

COMMON QUESTIONS

LUKE 2:21-24

WHAT'S THE POINT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

Have you ever wondered, "What's the point of all the sacrifices, ceremonies, rituals, washings, etc., in the Old Testament? In fact, have you ever wondered, "What's the point in the Old Testament?" Can't we just go straight to the New Testament and ignore and forget the Old Testament?

Jesus's first visit to church helps us understand the Old Testament and its relationship to the New Testament. It helps us to see the important connection between Jesus and the ceremonies, sacrifices, washings, and rituals.

In fact, I'll go further and say that you will never fully understand the person and work of Christ if you don't understand the Old Testament. The result of this disconnect will be weaker faith, love, and worship

Solution?

The first time Jesus went to church, aged 5-6 weeks, he effectively preached a sermon about his relationship with the Old Testament. Let's hear his first sermon in order to increase our faith, love, and worship of Christ

CONTEXT

The shepherds had just visited Jesus in the stable and returned to their fields praising God (Luke 2:8-20). Verses 21-24 narrate the first two religious ceremonies in Jesus's life, his circumcision and his first visit to the Temple.



What do these rituals teach us about the relationship between Jesus and the Old Testament?
They teach us that the Jesus honored the Old Testament.



1. JESUS POINTS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

If you were coming to the world to set aside the Old Testament, to tell people, "The Old Testament doesn't matter any more. Just forget about it. We're starting over," what's the first thing you would do? You would make it very clear from the outset that the Old Testament is now irrelevant. Right? What's the last thing you would do? Make clear in multiple ways right up front that the Old Testament, in all its detail, matters. Right?

What did God do when Jesus came to the world? He made it abundantly and repeatedly clear that the Old Testament was vital, central, important, and relevant. We'll look at this in more detail in a moment, but just notice the repeated refrain to begin with:

- o "...according to the law of Moses" (22).
- o "...as it is written in the law of the Lord" (23).
- o "...according to what is said in the law of the Lord" (24).
- o "...according to the custom of the law" (27).
- o "...when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord" (39)

As these opening verses about Jesus's life make clear, whatever he came to do, he did not come to trash the Old Testament. Now let's look at the details.

They honored the OT by circumcising Jesus

"When eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, his name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb" (21).

Circumcision was an act of obedience to God that marked out and set apart the child as a member of God's Old Testament people (Gen. 17:12).

An equally important ceremony accompanying circumcision was the naming ceremony of a child. "Jesus" was not a name Joseph and Mary thought up themselves. It wasn't a family name. It wasn't their choice. It was decided by God, before Jesus was even in Mary's womb and given to them by one of God's angels (Matt. 1:21). The name means "The Lord saves."

They honored the OT by purifying themselves

"Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed" (22).

A new mother in Israel was regarded as ceremonially unclean at birth and was not allowed to participate in religious ceremonies or worship until 40 days after the birth (Lev. 12:1-4). Then she presented herself at the temple for a ceremony of purification. We'll look at what happened in the temple shortly, but for the moment just note that Mary and Joseph followed the law to the letter.

This "lockdown" reminded new parents that no matter how beautiful a child looked, it was born in sin and was morally unclean. Although this did not apply to Jesus, seeing as he was perfectly holy, Jesus was willing to be identified with sinners, just as at his baptism thirty years later (Matthew 3:13-17).



They honored the OT by giving Jesus to God

"They brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord')" (22-23).

The first son in every family was to be presented to the Lord and given to the Lord (Ex.13:2). This was connected with Israel's redemption from Egypt at the first Passover. All firstborn Egyptians were slain at the time of the Passover. All firstborn Israelites were spared if they sprinkled the blood of a lamb on their doorposts.

As a reminder of this deliverance, the Lord not only instituted the annual Passover meal (Ex. 13:3-10), he also instituted the law of "the redemption of the firstborn" (Ex. 13:11-16). God commanded that the firstborn son in every family be devoted to the Lord's service.

However, he then provided a way to redeem the firstborn. This involved God taking all the men of Levi's tribe to serve him in the temple, instead of the firstborn of every tribe. The fathers in the other tribes also had to give five shekels in place of the firstborn (Ex. 13:11-16; Num. 18:15-17). This still left open the possibility that the family could offer their firstborn son for the Lord's service (1 Sam. 1:11, 22, 28), and that seems to have been what happened here as there is no mention of the five shekels. The Redeemer was not redeemed. Jesus was presented to the Lord and consecrated to his service.

They honored the OT by sacrificing pigeons

"And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (24).

