

Listening to the Word of God



In the School of the Holy Spirit

by Don Schwager

A Charismatic and Scriptural Approach to Reading Scripture Spiritually

- ❖ Part 1: The Holy Spirit opens Scripture for us
- ❖ Part 2: The Unity of the Scriptures – New hidden in the Old and the Old unveiled in the New
- ❖ Part 3: Formational Reading of Scripture – Shapes and transforms us in the likeness of Christ
- ❖ Part 4: Some Principles of the Spiritual Meaning and Interpretation of Scripture – a brief intro



Part 1: The role of the Holy Spirit in opening the Scriptures for us

“Reading the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit would be like opening a book in the dark.”

- Quote from *The Mystery of God's Word* by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa

“Did not our hearts burn within us
while he talked to us on the road...
while he opened to us the Scriptures”
– Luke 24:32

Jesus' disciples could not understand his death on the cross until he rose in glory and explained from the Scriptures the meaning of his atoning sacrifice and victory over sin, Satan, and death. As he opened the Scriptures for them, their hearts were set on fire with faith, love, and joy.

Role of the Holy Spirit

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

- John 14:25

Jesus explained to his disciples that the Holy Spirit would be their teacher and constant guide.

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

– John 8:32-32

The Lord wants us to approach the Sacred Scriptures not simply as a word of the past but as God’s Word that is also addressed to us today.

The Lord Jesus invites us to encounter him in the daily reading of Sacred Scripture. Through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit he opens our ears to hear his voice and to recognize his presence as he speaks to us through the words of Holy Scripture.

“The word of God is living and powerful”

– Letter to the Hebrews 4:12

God’s word is a creative and life-giving word. His word is wisdom and power that shapes and transforms our minds, hearts, and lives in the likeness of Christ (Romans 12:2).

His word frees us from ignorance, self-deception, and the blindness of sin and falsehood. His word strengthens us in faith, hope, and love. His word is infused with the breath and power of the Holy Spirit who purifies and makes us holy.

“*Sacred Scripture* is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breadth of the Holy Spirit.” - Quote from *Dei Verbum*, 9

“Anyone who wants to be always united to God must pray often and read the Bible often. For in prayer it is we who are speaking to God, but in the readings it is God speaking to us... All spiritual progress is based on reading and meditation. What we do not know, we learn in the reading; what we have learned, we preserve by meditation.”

“Reading the Bible provides us with a two-fold advantage. It instructs our minds, and introduces us to the love of God by taking our attention off vanities. None can understand the meaning of the Bible if they do not acquire familiarity with it through the habit of Bible reading.”

- Quote from Isidore of Seville (560-636 AD)

Conversing with God in Scripture Reading

Saint Jerome, an early church father (347-420 AD), wrote that to read Scripture is to converse with God.

“You are reading [Scripture]? No. Your betrothed is talking to you. It is your betrothed, that is, Christ, who is united with you. He tears you away from the solitude of the desert and brings you into his home, saying to you, ‘Enter into the joy of your Master.’”

“How could one live without the knowledge of Scripture, through which one learns to know Christ himself, who is the life of the believer?”

The Scriptures speak and sing of Christ

“The Scriptures are in fact, in any passage you care to choose, singing of Christ, provided we have ears that are capable of picking out the tune.”

“The Lord opened the minds of the Apostles so that they understood the Scriptures. That he will open our minds too is our prayer.”

