

Read Up or Why We Need The OT

Romans 15:4

ABC 6/11/17

What sets your priorities & the direction of your life? Is it the tyranny of the urgent, the debt or bills, the drive for more stuff, or is there something more to live for? What do you really believe? Every part of our lives is an expression of what we believe. So what do you believe about the Bible? & I don't mean what's the right doctrinal statement or SS answer. I mean in your life, in what you practice day after day, what would an analysis find you really believe about the Bible? How do you approach it? What role does it play in your decisions & choices? Where does it fit in your normal routine? Why do you have a Bible? Where does it rank among the influences in your life? What effort have you made to understand the Bible's overall themes? Do you have specific passages imprinted on your mind? What would life be like if the Bible was outlawed & you couldn't access it? Would it really matter in your daily life? I ask because the answers show what we truly believe about the Bible. Many Christians avoid the OT. If that describes you, you're not reading the Bible of Jesus, Paul, & the other apostles. The OT was the only Bible they knew. Jesus' & the apostles' teaching is built on the OT. They assumed those they taught were familiar with it. Paul was referring to the OT when he wrote Timothy,

... from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God & profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:15-17).

While it applies to the NT, it was written about the OT. Without the OT you lack a huge part of God's revelation about Himself, man, sin, & salvation. You're missing much of what God gave for reproof & correction of your sins. Maybe you're thinking, *I tried reading the OT, but Leviticus is brutal so I jumped to Numbers, but that really did me in!* I feel your pain. I'm not telling you the OT is always easy to read or understand. I too find parts tedious. I bog down reading the dimensions & descriptions of the tabernacle & the temple. I fog over reading the boundaries of the 12 tribes. I find the long lists of genealogies just as monotonous as you do. I sometimes wonder why God put these things in the Bible. But we must keep working at it, prayerfully

reading it. Why? Because it's God's written revelation to us. While there are parts I don't understand, I'm reminded of Mark Twain's statement: *It's not the parts of the Bible that I don't understand that bother me; it's the parts that I do understand!* In our text, Rom 15:4, Paul tells us why we need the OT. **15:1-7** PRAY

In an article entitled, *Sorry, OT: Most Theologians Don't Use You*, Christianity Today released a study this week that found that only 9 of the top 100 Bible passages in systematic theology come from the OT, with Gen accounting for 8 of them & 1 in Isaiah. It went on to say: *This raises the question of whether the OT is necessary for Christian theology.*¹ I've known Christians who would agree. They're wrong. Paul clearly tells us so here in Rom 15:4. The OT was written for NT people.

Remember that Rom 14 & 15 are all about how to love others who are different & have varying ideas about non-essential things. We've studied how to graciously accept each other & to sacrificially protect each other when we differ. Rom 15:1-3 emphasized the love that carries the weight of others' weaknesses & doesn't please ourselves. It means we patiently seek the God-centered good of others, putting up with & building them up in truth & faith. In vs 3 Paul gives Jesus as an example, not merely in bearing sin's punishment, but also in receiving people's reviling against God. To prove Jesus didn't live to please Himself, what did Paul point to? He quoted OT Scripture, Ps 69:9, that pointed forward to Jesus as the Messiah. We know Christ didn't merely please His human flesh because Ps 69:9 prefigured His suffering. & in case this seems out of place, Paul adds vs 4 to support the value of Scripture. We know vs 4 is a support of what he wrote in vs 3 because vs 4 begins with the word **for**. It's like he said, *Let me explain why I used Ps 69:9 to make my point about Christ here.* The 1st thing this teaches us is ...

1. The OT is about Jesus. I've said it before & I'll keep saying it: The OT is about Jesus. The overall theme of the OT is to testify to Jesus, the promised Messiah. Jesus rebuked the Jews for not reading the OT in light of Him: **You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have**

¹christianitytoday.com/news/2017/june/old-testament-systematic-theology-top-100-verses-logos.html

eternal life; it is these that testify about Me (Jn 5:39-40). After His resurrection, He told the 2 men on the Emmaus Road,

O foolish men & slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things & to enter into His glory? Then beginning with Moses & with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Lk 24:25-27).

