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Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers

Harding School of Theology

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### Footnotes: Is the Old Testament Dying?

Bob Turner

*Harding School of Theology*

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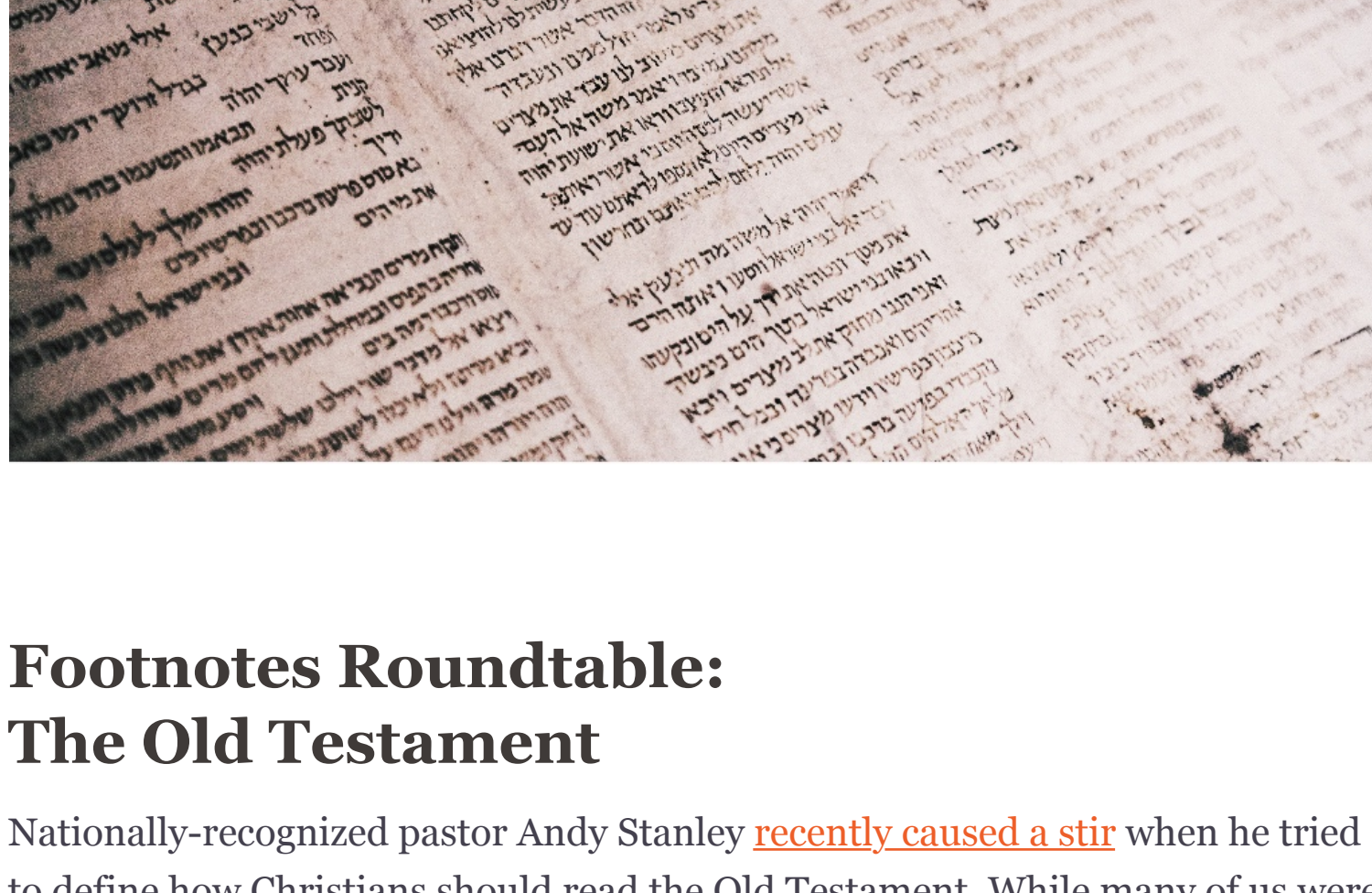
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# Footnotes<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Curated Resources for Ministers



## Footnotes Roundtable: The Old Testament

Nationally-recognized pastor Andy Stanley [recently caused a stir](#) when he tried to define how Christians should read the Old Testament. While many of us were eager to correct his proposal, I'm not sure we necessarily agree on one specific solution. When it comes to the Old Testament, we certainly lack a consensus. Often, the best we can do is to agree that it is old, fascinating, important, and that most movies about it have been awful. But surely that cannot be enough. For many, the Old Testament becomes like the RPM meter on a car's dashboard. We view it as truthful, accurate, and reliable. But that's not the one we look at to determine if we are in the wrong.

