What Do We Do With The Old Testament?

(Kent Heaton)

It is often thought of those in the Church of Christ that they do not believe in the Old Testament. It is a fair question to ask and worthy of consideration. The Old Testament is so named by the collection of thirty-nine books describing the history of early man, the creation of the nation of Israel with its laws and covenants and the history of Israel from its glory to its downfall. The book of Genesis is a book of “beginnings” telling the story of man’s creation, his dispersion over the face of the earth and the early traces of Israel’s history through the lineage of Abram of Ur Chaldee.

Exodus unfolds the story of Israel’s leader, Moses, who would lead the people out of Egyptian bondage and then to the borders of the promised land. Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy would unfold the covenant of God with the people of Israel and beginning with the conquest of the land seen through the eyes of Joshua, the promised land would be conquered. Following the conquest the land would be settled, established with kings and destroyed in captivity because of rebellion against God.

The Old Testament is largely the telling of the Law of Moses to the people of Israel. The Law was not given to any other nation but only Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). It is important to remember that the Law of Moses (which included the Ten Commandments – Deuteronomy 5:4-22) was only given to one people – the nation of Israel. A man who lived in Europe during the time of David, King of Israel, was not accountable to the Law of Moses without being a proselyte of Israel. Often people read the Old Testament with the Law as if all men were accountable to the Law of Moses. They were not – only the nation of Israel.

When Christ came, He came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17) by living perfect to take away the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14). The Law of Moses has been abolished with its commandments and regulations – including the Ten Commandments (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14). The Hebrew writer (8:7) describes the “***better covenant***” with “***better promises***” and “***if that first covenant*** (Law of Moses) ***had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second***” (Law of Christ). Paul declared we are “***delivered from the law***” in Romans 7:6.

As a body of law, the Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments) is not binding today. Most people fail to see a distinction between the Old Testament as a body of law and the New Testament as a body of law. This does not suggest that the Old Testament is not invaluable for the Christian because “***all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work***” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Romans 15:4 encapsulates the foundation of the Old Testament by reminding us of the lessons we learn from its writings (see also 1 Corinthians 10:1-13). The Old Testament tells us who God is, who we are and so many, many vital lessons for the Christians. The lessons are based on principles; not law. The law of the disciples of Christ comes from the New Testament and the New Testament alone. We serve Christ and seek authority for all we do from His law. The transfiguration clearly shows the law and the prophets are no longer binding as law (Matthew 17:1-5; see also Hebrews 1:1-4). We cannot understand the New Testament without the Old. It is the word of God!

**The Simple Plan of Teaching Others**

(Kent Heaton)

There is a story told of a community of fishermen that loved to get together to talk about fishing. They met once a week and spent hours pouring over the different ways to catch fish, the newest instruments, the most up-to-date information on the habits of fish. They met during the week to have another meeting to study fishing. Twice a year (*sometimes more*) grand meetings would be held inviting neighboring fishing communities to come and learn more about fishing and the importance of fishing. Speeches filled the assembly halls with examples of those who fished in days past and the great numbers of fish caught (*one such story told of catching 3,000 fish in one day*). Flyers were printed with all the information on how to catch fish, where to catch fish and the need to catch more fish. One could say that this community of fishermen were busy about the need of fishing and had all the resources to catch fish daily. Sadly with all the energy put into the science of fishing, few fish were ever caught and sometimes a few years would go by before even one fish was caught.

The problem in this fishing community was very simple. While everyone agreed on the need to catch fish only a few (*if any*) ever took the time to put a hook in the water and make an effort to catch fish. They knew just about everything there was to know about fishing but no one wanted to take the time to go to the river or the lake to catch fish. Some communities would hire a man to come in and do their fishing for them. Others were content to read about it but no one should expect them to do any fishing. Remarkably there were many who thought the fish would just jump out of the water and into the boat – *why should they do anything* – let the fish come to them.

With all the great evangelism plans and gospel meetings about teaching others, the words of Jesus still ring true today: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:19-20). The emphasis should be made of the need to “**GO**” and the only way to “**MAKE**” disciples of all the nations is to have someone sit down with someone and teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord further admonishes the need of “**TEACHING THEM**” and that takes individuals teaching individuals. All of this requires ‘putting a hook in the water’ but you can’t put a hook in the water unless you **GO** to the water.

“*Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them*” (Acts 8:5). “*Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to [the eunuch]*” (Acts 8:35). Cornelius tells Peter “*So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord*” (Acts 10:33). Paul found Lydia at the riverside in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15) and then taught the jailor and all his family (Acts 16:25-34). People taught people the gospel in the First Century.

The great need of the church today is for its citizens to realize that all the talk of saving souls is only as good as those who are willing to lay aside the busy affairs of life and spend time gleaning the fields ready for harvest. “*Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest*” (John 4:35). Jesus admonishes still today, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few*” (Matthew 9:37).