

# One book

The Bible in front of me has a blank page separating Matthew from Malachi. Someone has called it the only page in the Bible that isn't divinely inspired. More than that, before I begin at Matthew chapter 1, I'm told that I'm embarking on the 'New Testament'. All that comes before Matthew is 'Old Testament'.

Instinctively that forces me to think in terms of two books, not one. More than that, it makes me (being a child of my age) think that the 'Old' has to be in some way inferior to the 'New'. Does what is 'New' not replace what is 'Old'? Does not what is 'Old' belong to a past generation somewhere? Surely the 'New' is what I should be looking at! As I am a 'new creation' in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), what has the 'Old' Testament got to do with me?

## One interlocking book

In fact, the Bible is like a symphony in two parts or a play in two acts. If we only stay for the first half of the performance, we leave dissatisfied. We feel and know there must be more to come. It is incomplete and therefore only makes partial sense. On the other hand, if we don't arrive until Part 2 commences, we are confused. We need an explanation as to how the masterpiece reached the point at which we came in.

Matthew begins his Gospel narrative with the words, 'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.' But who were David and Abraham? Which lived first? Why is it important that Jesus be a descendant of those men? We wouldn't know if we didn't read Part 1—the Old Testament. How can non-Jewish Christians know what Paul meant when he talked about Jesus Christ as 'our Passover lamb' (1 Cor. 5:7)? Only by reading the Old Testament. Similarly, how

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can we identify the promised deliverer—the one who would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15), gain ‘the obedience of the nations’ (Gen. 49:10), be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) to a virgin mother (Isa. 7:14), be ‘pierced for our transgressions’ (Isa. 53:5), and be exalted as King and Priest (Ps. 110:1–4)? Only by reading the New Testament.

### **One divine Author**

By any criterion, the Bible is a remarkable book. It was written by more than forty people (ranging from kings, prophets and poets to shepherds and fishermen), in three languages, over some twenty-five centuries in many different locations. And yet, what unites these documents into one is that they have the same divine Author.

Each of the writers ‘spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’ (2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit speaks through the Old Testament writers (Acts 1:16; 4:25; 28:25; Heb. 3:7–11; 10:15–17) as much as through the New Testament writers (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 John 4:6; Rev. 2:7, etc.). Both ‘Old’ and ‘New’ are referred to simply as ‘Scripture’ (see 2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Peter 3:16). Whether he is quoting from Moses or Luke, Paul refers to the writings of both as ‘Scripture’ (1 Tim. 5:18), for the Bible is one book—God’s book.

### **One complete book**

Not only is the Bible one book with one Author, it is also one complete book. By that, I mean that we shouldn’t be looking for further revelations than those given in it. We certainly need to pray for greater illumination to understand what is written there, but we must avoid any claim of supplementary authoritative revelation, whether from the Book of Mormon, the Qur’an, or a self-appointed Christian prophet.

Peter went to his reward not encouraging his readers to expect new revelations from God. He urged them ‘to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and

Saviour through your apostles' (2 Peter 3:2). Notice how he brings the Old and New Testaments together. The task given by Paul the apostle to his young colleague Timothy was not to add to what he had learned from the apostle, but to 'keep' and 'guard the good deposit' and entrust it 'to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others' (2 Tim. 1:13–14; 2:2; see also Jude 3). It is noteworthy that the Bible's final warning is not to add to or subtract from what is written (Rev. 22:18–19).

### One Christian book

If the Bible is one book, written by one Author, to whom does it belong? Should it be the property of the synagogue or of the church? Let's answer those questions by asking two more.

The first question is this: For whom was the Bible written? Obviously there is a very simple answer to that question if we are thinking only of the New Testament. But we are not. We have argued that 'Old' and 'New' Testaments together form one book. So, for whom was the Old Testament written? Some people will say that it was written for Jews and that it is a Jewish book. But what does the New Testament have to say on the matter? It has a very clear answer, which it gives a number of times.

For example, writing to the Christian churches in Rome, Paul says this about what we call 'the Old Testament': 'For everything that was written in the past was written to teach *us*, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide *we* might have hope' (Rom. 15:4; cf. 4:23–24).<sup>1</sup> Writing to predominantly Gentile Christians, Paul says that the ancient Scriptures were written for *our* instruction, so that *we* might have hope. He confirms that view to another largely non-Jewish church, by pointing out that the history of Israel in the wilderness was 'written down as warnings for *us*, on whom the culmination of the ages has come' (1 Cor. 10:11).

According to Peter, the Old Testament prophets were aware of this. He says, 'It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves

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but you [Christians], when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you ...' (1 Peter 1:12).

So the entire Bible was written for Christian people from all nations.

The second question is: To whom shall we turn for a right understanding of the Scriptures? If the Old Testament was a Jewish book, the obvious thing might be to listen to Jewish interpreters of it. However, neither history nor Scripture encourages us to do that. When the Lord Jesus was here, he found Israel's leaders to be mostly in the dark when it came to understanding what was written. Though they trusted in Moses, they didn't actually believe him (John 5:46-47). The Sadducees were charged by Jesus with not knowing the Scriptures (Matt. 22:29), and even Nicodemus (though 'the teacher of Israel') was ignorant about the need to be born again (John 3:10).

Before running too quickly to Jewish scholars for an understanding of Scripture, we need to note Paul's caution that 'Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts' (2 Cor. 3:15-16).

How is that veil taken away? By turning to the Lord! He is the authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament, as he is the illuminator of it to his people (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-45). It has been helpfully noted that, 'though we read the Bible forwards, we understand it backwards'. And we do so because we must read the Scriptures through the eyes of Christ and his apostles. If we fail to do this, our understanding of the Old Testament may satisfy Jews or Moslems, but only because we haven't allowed Christ to lift the veil from our hearts. After all, it was written about him. And it was all written down for us, if we are Christian believers.

But, though the whole Bible was written *for* us, was it all written *about* us? That's our next question.