

Introduction to the Old Testament, Part 1:

Why Study the Old Testament?

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

I. Why Most Christians Neglect the Old Testament

- a. Most Christians focus almost exclusively on the New Testament, maybe also adding **Psalms** for devotional life. Many have read through the OT just once, to know the basic stories
- b. Most preachers and teachers focus on the NT as well.
- c. Reasons I hear why Christians avoid the OT:
 - i. “Not relevant for my life, for the challenges I am facing personally.”
 - ii. “OT was meant for Jews, not Christians.”
 - iii. “I want to focus on Jesus and his teachings.”
 - iv. “I like the God of the NT (full of love, grace and mercy) more than God of the OT (to be feared, punishing, stern, judging).”
 - v. “Isn’t OT all about the Law? Wasn’t the law done away with and therefore not relevant to us today?”
 - vi. “OT is too hard to understand. Not chronological; lots of characters and places; kings and prophets; hard to keep things straight.”

II. Top Eight Reasons for Christians to Study the OT (adapted from Richard Rogers of Sunset)

- a. **(Reason #1)** The OT makes up ¾ of the Bible!
 - i. **Deuteronomy 8:3**, also quoted by Jesus in **Matthew 4**, says that the lesson of manna in the Wilderness was to teach us that “man should not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God”.
- b. **(Reason #2)** OT Scriptures given that we can gain wisdom, to be “fully equipped for every good work”. **2 Timothy 3:14-17**
 - i. Note that Paul is talking about the OT here; since when Timothy was a child, likely most of the NT had not yet been written.
 - ii. All of it inspired by God; all profitable for doctrine (teaching), reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.

- c. **(Reason #3)** It helps us see the heart and character of God, revealed through history.
- i. See through examples that God is faithful (always keeping his promises), loving, patient, forgiving. He warns. Those who repent he forgives and restores. In the end, he brings judgment.
 - ii. He tests those who love him in trials, and delivers his righteous ones in the end.
 - iii. Critical to see accurately WHO GOD REALLY IS (not create our own imaginary God the way we want him to be).
 - iv. Let me introduce you the God who reveals himself in the OT:
 1. **Deuteronomy 1:29-31** God is a loving father who carries his people through their challenges as a man carries his son.
 2. **2 Chronicles 36:23-29** God tries repeatedly to get his people to repent; he sends them prophets. He does not want them to be destroyed; but his patience has a limit.
 3. **Ezekiel 18:21-32** God does not want anyone to be destroyed; he wants the wicked to repent, and he will forgive them. God (unlike Israel) is most concerned with how we end our lives.
 4. **Ezekiel 34:1-6, 34:11-16** God cares for all the hurting, wounded, and lost sheep.
 5. **Daniel 4:34-37** God is sovereign over all the rulers of this world.
- d. **(Reason #4)** OT is the background for understanding the New Testament. If you really want to understand the NT deeply, essential to have a solid understanding of the OT. Examples:
- i. **Hebrews and Revelation:** $\frac{3}{4}$ of these books are direct quotes from or allude to parts of the OT.
 - ii. In **Hebrews 11** all the aspects of saving faith are illustrated by examples from the OT, including...
 1. looking forward to something you can't yet see,
 2. belief combined with obedient action,
 3. faith in resurrection of the dead,
 4. forsaking pleasures in this world for a future reward, and

5. persevering over time, through persecution and trials.
- iii. The theme of Book of **Romans**, “the righteous shall live by faith”, is from **Habakkuk 2:4**.
 - iv. Consider how Peter supports all his arguments in his two letters. He could have used his own authority, or quoted Jesus. Instead, Peter points to the OT. For example, in **1 Peter** (a short letter) he uses at least 12 OT references to make his points. When he explains:
 1. Why we should be holy, he quotes from **Leviticus**, “be holy for I am holy”.
 2. Why we should be devoted to the word of God, he quotes from **Isaiah 40**.
 3. Describing what the church should be like, he cites the vision of “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” from **Exodus 19**.
 4. Why we should endure suffering patiently, he points to the example of the Suffering Servant in **Isaiah 53**.
 5. How a godly woman should live with her husband, he points to the example of Sarah in **Genesis 18**.
 6. Importance of being humble toward one another, he quotes from **Proverbs 3**.
 7. Why we should trust that God will save a righteous few, he goes back to the example of Noah’s family in **Genesis 6-8**, where 8 were saved “through water”.
 - e. **(Reason #5)** It gives us good examples (true heroes) to imitate, and bad examples to learn from. This world desperately needs real heroes (not immoral sports characters or entertainers). I certainly need them; they call me higher!
 - i. Good examples:
 1. Noah, Moses, Lot, Abraham, Joseph, Job (standing alone),
 2. David (courage, faith in God’s deliverance),
 3. Phinehas (zeal for sexual purity),
 4. Daniel (righteous on the job; devotion to prayer),
 5. Josiah (restoration),
 6. Hezekiah (prayer)

