

Relevance of the Old Testament Today

Since believers are under a New Covenant, what's the relevance of the Old Testament and how does it apply to our lives today?

This is a good question. The writings of the Apostle Paul and other men of God give us several answers to your question. Paul wrote this to young Timothy: **"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."** (*II Timothy 3:16-17*) The entire Bible has been given to us by God to help us in our overall spiritual growth. There are many things in the Old Testament that are applicable to our lives today. As we receive personal teaching from the Holy Spirit, he will reveal what he wants us to learn when he leads us to any of the Old Testament scriptures. (*I Corinthians 2:9-12, I John 2:27*) Although all the spiritual benefits that we can receive from these scriptures would be far too numerous (and only known by God) to give in this short answer; here are just a few of them to give us an idea.

1. The Old Testament scriptures teach us about our origin and the powerful truth that we have been created in God's image and likeness. (*Genesis 1 and 2*)

It's good for us to know where we came from as well as where we are going. God, in his wisdom knows this and this is why he has told us about our beginning as well as our end. (*Genesis to Revelation*) If we did not have the account of creation as given by our Creator, a big piece of the puzzle of our lives and purpose would be missing.

2. The Old Testament teaches us what sin is and its enormous consequences.

For instance, reading the account of Adam and Eve's sin teaches us the enormity of the consequences of sin (eternal death) and the separation that it brings between our Creator and us. (*Genesis 2:15-17, Isaiah 59:2*) We also learn that although God knew that our sins would separate us from him (that astoundingly) he already had a plan to redeem us from sin and death and to reconcile us back to him from the very beginning or foundation of the world. (*Genesis chapters 3:14-15, Revelation 13:8*)

3. The Old Testament Law teaches us what sin actually is.

Today, we have knowledge of what sin is because its definition has already been given to us through the law. Paul wrote: **"What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."** (*Romans 7:7*) Because we have come to know what sin is specifically due to the

law, our consciences usually let us know when we have personally committed sin.
(*Romans 3:20*)

4. When we read the Old Testament scriptures, we learn why we needed a Savior to deliver us from sin, the law and death and why we were unable to accomplish this ourselves.

Although God gave the people of Israel the law (which is holy, righteous and good), there are numerous examples in the Old Testament of how they continually broke it. This teaches us that no human being on earth could possibly live up to the righteous standards that God gave in the law. Although it was meant to bring life to those who kept it, because of the sinfulness of man, it became a yoke of bondage, a curse (punishment) and death to those under it. (*Leviticus 18:5, Deuteronomy 27:26, Galatians 3:10, Genesis 2:17, Ezekiel 18:20, Romans 8:1-4*)

Only the Lord could save and deliver us from our sins, the law and death because we are unable to do this for ourselves. Now that we have received salvation and deliverance through Christ and are under his grace, we should never revert to the law because it has now been fulfilled and removed by his sacrifice. Now we should live by the Spirit. (*Galatians 5:16-18*) If we would not have had the benefit of having the record of the Old Testament as well as the New, would we truly understand the seriousness of sin, our inability to save ourselves and appreciate the sacrifice that Christ paid on our behalf? I don't believe so.

5. There are many stories written down in the Old Testament that serve as warnings to us today and in which we can receive correction or rebuke.

Here are just a couple of examples. Paul used examples from Israel's past to warn believers in the Church to not repeat their mistakes. Paul taught that there was a divine purpose in the writing and giving of the Old Testament to the saints of God. He said:

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.” (*1 Corinthians 10:11*)

In the Book of Hebrews another example and warning was given concerning Israel's past that can greatly help believers today to not commit the same sins as they did during their time in the wilderness. (*Hebrews 3:7-11*) The Israelites did not obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. They hardened their hearts toward God and as a result they rebelled against him. After seeing all the mighty miracles he performed for them, they still did not believe. This serves as a lesson for us in the modern day Church as well. What are we to learn from this? The author's admonition to the Church was this:

“See to it, *brothers*, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

Since God sent his Son to us with a divine message, we should believe what he said. (*Hebrews 1:1-2*) The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians or *believers* in the Church that were going backward into the religion of Judaism or the works of the law. We have the great advantage of not only learning from the mistakes of Israel through the Old

Testament scriptures but also from the mistakes of the Hebrews through the New Testament scriptures. Thank God that he spoke through holy men and had it all recorded for our benefit!

