

Introduction:

In **Exodus 23:14-17**, the Bible says we are supposed to keep three feasts per year in which all the males appear before the Lord. Why don't we do that? In **Leviticus 4**, the Bible says if any one of us sins we are to offer a sacrifice at the tent of meeting. Why don't we do that? In **Psalms 150:3-5**, the Bible says to praise God with trumpets, lutes, harps, tambourines, dancing, and cymbals. Why don't we do that? For a people who claim to follow the Bible, we sure disregard a whole lot of it. Or at least it seems that way to some on the outside. The reality is while we learn from these passages and we need to study them, we do not follow these passages "religiously" because they are not part of our covenant. The Bible actually contains the records of several covenants. We are only part of one of them. **II Timothy 2:15** says we must handle the Word of Truth rightly. In our last lesson, we learned that we must use the proper standard. In this one, we want to start learning how to use the standard properly. One of the first tasks to accomplish that is recognizing the difference between the Old and New Covenants or Testaments.

Discussion:

- I. An overview.
 - A. The first thing we notice about the Bible is that it is not a book, but a book of books divided into two major sections. The Old Testament contains 39 books, which we typically break down into 5 major sections:
 1. *The Law* – **Genesis** through **Deuteronomy** (5 books)
 2. *History* – **Joshua** through **Esther** (12 books)
 3. *Wisdom* – **Job** through **Song of Solomon** (5 books)
 4. *Major Prophets* – **Isaiah** through **Daniel** (5 books)
 5. *Minor Prophets* – **Hosea** through **Malachi** (12 books)
 - B. The New Testament has 27 books, which we typically break down into 4 major sections.
 1. *Gospels* – **Matthew** through **John** (4 books)
 2. *History* – **Acts** (1 book)
 3. *Epistles (Letters)* – **Romans** through **Jude** (21 books)
 4. *Apocalyptic (Prophecy)* – **Revelation** (1 book)
- II. Note several differences between the two testaments.
 - A. The two testaments were written to two overlapping but different groups of people.
 1. The Old Testament was written to the nation of Israel (**Deuteronomy 4:1, 7-8**). Take note that this was a physical nation. People were a part of this nation by physical birth.
 2. The New Testament was written to the church of Christ (**Hebrews 12:22-24; I Timothy 3:15**). This is a spiritual nation. People are a part of this nation by rebirth (**John 3:3, 5**).
 - B. The two testaments promise that the coming Messiah will do different things.
 1. The Old Testament promised the Messiah would come to be a sacrifice for sins (**Isaiah 52:13-53:12**) and to establish His kingdom (**Isaiah 2:1-5**).
 2. The New Testament promised the Messiah will come to bring judgment on the wicked and save His own (**I Thessalonians 4:13-17; II Thessalonians 1:6-10**).
 - C. The two testaments promise different things to occur at the closing of each.
 1. The Old Testament promised that there would be a New Testament (**Jeremiah 31:31**).
 2. The New Testament promised that God will bring judgment, destruction, and salvation (**II Peter 3:10-13; John 5:28-30**).
 - D. Consequently, the two testaments are different and produce two different results.
 1. If we follow the Old Testament, we will be Jews bound by the Law (**Romans 2:17; Galatians 3:12**).
 2. If we follow the New Testament, we will belong to Jesus Christ, Christians saved by grace through faith (**Galatians 2:15-16; 3:26-29**).

III. The New Testament has superseded the Old Testament.

- A. We have already noted that the Old Testament was written to a particular people, the Jewish nation (**Deuteronomy 4:1, 7-8**). We must also note that the Old Testament was for a particular time. According to **Galatians 3:19**, the Law or Old Testament was put into effect until the offspring should come. The offspring, having already come (**vs. 16**), the time of the Old Covenant is fulfilled.
- B. The Old Testament was given for a particular purpose. According to **Galatians 3:21-25**, it was given to prepare the way for Christ, Who has already come. The Law was not given to save anyone (**Galatians 3:10-12**), but to prepare the way for the One who would save us.
- C. The Old Testament promised a New Covenant, by which it would be superseded (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). This promise is brought up again in **Hebrews 8:6-13**. The Hebrew writer explained that this New Covenant made the first obsolete and was ready to vanish away, which it did when Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple lost, and the priesthood dispersed.
- D. Today, many get hung up saying that since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, He would not change His law. Note two very important things. First, God being the same yesterday, today, and forever does not mean His law was not allowed to change, but that His nature never changes. Second, God actually said that the Law had changed in **Hebrews 7:12**. This change occurred with Christ's sacrifice. He removed the legal stipulations of that Old Covenant, replacing them with a new and better covenant; therefore, we are not to be judged based on the Law (**Colossians 2:13-17**).
- E. How does all this fit within our main heading—rightly handling the word of truth? If we are going to apply the word correctly we must handle the Old and New Testaments properly. The Old Covenant has been superseded by the New Covenant. The Old Testament does not contain the stipulations of our covenant, the New does. We must not go to the Old Testament to find our pattern for worship and service. We must go to the New. The fact that something was allowed under the Old Covenant does not authorize it under the New Covenant. Consider polygamy, contrasting **Exodus 21:10** and **I Corinthians 7:2**. Additionally, the fact that the Old Covenant condemned something does not mean it is necessarily condemned under the New. Consider the eating of certain meats, contrasting **Leviticus 11:4-8, 10, 13** and **Acts 10:12-16**.
- F. The choice is clear. If we want to be in Christ, we need to surrender to His New Covenant. If we go back to the Old Covenant, the Law to be justified, we will fall from grace and be severed from Him (**Galatians 5:4**). Thus, if we want to use our standard properly, we must turn to the New Covenant as our agreement with God, serving Him as outlined in that agreement based on the blood of Jesus Christ.