This interview will occur over two issues of *Footnotes*. I'm so glad these friends and scholars have joined the roundtable. I feel like this is the week where we get to fake our way into the AP classes and hang out with the smart people.

**Nathan Bills.** Independent Scholar. Ph.D. Duke University  
**John D. Fortner.** Retired Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East, Harding University

**Lance Hawley.** Professor of Old Testament, Harding School of Theology

### It is easy to say that preachers should spend more time in the Old Testament. But what exactly does that look like? What might you suggest?

Nathan Bills: Asking the question to those who have given their lives to the study of the OT is a good start. If I had to pick one transformative practice: learn to pray the book of Psalms, and then teach your church how to pray, perhaps even singing the Psalms (check out the work of Mark Shipp with the [Timeless hymn volumes](#)), both corporately and privately. Attend in your public prayers to the spectrum of language in the Psalms.

John Fortner: Building a useful, useable, and used personal library is key. The commitment to do this, however, will depend on the preacher's view of the relevance of OT themes and texts for his ministry. As "New Testament Christians," preachers may have concluded that God is found only in Jesus and NT texts. Until preachers realize that most of what can be known of God is found via a theological study of OT texts, they will have little incentive to spend more time in the OT, let alone commit to offer rich and meaty lessons to their churches from the OT. Hence the importance of wrestling with the rest of the questions below.

Lance Hawley: Preach sermons from all three portions of the Hebrew Bible: Torah, Prophets, and Writings. The poetic portions of the Old Testament are difficult but so rich. Ideally, preachers can work with resources that access the Hebrew. I also think public readings of Scripture, especially the poetry, are necessary for the church. Finally, when preaching the New Testament, make sure to tie the passage into the fuller story of God by pointing out connections with the Old Testament.

### It seems that some of the tendency toward the New Testament relates to whether or not the OT is authoritative for Christians (interpret that however you wish). How would you address this idea of authority?

NB: That's an important and perennial question that deserves more than a Twitter answer. But to keep it very brief, the church has received two testaments that witness to the one God. I've always liked what I learned from John [Fortner]: "we are new covenant people but two testament Christians." The best I can do in this succinct forum would be to point people to resources like Fredrick Holmgren's [The OT and the Significance of Jesus](#) or John Goldingay's delightfully provocative [Do We Need the NT?](#)

JF: I will answer this question with a series of observations which in my view lead to an incontrovertible conclusion:

- The OT was certainly authoritative for writers of the NT who made extensive use of it.
- In many instances, the OT text that the NT writers quoted / echoed / alluded to was the Septuagint (LXX) which included most if not all of what we know as the OT Apocrypha. As only one indication of the importance of this reality, Paul's moral arguments in Romans are largely based on the OT apocryphal book Wisdom of Solomon.
- While on the Emmaus road on resurrection day, Jesus certainly understood himself and his ministry and God's work through him in the light of the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms (ask Cleopas and his friend), Lk 24:13-32.
- Many themes and trajectories of NT Christology are rooted in the Wisdom Literature of the OT (viz. Prov 8), including books of the Apocrypha (Ecclesiasticus / Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch)
- The Passion accounts of the Gospels would look quite different without the use they make of OT texts such as Psalms 22, 31, 69, Isa 52:13-53:12, and Zech 8-14.
- Peter's sermon on Pentecost would be toothless without the OT scriptural "proof-texts" he employs from the Prophets and Psalms.
- If stripped of its quotations, allusions, and arguments based on the OT, the book of Hebrews would be non-existent.
- Isa 52:13-53:12 provides much of the sub-stratum for understanding the redeeming / atoning power of innocent suffering.
- The OT presentations of God / Yahweh in Torah, prophecy, psalms, and wisdom provide the "idiom" used by every NT author as he thinks and writes about the unfolding Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus.

LH: Simply put, if one wants to understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ, one *must* read the Old Testament. But we need to go beyond acknowledging that the OT is the Bible that Jesus read and pointing out the obvious reference to OT as Scripture in passages such as 2 Tim 3:16. The authority of the OT rests in its content as it witnesses to Israel's experience of the living God. We commune with the same God and need to look back to these ancient experiences to properly frame our own.

### Your office was raided by fiery fundamentalists bent on ridding the world of books about the Old Testament. Which three books do you most hope they missed and left for you to keep.

