

Series 4: The Old and New Covenants – the Earthly and the Spiritual

Each time, before reading our Bibles it is very important that we always read in “context” and as best as we are able to put ourselves into the time of the passage, knowing as much of the surrounding events of that time as possible, the people being spoken to, who is speaking, what is the purpose of the message, and what would be the mindset and worldview of the hearers of the message (this is what is meant by “Audience Relevance”).

Here are some questions which truly are important to ask yourself and keep in mind before you start your daily Bible reading in order to fully understand a passage:

- **Who?** *Who was writing? What kind of person was he? Who was he writing to? Who/what was he writing about?*
- **What?** *What does the writer say? What are the hearers experiencing? What kind of people were they? What worldview and cultural characteristics, language, mindset, would they be living under and believing?*
- **When?** *When was he writing and when does he apply his writings (past/present/future)?*
- **Where?** *Where are the events taking place, or where were/are they to take place? Where was that part of the Bible written? What do we know about those places where it was written from and of where it was written to?*
- **How?** *How does the author describe the events he describes, how will they be fulfilled (literal, apocalyptic, figurative/metaphoric, typological, poetic, hyperbole, symbolic, parabolic, cosmological etc.)?*
- **Why?** *Why does the author write? What do we know about the circumstances which called forth this writing? Why does he say what he says? Why will the events he describes occur?*

It is very important to be studying the Bible like this, as this will better allow us to understand passages in their context, and bring meaning to light that may not be seen or thought of if we are simply reading the Bible as if the passage were written to us.

Do not get a wrong understanding, as so much in the Bible is applicable “**for us**,” but it was not written “**to us**.” And this puts a different light and understanding to many things when we try to put ourselves into the setting, time and culture of any particular passage.

Let us take an overview of the Two Covenants, and then we will get into each one more deeply:

First, more correctly would be for us to refer to the two covenants as the "Earthly/Fleshly/Temporary as the Old" and the "Spiritual/Better/Eternal as the New" because in reality the one we call New is actually older than the one we call Old 😊. For simplicity sake we will use the terms Old and New as we are familiar with them in the Bible, as stated in Hebrews and elsewhere – Read 8:6-13:

Let's take a brief overview of the New (Spiritual/Better/Eternal) covenant:

Gen. 12:1-3 (The promise of the eternal covenant with Abraham of the blessing that would be to all the families of the earth – would also **include the Gentiles**)

Gen. 17:1-7; 19, 22:15-18 The covenant of "promise" would be established through the child of "promise," Isaac.

- Very key to notice that the "promises" of the Genesis 12 and 17 everlasting covenant were "not" made to the physical nation of Israel, but to "Abraham" and his "Seed" – meaning "Christ."

Gal. 3:16-18; 22-23 The Holy Spirit through Paul helps remove the mystery of these Genesis verses and provides light into what those OT promises meant.

- Paul shows a clear distinction between the eternal covenant promise to Abraham "about Christ" and "all the spiritual children of faith," and the Old Covenant nation of Israel and those physical descendants. Old Covenant Israel would not begin until 430 years after the time of Abraham when they would be brought out of Egypt and receive their covenant of law at Mt. Sinai. (We will be looking deeper into Galatians 3 in a future Study Series.)

Rom. 4:1-18 (The covenant of Grace/faith more expounded)

- At the end of verse 11 notice again that Paul again makes a clear distinction of who the “true Israel” descendants of Abraham are – “...all those who believe.” (Those of faith, not those who were born physically from his seed).
- And verse 13, “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law [not through being physically born an Old Covenant Hebrew], but through the righteousness of faith.”
 - Paul is saying that no one is able to say “I was born from the lineage of Abraham therefore I am of the true seed of Abraham,” but he is saying that the only “true descendants” are those who are by the righteousness of faith.
- And verse 16, “For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants [seed], not only to those who are of the Law [believing Old Covenant Hebrews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all”
 - Paul says that “the promise,” the “all the seed” and the “us” were the Christians in the church in Rome to whom he was writing → the “true seed (descendants)” → only the “believing” Jews and “believing” Gentiles.

