

Why should we study the Old Testament?

Luke 24:25-27 HCSB He said to them, "How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken! (26) Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His glory?" (27) Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

If there is anything that this brief passage teaches us, it is this – Jesus expects us to read the Old Covenant and find throughout its pages evidence of Him. In fact, the inability of the Pharisees to use the Old Covenant for the proper purpose impelled Jesus to call them “unwise and slow”! What does that say of those among the Culturally Christian who virtually ignore the Old Covenant, much less use it properly?

“Why should we study the Old Covenant?” is the question before us. I have spoken to you in the past, encouraging the use – indeed the focus on – the Old Covenant and have given you many reasons to do so. If you will be patient with me this morning, I would like to give you another twelve reasons. I would say that first and foremost we must study the Old Covenant...

1. In order to understand the New Covenant.

The Bible is a progressive revelation. If you skip the first half of any good book and try to finish it, you will have a hard time understanding the characters, the plot, and the ending. For instance, suppose you opened a book and read the following lines:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep:



Those lines are confusing to someone who has failed to read the beginning of the book.

But once you know that the guy speaking is a prince whose been told by the ghost of his dad, the king, that the king was poisoned by his brother (the prince's uncle) who subsequently and hastily married the prince's mom so that he could usurp the throne and that the kid is being asked by his dad's ghost to avenge the wrongful death and the kid isn't even sure if the ghost is telling the truth...now you can see why the prince is despairing and wondering whether or not his life is even worth the effort.

Similarly, the New Testament is only completely understood when it is seen as being built upon the foundation of the events, characters, laws, sacrificial system, covenants, and promises of the Old Covenant.

If we only had the New Covenant, we would come to the Gospels and not know why the Jews were looking for a Messiah (a Savior King) in the first place. Without the Old Covenant, we would not understand WHY this Messiah was coming. For that, we need to check out Isaiah 53.

- **Isaiah 53:1-12 HCSB** Who has believed what we have heard? And who has the arm of the LORD been revealed to? (2) He grew up before Him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or splendor that we should look at Him, no appearance that we should desire Him. (3) He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like one people turned away

from; He was despised, and we didn't value Him. (4) Yet He Himself bore our sicknesses, and He carried our pains; but we in turn regarded Him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. (5) But He was pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on Him, and we are healed by His wounds. (6) We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished Him for the iniquity of us all. (7) He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth. (8) He was taken away because of oppression and judgment; and who considered His fate? For He was cut off from the land of the living; He was struck because of My people's rebellion. (9) They made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man at His death, although He had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully. (10) Yet the LORD was pleased to crush Him, and He made Him sick. When You make Him a restitution offering, He will see *His* seed, He will prolong His days, and the will of the LORD will succeed by His hand. (11) He will see *it* out of His anguish, and He will be satisfied with His knowledge. My righteous servant will justify many, and He will carry their iniquities. (12) Therefore I will give Him the many as a portion, and He will receive the mighty as spoil, because He submitted Himself to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet He bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.

2. In order to identify the Messiah.

We would not be able to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah through the many detailed prophecies that were given concerning His coming.

His birth place.

- [Micah 5:2 HCSB](#) Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; One will come from you to be ruler over Israel for Me. His origin is from antiquity, from eternity.

His manner of death.

- [Psalms 22:1 HCSB](#) For the choir director: according to "The Deer of the Dawn." A Davidic psalm. My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? *Why are You* so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning?
- [Psalms 22:7-8 HCSB](#) Everyone who sees me mocks me; they sneer and shake their heads: (8) "He relies on the LORD; let Him rescue him; let the LORD deliver him, since He takes pleasure in him."
- [Psalms 22:14-18 HCSB](#) I am poured out like water, and all my bones are disjointed; my heart is like wax, melting within me. (15) My strength is dried up like baked clay; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You put me into the dust of death. (16) For dogs have surrounded me; a gang of evildoers has closed in on me; they pierced my hands and my feet. (17) I can count all my bones; people look and stare at me. (18) They divided my garments among themselves, and they cast lots for my clothing.
- [Isaiah 52:14 HCSB](#) Just as many were appalled at You--His appearance was so disfigured that He did not look like a man, and His form did not resemble a human being--

His resurrection.

- [Psalms 16:10 HCSB](#) For You will not abandon me to Sheol; You will not allow Your Faithful One to see the Pit.

and many more details of His ministry.

3. To understand the customs and mindset of the early Church.

Without the Old Covenant, we would not understand the Jewish customs that are mentioned in passing in the New. For instance, when we read Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians who were feasting to the point of drunkenness at the Lord's Table, we may consider our measly modern rendition of the Lord's Supper and wonder who in the world could get drunk on one of those teeny, tiny cups? But when we understand that the early church did not observe communion on a monthly basis or quarterly basis with infinitesimal crackers and juice, but instead considered the yearly Passover Feast the Lord's Supper – suddenly understanding dawns upon us.

