

**Battles, Laws and Lists – What Do Christians Do With the Older Testament?**  
**#1 in a Series on The Story: From Creation to Christ**  
**Faith Community Church – January 6, 2008**

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**Introduction:**

If you have your Bible with you this morning, I'd like to ask you to hold it closed and take a look at the edges of the pages. If you've had this Bible for a while you may find that some pages look more worn than others. My guess is that the most worn pages are in the New Testament. I'd also like to guess that there are pages in the Old Testament that have never seen daylight.

In many of our lives and in many churches the Old Testament – perhaps outside of some of the Psalm and the book of Proverbs – is not just unfamiliar territory: it is deliberately neglected.

**Why Do We Neglect the Old Testament?**

Let me suggest that there are two reasons why we tend to neglect the Old Testament:

First, in stating that we have a NEW Testament, we mistakenly think that the Old Testament is obsolete. After all, we read so often in the New Testament about how the Old Testament was fulfilled, why bother reading something that is simply past history?

But second, we may neglect it because so much of it seems irrelevant to us. Let me illustrate:

- You may begin reading from the beginning of the Old Testament, and then suddenly come to Genesis 5. But make it through this list of names and the unusual length of time that people lived, and continue reading only to get to chapters 10 and 11. Read 10:15-20. Is that what Genesis is all about? How can you stay interested in lists of names that are so hard to pronounce.
- Perhaps you give up with Genesis and go on to Exodus. Exciting stories about Moses and Israel leaving Egypt. But just past the halfway point we begin to read passages like 25:23-30. But they hang on and get through these instructions, only to find that when they reach chapter 35, Moses is recording how those instructions were fulfilled. See 37:10ff. And we wonder: what does all that have to do with me?
- Leviticus may be the least-read book of the Bible. It's full of laws about what kinds of animals can be eaten and different diseases. Look at 13:40-46. If you read that passage in your own devotions, how would you relate what it says to your life?
- Move on to Joshua and Judges and the other books of history. So many battles, so much confusion! Why is the Old Testament such a violent book?

- Finally we reach Psalms and Proverbs. They seem to be easier to follow, but then we hit Ecclesiastes. Some of what he says sounds, well, wrong.
- And then the prophets. Symbolism, judgment, horror. All seems so bleak and we need some encouragement in our lives. What God is doing to do with Nineveh doesn't seem to touch the problems I have with my kids or how I am going to deal with the stress of my job.

### **How Should Christians Approach the Old Testament?**

How can we best understand it and benefit from it? Let me suggest several things:

1. We can benefit from the Old Testament by recognizing that it is an historical record of God's dealings with his people.
  - a. The Old Testament is history. What we read actually happened. It is interesting to note that the most questioned stories of the Old Testament are regarded by Jesus as historical fact. Creation? Adam? Eve? Jonah & the great fish? Jesus does not regard them as myth, but points to them as historical events.
  - b. But not only is the Old Testament history, the Old Testament is God's history. It is about God and his dealings with people. And that gives us a clue about how to read it, because if we focus on what the passage tells us about God we will find out how it relates to us – even in some of the obscure details and laws.
2. We can benefit from the Old Testament by remembering that it points to Christ.
  - a. We see the first promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:16, and the promise narrows through Abraham and David and the prophecies become more and more specific.
  - b. Jesus himself provided the interpretive key to the Old Testament in Luke 24:13-27 in his conversation with two disappointed disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.
3. Finally, we can benefit from the Old Testament by realizing that it was the Bible of the Early Church.
  - a. Beginning in Acts 2, we find that the preaching of the Apostles about the death and resurrection of Jesus centers on the Old Testament. What they believed about who God was and what he was like and who Jesus was came from the Old Testament.
  - b. In Romans 15:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 Paul tells his readers that the Old Testament provides us with an understanding of how to live as a follower of Christ.

- c. That is why Paul writes what he does to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-17. In the first verse of 2 Timothy 4, when Paul tells Timothy to preach the Word, he is not talking about the New Testament, but the Old Testament.

As the New Testament books were written and embraced as Scripture, we gain an understanding of what the idea of fulfillment means and how we relate to some specific points of the Old Testament – especially the Law of Moses. But at no time does the Old Testament become obsolete or unimportant.

### **Summary and Application**

And therein lies the point of contact between your life and mine. When we ignore the Old Testament, we miss important truth about God. We miss seeing the lessons we can learn by seeing how he worked in the lives of other people. And we miss the ongoing reminder that God, who made promises to his people and fulfilled them, will keep the promises he made to us. And knowing that is a good way to start off the year.