

What is the Purpose of the Old Testament? **10-16-16AM**

It seems as though we live in a world where many believers practice a “Supermarket” Christianity. What we mean by this is that they approach Scripture as though it were a market where they go up and down the sections just picking what they want. Many people “pick and choose” their doctrine; consider that down the aisle of “salvation” they are choosing belief only, or to be saved like the thief on the cross. Perhaps down the “worship” aisle they have pulled from one section of the store to get instrumental music.

Most miss that there is a fundamental condition of a relationship with God: Our absence of choice. Consider the words of John in 2 John 9-10; there he makes it clear that we do not have a choice when it comes to doctrine. We do not choose our doctrine as Christians or as a church. We don’t choose with whom we have fellowship; we don’t choose how we are saved; we don’t choose what judgment will be like. With this in mind, we need to understand that our only choice in doctrine in the New Covenant of Christ is the teaching of the New Testament. This brings up an important question then: Why do we have the Old Testament? And what purpose does it serve?

What the Old Testament is Not

We need to make it clear on some points about the Old Testament. When we refer to the Old Testament, we mean those 39 books from Genesis to Malachi that were the covenant documents of the Israelite people. But the Old Testament is not just one prior testament for the Israelites only; it is actually a series of covenants that culminates with the covenant of Moses. Consider that there was a covenant before Moses with Abraham (Genesis 12, Galatians 3:17); with Noah and his descendants (Genesis 9:9, Romans 2:14); before that, there was a covenant with Adam (Hosea 6:7).

As well, it must be understood that the Old Testament is not a lawful document to the Christian today. There are a number of times in the New Testament where this is stated, such as Ephesians 2:14-15 and Colossians 2:13-14. When in the first century some Jewish Christians attempted to bring parts of the covenant of Moses into the covenant of Christ, they were condemned, and accused of creating another Gospel (Galatians 1).

In fact, the old covenants cannot even be stated to be a generic rule of morality (as some say when they say that the Ten Commandments are a universal moral code). Many of the actions of people under these preceding covenants would be condemned if they had behaved in a similar fashion under the covenant of Christ (consider David, Lot, Jacob or Samson, for example). Consider that many morals changed in general; marriage and divorce changed, as have the ways we raise children. What was moral then is not moral now.

The Purpose of the Old Testament

So then what is the purpose of the Old Testament to those who live under the New Testament? First, it is to be a tutor to Christ. In Galatians 3:19-25 Paul says that those who lived under the previous covenants were under a tutor (in ancient times a tutor, or governor, was charged with bringing up a minor child). The law (in the context of Galatians 3, the law of Moses) was charged to keep people under a legal bondage until they could be delivered to liberty in Christ.

Second, the Old Testament was a testimony of the finality of Christ, In John 5:39 Jesus states that the books of the Old Testament made a testimony of His coming. Thus, when He came, it was not a surprise or unannounced, but a clear final part of a plan. The significance of this is that there is no other testimony

of any others coming; Mohammed, Joseph Smith, etc. all claimed to be prophets of God, yet they lacked the testimony of the Old Testament to their arrival. Jesus was the subject of the Old Testament, and therefore its purpose is to declare Him.

Third, the Old Testament served the purpose of revealing the sinfulness of sin. In Romans 7:7-16 Paul states that without the Law (again, the context reveals he means the Law of Moses) he would not know sin. Law serves the purpose of making a point of right or wrong; like a speed limit sign, to tells us who has transgressed. The Law of Moses had carnal instruments and rules meant to demonstrate spiritual ideas (such as clean and unclean things, the temple and the priesthood, sacrifices, etc.). Paul sums it up in verse 13 when he says that *“through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful”*.

Fourth, the Old Testament served the purpose of revealing God’s Grace and Justice. In Hebrews 12:22-29 the Hebrew writer makes the case that we in the New Covenant should be more aware of the implications of our service because of the justice of God demonstrated in the Old Testament. To put it another way, the Old Testament showed what kind of Judge God was. He desires grace for all men, but He will be just in his judgment. God demonstrated repeatedly that He keeps His word. Today we have been told that the judgment of God will come on all one day; the Old Testament teaches us that God is an absolute judge, and shows no partiality.