

## Understanding the Old into the New

The question has often been asked by Christians over the years, “What is the point of reading the Old Testament?” “If Jesus ended everything from the Old Testament why bother even reading the Old Testament?” Some have tried to read the Old Testament (OT) but have found it too difficult to understand or comprehend and so have just concentrated on the New Testament (NT). Some have even gone so far as to identify that the God portrayed in the NT is much easier to like and connect with than the one often portrayed in the OT. We often pick simple stories from the OT like David vs Goliath or Jonah and the whale and use them for teaching kids but as for the rest of the OT, it can be much harder to figure out what it all means. It’s too complicated better to stick to the NT some may say.

The debate amongst Christians about whether the OT is relevant started in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, 100 years after Jesus went up to heaven. Marcion was a follower of Paul and a Christian teacher in the second century. When he read the sayings of Jesus and compared them to what God had said in the OT he made the conclusion that the two deities didn’t match up. He felt that the only rational way was to reject the Hebrew bible. His way of dealing with these differences was to start teaching that Christians shouldn’t focus on reading the OT but instead focus on the teachings of Jesus and the epistles of Paul. Eventually Marcion was branded a heretic and discredited as a Christian teacher.

So the question for the modern Christian still remains: how should they approach the OT? Does the OT still hold any value?

### The Holy Scriptures

For many of the authors of NT books the only scriptures they had available to them were the books of the OT. The writings of Paul, Peter and John came much later. What they knew about God often came from what they could gather in the OT.

It’s interesting to read through the NT and see how many times the authors used quotes from the OT. 283 direct quotes from the OT are listed in the various books of the NT. Many of these quotes were used to further support what the author of the NT was trying to get across.

There is an interesting take on this with Paul and his spiritual son Timothy.

2 Tim 3: 14-17      14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NIV)

Paul knew that from an early age Timothy had been reading the ‘Holy Scriptures’. But these ‘Holy Scriptures’ weren’t from the NT, as most of them hadn’t been written yet, but rather the teachings from the OT. Sources indicate that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy sometime around 66AD, yet it is generally agreed that Luke’s gospel was written around 90AD and John’s gospel around 100AD. Paul encourages Timothy to continue on with what he had learned from the OT teachings about God. To further reinforce his idea Paul then gives the quote that most Christians know which is in v 16. Paul states that all scripture is God breathed. For Timothy reading the statement by Paul meant realising that what was written in the OT was important and ordained by God.

## **How did Jesus view the OT**

There are a number of interesting scriptures in the gospels that give us an insight of what Jesus thought about the writings in the OT. Was He going to ignore what the OT had said or not? After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, He went into the desert and was tempted three times by the devil. Each time Jesus used a scripture from the book of Deuteronomy in the OT as a way of defeating the lies of the devil. In order for this to have happened Jesus must have spent some time reading through the various books of the OT and been familiar with them. When the Pharisees and the teachers of the law tried to accuse His disciples in Matthew 15, Jesus replied twice with scriptures from the OT. He reinforced the idea mentioned in Ex 21 that we should honour our fathers and mothers.

There is an interesting story in Mt 19 where Jesus encounters a rich man who enquired of Jesus what good thing he needed to do to get eternal life. Jesus replied by saying that if he wanted eternal life he needed to keep the commandments and then quotes them from the OT. When Jesus was tested by the Sadducees and the Pharisees when they asked which of all the commandments in the law is the greatest. Jesus replies using two scriptures from the OT. He quotes from Deuteronomy 5:5 to say "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And then from Leviticus 19:18 "Love your neighbour as yourself." Jesus quoted from 24 of the OT books at some point according to the four gospels. It is clear from these quotes and many others that Jesus had spent time pouring over all that was written in the OT and learning from what they had said. Rather than dismiss the OT he found important teachings in the old that were relevant in His times.

## **The same God in both the Old and the New**

One common comment made by Christians and those non-Christians who have read through the bible, is that the God of the NT is vastly different to the God in the OT. They label the God of the NT as all about love and acceptance but the God of the OT as one full of judgement and wrath. Many focus on the plagues, the wars and the judgments that lead to death. As they struggle with this they often overlook some key passages which reveal a undeniable truth about who God is. God spoke of himself in Exodus 34 in the presence of Moses.