This means every part of the OT must be interpreted in light of the person & work of Jesus. It may not directly relate to Him, but it's part of a larger context that must be understood in light of who He is & what He came to do. Some things are obvious: the sacrificial system points to Jesus as the final & complete Lamb of God, who bore our sins on the cross. The Exodus illustrates & has many parallels with how God redeems us from slavery to sin. There are over 300 OT prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Years ago, math professor Peter Stoner calculated the odds for just 8 prophecies being fulfilled by one man. Conservatively, he said it is 1 in 10^{17} . To visualize this, he said 10^{17} silver dollars would cover the state of Texas 2 feet deep. Mark one coin, toss it in somewhere, blindfold a man, & let him go wherever in the state he wished, but he had to pick the one marked silver dollar. That's the probability Jesus could've fulfilled just the 8 prophecies Professor Stoner used. Then he doubles it to 16 prophecies & the number of silver dollars becomes a sphere extending from earth in all directions more than 30 times as far as from the earth to the sun! Picking the right silver dollar would be the odds that Jesus fulfilled just 16 OT prophecies.² But He fulfilled more than 300! But, it's not always easy to draw a line from an OT text to Jesus. So you may ask, *How does the main point of the OT text find its fulfillment in Christ?* David King helpfully suggests these ways:³

A. Promise Keep your eyes open for a salvation promise or Messianic prediction like Gen 3:15, the 1st promise of a Savior who would conquer Satan & sin.

B. Instruction Any time you read a general instruction, you're reading about Jesus because He kept all these laws.

² *Science Speaks*, pp 99-112)

³ "Christ in the OT, 9marks.org/media/Christ-old-testament

C. Stories How does the storyline help make progress to Jesus? How is God keeping His redemptive promises that lead to Jesus? The Book of Ruth is a great example of this, but there are many others as well.

D. Need How does the text show our need for the Savior? Every sin, failure, defeat, or problem in the OT points us to Jesus.

E. Type A type is a theological shadow in which a greater reality is the substance. Adam is a type of Christ (Rom 5:14). Special days, such as the Passover & the Day of Atonement, point to Christ (Col 2:16-17). The Temple was a type of Christ (Jn 2:19-21), who is now the dwelling place of God with His people. Look for the shadows that point to the reality of Jesus.

F. Theme There are many themes in the OT, such as justice, wrath, mercy, holiness, & such. As you read, ask how is the theme fulfilled in Jesus? As you read the OT, look for Christ.

2. The OT Instructs Us For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction.

We need God's **instruction!** We need to learn about Him, who He is, what He's done, doing, & going to do. We need to get to know Him as He is, as He's revealed Himself to us. The Bible isn't a book of magic spells or incantations. It's not a buffet where we choose what we like & skip the parts we don't. **Instruction** means teaching; it means doctrine. & that means using the Bible rightly requires us to work at it. We have to read & study it to be instructed by it. **Instruction** requires we ask God to teach us what He's revealing about Himself, His Son, humanity, salvation, & so on. Then we can develop a grid of biblical truth on each topic or issue & we can test & refine & strengthen that with more study. As we do so, we must respond to what we learn, obeying what's commanded, believing what's revealed, & applying its principles so we are changed. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers that the Jews' exodus from Egypt was recorded so we'd have their example & not follow it. He wrote, **Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved** (1 Cor 10:6). Further, Paul continued, **these things happened to them as an example, & they were written for our instruction** (1 Cor 10:11). Do you want to know how to live? Then:

- Feel the loss of Job.
- Listen as Joseph refuses his employer's wife.

- Join in as the Israelites walk around Jericho.
- Study the exodus of the Israelites.
- Stand by as Gideon steps out in faith.
- Read the challenges of Daniel.
- Watch Hosea respond to the unfaithfulness of his wife.
- Feel Nehemiah's love for his homeland.
- & we could go on & on.

Think of this: The Living Word, Jesus Himself, quoted the OT 3x as He faced the devil (Mt 4:1-11)? When He was on the cross He quoted the OT 3x as well (Mt 27:46; Lk 23:46; Jn 19:28). Heb 11 traces the lives of OT men & women so we can learn from their examples. The historical sections of the OT show us how people succeeded through faith & obedience or failed through unbelief & disobedience. Job, Proverbs, & Ecclesiastes show us how to think & live rightly. The Psalms teach us to worship & to cry out to God in all experiences of life. The prophets warn us of the consequences of sin & God's judgment if we don't repent. They also encourage us with the truth that God will judge those who persist in evil & He'll reward the righteous.

