



HOW TO

# Teach the Old Testament to Christians

Discover How to Unpack  
All of Scripture  
for Today's Believers

**T. J. Betts**

THOM S. RAINER, SERIES EDITOR

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# Preface

THE INTENTION OF THIS SMALL BOOK is to help Bible teachers preach and teach the Old Testament in the local church, to help Christians understand its historical and theological context, and to interpret the Old Testament through the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

The largest portion of the book covers what the Old Testament is and why we should teach it in the church today. The reason for this is simple. I'm convinced that only when we have the right motivation to do something will we do it with fervor and diligence.

When we correctly understand what the Old Testament is and why the church desperately needs to know its contents, we will appreciate the privilege and experience the joy of preparing and teaching it to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I guarantee you will be blessed by significantly incorporating the Old Testament as part of your ongoing ministry. Those you disciple who deeply desire to grow in their knowledge of Christ and live according to his precepts will forever be grateful for your efforts.

## **What Is the Old Testament?**

Before addressing the question of why believers should study, preach, and teach the Old Testament, it's fitting to first answer the question "What is the Old Testament?" The answer may seem obvious, but it provides a foundation for everything else.

### ***The Scriptures***

What Christians today call the Old Testament, Jesus and the New Testament writers referred to as "the Scriptures" or "Scripture."

For instance, quoting Psalm 118:22-23, Jesus said, "Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures? 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing, and it is wonderful to see'" (Matthew 21:42).

Also, in Romans 4:3, referring to Genesis 15:6, the apostle Paul writes, "The Scriptures tell us, 'Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.'"

These are just a couple of the approximately fifty times the expressions "the Scriptures" or "Scripture" in the New Testament refer to the Old Testament. Writing to Timothy, Paul also said, "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

From these passages, we can see that the Old Testament is the eternal, inerrant, authoritative Word of God (Psalm 119:160; Isaiah 40:6-8; 1 Peter 1:24-25). It was the Bible that both Jesus and the early church used.

### ***Three sections***

In New Testament times, believers understood the Old Testament to have three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Law contains the first five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The section called the Prophets has two parts, the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The books of the Former Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and the books of the Latter Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), sometimes called the Minor Prophets today—because these books are short compared to the other books of the Prophets, not because they are less important or have less of an impact.

The books contained in the Writings are Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. With this arrangement, in Jesus' day, the Old Testament consisted of twenty-four books.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples just after his resurrection, he alluded to this threefold arrangement of the Scriptures, saying, “‘When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45). In this instance, Jesus used the largest book of the Writings, Psalms, to represent that section. Jesus did this with the Latter Prophets when he referred to that section as the writing of “the prophet Isaiah” and then quoted from both its last book, Malachi, and its first book, Isaiah, respectively in Mark 1:2-3.

The Old Testament as we find it today follows the structure and order of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint (LXX), which divides some of the books thematically. For instance, what might be a single book of Samuel is divided in two—1 Samuel is mostly about King Saul, and 2 Samuel is mostly about King David. It also divided the Twelve

into individual books. Additionally, the Septuagint changed the order from the tripartite Hebrew canon. As first compiled, the Old Testament loosely followed a more thematic organization; what we have today, at least from Genesis to Esther, is arranged more chronologically.

Be that as it may, even though the content is the same, today our Old Testament has thirty-nine books with four or five sections according to how one treats the prophetic books. The divisions are the books of law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy); the books of history (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther); the books of poetry and wisdom (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs); and the prophetic books, which may be subdivided into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets, a division based on the length of the books (Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel; and Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).

So the Old Testament is the collection of thirty-nine books that make up the Law, History, Wisdom, and the Prophets.

### *Human writers*

The Old Testament was written and composed by about forty human authors, mostly in the language of Hebrew and some in Imperial Aramaic, over about a thousand-year period roughly spanning the mid-second to mid-first millennium BC.

Chronologically, it starts with the narrative in Genesis 1 of how God created all things in the beginning. It ends with the book of Nehemiah, which tells how a remnant of God's covenant people

had returned to their homeland in Judah after seventy years in Babylonian Exile and finally completed the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem in about 445–444 BC.

