

To Point the Way

To ask what the Old Testament has to say about teaching is to ask a big question because the Old Testament and its entirety is Torah. Torah is a term which is sometimes translated “law” in the legal sense, but Jewish scholars rightly insist that it means “teaching.” The word Torah comes from the verb *yara* which signifies “to throw” or “to point the way.” The Torah narrowly defined as Pentateuch or broadly defined as the entire Scripture offers a wide range of pointers on the subject of teaching.

The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into three parts: Pentateuch (Torah), Prophets, and the Writings. From each one may select a passage that deals with the subject of teaching. From the Pentateuch one might choose Deuteronomy 6:1-9; from the Writings, Proverbs 22:17-21 and from the Prophets, Malachi 2:1-9. Such a selection from the three parts of the Hebrew Bible would identify three groups as teachers: parents, sages and priests. These would represent three sociological settings, then as now: the home, the school, and the religious community.

(Called to Teach, Edited by David Ewert, Winnipeg. MB: The Christian Press, 1980, 3, From Chapter I, Wisdom Teachers and Priests in the Old Testament and Now by Elmer Martens)