

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Why Bother?*
SERIES: *Old Testament*
SCRIPTURES: *Various*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
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**Credit to Philip Yancey*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you.

We spent much of last year 2019, talking about **knowing, loving and following Jesus**. We said that we have a **Christocentric** approach to the Bible. You'll notice that in our messages, we often get to talking specifically about Jesus, his life and teachings. That's our emphasis.

But if we're not careful we can end up missing out on God's fuller story...and the way he has made Himself known and how he relates to you and me.

And so that brings us to our sermon series this morning. "The Old Testament...why Bother?" (**Series Graphic**)

Over the next 5 weeks we're gonna talk about the Old Testament. What's there exactly? Why it's important, how fits into the overall story of the Bible and most importantly why it matters to you and me.

In order to pull this off in 5 weeks, it means that we aren't getting into the nitty gritty of each section. The Old Testament is 39 books, and makes up almost 75% of the Bible. We won't even be able to address each book. We're just gonna be highlighting some of the bigger sections that you find in the Old Testament.

Can I show you picture? Do you know what you're looking at?

IMAGE OF MAGNIFIED – Coffee

IMAGE OF MAGNIFIED – Humming bird tongue

IMAGE OF MAGNIFIED – Shark Skin.

IMAGE OF – Shaun crying after the super bowl last week.

Sometimes when we study the Bible, we study small sections and look at all of the details. Like last year when we walked through the Sermon on the Mount. We took about 20 weeks looking at 3 chapters in the Bible.

But another way to study and learn from Scripture is to step back and try understand the bigger picture...themes, ideas and story lines...within which, each of the little books plays a part. If we can get a grasp on the bigger picture it helps us to make sense of what we're reading. And that's the idea of this sermon series. We want to step back and understand that bigger picture and purpose of the OT.

This morning we are just laying the groundwork for the entire series. Just want to make a case for why the Old Testament matters. And then over the next 4 weeks we're going to look at the sections that make up the Old Testament. We'll be spending a week talking about the OT Law, we'll be spending a week talking about the Psalms, we'll talk about the prophets. Next week we'll going through the book of Job. But again this morning...just laying the groundwork for the series.

So where do we begin when it comes to the Old Testament?

I want to acknowledge one of the primary challenges we are faced with when it comes to the Old Testament.

I. The Challenge of the Old Testament.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is the culture and time gap between ourselves and the writing of the Old Testament.

Have you ever sat down with the best of intentions and started to read your Bible? But shortly after you start, you find yourself confused, lost in a world that just seems foreign to you. Let me just give you some examples of what I'm talking about from the Old Testament.

Exodus 23:4 - If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it.

Deuteronomy 25 - ⁵ If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her...

1 Samuel 15:3 - ³ Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy^[a] all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'"

Exodus 21:7 - ⁷ "If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as male servants do.

Numbers 15:4-5 - ⁴⁻⁵ If you sacrifice a young ram or goat, you must also offer two pounds of your finest flour mixed with a quart of olive oil as a grain sacrifice.

What's the deal with donkey's and oxen wondering off? Why does God care and why should I care?

What's the deal with a widow marrying her husband's brother?

Why does the Old Testament spend so much time on temples, priests, and a sacrificial system that is no longer in use?

Many people, pick the Old Testament with the best of intentions but very quickly find it baffling, boring and offensive! And choose to avoid it.

So as you come to the Old Testament, I think good and helpful to acknowledge the culture and time gap that exists between us and the world of the Old Testament. That's a good place to begin.

You know how easy it is to misunderstand something written in English, and from our cultural perspective. I'll just give you a few examples of how we can be confused by our own language:

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.

See how you have to pause, for a moment, to understand what you're reading. And that's writing from our own time and place.

Now think about this, the writers of the Old Testament were nomadic, desert dwellers, sheep-herders, in the ancient Middle East, just over 2,000 years ago.

The OT written over a time period of about 1,000 years and by over 20 different authors.