Ex 34:6-7 <sup>6</sup> And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

Many people might focus on the last part of verse 7 but miss the important reveal of God's nature in verse 6. God is compassionate, gracious and slow to anger. He is a God who abounds in love and faithfulness. The original meaning of the words indicates that God is a patient God, abundance in a huge size of love and goodness and full of compassion. The original word for faithfulness stems from a word which means trustworthy and truthful. The original words for the start of verse 7 indicate kindness and beauty for thousands. The original word for wickedness comes from the word which means fault, iniquity or fault. These verses declared by God himself, paint a vastly different picture of what many have interpreted as God's nature in the OT.

When the people in Nehemiah's time got together after the wall around the temple was built there are some good indications of what the people thought about God and his character.

Nehemiah 9:16-19 "But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands.<sup>17</sup> They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them, <sup>18</sup> even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, 'This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,' or when they committed awful blasphemies.<sup>19</sup> "Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness.

Nehemiah 9:16-19 <sup>30</sup> For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighbouring peoples. <sup>31</sup> But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

The people of Israel declared a God who is forgiving (v17), gracious and compassionate (v17), slow to anger (v17), and abounding in love (v17). They recognised that in the past their God was and is still is a God of love rich in mercy and compassion. In verse 30 and 31 they declare about God's patience even when their ancestors have abandoned God. While God could have left them He didn't but showed great mercy and stayed with them. Why? The answer is in their declaration - that God is a gracious and merciful God.

The OT paints an interesting picture of what God is really like. It is important we don't discard what is revealed about God and who He is in the OT. More about that later.

### **The Heart of God in the OT**

When Jesus came to earth one thing He often spoke out against was that those in a position of spiritual leadership, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, failed to fully understand the heart behind what God had done in the OT. The Pharisees in the NT had established a lot of human made rules and interpretations on what God had said to the point that it was near impossible to do anything without occurring the wrath of the leaders.

Jesus would often go after the fact that the heart of God was there in the OT. The heart of God was there to help and look after His people in the OT. Throughout most of the OT His heart was to develop a community, a group of people that would be His people and be His representation on Earth. His heart motive for giving rules and regulations was to help the people keep apart from those around them. It was never in God's heart to squash His people but to see them live in such a way which would be an example to the people of the world of who God is.

## **THREE THINGS TO CONSIDER**

When reading through the OT and the NT we need to consider three things:

1. What things from the OT ended with what Jesus did on the cross and His resurrection?
2. What things have been modified, altered or changed from the OT into the NT?
3. What things have stayed the same and have not changed from the OT and still apply to the NT?

It is important when reading through the OT to consider these three things and to fully understand whether the passage we are reading applies to which of these three areas.

We all have heard of the story of David and Goliath. Many of us have found this story very inspirational. But none of us have come away from the story thinking, "I should throw stones at tall people or at anyone who stands in my way just like David did." There is a specific context in this story that we need to fully understand in order to be able to apply the lesson in our lives.

Reading through any of the Psalms or the numerous stories, we realise that humans in the OT faced difficult situations. They might not have faced the exact same difficulties that we face today but their response to those difficulties can often help us in our own situations. David frequently writes in the Psalms for God to intervene in his life and problems. His trust in God is still helpful even for us today.

## **1. What things ended at the cross**

When was the last time you had to sacrifice a lamb during a Sunday service? A goat? A bird? Okay when was the last time you had to shed some sort of blood to gain forgiveness for your sins? Hopefully you would have answered never. Yet it is abundantly clear in numerous verses in the OT that God wanted the Israelites to offer sacrifices for their sins.

On Mt Sinai God established a covenant with His people the Israelites. The Ten Commandments were issued for the people to follow and obey. There were some conditions attached: follow them and everything will work out well for you. Don't follow them and there will be some consequences. This covenant was like a contract between God and His chosen people. It outlined what they were to do and in some cases avoid. This was first set up as the Israelites were making their way to the Promised land. In the desert they got the chance to start to walk out this covenant.

The many laws (over 600 of them) handed down in the OT were there for the Israelites to follow. There was a clear outline of what the Israelites had to do to gain God's forgiveness. The law of the OT required the shedding of blood – the sacrifice of animals. Paul mentions in the NT in Rom 6 that the wages of sin is death. The result of sin leads to death. The only way to overcome the power of sin is offer up a sacrifice and shed blood. As a result of the shedding of blood the penalty of sin was dealt with but only on a temporary measure.

Under this covenant God's presence would be in a specific place and no one was allowed to go into this place (called the Holy of Holies) unless they had fully purified themselves. Even then it would be awkward to know if you can still live in the very presence of God. Aaron was the first high priest who could enter into this Holy place once a year on the Day of Atonement to intercede for the people. Moses often acted as an intermediate between the people and God.