NB: I'm glad they didn't grab my computer, which has most of my language resources. I'd want to keep one of my commentaries on the Psalms for devotional purposes, say James Mays in the [Interpretation series](#). I'd want the compendium of Terence Fretheim's articles called [What Kind of God?](#) to illustrate superb biblical / theological interpretation (I once heard

Walter Brueggemann name Fretheim as the best biblical interpreter of this generation, just saying). And since this is an exercise of imagination, I'll dream that I have a copy of Michael Fishbane's [Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel](#) to feed my appetite to plumb the inexhaustible depths of Scripture.

JF: [God & World: A Relational Theology of Creation in the Old Testament](#), by Terence E. Fretheim; [A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. by Bruce Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence Fretheim, David Petersen; [The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture](#), by Brevard S. Childs

LH: Practically, it would be the books that I use the most and those within which I have many notes. Besides my teaching Bible, which is my most valuable book, I impulsively choose: Leong Seow's [commentary on Job](#), David Clines commentary on Job, [1-20, 21-37](#), and [38-42](#). F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp [On Biblical Poetry](#).

### If they stopped holding up a bed sheet with John 3:16 behind the goal posts at football games, which OT text would you suggest to replace it?

NB: The OT's "John 3:16" is Exod 34:5-7; or maybe Exod 34:5-7 is the NT's John 3:16??

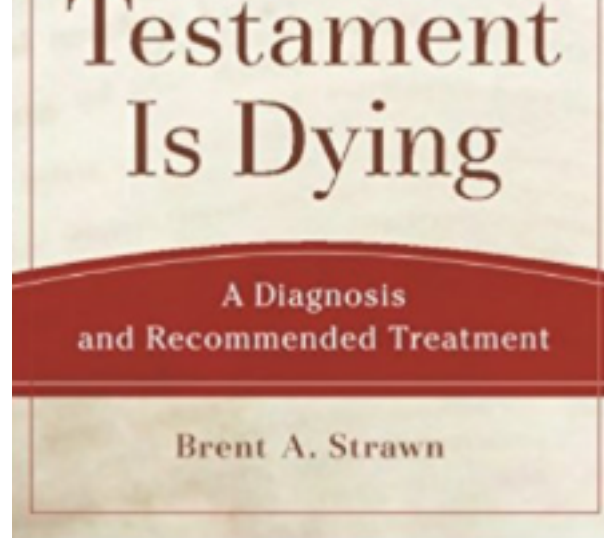
JF: Micah 6:8

LH: I suppose Deut 6:4-5 since the *Shema* was to be written on the doorposts and gates. Or maybe Micah 6:8, since it is such a clear statement of Torah.



## The Old Testament is Dying, by Brent Strawn

Phillip McMillion  
Retired Professor of Old Testament  
Harding School of Theology



A language dies when fewer and fewer people speak it fluently. As those few people age and die, the language dies with them. Using this analogy, Strawn suggests that the Old Testament is dying because its content, meaning, and message. He provides ample data to support his claim, although many of us have suspected this for some time. He also cites various groups who misunderstand the Old Testament, neglect it, or reject it intentionally. Failure to appreciate the different genres or to understand background and context also contribute to the problem. Strawn believes the Old Testament is an important part of scripture and wants to see it survive. He ends with several suggestions including more regular use, better training for leaders, more intentional passing on of this material in churches, and helping individuals see that both the Old and New Testament are important for people of faith. This is a significant book addressing a serious problem that needs our consideration before it is too late to revive the "patient."



## Preachers of Today

Baylor University led a study to determine the [most effective preachers in the English-speaking world](#). They were judged by their care with Scripture, delivery, theology, relevance, and style of preaching. They selected Alistair Begg, Tony Evans, Joel C. Gregory, Timothy Keller, Thomas Long, Otis Moss III, John Piper, Haddon Robinson, Andy Stanley, Charles Swindoll, Barbara Brown Taylor, and Ralph Douglas West.



## A Few More Footnotes

1. [Bobby Ross takes a look at the Colorado Cake Baker case](#) and shows how a few facts can make a difference.
2. A list of the [50 most commonly assigned works of literature](#) at top colleges. [my thought: a little more biblical literacy wouldn't hurt, given that many of these books assume a great deal of it]
3. One idea for how to reverse the perception that the Southern Baptist Convention is deaf to the plight of women: [Beth Moore for President](#).



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UPCOMING  
June 25  
The Old Testament  
is Dying, Part 2

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