- ii. Older age heroes:
 - 1. Moses (leads people from age 80 to 120);
 - 2. Caleb in **Joshua 14**, at age 85 “I am still as strong today as I was then (at age 40)”, confidently asks God to give him the mountain country.
- iii. Women heroines and examples held up: Deborah, Sarah, “woman of noble character” at end of **Proverbs**.
- iv. Bad examples to learn from: Cain, Esau, Solomon (David, too).
- v. Example of the nation of Israel in the **Exodus/ Numbers** account for us, as explained in **1 Corinthians 10**. Good and bad examples all there!
- f. **(Reason #6)** OT is a powerful weapon to use against Satan’s attacks.
 - i. **Ephesians 6:10-18** We are called to take up sword of the spirit (offensive weapon) = word of God
 - ii. **Matthew 4:4, 7, 10** When Jesus is tempted by Satan, he comes back with “it is written”, and quotes from Book of **Deuteronomy**.
 - iii. **Psalms 119:9-16** A young man can keep his way pure and avoid sin by hiding the word of God (OT) in his heart, and meditating on it.
- g. **(Reason #7)** Everything in Old Testament was written for our benefit (it was written for Christians).
 - i. In **Romans 15:1-4** Paul discusses not living to please ourselves. After quoting from **Psalms 69** he says, “For whatever things were written before (i.e., the OT) were written for our learning”.
 - ii. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD, a Christian from Samaria) says the same to Trypho, a Jew in his debate with him, *Dialogue with Trypho*:
 - 1. “For these words have neither been prepared by me nor embellished by the art of man; but David sung them, Isaiah preached them, Zechariah proclaimed them, and Moses wrote them. Are you acquainted with them, Trypho? They are contained in your Scriptures, *or rather not yours, but ours*. For we believe them; but you, though you read them, do not catch the spirit that is in them.” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 209*)

- h. **(Reason #8)** The original and still best way to persuade unbelievers that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is using the evidence of prophecies written hundreds, and even 1000+ years before.
 - i. When in Albania, Muslims told me, “The Christians changed the NT”. I told them “then let’s just use the OT; that belongs to the Jews; impossible for the Christians to have changed that!”
 - ii. Throughout the Book of **Acts**, this is how people were converted.
 - 1. Peter in **Acts 2** quotes Joel, David (**Psalms 16** and **110**); cites **2 Samuel 7** and **Psalms 89**.
 - 2. Ethiopian eunuch was reading **Isaiah 53**
 - 3. Apollos in **Acts 18** used the OT prophecies to prove to the Jews
 - 4. Steven in **Acts 7**
 - 5. Paul with Felix and Agrippa in **Acts 24 & 26**
 - 6. Peter to Cornelius in **Acts 10**, “to him all the prophets witness”
 - 7. Paul to those in Rome in **Acts 28**, from morning until evening persuading people from Moses and the prophets
 - iii. Foundation laid for Gentile church in Corinth (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**) that Christ died and rose on third day “according to the Scriptures” (OT).
 - iv. Early Christians used OT evidence to convince unbelieving Jews and Gentiles.
 - v. A few years ago I gave a series of lessons in Boston showing how to use evidence of the OT prophecies to persuade truth-seeking unbelievers that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. That series, called ‘*Prove It!*’ is posted online in YouTube video format.

III. Conclusion: Christians, Let’s Study Our Old Testament!

- a. Be devoted to studying and meditating on ALL the word of God. Do not neglect the OT! It is written for us; we need it for our daily manna, to meet all our spiritual needs!
- b. Please spread the word and persuade other Christians, too!