

INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Searching the Scriptures – February 8, 2012

The Bible is divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains 39 sections that we call “books.” The New Testament contains 27 sections that we call “books.” There are 66 books in this one Book we call the Bible.

Hello I’m Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Welcome to this edition of the Searching the Scriptures program.

Today we will focus our attention on the Old Testament. What is the Purpose of the Old Testament and why should we study the Old Testament? Now some people do not believe in studying from and/or teaching the Old Testament. They say that first, the Old has been fulfilled, therefore there is no need to study or to learn from that part of the Bible. Secondly, they say that people today no longer live under the Old Testament laws, therefore there is no need to study it.

Well, it is true that the Old Testament has largely been fulfilled. Jesus said concerning this that He came to fulfill it, not to destroy it. (Matthew 5:17.) Since the Old Testament also speaks about the end of time and Judgment Day, not all of the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled as yet. No doubt this is why Jesus continued by saying, “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” (Matthew 5:18.) And so, we still have available for our learning every jot and every tittle of the law, that is, the Old Testament. Studying the Old Testament introduces us to over 300 prophecies concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Every generation can find evidence in which to root faith. These prophecies give credibility to our faith. They give us reasons to believe the New Testament. Therefore, our faith can be nurtured by the Old Testament even though Christians are no longer under its law, but under the law of Christ in the New Testament.

Over and over again in the New Testament you read where Jesus or the apostles say, “as it is written.” Well, they are referencing the Old Testament scriptures. If we want to know fully what Jesus and the apostles are talking about, then we

should look up where “it is written.” That’s right! The apostle Paul used the ancient Abraham as an example of a person accounted righteous by faith. Paul quoted from Genesis 15:6. But then Paul made this comment about that passage in the Old Testament, “the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.” (Romans 4:23, 24 ESV.) Friends, Genesis 15:6 was not written and preserved all those centuries just for Abraham’s sake! It was also written for the sake of people living in the Christian age, after the New Testament was in effect!

So Friends, be not so hasty about setting aside the Old Testament. We should study and learn from every word that has proceeded out of the mouth of God. But back to our original questions: (1) What is the purpose, then, of the Old Testament? (2) Why study the Old Testament? These two questions are hinged together.

The principle purposes of the Old Testament can be seen in its principles of righteousness. The Bible says that all God’s commandments are righteousness. (Psalms 119:172.) In the Old Testament we see examples of righteousness and unrighteousness in action. We see the faith and obedience of Abraham, the trust and patience of Job, the courage of Elijah; we see the moral purity of Joseph, and even the consequence of the disobedience of Saul, first king of Israel.

The law foreshadowed many New Testament principles. The Jewish covenant of the Old Testament served the purpose of making the Jews to know sin and finally bringing them to the freedom that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Why should we study the Old Testament? The Old Testament gives us an explanation of how the universe and all things began. It tells us who human beings really are, where we came from, and in whose image we are made. The Old Testament explains the origin of sin and clearly shows man’s need for a Savior. It gives us the historical background necessary to fully understand the New Testament. In fact, many New Testament passages cannot be explained without a knowledge of the Old Testament!

Many “types” were given in the Old Testament that explain their anti-types in the New. For instance, the New Testament says that Christ is our “Passover.” It also says that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice. In the New Testament we also see parallels being drawn over and over again between Old Testament things and the New Testament things. For instance the tabernacle has its counterpart, its anti-type in the church Jesus built. The priesthood of the Old Testament has its counterpart, its antitype in the Christians of the New Testament who are called a holy priesthood. (1 Peter 2:5, 9.)

The Old Testament also gives us the eternal principles upon which both testaments are founded. For instance, the love of God, faith, obedience, God’s concern and care for humans are clearly seen in the OT. Furthermore, God’s sovereignty over the world is clearly witnessed by the OT.

The Old Testament helps us to see and appreciate the majesty and grandeur, the power and the wisdom of God, our Father. In the Old Testament we find the real-to-life stories of men and women who were good and who were evil. We see them in the “right” and in the “wrong.” In the Old Testament we find the good, the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. These images painted in the OT give us hope for ourselves and also give us warning about the consequences of sin.

The Old Testament prophecies also convince us of the inspiration of the scriptures and the Deity of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who fulfilled over 300 prophecies concerning himself.

Yes friends, we should study the Old Testament as well as the New. The Old will give us breadth and depth of understanding that cannot help but color our appreciation for the New.

Let us talk in closing about our principal sources for the Old Testament scripture. How was it that God preserved through the centuries this grand portion of the scriptures? The OT was written in Hebrew, except for a few parts in Ezra, Daniel, and Jeremiah that were written and preserved in the Chaldean language. Manuscripts are copies of the OT written in Hebrew. Versions are translations of

the Hebrew into another language. Some translations of the OT are actually older than the manuscripts that we have.

Up until 1947, the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew OT dated from the 10th century A.D. It is called the Masoretic Text because the texts were copied by Jewish scholars who were called Masoretes.

In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in several caves near the Dead Sea. There were several copies of Biblical books found, the most famous was the complete book of Isaiah. There was also a fragmentary copy of Isaiah and a copy of two chapters in Habakkuk. These manuscripts date from around 100 years before Christ was born. The amazing thing about this wonderful find of the book of Isaiah was that that manuscript, which was 1100 years older than the Isaiah text that we knew, said exactly the same thing as the one 1100 years younger. This fact gives us greater confidence that God has preserved the Bible for every generation.

Isn't it time you began to give the Bible more consideration? Don't you want to know what God has said?