A lot happens, in 1,000 years.

Think about a book started during the time of Christopher Columbus (In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue), compiled by different authors and only just now being completed.

It was written in a different language. **Hebrew** & also a little bit of **Aramaic**. (A few chapters in the book of Daniel 2:5 – 7:28.)

Let me just give you a visual to help you understand this.

This is a picture of Hebrew writing (**pic of Hebrew piece of Scripture**). And in Hebrew you read from right to left. The little markings you see are vowel markings. Which are not part of the original text.

Can you sense the culture/language gap?

Today we have the benefit of a cohesive unit (**HOLD UP A BIBLE**), put together and bounded and translated into easy-to-read English. Just the physical make-up of the book alone, can cause us to forget the culture and time gap between ourselves and its writers.

We should expect, that as we open the Old Testament, we will discover a world that is different from ours. When you read something that doesn't make sense, it's ok. So...

B. Why bother?

I'd just like to give you a couple important reasons this morning why it's worth your while. As we dig into some of the sections of the OT in succeeding weeks, you'll hopefully see how these reasons play out.

1. The Old Testament is the Bible Jesus read.

Turn with me if you would to a rather popular passage of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16 – All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness...

Now what's interesting about this passage is that phrase **All Scripture**. Today we typically think about that statement as a reference to the whole Bible. But, it's important to remember that when the writer of 2 Timothy wrote those words, the Bible had not yet been assembled. Some of it, not even written yet.

When this passage was written, the Scripture that existed was the Old Testament.

The only "Bible" that existed when Jesus was walking the earth 2,000 years ago was the Old Testament.

Remember when Jesus is young and his parents lose track of him. Do you remember where they find him? He's in the Temple and he's reading Scripture. Do you know what he's reading? He's not reading Paul's letters. They weren't written yet. He's not reading the Gospels. They weren't written yet. He's reading the Old Testament.

When Jesus tempted in the desert, he immediately begins quoting Scripture...but the Scripture he quoted was from the OT.

At one point Jesus says, **"These are the Scriptures that testify about me..."**

The Scriptures that Jesus was referring to, that testify about Jesus, are the Old Testament.

Kind of interesting...the Nazis in Germany because of their hatred toward the Jews, at one point actually forbade studying the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures. So a German theologian who disagreed with his countrymen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, defiantly published a book on the Old Testament Psalms.

He was immediately punished. He was fined for doing this. But he appealed the charges explaining that the Psalms were the prayer book of Jesus!

Avoid the Old Testament and you avoid the prayers Jesus prayed, the songs Jesus sang, the poems he memorized and the bedtime stories he learned!

The Old Testament is the Bible Jesus read.

Second, the Old Testament also portrays the world as it is.

2. Real Life

If I were sharing my life story with you...

I would leave out the time I forged a permission slip in Mrs. Coes 4th grade class.

I would likely leave out my poor attitude when my sports teams lose.

I would leave out...

You may expect me to leave out those real life moments of embarrassment, failure.

I'd try to tell you only the good stuff.

But if I told you only the good stuff...you'd know I wasn't telling you my whole life story, wouldn't you? You'd know I was leaving things out.

When it comes to God's story with humanity we might expect only the good stuff.

But instead, in the pages of the Old Testament we get it all. We get the world as it is.

We get Abraham the pagan idol worshiper as he is. We get the story of Noah's drunkenness. We get Solomon's many wives. We get a story about a Levite who sends his young female concubine out into the street late at night to fulfill the sexual desires of a group of men, and she is left for dead (Judges 19).

You see in the OT we get the world as it is, not as it was intended to be. We get real not perfect. We get honest, not sugar-coated. And it's one of the reasons we can relate to it.

I was watching the news a couple of months ago. And I was left silent, shocked, confused, in disbelief.

