

“The Usefulness of the Old Testament”
(Psalm 119:97-104)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we concluded our overview of the Old Testament, from the perspective of a history of God’s plan of redemption.
 - a. We ended with a summary of how the Lord used four world kingdoms to contribute to the advancement of the Gospel.
 - (i) Babylon dispersed the Jews throughout the world to prepare for the bringing in of the Gentiles.
 - (ii) Persia allowed the Jews to rebuild their Temple and city to prepare for the coming of the Messiah.
 - (iii) Greece brought one language to the world that enabled both the Jews and Gentiles outside of Palestine access to the OT through the LXX.
 - (iv) And Rome brought better travel and communication through one government, worldwide peace (Pax Romana), and better roads.
 - (v) The fact that Rome also ruled over the largest geographic area to that point in history also allowed the Gospel to go further than it could have in past years under other governments.
 - b. We also saw how the Lord preserved His church during that time.
 - (i) Babylon dragged them from the land by force, destroyed their city and burned their temple, but the Lord kept those who trusted in Him safe.
 - (ii) Haman almost succeeded in exterminating them, but the Lord had arranged for the king of Persia to marry a Jewish wife.
 - (iii) Alexander and his successors wanted to destroy the Jews, but the Lord turned their hearts and overthrew their plans.
 - (iv) And even the Romans subdued and oppressed them, but the Lord preserved their lives and their religion.
2. The Lord was shaping the world for the coming of His Son, and now everything was ready.

B. Preview.

1. But before we move into the culmination and fulfillment of all these things in Christ, I want us to look back at the Old Testament to consider how it is still a blessing to the church.
 - a. We need to remember that it is the Word of God, as much as the New Testament, and because it is, it is just as relevant for us today.
 - b. There are parts of the Old that have been fulfilled and therefore are no longer binding.
 - (i) I’m thinking of the Ceremonial Law, which was fulfilled through the sacrifice of Christ.

- (ii) We no longer bring animal sacrifices to the priest to make atonement for our sins, because Jesus has died once for all to reconcile us to God.
- c. But there are other parts which are still important, such as the history (as we've seen), the Law, the prophecies, the songs (psalms) and the wisdom literature.
 - (i) These are all inspired by God and as such normative for the church: they are part of our moral standard, what we are to learn and submit to.
 - (ii) Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-20).
 - (iii) And Paul writes to Timothy, primarily regarding the Old Testament, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- 2. This morning, let's consider five ways the Lord intends the Old Testament to help us be better Christians.
 - a. First, He intends for the OT to confirm our salvation.
 - b. Second, He intends for it to answer the most important questions in life.
 - c. Third, He intends it to teach us how to worship Him.
 - d. Fourth, He intends for it to show us how to glorify Him through an obedient life.
 - e. And finally, He intends it to show us how to endure trials.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, He intends for the OT to confirm our salvation.
 - 1. This is a simple point: because we know from the things we've seen that the Bible is God's Word, we can know that the way of salvation it teaches is true.
 - a. We've looked at several books, written by many different men, who lived in different times, and who were from many walks of life.
 - b. They all wrote on the same subject and were all in agreement.
 - c. They even agreed on the things they wrote that were still many years in the future, things they couldn't possibly have known about on their own.
 - d. How could they do this unless the Lord had shown them.
 - e. Next Lord's Day, we'll explore this a little more thoroughly; but for now consider the powerful testimony this gives of the Old Testament being God's Word.
 - f. And because we know it's God's Word, we know we can also trust it to show us the truth regarding salvation.

2. Application.
 - a. How would it be to pick up the Bible to learn how to be saved from hell only to find that what it says is confusing and contradictory?
 - b. You could never know whether or not it was true and so could never be sure that you were safe.
 - c. But the fact that the Lord confirms it through prophecy, miracle and unity, gives us confidence that it is true, and if true, that our salvation is assured, if we do what it says: trust in the One He sent into the world to save mankind: the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. Second, He intends for the Old Testament to answer the most important questions in life.
1. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to make sense of life or to understand what Jesus and His work was all about if we didn't have the OT?
 2. We don't need to waste time searching for the answers, as the world does – the Lord has given us a book to explain it. In the OT, He tells us:
 - a. Where everything came from; how it all came to be: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). An infinitely powerful and eternal Being made it from nothing.
 - b. He tells us where we and every living creature came from: we didn't evolve, but an infinitely wise and powerful Being created us. “And God said . . . and it was so.”
 - c. He tells us why we're different than the animals: because God made us in His own image: “In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (1:27).
 - d. He tells us why we're similar to the animals: because He made us all from the dust of the earth and to live off the fruit of the earth. “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:7).
 - e. He tells us why we have the problems we do in this world: Because of the first man's decision to sin against God that brought a curse on all mankind. “But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (2:17).
 - f. He tells us why there are so many nations and languages: because the Lord separated the families of the earth after the Flood by giving them all different languages. “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city” (11:7-8).
 - g. And, as we've seen, He answers the most important question of all: how we, who have been separated from God by our sins and condemned to hell, can escape that judgment and be reconciled to Him: through Jesus Christ.
 - (i) This is the one question He answers thoroughly.
 - (ii) He began to reveal the coming of the Savior beginning with the first sinner.
 - (iii) He continued to give many pictures, types and prophecies about Him as the years went by.

