

WHAT ABOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Jon Macon

Every Christian is instructed to “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Part of “rightly dividing the word of truth” involves discerning the difference between the Old and New Testaments. It is essential for us to recognize the authority that we are under today, which is that of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18; Col 3:17). This means that the only religious law we are to follow is the New Testament and not the Old. Yet it is also crucial for us to know and understand the Old Testament scriptures and the role they have in our eternal salvation.

The ministration of death

The Old Testament law is called the letter that kills (2 Cor 3:6), the ministration of death (2 Cor 3:7), and the ministration of condemnation (2 Cor 3:9). It is clear that this is speaking of the Law of Moses because that was the law which was “written and engraven in stones” (2 Cor 3:7; Exod 24:12; 31:18; 34:1,4; Deut 4:13; 5:22; 9:9-11; 10:1-5; 1 Kgs 8:9). This is the law that was brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses with his face shining gloriously (Exod 34:29-35; 2 Cor 3:7). The Old Law was “added because of transgressions” (Gal 3:19). It gave “the knowledge of sin” and stopped every mouth and made all of them guilty before God (Rom 3:19-20). That law worked wrath (i.e. brought upon Israel God’s wrath), “*for where no law is, there is no transgression*” (Rom 4:15). God gave Israel the law to teach them His judgments, but as soon as they broke the law, they were guilty of transgression and came under God’s wrath. The very definition of sin is transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4). The Old Law actually brought the people under God’s curse as soon as they disobeyed any part of it. “*Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law to do them*” (Deut 27:26). “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal 3:10). Thus, the Old Law “concluded all under sin” (Gal 3:22), and brought them all under God’s curse and wrath. That law was also unable to justify anyone (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; 3:11). It was unable to give redemption from transgressions (Heb 10:1-4). It was unable to give life (Gal 3:21). And it was unable to bring anyone to spiritual perfection (Heb 7:11,19). Since “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), and since the Old Law concluded all under sin (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:22), and could not provide escape from sin’s consequences, the Old Law thus became the ministration of death (see also Acts 15:1-11; Gal 5:1-4). In contrast, the New Testament, by faith in Christ, does bring justification (Rom 3:21-22; Gal 2:16; 3:11), redemption from transgressions (Matt 26:28; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:38;

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10:43; Rom 3:24-26; 1 Pet 1:18-19), even the transgressions committed under the first covenant (Heb 9:15). The New Law gives life (John 6:63), and is able to make a man spiritually complete (2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 7:11,19; 1 John 2:5).

Our schoolmaster

For these reasons, the Old Testament *law* was nailed to the cross of Christ (Col 2:14-17), and we must not follow any part of it today (Gal 5:1-4). (The exception would be the several Old Testament commandments that are repeated in the New Testament.) But the law takes up only a portion of four books of the Old Testament (Exodus through Deuteronomy), plus a few commands which God gave in the time of David (2 Chr 29:25). Even the “law” portion of the Old Testament is valuable to study, even though we cannot follow it. It serves as a “schoolmaster” of God’s judgments (Gal 3:22-25; Rom 3:1-2; Psa 19:7-8). But the remainder of the Old Testament is essential for us to study, and the New Testament even *commands* us to study it: “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Rom 15:4). The Old Testament is loaded with examples that teach us about God and His judgments. “Now these things were our examples” (1 Cor 10:6), and “*all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*” (1 Cor 10:11). Old Testament Israel is given as an “example of unbelief” (Heb 4:11). Paul wrote Timothy, “*But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim 3:14-15). Timothy did not even hear the New Testament gospel preached until Paul arrived on his first missionary journey (Acts 14; 2 Tim 3:10-11). Therefore, the *only* “holy scriptures” that Timothy learned as a child were the *Old Testament* scriptures. Timothy was told to continue in the lessons that he had learned from them, and that those *Old Testament scriptures* were able to make him wise unto salvation. The salvation is not in those Old Testament scriptures, but only comes by faith in Jesus Christ (2 Tim 3:15). But the Old Testament scriptures are able to make us wise unto the salvation that is in the New Testament through faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. Therefore, although the Old Testament is not a law for us to follow today, it is nevertheless required material for us to study, know, and understand. Without it, we cannot have a proper understanding of the New Testament and the salvation that it brings.