

Do We Need the New Testament?¹

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We do need the New Testament, but we need the Old Testament for an understanding of the story of God's working out his purpose, for its theology, for its spirituality, for its hope, for its understanding of mission, for its understanding of salvation, and for its ethics.

Do we need the New Testament? The answer is, of course: Yes, we do need the NT. But why do we need it? In what sense is the Old Testament incomplete? What difference would it make if we did not have the NT?

SALVATION

We need the NT because it tells us about Jesus. What does it vitally tell us about him? The NT itself suggests that the answer lies in what Jesus did and what happened to him. Half of the NT is occupied with telling his story—four times—with a special focus on his execution and resurrection. Much of the other half focuses on explaining the significance of that story, with an even sharper focus on his execution and resurrection.

Jesus' submission to execution and his resurrection were an expression of God's love and power. In these events, God let humanity do its worst to him, and he declined to be overcome by that action. God was both willing and able to overcome it. His submission and triumph were an assertion that he was unwilling to be overcome by humanity's rejection.

God was insistent on bringing to consummation the purpose he had initiated from the beginning. To use Jesus' language, God was insistent on *reigning* in the world. By doing so, the execution and the resurrection also meant something for humanity. They indicated to humanity the far-reaching nature of God's willingness to submit himself to us and the far-reaching nature of his power.

¹ This article is adapted from an address presented originally for the SCJ Conference, April 5-6, 2013, at Lipscomb University.

What if God had not sent his Son into the world or had not collaborated in his submission to execution or had not brought about his resurrection? And what if we had not known about these events? What if the Gospels had not been written?

In a sense, God did nothing new in Jesus. He was simply taking to its logical and ultimate extreme the activity in which he had been involved throughout the OT story. All the way through, God had been letting humanity do its worst. Specifically, he had been letting the people he adopted do their worst and had been declining to be overcome by their rejection of him; declining to abandon or destroy them. God had been paying the price for his people's attitude toward him. He had been sacrificing himself for them. He had been bearing their sin.

The Hebrew word most often translated “forgive” is *nasa'*, which means “carry.” God had been absorbing the force of sin, *carrying* it in himself rather than making Israel carry it. This did not exclude his disciplining Israel, but when God brought trouble on his people, it was an act of discipline within the context of an ongoing relationship, such as that between a parent and child.

The fact that God had been acting in this way throughout Israel's story does not make his self-sacrifice in Jesus redundant. This last self-sacrifice is its logical and inevitable culmination—its final expression. Throughout the story of Israel and the nations, God had been declaring he was king and acting as a king, imposing his will on Israel and the nations. That declaration and action was inclined to draw forth human resistance. Israel and the nations preferred to make their own decisions.

The coming of Jesus constituted another assertion that God is king and intends to behave as king in relation to the world, an assertion made in acts and in words about being king. Predictably, Jesus' coming and his declaration about God's reign drew forth a response of resistance expressed in his execution, which appropriately involved both the nations and the people of God. It constituted the ultimate expression of human wickedness, thus drawing forth the ultimate expression of God's submission to humanity.

God remains sovereign Lord; he is not compelled by factors outside himself. Yet he deliberately let humanity do what it wanted to him and did so under a compulsion that came from inside himself, a compulsion that derived from who he is, a compulsion to be himself. He could not deny himself or be untrue to himself (2 Tim 2:13).

By the same dynamic, our insistence on executing God's Son also drew forth the ultimate expression of God's faithfulness and power in resurrecting Jesus. One might say that God had to provoke humanity into its ultimate act of rebellion in order to have the opportunity to act in a way that refused to let its ultimate act of rebellion have the last word. By the same dynamic, our subsequent, continuing resistance to God's reign means he must come back to implement that reign.

God's submitting his Son to execution was thus necessary both for God's sake and for humanity's. It was necessary for God to be God in fulfilling his purpose and

overcoming human rebellion. It was also necessary for humanity's sake that he underscore the truth about humanity and about himself and draw humanity from rebellion to submission, from resistance to faith. The act of atonement had both an objective and a subjective aspect.

