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WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT STILL HAVE VALUE?

Kevin W. Rhodes

People, including some Christians, periodically question the value of studying the Old Testament. Perhaps they have struggled to understand the point of reading about the construction of the tabernacle. Or maybe they wondered why they should bother trying to figure out all the various sacrifices described in Leviticus. They might have had their eyes glaze over just trying to pronounce some of the names in the various genealogies. These reasons might sound weak on the surface, but they are real issues for many people. However, others object to studying the Old Testament for more doctrinal reasons. They argue that since the Old Testament has been fulfilled and was nailed to the cross (Matt. 5:17; Col. 2:14) it does not apply today and therefore should not be studied or preached. They might also point out that most of the regulations of the Old Law do not apply today for the same reason. We do not follow the same food limitations, health mandates, or feast days. We do not even remember the Sabbath since it was part of the Old Covenant but not part of the new. The Old Testament, they argue, cannot teach us how to be saved from our sins, cannot explain how to worship in spirit and truth, and cannot describe even why to hope. These are all true, as far as they go. But just because the Old Testament does not have value for us in these ways does not mean that it has no value at all. Quite to the contrary.

The early church used the Old Testament quite effectively to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. When Paul approached the Jews in their synagogues, he "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3).

Paul discussed the Old Testament with the Jews to show God's plan for the Messiah was for Him to suffer and die and then to be resurrected—contrary to their tradition. Then, by combining this evidence from the Old Testament with the facts about Jesus, he made the case for Jesus Christ and Christianity. This was not an exception for Paul; this was his regular practice. Indeed, Paul pointed out the value of studying the Old Testament Scriptures when he reminded Timothy of its effectiveness in his own early training as a youth, telling him that they played an important role in making him "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14-15). Timothy's training in the Old Testament prepared him well to accept and enjoy the benefits of the New. So while the apostle

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

THE OLD TESTAMENT & INSPIRATION

If you were to poll the average bible student and ask him which portion of God's word he spends the majority of his time studying, in all likelihood he would reply, "the New Testament." It is true that the Old Law has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), and today we live under the New Covenant. But, that does not mean that the Old Testament should be ignored. Unfortunately, over time an attitude of neglect, misunderstanding, and, in some cases, downright rejection of the Old Testament has developed. For example, in the early 2nd century Marcion insisted that the Old Testament be removed from the canon because of "discrepancies" between the "God of the Old Testament" and the "God of the New Testament." Later, Augustine wanted to allegorize the Old Testament, and Freidrich Schleiermacher dismissed it at heathenism. Sadly, there are many today who have followed in their footsteps for one reason or another.

Regardless of what Marcion, Augustine, Schleiermacher, and others like them may say, the Old Testament does have value for New Testament Christians and should be studied regularly. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Paul said that the Old Testament was written "for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Within it we find the record of our origins, Messianic and Kingdom prophecy, great principles of sacrifice, vivid examples of faithful living, and practical wisdom for every day life. But the chief reason is that the Old Testament is, and always has been, the inspired word of God.

The bible affirms without hesitation that the Old Testament's inspiration. Consider the following passages:

- God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets (Heb. 1:1).

- All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction; for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

A careful examination of these passages reveals a great deal about Old Testament scripture. First, God has indeed spoken through the Old Testament writers. Second, every word of scripture is completely inspired of God, and is necessary for our spiritual maturity—that includes the Old Testament. Third, no portion of scripture originated within the mind of a man. Rather, every syllable in the Old and New Testaments came to be through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, the Old Testament itself claims inspiration. Over 600 times within its pages we find statements like "thus saith the Lord," "God said," and "the Lord said." Here is a small sampling of Old Testament claims of inspiration:

- The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue (2 Sam. 23:2).
- Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth (Jer. 1:9).
- In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet saying (Zech 1:1).

