



THE OLDER TESTAMENT IS GOOD NEWS TOO!



have done a dis-service to the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Scriptures by calling them the Old Testament. To some, *old* is synonymous with out-of-date, old-fashioned, and irrelevant. This “old” mind-set leads often to what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery” in which we think that people in the past weren’t as smart or savvy as people are today and that their observations on life are no longer needed. I like Gordon MacDonald’s approach, in which he called the Hebrew Scriptures the “Older Testament,” indicating that it still has value for us today.

In Jesus’s day (and even now), the Hebrew Scriptures were called the Tanakh, an acronym of sorts based on the first letter of the three Hebrew words for *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, *Ketuvim* or The Law, The Prophets and The Writings. The Tanakh was Jesus’s Bible and was quoted and read by Jesus and His disciples as God’s authoritative word. In fact, the New Testament quotes passages from the Old Testament some 855 times! This is one statistic that points directly to the inherent value of the Old Testament for Christians today. After all, how could one hope to understand the intent of the writers of the New Testament if one was unable to understand the Scriptures that they viewed as God-inspired and authoritative and quoted by heart?

Paul writes, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). When Paul writes this, he is referencing the Hebrew Scriptures and stating that they are there to guide, instruct, and train all who follow Jesus Christ.

Yet, in the past year, an age-old question has been raised again in some Christian circles: of what value is the Old Testament now that we have the New Testament? One popular pastor has suggested that Christians “unhitch” themselves from the Old Testament. His rationale was that the Old Testament no longer has authority in our lives, because it was God’s word to the nation of Israel, and God has given the New Testament to the church as the guide for our lives today.

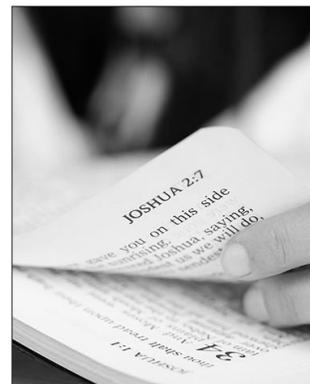
Some Christians claim that the Old Testament is God’s Word but, in practice, rarely open its pages, preferring to carry a shorter and lighter New Testament alone. Some Christians point to the difficult passages dealing with violence or the modern debate over creation and decide that the Old Testament is just too difficult to understand. Others ignore the Old Testament all together.

There isn’t time to get into all of the reasons for the above views on the Old Testament, but I’d like to make a simple case for the regular reading, teaching, and preaching from the thirty-nine books of our Older Testament, the Tanakh, or the Bible of Jesus. After all, it has been recognized for millennia by Jews and Christians alike as God’s holy and authoritative Word.

First of all, Jesus stated in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt. 5:17–18). In other words, if you want to understand the Messianic mission of Jesus, you need to know the Hebrew Scriptures. More than three hundred Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled through the words, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as detailed in the New Testament. These Old Testament prophecies are essential to seeing God’s plan of salvation for humankind and creation rolled out from the opening chapters of Genesis. Without the Old Testament, our understanding of God’s love, grace, and active plan of salvation from the beginning of time would be lost.

Second, if you want to understand one of the most famous sermons ever, the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5–7, you need first to have an understanding of Old Testament law as Jesus gets to the heart of faith and practice for His disciples.

Third, if you would like to learn how to pray, sing, or worship God, go directly to Jesus’s prayer book, the book of Psalms.





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Believers through the millennia have found comfort, guidance, and a means of praying with transparency, authenticity, and faith in our gracious and loving God. Praying the psalms is one of the best ways for Christians to put themselves in a place to experience the power of God's Word and His presence.

Fourth, if you need some wisdom on how to live your life, go to the book of Proverbs. Those sayings from the tenth century BC are just as applicable today as they were three thousand years ago when Solomon and others wrote them.

Fifth, if you're looking for romance and a healthy view of sexuality in marriage, read the Song of Songs. It's far better than anything you'll find today on the topic on Amazon.

Sixth, if you are looking for examples of men and women who exemplified faithfulness, courage, and love, read the narrative stories of the Prophets. We also find there that these people were flawed men and women with whom we can identify. We see their need and our need for a Savior.

Seventh, the Old Testament provides the understanding for our worldview in which God created the heavens and the earth. The adversary, Satan, brought evil into the world and sin entered the human race through Adam and Eve, the first human beings. The need for a rescue plan is made known by God in Genesis 3:15. Without the Old Testament, we don't have the beginning or the middle of the greatest story ever told, the true story in which God creates, sustains, redeems, and restores humankind and all of creation.

I could go on and on.

I encourage you, as you daily open your Bible, to read from the Older Testament and the New Testament. In this way, you will put yourself in a place to experience God's grace and goodness as revealed through all sixty-six books of the holy Bible. ■

NOTES

¹ Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.



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Joel Woodruff, President, C.S. Lewis Institute, has worked in higher education, “tent-making,” nonprofit administration, and pastoral ministries in Alaska, Israel, Hungary, France, and Northern Virginia. He served as Dean of Students, Chaplain, and Professor of Bible & Theology at European Bible Institute, where he helped train Europeans both for professional ministry and to be Christian leaders in the marketplace. Prior to joining the Institute, he was on the leadership team of Oakwood Services International, a nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization. He is a graduate of Wheaton College, earned his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and has a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

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