In summary, the Old Testament is a historical record of God’s act of creation and dealing with his creation, with special attention to his relationship with his covenant people, Israel.

### ***The covenants***

What is a testament? The word *testament* comes from the Latin *testamentum*, and it means “covenant” or “agreement.” Covenants point to the great promises God made in the Scriptures with his people. There is a covenant with Noah, a covenant with Abraham, a covenant with Israel, a covenant with David, and then the new covenant inaugurated by the Lord Jesus Christ. The old covenant refers to the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Israel’s failure to keep this covenant anticipated the new covenant about which the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied. Through his prophet Jeremiah, God declared,

“This is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the LORD. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the LORD. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”

JEREMIAH 31:33-34

Speaking of the new covenant through Ezekiel, God said,

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

EZEKIEL 36:26-27

In the upper room at the Lord's Supper, Jesus pronounced his inauguration of the new covenant in Luke 22:20, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you."

Consequently, the Old Testament anticipates the New Testament, in particular, the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when considering what the Old Testament is, one should recognize that it is not only the first part of God's magnificent story of redemption but also the largest part of it. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, God has revealed his plan of salvation. As God spoke through his prophet Isaiah, he declared, "Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish" (Isaiah 46:10).

Later, we will look more closely at this plan in the discussion concerning understanding the theological context of a passage, but here is a simple overview of the Bible's story of redemption:

1. God created all things.
2. Humanity fell into sin through Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

3. God promised that the woman's seed, or descendant, would crush the head of the serpent. From this, the Old Testament anticipates the coming Messiah, who will rule over all the earth and deal with humanity's sin problem. God used Abraham, Israel, David, and others to this end. This section comprises about two-thirds to three-fourths of the Bible's story of redemption.
4. Much of what is anticipated in the Old Testament is fulfilled with the incarnation of Jesus Christ, his birth, sinless life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father as our advocate and mediator.
5. The church is established and given the mission of spreading the gospel and making disciples.
6. The revelation of a new creation is proclaimed, when God will establish a new heaven and a new earth, and every one of his promises will be fulfilled.

So what is the Old Testament? It is the first thirty-nine books of the Bible, written by about forty human authors, mostly in Hebrew and some in Aramaic. It can be divided into four main sections: the books of the Law, History, Wisdom, and the Prophets. It is a record of the activities of God and his old covenant people, Israel, spanning from Creation to the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon in the mid-fifth century BC. Also, in anticipating the coming of Jesus, it lays the groundwork for God's revelation of his redemptive plan seen throughout the entirety of Scripture. The Old Testament is the eternal, inerrant, authoritative Word of God, and it is with this focus in mind that we will begin our discussion of why to study the Old Testament.



**PART I**

**CONSIDERATIONS WHEN  
TEACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT**

ONE DAY MY HEBREW PROFESSOR IN seminary entered the classroom obviously agitated. After glaring down at his books, he finally looked up at us and said, “I don’t know why I do this, because none of you are going to preach from the Old Testament anyhow.”

Before that, as a young pastor I had not thought much about it, but from then on, I began regularly teaching from the Old Testament. As I did, my congregation and I grew in our appreciation for the Hebrew Scriptures. After ten years, I believed God was calling me to return to seminary so I could teach the Old Testament in higher education and encourage others to teach it as well in their ministries. I hoped my students would discover the richness of its treasures and experience the joy of revealing it to others.

When I told my friends I was returning to seminary, they

understood because they knew my love for God's Word. However, when I told them I was planning to study the Old Testament, they looked befuddled.

"Why the Old Testament?"

Some even asked me, "Why not study something *important*, like the New Testament or theology?" I heard these remarks so many times that I vowed to make sure people knew the answer to "Why the Old Testament?" whenever I had the opportunity.