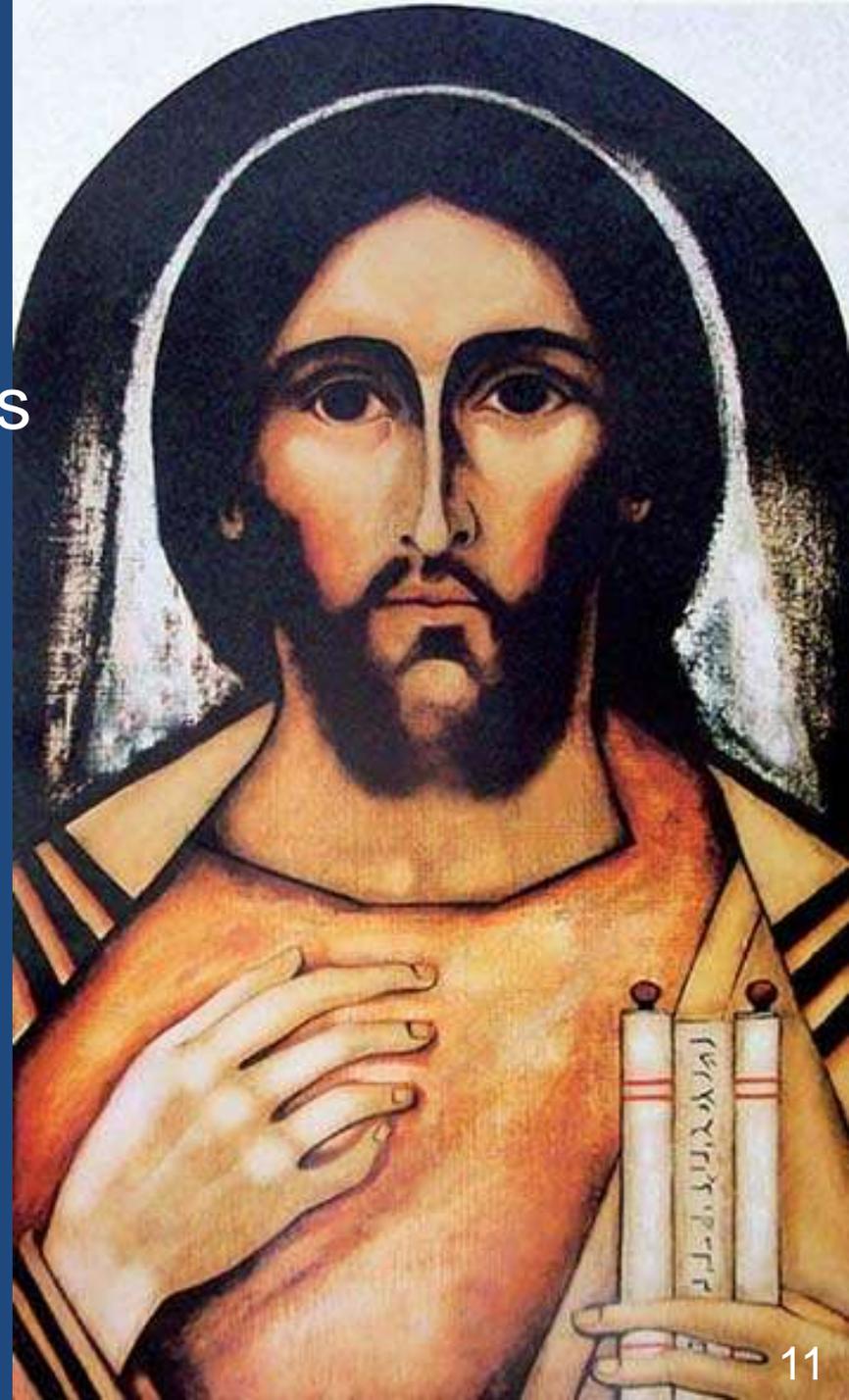
- St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)

Listening and Hungering

Through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus continues to open the Scriptures for us as we listen and reflect upon his word.

Hungering for God's Word

The first step is to hunger for God's word and to listen with a disciple's ear. If we ask God to feed us, he will nourish and sustain us with the daily bread of his life-giving word.



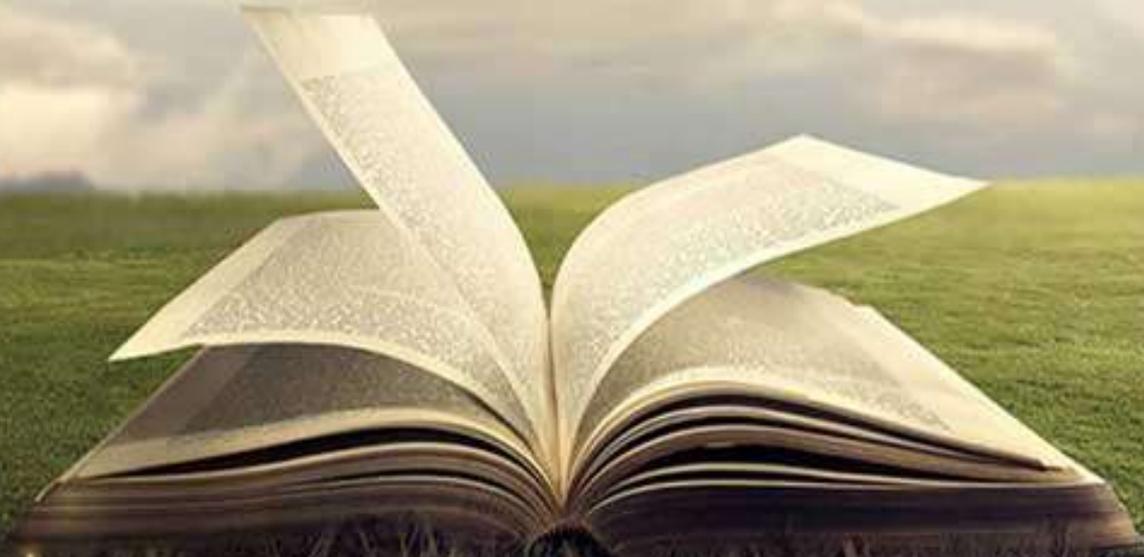
Jesus answered, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Listening with a disciple’s ear

