



“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

–Matthew 5:17-19

“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’”

–John 1:45

“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,”

–Luke 24:44-45

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

–2 Timothy 3:16-17

A typical overview of the Old Testament covers history, literature, and languages which are important items to be sure. Make sure to read this entry in your Bible dictionary. The discussion here will focus more on why we need to study the Old Testament and how it builds a foundation for the New Testament and God’s Word overall.

Sometimes we have studied the New Testament to the exclusion of the Old Testament. The theme of the **entire** Bible is God’s plan of salvation for man, which began with covenants God made with man in

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the Old Testament. Because of man's failure to keep what God referred to as the "Old" Covenant, the Old Testament closes with His promise to put into effect a "New" Covenant to reconcile man to God. In other words, the goals of the Old Testament were yet to be achieved. But we can't fully understand the New "Covenant" (the meaning of the word "testament") until we understand the Old "Covenant".

The Undisputed Authority of the Old Testament

Consider the verses quoted at the opening for a moment. They unquestionably accept the Old Testament as the absolute foundation for Christ Himself and all that follows in what we now call the New Testament. In Luke 24: 44-45 Christ not only identifies the *entire* Old Testament in His description of its 3 basic categories ("Law of Moses", "Prophets", "Psalms"), but proceeds to open the minds of His followers to understand the *entire* body of Scripture in the Old Testament.

In the early church there is a significant span of years between Christ's ascension into Heaven and the distribution of the letters and writings eventually to become known as the "New Testament." During those years without a New Testament—and even beyond—one of the primary tools was the Old Testament. It was used by the Apostles—evidenced in particular by their extensive quotation of it throughout their letters—and by all those teaching/preaching the Gospel. When the Gospel is brought to Berea, for instance, it is examined and proved by the hearers of the message through their examination of the Old Testament:

"The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men."

—Acts 17:10-12

The most wonderful application of the Sermon of the Mount as presented in Matthew 5-7 is how Christ, quoting directly from the Old Testament, shows Himself to be the **fulfillment** of the Old Testament as He now transitions to the New Testament, built on the sound foundation of the Old.

Old Testament Organization

The entire Bible conveys the progressive revelation of the character and Person of God. First only revealed to Adam and Eve, God is revealed through His interaction with early mankind, revealed substantially more through His calling of Israel and giving to them His written Law through Moses, even more through Israel's acceptance/rejection of Him (books of history), through those that wrote of the closeness of their relationship with Him (e.g. Psalms), and finally through God's commentary on man's behavior and His ultimate plan for them through the Prophets.

It may help to think of the Old Testament coming in basically 4 parts:

- ***The Books of the Law*** (Genesis – Deuteronomy). This covers the initial disclosure to man of God's written Law.
- ***The Historical Books*** (Joshua – Esther). This covers man's interaction with God and provides a kind of example of man's inability to follow God's Law and the need for a Savior.
- ***The "Journaling" (or Poetry) Books*** (Job – Song of Solomon). These reveal the inner workings of an obedient relationship to God through the personal writings of the likes of Job, David, Solomon, etc. They provide insight into the results of allowing obedience to God's Word take root and grow and essentially provide insight into how the Law is applied in a faithful relationship with Him.
- ***The Prophets*** (Isaiah – Malachi). Think of these as God's personal feedback to man on the quality of relationship being pursued; a commentary from God detailing why man has failed to achieve a proper relationship with God and His plan to resolve this issue through the sending of His Son through the new covenant to come.