Further evidence of the Old Testament's

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Cody Westbrook ----- Editor

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THE PURPOSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Tom Wacaster

inspiration is found in the fact that Jesus and the apostles used it regularly in their preaching. Jesus respected the Old Law and knew its purpose. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said,

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (Matt. 5:17-18)

He also knew that the Old Testament scriptures were filled with prophecy about Himself and His work. In John 5:39 He said to the Jews, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." His mastery of the Old Testament is on full display in Matthew 22:41-46 where He caught the Pharisees in a trap by quoting Psalm 110:1, thereby acknowledging that passage as scripture, the inspiration of David in writing it, and His own deity in its application.

The apostles also viewed the Old Testament as the word of God and quoted from it often. Consider what Paul accomplished with it in Thessalonica as he "reasoned with them out of the [Old Testament CW] scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead" (Acts 17:2-3). He would later write to the church in that location,

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively worketh also in you that believe. (1 Thess. 1:3)

Keep in mind that it was Old Testament scripture that Paul preached to them and said, was "effectively working" within them.

Indeed, every word of Old Testament scripture is inspired, and therefore should be respected and utilized in our studying, preaching, and teaching. To ignore it would be to do so at our own spiritual peril. May we approach a study of the Old Testament scriptures with the same level of respect as Jesus, the apostles, and other great heroes of faith.

CW

What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made. (Gal. 3:19a)

A proper understanding of the role that the Law of Moses played in the overall scheme of redemption is important to an appreciation of the relationship of the Old Law of Moses to the New Law of Christ Jesus. In addition, such an understanding would go a long way toward eliminating foolish appeals to the Old Testament for authority for what we do in worship to God today. Galatians chapter three addresses three important truths regarding that Old Testament Law: (1) Its relationship to the promise, (2) its temporary nature regarding the particulars, and (3) its purpose in the overall scheme of things. Consider each of these.

First, there is the relationship of the Law of Moses to the promise given to Abraham. Paul points out that the Law came "four hundred and thirty years after" the promise (Gal. 3:17). It is impossible, therefore, for the Law to justify. The Law did not "disannul so as to make the promise of none effect." The argument of Paul is astonishing. The Judaizing teachers were teaching that justification came through the Law of Moses. Their doctrine implied that Abraham was not justified in the sight of God, since the Law came many years after the promise was given to Abraham, and after it was stated that Abraham's faith "was counted unto him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Second, the particulars of the Old Testament were "abolished in his flesh...even the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (Eph. 2:15). Christ "blotted out the bond written in ordinances...and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). It is impossible to appeal to the Old Testament for authority in matters of religion today, and at the same time respect the force of the words "blotted out" and/or "abolished." The particulars of the Old Testament, including all of the ceremonial laws given to Israel, ceased to be binding upon God's people at the time Jesus died on the cross. Any appeal to that Old Testament for authority in matters pertaining to

worship today is equivalent to an appeal to British Law for authority in the upper New England States that constituted the original thirteen colonies.

Third, consider the purpose of the Law in the overall scheme of God's divine plan. It is to this point that Paul proposed the question in Galatians 3:19: "What then is the law?" Paul was not seeking to answer the question as to what the Law is, but rather why it was given. We might say, "Why then the Law? What purpose does it serve? Is the law, then, to be regarded as nothing? Does it serve no purpose?" To these questions Paul now turns his attention.

The Old Testament Law "was added because of transgressions" (vs. 19b). The Law did not replace the promise, nor was the Law given to somehow complement or complete the promise. "And the law came in besides" (Rom. 5:20) in an attempt to get Israel to recognize the seriousness of sin. The late Guy N. Woods pointed out that it was

not added to complete, but given independently and additionally. It was the apostle's purpose to show...that the law came along after the promise and was added, not to embellish the promise, but to give man a greater awareness of sin.¹

The specific purpose for which that Law was "added" was, according to Paul, "because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19). The law was given to point out sin. It was NOT to reveal a way of justification, but a means of teaching and informing with regard to the nature of sin. It did this by showing the consequences of sin. The Law acted as a magnifying glass. That device does not actually increase the number of dirty spots on a garment, but makes them stand out more clearly. In the same manner, the Law magnified sin by showing the full consequence of that sin. Paul put it like this:

I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. (Rom. 7:7)

Hence, the Law was designed to bring about a recognition of sin with its consequences. It did this by (1) showing man what God required of them. Without that communication, men could not come to understand their obligation toward the Creator;

1. Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers, vol. 2.*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 2001) 176.