Insofar as God's act was undertaken for God's sake, there was no great need for humanity to know about it. It could have been done secretly or left unrecorded. But insofar as it was undertaken for humanity's sake as a demonstration of divine love, it needed to be done publicly and to be recorded so that people two thousand years later can still be drawn by it.

So do we need the NT? Insofar as Jesus' execution and resurrection were the logical end to a stance God had been taking throughout OT times, then the OT story gives an entirely adequate account of who God is and the basis for our relating to him. Because of who God has always been, he has always been able to be in relationship with his people despite their rebellion. He has always been able and willing to carry their waywardness. And on the basis of that story, his people have always been able to respond to him and to be in relationship with him. In this sense, the gospel did not open up any new possibilities; those possibilities were always present.

Yet the story of Jesus' execution and resurrection is the story of the ultimate expression of who God is, and therefore, they provide the ultimate public basis for responding to God and trusting in him. We do not absolutely need the NT, but we do benefit from it.

NARRATIVE

Related to the question of salvation is another question: Is the OT story complete? The NT story clearly adds to the OT story, so do other Jewish writings from the Greek and Roman periods, such as Maccabees. The movie *The Bourne Legacy* added to the earlier Bourne movies, but this does not mean that the earlier movies needed a fourth in the sequence.

The beginning of Matthew's Gospel implies that this story needs to be read as a story unified with that of the OT, but it does so in a way that also indicates that the OT story does not have to be read that way. Matthew speaks of fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile, and fourteen from the exile to Jesus, but the OT itself shows he has been selective with its story in order to make the point. In the OT, there were not fourteen generations from Abraham to David and fourteen from David to the exile. Matthew is working backwards. He knows Jesus is the climax of the biblical story, and he shapes it accordingly. But the shaping does not emerge from the narrative itself.

Richard Hays has remarked that the "astonishing event" of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was "completely unpredictable on the basis of the story's plot development" but "is nonetheless now seen as the supremely fitting narrative cul-

mination, providing unforeseen closure to dangling narrative themes and demanding a reconfiguration of . . . the reader's grasp of 'what the story is all about.'"²

Are Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection unpredictable on the basis of the OT story? They were indeed unpredicted, yet Jesus did not see them as unpredictable. He was not surprised at his execution and resurrection, and his lack of surprise did not issue simply from his divine insight. Jesus pointed out that his crucifixion fit the pattern of the OT story. Israel had regularly rejected and killed its prophets. Likewise, the resurrection fitted the pattern of the OT story.

Ezekiel 37 notes how Israel in exile saw itself as dead and hopeless. Yet God brought it back from the dead and reestablished it in fulfillment of Ezekiel's promise that it would be raised from the dead. So the astonishing event of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is a logical continuation of Israel's story. Yet we might not have seen that Israel's story is a story of death and resurrection unless we were reading it in light of Jesus' story.

A converse point, then, needs to be made. The OT indicates that God brings Israel back to life after the exile, but it also indicates that this new life is by no means as glorious as the life promised by Ezekiel's vision. One could say that the late Second Temple community saw itself as still being in exile, though the fact that the Jewish people were by then dwelling throughout the historic borders of Israel may make this confusing.

It seems more accurate to speak of the late Second Temple community as having seen itself as still in need of restoration. The Holy Spirit thus inspires John the Baptizer's father to speak not in terms of exile and return but in terms of freedom, of light shining on people living in the shadow of death (see Luke 1:67-79).

Indeed, Luke's version of the gospel story starts by suggesting that Jesus' coming is to bring the downfall of Rome and the restoration of Israel to freedom and full life. "He has brought down rulers from their thrones," Mary says; he has "rescued us from the hand of our enemies," Zechariah says (Luke 1:52, 74).

