

# Dr. Tiberius Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 1, Introduction and Methodology Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 1, The Introduction and Methodology, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. Tiberius Rata's Session 1 on Old Testament Theology** introduces the discipline's methodology and historical development, tracing its origins to the distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology by Johann Philipp Gabler. **Biblical theology emphasizes understanding God's self-revelation within the historical context of the Old Testament**, moving progressively through the text rather than imposing systematic doctrines. **Several models and influential scholars are discussed**, highlighting different approaches, such as the emphasis on history (G.E. Wright), covenant (Eichrodt), and God's communion with humanity (Vriezen). **The session also touches upon canonical criticism (Brevard Childs)**, which considers the church's role in receiving and interpreting scripture, and ultimately underscores the importance of seeing Christ in the Old Testament, as Jesus himself indicated.

**2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → OT Theology, Rata).**



**Rata\_OTTheology\_Session01.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 1, The Introduction and Methodology

#### Briefing Document: Introduction to Old Testament Theology

##### I. Introduction and Purpose:

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Tiberius Rata in the first session of his Old Testament Theology course, focusing on the introduction and methodology of the discipline. Dr. Rata, an Old Testament teacher at Grace College and Theological Seminary, outlines the nature of Old Testament Theology, its historical development, its relationship with other theological disciplines, and various models proposed by scholars.

##### II. Main Themes and Important Ideas:

- **Defining Old Testament Theology:** Dr. Rata emphasizes that Christian Old Testament Theology cannot be done in isolation from the New Testament and the person of Jesus Christ. It is inherently a form of biblical theology, specifically focused on the Old Testament.
- Drawing on Vos, he highlights that it is the "branch of exegetical theology deals with the process of self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible."
- This necessitates an exegetical approach, where beliefs are drawn *from* the text (exegesis) and not imposed *onto* it (eisegesis).
- The Old Testament is considered God's Word without error, relevant for all aspects of life, not just faith and practice.
- **Historical Development of Biblical Theology:** The concept of biblical theology as a distinct discipline emerged after the Reformation, with Johann Philipp Gabler (17th century) being considered its father.
- Gabler advocated for a clear distinction between **biblical theology** (historical and descriptive, focusing on how God revealed himself in history within the biblical texts) and **dogmatic/systematic theology** (presenting scriptural truth in its totality and organizing it topically).
- Gabler emphasized the "purely historical character" of biblical theology, advocating for examining God's revelation progressively through the Old Testament narrative and within the historical context of individual documents.

- He believed biblical theology was crucial *before* engaging in systematic theology. He considered "biblical theology" itself an inadequate term, preferring an "exegesis of individual documents and a comparison of their various expressions."
- **Relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology:** While distinct, both disciplines engage with the biblical text and perform exegesis.
- **Biblical Theology:** Focuses on the "particular stage of maturation of God's revelation" across different historical periods (patriarchs, Moses, Christ). It has a "more historical, progressive arrangement."
- **Systematic Theology:** Presents scriptural truth topically (doctrine of God, man, sin, etc.) and aims for a comprehensive understanding.
- **Key Figures and Their Contributions:**
  - **G.E. Wright:** Emphasized God as "not only the God of covenant but also the Lord of history," reacting against those who separated theological truth from the historicity of biblical events like the Exodus. He believed God revealed himself through historical acts.
  - **Gerhard von Rad:** While acknowledging the Old Testament as a historical book and Israel's faith grounded in a "theology of history," he controversially suggested that what mattered was not necessarily what happened, but "what Israel believed that happened." This is critiqued by Dr. Rata for its subjectivity. Von Rad also argued against a singular theological center in the Old Testament.
  - **Julius Wellhausen (mentioned implicitly):** The "German school" Wright reacted against, which questioned the historicity of biblical narratives based on perceived miracles.
  - **Terry Ann:** Focused on the literature of the Bible rather than its history, a counterpoint to Gabler's emphasis.
  - **Walter Kaiser:** Argued that "history is not only the medium of revelation; it is the basis through which God can be known."
  - **Walter Eichrodt:** Proposed the **covenant** as the center of Old Testament theology, highlighting the various covenants God made (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, new covenant). While Dr. Rata appreciates Eichrodt's focus on God and the covenantal theme, he notes that Eichrodt was critical of systematic theology and believed the Old Testament contained "very little actual doctrine."