Whatever is in the Bible, whether it's Ps 69:9 pointing toward Jesus or anything else, it was written for **our instruction**. Here's the point: God wrote this book for you! Do you want God to speak to you? He already did, He wrote the Bible for you. & He's preserved His Word so we can compare thousands of copies from ancient times & it's remained the same. God has faithfully protected His Word from errors so thoroughly we can detail the miniscule percentage of differences in all the thousands of manuscripts & none of those differences has any doctrinal significance. When you hold the Bible, you hold a translated copy of the communication your Creator wanted to give you. Why wouldn't you want to read & study it? It was **written for our instruction**. & don't miss the word **written** here. God saw fit to have His revelation put into **written** form. This means that to grow in knowing God & His ways, you must be a reader or listener of God's Word. You must use your mind in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to grow in understanding the truths of His Word. As we saw in Rom 12:2, the way not to be conformed to the present age is to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The fact that God communicated His revelation to us in **written** form demands we use our minds so we become

biblical thinkers. Don't neglect reading & studying the written Word. It was given for our instruction.

3. The OT Gives Us Perseverance When the instructions of the Scriptures are properly understood, they produce **perseverance & encouragement**. **Perseverance** means steadfastness or endurance. It relates to how we deal with each other's weaknesses & how we keep on the path of obedience when we feel miserable & meet opposition. Where does endurance come from? It comes from the Scriptures. There's some question here as to what this means. One view says the Bible was written to teach us & if we **persevere** in reading it we'll find **encouragement & hope**. The other view says the Bible was written to teach us & we find **hope** through the **perseverance & encouragement** that comes from the Bible. Strictly speaking, the grammar of vs 4 separates **perseverance** from the phrase **of the Scriptures**. The word **through** is repeated twice, so the vs reads, **through perseverance & through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope**. This might be saying we gain hope through our perseverance & through the encouragement that comes from the Scriptures. While there's truth in that, I don't think it's what Paul is saying. I agree with James Boice when he says, *this is a place where it may be wrong to read too much into a fine point of Greek grammar*.⁴ He argues that Paul was thinking that through the Scriptures God produces perseverance in us (& vs 5 backs that up). & we know from other Scriptures (Js 5:10-11; Heb 11; etc) & from our own experience that the examples of perseverance in the OT encourage us to endure our trials & differences. As we read about how Abraham persevered in faith for years before God gave him his promised son & how he died in faith without owning any part of the Promised Land, except for a burial plot, it strengthens our faith to endure times when God doesn't immediately answer our prayers the way we think He should. Or read the story of Joseph in prison, falsely accused of a crime he didn't commit, how God eventually worked it out for His good & sovereign purposes, it encourages us to trust God when we've been mistreated or maligned. But there's a sense in which we must persevere in order to gain the benefits of the OT. It's not always easy to read. There are parts hard to understand, both from the standpoint of

⁴ *Romans: The New Humanity*, 4:1807

ancient customs that we don't get & events that seem harsh by today's standards. There are issues where we have to seek God for understanding & submit to His Word, even when we don't get it completely. So it's true we gain perseverance from the OT, but also we need perseverance to study the OT to gain the **hope** it brings. When we read our Bibles we're doing more than just reading words; we're allowing God's Word to penetrate our lives so we can become who He designed us to be.

4. The OT Gives Us Encouragement The Bible teaches us to **hope** rather than despair. The word for **encouragement** is virtually the same word Jesus used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). He is the *paraklete*, Counselor, or Advocate (1 Jn 2:1). Jesus does this for us, the Holy Spirit does it, & the Scriptures do it as well. & it's through the Scripture that the Holy Spirit chiefly does His work. God's Spirit inspired the writers & continues to use the Word of God to convict of sin, assure us of forgiveness, & point us toward the future. How does the Scripture encourage us? The main **encouragement** is that God promises a Savior. God makes this promise 1st to Adam & Eve (Gen 3:15). The OT follows that storyline throughout & God always keeps His promise! All the OT shows God working through human history to bring the Savior, not just for Israel, but for all people (Lk 2:29-32; Rom 15:8-12). The OT also gives encouragement as it reveals who God is & how He deals with fallen sinners. In one of the 1st revelations of Himself, God proclaims to Moses,

The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate & gracious, slow to anger, & abounding in lovingkindness & truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression & sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished ... (Ex 34:6-7).

