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God Preserves His Word

Key Themes

- The Old Testament is God's Word
- God has preserved His Word.

Key Passages

- Luke 24:13–32; Jeremiah 36:1–4, 36:17–32

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how Jesus affirms the authority of the Old Testament.
- Identify when the Old Testament Canon was written.
- Provide an example of the miraculous preservation of God's Word.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

As students come into the classroom, they should find and mark Luke 24:13 and Jeremiah 36:1 in their Bibles.

Write on the board, "Which is more important, the Old Testament or the New Testament?"



Studying God's Word

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The Old Testament was recorded by various prophets over a 1,100 year period. God has preserved His Word through time, and we can trust it as an absolute authority.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: How God Speaks

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Students will make a cross reference in their Bibles from 2 Peter 1:19–21 to Jeremiah 36:1–4, 36:27–32.



Optional Activity: Article Discussion

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Students will read and discuss the article, "Why Do We Need the 'Old' Testament?"

- Print one copy of the article, "Why Do We Need the 'Old' Testament?" from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

To prepare your heart and mind, study these passages: Luke 24:13–27; 2 Chronicles 34:14–32; Jeremiah 36.

The Old Testament begins God's Word—the history of the universe. It contains 39 books and tells us about ancient Israel and God's promise of the Messiah. This precious history has been revealed and preserved for us since the beginning of time.

One dramatic biblical episode of God preserving His Word begins in 2 Chronicles 34 during King Josiah's reign over Judah near the beginning of the seventh century BC. Josiah began a period of reformation in Judah. The people before him had completely turned away from God. But Josiah did what was right in the sight of the Lord and walked in His ways (2 Chronicles 34:2). The house of the Lord had been desecrated and Josiah commanded that it be repaired (2 Chronicles 34:8). It was during this restoration of the temple that Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses (2 Chronicles 34:14). When Josiah heard the Word of the Lord read he was convicted of the idolatry and sin in the land. He tore his clothes in repentance (2 Chronicles 34:19). Because of Josiah's tender heart and humble spirit before God when he heard the words, God's judgment was withheld from Judah for the time (2 Chronicles 34:27–28).

However, when Josiah's son Jehoiakim became king, the people once again turned their backs on God and His Word. This is when the Word of the Lord came to the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:1) and he was instructed by the Lord to write the words of judgment against Israel and Judah and all the nations (Jeremiah 36:2). Jeremiah dictated God's Word as Baruch wrote the scroll (Jeremiah 36:4). When the scroll was finished and read to King Jehoiakim, he was not afraid, repentant, or humble before the Lord as his father had been (Jeremiah 36:24). Instead, Jehoiakim destroyed the Word of God by casting the scroll into

the fire piece by piece as it was being read (Jeremiah 36:22–23).

But was King Jehoiakim able to destroy God's Word even with fire? No. God will always preserve His Word and did so then. He called Jeremiah again and instructed that yet another scroll be written. Jeremiah took the scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe who wrote on it. It contained all the words (and more) of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire (Jeremiah 36:32).

God has always been and will always be faithful to preserve His Word. In the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

And in the words of the psalmist, "The entirety of Your Word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160).

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

You may encounter people who don't necessarily feel that the Old Testament is significant to today's culture. It is, however, the Word of God. And God has taken great strides to preserve it in order to reveal His truth and plan of redemption completely.

As we study our Lord's life recorded in the New Testament, we see one who relied on the truth and promises of the Old Testament. Indeed, Jesus placed such a high value on the inspired Word of God that even He—the very Son of God, the Messiah—willingly submitted Himself to its authority while on earth. He relied on it to resist the temptations of Satan (Matthew 4), and He read from it when He taught in the synagogues. In fact, He was reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah when He proclaimed that He was the Messiah who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy (Luke 4:16–21).

On the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13), after His Resurrection, the Lord admonished his companions to believe the prophets (Luke 24:25). And as they walked, Jesus taught them from the Scriptures, beginning at the

writings of Moses and all through the Prophets, the things concerning Him—that He was the one sent to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21). Jesus Christ studied, taught, obeyed, and lived the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Because He held them in such high regard, we should as well.