- **Theodorus C. Vriezen:** Focused on "God's communion with human beings" as a central theme, alongside the importance of faith and revelation in theology. He also stressed the integral connection between the Old and New Testaments.
- **Walter Zimmerli:** Argued that "the center of Old Testament theology is God himself." He cautioned against the idea that history itself *became* the revelatory word, but rather that events urged people to hear God's word.
- **Klaus Westermann:** Emphasized that the structure of Old Testament theology should be based on "events rather than concepts," highlighting the narrative nature of the Old Testament and the theme of **blessing** as a continuous and often unnoticed work of God ("common grace").
- **Brevard Childs:** Developed **canonical analysis**, emphasizing that the theology of the Bible and the church developed together. He defined the canon as "the received, collected, and interpreted material of the church," highlighting the role of the Christian community in understanding and accepting Scripture. He viewed the Old Testament in relation to the New, but emphasized that the New is incomprehensible without the Old. He saw the Old Testament bearing witness to the Christ who was to come, and the New to the Christ who has appeared.
- **Different Models of Old Testament Theology:** Dr. Rata briefly mentions several models:
- **Typological Model:** (Von Rad, Eichrodt) - Though Eichrodt primarily focused on covenant.
- **Heilsgeschichte (History of Salvation):** Tracing God's saving work in history, seen as closely related to biblical theology.
- **Narrative Approach:** (Frey) - Emphasizing the narrative structure, though with caveats for evangelical believers.
- **Cultural-Linguistic Method:** (Lindbergh) - Focusing on the narrative presentation and cultural context.
- **Sociological Perspective:** (Gotwald) - Interpreting early Israel through a Marxist lens as a peasant revolt. This model is critiqued for reading contemporary ideologies into the past.
- **Jewish Biblical Theology:** Acknowledging valuable insights from Jewish scholars, while noting the fundamental difference in their view of the messianic promises.

- **The Centrality of Christ:** Dr. Rata concludes by emphasizing Jesus' own teaching that the Old Testament speaks about him. He quotes Luke 24:25-27 and 44-45 to illustrate how Jesus interpreted the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms as concerning himself. He states that "if we read the Old Testament without seeing Jesus, we miss the point."
- **The Purpose of Biblical and Dogmatic Theology:** Neither is an end in itself, but "useful tools by which to enable fresh access to the living voice of God in sacred scriptures."

### III. Key Quotes:

- "We don't do pure Old Testament Theology because we couldn't; we're not Old Testament prophets; we are Christian teachers, so we cannot teach the Old Testament as though Jesus didn't die on the cross and didn't rise again."
- "Vos says that the branch of exegetical theology deals with the process of self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible."
- "In other words, Old Testament theology has to be exegetical theology. In other words, it needs to come out from the text. We cannot do eisegesis, impose our beliefs on the text, but draw our beliefs from the text."
- "Gabler looked at the way theology was done and said, I think there needs to be a different way to look at this... he gave biblical theology a purely historical character."
- "biblical theology must attend to the individual documents of the Bible, placing them in their historical context and observing their form of expression." (quoting Gabler)
- "biblical theology stands between exegesis and systematic theology."
- "God is not only the God of covenant but also the Lord of history." (G.E. Wright)
- "[Von Rad said] it's not what happened in history. It's not what God did but what Israel believed that God did."
- "the center of Old Testament theology is God himself." (Walter Zimmerli)
- "The Old Testament is understood in relation to the New Testament, but the New is incomprehensible apart from the Old..."

- "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all scriptures the things concerning himself." (referring to Jesus on the road to Emmaus)
- "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Jesus speaking to his disciples)

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

Dr. Rata's introductory session provides a foundational understanding of Old Testament Theology, emphasizing its exegetical nature, its historical development as a distinct discipline, and its crucial relationship with both historical context and the overarching narrative culminating in Jesus Christ. He introduces key figures and their diverse approaches, highlighting both valuable contributions and points of divergence. The session underscores the importance of reading the Old Testament through the lens of Christ while respecting its historical and literary integrity, ultimately aiming for a deeper understanding of God's self-revelation in Scripture.

## 4. Study Guide: Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 1, The Introduction and Methodology

### Old Testament Theology: Introduction and Methodology Study Guide

#### Quiz

1. According to Dr. Rata, why can't Christians do "pure" Old Testament Theology?
2. Explain Johann Philipp Gabler's contribution to the field of biblical theology, particularly his distinction between two theological disciplines.
3. What does it mean for Old Testament theology to be "exegetical theology," and why is this important according to the lecture?
4. Describe the difference in how biblical theology and systematic theology approach the material in Scripture, according to the lecture.
5. How did G.E. Wright react to the German school of theology regarding the historicity of biblical events?
6. Contrast the views of scholars like Terry Ann with those of Gabler and Kaiser regarding the primary focus of Old Testament study.
7. Explain Walter Eichrodt's perspective on the "center" of Old Testament theology and why he might not be accepted in some evangelical schools today.
8. Describe Brevard Childs' concept of "canonical analysis" and the role of the church in his understanding of the canon.
9. According to Jesus' words in Luke 24, what is the significance of the Old Testament for understanding Christ?
10. What is the ultimate purpose of both biblical theology and dogmatic theology, according to the lecture?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Christians cannot do "pure" Old Testament Theology because they are teaching after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Their understanding of the Old Testament is inherently shaped by this later revelation; they cannot teach as if these events did not occur.
2. Johann Philipp Gabler is considered the father of biblical theology for clearly delineating between biblical theology and dogmatic (or systematic) theology. He

argued that biblical theology should have a purely historical character, focusing on how God revealed himself progressively throughout history.

