

Introductory Matters ¹

Foundational assertions:

- Every Christian is a theologian. (cf. Mt 28.18-20)
- The whole Bible is God's word to me. (cf. 2 Tim 3.16-17)

Why is the OT neglected? Why is three-fourths of our Bible largely untouched?

- Your thoughts?
- Hard to apply:
 - “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” (Ex 20.8)
 - “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.” (Ex 23.19)
- Hard to understand without knowing the background:
 - “Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up.” (Gen 49.9)
 - “How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter!
Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.
Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine.
Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.” (Song of Solomon 7.1-2)
- Possible wide ranges of meaning with no contextual clues:
 - “The leech has two daughters. ‘Give’ and ‘Give’ they cry!” (Prov 30.15)
- Some passages seem to present moral problems or are just hard to believe:
 - “O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” (Ps 137.8-9)
 - “So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the Lord God of Israel commanded.” (Josh 10.40)
 - “And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” (Ex 14.22)
 - “And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.” (Josh 10.13)
- Other reasons:
 - The OT is pre-Christian. The people of Israel are not Christians and do not live “Christian” lives in some (many?) respects.

¹ Quotes are taken from Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*

- The OT contains many directives that we (as Christians) do not observe.
- The prophets make no direct reference to Christ but speak directly to national Israel.
- If the OT is somehow a preparation for the NT, why are they so different?

What are our assumptions in reading the OT?

- The OT is the word of God
- The OT is the word of God about Christ (cf. Lk 24.25-27, 44-45; Jn 5.39-40)
- The NT interprets the OT
 - It is impossible to understand the full meaning of God's OT promises and acts from the OT alone, we must look to the NT
 - We must not read the OT in isolation from the NT—similarly, we cannot fully understand the NT apart from its OT context
 - We begin with Christ, who drives us to study the OT in light of the gospel
- The OT is a progressively revealed word from God
 - No covenant / promise / etc. stands on its own but builds on the previously established foundation beginning in Gen 1
 - Two OT events are key preparation for the coming of Christ
 - God's covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen 12, 15, 17, etc.)
 - God's covenant with David (cf. 2 Sam 7)
 - Abraham, David, and Jesus bind the saving work of God into **one** great work of salvation planned from before the foundation of the world (cf. Lk 1.32-33; Acts 2.30-31, 13.16-33; Gal 3.15-29)
- In summary, "It would be quite impossible to proclaim Christ as the Savior without constant reference to the foundations which have been laid in the history of God's saving work in the Old Testament...Indeed there is a real sense in which the gospel cannot be the gospel without the Old Testament" (pp.87-88)
 - The OT shows us what lies behind the person and work of Christ
 - The OT teaches us of the character of God and how his people ought to live and walk with him
 - Though some parts of the OT are obsolete in Christ, "The Old Testament is not completely superseded by the gospel, for that would make it irrelevant to us" (p.83)
 - In other words, the OT is still relevant to Christian believers today!

Things to keep in mind when reading the OT:

- God acts among us by his word

- “The full significance of the redeeming word, which began with the first announcement of God’s intention to deal with sin, is not revealed until the coming of Jesus Christ” (p.59)
 - Because of the effects of sin, “Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection is the fixed point of reference for understanding the whole of reality” (p.60)
- The whole Bible (including the OT) is God’s testimony to Jesus and his plan of redemption
- Jesus is God’s fullest and final revelation
 - The significance of Jesus’ person and work was not self-evident to those around him, God had to reveal himself through Jesus’ words and the inspired NT writers
 - Similarly, the significance of the events of the OT are not self-evident but require God’s revelation to interpret them and give them their fullest meaning
 - “Jesus does not simply fulfill the [OT] promises. Rather, he is the final and fullest revelation of what the promises are really about. This means that the form and the content of the fulfillment exceeds by far the form and content of the promises themselves” (p.65)
 - It was not self-evident that Jesus fulfilled the promises to Abraham (cf. Gal 3)
 - It was not self-evident that Jesus fulfilled the promises to David (cf. Acts 13.26-43; Rev 22.16)
 - It was not self-evident that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies (cf. Mt 1.22-23; 2.14-15, 17-18...12.17-21, etc. [“This was to fulfill...”])
 - The Jews looked for a ‘literal’ interpretation but were proven wrong again and again by Jesus, who revealed the *true* significance of those OT truths
 - Several examples show some OT themes applied by the NT to Christ

• Creator	• Israel	• Priest	• Servant of God
• Word	• Son of Abraham	• King	• Anointed One /
• Wisdom	• Son of David	• Light of nations	Messiah
• Son of God	• Son of Man	• New Covenant	• Redemption
• Adam	• Prophet	• Salvation	• Shepherd
- Progressive revelation (i.e., the correlation of OT to NT) depends heavily on typology
 - Definitions:
 - Type—“a figure, representation, or symbol of something to come, as an event in the Old Testament foreshadows another in the New Testament. Types generally find their fulfillment in the person and ministry of Christ, but they sometimes relate to God, His people, or some other reality.” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)
 - Antitype—“a fulfillment or completion of an earlier truth revealed in the Bible.” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)
 - Examples?

- Abraham’s seed (Christ), the flood (baptism, cf. 1 Pet 3.21)
- Taking it too far...Rahab’s scarlet thread...*not* a type of Christ!
- “Historical types are incomplete revelations and depend on their antitype for their real meaning. Typology rejects the principle of literalism [i.e., that the promises of the OT demand a literal fulfillment exactly as they are given]. The meaning of history, far from being self-evident, depends on revelation for its meaning...The NT recognizes the principle of typology in the fact that Christ fulfills the OT promises *in ways that differ* from the actual terms of the promises.” (p.68, emphasis mine)
- In other words, the literal OT promises point to a future fulfillment in Christ that has a fuller meaning (i.e., far exceeds) than their surface value

Great theory, but how do we actually make sense of all this???

- ‘Ingredients’ for properly understanding / applying the OT
 - We start with the gospel and Christ (our spectacles, lens, etc.)
 - First ingredient—the words
 - Basic to all communication is the idea that the author determines the his meaning / intent
 - We must understand the words the biblical authors (ultimately God) used in the way they intended them to be understood
 - Second ingredient—the history
 - While God is outside of time, the events of Scripture occur within history
 - The flow of biblical revelation is concerned with a particular succession of historical events
 - We need an outline of history to highlight the main events in order to make sense of the details
 - Third ingredient—revelation
 - Biblical words and history are inseparable from the revelation of the Bible
 - At its core, the Bible is the word of God revealed to man
 - All these ingredients combine with Christ as our starting point and the goal toward which we move
- Questions to ask ourselves when reading / studying the OT
 - What was God instructing / teaching / communicating to the original audience (hearers or readers)?
 - How does later OT or NT revelation shed light on or change our understanding of this passage, if at all?
 - What are the timeless truths God reveals in this passage about himself, humanity, salvation, faith, etc.?
 - How can we apply the timeless truths revealed here to our lives and Christian walk today?
- Most importantly—the gospel in Christ Jesus *must be* the ‘lens’ by which we read and understand the OT!
 - “The Old Testament is a story without an ending. Judaism and Islam have both provided their endings to the story that we as Christians cannot accept as valid. Jesus Christ is the goal of the Old Testament

and provides its true meaning. Any understanding of, and commentary on, the Old Testament that does not show up this fact is at best incomplete and at worst un-Christian” (p.88)