{vi} When we pause, we participate in divine rest; we rest in Him.

The Sabbath is the actual start for life. First must come a relationship with God and then work and service for others. First, humans need to be charged with energy, and then they can work! Sabbath in this sense be-

comes a starting point of life, because it is a cultivation of God's presence in life. The Sabbath teaches us to enjoy fellowship and not performance. A relationship is what matters and not achievements. The Sabbath is a deep lesson teaching us that we as humans need to be God-oriented and people-oriented beings and not thing-oriented or work-oriented. The Sabbath helps us to start every week refreshed, to start anew.

The message of God's people underlined that obedience is the result of God's re-creative work in them. It is a matter of a new heart (capitulation, dedication, and a new orientation in life) and accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joshua aptly stated: "You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" (Joshua 24:19). The prophet Ezekiel profoundly explains that obedience is possible only through God's intervention in our lives: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit

within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them”” (Eze. 36:26, 27).

10. *Mission oriented.* The message of the Old Testament people was mission and service oriented. The followers of God are called to be His witnesses. The Old Testament Church was a witnessing and serving community (Ex. 18:9-11).

The Gospel in Both Testaments

The people of the Old Testament (it might be better to say “Older Testament,” “First Testament,” “Hebrew Scriptures,” or “Scriptures of Jesus and the Apostles”)^{vii} were called to embrace a divine, authoritative revelation and announce the truth about God, His character, and His plan of salvation, which presents God as the Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. Thus, the message of the Old Testament Church was primarily about God.

They boldly proclaimed that He is the Creator, that humans are His children created in His image, and that they are accountable to Him. It is also a message about humanity, its sinfulness, alienation from God, and lostness.

Humans have no solution to the problem of sin; only God can resolve this enigma. This is why the hope of the people of God in the Old Testament gravitates toward and centers on the Promised Seed, the Messiah, because forgiveness, salvation, and restoration come uniquely from the Lord. He will come to establish His eternal kingdom. To declare and live this message was the mission of the people of God in the Old Testament.

The first task of the Old Testament people was to paint a correct picture of God before the people because it had been distorted by Satan from the very beginning. The community of believers began with the first couple (Adam and Eve) and continued in the line of families that wanted to build a right relationship

with God and to serve others (like Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses). This community of faith believed in one God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. One family witnessed to another family about the mighty acts of God.

After the Exodus from Egypt, Israel was formed as a nation and a church at the same time in order to be a living witness for God in the world. The people of God worshiped the Lord God who made a covenant with His people, were gathered together for a holy assembly on Sabbaths, and came to the tabernacle to learn more about God, His will, the plan of salvation, and how to follow Him.

The Old Testament people of God constitutes people who are called by God to form a community of believers in the Lord (*Yahweh*) and His promised Messiah. These people of God are called to be His witnesses for the expectation of the Messiah, establishment of His kingdom, His truth, and unselfishly serve others in order that they can also know the true God, His message, and become His disciples. Worship is an integral part of this community, but not its goal *per se*, because the reason for the existence of the people of God is to accomplish its mission for others by serving them and teaching them the true worship. Genuine worship is a response to God’s love and is built on His Pres-

ence and on a true respect of His word/law.

In the Old Testament, the community of God’s people is never called to be the kingdom of God. Its members are not building the kingdom of God on earth, but they are expecting the kingdom of God that comes from above as a result of His activity. The people of God in the Old Testament should have lived in a loving, dependent, and responsible covenant relationship with their Creator in order to worship Him, witness about His goodness, and serve others in need. The Old Testament prophets, as servants of the covenant, called people to the original intent of the covenant, to renew a right attitude toward God and accomplish its mission (Jer. 31:31-33).

The message that was proclaimed in Old Testament times is the same in principle that we are commissioned to preach. The eternal Gospel has to be preached to our contemporary world, and this message needs to be interpreted in theocentric terms; otherwise, it is not an eternal Gospel. We need to be on guard against falling into the tendency to interpret the gospel with a gap between the Old and New Testaments or speaking about two systems of salvation. Our emphasis in presenting truth may be different because we are not expecting the first but the second coming of the Messiah; however, presenting God as the Creator,

Re-Creator, and Judge was and is an integral part of the gospel.

The message of the Old Testament people was about love, faith, and hope! A relationship of love was always the most essential constituent of the true religion because God is a God of love and of relationships. Their message was the gospel; it was good news about God, Creator, Redeemer, Judge, King, and Lord, and His purposes for this world and beyond. This message started with the gospel according to Moses, was developed throughout the whole Old Testament, was centered on the Promised Seed (the coming of the Messiah), and culminated with the message about the resurrection and the kingdom of God that would be established by God through His intervention in our history. This kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom. The Old Testament community of faith was a witnessing community with a worldwide mission.

“God is love”; “God with us”; “God cares”; and “God rules” are the

capstones of the message of the Old Testament people. In order to summarize in a few words the purpose of their message and mission, I want to paraphrase the prayer of Richard of Chichester: “To know God more clearly, to love Him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly.” □

NOTES AND REFERENCES

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from The New King James Version of the Bible.

ⁱⁱ Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, trans. and intro. by Norman E. Wagner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 37.

ⁱⁱⁱ James E. Smith, *What the Bible Teaches About the Promised Messiah* (Nashville: Nelson, 1993), p. 38.

^{iv} Richard M. Davidson, “Satan’s Celestial Slander,” *Perspective Digest* 1:1 (1996), pp. 31-34.

^v Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), p. 40.

^{vi} John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), p. 153.

^{vii} See Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