Most of the OT tells stories of the people of God trying to live up to those laws and rules but frequently failing and falling short. Many tell of the people giving up and trying to find solace in other Gods and areas.

The key thing to learn when reading through the OT is that the people often tried but always failed to live up to the standard expected to fulfil all these laws.

But when Paul mentions in Rom 3 "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" this was never going to be an everlasting situation.

### **The foretelling of Jesus through the prophets**

Have you ever watched a thriller or read a book which has you trying to solve the case of who committed the crime? You get to the end of the movie or the book and the culprit is revealed and then you finally understand what happened. It's the "Oh that's what happened" moment. The interesting thing is when you go back and watch the film again or re-read the book, knowing the ending you look for the clues that were given by the director or the author that sought of foretold what was to come. You can clearly see where the clues are. You look at it knowing what is to come.

It was a bit like this with the foretelling of Jesus in the OT. Many of the prophets foretold the arrival of Jesus who would be the solution to the problems faced.

There are over 50 passages in the OT which foretell the coming of Jesus, what He would be like and what He would do. If you look through the books of the prophets you will see glimpses here and there of the plan God had installed to help out humans. These passages give a glimmer of hope that a better and final solution to the whole problem of dealing with sin and separation from God is about to happen.

Early on in Jesus journey on earth we see a clear indication of what He was here on earth to do. After Jesus was tempted by the devil and stood firm three times He goes back home and enters into the synagogue as was His usual routine. He takes the daily scroll and reads from the prophet of Isaiah:

Mt 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” <sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Not long after this story Jesus gets up and gives a stirring speech which has become known as the Sermon on the Mount. After revealing those things which will cause people to be blessed He stipulates His mission in regards to the old covenant.

Matthew 5:17-20 <sup>17</sup> “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. <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus makes it clear that He hasn’t come to abolish/end what the law in the OT states but His role was to fulfil it. This verse tells us that Jesus was going to do something and what he wasn’t going to. Jesus didn’t come to dissolve it or say that God had a change of mind and now get rid of it. Later on the Pharisees would accuse Jesus of usurping the law, but Jesus came to answer all that the OT law required. He was going to be the perfect sacrifice which would fulfil all that was required by God as revealed in the OT. One thought is that by fulfilling all the requirements of the law Jesus gives us a clear indication of the nature and the character of God that was foreshadowed in the OT.

What’s interesting here is that Jesus indicates in v20 that unless your righteous is better than the Pharisees and the teachers of the law you can’t enter heaven. What hope would the average person have if they couldn’t keep up with the Pharisees.

Paul summoned it up in Romans:

Rom 10:4 <sup>4</sup> Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Bill Johnson gives us a great insight into what Jesus did in his book ‘God is Good’ (pg 63)

“The Old Testament Law is the teacher that leads us to Christ. It first reveals that we are sinners, but thankfully it doesn’t leave us there. “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal 3:24-25). Jesus not only satisfied the appetite of the Law in bearing our judgement upon Himself: He was the One the Law was pointing to, much like a sign on a restaurant points to what’s inside the building. The Mosaic Law pointed to Jesus.”

Jesus fulfilled all that the OT law required. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear what Jesus did on the cross:

Heb 9:11- <sup>11</sup> But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup> He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. <sup>14</sup> How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! <sup>15</sup> For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Aaron was the first high priest. After making sacrifices he would go into the tabernacle into the place where God’s presence resided. This tabernacle was made by human hands. The writer of Hebrews indicates that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice who went into the place where God resided and pathed the way for all to enter into that place. It is through the blood shed by Jesus that we all can now enter into the place where the presence of God resides. Jesus was the unblemished sacrifice. Through Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection there is a now a new covenant. A contract which outlines how we will be able to live in a new way different those in the OT. When we call upon the name of Jesus Christ we enter in through the cross into a place where the separation from God is over. We are forever connected to God.

Jesus proclaimed that the old covenant was fulfilled when on the cross he called out “It is finished” (John 19:30). The new covenant starts and is for all to access whoever calls on the name of Jesus Christ.