This intention comes to be frustrated by the leadership of the Jewish people, whose hostility leads to Jesus' execution. The process whereby God restores his people and implements his sovereignty in the world thus takes a new form as God lets that rejection happen and turns it into a means of achieving his purpose. The process God goes through in Jesus parallels that which God goes through in the OT story.

So Jesus comes to bring Israel back to fullness of life, and his own dying and rising is designed to bring closure to its story. Yet it did not do so. Israel strangely declines that closure. Paul then sees a mysterious divine providence in this refusal;

² Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 100. Hays acknowledges in a footnote the influence of insights from Northrop Frye and Paul Ricoeur on this sentence.

it adds impetus to the carrying of the gospel to the Gentile world pending a closure for Israel that will come later.

Further, we can hardly say that the result of the gospel's spread is that the church manifests unqualified resurrection life. The church engages in crucifixion; the church experiences crucifixion; the church experiences resurrection. The pattern continues into our own day.

The OT, then, reaches a partial closure but not a complete one; the NT likewise achieves a partial closure but not a complete one. This parallel gives the OT story more potential to be instructive for the church than one would think based on the way the church uses that story. For instance, when Paul wants to get the Corinthian church to think about its life, he points it to the story of Israel from Egypt to the promised land and comments that "these things happened to them as examples, but they were written for our admonition, on whom the end of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11).

Paul's comment might seem to contain some tension if the end of the ages has come; would one expect there to be illumination for the church in these stories about Israel's experience before it reached the Promised Land? Yet the issues that arise in the Corinthian church's life show that living in the last days does not transform the life of the church. Israel's position between the exodus and the Promised Land provides a parallel for the church's position between Jesus' resurrection and his final appearing.

The OT story is not merely our ancestors' history, a history of a period so different from ours that it hardly relates to our life in this time when the end of the ages has come. It is the history of a people like us in a position not so different from ours. Our pretense that things are otherwise puts us into a potentially fatal jeopardy.

HOPE

Does the OT relate the promises whose fulfillment is related in the NT? Insofar as this is so, we clearly need the NT to tell us about that fulfillment.

The OT certainly relates promises that are fulfilled within the OT itself. For instance, Isaiah tells Hezekiah that the treasures of Jerusalem will be taken off to Babylon, along with some of his descendants (Isa 39:5-7), and it happens. Subsequently within the OT, Yahweh's proven capacity to declare what is going to happen and then to make it happen is a major reason for believing he is God (Isa 41:1-7,21-29). Likewise, the NT makes declarations about the future that are fulfilled within its own pages. Notably, Jesus foretells his rejection, death, and resurrection (Mk 8:31). And it happens.

Yet it is strikingly difficult to give an example of such fulfillment *between* the Testaments. Matthew 1-4, for instance, refers seven times to fulfillment, but none of the references involves a direct fulfillment of the prophecies Matthew quotes that

parallels those fulfillments within the OT and within the NT. When Jews dispute that Jesus is the Messiah, they often argue that the claim is implausible because Jesus did not fulfill OT hopes. He did not introduce a lasting reign of God’s righteousness and justice in the world.

Paul’s comment in 2 Cor 1:20 is helpful in trying to understand the theological significance of this phenomenon. He observes, “Whatever promises of God there are, in him [in Christ] there is a ‘Yes.’” God’s promises are not all *fulfilled* in Christ (in the sense in which we commonly use the word), but they are all *confirmed* in Christ. The fact that Jesus came, healed people, expelled demons, stilled the storm, submitted to rejection and execution, rose to new life, and overwhelmed people with God’s spirit is the evidence for seeing him as the confirmation of God’s promises.

Most of these acts are not the *subject* of the promises, but they do confirm the promises. They indicate that God is at work in Jesus and that this activity is one with the promises God made through the Prophets. We do not exactly need the NT in order to make it possible for us to believe in God’s promises; at least, many Jews believe in them without believing in Jesus. But the NT does direct us back to the OT to consider what the promises are that we can believe in.

