

Why Read the Old Testament?

Christians believe that the Old Testament Law given to Moses is no longer binding on us, yet we believe that it is good for us to read the Old Testament. Why? This FAQ attempts to show the many good reasons for reading the Old Testament. A separate FAQ explaining "Why a New Covenant" is also available and shows why we believe the Old Testament Law is no longer binding.

We learn from the Old Testament where we came from, why we are here and what sin is and its high cost which makes us realize our need for a savior. A knowledge of the Old Testament can help us make a good choice as to where we will go in eternity. We can choose to become children of God. The Apostle Paul told the Galatians that the law was a tutor to get us ready to know Christ.

Galatians 3:23-26 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, confined for the faith which should afterwards be revealed. So that the law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Old Testament was written to give us examples of how to live and to encourage us to remain faithful even under trials and persecution.

1 Corinthians 10:10-11 Neither grumble, as some of them also grumbled, and perished by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

The Old Testament Scriptures bring us hope and encouragement. If you face insurmountable odds, think about David and Goliath or Daniel and the lions den or Joshua and the walls of Jericho and turn to God for help. It gives us good examples to follow and bad examples to avoid. It encourages us and teaches us to be brave like Joshua, David, and Daniel, faithful like Samuel and Ruth, patient like Abraham, to flee temptation like Joseph and the wisest man who ever lived tells us how to live our lives in the book of Proverbs.

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through patience and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

The Old Testament and the New Testament together comprise the Bible, which tells us that there is a God who created the world, cares for its inhabitants, and is very patient with us, his fallen children. God is so holy that it is hard for him to stand our sinfulness. But thankfully God loves us and is merciful and slow to anger so He devised a plan to save us. We call that plan the Gospel.

Ezekiel 18:30-32 Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

Clearly one needs a knowledge of the Old Testament in order to understand what the New Testament is talking about. Moses used a serpent on a pole to heal those bitten by poisonous snakes, because of his love for us God used his son lifted up on a cross to deliver us from our sins.

John 3:14-16 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The Old Testament teaches us not to lust for evil things by giving us examples of what happened to those who did. The children's song "Be careful little eyes what you see. Be careful little ears what you hear." is good advice for all of us.

1 Corinthians 10:5-6 However with most of them, God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

The Old Testament tells us what God requires of man.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does the LORD require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

The Old Testament tells us what is required to turn to God. The FAQ "Can I Be Saved" tells more about this, but a good place to start is to admit that you need help, to humbly seek God, to repent, and to pray for forgiveness, for help and for guidance. You seek God by reading his word to learn about him and by associating with other people who are seeking him too. A good place to find other seekers is in a Bible believing church. Look for a place where they are seriously seeking God and admit that they aren't perfect. The church is a sort of spiritual hospital for sin sick souls seeking a cure for their sin. In a hospital you find sick people, dead people and people who are nearly healed. Don't expect all the people in a hospital to be well or all the people in a church to be perfect.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 If I shut up the sky so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

The Old Testament teaches us what God dislikes in several places. If you are going to seek God, it makes sense to learn what God cares about. Clearly He hates evil and loves good.

Psalms 11:4-5 The LORD is in his holy temple. The LORD is on his throne in heaven. His eyes observe. His eyes examine the children of men. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and him who loves violence his soul hates.

We learn in the New Testament that God loves peacemakers, but hates troublemakers.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Proverbs 6:16-19 There are six things which the LORD hates; yes, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness who utters lies, and he who sows discord among brothers.

We learn from the Old Testament that God's patience has limits and He knows what is going on. When we go too far into sin, punishment is certain if we don't repent. We all know the story of how God told the prophet Jonah to go to Ninevah and warn them to repent. The Ninevites were one of Israel's worst enemies and Jonah wanted them to be destroyed, so instead of obeying God Jonah got on a ship to flee from him. Then the Lord sent a storm and a large fish which swallowed him, he repented, the fish vomited him onto the beach and so finally Jonah went and preached to Ninevah. They repented and God spared them from destruction. Jonah complained to God about sparing them and in the process gives a good description of our great, patient, merciful, kind and loving God.

