

Why Christians Should Know the Torah

Daniel Botkin

"Why should I study the Old Testament Law?" some Christians ask. "I'd rather read the New Testament. I occasionally read in Psalms or Proverbs, maybe something from the Prophets once in a great while. But the Law? I don't see any point in studying that. I'll concentrate on studying the New Testament."

Studying the New Testament is certainly very important. No question about that. But it is for this very reason that studying the Old Testament Law is also very important, because much of the New Testament cannot be correctly understood without a knowledge of the Torah. One of several passages where this vital truth is revealed is in a parenthetical remark that Paul makes. In his letter to the Romans, Paul is explaining theological doctrine to his readers. In the midst of his explanation Paul makes a parenthetical remark: "(for I speak to them that know the law)" (Rom. 7:1).

When words are enclosed in parentheses, it often means that the words are of minor importance. Not in this case, though. Think of the importance of Paul's parenthetical remark. If Paul is addressing his teachings to people who know the Law, what does that imply about people who do *not* know the Law? Paul's parenthetical remark is an "oh-by-the-way" remark: "Oh, and by the way, let me point out to you that this information I'm sharing is intended for people who are familiar with the Torah. If you don't know the Torah, I'm not speaking to you, because I speak to them that know the law."

We can conclude from Paul's remark that a person who does not know the Law is very likely to misunderstand Paul, because Paul's teachings, and indeed all of the New Testament writings, presuppose a familiarity with the contents of the

*"(for I speak
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Romans 7:1

Torah. The writers of the New Testament were writing to people who were very familiar with the Old Testament. This can be seen from the way that the New Testament writers quoted extensively from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms. It is quite obvious that they assumed their readers would be people who knew the Torah.

I have had Christian friends admit to me that they know very, very little about the content of the Old Testament Law. And these are not baby Christians; these are people who have been saved and in church for over 25 years. They admit that they do not know the Law, and yet they think they understand the New Testament, even though Paul and the other New Testament writers were addressing their teachings to them that know the Law.

Knowing the Law is a prerequisite to correctly understanding the New Testament Scriptures. Trying to understand the New Testament without a knowledge of the Old Testament Law is like trying to understand complex algebraic formulas without a knowledge of basic math. It is like trying to build a house without a knowledge of basic carpentry skills. It is like trying to farm a few hundred acres without a knowledge of basic agriculture. You do not need to understand the complexities of rabbinic and Talmudic law, but you do

need to "know the [written] law." You must be familiar with the contents of the Torah and have a basic understanding of it if you want to correctly understand the New Testament.

The Bible consists of four parts: the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament. The first three parts make up the Old Testament; the fourth and final part is the New Testament. Suppose you had written a play consisting of four acts. You give a copy of the script to a friend. Your friend reads Act 4, but pretty much ignores Act 1, Act 2, and Act 3. He just flips through some of the pages of Acts 1 through 3 and skims over a few bits and pieces of the text that catch his attention. He gains only a very scant knowledge of that which is written in Act 1, Act 2, and Act 3. And yet your friend assures you that he understands the play you have written, because he has read the final act of the play. What would you think of your friend's assumption? What do you suppose the Lord thinks of Christians who claim to understand the New Testament even though they have only a very scant knowledge of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings of the Old Testament? Q

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