

The Old Testament

The Old Testament: When God spoke to Christians

Is the Old Testament relevant for Christians? Yes, because it was the only Bible Christians had to begin with, and because Christians would be the first people to actually understand it.

In **Ephesians 1:9**, Paul writes that God “made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.” And to Christians in Corinth Paul wrote, “We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began,” **1 Corinthians 2:7**. Where was the “mystery of God’s will” and “God’s secret wisdom” contained? In the Old Testament. And who was it meant for? Christians.

It wasn’t even meant for the people who wrote the Old Testament, **1 Peter 1:12**, because “It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you.” The Old Testament, therefore, was written for Christians, and its mysteries were kept secret - according to God’s plan “before time began” - until Christians turned up.

So what was this secret in the Old Testament that had to wait for Christians to arrive? It was the secret to salvation. And “Concerning this salvation, the prophets searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow,” **1 Peter 1:10-11**.

So the prophets knew that salvation hinged on the “sufferings of Christ,” and once Christ’s suffering was done a glorious new world would begin. But it wouldn’t begin in their lifetime. Even the angels would have to wait (**verse 12**). “By orders from heaven” (The Message) the treasure map and the code that unlocked its secrets were kept in storage until a short time after Jesus’ death. It was only then - and in the most un-Hollywood of ways - that Jesus dropped the first clue.

Two disciples are taking a walk and Jesus joins them. They tell him they can’t understand why Jesus had to die, or what’s happened to him since he came back to life again (**Luke 24:13-24**), to which Jesus says in **verses 25-26**, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart that you do not believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

You mean the prophets had predicted all this to happen, and it was all there in the Old Testament, all along?! Exactly, which is why, “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,” Jesus then “explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself,” **verse 27**.

It was the first occasion in all human history when the locks to the mystery of God’s will clicked open. The moment those prophets of old would have given their eyeteeth to be present at, had just happened. And who did it happen to? A couple of bewildered future Christians. And look at their reaction, **verse 32**: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

And what Scriptures was Jesus using? The Old Testament. So it’s an understanding of the Old Testament that sets a Christian’s heart on fire! No wonder Jesus spent so much time in the Old Testament when talking with his disciples. It’s because the Old Testament was God speaking to Christians!

And what was God saying? The same thing Jesus had been saying to his disciples, **verse 44**, that “Everything must be fulfilled that is written *about me* in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” The key that unlocked the mystery of God’s will and God’s secret wisdom was Jesus himself. And there it was, tucked away in the Old Testament waiting for Christians, who’d burst on the scene one day shouting to the world what the Old Testament had been saying all along, **verses 45-46**, that “The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.”

And it didn’t take long for Christians to start shouting. Peter’s already yelling to the crowd in **Acts 3:24**, “Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold of these days.” What got Peter so excited, though, was the realization that God was now *fulfilling* “what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer,” **verse 18**. Peter now knew what the prophets knew, of “the glories that would follow” Christ’s death, **1 Peter 1:11**. What glories? The restoration of everything through Jesus, **Acts 3:21**, just as “promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

The reaction in the first people who understood that was sheer joy (**Acts 2:46-47**). And when Christians from that time on cottoned on to “the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you (through Christ’s sufferings),” **1 Peter 1:10-11**, their reaction would be “inexpressible and glorious joy” too, **verse 8**.

Is there something wonderful waiting for Christians in the Old Testament, then? Yes, because the Old Testament was waiting for us! It was waiting for the existence of Christians so that the glorious world foretold by the prophets could begin.

Is the Old Testament relevant for Christians, therefore? Yes. It's when God spoke to Christians - before time even began - about the key to the restoration of everything. And when Christians see how that restoration unfolds in all its glory through Jesus in the Old Testament, their hearts sing!