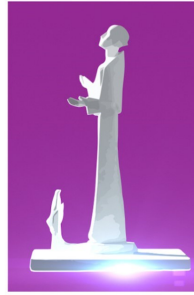


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Theme 3: Reading the Old Testament

Question 3e. Now we have the New Testament, do we need the Old Testament?

1. In what ways could the Old Testament be useful for a modern world?
2. What tips do you have for new readers of the Old Testament?
3. Given that the Old Testament is an ancient text, consider approaching one of the books as an archaeologist might: examine where it comes from, the context in which it was written, the way it has been used throughout history, and the purpose for which it was written. See if a rich understanding of the text and its production contributes to your appreciation of the book.

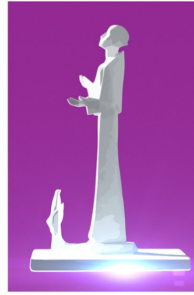
Archbishop Phillip Aspinall

The Old Testament is still really important, even though we have the New Testament. Someone once said you have to be a good Jew before you can be a good Christian and that's because so much of the meaning of the Christian faith has its roots in the story of the Jewish people.

A really good example is the Eucharist at the centre of Christian worship. You can't really understand what's going on in the Eucharist until you understand what's going on in the Passover. So it was in the Passover meal that Jesus said the words 'do this in remembrance of me'. The Jews were given very clear instructions never, ever, ever to eat meat with blood still in it, so you find in the Old Testament law, the blood had to be returned to the earth when an animal was slaughtered because the the blood contained the life and the life belonged to God. So the life had to be returned to God before the meat could be eaten. So, when Jesus at the last supper picked

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up the cup and said 'this is my blood, drink it' they would have been aghast at that. But what he was saying would have been very clear to him as well: 'this is my life, take my life into yourself'. Once you understand the Jewish background, the impact of what Jesus did at the last supper takes on a whole new significance. So yes, we still need the Old Testament and the two go together.

Marie Louise Craig

Yes we absolutely do. Jesus only had the Old Testament so if we're actually going to follow his example, obviously if he read the Old Testament and saw it as relevant then we also need to delve into the Old Testament. But it is difficult to read for those of us who've lived in the New Testament most of our lives. Sometimes we don't read it well. It's like we've lost the language for reading and I'm not talking about Hebrew here. I'm just talking about understanding how the literature works. You know, what is going on in these stories and all the ugly bits that we struggle with like the killing and the wishing people dead and all the difficult bits that that you have with the Old Testament. But if we can learn to read it well then, we can see the depth that's there.

Things in the New Testament do not make sense without the understanding of what God was doing in the Old Testament. If we don't understand what God had promised in the Old Testament, we will not understand how Jesus' death and resurrection actually works. So we need to go back to the Old Testament and look at how God dealt with people, not just the messianic prophecies but also how God brings people back into relationship with Himself and how that works. So even books like Leviticus which list all the offerings, if you read that well, you will understand why God needed Christ to come and do what he did, because that is the beginnings of the thinking about restoration in our relationship and atonement.