

Appreciating the Old Testament

John M. Buttrey II

I sometimes wonder if we, as New Testament Christians, appreciate the Old Testament as much as we should? We have heard it said many times, "We are no longer under the Old Covenant." Truthfully, we were never under the Old Covenant. This was a covenant given exclusively to Israel. However, this does not mean it is of no value to us.

Yes, the Old Testament is full of strange names that are difficult to pronounce. We struggle reading names like Shear-Jasub (Isa. 7:3), Sennacherib (Isa. 36:1), and Miphibosheth (2 Sam.9:6), to list a few. There are laws given to Israel that seem strange to us. Take, for example, this one from the book of Leviticus:

'You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together (Leviticus 19:19).

With a little study, we can better understand such strange sounding laws. However, as unrelated as such laws may be to us, they are no reason to disregard the Old Testament.

Perhaps, because we refer to it as the "Old" Testament is one reason we tend to undervalue this portion of inspired Scripture. We generally gravitate toward things that are new and improved. The word "old" does not always have great appeal to us. I have suggested, in the past, that we might do better to think of the Old Testament as the First Testament. The Hebrew writer used such a designation (Heb. 8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 18; 10:9). With the designation of "old" taken away, perhaps more of us would find an interest in the first thirty-nine books of the Bible.

The apostle Paul wrote of the value of the "First Testament." He did so in several different letters. In his Roman letter, he noted:

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4).

The "earlier times" Paul references were Old Testament times. The apostle tells us the things written during that period were for our (New Testament Christians) instruction. He told the Corinthians the same thing. Writing of the problems and challenges experienced by Israel, the apostle says:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Corinthians 10:11).

In learning to appreciate the value of the Old Testament, notice how Paul reminded Timothy of the evangelist's childhood upbringing:

And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).

The "sacred writings" Paul mentions are the Old Testament Scriptures. It is interesting that, of these Old Testament Scriptures, Paul says they are "able to give you the wisdom that leads to

salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Yes, the Old Testament Scriptures speak of the Christ and the importance of faith.

Truly, there is great value in the Old Testament. Think of all the fulfilled prophecies we find in the New Testament, which were originally spoken by prophets in Old Testament times. The book of Hebrews is so powerful because of its many Old Testament references. We have recorded for us, in the first thirty-nine books, the lives of the men and women of faith mentioned in the Hebrew writer's "Hall of Fame" of faith (Heb. 11). Without the Old Testament we would miss the wisdom of Proverbs, the comfort and praise of the Psalms, the creation history of Genesis, the beautiful types of Jesus in the Feasts of Israel, and so very much more.

It has well been said, the New Testament is in the Old, concealed; and the Old Testament is in the New, revealed. Let us revere and study the whole of Scripture, for it is all the word of God.