

12. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Part 5: Application – “Why does the passage matter?”

How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament

Jason S. DeRouchie, PhD

Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology

Bethlehem College & Seminary

Elder, Bethlehem Baptist Church

Spring 2019

Goal: Apply the text to yourself, the church, and the world, stressing the centrality of Christ and the hope of the gospel.

1. God Gave the OT to Instruct Christians.

- a. NT reflections on the main audience of OT instruction (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:15–17; 1 Pet 1:10–12).

- b. OT reflections on the main audience of OT instruction
 - Moses (Deut 9:6–7; 29:2–4; 30:6, 8; 18:15)

 - Isaiah (Isa 29:9–11, 18; 30:8)

 - Jeremiah (Jer 30:2–3, 24–31:1, 33)

 - Daniel (Dan 12:4, 8–10)

- c. NT reflections on Christ as the key to understanding the OT
 - Israel’s inability to grasp the Scriptures (John 5:39–40; Rom 11:7–8; 2 Cor 3:14)

 - Jesus’s person and work reveals the mystery (Mark 4:11–12; Rom 16:25–26; John 2:20–22; 12:13–16).

2. General Guidelines for Applying the Old Testament

Exod 19:4–6. You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

a. Establish the original application.

- *Identify the audience of the application.*
 - Does the passage target individuals, groups, or institutions? If such differentiation cannot be made, why not?
 - If the object is individuals, what kind (e.g., believing remnant or faithless rebel, parents or children, powerful or weak)?
 - If the object is a group, what kind (e.g., community of faith, a nation, clergy, a profession)?

- *List the external life issues of application.*
 - What aspects of life is the passage most concerned with?
 - What do we encounter that is similar to or at least closely related to what the passage deals with?
 - Is the application directed toward matters that are more interpersonal in nature?
 - Is the concern social, economic, religious, spiritual, familial, financial, or something else?
 - Does the passage relate directly to the people's relationship with God?

- *Clarify the nature of the application.*
 - Does the passage inform the mind, supplying faith, or direct the will, giving instruction?
 - Does it supply more an indicative or an imperative?
 - Does it speak more to the heart or the hands?

- *Determine the time focus of the application.*
 - Does the passage call for present faith or action?
 - Does it look back to something in the past or ahead to something in the future?

- *Fix the limits of the application.*
 - Is the passage primary or does it function more as background or support?
 - Is the passage part of a larger passage that suggests a clearer application than your passage does on its own?
 - Does the passage call for a response that could be misunderstood or taken too far?
 - In what ways does passage apply?

- *Summary for Exod 19:4–6:*
 - The text supplies a synthesis of the old covenant by addressing the nation of Israel’s redemption and life-calling in relation to the world.
 - It explicitly informs but also implicitly directs, calling for action and motivating this call by the promise of global impact.
 - The words target every member of the community and address surrender to Yahweh that impacts every facet of life in every present and future generation.

b. Determine the theological significance of the passage.

- Clarify what the passage tells us about *God* (character, desires, values, concerns, standards) and his *ways* (actions and purposes in redemption).

- Assess how Christ’s fulfillment of the OT impacts our application of the passage.
 - Questions:
 - a) Does the passage speak directly to old covenant structure that get transformed in the new?
 - b) How has the progress of salvation history influenced how we hear and may apply this text?
 - c) How does the passage anticipate Jesus’s life and work, the church age, or the consummation?
 - d) Does the text express time-bound or culturally bound elements that can no longer relate to us on this side of the cross?
 - e) Does the NT quote or allude to the particular text in a way that clarifies its lasting value for Christians?

 - How does Christ fulfill Exod 19:4–6?
 - a) The exodus from Egypt typologically anticipated a greater, more universal second exodus from sin that Jesus himself embodies (Isa 11:10–12, 16; Luke 9:30–31).
 - b) Christ fulfilled the charge of this text as the perfect royal priest, bringing us to God and empowering us to serve him (Rom 5:18–19; Heb 4:15; 2 Cor 5:21).

c) Christ now empowers us to magnify God as he has (2 Cor 3:18; 1 Pet 2:9).

c. Summarize the lasting significance of the passage for today.