I began to realize just how neglected the Old Testament is in pulpits and Bible studies in many churches today. In twenty-plus years of teaching a survey of the Old Testament, I've found that about half my students have received little to no significant instruction in the Old Testament before coming to seminary. Many of their pastors will preach through books of the Bible, but rarely if ever through an Old Testament book. I've even had students ask me why New Testament believers should bother with studying the Old Testament.

I have come to realize that when I teach the Old Testament to evangelical Christians, there will be many who have little background in it and others who don't believe there is any value to studying it. Students have indicated to me that before coming into an Old Testament survey class, they really wondered if there was anything they could learn that would be beneficial to them as New Testament believers.

In teaching, everything begins with *what* and *why*. They are entwined. The answer to *what* always leads to *why*. The answer to *why* is grounded in the answer to *what*.

The introduction began with answers to the question "What is the Old Testament?" Now we need to answer why it's essential for believers today to study and know it. A deeper understanding of that answer is necessary to know why we should teach it.

# The Old Testament Is the Word of God

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS MORE THAN THE record of an ancient people, more than just a collection of religious texts, and more than a compilation of wise teachings. It may seem obvious, but when one studies, teaches, or preaches the Old Testament, it's essential to remember that it is the Word of God.

This truth has not always been recognized by everyone throughout the history of the church. For instance, in the mid-second century, Marcion rejected the Old Testament because he believed the malevolent creator “god” (the so-called Demiurge) depicted in the Old Testament, who ordered the slaughter of multitudes of human beings, whose laws were oppressive, and who was generally antagonistic toward people was incompatible with Jesus, the gracious, loving God in the New Testament.

However, this became a problem given that the apostle John

reveals that nothing was created except through Jesus, the Word who was God and became human (John 1:1-4, 14). In fact, most of the New Testament became a problem for Marcion for two reasons: (1) The writings in the New Testament are intricately connected to the Old Testament; and (2) The New Testament authors referred to the Old Testament as the Scriptures, the Word of God.

As a result, Marcion focused on the apostle Paul's writings, especially those that make a distinction between the law in the Old Testament, which to Marcion represented the Old Testament god, and the gospel in the New Testament, which represents the God of compassion and grace. According to Marcion, Jesus came to rescue people from the god of the Old Testament along with his laws and ruthless ways.

To eliminate every reference and allusion to the Old Testament in the New Testament, Marcion's version of the Bible included sections of Paul's writings and a revised version of the Gospel of Luke.

The leaders of the church rejected Marcion's views, understanding that both Testaments are the revelation of the one and only eternal God. They recognized that the God who is the Creator and who revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets in the Old Testament is the same God who has revealed himself in the person and work of Jesus in the New Testament. They also affirmed that the Old Testament is the eternal Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

Even so, many of the issues Marcion had with the Old Testament are shared by people in the church today.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, let's consider what the Old Testament authors, the New Testament authors, and Jesus himself said about the Old Testament.

### **The Old Testament Authors**

In the Old Testament, the authors clearly affirm that they are speaking and recording God's Word.

For example, when the Lord gave his law to Israel, he said to Moses, “Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel” (Exodus 19:3); and when the people of Israel were preparing to enter into the Promised Land, Moses said, “These are the commands, decrees, and regulations that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you” (Deuteronomy 6:1).

Also, Deuteronomy 31:24-26 specifies that when Moses finished writing the Book of Instruction he received from God, he commanded the Levites to place it beside the Ark of the Covenant.

Summarizing the laws, Leviticus 26:46 indicates that “These are the decrees, regulations, and instructions that the LORD gave through Moses on Mount Sinai as evidence of the relationship between himself and the Israelites.”

Moses was only one of many prophets who recorded the Word of God. When Israel rejected the Lord and turned instead to Egypt, God instructed Isaiah, “Now go and write down these words. Write them in a book. They will stand until the end of time as a witness that these people are stubborn rebels who refuse to pay attention to the LORD’s instructions” (Isaiah 30:8-9).

Similarly, Jeremiah 36:1-2 records, “During the fourth year that Jehoiakim son of Josiah was king in Judah, the LORD gave this message to Jeremiah: ‘Get a scroll, and write down all my messages against Israel, Judah, and the other nations. Begin with the first message back in the days of Josiah, and write down every message, right up to the present time.’”