That description is repeated several times throughout the OT.⁵ When you see how God deals graciously with imperfect sinners who made some terrible mistakes (Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, & others) it gives you encouragement that He'll also be gracious to you as well. There are stories of **perseverance** & words of **encouragement** in the Scriptures. But the way these stories & these words actually make a difference in our lives is by sustaining our **hope**. It's **hope** that keeps

⁵ Num 14:18; Dt 4:31; 2 Chron 30:9; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3

us going in tough situations. Christian endurance isn't just teeth-gritting will power against all odds. We are driven & sustained by **hope**.

5. The OT Gives Us Hope The purpose of the Scriptures being written for our instruction is that we might have **hope**. If we're *without hope* we despair, which is what *despair* means. When Milton wanted to depict the depth to which Satan fell when he was thrown out of heaven, he has him say to the fallen spirits, *Our final hope is flat despair*.⁶ Our text says a Christian can have **hope** & the way to that **hope** is through the Bible. The word **hope** has the article here; it's **the hope**. This isn't just optimism; it's not a hope based on something the world thinks possible. Paul wrote about this hope in **Rom 5:1-5**.

Biblical hope isn't uncertain, as when we say, *I hope it doesn't rain on our pool party at Ruth's Sat*. That's just our wish. Biblical **hope** is certain because it's based on the promises of God, who cannot lie; but it's still future. **Hope** is an assured thing, an anchored promise that's secure & will be fulfilled & accomplished in God's time. Reading the OT should give you **hope** because it shows that in spite of your trials, in spite of what seem like unanswered prayers, in spite of years of waiting on God without seeing any change in your circumstances, God is faithful to His promises. This final **hope** is the full experience of eternal life, but it includes the assured goodness of God along the way as He works all things together for good for those who love Him (Rom 8:28). 1 Pt 1:3-5 says,

Blessed be the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable & undefiled & will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The Scriptures were written for our instruction that we might have that anchored, thrilling **hope** before us.

We're familiar with the saying, *No pain, no gain*. While that may be true, the reverse is also true. If you can't be sure there's going to be gain, you won't endure the pain of obedience to Christ.

⁶ *Paradise Lost*, book 2, line 139

That's where God's Word becomes absolutely essential; because your own feelings & all the wisdom of the world is going to tell you again & again, it isn't worth it.

- reading the Bible isn't worth it;
- working in the nursery isn't worth it;
- teaching this class isn't worth it;
- getting up for SS & staying for church isn't worth it;
- being a living sacrifice isn't worth it.

That's what your feelings & the world will often say. But it isn't what the Scriptures say. They say,

The LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always (Dt 6:24).

What does the LORD require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart & with all your soul, & to keep the commandments & statutes of the LORD (Dt 10:12–13).

Obedience to God is always worth it. God's Word helps us see the value of staying under the load God gives us in His plan for our lives, seeing His providence as good & not rejecting His ways or running from His lessons for us. That's what **perseverance** is. It's more than just sucking it up & dealing with it. It's remaining steadfast & trusting in God's ways even when it's hard & we feel overwhelmed. The Scriptures give us examples of those who've persevered in the faith whether through trials like Job & Paul or through their own failings turned for good like Abraham & Peter. The Scriptures offer the comfort & counsel & exhortation & **encouragement** & that helps us. We find help in the Scriptures because that's where we find God revealing His character, grace, faithfulness, & His many promises for our good. Through the **perseverance** & **encouragement** of the Scriptures, we can have **hope**. We can have **hope** to keep going, to remain faithful, to not give in to sin, or give up on holiness. We can have **hope** that heaven really will be better & that our eternal investments will yield worthwhile dividends. If you're not reading the OT, you're missing a major source for **hope**. Or if you're reading it, but it's not changing how you think, how you process your trials, & how you feel in the midst of them, you're not reading it rightly. You need the OT because it points you to Jesus, who is your sufficiency in all of life. You need it because it instructs you in godly living in the midst of an ungodly world. You need it to give you

perseverance, encouragement, & hope in the midst of your trials. I encourage you, don't neglect reading the OT.