Books of the Old Testament

The Law				History				Journals				Major Prophets				Minor Prophets																						
Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy	Joshua	Judges	Ruth	1 Samuel	2 Samuel	1 Kings	2 Kings	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	Ezra	Nehemiah	Esther	Job	Psalms	Proverbs	Ecclesiastes	Song of Solomon	Isaiah	Jeremiah	Lamentations	Ezekiel	Daniel	Hosea	Joel	Amos	Obadiah	Jonah	Micah	Nahum	Habakkuk	Zephaniah	Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi
Provided thru Moses, these books document man's first relationship with God culminating in His written Law.				Although "historical", this is really the history of God's chosen people Israel and the example of their relationship to God in terms of their obedience to His Law and will. They document the fact that man cannot achieve salvation except by means of a Savior.				Except for the journals of a few righteous men, we would never know the true effect of God's Law as intended.				Having given His Law and called a specific people (Israel) to be devoted exclusively to Him, God provides feedback through His prophets as to Israel's disobedience, man's inability to please God, and how God Himself will reconcile mankind to Himself through a new covenant initiated by the coming Messiah. These books are essentially God's commentary on man and His plan of salvation for them.																										

Obtaining the Correct Context

You can probably see that studying the books in this order might provide useful insights as they individually catalog man's relationship to God from a slightly different point of view. Another way is to line these up chronologically so that we can study a point in time while simultaneously seeing many of these points of view at the same time. In other words, to compare and contrast a historical event in the shadow of the Law but also receiving God's own "commentary" through the prophet or prophets active at that same time.

For instance, we can see the application of the Law in the return from captivity in Babylon by Israel as documented by Ezra and Nehemiah, and study in parallel God's commentary through Haggai and Zechariah, His active prophets during that time. Walk with the Word has chosen to order its reading schedule according to this school of thought because one of the most critical elements for correctly interpreting and understanding Scripture is context. The more you understand the context of the times, situation, people, etc., etc. the more likely Scripture will be understood as God intends.

Another example of this is the ministry of Jonah. He is called to preach God's word to a foreign people, a task he does not want to do. But when we understand that these people within the near future will rise

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to power as the Assyrian Empire and will be the instrument by which God destroys the northern kingdom of Israel, the mission and message of God through Jonah take on specific meaning within this context.

A Rich Foundation for All that Follows

The Old Testament on its own is rich with relevant content that speaks to the condition of our life in general and our relationship with God specifically. And it's certainly filled with things God has promised to do yet are so far unfulfilled today; so it's worth noting the ongoing work of God to come. Additionally, here are but a few building blocks from the "Old Covenant" that provide a foundation for the "New Covenant", things that will provide a foundation of understanding for the New Testament;

- The more we study and know about Joseph, the more we'll understand about Jesus' first coming. The more we study and know about David, the more we'll understand about Jesus' second coming. (They are "types" or examples of the Messiah.)
- The southern kingdom of Judah is carried off into captivity in 3 distinct events and then return in 3 distinct events. This is a pattern replicated in Revelation. (You're going to have to do your homework to refute/support this.)
- Christ's lineage may be traced back to Adam but mankind's is repeatedly traced to Noah and his 3 sons Ham, Shem, and Japheth. God sees nations and people in a different way than we do today. It's important how God uses this structure throughout His messages through the Old Testament prophets. Representatives of all 3 branches are present at Jesus' birth, Jesus' death, Pentecost, and so on. Every genealogy in the Old Testament has significant meaning and helps explain the use of nations' names in prophetic books such as Revelation. (Hint: Every time you come across the name of a person or place, look it up in your Bible dictionary.)

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- The role of a prophet is actually more of an evangelist to Believers than providing predictions of God's actions in the future. Prophets provide a measuring stick to people as to whether or not they're in the proper obedient, loving relationship God desires or on the path leading to rejecting Him. This helps us to understand that the gift of prophecy is very much alive in the church today and how to recognize and respond to it.
- David writes entire Psalms devoted to the loving power and grace of God's Law. Yet during his lifetime, most of the Old Testament did not exist. It can be argued that only the first 5 books existed, and certainly no more than 10 or 12 at most in a variety of forms that David might have been aware of. So David's Psalms are derived from his meditation on Genesis through Deuteronomy. How is **THAT** possible?!? It's the ultimate insight into how the Law was supposed to be applied to one's life, a lesson that continues for all those today that think "obedience" is simply following a rule instead of changing one's heart and mind. They're the ultimate "journal" of a righteous life and the best interpretation of what was given through Moses.
- Because the Law was given through Moses we might make the mistake of assuming that Moses is the most important figure in the Old Testament. That's the mistake the Pharisees of Jesus' day made. As Paul will explain in greater detail in the New Testament, Abraham is far more important and it's the promises given him and his relationship with God that we need to more greatly consider.
- Jesus spends much of His sermon time providing the correct interpretation of Old Testament Scripture. Much of the "history" provided in the Old Testament is really a personal example to