One truth is confined to the NT, and it is a truth about hope. In the OT, the grave or Sheol or Hades is the end of the story for human beings. In the NT, there is a bigger End to come after our death, an End that will mean we rise to a new life, with new bodies—or that we go to Hell. The OT does not incorporate either aspect of this truth, the good news or bad.

There are slight hints of it, once at the very beginning and once at the very end of the OT. At the very beginning, the first human beings have access to the tree of life; if they ate of it, they would live forever. Because they chose to eat of another tree in disobedience to God’s command, they and their descendants are denied access to the tree of life. So this story explains why we all die, but it also demonstrates that God originally intended us to live eternally.

The very last scene in the OT, in Daniel 12, promises that many dead people will wake up again, some to lasting life, some to lasting contempt. This promise has its background in the martyrdoms brought about by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second-century crisis in Jerusalem when he banned proper worship of Yahweh and replaced it with pagan worship. Jews paid with their lives for their faithfulness to God in that situation. It surely cannot be the case that God simply lets the faithful be killed in this way and lets the unfaithful live on until they die in their beds? Daniel 12 promises God will take action to reverse things.

Daniel 12 is the only reference to a form of resurrection to life or death in the OT. In principle, the OT is content with the idea that this life is all we have. It tells some stories about dead people being resuscitated, but resuscitation is not resurrection; resurrection involves a new kind of life and a spiritual body—that is, a body

that lives according to the spirit and not according to the lower nature. When people have lived a full life and are “full of years,” they are content to go to be with their ancestors. They will not cease to exist but will go to Sheol, which is not a place of suffering but of lifeless existence.

The Psalms chafe loudly about not being able to live out one’s full life because of undeserved troubles, but what they look for is deliverance that makes it possible to live a long life, and for the early death of those who seek to cause their death. They can speak about living in God’s presence forever, but the “forever” refers to the whole of life. It does not envisage anything beyond Sheol. Enoch and Elijah are taken to be with God, but their experience does not correspond to the resurrection of which the NT speaks.

It is entirely appropriate that the OT should have virtually no hope of resurrection because until Jesus died and rose, there was going to be no resurrection. It is not that the OT was wrong; it was right. Hence the fact that Jesus went to make a proclamation to people who belonged to God but had died and were in Sheol (1 Pet 4:6); he went to give them the good news that they were not stuck there forever.

Admittedly, when Jesus argued with the Sadducees about resurrection, his argument also implies a reason for the reality of Hell. As resurrection to life must follow from the reality of God’s relationship with people, so perhaps Hell must follow from the lack of such a reality. “Hell is other people,” one of Jean-Paul Sartre’s characters famously says in his play *No Exit*, which portrays three people who are in Hell and thus cannot escape one another. Hell is a matter of relationships—specific relationships, in the context of the saying in Sartre’s play.

To turn that idea inside out, Jesus’ might imply that Hell is the continuing lack of a relationship between God and us that characterizes this life. The related implication of Daniel 12 is that it is appropriate for faithlessness to receive some more explicit exposure than the fact that life simply peters out, which is the reason why the realization about Hell, as well as that about resurrection, developed in Judaism. Hell means judgment. While Jesus is the person who introduces Hell into the Bible, he was taking up an idea that was present in Judaism by his day.

The OT continues to teach us about hope in yet another sense. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wondered why God did not let the Israelites know about resurrection life, and speculated that it was because he needed to get them to take this life really seriously. Once people know about eternal life, they stop doing so. The history of Christian attitudes to this life provides evidence for his speculation. We therefore need the OT to remind us of the importance of this life, and to give us hope for this life.³

³ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (repr. London: Collins, 1962) 50, 112.

MISSION

Do we need the NT because the OT focuses exclusively on Israel and we would not otherwise know God is concerned for the whole world? Did God not reveal his concern for the nations before Jesus came? In fact, God's concern for the nations goes back to the beginning. He created the whole world and was involved with the development of all the nations.