We do well to remember His words to Satan during His temptation, “It is written, ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

God has preserved His Word for thousands of years. And He has been gracious to leave historical evidence that confirms the Bible. We know that the ancient Hebrews relied on Scripture. They recognized the inspiration of certain texts and depended on them for wisdom.

The five books of Moses, beginning with Genesis, were written around 1500 BC and chronicle the history of the earth over the previous 2,500 years. After that, the remaining books were written by prophets and scribes. These holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19–21). The words were recorded on scrolls and carefully transmitted through the generations with painstaking diligence to ensure their accuracy. The final record from the Old Testament prophets came at the hand of Malachi. His prophecy of the coming Prophet (Malachi 3–4) begins a period of 400 years of silence before John the Baptist proclaimed the arrival of Christ.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered at Qumran in 1947, gave rise to additional confirmation of these ancient texts. This finding presented Old Testament manuscripts dated as early as 150 BC. These manuscripts were written nearly 1,000 years before other manuscripts already discovered, and proved to be the same as those previously found.

For example, a copy of the book of Isaiah was part

of the findings at Qumran dated about 150 BC. Prior to this, the oldest dated manuscript of the book of Isaiah was around AD 980. Yet when these two copies of Isaiah were compared they were found to be 95 percent accurate to the Hebrew Bible.

This evidence of ancient Old Testament Hebrew texts together with the astounding number—more than 24,000—of partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament give us solid historical background to the reliability of the Bible. Biblical scholars have agreed that the number of manuscripts supporting the Bible provide unparalleled authentication of the original documents. In fact, the Bible has more documentation to verify it than any other book of antiquity that is commonly accepted.

For those of us with faith to believe, these findings serve as confirmation that we worship a mighty God who does not change. He speaks to us through the consistently preserved Scriptures so we can know Him, His character, His purpose, and His plan to redeem a people to Himself for all eternity.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear Father, please enable me to give the Bible the same honor and authority over my life that it had over Christ’s life and ministry. I know that you gave me your Word so that I could be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. Please help me prepare for this class so that the students will be moved to honor your Word. Develop in them a passion that will lead them to a spirit of humility and obedience toward the Scriptures. Thank you for faithfully preserving your Word from all attacks.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

Last week we answered the questions of from where and how we got the Bible. Understanding the basic arguments for the inspiration of Scripture is a very important part of sharing our faith with others and answering the questions of those who sincerely understand what we believe.

? What two passages from Scripture give us a solid understanding of how we came

to have the Bible? *2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:19–21.*

? What is the basic answer for the origin of the Bible based on these two passages? *God, through the Holy Spirit, moved His prophets to record His words. The recorded words are inspired Scripture—breathed out by God for our benefit.*



➤ Write on the board, “Which is more important, the Old Testament or the New Testament?”

➤ As students come into the classroom, they should find and mark Luke 24 and Jeremiah 36 in their Bibles.



Studying God’s Word

Today’s lesson will help us understand the writing of the Old Testament Canon and how Jesus affirms its authority. Some of you might be confused by the word *canon*, so let’s clear that up right now. By canon, we do not mean a big gun. The word comes from the Greek and Hebrew words for a reed used as a measuring rule. So when we talk of the canon of Scripture, we are talking about the books of the Bible that act as a rule or guide for our lives, rather than a weapon.

READ THE WORD

To begin looking at our topic today, let’s open our Bibles and read Luke 24:13–32 together. *Divide the passage for members of the class to read aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now that we have read the text, let’s take some time to observe what it is saying to us.

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God’s Word by asking the right questions.

- ? **Who are the people in this passage?** *Two of the disciples (not apostles) of Christ— one named Cleopas, and the risen Christ.*
- ? **Where did this take place?** *On a road from Jerusalem to Emmaus and in a house in Emmaus.*
- ? **When did this take place?** *On the day that Jesus had risen from the dead.*
- ? **Did the disciples recognize Jesus?** *No, their eyes were restrained from knowing who He was.*