In Madagascar, a little island just off the coast of Africa, there is an area that looks like this (**PIC OF MICA MINES**). It's a series of underground tunnels, where native workers mine for a special mineral called **mica**. Because of mica's properties it is extremely valuable to many of our industries and products even here in North America. It used in our automobile, cosmetic and electronic industries. You'll find it in products like make-up, batteries, microwaves, audio speakers, hair-dryers etc.

But it's not easy to get to. And so the workers dig these underground tunnels to mine for it. Unsafe, poorly ventilated. It's uncomfortable to think about and talk about. And then, then this...

A boy climbs out of a pit in the ground and shields his eyes from the sun. His hands and feet are covered in dust, his T-shirt and shorts covered in rips.

The boy has spent the last several hours working inside the pit. Now above ground, he proudly holds up an example of his labor: a silvery sheet of mica, the iridescent mineral shimmering in the afternoon light.

The boy is 10 years old, but he doesn't go to school. He works for much of the day — and sometimes through the night — crawling through pitch-black tunnels inside the makeshift mine, his fingers picking through the earth, collecting and sorting shards of mica.

The minerals he picks up will soon make their way through an opaque supply chain from Africa to Asia before landing in millions of products — electronics, appliances, even trains — that wind up in America.

“My mother doesn't make enough money,” says the boy, whose name is Manjoraza. “So I have to help her make money.”

Manjoraza is among thousands of children working in Madagascar's mica industry — an underground army of little laborers who go largely unseen in a country famous for its lush forests, vanilla crop and lemur population.

Here, where Madagascar's mica supply chain begins, the boy and his family are trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty, exploitation and child labor that spans generations. Without clean water, access to health care or schooling, children like Manjoraza see their present and their future as revolving around the shards of mica buried in the pits down below.

Children as young as 4 years old, performing long hours of labor-intensive work in often dangerous conditions to collect a mineral for items in my life.

In moments like these I am horrified. I am left wondering about my faith and how understand it, how I live it. But I'm not the only one. The Old Testament is filled with these same responses to the reality of life.

The Old Testament is filled with stories of love and hate, rape, dismemberment, trafficking of slaves, high honor, and cruel treachery of war, evil, revenge, violence, sexual scandals...it's all in there.

“Like nothing else, the Old Testament depicts the cries, the complaints, the deep, insistent questionings of the heart, the stuff of life we all must contend with.” (Yancey)

“When we find ourselves asking tough questions, sometimes we want answers, but many times we just want a friend who is asking the same questions we are.” (Chad Gibbs)

The Old Testament is the real story of a group of people trying to make sense of God and their faith in a messy world. And when I hear that, I think, *“Yeah, I can resonate with that. I could use a companion like that on my own journey.”*

And it kind of leads to the third important point about the Old Testament.

3. The Old Testament is the story about God entering that messy reality with us.

Isn't that astounding. Life in all its messiness on full display in the OT, stories, the characters...and in the midst of the mess, God joins us.

The term **“Old Testament”** can be confusing.

But in its original meaning Testament simply means **contract** or **covenant**.

There were covenants all over the ancient world. Covenants between people, cutting deals about livestock or property or sharing land etc. But one thing you won't find

are pagan god's making covenants with people. God's are not interested in relationship with people.

The Old Testament is this incredibly unique story about a God, the One True God, who makes a covenant with humans. He enters our messy world. No god in the ancient world ever did that.

It was so unbelievable to the writers of the Bible they actually started to refer to God as "The God of the covenant." 285 times in the OT, God is referred to as the God of the covenant."

In our language today we would say, "God entered into a relationship with a group of people." That's the story of the Old Testament. A personal, intimate, God enters real life with us.

ILLUSTRATION

God has it out with loud complainers like Job, Jeremiah and Jonah. He engages Abraham and Moses in lengthy arguments – and sometimes lets them win! He takes human beings seriously, conducts dialogues with them, includes them in his plans, listens to them.

