

The New Testament Believer and the Old Testament

The Old Testament is rich in theology, wisdom, prophecy, and foundational truths for the New Testament. Yet, it is often ignored, misused, and misapplied in teaching and preaching. Some, in the dispensational camp, not only ignore it but have criticized those who teach and preach from it. It is true that many people do misinterpret the Old Testament, some want to allegorize or make a type out of every thing found there, and worse some use the OT to put the New Testament believer under law.

The NT shows us a high view of the Old Testament. It often quotes, references, and explains Old Testament passages. The Old Testament was the Bible for the early church. They did not have the epistles or the gospels to refer to. We see that the young church was able to grow spiritually, see people saved, churches planted, and even receive rebuke for NOT growing in grace, all with the Old Testament as the main scripture. Today we can and should use the Old Testament, we should not be hesitant to teach and preach from it. We should be extremely careful to rightly divide and apply it. There is a relationship of the Old to the New

The way the New Testament relates to the Old Testament falls in three major schools of thought- “(1) Some see “abidingly valuable” elements in the Old Testament through some New Testament principle. This is the most popular view in Christendom. Maston wrote, “There is much in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings that is abidingly relevant and authoritative. This does not mean, however, that the Old Testament is equally authoritative with the New Testament for the child of God.” (2) To the other extreme stands Rushdoony, for whom the law (meaning Mosaic Law primarily) is binding on Christians. After stating several characteristics of biblical law, he wrote, “The law is therefore the base for Christian man and Christian society.” (3) Dispensationalists stand in between. They say that the Old Testament should not be read through the New, nor should the New Testament be read through the Old, but that there is a relationship between the testaments.”¹

We see this relationship in the connection of Jesus to the Old Testament. The Old Testament clearly speaks of Jesus Christ. In fact Jesus Himself claimed that the Old Testament speaks of Him. In His first sermon in His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus read the scroll from Isaiah 61 and proclaimed, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” Lk 4:21. Jesus also proclaimed the Jews, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” Jn 5:39. Speaking of His resurrection Jesus rebuked two of His disciples, Lu 24:25-27:

“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:
26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Later Jesus met the Eleven and their friends where he stated this even more pointedly,

Lu 24:44, “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.”

Clearly, Jesus saw His life and work as a fulfillment of Old Testament promises and prophecies.

¹Ramesh P. Richard, “Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (1986): 572.

This relationship also includes the fact that both dissimilarities and similarities exist between the people of God in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament. The fundamental dissimilarity occurs because Israel preceded (law) the Cross and the church succeeded the Cross (grace). The Cross has truly become the central event of all history. To call the church Israel or to begin the church with Israel is to diminish the power of the Cross in history and salvation. Many differences between the church and Israel have been noted. Prominent contrasts include physical and spiritual, national and international, racial and universal features of Israel and the church, respectively. The regulative principle in each testament is different. The knowledge of the content of salvation, what people appropriate by faith for salvation, is different in each administration. The Bible itself makes certain distinctions between the old and new dispensations. The New Testament also distinguishes the church as an entity different from Israel (cf Eph 3:5, and see 1 Co. 10:32).

While it is true that there are some similarities between the church and Israel, the church is not Israel. Some of the similarities are: Both were elect and set apart for a special purpose (Nu. 2:9, Dt. 32:8, 33:29, Eph 1:4, 1 Pt. 1:14-16). Like Israel, the church is not to be conformed to the system of this world (Lev 18:1-5, 1 JN. 2:12). Both were to be representatives of God in this world (Ps 66:67, Phil. 2:15). Both were to uphold the name of God (Isa. 52:5, Ez 36, 1 Pt. 2:12). “The nation motif (1 Pt. 2:8), the priesthood motif (1 Pt. 2:9, 2 Co. 11:2, Eph 5:31-32), and the sacrifice motif (1 Pt. 2:5, Heb. 13:15, Ro. 12:1)”² are also found in both.