- ? **How did the disciples feel as Jesus approached them?** *They were sad, according to verse 17.*
- ? **What were the disciples hoping for in verse 21?** *They were hoping that Jesus was going to redeem Israel. This was probably a hope for Christ to rescue Israel from Roman occupation—a hope that could not be fulfilled if Christ had died and His body was missing. They may have had their minds fixed on an earthly kingdom rather than a heavenly one.*
- ? **What was Christ’s response to their despair?** *He rebuked them for not understanding what was taking place in light of Scripture.*
- ? **Are there any figures of speech used in the text?** *Verse 27 uses “Moses and all the Prophets” as an idiom for the Old Testament Scriptures.*
- ? **What is the main point of the passage?** *Jesus shows the two disciples how the Scriptures testify of His life, death, and Resurrection.*

Discover the Truth

Now that we have asked questions about the text, let’s talk about the main idea and try to rightly interpret some of the elements we looked at.

- ? **Verse 27 says that “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets” Christ explained things concerning Himself. What does this figure of speech mean?** *This is a figure of speech indicating that Christ used the text of the Old Testament, called the Scriptures later in the verse, to explain the ideas. This is called a merism and is quite common in our language. For instance, we often say “we searched high and low” to mean that we searched everywhere.*
- ? **Why is this a fitting figure of speech for the Old Testament Scriptures?** *Genesis is the first book of the Bible and was written by Moses. Beginning at Moses indicates that He started from the beginning, likely with Genesis 3:15 where the Seed is promised in the first proclamation of the gospel. So Moses refers to the five books written by Moses, and the Prophets would be the closing part of the Jewish canon. So, everything from Moses to the Prophets contains the whole of Scripture at that time. This would also include the Psalms and Wisdom books like Proverbs.*

In the Gospels, Jesus often refers to the Law and the Prophets (e.g., Matthew 5:17). The Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, are commonly referred to by the Jews as the books of the Law. So His hearers would have easily understood what He was speaking of. Also, if we look forward to verse 44 of Luke 24, Jesus adds the Psalms when explaining that He has fulfilled the prophecies contained in Scripture, regarding the Messiah.

What we know as the Old Testament—the first 39 books of the Bible from Genesis to Malachi—records 3,600 years of history from the creation to the intertestamental period when there were no prophets in Israel. Moses wrote the Pentateuch around 1500 BC and Malachi was written around 400 BC. This set of writings was, and still is, considered the Jewish Scriptures. These are the books that Christ and all of His disciples would have studied in order to understand God and His relationship to mankind. *Refer to the Seven C’s Timeline to show the period during which the Old Testament canon was recorded.*

- ? Jesus often used the phrase “have you not read?” (e.g., Matthew 12:3, 19:4, 22:31) or some variation while talking to the religious leaders who challenged Him. How does that relate to the topic we are discussing? *Jesus constantly referred to the Scriptures as the authority for understanding what God expected from mankind. We would be wise to follow His example.*

As Jesus walked alongside these two disciples in Luke 24, He took them back through the Scriptures and explained how He was present through the Old Testament writings. He was the Word at creation (John 1 and Genesis 1). He was the promised Messiah who would crush the head of the serpent, that is Satan (Genesis 3:15). He was the rock that was broken to give streams of living water to the Israelites in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:4 and Exodus 17:5–7). He was the bruised, beaten, and crucified Savior (Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53). He was the Sun of Righteousness who would come to bring healing (Malachi 4:2–3). Christ has often been called a scarlet thread that is woven throughout the Old Testament. In this passage back in Luke, He strongly affirmed that the Old Testament contains those truths about Him and many more.

Would it not have been an amazing experience to have those very things explained to you by Christ Himself?



READ THE WORD

The next passage we are going to look at will give us an example of the way God has delivered and preserved His Word through history. Listen to some background on this passage. During the reign of King Josiah (about 641–610 BC), Judah was called back to worshipping God. One of the priests found the Book of the Law in the Temple and it was read before the king. Josiah desired to follow God’s commands and instructed the people to do the same (2 Chronicles 34). His sons who ruled after him turned from God. His son, Jehoiakim, became king in about 610 BC, while Jeremiah was still a prophet in Judah, the southern kingdom. That is where we pick up the account. *Refer to the Seven C’s Timeline to show the timeframe of these events.*

