



A CHRISTIAN'S POCKET GUIDE TO

# LOVING

# THE OLD TESTAMENT



A Christian's Pocket Guide to Loving the Old Testament,  
*and Alec Motyer's recent volume Preaching? prove that  
faithful believers 'will still bear fruit in old age—they will stay  
fresh and green.'* (Ps. 92:14) *Why? Because they will continue  
'proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is  
no wickedness in him."* (Ps. 92:15)

Tim Keller  
Senior Pastor,  
Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, New York

*...If the world is still here in a hundred years' time, these  
thrilling pages will still be looked upon as a treasure trove  
among God's faithful people.*

Richard Bewes  
Rector Emeritus,  
All Souls Church, Langham Place, London

*...it is a huge privilege to commend the author of the Pocket  
Guide you now hold in your hand – although, quite frankly,  
his work speaks for itself so well that it does not need me to  
approve it.*

D.A. Carson  
Research Professor of New Testament,  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois

*Now 90, Alec Motyer retains all his old clarity, warmth and  
charm as he shares his infectious affection for, and insight  
into, Jesus's Bible. This is a first-rate get-you-started book.*

J.I. Packer  
Board of Governors' Professor of Theology,  
Regent College, Vancouver, Canada



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# LOVING THE OLD TESTAMENT

ALEC MOTYER

CHRISTIAN  
**FOCUS**







To

Brian Ruff  
Alasdair Paine  
Nick Hiscocks

My successors (to my delight) in ministry at Christ  
Church Westbourne, Bournemouth



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-  Warning
-  Don't Forget
-  Stop and Think
-  Point of Interest





## FOREWORD

*Tim Keller*



Approximately forty years ago, during the summer between my undergraduate college years and seminary, I was working and living with my parents in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. One evening I drove over the mountains down into a long valley in the midst of the Laurel Highlands and came eventually to the Ligonier Valley Study Center, just outside the little Western Pennsylvania hamlet of Stahlstown, where R.C. Sproul was hosting at his regular weekly Question and Answer session a British Old Testament scholar, J. Alec Motyer. As a still fairly new Christian, I found the Old Testament to be a confusing and off-putting part of the Bible.

I will always remember his answer to a question about the relationship of Old Testament Israel to the church



(I can't remember if R.C. posed it to him or someone from the audience). After saying something about the discontinuities, he insisted that we were all one people of God. Then he asked us to imagine how the Israelites under Moses would have given their 'testimony' to someone who asked for it. They would have said something like this:

We were in a foreign land, in bondage, under the sentence of death. But our mediator—the one who stands between us and God—came to us with the promise of deliverance. We trusted in the promises of God, took shelter under the blood of the lamb, and he led us out. Now we are on the way to the Promised Land. We are not there yet, of course, but we have the law to guide us, and through blood sacrifice we also have his presence in our midst. So he will stay with us until we get to our true country, our everlasting home.

Then Dr Motyer concluded: 'Now think about it. A Christian today could say the same thing, almost word for word.'

My young self was thunderstruck. I had held the vague, unexamined impression that in the Old Testament people were saved through obeying a host of detailed laws but that today we were freely forgiven and accepted by faith. This little thought experiment showed me, in a stroke, not only that the Israelites had been saved by grace and that God's salvation had been by costly atonement and grace all along, but also that the pursuit of holiness, pilgrimage, obedience, and deep community should characterize Christians as well.

Not long after this I heard a series of lectures by Edmund P. Clowney on the importance of ministers

always preaching Christ, even when they are preaching from the Old Testament. Dr Motyer's little bombshell and Ed Clowney's lectures started me on a lifetime quest to preach Christ and the gospel every time I expound a Biblical text. They are, in a sense, the fathers of my preaching ministry.

While I believe I have read and used all of Dr Motyer's published works over the course of my life, three of his books were transformative to my ministry in particular. In my early days as a preacher his commentary on Amos, sub-titled 'The Day of the Lion', was a huge help to me as I struggled for the first time to expound the minor prophets. That work showed me God's emphasis on social justice and righteousness, a standard he applied not only to his own covenant people but also to the nations around them.