God's aim in appearing to Abraham was not simply to bless him but to drive the nations to pray for blessing such as Abraham's. God's judgment of the Egyptians and the Canaanites does not mean God is unconcerned about other nations, as God's judgment of Israel and of the church does not mean he is unconcerned about Israel or about the church. Prophets look forward to a time when nations will flock to Jerusalem to get Yahweh to make decisions for them. Psalms repeatedly summon all the nations to acknowledge Yahweh with their praise.

It is in keeping with this concern that the spread of the Jewish people around the Middle East and the Mediterranean before Jesus' day had the happy result that there were synagogues all over the known world, and that these synagogues were attracting Gentiles to acknowledge Yahweh. It is in keeping with this concern that, before Jesus' day, the Jewish Scriptures were translated into Greek so that people who did not know Hebrew could read them.

The Book of Acts relates a series of events that gave huge new impetus to spreading the knowledge of the God of Israel: Pentecost, the abolition of the Jewish people's distinctive rule of faith in the Cornelius story, and the broader mission process described in Acts. But these events did not initiate the spread among the Gentiles of knowledge about Israel's God. One might try a thought experiment. Suppose Jesus had not come. What would have happened? One can imagine Judaism would have continued to spread through the Gentile world and become more and more of a world religion.

God's strategy in seeking to fulfill his purpose for creation worked somewhat as follows. First, he commissioned humanity to subdue and care for the world. It did not work. So he tried destroying most of the world and starting again with one family. It did not work. So he tried a third time with one family but separated them from the rest of the world in order to bless them so spectacularly that the entire world would pray to be blessed as they were blessed. This strategy also did not work, and the descendants of Abraham and Sarah ended up back in the Babylon from which they had come.

God tried a fourth time by reestablishing the community centered on Jerusalem, even while many people who had been scattered around the Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern worlds stayed in the places of their dispersion. This arrangement proved more effective insofar as the Jewish community did attract many Gentiles to come to believe in the God of the Torah. But the Jewish

people centered on Jerusalem remained under the domination of the superpower of the day.

So God tried a fifth time by sending his Son into the world. This strategy initially failed in a particularly catastrophic fashion, but God again turned disaster into potential triumph. He turned the failure and his refusal to be beaten by it into a message that could go out to the world as a whole. In this connection, he made use of that already-existent dispersion of the Jewish community and the way it had already attracted many Gentiles to believe in the God of the Torah.

The strategy of attraction that God had initiated with Abraham and Sarah continued. The focus of the Epistles centers on the Christian congregation's growing in its understanding and embodying of the gospel. The world's recognition of the God of that gospel would then follow. Paul makes this vision of attraction particularly specific to the Corinthians when he speaks of people coming to the congregation's worship, falling down to worship God themselves, and acknowledging that "God is really among you" (1 Cor 14:26). This dynamic is envisaged by Zechariah, who pictures ten people from every tongue among the nations taking hold of the hem of every Jew's cloak and saying, "We want to go with you, because we have heard that God is with you" (Zech 8:23).

We do not need the NT because otherwise we would not realize that God cares about the whole world nor because Jews who lived before Jesus had not been active in spreading God's revelation. The OT makes God's concern for the whole world clear, and the Jewish people had been attracting others to the revelation in the Scriptures.

Missionally speaking, a major significance of the NT is that it opens a window into the life of a series of Christian congregations and helps us see the nature of the congregational life that commends the gospel. But the OT makes clear the problem the church still faces. We have noted that Paul speaks to the Corinthians about the importance of learning from Israel's story. Another facet of that importance appears here. God's strategy was that his people would be the magnet that attracts others to him. Israel was not very good at being such a magnet. The church continues to have this problem.

THEOLOGY

Do we need the NT because we would not otherwise have as true a revelation of God?