In light of passages such as 1 Cor. 10:1-13 and 2 Tim 3:16 (and possibly Heb. 3:7-19), what is the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament? This is an important question because whatever unites the two has serious ramifications for Christians, who are addressed directly in the New Testament. Baker surveyed eight views on the way the two testaments are related: “(1) The Old Testament is the essential Bible, and the New is its interpretive glossary. (2) The Old Testament is an independent witness to “the Name,” and the New Testament is its Christian sequel. (3) The New Testament is the essential Bible, and the Old Testament is its non-Christian presupposition. (4) The New Testament shows that the Old Testament is a witness to the promise in Christ. (5) The Old and New Testaments are equally Christian Scripture. (6) The Old and New Testaments correspond to each other (7) The Old and New Testaments form one salvation history. (8) The Old and New Testaments are both continuous and discontinuous. It is not easy to decipher this relationship and posit one unifying theme or center. This is why a more inclusive view, which takes into account such multiform strands as creation, promise, law, grace, covenant, redemption, Christology, and kingdom is versatile, generic, and necessary. A view that emphasizes continuity and discontinuity may thus be comprehensive enough to include the diverse themes. The way the Old Testament is relevant to the New Testament and to the Christian today is through what may be called “trans-temporal constants.” These stand as constants throughout time in spite of the differing regulative modes of God’s administrative stewardships.”³

Anytime the New Testament believer uses the Old it must be remembered that there is doctrine to be believed and practiced (didache) and (didaskalia) doctrine to be believed but not practiced.⁴ Mosaic law and Kingdom law are not for the NT believer to live by. The NT itself gives very clearly the way the OT should be used today. It is important to have an understanding of the previous information. The NT has approximately 900 references to the OT, with approximately 300 quotes or paraphrases

²Ramesh P. Richard, *Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament*.

³D.L. Baker, *Two Testaments One Bible* (ILL. Inter varsity Press, 1976), 2-4

⁴David K. Spurbeck Sr., *The Christian “In Christ”* (Oregon, Know To Grow Publications, 1999), 43-44

according to *Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament* by David Phillips. What does the NT say about the OT. There are some important passages to consider. We find certain words used in the NT that show the clearly defined uses of the OT for the believer in this present dispensation. It is very clear that the OT has value today.

I. Different words that show the OT purpose and use

A. written(grapho)- used 78 times in reference to the OT. Some examples are Acts 1:20, 7:42, 13:29,33. These examples show some OT prophecies and their fulfillment, mans rejection of God's revelation, specific Messianic prophecies.

B. Example / ensample- used in Heb. 4:11, 8:5, 2 Pt. 2:6. The word is hupodeigma- it is an example of destruction or death brought on by disobedience. Clearly the NT believer is to learn lessons from the failures of the OT examples.

C. example- Jude 7, example is deigma- a sample, commonly used by salesmen in reference to samples placed out so that buyers could make an informed choice. A clear reminder of the high cost of sin.

D. example- 1 Co. 10:6, 11-tupos is used here, it means a a model, a die or a stamp. In this use it points to a negative example that will always be a terrible or negative example.

E. admonition- 1 Co. 10:11- admonition- nouthesia, to call attention to a danger and give warning and instruction.

F. learning- Ro. 15:4- didaskilia-teaching and instruction, these are things we believe and learn from but do not practice.

G. allegory- Gal 4:24- allegoreo- from allos, another, and agoreo, or agoreuo, to speak, signifies a thing that is a representative of another. Where the literal sense is the representative of a spiritual meaning. The distinction between a parable and an allegory is said to be, that a parable is a supposed history to illustrate some important truth, as the parable of the good Samaritan, etc.; an allegory is based on real facts.

II. 2 Tim 3:15-17

This passage shows the importance of the OT to the spiritual growth of Timothy. Paul was aware of the gift of prophecy and the new revelation it brought, especially concerning the mysteries we find in the NT, but here he directs Timothy to the OT. Clear and specific uses are given for the Scriptures that were in existence in Timothy's time, which he had been exposed to since childhood.

A. v15- This is a reference to the OT. There Timothy could find the law, our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, the nature and character of God is clearly seen in the OT. The mercy (chesed) of God, His loving loyalty, His holiness, and other theological truths. Prophecies of the first and second comings of Messiah, characteristics of the Millennial kingdom are all in the OT. The OT is full of information that would lay the ground work for Timothy hearing and understanding the gospel. Many of the foundational doctrines of Christianity are taught in the OT.

B. The authority of the OT- given by inspiration. Specifically here it has the idea that all

Divinely inspired writing is profitable. Clearly referring to the OT. This process is described 1 Pt. 1:21. Since the OT is inspired it is also.