(2) showing man the nature and extent of sin, and showing how far he has departed from the law; (3) showing the just penalty of sin, thereby revealing the true nature of sin; (4) producing conviction of sin, so as to impress upon our minds how bitter transgression is; and (5) showing its inability to justify. Law makes no provisions for forgiveness; it merely passes judgment. If someone is arrested for breaking the speed limit, he is brought before the magistrate, and the fine is imposed. All the law can do is point out what the crime might be and, if violated, impose the penalty for that violation. To illustrate, let me assume I planned to visit some country. I read about some law that forbids the chewing of gum, the violation of which carries a \$500.00 fine. The law has revealed the serious nature of the transgression, thereby giving me fair warning as to the serious nature of the crime.

The practical result of the law, then, was to demonstrate that every man who attempted to keep the law had failed, and stood condemned and in need of justification by some system other than law. That "system" is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CW

KINGDOM PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Andy Baker

Quick now, without looking, answer the following questions:

- Who will be president in 2036? What institution(s) will he/she establish?
- Too hard? What about the president in 2024? That's only two presidential election cycles from now. Same question: Who will be the president and what institution(s) will he/she establish?

One of the amazing, awe-inspiring facts about the Old Testament is that in book after book, prophecy after prophecy is made some hundreds and even thousands of years before the Messiah ever walked the earth. Each of these prophecies gave a piece of the puzzle to show the plan of God through the Messiah to establish a "Kingdom that would never be destroyed" (Dan.

2:44). The fact that each prophecy is fulfilled in Christ and the church is great evidence for inspiration! Here are some hopes, promises, and implications of the Kingdom prophecies in the Old Testament and how they relate to Christians today:

The Legitimacy of the Kingdom Stands or Falls with the Legitimacy of Jesus (Luke 24:44-48). The truth of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were all the catalysts to bring about fulfillment of the Kingdom prophecies and its establishment in Acts 2. In fact, as Peter and the apostles preached the first gospel sermon in Acts 2, Peter quoted the Kingdom prophecy from Joel 2:28-32 and immediately tied it to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus to show the plan of God in the church's establishment (Acts 2:16-47). As the book of Acts unfolds, the authority and name of Jesus become the focus for the Kingdom to be preached in all the world (Matt. 28:18-20). We cannot separate the Kingdom from the King!

Because the Kingdom is Not the "Preferred Plan" by Mankind, Does Not Make It Any Less of God's Plan (Romans 10:15-21). The Jewish nation is a great example of this. In Romans, Paul is systematically answering the questions about how God can reconcile both Jews and Gentiles into one body. He quotes from a great number of Old Testament prophecies throughout the book to prove to the Jews that God did not "switch horses" but that Christ and the church were always His plan (cf. Rom. 15:8-12; Is. 11:10). As one man said, "It's God's train. You can get onboard or you can get run over, but it's not going to stop just because you don't like it" (cf. Acts 13:40-41; Hab. 1:5). Though men may still today reject the church (i.e. "the Man not the plan"-type philosophies), we know that there is only salvation in Christ, in His body, in the church, in the Kingdom (Eph. 1:3; 22-23).

In the Kingdom, Christians Can Be Confident in God's Promise of Forgiveness (Hebrews 8:8-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34). The Law of Moses could never take away sin (Heb. 9:22). However, when the Kingdom was prophesied by the inspired prophet Jeremiah, he foretold of a time when God would establish a "better covenant based on better promises" (Heb. 8:6). In this promise of the new covenant, God emphasized, "for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds, I will remember no more" (Heb. 8:12; Jer. 31:34). Friends, if God has promised from the Old Testament that in the Kingdom there is a

better covenant, a better hope, and better promises, is it not God's will that Christians be confident in His precious forgiveness (I John. 1:7-9)? Because all Christians stumble and fall sometimes, does not give us cause to think we are any less a part of His Kingdom than we were before. As we walk faithfully in the Kingdom, God's forgiveness promises still stand and that ought to give Christians great comfort and encouragement.