**Further reading**

The Bible project has two great videos which outline what The Law was as mentioned in the OT.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BGO9Mmd\\_cU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BGO9Mmd_cU)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sew1kBle-W0>

**Law compared to Spirit**

<b>LAW (Old Covenant)</b>	<b>SPIRIT/Grace (New Covenant)</b>
1. Law written on stone	Law written on hearts
2. Behaviour	Attitudes, values – what’s your heart?
3. Negatives (don’t)	Positives (do)
4. Limits	Guidance
5. Compliance	Responsiveness
6. Human effort	Divine power – grace to empower us
7. Rules	Holy Spirit guides and helps us
8. Ministry of Death	Ministry of Life

There is a great website which gives a list of 32 differences between the old covenant and the new covenant. Go to the following website:

<https://www.christiantruthcenter.com/difference-between-the-old-covenant-and-the-new-covenant/>

## **2. What things changed from the Old testament to the New Testament**

There are a number of things that become clear when reading through the gospels that Jesus made some clarifications or adjustments about things that were raised in the OT. In many cases Jesus clarified the heart behind what was first given in the OT and outlined how those who follow Him should live.

### **The revelation of the Father**

In the OT God was often viewed as one who was all powerful and glorious. There were many names for God mentioned in the OT (more on that later). But the one name for God which was hardly ever mentioned was Father.

When Jesus came on the scene that all changed. The gospels record that Jesus referred to God as Father over 160 times.

John 16:28 "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father."

John 5:19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray he gives them an example. He starts off by calling God "Our Father". Jesus constantly talked about His relationship with the Father that it would have rubbed off on the disciples. They would have shifted in their view of God to be more in line with how Jesus spoke about God as Father. Paul talks in Galatians and Romans how the Spirit which now resides within us calls out to God as "Abba Father". A term of intimacy expressed from a child to their father. That sense of intimacy in Jesus towards the Father now can be worked out in us. The revelation of God as Father has had a dramatic shift for many Christians over the years. For some it has been the breakthrough that they needed to overcome the problems in their lives.

### **The role of the Spirit**

In the OT the spirit would come down and rest upon an individual and empower them to do something extraordinary. Once done the spirit would lift off and leave that person.

- Judges 3:10 tells us how "The Spirit of the Lord" came upon Othniel as he judged Israel
- Judges 6:34 tells us that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.
- Judges 13:25 tells us the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon Samson. In Judges 14:6 it mentions how the Spirit of the Lord came mightily on Samson which helped him to tear apart a lion.
- 1 Samuel 10:9-10 tells the story of how the Spirit of God came upon Saul and resulted in him prophesying.

In John 14 Jesus informs the disciples that He has to leave in order for the Holy Spirit to come. He mentions that the Father will send the Holy Spirit, who will teach us all things (v26). With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost a new shift occurred and paved the way for a greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit for those who followed Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

2 Tim 1:14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Rom 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Our inheritance lies within us and empowers us to follow Jesus and helps to reveal more about God. We now can call on the Holy Spirit to help us know and follow God.

### **Rest and the Sabbath**

Right at the start of the bible we have the story of creation. On the seventh day God rested. He rested after creating so much. The first mention of the word Sabbath occurs in Exodus 16.

Ex 16:23 <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'"

In the listing of the ten commandments on Mt Sinai, God outlines how His people were to treat the sabbath.

Ex 20:8-11 <sup>8</sup> "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Unfortunately over time the heart behind what God had intended was lost so by the time Jesus came on the scene keeping the Sabbath was more about keeping a long list of rules.

When Jesus came on the scene he often challenged the notion of how people were to observe the Sabbath.

In Mark 2 there is a story of the Pharisees accusing the Jesus disciples of breaking the Sabbath when they plucked the heads of grain in the field. The issue the Pharisees had was not the taking of the heads of grain but the specific day they did it on. The disciples had broken the long list of things one shouldn't do on the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27 <sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Here Jesus announces that He is the Lord of all even over the Sabbath. The Sabbath was something God intended to help humans not hinder them.

Jesus came to announce that through Him He would provide a place of rest for all. Those who were under heavy burdens would finally find a place where in Jesus they could rest. What Jesus required would be very different from what the spiritual leaders required.

Matt 11:28-30 <sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Hebrews 4 talks in details about the significance of the new rest found in Jesus Christ.

What Jesus did on the cross changed the nature of rest for all Christians. What's clear is that in Jesus Christ every Christian can now live in a daily experience of rest and liberty. Our rest in Jesus is to be an outward sign to those around us that we belong to Him and in Him we have rest from the constant need to strive to succeed. Not just one day but every day of the week.



## **Prophecy**

In the OT God often spoke to His people through certain people called prophets. These would be the mouth piece for what God wanted to say to His people. Many prophets would be raised up from a child to become prophets. Being a prophet in the OT was a very selective process.

