

# **HOW TO TEACH THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649298358

How to teach the Old Testament by W. Benham

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Cover @ 2017

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**W. BENHAM**

# **HOW TO TEACH THE OLD TESTAMENT**



RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE MANUALS  
FOR SUNDAY AND DAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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HOW TO TEACH  
THE  
OLD TESTAMENT

BY  
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LONDON  
NATIONAL SOCIETY'S DEPOSITORY  
BROAD SANCTUARY, WESTMINSTER  
1881

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## HOW TO TEACH THE OLD TESTAMENT

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### CHAPTER I.

#### INTRODUCTORY WORDS.

1. **Preparation of the Lessons.**—Before I enter into details as to the proper method of teaching the Old Testament, I hope I shall be pardoned if I offer, as the result of a long experience, a few words on a very serious and important matter.

Take the 119th Psalm. Many readers of the present treatise know that every verse of that psalm has some reference to 'the Statutes,' or 'the Testimonies,' or 'the Law' or 'Word' of God. And yet there is a wonderful freshness all through the Psalm. There is no barren repetition, but always something new. We see the writer continually studying the Scriptures, and he has one end in view—namely, to know, and love, and rejoice in God's will. Let me, then, at the outset, affectionately call attention to the writer of that Psalm, as affording to every teacher an example of how to study the Old Testament. He should do so in order to be made 'wise unto salvation' (2 Tim. iii. 15). To this end he must in his reading and in preparing his lessons ask for God's help. And this not merely in formal words. He must endeavour to throw himself into entire sympathy with his subject, whatever it be. I am sure

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that no man ever attained eminence, either as teacher or preacher, however great his natural gifts, without first feeling the truth of what he was going to say, if it was a point of doctrine; without trying to act up to his own teaching, if it was a point of practice. 'I drew them with the cords of a man,' says Christ by His prophet. And His power lay in His own perfect obedience and sinless life. Those who would teach His truth must be continually labouring to walk in His steps, or they will not draw with His cords. The cords will break. On the other hand, a man may have great and serious faults, known of men; but if they see him manfully striving to conquer them, they will give heed to his teaching. To this end, some part of the teacher's Sunday should be given to a study of the Scriptures, in which, as far as possible, he should forget his classes and lessons, and study for himself alone, to deepen his own spiritual life. Then his teaching, almost unconsciously to himself, will have a wonderful life and power in it. His arrows will hit their mark. And, having taught others, he will not himself be a castaway (1 Cor. ix. 27). I need not pursue this subject further, but will give a few texts of encouragement and promise to all who seek the assistance of God's Holy Spirit in their Bible studies—Ps. cxix. 18; John xiv. 16, xvi. 13; Luke xxiv. 45; Acts xvi. 14; Ps. xcii. 15; Luke xi. 13.

2. **Practical Suggestions.**—A few practical suggestions, too, of a general character will not, I hope, be out of place, seeing that at any rate I can give them this recommendation—whatever success I myself have gained in my work, I owe much to following out my own plan. Keep a Bible interleaved, or with a good margin, have it ready at hand and note down *as shortly as possible* anything which you meet with which will illustrate the passage you so annotate. My own Bible (one of Bagster's blank-page editions) is annotated with references to 'Stanley,' 'Vaughan,' 'Pusey,' 'Sumner's Apostolical Preaching,' 'Maurice,' 'A.P.B.' [Annotated Paragraph Bible of the Religious Tract Society], &c. &c.

Opposite to 1 Kings xxii. 49 I find written, 'S.P.C.K. 1,436.' Turning in the Christian Knowledge Society's list to the tract so numbered, I find that it is a very telling tract by Mr. Storr, entitled, 'Jehoshaphat would not ; or, Learn to say No.' Against 2 Kings vi. 5, 'S.P.C.K. 1,062' ['The Borrowed Axe']. Against 1 Sam. xxv. 23, 'S.P.C.K. 1,121' ['Abigail the Peacemaker']. Against Ezek. ix. 4, 'S. P. C. K. 1,432' ['Sorrow for Abounding Iniquity']. Against 2 Kings iv. 6, 'Trench's Justin Martyr, p. 267.' This reference is to a very beautiful poem on 'The Widow's Oil,' by the Archbishop of Dublin.

These are only specimens. When I read the chapter I am reminded by my reference that something good has been said about this and that passage, and I turn to it, for every book or tract referred to is within my reach. And I recommend my young readers to begin their annotations early, and they will gradually make for themselves a valuable Biblical Encyclopædia.