Jonah 4:1-2 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. He prayed to the LORD, and said, "Please, LORD, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and you relent of doing harm.

Fulfilled Prophecy in the Old Testament

Fulfilled Old Testament prophecy is one of my primary reasons for believing. Several Old Testament prophecies such as some of Daniel's were fulfilled hundreds of years after they were written, hundreds of years before the time of Christ. One such prophecy in Daniel 8:1-18 is partially explained in the following verses:

Daniel 8:19-22 He said, 'Behold, I will make you know what shall be in the latter time of the indignation; for it belongs to the appointed time of the end. The ram which you saw, that had the two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia. The rough male goat is the king of Greece: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. As for that which was broken, in the place where four stood up, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power'..

When you dig into ancient history you will find that Alexander the Great, the king of Greece conquered the Medio-Persian Empire along with most of the world at that time. But he died at a young age and his empire was divided among his four generals, each of whom became a king. This was all prophesied by Daniel hundreds of years before the Grecian empire. This is just the tip of the iceberg, a detailed study of the Old Testament prophecies will lead you to realize that these men wrote down what was going to happen hundreds or in some cases thousands of years before it happened. There is no way they could have accurately predicted such a strange turn of events hundreds of years in advance, without divine inspiration.

The Old Testament is the prerequisite that both confirms the facts and prepares our minds so that we can understand the New Testament. It validates the truth that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah by its many fulfilled prophecies. There is a scarlet thread of prophecy concerning Christ threaded throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps the most famous are those of Isaiah which were fulfilled by Jesus Christ, his life, his suffering and his death on the cross for our sins. Here is just one of the many from Isaiah.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus Christ Considered the Old Testament Scripture to be the Word of God.

Another reason why the Old Testament is important is that Christ regarded the Old Testament Scripture as the Word of God and criticized the Pharisees for making their traditions more important than God's Word.

Mark 7:9-13 He said to them, "Full well do you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother;' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death'. But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban, that is to say, given to God;" then you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother, making void the word of God by your tradition, which you have handed down. You do many things like this."

Christ said that the Scripture can't be broken.

John 10:34-36 Jesus answered them, Isn't it written in your law, 'I said, you are gods?' If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture can't be broken), do you say of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'

Clearly Jesus Christ regarded the Scriptures as the Word of God. He chose to die in order to fulfill them. When they came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew his sword and started to fight, here is what Jesus said.

Matthew 26:52-54 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?"

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are Inspired by God.

Christians not only have the Old Testament, we have the New Testament which teaches us about Christ and his gospel and how to live as his followers. The Apostle Paul describes the scripture as being able to make us wise for salvation through faith and to completely equip us for all good works. The Scripture Paul was referring to in this verse was probably the Old Testament. But the New Testament is also scripture, Peter says that Paul's writings are scripture. The early church fathers regarded all the books in our New Testament as being inspired by God. This was confirmed by the Council of Nicea where the leaders of the church confirmed which books belong in the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 From infancy, you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 3:14-16 Therefore, beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent to be found in peace, without blemish and blameless in his sight. Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you; as also in all of his letters, speaking in them of these things. In those, there are some things that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unsettled twist, as they also do to the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

What Should I Do?

Just as Peter said some of Paul's writings are hard to understand, we need help to understand the scriptures. Seek out a church that believes and teaches that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that the Bible is God's inspired word and seeks to follow it. Ask God to help you.

Proverbs 3:5-7 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

James 1:5-6 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed.

Ask humbly but confidently, trust God and have faith in Him.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your worries on him, because he cares for you.

How wonderful, to have the all-wise all-knowing all-powerful creator of the universe, God, our Heavenly Father, guiding us. Once we get to know the Lord, we can say with the Apostle Paul:

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, 'For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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