3. For Old Testament theology to be "exegetical theology" means that it must draw its beliefs and understanding directly from the biblical text itself through careful interpretation (exegesis). This is important to avoid eisegesis, which is imposing one's own beliefs onto the text.
4. Biblical theology arranges scriptural material in a more historical and progressive manner, tracing the maturation of God's revelation over time (e.g., through the patriarchs, Moses, and Christ). Systematic theology, on the other hand, presents scriptural truth topically in its totality (e.g., the doctrine of God, sin, etc.), often drawing verses from various historical periods.
5. G.E. Wright reacted against the German school by asserting that God reveals himself through historical acts and that theology cannot be separated from the historicity of biblical events like the Exodus. He believed that the historical reality of these events is crucial for understanding God's character as both the God of covenant and the Lord of history.
6. Scholars like Terry Ann focus on the literature of the Bible rather than its history, emphasizing the literary aspects over the historical accuracy of the events. This contrasts with Gabler and Kaiser, who believed that the historical context and history itself are essential for understanding God's revelation.
7. Walter Eichrodt suggested that the "center" of Old Testament theology is the covenant between God and humanity. He might not be accepted in some evangelical schools today because he was critical of systematic theologians and believed the Old Testament contained very little actual doctrine, emphasizing studying the text itself rather than imposing doctrinal outlines.
8. Brevard Childs' "canonical analysis" emphasizes understanding biblical theology within the context of the church's reception, collection, and interpretation of the biblical writings. He argued that theology cannot be divorced from the interpretive tradition of the church, which played a crucial role in determining the canon.
9. According to Jesus in Luke 24, the entire Old Testament—the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms—speaks about him. He interpreted these scriptures to the disciples to show how the prophecies and writings pointed to his suffering,



death, and resurrection, highlighting the Old Testament's essential role in understanding Christ.

10. The ultimate purpose of both biblical theology and dogmatic theology is not to be ends in themselves, but rather to serve as useful tools that enable fresh access to the living voice of God within the sacred scriptures.

## **Essay Format Questions**

1. Discuss the key differences between biblical theology and systematic theology as presented in the lecture, and analyze the strengths and limitations of each approach for understanding the Old Testament.
2. Evaluate the significance of Johann Philipp Gabler's contribution to the field of Old Testament theology. How did his emphasis on the historical character of biblical theology shape subsequent scholarship?
3. Compare and contrast the views of at least three Old Testament scholars mentioned in the lecture regarding the central theme or organizing principle of Old Testament theology. Which perspective do you find most compelling and why?
4. Analyze Brevard Childs' concept of canonical criticism. What are the implications of his approach for how we understand and interpret the Old Testament today, and what are some potential critiques of his methodology?
5. Based on the lecture, explain the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament in Christian theology. How does understanding the Old Testament inform our understanding of Jesus Christ, and vice versa?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Biblical Theology:** A branch of theology that focuses on understanding the progressive self-revelation of God as it unfolds historically within the Bible. It emphasizes drawing theological conclusions from the biblical text within its historical and literary context.
- **Systematic Theology (Dogmatic Theology):** A branch of theology that organizes biblical truths into a coherent and comprehensive system of doctrines, often addressing topics topically rather than chronologically.
- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of a text, especially of scripture. It aims to understand the original meaning of the text in its historical and literary context.
- **Eisegesis:** The interpretation of a text by introducing one's own preconceived ideas or interpretations into it, rather than drawing meaning from the text itself.
- **Self-Revelation of God:** The idea that God actively makes himself known to humanity through his words and actions in history, as recorded in the Bible.
- **Heilsgeschichte:** A German term meaning "salvation history," referring to the narrative of God's saving actions in history, especially as recounted in the Bible.
- **Covenant:** A binding agreement or solemn promise between God and humanity or between two human parties, often forming the framework for their relationship.
- **Canonical Analysis:** An approach to biblical theology, associated with Brevard Childs, that emphasizes the final, canonical form of the biblical text as received and interpreted by the church as the basis for theological reflection.
- **Canon:** The collection of books that are recognized as authoritative and divinely inspired Scripture by a religious community (in this context, the Christian Bible).
- **Progressive Revelation:** The theological concept that God's revelation of himself and his will to humanity has unfolded gradually and increasingly throughout history, culminating in Jesus Christ.