6. There are many stories written down for our encouragement, edification and training in righteousness and faith as well.

We can learn from the mistakes of others but we can also learn from their good examples also. Hebrews chapter eleven tells us of many such men and women of God. Thankfully, all of their stories were recorded in the Old Testament for our benefit today. As we read about these precious saints from the “hall of faith”, we can receive tremendous spiritual benefits. When we read of the great faith that they displayed even in the face of tremendous suffering, persecution, threats of death and even death itself, this helps to train us in righteousness and build us up in the faith. It also encourages us to trust God during times of personal trials and tests. Looking to the examples of our faithful brethren that have gone on before us will exhort us to stay faithful to the Lord today as well.

In the New Testament, the life of Abraham is often held up as an example for our learning and exercising of faith. (*Romans 4, Galatians 3:6-9*) We can do this only because God made sure that the Old Testament scriptures were written down and preserved for our benefit today. We can go to the Old Testament and read not only about the life of Abraham but other faithful men and women of God as well and as we do, our faith grows.

7. The promises that God gave in the Old Testament to Abraham and that were written in the law, prophets and psalms serve as proof that God brought his promise to pass through Jesus Christ.

If we did not have the Old Testament scriptures to go by, how would we be able to know the identity of the Savior and prove that Jesus is that Savior? The life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus proved that he was sent by the Father to die for the sins of the people and give eternal life but there is other proof as well. He was the only one that actually fulfilled the promise that God gave to Abraham and all that was written in the Law, Prophets and Psalms concerning him. (*Luke 24:44-49, Galatians 3:16, Hebrews 6:13-20*)

God is always faithful to perform all he has promised us. The specific plan that he laid out under the Old Testament was brought to pass exactly as he said. From the time that God gave his promise to Abraham, he consistently spoke of it all throughout the Old Testament through the Law, Prophets and Psalms. He did this for a reason. The reason is given to us in the Book of Hebrews:

“God wanted to prove that his promise was true to those who would get what he promised. And he wanted them to understand clearly that his purposes never change, so he made an oath. These two things cannot change: God cannot lie when he makes a promise, and he cannot lie when he makes an oath. These things encourage us who came to God for safety. They give us strength to hold on to the hope we have been given. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and strong. It enters behind the curtain in the Most Holy Place in heaven, where Jesus

has gone ahead of us and for us. He has become the high priest forever, a priest like Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 6:13-20 NCV, Read also Genesis 22:15-18)

8. Both the Old and New Testament scriptures both bring glory to God.

Because the specific plan that God laid out under the Old Testament was brought to pass exactly as he said, it has also brought great glory to God. The fact that we have received that plan or promise through Christ brings glory to God as well. Paul boldly declared: **“The yes to all of God's promises is in Christ, and through Christ we say yes to the glory of God.” (II Corinthians 1:20 NCV)**

9. Studying the Old Testament also gives us the benefit of gaining encouragement and wisdom through the Psalms and Proverbs when we need it.

God may speak a “word from the Word” to us through either the Old or New Testament depending on our particular need at the time. He knows exactly what we need and when we need it. God can also give us instruction and guidance through these God-breathed scriptures by the Holy Spirit. We can have a better understanding of God’s overall plan for mankind by studying the entire Bible. The Old and New Testaments are mutually dependent on each other. We have God’s plan concealed in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. To have one half is to only have half the picture of God’s entire plan, to have all of it is to see the whole picture that God wants us to see. It’s all good and it’s all from God.

—answer by Denise Bostic