Many prophets in the OT gave warnings from God to Israel and then Judah, warning them that unless there was a change they would go into exile. Many prophets therefore spent a lot of time giving words of warning and potential judgement. Look closely and the heart of God is still there.

As the Spirit of God now resides in all, Christians can now hear from God. We can now spend time in stillness to hear His voice and not have to rely on someone else. Furthermore we can now hear the heart of the Father for other people. In the 1 Cor 14 Paul makes it clear how Christians were to use the gift of prophecy.

1 Cor 14:3 <sup>3</sup> But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.

Paul indicates that prophecy should be used to encourage and strengthen others. The goal of NT prophecy is to be positive in its character. Prophecy should build up others and not to tear down. Paul urges all Christians to seek out the gift of prophecy. The gift of prophecy is not just for the select few but for everyone. Everyone can now seek out the heart of the Father to find words of encouragement for others.

## **From one nation to many nations**

Right from the early parts of the OT it is clear that God had chosen a group of people which He called His own. This started with Abraham and the covenant He made with him which declared that from Abraham's line would be a group of people who would be God's representation on Earth. Judges 20:2 and 2 Sam 14;13 are verses which mention that the Israelites were referred to as "the people of God". God wanted this group of people to be His people on earth and to represent who He was. The idea of God being Holy and set apart was to also be linked to His people on earth as set apart from all the other people. They were called to be different.

But with Jesus death on the cross and the revelation that God showed Paul, all people in every tongue and nation now have the chance to be part of God's chosen people and family.

1 Pet 2:9-10 <sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## **Murder and the heart**

It was clear when reading through the ten commandments that murdering someone else is not something God wants us to do. But when Jesus came on the scene He gave a clearer picture of the intent behind what was given in the OT. Jesus now made it clear that the issue of someone's heart was more important than what someone did outwardly.

Mt 5:21-22 <sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Jesus quotes from Exodus 20:13 that it was established in the OT that no one should murder. But now Jesus makes an adjustment which will have an everlasting effect. It's no longer acceptable to have murderous intent in your heart but now the issue of someone's heart becomes important. How you view others in your heart is now the key.

### 3. What things not changed from Old testament to the New Testament

If we now live under the new covenant started with the cross, does that mean the sayings under the old are no longer applicable to us? What if something was taught in the OT but there is no mention of it in the NT, does that mean we don't need to follow or observe it?

It is important to remember:

- Not everything that was bad in the OT is now good in the NT.
- Not everything that was good in the OT is now bad in the NT.
- OT commands are valid unless revised in the NT.

Let's look at some things mentioned in the OT which still apply to use Christians today.

#### Names of God in the OT

God reveals many aspects of his nature in the OT. These many different aspects of who God really is that still apply to modern Christians. By reading through the OT we gain a further understanding of who God is.

Hebrew Name for God	English translation	Bible reference and meaning
EI Shaddai	Lord God Almighty	Gen 17:1 used 7 times; means the most powerful
EI Elyon	The Most High God	Gen 14:18 used 28 times; means lofty as a title the most supreme
Adonai	Lord Master	Gen 15:2 used 434 times, used 200 times in Ezekiel.
Yahweh	Lord Jehovah	Gen 2:4; used 6,519 times. The promised name of God.
Jehovah Nissi	The Lord my Banner	Ex 17:15; to become known – denotes a God who reveals Himself.
Jehovah Raah	The Lord my Shepherd	Ps 23; from the root word to tend a flock or pasture. One who feeds or leads His flock.
Jehovah Rapha	The Lord that heals	Ex 15:26. From the root word meaning to mend or cure.
Jehovah Shammah	The Lord is there	Ezek 48:35
Jehovah Tsidkenu	The Lord our righteousness	Jer 23:6; used 2 times
Jehovah Mekoddishkem	The Lord who sanctifies you	Ex 31:13 used 2 times; comes from the word which means sanctify, holy or dedicate.
Jehovah Jireh	The Lord who provides	Gen 22:14 used by Abraham when God provided a sacrifice for Isaac.
Jehovah Shalom	The Lord is peace	Judges 6:24
Jehovah Sabaoth	The Lord of Hosts	1 Sam 1:3; used 285 times. Can be also used as The Lord of Armies. King of all.
EI Olam	The everlasting God	Gen 21:33; means forever, eternity.
Elohim	God	Gen 1:1; used over 2,000 times. Means Supreme God.