When King Jehoiakim burned the scroll, the Lord gave Jeremiah another message. He said, “Get another scroll, and write everything again just as you did on the scroll King Jehoiakim burned. Then say to the king, ‘This is what the LORD says . . .’” (Jeremiah 36:28-29).

Speaking of God’s prophets, the author of 2 Kings writes,

“Again and again the LORD had sent his prophets and seers to warn both Israel and Judah: ‘Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets’” (2 Kings 17:13).

The Old Testament authors speak of several attributes of the Old Testament that demonstrate it is the Word of God. For instance, Isaiah proclaims, “The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). Also, through his prophet Isaiah, the Lord proclaims, “Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish” (Isaiah 46:10), and that “my word . . . will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it” (Isaiah 55:11).

The psalmist in Psalm 111:7-8 says that the Lord’s “commandments are trustworthy. They are forever true.” The psalmist also declares, “Your eternal word, O LORD, stands firm in heaven. . . . Your regulations remain true to this day, for everything serves your plans” (Psalm 119:89, 91). Accordingly, the Old Testament testifies to its being the eternal Word of God and not obsolete. It will accomplish what God wants to accomplish with it in both the present and the future.

In Psalm 19:7-9, after declaring the majesty of God revealed by all of creation, David delineates several characteristics of God’s Word and its impact on the people of God, using six synonyms referring to various nuances of God’s Word: *perfect*, *trustworthy*, *right*, *clear*, *pure*, and *true*. Though the Hebrew word *torah* at times refers specifically to the legislative material of the Pentateuch, in this context, as often in the Psalms, it seems to refer more generally to all of the written revelation of God’s Word and is therefore translated “the instructions of the LORD” in verse 7.

Let's take a more in-depth look at these attributes of God's Word:

1. God's Word is *perfect*—that is, blameless or without defect. God's perfect Word brings us back from going the wrong way while refreshing, reviving, and restoring our vigor for the abundant life that he intends for us to live (Psalm 19:7).
2. God's Word is *trustworthy*, meaning it has been confirmed to be reliable. The Word of God makes wise those who are inexperienced, naive, and unwittingly headed for trouble (Psalm 19:7).
3. God's Word is altogether *right* and *applicable to all of life*. Therefore, it is a source of extreme joy (Psalm 19:8; see also Jeremiah 15:16).
4. God's Word is *clear*. As a result, it gives *insight* to those who look to it (Psalm 19:8).
5. God's Word is *pure*, and he inspires pure reverence from his people (Psalm 19:9). *Pure* means spotless, without blemish, free from contamination. It is the opposite of defiled, unclean, corrupted, and impure. In Psalm 12:6, David declares that the promises of the Lord “are pure, like silver refined in a furnace, purified seven times over.”

Though the biblical authors never use the word *inerrant*, that the Bible is free from any error is irrefutably inferred, given that it is God's *perfect, trustworthy, right, clear, and pure* revelation of himself.

Declaring that the Scriptures are *inerrant* is stronger than asserting they are *infallible*. In some circles, *infallible* means that the Bible is without error in matters of faith

and theology but not necessarily error-free in all matters. However, as noted above, David's statements in Psalm 12 and 19 under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit clearly establish the inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, just as God is from everlasting to everlasting, so is his inerrant Word (Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; 119:89-90; Isaiah 40:28).

Robert Plummer provides a list of matters one must consider to avoid misunderstanding the inerrancy of the Scriptures:

- a) "Inerrancy applies only to the autographs (original copies of Scripture)."
- b) "Inerrancy respects the authorial intent of the passage and the literary conventions under which the author wrote."
- c) "Inerrancy allows for partial reporting, paraphrasing, and summarizing."
- d) "Inerrancy allows for phenomenological language (that is, the description of phenomena as they are observed and experienced)."
- e) "Inerrancy allows the reporting of speech without the endorsement of the truthfulness of that speech (or the implication that everything else said by that person is truthful)."
- f) "Inerrancy does not mean that the Bible provides definitive or exhaustive information on every topic."
- g) "Inerrancy is not invalidated by colloquial or nonstandard grammar or spelling."<sup>4</sup>

6. God's Word is *true* (Psalm 19:9). It is firm and dependable. Consequently, one can trust it to be just and to uphold righteousness. Numbers 23:19 states, "God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?" The Scriptures are God's revelation of himself and consequently a reflection of his character. Thus, we can trust that what we read in the Bible is true.