IV. How do we rightly handle the Old Testament?

- A. This leaves us with a question. If the Old Testament is not our covenant, how do we rightly handle those scriptures? Should we just throw it away? No. Allow me to provide five principles that will help us use the Law lawfully.
- B. First, we must recognize that the Old Testament is and always will be scripture. **II Timothy 3:16-17** says "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable..." we must remember Paul was including the Scriptures from Moses, David, Isaiah, and the rest of the Old Covenant prophets. The prophets of the New Covenant viewed those old scriptures as God-breathed. Consider the following quotes:

According to one count, there are 239 acknowledged quotations of the OT, introduced by some kind of formula; there are 198 quotations not introduced by any formula; there are 1,167 instances of OT passages reworded or directly mentioned. This makes a total of 1,604 NT citations of 1,276 different OT passages. There are many more allusions to the OT and borrowing of its phrases. Most of these passages represent a straightforward, literary use of the OT. The NT uses the Old in many ways: for vocabulary and phraseology to express its own ideas, for illustration, for proof of its statements, for moral instruction, for predictions of the new situation. (Everett Ferguson, "Christian Use of the Old Testament in the New," *The World and Literature of the Old Testament*, ed. by John T. Willis, College Press, Joplin, MO, p. 373)

"It is impossible to overstate the importance of understanding the use of the Old Testament for New Testament research. Every strata of the early church—every tradition, every author in the New Testament—was immersed in the Old Testament and its theology is based on it." (Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Intervarsity press, Downers Grove, IL, 2006, p. 343)

It is painfully obvious that the apostles and prophets of the New Covenant viewed the Scripture of the Old Covenant as Scripture for us as well. Modern notions that we should not preach from the

Old Testament are misguided. **I Timothy 1:8** says we are to use the Law; we must simply make sure to use it lawfully. Further, **Romans 15:4** says the Old Covenant scriptures were written for our learning. If our New Testament counterparts were immersed in the Old Covenant scriptures, we should be too.