The Holy Spirit will give us a disciple’s ear if we are ready to listen and eager to learn.

“Morning by morning he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious” (Isaiah 50:4-5).

Part 2: The Unity of Scripture



Christians recognize the Old Testament and the New Testament as one book, commonly called the Bible or Holy Scriptures. Both the Old and New Testaments are divinely inspired by one and the same Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16).

“The New Testament is *hidden* in the Old and Old Testament is *unveiled* in the New”

- ❖ A very common expression, dating back to the early beginnings of the Church, states that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New – the two shed light on each other.
- ❖ The Old Testament prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ who came not only to redeem the people of Israel but the whole world as well.

“All Scripture describes the coming of the Lord. The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is brought to light in the New.”

“Those who are unspiritual have always failed to see this hidden meaning. Yet even before Christ those who were spiritual could find the Words of God hidden in the words of the prophets, and so through this understanding could be set free.”

– St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430 AD)

A Scripture study exercise

Read and compare the following two passages:

Genesis 1:1-3,26
and John 1:1-3

How might these passages be related to one another?

In the beginning...

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1,3)... Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Genesis 1:26).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3)."

Compare the verses in Genesis 1:1-3 with the verses in John 1:1-3. What similarities do you see? And what differences do you see?

God's word is a spoken word – when God speaks his word has creative and dynamic power to bring about a change and transformation. His word can even create something out of nothing.

Why does John begin his Gospel account with the same three words recorded in the book of Genesis, chapter 1 (Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1)?

Is John comparing the beginning of creation with the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, who became a man of flesh and blood like us?

Or is John saying something more – a continuity, development, or fulfillment of what began in the Old?

How does Genesis 1 shed light on John 1 and how does John 1 bring to light what is hidden in Genesis 1?

In Genesis 1:26 God speaks in the plural, “Let us make man in our image.” How does the Gospel of John reveal what is hidden in Genesis 1:26?

Christians throughout the ages have understood this plural expression in Genesis as a veiled reference to the Trinity of the one Godhead (three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – in one God).

A Scripture study exercise

The Tree of Life & the healing of the nations

Read and compare the following two passages:
Genesis 2:9 and Revelation 22:1-2

Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden

“And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The **tree of life** was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

– Genesis 2:9

Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life... flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... also, on either side of the river, the **tree of life** with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the **healing of the nations.**”

- Revelation 22:1-2

Connection between the Tree of Life and the Cross of Christ?

A composite image with a purple and blue background. On the left, Jesus is depicted on the cross, appearing as a suffering man with a crown of thorns and visible wounds. On the right, the Resurrected Jesus is shown standing, wearing a white robe, with his arms outstretched and a bright, glowing aura around his head. In the foreground, a woman wearing a yellow headscarf is shown in profile, looking upwards with a contemplative expression.