Let it not be objected that it presupposes the possession of a large library. On the contrary, the system only ensures the use of what you have. Any theological work which you read, any tract which you meet with, if it is good for anything at all, may thus be turned to account. If I pick up a penny sermon or treatise at a bookstall, and find it worth the penny, I duly number and index it, and stow it away, and make the reference in my Bible. I do not advocate copying long notes from books ; it takes a long time, and generally you do not read them afterwards. Only make a reference, and that to works within your reach.

As regards your library, of course it depends much on your depth of pocket. The National Society has just issued a very valuable list of books, which may be studied with great advantage. For those with small incomes I recommend the new 'Commentary of the S.P.C.K.,' or the Religious Tract Society's 'Annotated Bible ;' Smith's 'Smaller Dictionary,' and 'Aids to Bible Students,' which is



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published by the S.P.C.K. for a shilling. It is an improvement on the 'Helps' in the Oxford Bible. Possessed of these, the teacher will never be at a loss. For myself, using the above works for arrangement of facts, I find for sermon purposes no commentator to equal Matthew Henry. I have another little book always lying on my table, which costs sixpence. It is called 'The Scripture Text Book,' and is published by the Dublin Christian Knowledge Society. It is full of beautiful helps to the teacher, and I use it almost every day.

One word more in this Introduction. I have assumed that the teacher has taken pains in the preparation of a lesson ; now let me add, keep all your notes of lessons, and do not destroy them after the lesson has been delivered. I have some which I used many years ago, and they do duty still, enlarged of course and enriched by subsequent experience and fresh reading.

## CHAPTER II.

## ON PROGRESSIVE TEACHING.

1. **How to Teach Little Children.**—*Teach both Eye and Ear.*—Obviously the teacher must at once direct his attention to making his lesson attractive. Of the Great Teacher we are told that 'the common people heard Him gladly,' 'all the people were very attentive to hear Him.' And they who desire to follow His steps, and to make known to their fellows what the will of the Lord is, must take diligent heed to make their teaching a delight. The sympathies of the children must be awakened, their highest faculties appealed to. Perhaps the time is gone by, such as the great satirist of our times describes, when children were made to 'read genealogies from Nehemiah' by way of penance; but there will still be room for improvement so long as the affections and sympathies of children are latent during the Bible lesson. Those who cannot read with fluency must be taught by pictures. We perhaps all of us remember with delight the great picture Bible at home; how we conned over and over the history which the picture was supposed to illustrate. Very often the pictures were poor enough. I have just been looking at two books dear to me through all the years that have come between those early days and these, Brown's folio Bible and Fleetwood's 'Life of Christ;' and though now I see that the pictures are very inferior to those which are produced at the present day, they answered their purpose in making me love the narrative. I have also here 'The Pictorial Bible,' in the illustrations of which much light is thrown

upon the archæology of the Bible; and yet I doubt whether the old-fashioned pictures, with their bad perspective and incorrect architecture, were any whit inferior. There is a human interest about them. At a glance they tell their own story, and the memory of it abides.

*The Pictures.*—The teacher will find abundant materials out of which to choose his pictures. I have before me three different sets—'The Bible Picture Book,' published by the S.P.C.K.; a set published by the Religious Tract Society; and 'Cottage Pictures from the Old Testament,' published by J. H. Parker. It would be useless to write lessons on these for this volume; but I have in each case tried to put myself in the position of the teacher by setting these books on the table in front of me, and studying the pictures one by one. Here, for example, I open the Tract Society's collection at random, and find 'The Little Captive Maid (2 Kings v. 1-3).' There would be no need to go beyond the three verses to find an excellent lesson for little children from this picture. Speak of Naaman, the rich and powerful soldier, with a great misery in his life—he was a leper. Then of the little maid carried off as a slave in one of the forays which were always going on between the warring countries. Her lot was hard enough, to be violently carried off from home and friends; but she remembered fondly the home she had left, and she earnestly desired to be useful to her master. Here she is in the picture, waiting on her grand heathen mistress, and pointing upwards with her finger, as if telling of the power of her God to heal her master; while the mistress is looking on with eager and absorbed gaze, and evidently with growing hope. If the teacher has a copy of Keble's 'Lyra Innocentium,' he will find a beautiful poem on this incident, which might be read or paraphrased to the class. The lessons will be—(1) Faithfulness to God and the Church wherever you are placed; (2) Desire to do your duty to those about you; (3) There are none so poor or insignificant but they may do great good.