

# How Reading the Old Testament Enhances Understanding of the New Testament

**Objective:** One of the most impactful faith journeys any person can take is to read the entire Bible. While it seems like a daunting task, tools like the "The Bible in a Year" podcast or similar reading plans make the task achievable. Many might think, I read the Gospels, why bother reading the Old Testament? Can you understand Jesus if you do not understand his heritage, the history he draws upon, and the spiritual texts he relied upon for his teachings? We hope to encourage interest in the entire story of God, including the Old Testament.

**Song Suggestion:** Faith of our Fathers

## Bible and Catechism Readings: –

### Matthew 17: 1-5

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents\* here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

### Exodus 16:9

Then the LORD said to Moses: "I am going to rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not."

### John 6:30-35

So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

### Catechism 61

The patriarchs, prophets and certain other Old Testament figures have been and always will be honored as saints in all the Church's liturgical traditions.

**Saint:** The prophet Elijah is one of the most interesting and colorful people in the Bible, and God used him during a critical time in Israel's history to oppose a wicked king and bring revival of belief to his people. Elijah was one of the two Old Testament figures to appear, along with Moses, during the transfiguration. Elijah's struggles and successes provide great stories of God's faithfulness.

### Vignette: – 1 Kings 18:20-40 "The Prophets of Baal Defeated"

So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to

us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs[a] of seed. And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

### **Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:**

What stories or figures from the Old Testament do you enjoy reading?

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What is something in the Old Testament that you think more people need to know?

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Is there a book in the Old Testament you don't recommend reading?

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Would you consider reading the entire Bible as a spiritual exercise?

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## Action Plan:

**A How-To Guide:** Finding the Old Testament in the New Testament

### Find *Quotations* from the Old Testament in the New Testament

1. Use a Bible that has footnotes and cross references to the Old Testament.
2. Look up the reference(s) and consider the larger context. Where does it fit in the book? (Consult a Bible commentary to find this answer.) Remember, the biblical authors did not write in verses and chapters, those were added much later. A single verse can actually reference a whole paragraph, psalm, or even an entire book.

### Find *Allusions* and *Echoes* of the Old Testament in the New Testament

1. Allusions and echoes are not always cross referenced. The key to finding allusions and echoes is to read and reread large sections of the Bible at a time so that you get the big picture. Also consider investing in an audio Bible of your favorite translation.
2. As you read and listen to the Bible, take note of any repetition and contrast. Keep in mind that those features do not just happen at the word level. They also occur with related or contrasted concepts. For example, *baptism* is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but *water* is.

### Think about How the Biblical Author Uses the Old Testament

Does the New Testament author's allusion or quotation of the Old Testament suggest continuity or discontinuity? For example, the allusions to water and wilderness in Jesus' baptism and temptation suggest *continuity* with Israel as God's humanity. But Jesus' quotations of Deuteronomy, when He is resisting the devil's temptations, suggest *discontinuity* with faithless Israel who perished in the wilderness.

## Reference:

Beyond Cross References: Old Testament Allusions in the New Testament

<https://www.biblestudymagazine.com/bible-study-magazine-blog/2015/6/18/beyond-cross-references-old-testament-allusions-new-testament>

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