- (iv) He gave His moral and ceremonial Law through Moses both to convict His people of their sins and to point them to the Redeemer.
- (v) When there was a particularly important person or event that revealed Him, such as with David and Solomon, the Lord would make sure to spend more time focusing on it.
 - (a) On David, because he was the first in a line of kings that pointed to Messiah.
 - (b) And on Solomon because he built the temple that would picture Christ and His body, the church.

(vi) And when His inspired history was complete, He continued to point His people forward to Christ, until He finally came.

- h. The Lord answered many of the most important questions we will ever ask in the OT, which is another reason it is useful and not obsolete.

C. Third, He intends the Old Testament to teach us how to worship Him.

1. The Lord gave His people a book of inspired songs: the psalms.
 - a. The psalms are songs of worship that grow out of just about every possible circumstance.
 - b. Not only do they teach us what the proper response to each of these circumstances should be, they teach us how to express our thanksgiving and praise to Him in those circumstances and afterwards.
 - c. They also have a wonderful way of continually pointing us to the Messiah for forgiveness and for hope.
2. The Lord certainly intends for us still to use these songs today.
 - a. I don't believe He requires us to use them exclusively. If so, He would be requiring us to worship under the shadow of the OT, though we have the clearer light of the NT.
 - b. But we should still use them – and we can do so now understanding them more fully than the OT saints.

D. Fourth, He intends the Old Testament to show us how to glorify Him through an obedient life.

1. The NT gives us instruction in holiness, but the OT is much fuller.
 - a. In the OT, the Ten Commandments are revealed, explained and applied in a variety of situations.
 - b. In the OT, we also get a good look at the justice of God – what true justice is and how crimes should be justly punished, as well as what mercy is (let's not forget God's mercy at the Fall).
 - c. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are applications of God's Law in virtually every circumstance we will ever have to face.
2. Now that we've entered into the New Covenant through faith in Christ, do we no longer need that instruction?

- a. Is His writing His Law on our heart enough?
- b. No. We still need instruction in righteousness.
- c. There is nothing more helpful than the OT in this area.

E. And finally, He intends the Old Testament to show us how to face trials.

- 1. He devoted a whole book to teach us how to endure when we're afflicted and to assure us that there is always a gracious purpose behind affliction, if we love and trust Him, in the book of Job.
- 2. This is the way James used it: "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful" (James 5:10-11).

III. Application.

A. Is it any wonder that Paul reminds Timothy of the authority and usefulness of the OT, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

- 1. Every part of the Old Testament is precious and if any of it was missing, it would cripple the church. If we think that any part of it is superfluous or useless, it's only because we don't understand it.
- 2. The Lord has given us a great treasure in the OT – and of course, the Bible as a whole.
 - a. We can often take it for granted because it's so available.
 - b. Let's not forget that it is the only book God has written, the only book that reveals Him, that reveals Christ and His salvation, and the only book that shows us how we can be saved from our sins and glorify Him.

B. Let's be encouraged by this to read and *study* the Bible more often.

- 1. And so that we might get the most from it, let's pray for the help of God's Spirit to understand it, as the psalmist prayed, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from your law" (Ps. 119:18).
- 2. If we don't read it, it won't do us any good. Jonathan Edwards once wrote, "Whatever treasures the Scriptures contain, we shall be never the better for them if we do not observe them. He that has a Bible, and does not observe what it contains, is like a man who has a box full of silver and gold, and does not know it, nor observe that it is anything more than a vessel filled with common stones. He will be never the better for his treasure; and so might as well be without it. He who has plenty of the choicest food stored up in his house, and does not know it, will never taste what he has, and will be as likely to starve as if his house were empty." Amen.