us of both incorrect interpretation and application of God's Word to our life.

Aside from more than 300 prophecies concerning Christ, here are just a few of a myriad of points from the Old Testament that have pertinent application in the study of the New:

- Why does Jesus not begin His ministry until He's 30 years old? That's how old you must be to become a priest according to the Law. (What's the connection between the laws for priests and Jesus?)
- Why doesn't God simply write the Law in His own hand? He did write 3 times: The original tablets given Moses, on a wall in Babylon, and in the dirt before accusing authorities. Yet He prefers to have men write for Him. What does this teach us?
- What do the temple sacrifices teach us about Christ's need to give His life for us on the cross? (Not just the meat sacrifices but *all* the sacrifices and associated rituals.)
- Satan is consistently represented by 2 symbols: The dragon and the serpent. Personified as a dragon, he is actively engaged in persecution of God's people; as a serpent his activities are cloaked as attempted deception of God's people. Note how he engages in and uses these character traits.
- Signs are more for unbelievers. The role of Believers through the events fulfilling prophecy is to be an example of faith. It's not a test of knowledge but of faith. (Luke 18:8, "...However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?")

Suggestions for Studying the Old Testament

Having established the historical context in which a chapter or book takes place, the number one thing you should do is consult your Bible

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dictionary. This is especially crucial not only to understand a term that may come up (e.g. ephod) but for names of places, people, and nations. Names tend to have meanings in ways they do not in today's culture. They often betray characteristics of the person/people/place. And your Bible dictionary will tie the history of a place together so that you can see the significance of what is going on. For instance, Shechem was a special place for Joshua and Israel when they first crossed the Jordan into the Canaan. It will be the focus of future events in Israel and even bear prophecies concerning it. The historical context provided in your Bible dictionary will help you realize that God is not so much talking about a place but a spiritual condition. Every people/person/place teaches us something about God.

Use the "[Prophetic Points in History](#)" bookmark. From a certain point of view, God's Word given throughout different times in the Old Testament all appear to be on the same "mountain"; but if you stand to the side you realize that they're on separate peaks of a range of mountains with valleys of time between. It's important to understand if what God spoke at a particular time was for that present time or in relation to a future event, such as Christ's First Coming. You will find that much of prophecy has a dual purpose both for the time in which it was spoken and for another time in the future. [Comment: Biblical prophecy is more about patterns than specific dates.] This chart is a visual reminder to ask one's self about the context and timing of the passage.

What are the New Testament tie-ins? When reading a passage that invokes memory of something said in the New Testament-or if you notice a cross-reference in your Bible-look it up and meditate on what the Spirit is communicating. It's definitely more than worth the time to build these associations which will become even more valuable when studying the New Testament. Over time you're going to clearly understand the relationship between them and the foundation laid by the Old Testament.

Finally, whenever you come across a statement of God that He will destroy something or someone, make note of the effort He made to first reconcile them to Him. You will clearly see that “final judgment” is the result of a very long series of choices by man to reject God, not simply God “flexing His muscle”. Within the context of every “final judgment” is the revelation of God’s loving character to provide multiple opportunities for man to be reconciled to Him. Taking special note of this interaction moves our focus from “facts” or “information” towards the application of God’s grace and love in our life.