Clearly the Old Testament authors understood that their writings and the words they contain are the inerrant Word of God, that their writings would continue to achieve God's purposes for which they were given, and therefore that they would never cease to be the Word of God.

### **The New Testament Authors**

Conservatively, there are two hundred or more quotations of the Old Testament in the 7,957 verses in the New Testament. However, some argue that there are about one thousand allusions to Old Testament passages in the New Testament. If this is accurate, then about one of every eight verses in the New Testament refers in some way to the Old Testament. Even so, did the authors of the New Testament demonstrate a conviction that the Old Testament is the Word of God?

The New Testament writers referred to the Old Testament as "Scripture" or "the Scriptures," using the Greek word *graphē*, which literally means "a writing." It reveals they understood that the Old Testament is the Word of God.

Matthew demonstrates this in his Gospel. In Matthew 26:56, he affirms that the writings of the prophets are "recorded in the Scriptures."

Luke does this as well. When Jesus met a couple of his disciples on their way to Emmaus shortly after Jesus' crucifixion, Luke writes, "Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The two disciples Jesus spoke with referred to the writings of Moses and all the prophets as the Scriptures also (Luke 24:32). Then when Jesus later met with his disciples, Luke equates what Jesus taught about himself "in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms" as the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

The apostle John picked up on this regarding Jesus' resurrection indicating, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said" (John 2:22).

James and Peter also refer to the Old Testament as Scripture. Quoting Leviticus 19:18, James writes, "It is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (James 2:8). James most likely calls it "the royal law" because Jesus also quoted this verse as being one of the two most important verses of the entire law in the Old Testament (Matthew 22:36-40). Furthermore, James quotes Genesis 15:6, declaring it as fulfilled Scripture (James 2:23). James 4:6 also quotes Proverbs 3:34: "As the Scriptures say, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" And Peter recognizes as Scripture Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messiah, when he quotes Isaiah 28:16 in 1 Peter 2:6.

What's more, though the book of Hebrews doesn't use the word *Scriptures*, the author's arguments and exhortations are thoroughly entrenched with Old Testament motifs such as the sacrifices and priesthood. Along with the books of James and Revelation, Hebrews sounds much like an Old Testament book

in places—including right from the beginning: “Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets.” (Hebrews 1:1).

The apostle Paul also refers to the Old Testament as Scripture or the Scriptures. For example, in Romans 1:2, he refers to the Prophets as part of “the holy Scriptures.” In Romans 4:3, as Paul declares that salvation is by faith and not by works, he quotes Genesis 15:6 as “the Scriptures” declaring, “For the Scriptures tell us, ‘Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.’”

In Romans 9:17, the apostle references the Pharaoh in Egypt who opposed Moses in Exodus 9:16 and calls this passage “the Scriptures.” In Galatians 4:30, speaking of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 21, Paul calls this passage “the Scriptures.” These examples show that Paul understood that the Old Testament is the Word of God.

Paul not only calls the Old Testament the Scriptures or Scripture, but he also reveals that “all Scripture is inspired by God” in 2 Timothy 3:16. The literal translation of the word rendered “inspired” is “God-breathed” or “breathed out by God,” indicating that the Scriptures, all of the books of the Old Testament along with the New Testament writings existing at that time, were produced by God’s breath and are therefore from God. The words in the Old Testament are God’s words.

In 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter makes a similar declaration concerning Old Testament prophecy, stating that “you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.”