4. To understand the dynamics that led to the Messiah's death.

We would not understand the perversions that the Pharisees had made to God's law as they added their tradition to it.

5. To understand the heart of the Messiah.

We would not understand why He was so upset as He cleansed the temple courtyard.

6. To be able to use the same spiritual weapons He used.

We would not understand that we can make use of the same wisdom that Christ used in His many replies to His adversaries (both human and demonic).

7. To have our faith confirmed by prophecy.

Without the Old Covenant, we would miss out on numerous detailed prophecies that could only have come true if the Bible was God's word, not man's. These prophecies give specific details about the rise and fall of nations, how they will fall, if they will rise again, which powers would be next to emerge, who the major players would be (Cyrus, Alexander the Great, etc.) and what would happen to their kingdoms when those players died. These detailed prophecies were so accurate that skeptics charged that they had to have been written after the fact.

8. To learn life lessons from other's mistakes.

The Old Covenant also contains numerous lessons for us through the lives of its many fallible characters. By observing their lives, we can be encouraged to

- Don't compromise in the little things (Daniel 1)...
- ...so that we will be faithful later in the big things (Daniel 6).
- Don't play with sin, it will find us out and its bite is deadly (See Judges 13-16).
- If we contemplate sin, we are only setting ourselves up for committing it (Genesis 3; Joshua 6-7).
- Confess sin early and sincerely instead of blame-shifting (1 Samuel 15).
- Sin has consequences not only for ourselves but for our loved ones around us...
- ...conversely our good behavior brings rewards not only for us but for those who are around us as well (Genesis 3; Exodus 20:5-6).
- Trust God no matter what (Daniel 3).
- Trust (and thus obey) God if we expect to experience His "promised land" living in this life and His paradise in the next (Numbers 13).

9. To gain wisdom that is only available in the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant also contains vast quantities of wisdom that the New does not share. Many of these are contained in the Psalms and Proverbs. These bits of wisdom reveal:

- how I can be wiser than my teachers,
- what various sins will lead to (it helps us to see the hook that the bait is hiding),
- what worldly accomplishments hold for us (nothing!)
- how I can recognize a fool (even if it is myself)
- how I can inadvertently turn people off without trying
- how I can open doors to lasting success

- how I can find meaning in life

Again, there is so much in the Old Covenant that is just waiting to be found by one who truly wants to learn.

10. To be able to discern modern errors and heresies.

Without the OT, we would not have a basis for standing against the error of the politically correct perversions of our society. We would buy the lie that marriages and the family unit are an evolving structure that should continue to change as society changes (instead of being seen as a design by God for the purpose of raising up godly children and for the protection of those who would otherwise be used and abused (most often women and children).

11. To be able to understand the promises we can claim as His people.

It is in the Old Covenant Halakhic law that we first come to grips with the concept of Ezrach' – the idea that when we attach ourselves to God He adopts us into His people and we become native Jews (Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 19:33-34; Numbers 15:13-16; Isaiah 14:1; 56:3). It is in the book of Ruth that we see that process come to its fruition. It is in the book of Isaiah that we discover that not only do we obtain the blessing of adoption, the blessing of citizenship that has been offered the promise that “all those who bless you will be blessed and all those who curse you will be cursed”, but we further discover in Isaiah 56 that our offerings will be accepted on the Millennial altar and that some of us may even serve as priests!

12. To be able to recognize the “loose ends” that God is tying up in the end of days.

Without careful scrutiny of the Old Covenant, we will not be able to recognize how the end of the Bible ties up the loose ends that were unraveled in the beginning of the Bible, restoring the paradise that God originally created this world to be in which we would enjoy close companionship with Him on a personal basis...as in the Garden of Eden.

Conclusion

In summary,

- The Old Testament is a mirror that allows us to see ourselves in the lives of biblical characters and helps us learn vicariously from their lives.
- It sheds so much light on
 - who God is
 - the wonders He has made and
 - the salvation He has wrought.
- It shares so much comfort to those in persecution or trouble (see Psalms especially).
- It reveals through repeatedly fulfilled prophecy why the Bible is unique among holy books...it alone is able to demonstrate that it is what it claims to be: the inspired Word of God.
- It reveals volumes about Christ in page after page of its writings.
- It contains so much wisdom that goes beyond what is alluded to or quoted in the NT.

In short, if you have not yet ventured in depth into its pages...you are missing much that God has available for you. As you read it, there will be much you do not understand right away, but there will be much you will understand and learn from. And as you continue to study it, asking God to teach you further, your mining will pay off in brighter treasures still.