Jeremiah 36:1–4,
36:17–19

Let’s read Jeremiah 36:1–4 and 17–19 together. *Divide the passage for members of the class to read aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What type of literature is this passage? *Historical narrative.*
- ? Who was instructed to write God’s words? *Jeremiah (verses 1 and 2).*
- ? Who actually wrote the scroll? *Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch (verse 4).*

- ? **How did this process work?** *Verses 17 and 18 describe how God spoke through Jeremiah to Baruch as he wrote on the scroll.*
- ? **What message did Jeremiah proclaim?** *God is going to judge Israel and Judah, and that God is calling them to repentance.*
- ? **What advice do the princes give to Baruch?** *The princes advise him to take Jeremiah and hide.*

Discover the Truth

We know the message that Jeremiah was bringing was one of judgment. Baruch was simply the messenger delivering the scroll of judgment.

- ? **Why did the princes advise Baruch and Jeremiah to go into hiding?** *They likely believed that Jehoiakim would want to bring harm to the messengers.*
- ? **How does the description of the recording of God's words compare to the 2 Peter 1:19–21 passage we looked at last week.** *Jeremiah is the holy man of God being moved by the Holy Spirit to speak God's words as Baruch recorded them.*



READ THE WORD

The next part of the passage gives us Jehoiakim's reaction to the message once it was delivered by the princes. Was the suggestion to go into hiding good advice?

Let's read Jeremiah 36:20–26. *Have someone read the passage.*

Jeremiah 36:20–32

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What did the princes do with the scroll?** *They hid it in a scribe's chamber.*
- ? **What did they do with the message on the scroll?** *They told the king what it said.*
- ? **What was the king's reaction upon hearing the scroll read?** *He stopped the reading, cut up the scroll, and burned it in the fire.*
- ? **What was the response of those in the court?** *Three men implored him not to burn the scroll, but they did not fear sinning against God (verse 24).*
- ? **What command did the king give regarding Jeremiah and Baruch?** *He commanded their seizure.*
- ? **How were God's messengers protected?** *We don't know exactly how, but God protected them by hiding them.*

Discover the Truth

So we see King Jehoiakim and his court having great disrespect for the commands of God. This is not an uncommon reaction to a call to repentance delivered from the prophets. However, there are also

examples that show God’s call to repentance taking effect in the hearts of men—Jonah preaching in Nineveh, for example.

Did Jehoiakim really think that these were the words of God and that burning the scroll would destroy God’s words? Peek down to verse 29 to see what he was thinking. He obviously did not think that God could destroy his kingdom. He was truly arrogant and foolish, thinking that he knew better than God.

God would not allow His words to be destroyed. This passage concludes in verses 27–32 with Baruch rewriting the words God had given through Jeremiah. *You may want to read verses 27 and 32 to describe this command to write a new scroll.*

God has supernaturally preserved His Word throughout history and this is one excellent example. The scribes who transmitted the Old Testament Scriptures took great care to copy **exactly** what the prophets had written, out of a reverence for God—exactly the opposite attitude that Jehoiakim had.

Another interesting detail from this passage demonstrates God’s omniscience. In verse 29 we are given the thoughts of Jehoiakim regarding God’s call to repentance—something only an all-knowing God could have revealed to Jeremiah.

An evidence of this miraculous preservation was found in 1947 in the caves near Qumran, Israel near the north end of the Dead Sea. In this cave were found many ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament dating as far back as 150 BC. When compared to much later manuscripts, the sets were virtually identical. You likely know these as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Many skeptics would claim that we can’t know that the Bible contains what the prophets actually heard from God. They may suggest that the transmission of the Bible must have been corrupted over time. They use the analogy of the game “Telephone,” where a message is passed through whispers along a chain of people and “John ran to catch his plane” comes out at the other end something like “Jaw Iran toucans are plain.” This idea, however, is patently false when it comes to the Scriptures. The message wasn’t passed through whispers, but by a careful system of copying the text. The accuracy of this process is confirmed in comparing the manuscripts that were written 1,000 years apart. This confirms the truth that the Bible has been supernaturally preserved by God, as we saw demonstrated in the book of Jeremiah.





How God Speaks

MATERIALS

- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Have the students make a cross reference in their Bibles from 2 Peter 1:19–21 to Jeremiah 36:1–4, 27–32.