- C. Second, we must recognize that the Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Jesus.
1. Many make a great deal out of **Matthew 5:17-18**. Jesus says He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets (by which He means the Old Testament scriptures). They hone in on the fact that Jesus says He didn't come to abolish the Law. However, they miss that He says He came to fulfill it.
 2. He goes on to say that none of the Law will pass away until it is all accomplished. Folks argue and bicker about what that means. Some search for passages in the Old Testament they feel have not been accomplished or fulfilled, with which they hope to explain "all" has not been accomplished. I believe this misses the point. Let us first keep this statement in its immediate context. Jesus claims He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. That is, He came to accomplish the Law and the Prophets. The main question we need to ask is did Jesus do what He claimed He came to do or did He fail? I may struggle to know exactly what aspects of the Law and the Prophets He meant and I may argue about some stray verse here or there still needing fulfillment, but Jesus claimed He came to fulfill it. Did He do what He said He was going to do or did He fail?
 3. If Jesus failed, then this whole discussion is moot and useless anyway. If Jesus didn't fulfill the Law, then there is no salvation in Him and there is no point in trying to be part of either covenant. However, the Law and the Prophets have been fulfilled in Him. Thus **Romans 10:4** can say that Christ is the "end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (ESV). That is, Christ was the goal, the fulfillment, what the Law was pointing to all along.
 4. Understand what this means. We can (1) use the Law to point to Christ. As Peter did on the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2:25-28**, we can look to the Old Covenant Scriptures and see what they tell us about the coming Christ. However, this is so much more than finding the odd prophetic statement fulfilled in Jesus; this is recognizing the entire story of Israel and its covenant with God is fulfilled in Jesus. We can (2) see how the covenantal laws of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus. For instance, we no longer are required to keep the feasts of the Law, pilgrimaging to the Temple to present ourselves to God three times a year because the feasts and the temple are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and His church. He is our Passover, the First Fruits, God tabernacling with men. He is the temple that was destroyed and rebuilt in three days. We, His church, are the temple of God in the earth today. We no longer are obligated to keep the Sabbath day or year because the Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is our rest and we long for our Sabbath rest not on the seventh day of the week or the seventh year of the calendar but in eternity around the throne of Christ. We no longer offer the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament because they are fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus who is our guilt offering, sin offering, burnt offering, and peace offering.
 5. As **Colossians 2:16-17** explains, these were all a shadow, but the substance belongs to Jesus Christ. This brings up two points for us. First, why would you want to hang on to the shadow when you can have the real thing? Second, though it is a shadow that you wouldn't want to hang on to, it still gives some indication of the real thing so you don't throw it away.
- D. Third, there are great parallels between the Old and the New Covenants. Though we are not under the same agreement with God as our Old Testament counterparts, we know that they too were in a covenant agreement with God. As Paul did in **I Corinthians 10:1-11**, we can examine their examples, see how they were parallel to our situation and make applications in our own lives. For instance, the wilderness wandering Jews mentioned in **I Corinthians 10** were baptized like we are and were sustained by the rock which is Christ like we are. But what tripped them up? Idolatry. We must also steer clear of idolatry which will separate us from Christ. As seen in this example, we can turn to these accounts to learn of dangers and see examples of faithfulness to God in the face of those dangers.
- E. Fourth, even the New Covenant recognizes there were some legal stipulations of the Old Covenant that were not limited to that covenant but were, for lack of a better term, universal moral law. That is, there are some laws that were administered because of the agreement with Israel that have been fulfilled in Jesus and are abrogated by the New Covenant agreement we have with God through the blood of Jesus on the cross (circumcision, dietary laws, temple laws, worship practices, feasts, Sabbaths, etc.). On the other hand, there were some laws that were simply universal and apply no matter which covenant agreement someone has made with God or whether they are even in a covenant agreement with God. In **Acts 15:19-20, 29**, when the Jerusalem church realized they could not bind circumcision (Old Covenant law) on Gentiles becoming Christians,

that is entering the New Covenant with God, they didn't summarily dismiss every legal stipulation mentioned in the Law. In fact, they highlight an entire section of the Law that does apply to Gentile Christians. The four stipulations they bring up, abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality, are not merely the four stipulations in the Law that they required of Gentile Christians. Rather, this is a shorthand reference to an entire section in **Leviticus 17-18**. It is an outline of those two chapters highlighting that James and these early Christians did recognize a distinction. There were some aspects of the Law that were so because they were specifically part of the covenant agreement between God and Israel. That was why they did not bind circumcision on the Gentile Christians. But there were some aspects that were simply part of God's universal moral law that apply to people whether they've made a covenant with God or not. This is why the nations who were not in covenant agreement with God were still held guilty for violating these very principles, had made the land unclean by them, and were vomited out of the land because of them (**Leviticus 18:24-30**).

- F. Fifth, as an extension of the previous point, recognize that some parts of the Old Testament scriptures are not "covenantal," if you will. For instance, the **Proverbs** is not covenantal scripture. What I mean by that is **Proverbs** (and **Ecclesiastes**, **Song of Solomon**, **Job**, and perhaps some parts of the **Psalms**) is in the main providing insight to wise living. It is not providing covenant law for Old Testament Israel. For instance, **Proverbs 6:1-5** speaks against co-signing on a loan for a neighbor and especially for a stranger. However, this wasn't a covenant law with Israel. This was simply wise advice for more successful living. It doesn't matter what covenant agreement you are making with God, this is wise living. This advice didn't suddenly become folly with the death of Jesus. It still applies to us in the exact same way it did to those under the Old Covenant.

Conclusion:

We are using the proper standard. We must make sure to use it properly, understanding the differences between the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament is for our learning, certainly, but it is not our pattern for serving God. That is the New Testament. We need to remember the ominous warning and glorious solution presented by Paul in **Galatians 3:10-14**. If we go back to the Law as our means of salvation and strict guide for service, we are cursed and must strive to live by it entirely. However, Christ has redeemed us from that Law. Why not live in Christ and submit to His better covenant based on better promises (**Hebrews 8:6**).