When contemplating the meaning of the inspiration of Scripture, it is prudent to clarify the difference between the terms

*revelation* and *inspiration*. *Revelation* refers to how God discloses or reveals himself—who he is and what he does. *Inspiration* refers to the truth that the Bible is the Word of God.<sup>5</sup>

This truth that the Old Testament is the Word of God lays the groundwork for understanding that the New Testament books are also Scripture. Peter instructs believers that they should regard the New Testament books with the same authority as the books of the Old Testament. In 2 Peter 3:16, he writes of those who twisted Paul’s “letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture.” As Guy Prentiss Waters correctly states,

The apostles not only confirm that the Old Testament is the inspired Word of God but instruct the church to regard the books of the New Testament as having precisely the same authority as the books of the Old Testament. The unbroken testimony of the apostles is that the books of both Testaments are in their entirety special revelation, the inspired Word of God.<sup>6</sup>

Given these points, it is clear the New Testament writers understood that the Old Testament is the Word of God and that rather than being a replacement of the Old Testament, the New Testament is an expansion of the Word of God. While believers today may say, “Even the Old Testament is the inspired Word of God,” the apostles were saying that, along with the Old Testament, “Even the New Testament is the authoritative Word of God.”

### **The Words of Jesus**

The writers of both Testaments recognized that the Old Testament is the Word of God, but what did Jesus say about it? Like the New

Testament authors, he referred to the Old Testament as “Scripture” or “the Scriptures.”

For instance, when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, Deuteronomy 6:16, and Deuteronomy 6:13 as the authoritative Word of God to rebuff the tempter (Matthew 4:1-11). Also, when Jesus cleansed the Temple of the money changers, he quoted Isaiah 56:7 proclaiming, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer’” (Matthew 21:13). And when Jesus returned to the Temple and the Jewish leaders questioned his authority, he quoted Psalm 118:22-23, calling these verses “the Scriptures” as he applied this passage to himself and rebuked them (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10).

Responding to the Sadducees concerning life after death, Jesus said, “But now, as to whether there will be a resurrection of the dead—haven’t you ever read about this in the Scriptures? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ So he is the God of the living, not the dead” (Matthew 22:31-32). In this instance, Jesus quoted the words God spoke to Moses at the burning bush on Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:6) and called them “the Scriptures.”

On another occasion, when Jesus and his disciples had completed their Passover meal and were headed toward the Mount of Olives, he told them they all would desert him. Next, Jesus told them that when they abandoned him it would be in fulfillment of the Scriptures (Matthew 26:30-31, referencing Zechariah 13:7).

Luke records that when Jesus visited his boyhood village of Nazareth, he went to the synagogue and “stood up to read the Scriptures” (Luke 4:16). Then he took the scroll of Isaiah the

prophet and read Isaiah 61:1-2. When he finished reading, Jesus said, “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!” (Luke 4:21).

As Jesus states in Matthew 5:17, “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.”

Certainly, Jesus demonstrated that the Old Testament is the eternal, authoritative Word of God. For instance, when the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus concerning marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:1-9, he responded by quoting Genesis 1:27, stating that God “made them male and female.” Next, he quoted Genesis 2:24, stating that this “explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together” (Matthew 19:5-6).

Using the Old Testament as an authoritative source, Jesus teaches that God created humankind, from the beginning, as male and female. God also established the institution of marriage, defined as a male and female joining together and becoming one flesh, and that no one should split apart what God has joined together.

In this chapter, we’ve begun addressing necessary considerations to make in preparation for teaching the Old Testament. The first consideration is that the Old Testament is the Word of God. It is eternal, inerrant, authoritative, and inspired by God. Both the Old Testament and New Testament authors attest to this truth in their writings, and Jesus attests to it also.

When teaching the Old Testament, we must recognize that we’re teaching more than just an ancient book filled with historical information, words of wisdom, and moral platitudes from a time

and culture far removed from ours. It is much more than that. The Old Testament is the eternally trustworthy Word of God, just as Agur son of Jakeh exclaims in Proverbs 30:5: “Every word of God proves true.”