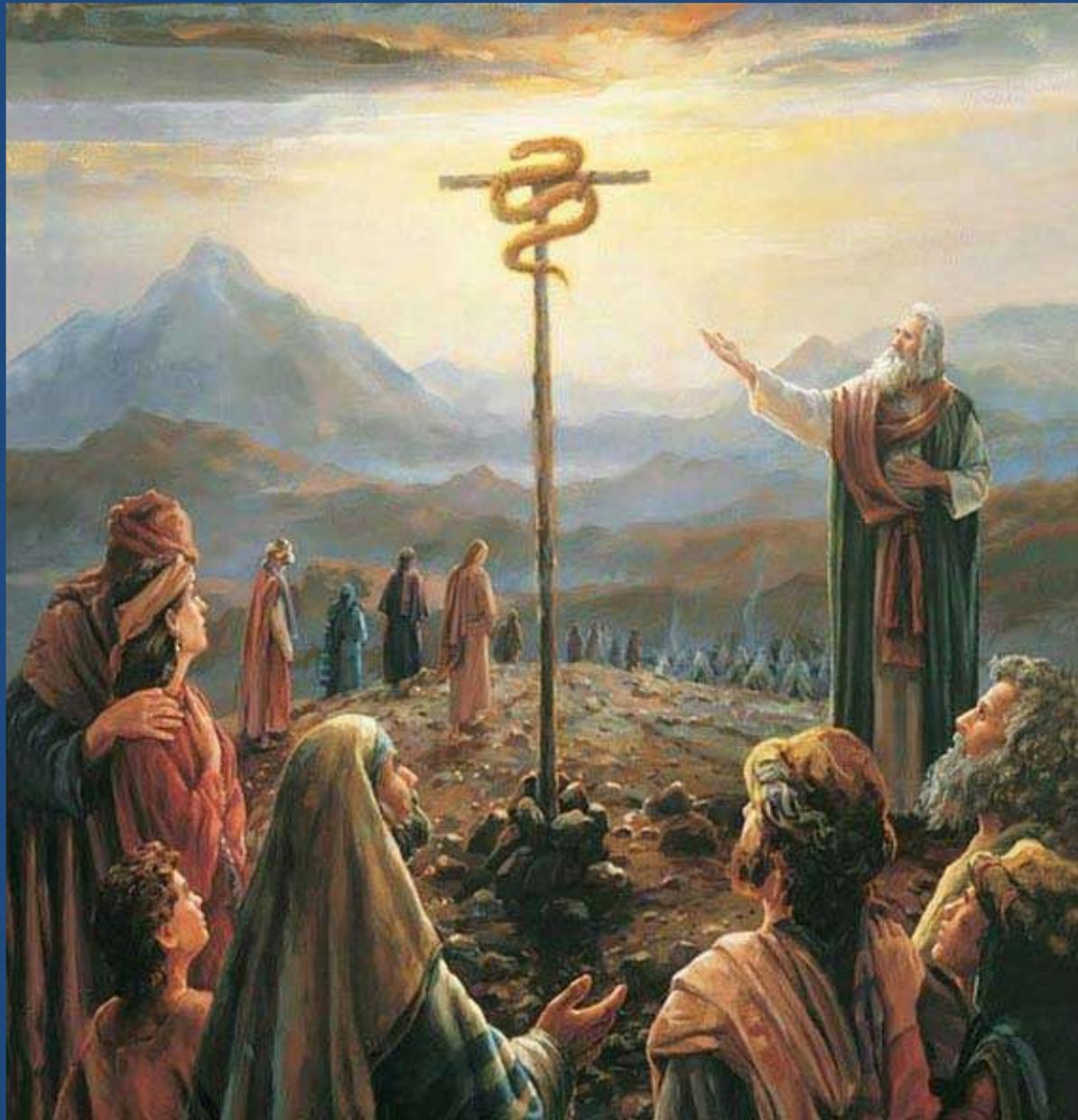
“The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.”

- Acts 5:30

Sign of Healing and Life

“And as Moses
lifted up the serpent
in the wilderness
(Numbers 21:4-9),
so must the Son
of man be lifted up,
that whoever
believes in him
may have eternal
life.”

- John 3:14-15



The Life-Giving Cross

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...

By his wounds you have been healed.”

- 2 Peter 2:24

The Cross of Christ is a Tree of Life that brings healing and restores us to new life in Christ



“How precious the gift of the cross, how splendid to contemplate! In the cross there is no mingling of good and evil, as in the tree of paradise: it is wholly beautiful to behold and good to taste. The fruit of this tree is not death but life, not darkness but light. This tree does not cast us out of paradise, but opens the way for our return...

By the cross death was slain and Adam was restored to life. The cross is the glory of all the apostles, the crown of the martyrs, the sanctification of the saints. By the cross we put on Christ and cast aside our former self. By the cross we, the sheep of Christ, have been gathered into one flock, destined for the sheepfold of heaven.”

