

The Old Testament and Inspiration

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If you were to poll the average bible student and ask him which portion of God's word he spends the majority of his time studying, in all likelihood he would reply, "the New Testament." It is true that the Old Law has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), and today we live under the New Covenant. But, that does not mean that the Old Testament should be ignored. Unfortunately, over time an attitude of neglect, misunderstanding, and, in some cases, downright rejection of the Old Testament has developed. For example, in the early 2nd century Marcion insisted that the Old Testament be removed from the canon because of "discrepancies" between the "God of the Old Testament" and the "God of the New Testament." Later, Augustine wanted to allegorize the Old Testament, and Freidrich Schleiermacher dismissed it as heathenism. Sadly, there are many today who have followed in their footsteps for one reason or another.

Regardless of what Marcion, Augustine, Schleiermacher, and others like them may say, the Old Testament does have value for New Testament Christians and should be studied regularly. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Paul said that the Old Testament was written "for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Within it we find the record of our origins, Messianic and Kingdom prophecy, great principles of sacrifice, vivid examples of faithful living, and practical wisdom for every day life. But the chief reason is that the Old Testament is, and always has been, the inspired word of God.

The bible affirms without hesitation that the Old Testament's inspiration. Consider the following passages:

- God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets (Heb. 1:1).
- All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction; for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

A careful examination of these passages reveals a great deal about Old Testament scripture. First, God has indeed spoken through the Old Testament writers. Second, every word of scripture is completely inspired of God, and is necessary for our spiritual maturity—that includes the Old Testament. Third, no portion of scripture originated within the mind of a man. Rather, every syllable in the Old and New Testaments came to be through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, the Old Testament itself claims inspiration. Over 600 times within its pages we find statements like "thus saith the Lord," "God said," and "the Lord said." Here is a small sampling of Old Testament claims of inspiration:

- The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue (2 Sam. 23:2).
- Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth (Jer. 1:9).
- In the eight month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet saying (Zech 1:1).

Further evidence of the Old Testament's inspiration is found in the fact that Jesus and the apostles used it regularly in their preaching. Jesus respected the Old Law and knew its purpose. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-18). He also knew that the Old Testament scriptures were filled with prophecy about Himself and His work. In John 5:39 He said to the Jews, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." His mastery of the Old Testament is on full display in Matthew 22:41-46 where He caught the Pharisees in a trap by quoting Psalm 110:1, thereby acknowledging that passage as scripture, the inspiration of David in writing it, and His own deity in its application.

The apostles also viewed the Old Testament as the word of God and quoted from it often. Consider what Paul accomplished with it in Thessalonica as he "reasoned with them out of the [Old Testament CW] scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead" (Acts 17:2-3). He would later write to the church in that location, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 1:3). Keep in mind that it was Old Testament scripture that Paul preached to them and said, was "effectively working" within them.

Indeed, every word of Old Testament scripture is inspired, and therefore should be respected and utilized in our studying, preaching, and teaching. To ignore it would be to do so at our own spiritual peril. May we approach a study of the Old Testament scriptures with the same level of respect as Jesus, the apostles, and other great heroes of faith.