

LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

After Jesus died on the cross, God made a new covenant with His people. The writer of Hebrews tells us that when that new covenant was made, the old covenant that God at one time had with the children of Abraham vanished away (Hebrews 8:13). That old covenant is revealed in the history of, and the law given to the Jews, as recorded in the Old Testament. The Old Testament records the history of God's relationship to man before the cross, and the New Testament reveals the wonderful age of salvation through faith in Jesus, which fulfilled and led to the ending of that Old Testament Law. Now, there are many who believe and falsely teach that the Christian is still subject to the Old Testament law, but that's simply not true, because Paul plainly taught in several passages that that law was fulfilled and done away with in Christ's death upon the cross. For example, **Colossians 2:14** states:

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

So, why then is the Old Testament even in our Bibles? Why should we read it and try to understand it? Does it serve any purpose for the Christian? Absolutely! In fact, you will never really understand the New Testament until you understand the Old Testament. One of the greatest stories of all time is that of Israel under the leadership of Moses leaving the bondage of Egypt and inheriting the land that God had promised them. But that triumph did not come without trial and tragedy. In fact, the ones who crossed the Red Sea before Pharaoh's army were not the same ones who conquered the land of Canaan forty years later. Only two people of the multiplied thousands who left Egypt actually entered into Canaan. The rest died in the wilderness during the forty years that they wandered there. They murmured, they complained, they practiced idolatry and did about everything they could do to disobey and anger the Lord. The Bible reminds us about that sinful generation in **Psalm 106:13-14** where it says:

“They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.”

Finally, you see, God's patience ran out. God pronounced this judgment on them in **Numbers 14:29-30**:

“Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me. Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.”

That's exactly what happened. Joshua and Caleb were the only two who realized the promise that they left Israel to obtain. Paul reminds us of those events in **I Corinthians 10:5-11**, and this passage will be the premise for our study:

“But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

Paul says that the Old Testament was recorded and preserved even for us who are not subject to its ceremonial law, because of some fundamental lessons that it teaches us.

Several years ago, I baptized an older gentleman. Before the baptism, I asked him to confess his faith in Christ, like the Ethiopian eunuch did in Acts 8:37. He did so, then he looked out at the congregation and very proudly said, “And I just want everybody here to know that I believe it all—from Exodus to Revelation!” Well, I think that maybe he was a little

confused about the canonical order of the books of the Bible. Either that, or I'm not sure why he was so skeptical of Genesis. Nevertheless, there are many people who will say, "I believe *all* of the Bible." Or, "Where I go to church, we preach *all* of the Bible—not just the New Testament." Well, I believe *all* of the Bible as well--from Genesis to Revelation. I believe what Paul wrote in **I Timothy 3:16**:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

I believe that all scripture is not only *from* God, but that it was given for a purpose. None of the Holy Scripture is untrue. None of it is irrelevant to our knowledge of Jesus Christ. The entire book is about Him. But the scriptures do teach that we don't live under the law of Moses as the Jews did. We are free from that law. It was fulfilled in Christ and taken away at the cross. But it is still germane and relevant to our faith in Jesus, and our understanding of salvation.

In Galatians 3, when Paul taught the gentile Christians that they were not to live under that law, he then rhetorically asked in verse 19, "Wherefore then serveth the law?" In other words, if the law was removed, why was it given in the first place? What does it have to do with us? Paul answered his own question in at least two other places.

Romans 15:4 "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

I Corinthians 10:11 "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

So, one of the reasons that even we who are Gentiles and not a party to the Old Covenant, have been given the Old Testament record, is because of the

fundamental lessons that we learn from it. We're going to look at four of those fundamental lessons in this study.

I. GOD IS HOLY.

God is holy, therefore He abhors sin. Look back at verse 5 of our text:

I Corinthians 10:5 “But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

Why was He displeased? Because they had disobeyed Him. They had sinned against Him. They broke His law. And those people learned, in a very real and personal way, that God hates and will punish sin. Now, there's a lot of punishment and violence in the Old Testament, admittedly. It is a bloody book. That is very true. But have you ever stopped to think that there is a lot of grace in the Old Testament too. I mean, the very fact that anybody lived to have their story told, and the very fact that *we* now today live and exist on this planet to read the Old Testament in and of itself is a testament to God's mercy. Now, what do I mean by that? People often try to discredit the Bible by saying that a loving God would never do the things that we read about in the Old Testament. All of the bloodshed, the people who died at the hand of God's vengeance, the suffering that even His own people were put through...But friend, it's not amazing that God would punish sin if you understand the holiness and the righteousness of God. What's amazing is that anybody lived through the Old Testament! I'm at a much greater loss to explain how a holy God could save a sinful man, than I am to explain how a loving God could punish wickedness. That is the question: How can a just and holy God save any of us? We don't deserve His salvation! We don't deserve to live! We sinned against Him!