– Theodore the Studite (759–826 AD)

Part 3:

Formational Reading of Scripture

Shapes and transforms us in
the likeness of Christ

What is the right attitude and approach to Sacred Scripture? God's Word shows us:

- ❖ I have laid up your word in my heart that I may not sin against you. I revere your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.
- ❖ Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.
- ❖ The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. The sum of your word is truth; and every one of your righteous ordinances endures for ever. I rejoice at your word like one who finds great treasure.

A disciple's heart and mind

We need the heart and character of a disciple in order to hear and grow in understanding and living according to God's Word in Scripture.

These are some of the key qualities we need:

- Humble, ready to listen and be taught
- Teachable, ready to be changed
- Listen with love, trust and respect
- Receptive to guidance of Holy Spirit

Two very different ways of reading Scripture:

Informational reading

We generally approach informational reading as a subject we wish to master. We approach the text with an analytical and critical mind so we can form our own opinion and judgment on the subject.

Formational reading

In a formational approach to reading Scripture we allow the text to master us so we can grow in our understanding of God's mind, heart, and plan for us as it is revealed in his word. Formational reading requires a humble, detached, and loving approach that is also open to God's mystery.

This chart highlights some key differences in how we can approach the reading of a text of Scripture.

INFORMATIONAL READING	FORMATIONAL READING
Seeks to cover as much text as possible	Focuses on small portions of the text at one time
A linear process	An in-depth process
Seeks to master the text	Allows the text to master us
The text as an object to use	The text as a subject that shapes us
Analytical, critical, judgmental approach	Humble, detached, willing, loving approach
Problem-solving mentality	Openness to mystery

Part 4:

Some Principles for the Spiritual Meaning and Interpretation of Scripture

(a very brief intro)

The Spiritual Interpretation of the Bible

Quote from Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)

By what principle ought one to read and interpret the Scriptures? It is a fact that a number of errors have had their origin in an inability to understand a sacred text in the right way.

For example, many Jews have not believed in our Savior, because they have been attached to the literal meaning of the prophecies made about him and have not seen them physically fulfilled...

So then the reason for so many mistaken ideas about God consists solely in the inability to interpret Scripture in a spiritual sense. It has been taken in its literal sense only.

The Two Meanings of the Bible - Literal and Spiritual

by Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)

“The reason why the divine power has given us the Scriptures is not solely to present facts according to the literal interpretation of the narrative. If one looks to the letter of the text, some of the facts have not actually happened and would be irrational and illogical.

By keeping the commandment of the Lord to *search the Scriptures* (John 5:39), one ought to examine with care and attention where the literal meaning is historical and where it is not

In Scripture not everything is objectively historical in the literal sense. Sometimes it is obvious that the result of taking it literally is impossible. But the **divine Scripture, taken as a whole, has a spiritual meaning.**”

The Spiritual Meaning of the Scriptures

by Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)

“The Scriptures that prophesy about Christ, the words that announce his coming and his teaching are inspired by God. They were proclaimed with power and authority and it is for this reason they have conquered so many people's hearts.

However, only with the coming of Christ have the divine character of the prophetic writings and the **spiritual meaning** of the books of the Mosaic Law become apparent. Before Christ it was not possible to produce decisive arguments for the inspiration of the Old Testament. The coming of Jesus persuaded even the doubtful that those pages were written under the influence of grace.”

The Spiritual Interpretation of the Bible

By Raniero CantaleMESSA

“Biblical inspiration is the basis for much more than the... inerrancy of the Word of God; positively, it is the basis for its inexhaustibility, its divine force and vitality, and what St. Augustine called its *mira profunditas*, its marvellous depth.”

“Spiritual interpretation is objective; it is interpretation done under the guidance, or by the light, of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures in the first place. It is based on an historical event, that is, the redemptive act of Christ, who by his death and resurrection completes the plan of salvation, fulfils all types and prophecies, unveils all hidden mysteries, and offers us the true key for interpreting the whole Bible.”

Spiritual interpretation... By Raniero Cantalemma, continued

“Anyone choosing to read the Scriptures after Christ's life while disregarding his act would be like someone persistently reading a musical score in the key of G when the composer has already moved into the key of B; every single note after the shift would sound false and out of tune. ”

“The New Testament calls the new key "the Spirit," while it defines the old key as "the letter," saying that "the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6).

