



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

The Bible's One Story

1 - The New Testament's Assumption

Introduction

1. The Preface of a Survey of the Old Testament textbook begins, "Why study the Old Testament? This question has echoed down through the centuries of church history, ever since the new covenant of Jesus Christ made the old covenant obsolete (Heb. 8:13)."¹
2. First consider a dismissive answer I once heard, and more than once have seen in practice: "We are *New Testament* Christians: we don't really *need* to study the Old."
3. Most reject that since the *New Testament* (Rom. 15:4 - "for our instruction"; and 1 Cor. 10:11 - "for our admonition/warnings" [KJV, ASV, NIV; contra ESV/NASB: "instruction"]), says there is value to Old Testament study. From lessons heard and other discussions, I thought of the following.
 - a. Three *informational* reasons.
 - i. To understand references and allusions we find in New Testament writings (e.g. Jude 5-11 [Egyptian slavery, Sodom/Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, Korah], etc.) and/or learn life lessons from their failures or successes (e.g., Saul, David, Solomon, etc.)
 - ii. To understand the "copy and shadow" of the old covenant so we can then understand the "heavenly/real things" of the new (Heb 8:5; 10:1).
 - iii. To learn the predictions that come true in the NT.
 - b. A *theological* reason; again, it is based on what I've heard and seen.
 - i. Studying the Old Testament helps us understand and appreciate by contrast the new and better way we have in Christ.
 - (1) We *do* have a new and better way (see Heb. 8:7-13), but I don't think the New Testament writers would express the point the way some we've heard do.
 - ii. Some hold as an axiom (often dogmatically so) that what is revealed in:
 - (1) The Old is a God of vengeance and law, a law lacking in grace or mercy.
 - (2) The New is a God of love and grace, a way that universally rejects law (and ritual).
 - iii. But both teach that "obedience flows from grace; it does not buy it" (see Deut. 6:20-25), and "rite without right is wrong" (see Amos 5:21-24; Isa. 1:10-17; etc.).²
 - iv. Richard Hays illustrates how common this view is: "Judaism [OT] is regarded as a legalistic foil from which Jesus has delivered us. (I once had a student say to me in class:

¹ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 11.

² Quoting Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 195; and the professor I had for an undergraduate prophets course.

'Judaism was a harsh religion that taught people to *fear* God's judgment, but Jesus came to teach us to *love* God with all our heart and soul and strength')."³

(1) The student was right about Jesus' teaching (Matt. 22:37 and parallels).

(2) But, Jesus was *quoting* Deuteronomy 6:5, the *shema*, the statement that lies "at the heart of daily prayer in the Jewish tradition."⁴

4. I do not think that the above choices are of equal weight. In other words, some have more merit than others. However, I do think the following affirmations offer more comprehensive reasons for studying *both* testaments.

a. "*The Old Testament tells the story that Jesus completes*" (16; Wright's emphasis).

b. "*Not only does the Old Testament tell the story that Jesus completes, it also declares the promise that Jesus fulfills*" (64; Wright's emphasis).

5. We should study the Old Testament because it is the first part of the *one story* the Bible tells, but more importantly, because it is necessary for understanding who Jesus was, what he accomplished, and what that means practically for you and me.

6. After preliminary thoughts, we will get a feel for how the New Testament assumes it is completing a story already begun. In part 2, we will offer a panoramic view of that story.

Body

I. Important Affirmations to Ponder.

A. Regarding the "Judaism-as-legalistic-foil" view, Martin Luther responded and then showed its essential flaw: "There are some who have little regard for the Old Testament. They think of it as a book that was given to the Jewish people only and is now out of date, *containing only stories of past times*. . . . But Christ says in John 5[:39], 'Search the Scriptures, for it is they that bear witness to me.' . . ." (my emphasis).⁵

B. Chew on these statements to stretch your thinking.

1. ". . . the Old Testament is much more than a promise box full of blessed predictions about Jesus" (Wright, 38).

2. ". . . if we were to throw away the Old Testament, we would lose most of the *meaning* of Jesus himself" (C. Wright 45; my emphasis).

3. ". . . the more you understand the Old Testament, the closer you will come to the heart of Jesus" (C. Wright, 115).

C. Neither without the other.

1. N. T. Wright notes that, when we get to the end of the Old Testament, we are left with the sense that, "It is an unfinished narrative, an unfinished *agenda*. Things are supposed to happen that haven't happened yet."⁶

³ Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (London, England: SPCK, 2014, 2015), 5.

⁴ Hays, 113, n. 10. See also Old Testament passages that stress obedience as a response to grace (Deut 6:20-25), speak of loving and serving God *before* mentioning commands and statutes (Deut 10:12-13), and say that the essence of serving God is not ritual sacrifices, but justice, kindness, and humility (Mic 6:6-8).

⁵ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Old Testament," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (ed. E. Theodore Bachmann; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 235-236; in Hays, 1.

