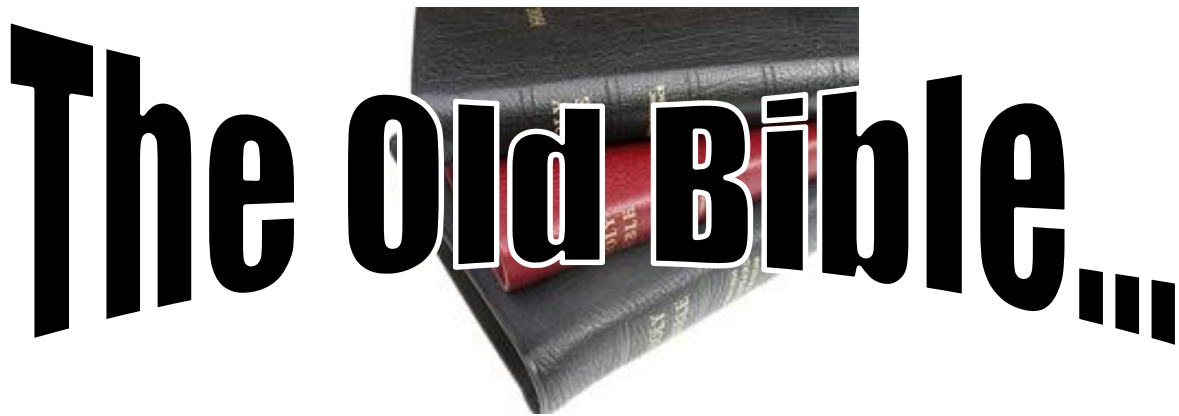


The Old Bible...



WHEN I LIVED IN KENTUCKY, one common way people referred to all the scriptures preceding *Matthew* was “The Old Bible.” Of course, they were referring to the Old Testament. This was not really an accurate way of speaking of the Old Testament scriptures because there is only ONE Bible consisting of both Old and New Testaments (or covenants) and this terminology suggests there is a new Bible. The word *bible* (greek *biblios*) simply means “book” and the Holy Bible is THE BOOK OF BOOKS because it (all of it) is the inspired word of God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:14-17).

However, the reason I bring this up is not to criticize how some refer to the Old Testament scriptures. Rather, it is to caution all of us about our ATTITUDE toward the Old Testament. I have been preaching about 20 years now, and I can’t count how many times I have heard some negative comment about the study of the Old Testament. “*I’m tired of the OT*” one says. Another person chimes in, “*We’re not under the OT anymore... we should be studying the NT.*” Still another protests, “*I am bored with all the history of the OT.*” Are these valid reasons for avoiding deep and frequent study of the Old Testament? Please consider carefully the following thoughts. I am not claiming I have some special insight, but maybe I can steer you toward some points that you have not (or not seriously) pondered previously.

I’m thankful that the Lord made my circumstances such that I was in the right places at the right time to learn the importance of the OT scriptures (e.g., lectures at FC, gospel meetings, Bible classes, discussions with those who are knowledgeable of the relevance of the OT, etc.). Also, I thank God that I was forced to study the OT in depth as we engaged in a 3-year Bible study course here at Steele (it has since completed and all the question sheets are available on our website <http://steelechurch.com>). This helped me to understand that the OT is much more than just history for the Christian living under the NT.

For example, it’s one thing to just read the HISTORY of **Rahab** (the harlot) hiding the spies of Israel when they went to the city of Jericho (Josh 2). I have done that since I was a little kid in Bible class and, it was interesting, but didn’t really seem to be any more than just a good story with a little bit of drama that took place “a long time

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ago in a land far away." But, in recent years, I have come to realize the importance and relevance of this account for my life today.

One aspect is that this OT historical account is preserved in the NT as one of the great examples of faith. Right after speaking of the faith that brought down the walls of Jericho, the Hebrew writer gives Rahab as a great example of faith (Hebrews 11:30,31). Now, of all the people the Holy Spirit could have chosen, He chose Rahab... THE HARLOT! Today, when I read Joshua 2, I don't concentrate so much on the relevance for the spies and Israel as I do the fact that God used a harlot to be an example of faith. If God used HER, He can use me. I thank God!

A second point worthy of consideration in this same story is that Rahab is in the lineage of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 1:5). Rahab was Ruth's mother-in-law and she is the great-grandmother of David the king! God chose Rahab, a Canaanite, a harlot, to be part of the seed that produced our Savior. She is not only preserved as an example of faith but as a constant reminder that God is in control, and that He uses the most unlikely of characters in His grand drama we call history. When I read of Rahab, I begin to wonder, "Could God be using me to accomplish some purpose right now?" Even as little as I think of myself at times, from Rahab I learn that God can use me... YES, EVEN ME! (This may be one of the earliest hints that God would eventually offer salvation to everyone regardless of nationality or their past sins. Of course, it goes without saying that Rahab had to repent of idol worship and harlotry and any other sin of which she was guilty to be accepted of God.) We can also see that even one who has been raised in idolatry CAN have the ability to recognize the One True God. There is hope for all, regardless of background and environment.

And yet a third great lesson we learn in the NT (that started out as a brief history in the OT) is that Rahab has been preserved as an example of how we are justified by works, and not by faith alone (James 2:25,26). Now, of all the great examples in the OT, why did the Holy Spirit choose this lowly gentile harlot? I don't know, but I am impressed! When the Spirit wants to teach us that faith and works are inseparable, He turns to the life and actions of Rahab – WOW! So my point is, when I read this OT story in Joshua 2 these days, it is with new eyes and with a new appreciation.

And that is just one little microscopic part of the OT that has relevance for me today. Another is the faith-building effect of fulfilled prophecy. I have known of many of these cases of fulfilled prophecy for a long time, but when forced to go through the entire OT in our study, I found so many more – and seemingly much stronger cases than I had known previously! For example, Cyrus (the Persian King) is named by God in Isaiah 44 as being the one who will deliver the Jewish captives (Judah) from Babylonian captivity. Well, Isaiah was written more than 700 years BC and I don't think Cyrus was even born for about 100 years after that – INCREDIBLE! Isaiah 53 is another passage

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that tells in detail what would happen at the cross (about 700 years before Jesus was even born). And on and on...

Another thing – the NT book of *Hebrews* would pretty much mean nothing to a person who did not first understand the statutes and ordinances given to Israel regarding the tabernacle and temple worship (e.g., the holy place and most holy place, mercy seat, priest, high priest, etc. are all used symbolically in *Hebrews* as foreshadowing various things under Christ's new covenant). I hope these few points serve to “wet your appetite” a little for the rich content of the OT. Most of all, I hope you can appreciate how, even though we are not bound by its laws today, the OT is VERY relevant to our lives and will always be a rewarding study. As Paul said, “*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*” (Romans 15:4).

-John