Is it the case that the OT gives the impression that Yahweh is a God of wrath and that we need Jesus to demonstrate that God is a God of love? This is a popular understanding but one difficult to reconcile with either Testament. It is not a Jewish view; Jews do not get the impression from their Scriptures that Yahweh is a God of wrath. Of course Yahweh is capable of acting in wrath, but the relationship

of love and wrath in Yahweh is well summed up in a line from the middle of Lamentations. Yahweh does not willingly afflict or hurt people, as translations commonly have it (Lam 3:33). More literally, Lamentations says Yahweh does not afflict or hurt people from his heart. Yahweh's heart is compassion and mercy. It fits with the fact that the NT does not say, "You know the Scriptures give people the impression that God is a God of wrath? Well, we can now tell you that God is a God of love."

The NT does not speak in terms of new things about God not stated in the OT. It does not describe people such as the Pharisees or Jesus' disciples as having a false or incomplete understanding of God. It does not disclose things about God they did not know. It does not picture the Pharisees or the disciples responding with horror or surprise at things Jesus says about God. The NT does not invite the reaction, "Oh, we could never have known God was like that, but now it is revealed to us."

Some NT texts have been read that way, but such an interpretation does not bear up under examination. For instance, John says the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). He hardly means that Moses did not know about God being grace and truth. That very phrase sums up God's self-revelation to Moses in Exod 34:6, which is then evoked repeatedly in the OT. The King James Version (among others) has the very words "gracious" and "truth" as part of its translation of the verse.

Grace and truth came through Moses; he taught Israel that these realities were the foundation of God's relationship with them, or rather Moses reaffirmed that point (Abraham knew it already). But Moses was not himself an embodiment of grace and truth, as Jesus was. Jesus was the very incarnation of God. He was grace and truth on two legs walking around Galilee and Jerusalem. As John goes on, "no one has ever seen God, but a one and only son, God, who is close to the father's heart, he has given an account of him" (John 1:18).

Being one who embodies grace and truth and being God's only son and being one who can give an account of God, Jesus *is* himself divine. He did not offer a new revelation of God, but he did provide people with an unprecedentedly vivid embodiment of the revelation they already had. The gift the NT gives is its story of God's known character embodied in someone visible, embodied in a concrete life.

The same insight emerges from the beginning of Hebrews. "God, having spoken in many different forms and in many different ways of old to our ancestors through the prophets, at the end of these days spoke to us through a son" (Heb 1:1-2). Hebrews' point is not that God has now said something different or something additional over against what he said through the Prophets. It is that the different revelations given through the different Prophets have now been embodied altogether in this one person.

This embodiment means that the NT does indeed make the metaphysical questions about God more complicated. God is one; Jesus is divine; Jesus address-

es the Father, so he is in some sense a different person from the Father; the spirit of God or of Jesus brings the real presence of God or Jesus to people. These facts in due course led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

What did the doctrine of the Trinity add to our knowledge of God? Suppose by another thought experiment we project ourselves back into the position of believers in OT times, or believers living on the eve of Jesus' birth—people such as Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon. What did they lack by not knowing about the Trinity? They knew God was powerful and loving and just. They knew he was a reality in their lives. They heard him speak. They knew they could pray to him. When the NT speaks of God as our Father, it does not give the impression it is inviting Jews to think about God in a way that would have seemed novel. It does not seem that Israel missed out too much by not knowing about the Trinity.

Now I accept the doctrine of the Trinity; I say the creed every Sunday without any mental reservation. Yet I am not inclined to say it is a NT truth. Rather, its importance lies in the way it safeguards those truths the NT does imply. The importance of the doctrine of the Trinity does not lie in what it reveals. Indeed, I am not clear it reveals anything.

In making that statement, I go against a trend in Systematics. If you ask how the Trinity is positively significant for us, then a standard contemporary answer in the West is that it establishes the presence of relationality in God and of free collaboration within God. But those statements are inferences from the doctrine of the Trinity, contextual inferences that became important to Western thinkers in the late twentieth century because of our concern about relationality, which issues from relationality being a problem to us. It is not a truth that comes from the NT as opposed to the OT.