The last step in this path of obedience was to offer a lamb and a young pigeon as a sin-offering to cleanse Mary of her uncleanness (Lev. 12:2-8). In this case Joseph and Mary offered two pigeons, which was a concession to poor families (Lev. 12:8).

APPLICATION

♥ **Jesus was born under the law (Gal. 4:4).** The Lawgiver put himself under same laws as his people. Unlike many law-makers who seem to think that laws are only for the little people, he became "a little person" in his obedience to his laws. If Jesus put himself under these OT laws, then surely we want to study them to find out why this was so important, what they mean, and what this was like for him.

♥ **Jesus honored the Old Testament.** Although he was passive in his obedience here, with his parents active, it was Jesus who actively planned and organized every detail of his birth, life, and death so that he followed the Old Testament meticulously. If Jesus honored the OT surely we want to follow him in honoring them too. Let's follow his finger as he points us to the Old Testament (Lk. 24:27).

**JESUS POINTED TO THE OLD TESTAMENT,
SO THE OLD TESTAMENT CAN'T BE POINTLESS.**



**Why does Jesus point to the Old Testament?
Because the Old Testament points to Jesus.**



2. THE OLD TESTAMENT POINTS TO JESUS

Jesus pointed to the Old Testament because it points us to Jesus. Let's see how these OT laws point us to Jesus.

Christ is the Seed

"When eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, his name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb" (21).

Circumcision was a central command in the Old Testament because it pointed to Jesus:

- Circumcision points to God's promise to send the Seed of the woman to be a Satan-crusher (Gen. 3:15) and the world-blesser (Gen. 12:3).
- Circumcision points to the Seed being cut off for sin so that we will be cut off from our sin (Col. 2:11; Rom. 2:28-29; Deut. 10:16 and 30:6).

Christ's blood was shed at the beginning and end of his life to show what his life was all about.

The name Jesus ("Savior") given by God through the angel points to Christ's character and work. The name tells us something about Jesus: he is the Savior. It also tells us something about ourselves: we need saving.

Christ is the Sanctifier

"Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed" (22).

The Old Testament had multiple laws about washing, cleansing, and purification. They all pointed towards the need for cleansing from sin and God's provision of it (Matt. 8:2; 1 John 1:7). Christ brings his people back into fellowship with God by cleansing them from sin.

Christ is the Servant

"They brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') (22-23).

The Lord was presented to the Lord. He was set apart and dedicated to the Lord. No redemption price was paid because he was not redeemed but consecrated to the Lord's service. The Redeemer was not redeemed. He was the firstborn son and the firstborn servant (Rom. 8:29).



Christ is the Sacrifice

"And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (24).

The sacrifice was a sin-offering to remove the ceremonial penalty for sin and restore the person to fellowship with God's people in the Temple. The astonishing thing here is that the poorest offering was offered by the parents of the richest ever sacrifice.

No animal or bird sacrifice could ever take away the moral penalty of sin and therefore every sacrifice pointed to the need of a greater and more perfect sacrifice. As they offer their poor little pigeons with one hand, they are holding in their other hand the spotless Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19).

APPLICATION

♥ Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament.

From the earliest days of his life, he is fulfilling the Old Testament promises. It promised a serpent-crushing Seed, a sin-defeating Savior, a sin-cleansing Sanctifier, a single-minded Servant, and a substitute Sacrifice. Jesus kept every promise. Jesus was God's Amen to every Old Testament promise (2 Cor. 1:20). Does that not give you faith and strengthen your faith in God, God's Word, and God's Son?

♥ Jesus is magnified by the Old Testament.

It shows us more clearly who he is and what he did and still does. As it makes Christ bigger and better in your eyes, does that not make your love and worship bigger and better? Does it not make you love more passionately and worship more heartily? Thank you Jesus for being my Seed, Savior, Sanctifier, Servant, and Sacrifice! Or does it not make you pray, "Lord Jesus be my Seed, Savior, Sanctifier, Servant, and Sacrifice.

Christ our hope our hearts desire

Sing how he came forth from heaven,
Bowed himself to Bethlehem's cave,
Stooped to wear the servant's vesture,
Bore the pain, the cross, the grave,
Passed within the gates of darkness,
Thence his banished ones to save.