## 5. FAQs on Rata, Old Testament Theology, Session 1, The Introduction and Methodology, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions on Old Testament Theology (Based on Dr. Rata's Session 1)

#### 1. What is Old Testament Theology, and why is it important for Christians today?

Old Testament Theology, as understood by Christian teachers, is a branch of biblical theology that seeks to understand the self-revelation of God as it unfolds within the Old Testament scriptures. It acknowledges that while we are not Old Testament prophets, the Old Testament cannot be studied in isolation from the understanding that Jesus Christ has come. It's crucial for Christians today because Jesus himself affirmed that the Old Testament speaks about him, and understanding it provides the necessary foundation for comprehending the New Testament and the entirety of God's redemptive plan.

#### 2. How does Old Testament Theology differ from systematic theology?

The primary distinction lies in their methodology and arrangement of material. Old Testament Theology, rooted in the work of Johann Philipp Gabler, adopts a more historical and progressive approach, examining how God revealed himself through time, from the beginning of the Old Testament narrative. It emphasizes the historical context of individual books and the development of God's revelation. Systematic theology, on the other hand, presents scriptural truth in a comprehensive and topical manner, organizing doctrines such as the doctrine of God, humanity, and sin, often drawing verses from various parts of the Bible without necessarily focusing on their historical progression. While both use exegesis, Old Testament Theology prioritizes the historical unfolding of revelation before systematic categorization.

#### 3. What is the role of exegesis in Old Testament Theology?

Exegesis is foundational to Old Testament Theology. It is the process of drawing meaning *out* of the biblical text, as opposed to *eisegesis*, which is imposing one's own beliefs onto the text. Old Testament Theology, as exegetical theology, must be firmly rooted in a careful and contextual reading of the Old Testament scriptures. This involves paying attention to the literary form, historical setting, and original meaning of the texts before attempting to synthesize theological themes.

#### **4. What does it mean to say that God revealed himself in history, according to the sources?**

Several scholars, like G.E. Wright and Kaiser, emphasize that God's revelation is deeply intertwined with historical events in the Old Testament. This means that God didn't just reveal himself through words, but also through his actions in the history of Israel, such as the Exodus. Theology cannot be separated from the historicity of these events.

Understanding what God did in history is crucial for knowing who God is. However, some scholars like von Rad later shifted the focus to Israel's *belief* about what happened, a view the presenter critiques, emphasizing the importance of the objective truth of God's actions.

#### **5. Is there a central theme or unifying principle in Old Testament Theology? What are some proposed centers?**

The question of a central theme in the Old Testament is debated among scholars. Walter Eichrodt proposed the concept of "covenant" as the center, highlighting God's relational commitments with humanity through covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Theodorus Vriezen emphasized "God's communion with human beings" as the central idea. Walter Zimmerli argued that "God himself" is the ultimate center of Old Testament Theology. Others have suggested "blessing" as a key theme that runs throughout the Old Testament narrative. While various compelling themes exist, the presenter seems to lean towards the idea that God is central, while acknowledging the significance of themes like covenant.

#### **6. What is "Heilsgeschichte" and how does it relate to Old Testament Theology?**

"Heilsgeschichte" is a German term meaning "salvation history." It refers to the concept of tracing God's saving work throughout history, particularly as recorded in the Bible. This approach is closely related to biblical theology and Old Testament Theology because it focuses on the progressive unfolding of God's plan of salvation within the historical narrative of the Old Testament. It examines how God acts in history to redeem his people, a theme that connects directly with the historical and progressive methodology of biblical theology.

**7. What is "canonical criticism" as proposed by Brevard Childs, and why is the concept of the "canon" important for Old Testament Theology?**

Canonical criticism, associated with Brevard Childs, emphasizes the final form of the Old Testament as it has been received, collected, and interpreted by the church. It argues that theology should consider the entire canon of Scripture and the way the community of faith has understood and used these texts over time. The concept of the canon is crucial because it defines the authoritative body of texts that the church recognizes as God's Word. Canonical criticism highlights that theological understanding is not developed in isolation but within the context of the believing community and its historical interpretation of Scripture.

**8. How does the Old Testament relate to the New Testament according to the sources, and what is the task of a biblical theologian in light of this relationship?**

The Old Testament is seen as bearing witness to the Christ who was to come, while the New Testament reveals the Christ who has appeared in his fullness. Jesus himself taught that the Old Testament scriptures spoke about him, and his post-resurrection appearances involved explaining how the Old Testament prophesied his suffering and glory. Therefore, the New Testament is incomprehensible apart from the Old. The task of a biblical theologian is to reflect on the whole Christian Bible, recognizing these interconnected voices, and to understand how the Old Testament anticipates and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Reading the Old Testament without seeing its connection to Jesus is seen as missing its central point.