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

I John 3:4 “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

We only live because of the mercy and the patience of God! So, yes, the Old Testament may be full of wrath, but it’s just as full of mercy. God had every right and reason to wipe the earth clean of sinful man from nearly the beginning. But he suffered long, in order that, in the fullness of time, Jesus might come to redeem us from our fallen state, restore us to God in righteousness and make us holy through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. God was and is bound by His own holiness to punish sin. As He was weaving a picture on the loom of time beginning in Genesis 2 and all the way to the cross, He was painting the picture that He hates sin. He cannot countenance sin. And He is bound by His very own nature—not just His choice, but His nature—to punish sin. What did God tell Adam when He told him not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2?

Genesis 2:17 “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Interestingly, when Satan approached Eve with the forbidden fruit, what did he tell her? He said that eating of it *would not* cause her to die. In other words, Satan was challenging the holiness and the truthfulness of God even then! He was telling her that she could sin against God and not be punished. That God really didn’t mean what you think He said. You know, if God had overlooked Adam and Eve’s sin, He would’ve defied His own nature and corrupted and made a mockery of His own law. So, He cursed them and He drove them out of His garden of righteousness and divine fellowship, placing at the entrance of that garden cherubim or angels with flaming swords that guarded His own perfection and holiness from the taint of man’s sin.

Fast-forward to the days of Noah in Genesis 6. Man there had become so sinful and disobedient that **Genesis 6:6** says:

“And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.”

God wiped the earth clean of its wickedness by means of the great flood. The fire that fell from Heaven and consumed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 speaks eloquently of God’s hatred for sin—not for the sinner, but for sin. And every drop of blood that was shed in the Old Testament is a token of God’s detestation of sin. The prophets later wrote of this:

Isaiah 59:2 “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”

Psalm 119:128 “...and I hate every false way.”

Psalm 45:7 “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness...”

The problem is this: the religious community in America in the 21st century has largely forgotten about the holiness of God. But that message is thundered from the pages of the Old Testament, and it is one of the fundamental lessons that the Old Testament teaches us today.

II. GOD DESIRES OBEDIENCE.

God is not only holy, but He desires, yes, even *demand*s our obedience. After enumerating the sins of the Israelites in the wilderness in our text passage **I Corinthians 10**, Paul says in verse 11:

“Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

What is an admonition? It’s a rebuke or warning. Paul is warning us about the consequences of disobedience. You see, the Lord teaches us, by means

of the law, that we are subject to Him and our place is to submit to God and obey Him. I mean, we hardly get out of the Garden of Eden and once again, man shows his propensity to sin. You recall how Cain and Abel prepared sacrifices to offer to God, but Cain didn't seek God after the due order. Abel did, but Cain did not. Cain offered his own kind of sacrifice instead of the bloody kind that God required, and despite the value of his vegetable offering, despite the motive out of which he offered it, despite the beauty of it, despite the sacrifice of his time, effort and toil that it took him to provide it, the fact is that God rejected it because it wasn't what God had commanded. There is a vital lesson in that for you and me today, when it comes to our seeking salvation and when it comes to offering worship to God. That lesson is this: God doesn't desire our brilliant schemes and our well-meaning substitutions and our efforts of self-merit. He doesn't look for our exciting and cutting-edge innovations! He rejects all of that! He desires simple, humble and reverent obedience.

There is an outstanding example in the Old Testament in the life of Saul, the first king of Israel. God gave a very simple and straightforward order to Saul. He wanted Saul to settle an old score and destroy the Amalekite people. Now this wasn't arbitrary violence on the part of God: these were wicked people who had done great harm in the past to His people. So, God told Saul to go and destroy them—not just hurt them—destroy them.

2 Samuel 15:3 “...and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not...”

That means that he was to kill every single one of them. He was to even kill their livestock. They were to be wiped off of the face of the earth. Well, I suppose that all sounded fine to Saul and he went off to fulfill God's command. But when he got there, he came up with a different idea. Now, he killed the Amalekites. That is to say, he went in and did exactly what God sent him there to do, up to a point. But it gets to the king, and Saul was arrogant and presumptuous and he thinks, “You know, why shouldn't I bring King Agag back alive? I mean, that's a trophy to bring back a king bound and captive! And come to think of it, there are some mighty fine sheep and oxen here that would make wonderful sacrifices to offer to the Lord!” You see, he wasn't trying to deceptively or underhandedly do

something immoral or overtly evil. He just thought that he could do something for God. The problem is that these sacrifices that he was so determined to offer to God were not what God wanted. God didn't ask for

the king to be brought back alive. God had told him to kill every last one of them. God didn't want an Amalekite person OR animal left alive.

