

## Does the Old Testament Still Have Value? Kevin W. Rhodes

People, including some Christians, periodically question the value of studying the Old Testament. Perhaps they have struggled to understand the point of reading about the construction of the tabernacle. Or maybe they wondered why they should bother trying to figure out all the various sacrifices described in Leviticus. They might have had their eyes glaze over just trying to pronounce some of the names in the various genealogies. These reasons might sound weak on the surface, but they are real issues for many people. However, others object to studying the Old Testament for more doctrinal reasons. They argue that since the Old Testament has been fulfilled and was nailed to the cross (Matt. 5:17; Col. 2:14) it does not apply today and therefore should not be studied or preached. They might also point out that most of the regulations of the Old Law do not apply today for the same reason. We do not follow the same food limitations, health mandates, or feast days. We do not even remember the Sabbath since it was part of the Old Covenant but not part of the new. The Old Testament, they argue, cannot teach us how to be saved from our sins, cannot explain how to worship in spirit and truth, and cannot describe even why to hope. These are all true, as far as they go. But just because the Old Testament does not have value for us in these ways does not mean that it has no value at all. Quite to the contrary. The early church used the Old Testament quite effectively to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. When Paul approached the Jews in their synagogues, he "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3). Paul discussed the Old Testament with the Jews to show God's plan for the Messiah was for Him to suffer and die and then to be resurrected—contrary to their tradition. Then, by combining this evidence from the Old Testament with the facts about Jesus, he made the case for Jesus Christ and Christianity. This was not an exception for Paul; this was his regular practice. Indeed, Paul pointed out the value of studying the Old Testament Scriptures when he reminded Timothy of its effectiveness in his own early training as a youth, telling him that they played an important role in making him "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14-15). Timothy's training in the Old Testament prepared him well to accept and enjoy the benefits of the New. So while the apostle Paul wrote extensively about how all people are now accountable to the gospel, he still found great value in the Old Testament.

Despite these biblical reasons, some might assume that the situation is different today. While no one would dispute the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is vastly different from what it was in the first century—by God's design—in principle the value of the Old Testament remains. In fact, the Old Testament provides vital information that no Christian can do without. The Old Testament provides multiples proofs of inspiration. The repetition of "Thus saith the LORD" throughout the Old Covenant offers a distinct claim of inspiration that permeates the text. The hundreds of prophecies of the coming Messiah, fulfilled by Jesus, establish a claim on inspiration that cannot be successfully ignored. Beyond this, the prophecies concerning the nations included in the Old Testament and fulfilled in history support not only the authenticity of the Bible but the relevance to all. The Old Testament answers the basic questions of life. It explains the origins of the universe and man (Gen. 1-2) in a way that brings together the sovereign power of Almighty God and the scientific realities of His creation. It explains the existence of morality and how this became a problem. It is in the early pages of the Old

Testament that man's purpose in having a relationship with God finds expression, which is then supported throughout the rest of its writings (Ecc. 12:13). The Old Testament offers insight into the nature of sin as a destructive force with terrible consequences and the nature of God who judges sin, offers hope, demands obedience, keeps His promises, and requires a perfect blood sacrifice for the propitiation of sins (Leviticus). The Old Testament points to the coming of Christ by establishing the need for redemption and the scheme of redemption and by pointing to the standard of righteousness in the Law that Jesus Himself would have to fulfill and the pointers in Scripture to all that He would accomplish. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). Studying the Old Testament is essential to understanding the New Testament. The quotations of the Old Testament included in the New imply the necessity of understanding their context and meaning to appreciate their application. Without studying the Old Testament, a Christian cannot appreciate the misunderstandings of the Jews in the first century, follow Jesus' reasoning in His replies to them, or appreciate the argumentation found in the epistles, especially the reasoning found in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. And this does not even account for the numerous allusions to Scripture found throughout the gospel. Even reading the Old Testament helps us appreciate how difficult it is to live perfectly and why we need Christ because the exacting nature of the Law was designed to demonstrate just that. And then we should think about how the Old Testament provides access to centuries of life experience, which was part of Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10:11.

Does the Old Testament still have value? Absolutely! It had value the moment it was penned. It had value in the first century. It has value today. And it will have value until Judgment Day. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), but it stands on the bedrock of the Old Testament. We ignore it at our own peril. We study it to gain perspective and insight. And we love it because it paved the way for Jesus. "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97).