

The Essential Links

Helen was talking about her new Bible. “How is this different from my old school Bible?” she asked.

“Unfortunately, your old Bible isn’t all there”, was the reply.

Helen giggled at this: “What do you mean, ‘not all there’?”

“Well, your old Bible contains the New Testament and the Psalms, but not the whole Old Testament. The Bible consists of 66 different books written by a variety of people. The Old Testament comprises 39 books written before Jesus was born. They do teach about Jesus, but in prophecy. This was what Jesus had as his Bible, which he referred to as ‘scripture’. The New Testament contains the four gospels...”

“Ah – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John”, said Helen.

“Yes, that’s right; then Acts which is about the spread of the gospel message, letters to various churches and individuals in the first century, and finally the book of Revelation. The New Testament has 27 books, but it is impossible to fully understand them without the Old Testament.”

Jesus and the Old Testament

The Old Testament records the history of the Jews, with important promises from God and prophecies about world history. These centred on Jesus Christ, and we cannot make proper sense of the New Testament without the Old Testament. In fact, the very first verse in the New Testament says:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

Without knowing about Abraham and David from the Old Testament, we cannot appreciate why this was important enough for God to inspire Matthew to record them. Christians claim to accept the teachings of Jesus, and there are many, many occasions where Jesus was referring to the Old Testament. Here are some examples:

- ❖ King Solomon’s royal glory (Matthew 6:29).
- ❖ Judgement on Sodom, and its destruction (Matthew 11:24).
- ❖ The sign of Jonah the prophet (Matthew 12:39–41).
- ❖ The words of the prophet Daniel (Mark 13:14).
- ❖ Old Testament prophecies about Jesus himself (Luke 24:25–27).



There are other instances. For example, Jesus told many parables, and one of these, recorded in Matthew 21:33–41, is about a vineyard. It is based on a prophecy in Isaiah 5:1–7 which explains exactly what the vineyard represents, providing the key to a proper understanding of the parable.

We cannot fully understand what Jesus said without the Old Testament.

His words, like all words in the Bible, had a meaning and we are not at liberty to put our own interpretations on them. Bible expressions have biblical meanings, not man-made ones. In order to understand the gospel message in the New Testament we must look at the Old Testament.

The New Testament Letters

We need the Old Testament to properly understand the letters to the first century churches. This applies especially to Romans, Galatians and Hebrews with their extensive references to Adam, Abraham and the Law of Moses.

The table below shows more examples of words or people mentioned in the New Testament, which refer back to the Old Testament. For each, it shows how many New Testament verses refer to it, and in how many different New Testament books the expression or name appears.

Word or Person	NT Verses	NT Books
'written' <i>refers to OT text</i>	85	11
Moses	78	11
Abraham	65	11
David	54	9
'fulfilled' <i>refers to OT text</i>	32	6
Jacob	25	7
Isaiah	21	6
Isaac	18	8
Ancient Egypt	16	3

Totally Connected

Some Bibles have notes down the middle or at the bottom of the page,

containing cross references. These are connections between the particular verse and other verses, identifying links with an idea, event or word. These notes show how often the New Testament refers to the Old Testament.

Just dipping into the New Testament is not like reading volume two in a series of novels, where each book is self-contained. It is more like trying to study stage two of a college subject without having done stage one. The Old Testament is no easier than the New Testament, but it is certainly the foundation for it.

Nearly all of the New Testament was written by Jews familiar with the Old Testament. So the teachings in the New Testament are based on, and must be interpreted in the context of, Old Testament teachings. Misunderstand the Old Testament and you will misunderstand the New Testament. Reading the New Testament without the Old Testament will lead to bias and false beliefs.

How to Start

However, if you are new to the Old Testament, there is a better way than reading straight through from Genesis to Malachi. It is better to use a reading planner to break it into more easily digested sections. This will also get you into the habit of regular Bible reading.

Such a planner is available in each December issue of *Glad Tidings*. You can request this, or indeed a full Bible Reading course, on our web site or by post – all the details are on the back of this magazine. Whichever way you do it we urge you to prayerfully read the whole Bible.

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