

Question: How should the Old Testament be used today? (Part 1)

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” including both Old and New Testament scripture. We are to have a profound respect for all inspired writings. Our next three articles will discuss the relation of the Old Testament to Christians today.

In the early days of the church, Jewish sympathizers tried to bind the Law of Moses (the Old Testament) on Christians. They claimed that no one could be right with God unless they kept this law and the covenant of circumcision. The apostle Paul warned that such teaching would result in one becoming “estranged from Christ” and falling from grace (Gal 5:4). Every effort to bind parts of the old law upon Christians was met with vigorous resistance (cf. Acts 15:1-29, verse 5 specifically; Gal 2:1-5).

Modern day religious groups have accepted parts of the Old Testament as authority for religious practice today; e.g., a separate priesthood (clergy), buildings as temples of worship, holy vessels, instruments of music, Sabbath observances, etc. When this is done, the effect is to bind Old Testament practices upon religious people today. The tragic results are stated above (Gal 5:4).

God gave the Old Testament to a specific group of people: the Israelites. And He gave it to them for a specific purpose: to prepare them for Jesus Christ (cf. Deu 5:1-3; Neh 9:13-14). “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these word I have made a covenant with you and with Israel’ ... And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Exo 34:27-28). Regarding the law of Sabbath keeping, God said, “It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel” (Exo 31:12-18). Paul said, “the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal 3:24-25).

The verses above make it clear that Christians are not accountable to God for keeping any part of the Old Testament as such. Furthermore, it is sinful to extract laws from that covenant and bind them upon Christians. This is not to say there are no similarities between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. Indeed, many of the moral directives are identical (cf. Rom 13:8-10). However, Christians are to observe the teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles. We are living in a time when all people from every nation are accountable to the words of the Son of God (cf. John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31).

The Old Testament scriptures do have a practical value for Christians today. They “were written for our learning” (Rom 15:4). They answer the fundamental questions we have about the nature of life: the origin and nature of man (Gen 1:1; Psa 33:6; Gen 2:7; Zec 12:1), the origin of sin (Gen 3:1-6). They tell us of God’s purpose for the Hebrew nation through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; Gal 3:16). God’s prophets in Israel issued much teaching to their people from which we can benefit, and foretold many details of the life of Christ (Psa 22; Isa 53; Zec 9:9-10; etc.) As so many have said before, “The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.” We will have more on this subject next week.

Study your Bible and search for Truth. Contact us for a free Bible Correspondence Course. Feel free to visit our assemblies at any time; you will be our honored guest. Thanks for reading!

C. Boyd Jennings