1. profitable- ophelimos- helpful or advantageous in the area of spiritual teachings.
2. doctrine- didaskalian- instruction or teachings, not necessary to live by or practice but to believe.
3. reproof- elenehon- to show where one is not right and to bring reprimand.
4. correction- epanorthsin- to set straight or to set right. The idea of setting up right on the feet.
5. instruction- paideian- to discipline or educate. Often used to describe the training of a child. This instruction is in the specific are of righteousness.

C. Paul gives the results of the use of the Scriptures. So that the man of God may be ready to serve. Specifically he will be sufficient, and be completely equipped to accomplish the task for which he is called, in this context the right service to the Lord.

III. Some cautions about the use of the OT

A. Remember dispensations

The OT took place and was written under the dispensation of law. The NT believer is not under law, so it is critical to understand who the material being was written to and when it was written. Some cautions concerning dispensations follow:

1. Truth that belongs to one part of the past must not be read into another part of the past- Know where you are in Scripture. This is especially true in the gospels. This was largely a time when the kingdom was being offered to and was rejected by Israel. Many passages contain Kingdom law and are not for the NT believer.
2. Truth from a past dispensation cannot be used to interpret the present dispensation- Failure to use caution here will lead to the believer putting themselves under law. Dt. 6:25 declares that the Lord will be our righteousness by obeying all the commandments, Ro. 3:20 declares righteousness without the works of the law! Both statements are true in their proper dispensation. Kingdom law, even though found in the Gospels, is not for the church.
3. Truth that belongs to the present dispensation must not be read back into prior dispensations- This present age is a mystery, therefore it was not known to those in the OT, Ehp. 3:5. While there may be types of the church seen in the OT, we do not go to these types for truth. We only recognize them as types because of the revelation of NT truth.

4. Truth that belongs in a future dispensation must not be read into the present- The

Tribulation is a future event but it is not for the church, it is for Israel (Jer. 30:7, Daniel 7-11). Many use OT passages to try to show the Church in the Tribulation.

5. Truth that belongs in one part of the future must not be read into another part of the future- The rapture differs from the 2nd coming, and the Judgment Seat of Christ is different from the Great White Throne Judgment. The distinctions must be maintained.⁵

B. Use of OT wisdom / poetry / prophecy

1. Realize that not all Proverbs are promises. Proverbs 22:6 is commonly quoted as a guarantee that a child raised in church and Christian home or school will turn out right. The key to this Proverb is found in a study of the word “way,” which is not the scope of this study.

2. An understanding of the OT culture is helpful.

3. Some attitudes and practices found in OT poetry are foreign to NT teachings, Pr. 21:9, 25:24, 27:15.

4. Beware of figures of speech, Pr. 26:8

5. Imprecatory prayers for vengeance are not consistent with the NT teachings of love, mercy, and grace.

C. Prophecy- focuses primarily on the sin of Israel and Judah, 1st coming, 2nd coming, Millennial Kingdom, and the nation of Israel in the future. The over all message to the nation is to turn back to the Lord, consequences for failure to do so, and future blessings in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic and New Covenants. The church, rapture, and many countries currently in existence(U.S.) are not the subjects of prophecy.

D. Old Testament History- These sections show God's provision, providence, and faithfulness to His people. The history teaches the cost and result of sin.

The OT is rich and important. It is in the OT that much of our theology is grounded, it shows who God is, how He works, His love, faithfulness, providence, and provision. The history of Creation, early man and the nations of Israel and Judah teach many lessons. The Psalms are great examples of worship, showing what God has said about himself. Wisdom and poetry are found in the OT. It is profitable today, but as NT believers we must be careful. We believe all of the OT, but we do not practice all of the truth there. The law must remain the school master to point to Christ and not a means of attempted righteousness. Prophecy helps us rightly divide between the 1st coming of Christ, and the 2nd coming. Do not neglect the study of the OT, it is rich.

⁵John Phillips, *Bible Explorers Guide* (New Jersey, Loizeaux Brothers, 1987), 85-87

Baker, D.L. *Two Testaments One Bible*. DownersGrove: InterVarsity Press, 1976.

Day, John. Psalms and Christian Ethics. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 no.634 (Apr-June 2002): 162.

Phillips, John. *Bible Explorers Guide*. Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1987.

Richards, Ramesh. Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 no.576 (1986) 501.

Rogers, Cleon Jr., Rogers Cleon III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.

Spurbeck, David K. Sr. *The Christian "In Christ."* Forest Grove: Know to Grow Publications, 1999.