Reading the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit would be like opening a book in the dark. ”

Spiritual interpretation... By Raniero Cantalemma, continued

“To erect an antithesis between "letter" and "Spirit" does not mean erecting one between Old and New Testaments, as though the former merely represented the letter and the latter only the Spirit.

It means, rather, to make an antithesis between the two different ways of reading either the Old Testament or the New: between the way which disregards Christ, and the way which, by contrast, evaluates everything by the light of Christ. This is why the Church prizes both Testaments, for both speak to her of Christ.”

An Example of the New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures

“They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.” – Hebrews 8:5

“For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ” – Hebrews 9:24

*An Example of the New Testament Interpretation
of the Old Testament Scriptures*

“I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

– 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Some Old Testament Types that Foreshadow Christ and his Work of Salvation

A “type” as it is used in the Scriptures is a representation or prefiguring of something that is to come. We might think of it as a template or even a shadow (or foreshadowing) that dimly represents what is to come.

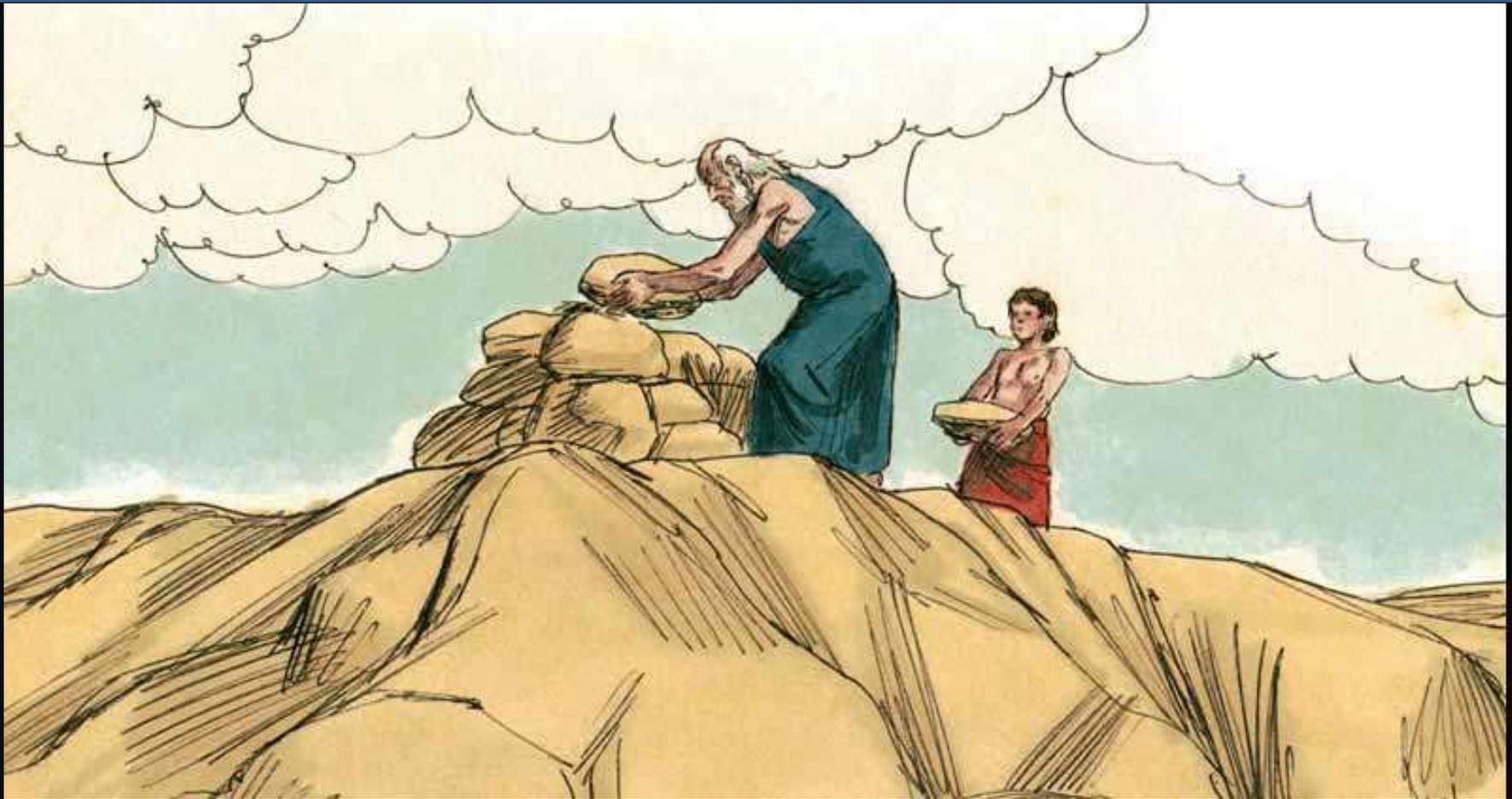
The Old Testament is full of “Types” of Christ (God’s Anointed Son and Messiah). These are intentionally placed in the Scripture to describe and identify the Messiah when he came.