SPIRITUALITY

Do we need the NT because without it, we would not know how to relate to God or how to pray or how spirituality works?

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with a prophetic summary of the dynamics of life with God. He tells people it is all right to be crushed and to be longing for God's righteous purpose to be fulfilled; God is going to respond to that longing. Jesus sees people who are crushed and mourning as being in the kind of position out of which people pray in the Psalms, and in response, he speaks like a prophet.

Most of the wording in the Beatitudes starts from the Psalms and Isaiah. It is therefore not surprising that Ephesians 5 bids people to be filled with the Spirit and to speak to one another in *psalms* and hymns and spiritual songs—which at least includes the scriptural Psalms. Nor is it surprising that the praise of heaven as Revelation describes it looks very much like the praise of the Psalms.

Prayer in Revelation also looks like prayer in the Psalms. In Revelation 6, John sees the martyrs under the altar in heaven. (There is an altar in heaven because heaven is the heavenly temple, and a temple has an altar.) The martyrs are praying in the way people pray in the Psalms, crying out and asking how long it is going to be before the Lord judges and takes revenge for their blood from the people on earth.

It might seem the appropriate Christian response to their prayer would be to tell them that because they live after Christ, they ought not to be praying this way; this was a way of praying that was perhaps tolerable before Christ, but is hardly acceptable any longer. Instead, the Lord gives each a white robe and does not rebuke them except by telling them to wait a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters have been killed as they have been.

Events later in Revelation constitute the fulfillment of that promise within the vision. When we were young, we may have been told God answers prayer by saying yes, no, or wait. On this occasion, we might have thought God would answer “No,” but actually he gives the answer: “Yes, but wait.” Apparently it is still fine to pray for one’s attackers to be punished.

So the NT affirms the ways of worshiping and praying that appear in the OT. Does it add anything to them? When Ephesians urges people to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, one can assume it includes the Psalms in the Psalter, but one can also assume that it does not confine its reference to them.

At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke includes two songs of praise by Mary and Zechariah, which would seem to count as hymns or spiritual songs. Even more than the praise in Revelation, they constitute praise of a kind one finds in the Psalms, in this case praise that bases itself on what God is now doing afresh. As is appropriate in the context, they most resemble thanksgiving psalms or testimony psalms, as one may easily call them.

Like all such psalms, they recount what God has just done for the person praying, reaffirm truths about God that have been newly demonstrated, express confidence for the future in light of what God has done and assume that what God has done for the worshiper is of significance for others in building faith and hope. Like some examples of this kind of praise in the Psalms, they praise God for having done what God has actually not yet done but has made a commitment to doing; because God has made that commitment, the deed is as good as done.

When Jesus gives the disciples what we call the Lord’s Prayer, one might ask whether he intends people to repeat his words or take the prayer as a pattern. The answer seems to be that it has both significances. The same is true of the Psalms. They are meant for us to pray; they are also a pattern for prayer. What the NT adds is examples of people taking up the pattern in their own prayer and praise.

When I listen to Christians pray, I hear little evidence of our praying being shaped by Scripture. We could do worse than to learn from the Psalms, along with other prayers in the OT, in Lamentations, Ezra-Nehemiah, and elsewhere.

ETHICS

Finally, do we need the NT because it lays before us a higher ethical ideal than that of the OT?

Jesus himself suggests three hermeneutical clues for understanding the significance of the OT. One comes in a response to a question about this very subject. If you want to understand the Torah and the Prophets, he says, you need to see them all as being dependent on the commands in the Torah to love God and love one's neighbor (Matt 22:40).

Augustine, in his book *On Christian Doctrine* (4.36), thus declared that the proper test of interpretation is whether it builds up this twofold love. The entirety of the Torah and the Prophets is an outworking of these two commands.