If the Old Testaments overwhelming lesson about God is that he is personal and intimate, it's overwhelming lesson about human beings is that we matter. What we say, how we behave, even what we think and feel – these things have an enormous effect on God. They have in fact cosmic implications. (pg. 35)

The Old Testament informs us that God is not distant, far away, disinterested in the lives of humans.

This concept is in fact at the very heart of the Gospel. *“Jesus, being in very nature God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant.”*

Somebody described the concept using ladders one time. We (humans) spend so much of our lives trying to climb up the ladder and we walk right past Jesus who is on his way down the ladder to meet us where we are.

God enters into our messy world to interact with you and me. That’s the Old Testament.

4. The Old Testament is the beginning of the story of God’s grace.

This is one of the most common misunderstandings related to the Old Testament. Have you heard this before: **Old Testament is about LAW and the New Testament is about GRACE.**

The truth is, the Old Testament is actually the beginning to the story of Grace. The entire Old Testament revolves around God and his relationship with a group of people called the Israelites.

In Genesis 12, for example, we hear of this fascinating plan that God has, of making himself known to the world. He’s gonna start with One tribe...Israel

But to found this tribe, God chooses Abraham, he’s a pagan, Mesopotamian Idol worshiper, from the region that is now Iraq. He puts Abraham through a series of tests, many of which he fails. (In Egypt for example, Abraham demonstrates a morality inferior to that of the Egyptian Sun Worshipers.) And God says, “I’ll use this man to start my people.”

The writer of Deuteronomy describes the chosen group of people this way...

Deuteronomy 7:6-7- ⁶ The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession...

⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you...

That's grace.

One of the primary characters of the Old Testament is **King David**. He is a central figure.

What's fascinating is that by historical standards King Omri is one of Israel's most powerful kings and yet Omri's story in Scripture is given a grand total of 8 verses, while the story of David goes on for chapters.

He is chosen as the youngest in his family. He is a failure as a leader. He is a failure as a husband, he kills another man for his wife and sleeps with her. He is a failure as a father. And yet, he is the only person in Scripture described as a man after God's own heart.

David's story is ultimately a story of God's grace.

Yancey says this of the characters we discover in the OT: **“Abraham pimped for his wife, Jacob cheated his brother, Moses murdered, David murdered and committed adultery both – yet all of these ended up on God's list of favorites.”**

Or hero's of the faith.

That's grace.

Even between all of the major Old Testament stories there are hidden smaller stories of grace. This is one my favorites, Exodus, for example identifies by name the two Hebrew midwives who helped save Moses' life, but does not bother to record the name of the Pharaoh ruling Egypt (an omission that has baffled scholars ever since!). (Yancey 33)

You find the marks of grace on almost every page, every book, every character!

God's grace, meets us where we are and then begins to move us where he wants to be.

If we miss out on the Old Testament we will never fully understand or appreciate the magnitude of God's grace and patience with humanity.

In the midst of my failure, I need a God who is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Who meets me where I am, in all the realness of my world and my life and begins to move me where he wants me to be. That's the story of the Old Testament.

So, I close with...

C. A Warning

It's dangerous to get involved with the characters and the story of the Old Testament. It may initially be confusing or offensive...but beware.

There's a story in **2 Samuel 12**. Where a Prophet Nathan, begins telling a story, a Parable to King David about a rich man. This rich man has herds and flocks of cattle and sheep. The rich man has a neighbor. A poor man who has only little lamb, which is his pet, eats at his table.

A guest, comes to visit the rich man tired and hungry. But the rich man refuses to use one of his plentiful animals to feed his guest. Instead, he steals the poor mans only lamb to feed his guest.

As King David listens to Nathan's story, he becomes caught up in the story, infuriated. He says to Nathan, "Where is this rich man. He must surely die."

And Nathan replies, "Ahh King David, you are that man and this story is about you."

We are walking that same line when we open up the pages of the Old Testament. We may initially believe we're hearing a story about another world, but if we stick with it we may soon hear the Old Testament crying out to us "*You are that man, woman, people, group and this story is about you.*"