

St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Minot, ND  
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# The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflictive World

Acts 8:25-40

Many people read the Bible; many people do not understand what they are reading. The reason why? If one does not read the Bible with the lens of Christ, one will miss the central message of the Bible. Indeed, we must realize that Christ is not only the center of the Bible but, as God's eternal Word, the actual author of all of Scripture.

Take the Ethiopian Eunuch as an example. He was reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, yet he needed Philip to guide him. The Eunuch read the Old Testament scriptures but did not know whom it applied to. Thus, Philip had to speak to the Eunuch about the Gospel – Jesus. Without Jesus, the Bible is like an incomplete puzzle. Without Jesus, the Bible is like an unfinished painting.

And so, if one reads the Bible without the realization and context of Christ, one is not actually reading the Bible. Alas! Think of all the wasted ink

in books, wasted preaching, and wasted teaching from zealots who teach the Bible without Christ!

Using this opportunity, let us consider the guidelines for interpreting the Old Testament.

Taking our cue from Irenaeus and Chrysostom, (*i.e., two really smart Christian Fathers from long ago,*) we can liken the Old Testament to a painting which God is sketching on the canvass of history. As long as the painting is incomplete, it can be developed in various ways—that is, it is open to various interpretations. But when the painting has received its definitive shape and hues with New Testament teachings about a first and second coming of Christ, the ambiguity inherent in the Old Testament is resolved. Now every part of the Old Testament must be seen in its relation to the complete picture; every part must be seen in its relation to Jesus Christ.

And so, Jesus Christ is the link between the Old

Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament speaks of promises. The New Testament speaks of fulfillment. God's revelation reaches its climax in the New Testament—and this climax is not a new teaching or a new law, but a person, God's own Son.

In writing their Gospel and letters, the New Testament writers did not abandon the Old Testament as if it was irrelevant or not a part of the Christian faith. The New Testament writers deliberately connected their work to the Old Testament. Depending on the criteria used, the number of quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament ranges from 250-600, and the number of allusions from 650-4,000. In addition, the New Testament authors carried forward into the New Testament countless images and concepts from the Old Testament. Clearly, they saw the Old Testament as the book of God's promises, which find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The two testaments are not two books but one! And this conclusion, in turn, leads to the equally fundamental interpretive conclusion that the Old Testament must be interpreted not only in its own context but also in the context of the New Testament. What this means is that every message from the Old Testament must be seen in the light of Jesus Christ. Therefore, one can really understand the Old Testament passages only in the light of the New Testament and its testimony of Christ. But the reverse also holds true; one cannot really understand Jesus Christ until one knows the Old Testament.

### **Questions & Contemplation:**

- 1) If a person loses the central focus of Christ, how can a person read the Bible incorrectly? What are the consequences?
- 2) What do we learn from the following passages? Luke 24:27; Luke 24:44-47; John 1:45; John 5:39; John 5:46; Acts 7:52; Acts 8:34-35; Acts 10:43; Acts 17:2-3; Acts 28:23; Romans 1:1-3; Romans 3:21-22; and Romans 16:25-26.