Well, Saul comes home and the prophet Samuel comes one morning to inquire about the success of Saul's mission. About the time that Saul is telling Samuel how he went and did what God said to do and about the great battle that had been waged, Samuel hears "the bleating of the sheep" and "the lowing of the oxen" (**1 Samuel 15:14**). Here is the conversation between Saul and Samuel the ensues in **I Samuel 15:14-15**:

"And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Well, that was it for Saul. God stripped him of his kingly robe and thus began the demise of his administration. God rejected him as king.

I Samuel 15:22 "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Now, why did the Spirit of God preserve that story for us? Well, for one reason, even today under different law and different dispensation of time, God wants our obedience. Not our own inventions of worship and service; He wants simple, humble obedience. You can never do anything greater to

please and glorify the Lord than to simply and humbly take God's Word for what it says in faith and obey Him.

III. GOD REWARDS OBEDIENCE.

It wasn't all bloodshed, vengeance and punishment in the Old Testament. There were people whom God greatly blessed and highly favored, whom He exalted and enriched. I think about Noah. The Bible says that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (**Genesis 6:8**) in a time when God was ready to destroy mankind. God made a provision. Well, what does the Bible tell us that Noah did?

Hebrews 11:7 “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house...”

Noah set out to do exactly what God told him to do in the exactly the way that God told him to do it., so he built an ark.

What about Abraham? Abraham followed God, going in search of the country that God called him to, and his faith even led him to the crest of that mountain where he nearly sacrificed his own son to God, because that's what God said to do, in order to test his faith. Well, Abraham was rewarded for all of that. He is the greatest example of faith and the reward that follows obedient faith that can be found in all of God's Word.

So, the rewards and blessings of the people of faith are another important lesson for us from the Old Testament. God not only detests and punishes sin, but that He loves the faithful and He rewards obedience. Hebrews 11 is often referred to as 'The Roll Call of the Faithful' or 'Faith's Hall of Fame' and it chronicles the lives of great people who not only believed God, but obeyed Him. And, as Paul said in our text, these things were written for our learning (**I Corinthians 10:11**).

IV. GOD'S PATIENCE IS LIMITED.

As I said, the very fact that humankind survived to even have and read the Old Testament is in itself a testimony to God's enduring patience, His grace and His mercy. Though God had to punish sin, in the very same event He also promised mercy, and He finally and ultimately mingled those two opposing things together with the blood of Calvary.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son..."

Romans 5:8-9 "...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

2 Peter 3:9 "...is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

The truth from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 is that God wants all men to be saved. That's God's great desire. Sometimes we think, how can the world continue on? We see it in the newspaper, we hear it on the evening news, the moral and spiritual mess and the state of decay that this world is in spiritually. How that men have just by and large rejected God and His Son. How can it go on? How much longer? Why does God allow time to continue? Well, I know one reason: because He desires for men to be saved. His mercy endures a long time.

2 Peter 3:8-10 "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;”

How long has God’s mercy and patience undeservedly lasted?! Yet, the Old Testament has a stark lesson for us, that God’s patience does have a limit.

He will not always allow wickedness to continue. There comes a day when He will finally destroy those who are determined to continue in sin. The Israelites wandered through the wilderness in unbelief, rebellious and complaining, but God graciously still kept them, providing for them, not giving up on the promise that He made. He still held out the promise of the land of Canaan, until one day, they finally went too far. Then the sentence came. He said it like this in **Numbers 14:27-29**:

“How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me...Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness...”

That’s a lesson to us. An example that God’s eternal principles are still at work today. He is still longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. My friend, He is still waiting for you to obey the gospel, to be baptized, to bring your life to Him in humble faith and repentance. But for some reason, you keep putting it off. You keep delaying. You keep remaining in your sin. One day, the last grain of sand is going to pass through God’s hourglass and that’s going to be it. Israel wasn’t warned, “All right, now. Three more sins and you’ll be punished.” God was patient, and He was patient, and He was patient, and He was *still* patient...until one day, He had had enough. The Old Testament teaches us that God’s patience has a limit.