The second intervention came a couple of decades later, when I was convicted about the shallowness of my prayer life. In response, I began to dig into the Psalms, and the two resources I relied on were Derek Kidner's Tyndale commentary and Alec Motyer's brief but luminous treatment of the Psalms in the *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. Dr Motyer's compact description of the psalmists—that they were people who knew far less about God than we do, yet loved him a great deal more—is a crucial guide for interpreting the anguished cries, shouts of praise, and declarations of love we meet in God's own Prayer Book. It is clear at some points that we are reading authors who were writing about God's salvation before the 'fullness of time' had come and the

Cross laid bare God's plan for saving the world. And yet the psalmists—with their less granular understanding of the outworkings of it all—did indeed grasp the gospel of salvation by grace, substitutionary atonement, and faith. Across the 150 psalms we see virtually every human condition and emotion set before God and transfigured by prayer. The authors' love for God convicts, uplifts, and instructs us as nothing else can. Through Motyer and Kidner I was ushered into a new stage in my journey toward fellowship with God.

Finally, a few years ago I tackled a series of sermons expounding the book of Exodus mainly because I saw that Dr Motyer had produced *The Message of Exodus* in 2005. It did not disappoint and became my main go-to resource for the series.

This book, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to Loving the Old Testament*, and his recent volume *Preaching? Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching* prove that faithful believers 'will still bear fruit in old age—they will stay fresh and green.' (Ps. 92:14) Why? Because they will continue 'proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'" (Ps. 92:15)

*Tim Keller,  
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August, 2014*



## PREFACE



The title of this small book expresses exactly where I am today, nearly nine decades since my grandmother introduced me to the wonderful stories of the Old Testament. The love of the Bible, not least the Old Testament, which she shared with me has been the ‘story line’ of my life. Privilege and delight, therefore, came together when I was asked to offer three lectures under the title ‘Loving the Old Testament’ at ‘The Bible by the Beach’ conference in 2012 AD.

Those lectures have now been given a new lease of life in this book.

1. Everything has, of course, been re-written. It is only in the case of very rare and exceptional speakers that the spoken word can be transferred,
- 



without alteration, to paper. The two forms of communication—speech and writing—demand different treatment. What can be sketched out in a lecture needs to be spelled out on paper; the speaker’s repetitions, so necessary in order to give hearers time to listen, are tedious in print. Likewise, most illustrations, even if effective in a sermon, are rarely more than banal when written down. Everything has to be filtered through a different lens for the new medium.

2. The three lectures have now become fourteen chapters—for two reasons: first, in the hope of making the material more easily digestible in distinct ‘bites’; and secondly, because the exercise of writing exposed the need to introduce topics that did not feature in the lectures at all, or to expand some that did.

I have enjoyed the work of re-presenting the lectures, and I hope you will enjoy reading the result. Long ago we used to sing, in what I fear may be a by-gone hymn: ‘Teach me to love your sacred Word, and view my Saviour there.’ It applies equally to the Old Testament as to the New; it is my prayer for myself day by day: it is my prayer for you as you read my book.

Alec Motyer





# 1

## BEGIN HERE!

The Bible is God's gift to us as a domestic and personal 'means of grace'. Just as the Lord's Supper is a corporate 'means of grace' at which the Lord ministers to his believing children his promises of eternal salvation, and assures us of our 'interest' in them, so, day by day, in the family and in the privacy of personal times of devotion, we open his holy Word, hear his voice, learn his truth, delight in his presence, embrace his promises, and re-commit ourselves to the life of the obedience of faith.

It is a particularly lovely thing to take up an attitude of prayer as we hear the Word of God so that we can move straight from the Scriptures to talk to our Heavenly





Father, to the Lord Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit, bringing before him the truth he has just imparted, turning it to prayer, praise, adoration, thanksgiving and intercession.