It is often difficult for us to see the Torah and the Prophets this way when we see Moses laying down a puzzling rule about not boiling a kid goat in its mother's milk or Joshua telling Israel to slaughter the Canaanites. Yet Jesus sees the Torah and the Prophets this way, and keeping his twofold principle in mind illuminates our reading of them. How does this or that command work towards the twofold love? The implication is that if you want to know what love is, read the Torah and the Prophets.

A second comment by Jesus helps show why some of those commands are puzzling. Jesus is responding to a question. Is divorce permissible, and if not, why did Moses presuppose it is? A command like this one, Jesus says, was given because of people's hard hearts, even though it does not fit with God's creation intent (Matt 19:8). One can see how Moses' command is an expression of love. Given that we fail to live up to God's creation intent, it would not be an act of love for God then simply to say, "Well, you're on your own now."

In particular, in a patriarchal society, it would not be an act of love to leave a woman who has been thrown out by her husband without any documentation of her marital status. So the Torah requires that she be given such documentation. Much of the Torah, then, starts where people are in their sinfulness.

The NT does the same. Although the OT talks about slavery, Middle-Eastern slavery was not an inherently oppressive institution such as that of the slavery accepted under the Roman Empire and then by Britain and the United States. It would be better to call Middle-Eastern slavery "servitude." The Torah places constraints on such servitude, but the NT places no constraints on slavery. It shrugs its shoulders at this aspect of human hardheartedness. A third comment by Jesus comes at the beginning of Matthew, though I refer to it last because it is more difficult to interpret. Jesus comes not to annul the Torah or the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). What does the word mean in this context? Elsewhere in the NT "fulfilling" the law means obeying it, and Jesus indeed embodies the expectations of the Torah and the Prophets. This understanding fits the immediate con-

text of his words in Matthew 5. Yet what he goes on to say in that chapter may point in another direction.

While English translations use the technical-sounding word “fulfill,” Matthew uses the ordinary Greek word for “fill.” We have noted that when the NT speaks about fulfilling prophecy, it does not mean that the event in question simply corresponds to the prophecy. One might see it more as filling out or filling up. In Matthew 5, it would make sense to think of Jesus filling out the expectations of the Torah and the Prophets, working out their implications.

The command about loving enemies provides a convenient example. “You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’” (Matt 5:43). No command in the OT or in the Jewish teaching of Jesus’ day exhorts to hate one’s enemy. There are of course expressions of hatred towards enemies in the Torah and the Prophets; but then, there are examples in the NT. Jesus himself tells people to hate their family (Luke 14:26), whereas the OT never tells people to hate anyone. Indeed, Jesus is the only person in the Bible who tells people to hate other people.

Further, the OT gives examples of people loving their enemies, and when it tells people to love their neighbor (Lev 19:18), the context makes clear that the neighbor they are being bidden to love is the neighbor who is their enemy. (People hardly need to be told to love the neighbor they get on with.) Jesus is making explicit something implicit in the commandment. One could say he is fulfilling or filling out or filling up the Law by making explicit what the command implies, as well as by obeying it. Thus other Jewish teachers in Jesus’ day could have accepted his teaching on the subject as an exposition of Scripture. There was nothing shocking about it.

Jesus indeed puts radical demands before people, but so did Isaiah and so does Proverbs, for instance. Jesus puts radical demands before people because he is a prophet and because he is the embodiment of wisdom. What he said could have scandalized people, but not because it went against what the OT said or because they could not have found it in the OT if they had looked with open hearts.

Jesus makes statements that no prophet could have made, but these are statements such as the “I am” declarations in John’s Gospel. They relate to his being the incarnate one and the Savior. His teaching about behavior relates to his being a prophet and a wise man.

CONCLUSION

Yes, of course, we need the New Testament, but what the church needs to see is that the New Testament does not supersede the Old. We need the Old Testament for an understanding of the story of God’s working out his purpose, for its theology, for its spirituality, for its hope, for its understanding of mission, for its understanding of salvation, and for its ethics. **ScJ**