⁶ N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York, NY: 2012), 66.

2. In the same way, as we begin the New Testament, we get the sense that the writers are continuing a story that had already begun. This is immediately evident in Matthew's beginning with a Jewish genealogy (1:1-18).

II. New Testament Assumption Illustrated from the Bookends of Luke.⁷

A. Regarding Luke's style and emphasis in chapters 1-2.

1. His preface (Luke 1:1-4) is written in some of the most cultured Greek in the New Testament.
2. But, the style changes in 1:5-2:52. Unlike anything else he writes Luke or Acts, Luke adopted the style of the Septuagint.
 - a) Those who had immersed themselves in the language and themes of the Old Testament would have recognized the allusions to the stories and themes from Israel's history.
 - b) The effect is "to transport the reader into the world of the Old Testament, . . . introduc[ing] the reader to the faithful remnant of the people of God, waiting expectantly for the fulfillment of the promises God has made to them."⁸
 - c) "The central theme of the birth narrative is the arrival of God's salvation and the fulfillment of his promise to Israel" (Strauss, 264).

B. Notice some of the examples of this connection from chapter 1.

1. He begins his preface with the declaration that he is concerned to report on "the things that have been *accomplished* among us" (1:1). "Fulfilled" (NRSV, NIV) is a better translation of the word (πληροφορέω, *plērophoreō*).
2. Mary's song explains the events in terms of God having "helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever" (1:54-55).
3. Zechariah's prophecy is replete with echoes and allusions.
 - a) God had "visited and redeemed his people," as promised (1:68).⁹
 - b) He "raised a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (1:69).
 - c) This was just as (καθώς, *kathōs*) "he spoke by . . . his holy prophets of old" regarding salvation from their enemies, "to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant" (1:70-72).
 - d) The promise goes back to "the oath he swore to our father Abraham" (1:73); its content was deliverance, service, and being holy and righteous (1:74-75).

C. Note the Emmaus road episode from the last chapter (Luke 24:13-47).

1. The disciples report their expectation about Jesus (v. 21). They were correct in their expectation, but wrong to be discouraged by Jesus' suffering and death.
2. Jesus tied his ministry to the Old Testament (vv. 25-27, esp. v. 27).
 - a) "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he *interpreted* to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27; my emphasis).¹⁰
 - b) The "Scriptures" are defined as "Moses and all the Prophets."

⁷ I focus on Luke because there is a much greater connection with the Old Testament than many think, but mainly because the same author shows how the story plays out in Acts, a development we will introduce in part 2.

⁸ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 264.

⁹ The ideas that God had visited and redeemed his people and would do so again appear in the Pentateuch (see Exod. 3:7-10, 16-20), Psalms (see 106:4), the prophets (see Jer. 29:10; Ezek. 34:11-12), and intertestamental Jewish literature (see Wisdom of Solomon 3:7, 8; Psalms of Solomon 3:11; 10:4).

¹⁰ "Interpreted" is διερμηνεύω (*diermēneuō*), a form of the word from which comes "hermeneutics." It means, "make something clear or intelligible."

- c) Jesus said they revealed "the things concerning himself."
- 3. Notice the disciples' conclusion in vv. 31-32.
 - a) After "breaking bread," their "eyes were opened (διανοίγω, *dianoigō*) and they recognized him" (v. 31).
 - b) Don't miss v. 32: "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, *while he opened* (διανοίγω) *to us the Scriptures?*'"
- 4. Finally, notice the subsequent appearance to the entire group after the two Emmaus road disciples had returned to Jerusalem (vv. 44-47).
 - a) After testimony from the two and evidence to confirm his resurrection (vv. 33-43), Jesus once again began to teach.
 - b) He said that the Law, Prophets, and Psalms¹¹ were about him and needed to be fulfilled (πληρώω, *plēroō*) (v. 44), an important theme in Luke (1:20; 2:40; 3:5; 4:21; 7:1; 9:31; 21:24; 22:16; 24:44).
 - c) He "opened (διανοίγω) their minds *to understand* (συνίημι, *sunīēmi*) *the Scriptures*" (v. 45) and said the Scriptures were "written" about the Christ's suffering and resurrection (v. 46).
 - d) The proclamation of repentance and forgiveness was part of the story (v. 47).

Conclusion

- 1. In the first of six summary statements of his book's chapters, Christopher Wright writes, "The relationship between the Old Testament and Jesus is *historical*, because the story of God with his people links them together with Christ as the climax" (C. Wright, 277).
- 2. Really seeing that *story* will result in our eyes being "opened" and will enliven our faith. We will trace it in part 2.

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¹¹ I take "Law, Prophets, and Psalms" to refer to the threefold division of Hebrew Scriptures, often shortened to "the Law and the Prophets" (see Luke 16:16). For a defense of this view, see Mark L. Strauss, "Luke," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 500; for further discussion, see David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 911.