Earthly Kingdoms Come and Go, But the Kingdom God Established is Forever (Daniel 2:44; Matt. 16:18-19). How much better would the Kingdom of God be if Christians in America spoke as passionately about the church as they did about the American kingdom? The Old Testament book of Daniel shows, among other lessons, "God rules in the kingdoms of men" (Dan. 4:34-37). God's purposes will not be thwarted. In fact, during the reign of one of the harshest governments to ever be on the earth, God established the church. That harsh government (Rome) would then proceed to persecute the citizens of God's Kingdom for the next 200 years. The church saw the demise of Rome (Rev. 18). Indeed, God has watched the church of His Son flourish throughout two thousand years of human history while earthly kingdoms have risen and fallen. Is this not the message of what Daniel originally interpreted regarding the Kingdom God would establish that would "never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44)? Our citizenship on this earth will not matter in eternity, what will matter is if we accept now the Kingship of Jesus Christ and are added to His Kingdom (Matt. 9:35; Rom. 6:17).

It is important to remember that the knowledge of Kingdom prophecies in the Old Testament are not just an academic fancy or simply an answer to Bible trivia. Rather, they are exceedingly precious promises that should encourage and bolster the faith of Christians everywhere. They remind Christians that God is faithful, that His work is sure, that His Kingdom will endure, and that we are a part of what He has been working in all of history to accomplish! That, friends, is great news. Add to that fact that ALL can be a part of the Kingdom of God and we have something that is worth sharing (Rom. 1:16-17)! *Oh, will you not tell it today?*

CW

MESSIANIC PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Kris Groda

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples in Jerusalem and said, “[A]ll things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45). Just before this, on the road to Emmaus Jesus joined himself with Cleopas and another disciple who were talking about the Lord’s death and the report of His resurrection. Jesus said to them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Importance of Messianic Prophecy in the Old Testament

Until the New Testament was penned, the only scriptures the early church had were the Old Testament scriptures (Acts 17:2, 11; 18:24-28). Paul said that the Old Testament was also written for our learning (Rom. 15:4) and our admonition, or warning (1 Cor. 10:11). The way the New Testament writers used the Old Testament is very interesting. We see it used in typological ideas (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1; 1 Pet. 3:20-21); sermons, like Peter’s on Pentecost (Joel 2); and sometimes in highlighting principles or warnings (i.e., 2 Pet. 2:1-2). Messianic prophecies like Genesis 3:15 present some description or fact about the Messiah (“Christ” means “the Anointed One”). Since the focus of the Bible is upon Jesus the Messiah (John 1:41; Matt. 16:16; Acts 2:36), it is important for us to focus our attention upon Messianic prophecy.

Messianic Examples and New Testament Fulfillment

Let us consider a few examples of Old Testament prophecy. In Psalm 16:8-11 David said, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” On Pentecost Peter described David by calling him a “prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was

not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:30-31).

When God made the covenant with Abraham, He said, “and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Paul told us that this prophecy was an early announcement of the Gospel. He said, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8). One can see why Paul would call this the “gospel” because, as he explained, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

Another exciting example is the portion of Isaiah 53 that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading as he journeyed toward Gaza (Acts 8:32-33). Since the eunuch did not know of whom the scripture was speaking, “Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

The Importance of Being Familiar with Messianic Prophecy

There are at least two reasons why Christians should be familiar with Messianic prophecy.

1. *Your faith in Christ depends on it.*

Paul taught that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), a context saturated with prophetic quotes from the Old Testament! Did Paul have the Old Testament scriptures in mind when he was talking about preaching the Word of God in Romans 10? “Yes!” and especially those Messianic texts! Our faith in Christ is mostly based in the New Testament, but the early Christians had to listen to the teachings of the Old Testament closely since the New Testament texts were only slowly being composed. Oral teaching and the Old Testament formed the early Bible for the earliest church members.