- ? If you were to open your Bible to show someone, a new believer or a skeptic, how we got the Old Testament writings, where would you go? *Allow for answers.*

Let's take a few minutes to make a cross reference between the Jeremiah 36 passage and 2 Peter 1:19–21. You might write the heading "Examples" next to the 2 Peter passage. Then after that, write the Jeremiah reference; specifically verses 1–4 and 27–32.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Knowing where we can turn in the Bible to support the various doctrines we rely on is a great evangelistic tool. Rather than simply saying, "The Bible says . . ." we can open to the passage and read it, or have someone else read it, and let God's words speak. I would encourage you to look into this idea and find more examples of how God used the prophets to record and proclaim His decrees. Mark these under the *Examples* heading you just created. Then, you will have a place in your Bible where you can turn when you are asked to support and explain where this precious book came from.



Article Discussion (Optional)

MATERIALS

- "Why Do We Need the 'Old' Testament?" article for each student

INSTRUCTIONS

Have volunteers read the article out loud as the rest of the class reads along.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

- ? What did Timothy know that the Scriptures (Old Testament) could do? *They could make him wise for salvation.*

- ? The Old Testament records events that provide the historical background for many things recorded in the New Testament.

What are some of these events? *Answers will vary, but may include creation, Adam's Fall, Noah's Flood, prophecies, etc.*

- ? What are some reasons we need the Old Testament? *Refer back to last week's lesson—it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. It also provides the historical background for the New Testament.*





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We have covered three basic points today, so let's stop and think about what we have learned.

- ? **What are the approximate dates of the writings in the Old Testament?**
Genesis and the other books of Moses were written about 1500 BC and Malachi about 400 BC. Job may have been written earlier, but there is no clear date of its writing.
- ? **What can we learn from the way Jesus referred to the Old Testament?**
Jesus constantly referred to the Scriptures as His authority and where others should look for theirs. Specifically, He showed the two disciples on the road to Emmaus how He was present throughout the Old Testament. If Jesus trusted it as a source of authority, we must too.
- ? **How has God preserved the text of the Old Testament?**
In the Jeremiah passage there is a specific case of rewriting a scroll that had been burned. Many other passages of Scripture could be shown that support the preservation of what God had written. Another example is the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls which confirms the accuracy of the transmission of the recorded words of God.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Now that we have looked at the text of two passages and completed our observation and interpretation steps, let's think about how we can put this information into practice in our lives.

- ? **What new idea or information did you see in the passage of the encounter between the risen Jesus and His disciples along the road? How does this give you a clearer picture of the importance of the Old Testament?**
Responses will likely include surprise from some that there was so much in the OT about Jesus.
- ? **How has what we talked about today encouraged you? What things can you meditate on or praise God for as you think about these things?**
Seeing how God has specifically preserved His Word should provide great comfort.
- ? **As you share your faith, you will likely encounter people who doubt the truthfulness of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Some may refer**

to the Bible as a collection of myths written by desert goat herders. If you knew you only had one chance to share the truth with them, would you open the Bible and show them specific Scriptures or tell them about the Dead Sea Scrolls? *Many would tend to turn to the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls rather than the evidence within God's Word. Try to persuade the students that it is much more honoring to God to use His Word than to use secondary evidences. This is confirmed in the account of the rich man and Lazarus when Abraham tells the rich man that even if someone came back from the dead his brothers would not believe since they already had the testimony of "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:19–31). If the opportunity arises to confirm the accuracy of the truthfulness of Scripture, the various manuscript evidences can be brought in, but the Word of God should be our first evidence.*

? **What questions has this topic raised in your mind and how might you go about answering those questions?** *Answers will vary, but remind the students that there is a wealth of knowledge on the Answers in Genesis website. There is an entire section devoted to the Bible and its accuracy.*

Next week, we will continue in this same thread, but focus on the New Testament. I hope you are learning a lot as we continue through this study.



MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 19:7–9 The law of the Lord is perfect,
converting the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the
simple;
the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the
heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous
altogether.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for His goodness in giving us His Word and preserving it for us.
- Pray for translation projects as the Bible is spread across the globe in native languages.
- Ask God to help each person understand how to share the gospel message in every opportunity that presents itself.