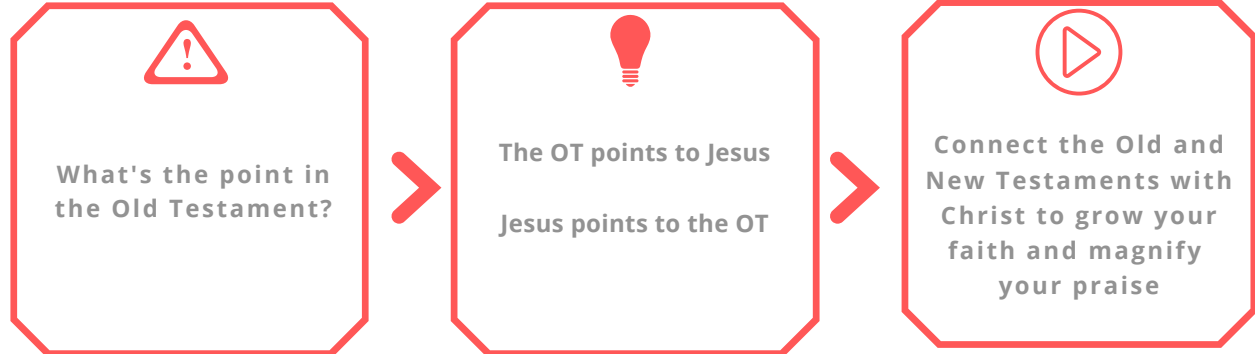
Not all the Blood of Beasts

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain

But Christ, the heavenly Lamb
Takes all our sins away,
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

THE OLD TESTAMENT POINTS TO JESUS BECAUSE
JESUS IS THE POINT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CONCLUSION



PRAYER: God of Truth, help me to see Christ in all of Scripture so that I can believe in him better and magnify him greater. Amen

FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [Where is Jesus in the Old Testament](#) by Glen Scrivener
- [Why we can't unhitch from the Old Testament](#) by Michael Kruger
- [How to proclaim the Gospel from the Old Testament](#) (panel discussion)

Books

- [Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Find Christ in the Old Testament](#) by David Murray
- [The One-Year Book of Discovering Jesus in the Old Testament](#) by Nancy Guthrie
- [Beginning at Moses: A Guide to Finding Christ in the Old Testament](#) by Michael Barrett.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the difficulties you've had with the Old Testament? How did this sermon help?
2. What other examples from Jesus's life show him honoring the Old Testament?
3. What would you say to someone who said, "I don't read the Old Testament, I just want to read about Jesus"?
4. What's the role of OT ceremonies today? See Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 18-19, Belgic Confession Art. 25, and Westminster Confession 19.3.
5. How can the Old Testament strengthen our faith and our witness to others?
6. Turn each of these titles into a sentence of praise: Christ the Seed, the Savior, the Sanctifier, the Servant, and the Sacrifice?

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WHAT'S THE POINT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?



Many think the Old Testament is pointless

- The Gospel is the Law
- The Gospel trashes the Law
- The Law plus the Gospel

Biblical answered?



Jesus points to the OT

OT honored by:

- Circumcising
- Purifying
- Consecrating
- Sacrificing

JESUS POINTED TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, SO THE OLD TESTAMENT CAN'T BE POINTLESS.

Why point to OT?



Connect the Old and New Testaments with Christ to grow your faith and magnify your praise



The OT points to Jesus

OT points to:

- Christ the **Seed**
- Christ the **Sanctifier**
- Christ the **Servant**
- Christ the **Sacrifice**

THE OLD TESTAMENT POINTS TO JESUS BECAUSE JESUS IS THE POINT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Action?

"WE BELIEVE, THAT THE CEREMONIES AND FIGURES OF THE LAW CEASED AT THE COMING OF CHRIST, AND THAT ALL THE SHADOWS ARE ACCOMPLISHED; SO THAT THE USE OF THEM MUST BE ABOLISHED AMONGST CHRISTIANS; YET THE TRUTH AND SUBSTANCE OF THEM REMAIN WITH US IN JESUS CHRIST, IN WHOM THEY HAVE THEIR COMPLETION. IN THE MEANTIME, WE STILL USE THE TESTIMONIES TAKEN OUT OF THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS, TO CONFIRM US IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL, AND TO REGULATE OUR LIFE IN ALL HONESTY, TO THE GLORY OF GOD, ACCORDING TO HIS WILL."
BELGIC CONFESSION ART. 25.



THEN HE SAID TO THEM, "THESE ARE THE WORDS WHICH I SPOKE TO YOU WHILE I WAS STILL WITH YOU, THAT ALL THINGS MUST BE FULFILLED WHICH WERE WRITTEN IN THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS AND THE PSALMS CONCERNING ME." AND HE OPENED THEIR UNDERSTANDING, THAT THEY MIGHT COMPREHEND THE SCRIPTURES.

LUKE 24:44-45