When Jesus was confronted by Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection, He asked them, “Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?” (Mark 12:24). The implication is that the doctrine of the resurrection could be believed if they knew the scriptures—the Old Testament scriptures. To the Pharisees who came tempting Him about the doctrine of divorce, He replied, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female...?” (Matt. 19:4). In both accounts, Jesus references the Old Testament.

2. *Your personal evangelism depends on it.*

Messianic scriptures are the foundation of Christian faith, showing that Jesus is the one way to salvation. Messianic scriptures show that the Bible is inspired by God and thus an accurate and reliable source upon which to base one's faith. The Messianic texts build faith in Jesus and in God's written word, and they provide a tool for personal evangelism to both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 11). The apostles and early evangelists could use those Messianic scriptures to show that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:22; 18:28). So Christians should always be prepared to give a defense of the faith, but to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

It is precisely because God intended to send Jesus for the salvation of humanity that the Old Testament is filled with so many significant prophecies about His messianic service. Knowing of this continuity reminds us of the long-term plans that God has developed and unfolded through the centuries; this allows us to see His great wisdom and love simultaneously (see Acts 3:19-26). Let us be committed to learning more about our Lord, especially that which is said of Him in the Old Testament!

CW

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Paul wrote extensively about how all people are now accountable to the gospel, he still found great value in the Old Testament.

Despite these biblical reasons, some might assume that the situation is different today. While no one would dispute the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is vastly different from what it was in the first century—by God's design—in principle the value of the Old Testament remains. In fact, the Old Testament provides vital information that no Christian can do without. The Old Testament provides multiples proofs of inspiration. The repetition of "Thus saith the LORD" throughout the Old Covenant offers a distinct claim of inspiration that permeates the text. The hundreds of prophecies of the coming Messiah, fulfilled by Jesus, establish a claim on inspiration that cannot be successfully ignored. Beyond this, the prophecies concerning the nations included in the Old Testament and fulfilled in history support not only the authenticity of the Bible but the relevance to all. The Old Testament answers the basic questions of life. It explains the origins of the universe and man (Gen. 1-2) in a way that brings together

the sovereign power of Almighty God and the scientific realities of His creation. It explains the existence of morality and how this became a problem. It is in the early pages of the Old Testament that man's purpose in having a relationship with God finds expression, which is then supported throughout the rest of its writings (Ecc. 12:13). The Old Testament offers insight into the nature of sin as a destructive force with terrible consequences and the nature of God who judges sin, offers hope, demands obedience, keeps His promises, and requires a perfect blood sacrifice for the propitiation of sins (Leviticus). The Old Testament points to the coming of Christ by establishing the need for redemption and the scheme of redemption and by pointing to the standard of righteousness in the Law that Jesus Himself would have to fulfill and the pointers in Scripture to all that He would accomplish. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). Studying the Old Testament is essential to understanding the New Testament. The quotations of the Old Testament included in the New imply the necessity of understanding their context and meaning to appreciate their application. Without studying the Old Testament, a Christian cannot appreciate the misunderstandings of the Jews in the first century, follow Jesus' reasoning in His replies to them, or appreciate the argumentation found the epistles, especially the reasoning found in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. And this does not even account for the numerous allusions to Scripture found throughout the gospel. Even reading the Old Testament helps us appreciate how difficult it is to live perfectly and why we need Christ because the exacting nature of the Law was designed to demonstrate just that. And then we should think about how the Old Testament provides access to centuries of life experience, which was part of Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10:11.

Does the Old Testament still have value? Absolutely! It had value the moment it was penned. It had value in the first century. It has value today. And it will have value until Judgment Day. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), but it stands on the bedrock of the Old Testament. We ignore it at our own peril. We study it to gain perspective and insight. And we love it because it paved the way for Jesus. "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97).

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