

The Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ (IX)

Usage of the Old Testament Scriptures

By Cecil Willis

With this ninth lesson on the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we bring to a close this particular series. Together, we have studied numerous statements showing that Christians are not governed by the Law of Moses, nor will we be judged by the Law of Moses, but by the Law of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last great day" (Jno. 12:48). One can go only to the New Testament as an adequate source of authority for worship in this era. But when one learns that he is not bound by the Old Testament today, he might get the idea that the Old Testament is of no value for us. Hence this week it is our purpose to study the "Usage of the Old Testament Scriptures." God preserved them for us, so they must have a very definite value.

Proof of the Divinity of Jesus

First of all, the Old Testament Scriptures may be used as an evidence of the divinity of Jesus Christ. One of the strongest lines of proof of the divinity of Christ is that He fulfilled the many prophecies made in the Old Testament. Scholars have estimated that there are 333 messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Each one of these statements tell us something describing what the Saviour would be like. Then, when we view Christ in the light of these prophecies, we learn that He is, indeed, the Son of God with power. To my mind, this is one of the strongest proofs of Christ's deity. The next great proof would be the works that He did.

Take for example, the prophecy of Isaiah, in which it is said, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Then we turn to the New Testament and learn that Jesus was born of a virgin, thus establishing beyond doubt that He is the One of whom Isaiah spoke. Furthermore, Micah told us the city in which He was to be born. He said, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). Isaiah predicted Jesus' virgin birth; Micah predicted His village birth. And on and on we might go showing how Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies. The Old Testament is therefore of great value in establishing the divinity of Jesus.

On one occasion, our Saviour found a man named Philip, and said unto him, "Follow me." Philip immediately went to Nathanael and told him who

he had found. In Jno. 1:45 we read, "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." The fact that Jesus fulfilled the statements in the Law and the Prophets enabled Philip to recognize Him as the Son of God.

On the day of Pentecost, when Peter was trying to persuade a group of murdering Jews that they had killed the Lord of Glory, he quoted two or three passages from the Old Testament which unquestionably indicate that in Jesus they have their fulfillment. He even pointed out that David had predicted that Jesus would be raised from the dead, so that His flesh would not see corruption. These statements are found in Acts 2.

Just before Jesus' ascension back to the Father, He told His disciples that He fulfilled the Old Testament statements. In Luke, He said, "These are my words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me." Jesus said these passages establish His identity.

While Peter preached to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, he said, "To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

Jesus further used the Old Testament Scriptures as a proof of His identity in Jno. 5:39. He said, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me." The Old Testament Scriptures bear witness of Christ. Paul often went into the Jewish synagogues and argued that the Old Testament prophecies proved Christ's divinity. Hence one reason why we shall ever need the Old Testament is as an additional proof of the divinity of Christ.

Exemplifies Principles of Righteousness

A second continuing usage of the Old Testament Scriptures is that they exemplify principles of righteousness. We can study the Old Testament to see the kind of character God approved and therefore strive to mold our character, in accordance with New Testament teaching. In Hebrews 12, Paul said, "Therefore let us also, seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1,2). Paul's argument was that because we are compassed about with such a great cloud of witnesses, we ought to strive harder to live right. This great cloud of witnesses had just been enumerated in the previous chapter. Heb. 11 has been called the "Honor Roll of the Bible," for in this chapter we read how

by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by faith Noah prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by faith Abraham offered up Isaac, by faith Enoch walked with God, by faith Moses forsook the treasures in Egypt, by faith the city of Jericho was taken, and on and on. In view of this great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside the sin which besets us, and run with patience the race that is set before us. The Old Testament exemplifies the great men of righteousness.

We read a great deal about Abraham in the Old Testament. When one thinks of Abraham, he automatically thinks of his faith. We need to emulate the faith of Abraham, so that we are willing to perfect our faith by letting it direct us to do whatever God commands.

Another great character of the Old Testament is Job. We often talk of an individual as "having the patience of Job." We mean by that, that he is able to endure with steadfastness. You remember how that, in a brief period of time, Job was reduced from one of the richest men in the east, to poverty, shame, and pain. Yet he said, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah taketh away, Blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1:21). We need to have the patience in suffering that characterized Job.

In 1 Kings 18 we read about a prophet of great courage, Elijah, the man of God, challenged 450 false prophets to a duel. They were to select a bullock, and then he would choose one. These 450 prophets were to cry out to their idolatrous god, Baal, and Elijah would entreat Jehovah, and the people were to worship the one who answered by fire. While the false prophets called upon their god, and received no answer, Elijah ridiculed them, so that they cut themselves, and Elijah said, "Cry louder. Perhaps your god is asleep." It took courage to stand in the midst of so many and keep an unwavering faith in Jehovah and His Law. Yet this is exactly the attitude of Elijah. The Old Testament is of great value in giving us these lessons from the lives of the men of God.

From the Old Testament, we may also learn the lesson of obedience. In 1 Kings 15, we find that God commanded King Saul to go and utterly destroy the Amalekites. Saul went down, killed the people, and part of the cattle, but the fattest of the cattle and King Agag, he kept. He did not obey God. He only did what he wanted to do of that which God had commanded him. For his disobedience, he was rejected as a king over God's people, and ended his life in miserable suicide. So a second usage of the Old Testament is that in it are exemplified the principles of righteousness.

Hope

In the third place, the Old Testament gives us hope. In Rom, 15:4, Paul said, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our

learning, that through patience and comfort of the scriptures, we might have hope." The things written aforetime refer to the Old Testament. So Paul is saying that the Old Testament should give us hope. From the Old Testament we learn that Jehovah cares for His people, makes great promises to them, and then keeps His promises. "Blessed be Jehovah, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised by Moses his servant" (1 Kings 8:56). And in what may be called his farewell address, Joshua said, "And, behold this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which Jehovah your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, not one thing hath failed thereof" (Joshua 23:14).

When we read statements like this in the Old Testament that declare that God did everything that He ever promised to do, we should take courage, knowing that He is faithful that promised (Heb. 10:23) and that God cannot lie (Titus 1:1,2). So the Old Testament is needed, for it gives us hope.

Warns Against Disobedience

Finally, the Old Testament may be used, and is needed, for it warns us of the consequences of disobedience. We have already cited the disobedience of King Saul, and how we are not to emulate *that* way of life. In Acts 7:53, Stephen, the inspired evangelist, said that the Law was ordained by angels. Notice in the following passage that the Law is spoken of as the Word spoken by angels. Notice that none escaped who violated this Law: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation" (Heb. 2:1-3). The implication is, since those under the Law were without exception punished when they disobeyed God's command, we likewise shall not escape.

Again in Heb. 10:28,29, Paul said, "A man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?" Here again we see the consequence of disobedience.

Once more, in 1 Cor. 10:8-12, Paul said, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyed. Now these things happened unto them by

way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Conclusion

So friends, even though we are not living under the Old Testament Law today, *it is not useless*. (1) It is an evidence of the divinity of Christ; (2) It exemplifies the principles of righteousness; (3) It gives us hope; (4) It warns us of the consequences of disobedience.