## **Worship**

There are many times throughout the OT where the people of God declared out who God is. Often in times where they faced some sort of challenge or at times where they celebrated who God was. In their declaration of what God had done and who He was they re-established the connection they had with God. We too as Christians can declare who God is and stand on what He has done for us and who He is.

David was a man who is known as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14 and Acts 13:22). David was someone in the OT who had a heart to go after God. We see early on in his life that David was someone who worshipped God. You only have to read through the Psalms of David to see his heart to worship God. David often uses poetic expression to express his trust in God.

Ps 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. <sup>2</sup> He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. <sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

When David was being chased by his enemies who wanted him dead, David would declare out who God is:

Ps 3:1-5 <sup>1</sup> LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! <sup>2</sup> Many are saying of me, “God will not deliver him.” <sup>3</sup> But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. <sup>4</sup> I call out to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy mountain. <sup>5</sup> I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

Other Psalms encourage us to have a heart like David to worship Him in all situations.

Ps 95:6-7 “Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.”

In a time of trouble Jeremiah puts his confidence in God when he declares his trust in God.

Jer 20:13. <sup>13</sup> Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.

It is clear from reading through the life of David and in many other cases in the OT that a life of praise, worship, adoration and declaration is something that modern Christians can embrace and follow. The examples of standing in difficult times declaring and praising God can help us in our modern difficulties that we face.

## **Aspects that still apply to Christians**

- There are many covenants made in the OT that still stand today. The covenant God made with Noah not to destroy the earth with a flood still stands. The covenant God made with Abraham and the covenant with David have both found their fulfilment in all those who follow Christ.
- The commandment to love God and love others mentioned in the OT still applies.
- Don’t murder – listed in the ten commandments
- Honouring our parents – listed in the ten commandments
- Tithing. Tithing was introduced in the OT. Looking through the NT there is nothing to indicate that tithing is no longer applicable for Christians. Most Christian churches teach about the process of Christians giving a tenth of their wage. In Hebrews we now give our tithes to Jesus. Once again it is the heart behind what is done outwardly.

## Helpful hints when reading the Old Testament

- Remember the goal of reading the bible is not to learn stuff for the sake of being smarter but to establish a connection with God. He wants so much to reveal Himself to us. His heart's desire is that as we read through the scriptures we make that heart connection with Him.
- Enjoy His presence when reading.
- Ask God to reveal Himself as you read. The Holy Spirit resides in us and is there to help and guide us. Allow the Spirit to guide in you in revealing more about God as you read.
  - "Father show me something about who you are as I read this bible passage"
  - "What do you want to say to me through this verse?"
  - "Help me Holy Spirit to understand what this means for me."
- When you read something in the OT think through:
  1. Is this about something that ended with Jesus dying on the cross?
  2. Does Jesus make any modification in the NT about what I'm reading in the OT?
  3. Does what I'm reading in the OT still apply to me living as a NT Christian?
- The OT is part of a big story. We are part of that story. Right from the start where we read about creation there is a long story which involves us. When reading any part of a story we still need to consider the overall picture. You wouldn't fully understand what a movie was about if you just saw a ten second scene from the movie. So when reading the OT passage think about where this fits in with the overall story God is telling. What has come before and what will come after? What is the setting for what you read in the OT? Understanding the significance of what Nehemiah did in rebuilding the walls only comes from understanding the significance of the exile of the Israelites. When looking at characters: What has been revealed about this character before this story? Once you establish the greater context then its time to understand what is taking place in the passage. What drives the story along? Much like a plot in a movie unravelling we too get to see the story unravel as we read. Allow these to help you fully understand what is taking place.
- In the OT the focus was on God and the nation that He called His own. They were supposed to be His people, His family and represent Him to the other nations. Much of the OT tells us about how God tried to form and shape a group of people into a representation of who He is. We are now part of His family and we are now being called to be a community of believers who represent God to the world.
- The OT has authority and power to change lives because they come from the heart of God.
- Most of the writings of the OT point us towards Jesus. Stories expose the hopeless condition that the people of the OT were in. The many stories in the OT show us that we all need a saviour which is Jesus Christ. We now a hope in Christ. What links can be made to Christ in what I'm reading here in the OT?

### Further reading

- God is Good – Bill Johnson. A great book which goes through the revealing truth that is God is good. Chapters 2-4 discuss how the God in the OT still shows that God is good.
- How to preach and teach the Old Testament for all its worth – Christopher J.H. Wright. A very thorough book on how to approach the writings of the OT and what to consider when reading and preaching them.