So will you take up an attitude of readiness for prayer as you read the Word of God as it is written in Psalm 19, a Psalm of David. The Word of God says;

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. The testimony of the Lord is reliable, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgements of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:7-11).

Lovely words in Psalm 19, are they not? We could go on reading them over and over again and pondering them. Delightful words! But just look at verse 10 again. That will do for now. 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, honey flowing from the comb.'

#### INTRINSIC RICHES; EXPERIENCED DELIGHT

'More to be desired than gold'—that's the intrinsic value of the Word of God. Intrinsic—the value that is there; the value that inheres in the Word of God—gold and fine gold in abundance. You know that the Psalms have come to us in Hebrew. If we were to open up the translation of verse 10 just a fraction—not paraphrasing but opening up



the meaning that is there, we'd say 'More to be desired than gold, yes, and deservedly so.' This is the intrinsic value of the Word of God.

But then alongside the intrinsic value there is the experienced value—'sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.' Do you like honey? The experienced value of the Word of God—honey flowing out of the honeycomb for our delectation and enjoyment, tasting the sweetness of it on our tongues and palates. What a beautiful description of the Word of God, and, please God, one well known to you and me in personal experience, when the pure gold God has infused into his Word becomes the pure honey of our delight! Very often it may be an old truth, already well known but suddenly alive with fresh vigour and tastiness; it may be a new truth or a new emphasis but in it and with it the fresh honey is flowing from the comb.

#### THE GOLDMINE; THE HONEYCOMB

Now do something very obvious, tell yourself where this verse is in the Bible—Psalm 19, yes, and where, pray, is Psalm 19? It's not part of the Book of Revelation, looking back over the whole book of Scripture. It's not part of what we call the New Testament, where the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ would lead us to expect the finest gold and the purest honey. It's bang in the middle of what we call the Old Testament, and it says about the Old Testament that it has greater intrinsic value than much fine gold and greater sweetness in experience than fresh honey flowing out of the honeycomb. And I say

for myself, 'Lord, make your Word like that to me. And particularly this larger bit of our Bibles, the bit at the beginning that we call the Old Testament—make it to me the purest of gold, the sweetest of honey.

*Some Old Testament references to the Word of God:*

Read Ezekiel 2:8–3:4 and note how this 'illustrative experience' underlines (1) the completeness of God's Word as given, 2:10a, written on both sides, leaving no room for addition; (2) the clarity of its contents, 2:10b, pointing to the ability of the word to make itself plain to the reader; (3) Its inherent nourishment, 2:8; 3:1, 3a; (4) how 'palatable' it is to those who feed on it, 3:3b; cf. Jer. 15:16; (5) Its effectiveness as a 'tool' for ministry, 3:4—NB (NKJV) 'with', i.e., 'by means of'. The Word is the



**Seven titles for the Word of God from Psalm 1 (NKJV):**

- 'law' = 'teaching', the word to instruct (v. 1);
- 'testimonies', what God 'testifies to' as his truth and the truth about himself, the word to reveal (v. 2);
- 'ways', the word as the guide to characteristic life-style (v. 3);
- 'precepts', the word as instruction for the details of daily life (v. 4);
- 'statutes', from the verb 'to engrave', the word in its permanency, engraven in the rock (v. 5);
- 'commandments', the word given by God for our obedience (v. 6);
- 'judgments'—as of the authoritative pronouncements of a judge; the word expressing what the Lord himself has 'decided upon' as truth to hold and life to live (v. 7).



only weapon given to Ezekiel to deal with the inveterate hard-heartedness of his audience (2:7).

Genesis 1:3, 6–7, etc. refer to the Word in Creation, to its creative power and control (cf. Ps. 33:6; 147:15; 148:5).

Isaiah 40:6–8 speaks of the enduring Word.

The psalmist extols its purity (Ps. 12:6); it demands purity in those who would use it (Jer. 15:19).