They were designed by God to prefigure some aspect of the person of Jesus Christ. They are Old Testament “anticipations” of Christ and since they dealt with a future person (the Messiah), they were “prophetic.”

The command to sacrifice Abraham's *Son of Promise* foreshadows Christ, the Son of God who carried the wood of the cross to Calvary



“Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son.” – Genesis 22:6



And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “**God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.**” – Genesis 22:7-8

Melchizedek and Christ

“You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”
- Psalm 110:4

Jesus is explicitly compared with Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20) because both held the position of Priest and King for time without end (eternal not temporal position). (Hebrews 5-7; Genesis 14/ Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6)

Melchizedek's name means “King of Righteousness.” He ruled over “Salem” which means “peace.” He was the King of Peace. As a Priest, he was superior to the Aaronic priesthood of the Jews in the sense that even Abraham, (great-grandfather of Levi – Aaron and the priests of Israel all came from the tribe of Levi), paid tithes to Melchizedek. The Letter to the Hebrews makes the argument that even Aaron paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham.



And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, "Blessed be Abram to the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, And blessed be the most high God, who has delivered your enemies into your hand". And he gave him tithe from all. — Genesis 14:18-20

New Testament Interpretation of Melchizedek and Christ

“Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; as he says also in another place, “You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

- Hebrews 5:5,10

This workshop presentation was prepared by Don Schwager © 2015. He is the author of DailyScripture.net and editor for [Living Bulwark](http://LivingBulwark.com), an online magazine that seeks to foster the renewal of Christian life and mission among Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox.

For further study see:

- [Scripture Study Course](#), an online resource by Don Schwager
- *The Mystery of God's Word*, by Fr. Raniero CantaleMESSA, 1994
- *Verbum Domini: Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, by Benedict XVI, 2010
- *Dei Verbum [The Word of God]: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, Second Vatican Council, 1965

Credits

- Excerpts from *The Mystery of God's Word, Chapter 8 The spiritual interpretation of the Bible*, by Raniero Cantalamessa, 1994: slides 37-39.
- Illustration of *Cross and Holy Spirit*, slide 1, by © Kimmit at Bigstockphoto.com
- Illustration “Jesus Christ The Word of Life,” slide 11, by © [Michael O'Brien](#)
- Illustrations by [Kevin Carden/ChristianPhotoshops.com](#): slides 13, 16
- Illustration of Christ on the Cross, by James Tissot: slide 26
- Illustrations by [Jim Padgett/Sweet Publishing](#): slides 43, 44
- *Melchizedek Blesses Abram*, illustration by Walter Rane: slide 46

Final page. This PowerPoint presentation was given by Don Schwager during the European Catholic charismatic conference in Warsaw, October 2015. His written text of this workshop was published in EUCRIL 294 (www.iccrs.eu). Don Schwager wrote:

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"You are reading [Scripture]? No. Your betrothed is talking to you. It is your betrothed, that is, Christ, who is united with you. He tears you away from the solitude of the desert and brings you into his home, saying to you, 'Enter into the joy of your Master'... 'How could one live without the knowledge of Scripture, through which one learns to know Christ himself, who is the life of believers?'"

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Spirit would be like opening a book in the dark"
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A formational approach to reading Scripture with the Holy Spirit

How can we read the Scriptures with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit will give us a disciple's ear if we are ready to listen and eager to learn. "Morning by morning he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious" (Isaiah 50:4-5).

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Jesus offers us a great promise, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

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Much more materials from this conference (text, audio and pictures) you can find on <http://www.isidor.se/ccreurope/media/warsaw2015.aspx> or from the drop-down menu under MEDIA on www.iccrs.eu.

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