Henry Martyn was a young missionary in the early 1800's. He left his fiancé, Lydia Grenfell, & would never see her again as he died at 31 years of age. As he left England & Lydia he fought back self-pity & despair with the promises of God's Word. He arrived in Calcutta in May & 2 months later one of the veteran missionaries preached a sermon directed against him & his doctrine. His teaching was called inconsistent, extravagant, & absurd. He was accused of seeking only to *gratify self-sufficiency, pride & uncharitableness*. How could this lonely young man endure such a crushing experience, & not only endure but during the next 6 years have the perseverance to translate the NT into 3 different languages? We hear the answer in his journal:

In the multitude of my troubled thoughts I still saw that there is a strong consolation in the hope set before us. Let men do their worst, let me be torn to pieces, & my dear Lydia torn from me; or let me labour for 50 years amidst scorn, & never seeing one soul converted; still it shall not be worse for my soul in eternity, nor worse for it in time. Though the heathen rage & the English people imagine a vain thing, the Lord Jesus, who controls all events, is my friend, my master, my God, my all.⁷

Henry Martyn fought the battle against discouragement & hopelessness with the truths of God's Word: *Jesus is my friend, my master, my God, my all!* & that's the way we must fight every day & never stop until our Lord puts the wreath of victory on our heads.

As Christians we must be people of the Word, who live our lives according to its instruction. The Bible is the revelation of God to display His character & to show what it means to live for Him. It's an infinite privilege to have access to the mind & will of God. While many people give lip-service to the Bible, few love it. How can you know if your love for the Bible goes beyond a passing fancy? Here are a few ways to measure whether or not you truly love God's Word.⁸

1. You show your love for the Word by reading it diligently. Your heart is a library meant to hold the Word of God. It's a map that charts the way to heaven & deserves to be pored over every day.

⁷ *Journals & Letters of the Rev. Henry Martyn: In Two Volumes, Volume 1, p 515*

⁸ Tim Challies, adapted from Thomas Watson's *The Godly Man's Picture*, challies.com

2. You show your love for the Word by meditating on it. David said, **Oh, how I love your Law, it is my meditation all the day** (Ps 119:97). It isn't enough to just read the Word. Our hearts & minds need more than passing thoughts of truth, but also a long steeping in them.

3. You show your love for the Word by delighting in it. Jeremiah proclaimed that God's words were like food that fed, nourished, & satisfied him. No one ever loved a fine meal as much as he loved the Word!

4. You show your love for the Word by hiding it in your heart. David says he hid the Word in his heart so he wouldn't transgress God's will (Ps 119:11).

5. You show your love for the Word by defending it. David said God's words were his heritage & inheritance. What person would allow their inheritance to be taken from them? You show the depths of your love for the Word by your willingness to defend it.

6. You show your love for the Word by regarding it as precious. God's Word is better than food, riches, & honor. Besides God Himself, there's nothing more precious, more beneficial, or more important than His Word. Is it of the highest value to you?

7. You show your love for the Word by speaking of it. Once again, it's David who said, **My tongue will sing of your Word** (Ps 119:172). The way a rich man brags of his wealth, the Christian brags of the precious Word.

8. You show your love for the Word by conforming to it. The Word is a compass that sets the direction of your life & a balance that weighs your every decision. People who desire godliness diligently read the Word & then live their lives in conformity to it. Do you love the Word?

Maybe you feel guilty because you don't read God's Word regularly. Can I be blunt? Good! That's a good guilt if it prods you to begin reading what God wrote for you. Here are some simple suggestions to get started:

1. Begin a realistic plan & stick with it. There's a Bible reading every day in the Daily Bread, there are numerous plans online, & there's probably one in your Bible as well. Reading not your thing? Pick up an audio version of the Bible. (www.christianaudio.com has the NT for free in the KJV this

month.) Until you find a program start with the Gospel of John or read a chapter of Proverbs each day. Do something!

2. Interact with the text. It's not a sin to underline key words, circle repetitive words, & jot thoughts & questions in the margin. Ask not only, *What did this text mean to those who received it?* Ask also, *What does God want me to learn from it?*

3. Get a study Bible in a version you can understand. But be careful to put your focus on the text & not the notes. Use the notes to help you understand the text.

4. Persevere! Just because you missed a day or 6, keep going. Find a friend who can encourage & hold you accountable & discuss what you read.

5. Don't be intimidated by what you don't understand, live out what you do understand. A man was out walking in the desert when he heard a voice say to him, *Pick up some pebbles & put them in your pocket, & tomorrow you'll be both sorry & glad.* The man obeyed. He stooped down & picked up a handful of pebbles & put them in his pocket. The next morning he reached into his pocket & found diamonds & rubies & emeralds. & he was both glad & sorry. Glad he had taken some & sorry he hadn't taken more. This is the way it is with God's Word. When you make the effort to read & study His Word you discover that those words become the source of life. Your only regret is you didn't take in more.