Rom. 8:3-6 and 12-13 (Life in the Spirit [born again new man walking according to the Spirit] vs. life in the flesh [living satisfying the lusts and desires of the old man])

Gal. 4:22-31 (Explains the two covenants: Abraham: Promise thru Sarah = Isaac vs. Bondage thru Hagar = Mount Sinai)(We will go into this passage deeper in a future Study Series).

Gal. 3:6-9 (eternal covenant promise to Abraham: gospel in Christ) **then 13-18** (“the promise” was to all “Jew or Gentile” and this was the first covenant he is referring to) **then 23-29** (those in Christ are the “spiritual true Israel” as we just saw in **Gal. 4:26**)

Read all Hebrews 8 (notice in particular vs. 8:1-2, 5-10, 13. The chapter is a contrast of the earthly vs. the spiritual, or Old/physical Israel covenant vs. New/spiritual Israel [all believing Jews or Gentiles] covenant)

Heb. 9:8-11 At the end of vs. 10 the NKJV has the English word “reformation.” The Greek word used here is “*diorthosis*.” This word can be understood in a medical way to “put a broken bone back in place.”

- Strong’s NT 1357 - properly, in a physical sense, a making straight, restoring to its natural and normal condition something which in some way protrudes or has got out of line, as (in Hippocrates) broken or misshapen limbs.
 - Christ’s coming was to put back in place the entire cosmological order of the heavens and earth which had become broken since the fall of Adam and sin.
- Verse 11 says that Christ was to come with “the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.” Clearly indicating that the reformation/restoring by Christ being spoken of would be with a tabernacle/temple “not made by hands.” (Which nullifies a future literal rebuilding of an earthly temple).

(We will extensively study the New Covenant, cosmology, Old/New Heavens and Earth, The Kingdom, and many other related topics in several future Study Series)

****As we move into this next section it is very important that we remember what we have learned on page 1 of how to study the Bible in the audience relevance!!**

Let us now turn to look at some clear Scriptures which testify how “The Law” had a **definite beginning** at a point in time, and also a **definite termination**. (By “LAW” we mean the Mosaic system of statutes, ordinances, and commandments)

The Law, which was designated as the Mosaic code, came into being with Moses. Let’s turn to **John 1: 17: For the law was given by Moses, but **grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.**”**

Of course, this verse does not imply that law never existed before Moses, any more than it implies that grace and truth were not in the world before the manifestation in the flesh of the blessed eternal God the Son. Every person since Adam (Jew or Gentile) was under the “**Law of Sin and Death**” (when a person sins they bring upon him/her self condemnation under sin to eternal death)

The Law of the Jewish commonwealth did begin with Moses, and the specific display of grace and truth as seen in the New Testament did come by Jesus Christ. The Law as an active force has ceased to exist, because the physical death and literal shed blood of Christ on the cross fulfilled all the requirements of the law.

Romans 10:4, "For Christ is the end of **the law** for righteousness to everyone who believes!".

2 Cor. 3:1-13 Paul says the letter/law [Ten Commandments] kills – it applies comprehensive death (Sin-Death: defiled conscience, guilt, shame, broken relationship, condemnation; and Eternal Death: eternal conscious separation from God after physical death in the Lake of Fire), but he says that they were “...ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter [Ten Commandments]...for the letter kills...the **ministry of death**, written and engraved on stones...” Man could never keep the Law. It could only increase and magnify the condemnation under sin to eternal death.

Rom. 7:9-11, “...sin became revealed and clear to me (revived) and I realized how condemned to eternal death I was (died)...the commandment...I found to bring more clarity to realize my condemnation (death)...sin...by the commandment...condemned me to eternal death (killed me).” The law magnified the condemnation to eternal death. It was as if looking in a **mirror** to see how as our sin increases so does our condemnation to eternal death.

Gal. 3:19 Paul tells us that the law, "...was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made..."

Gal. 3:24-27 The Law was to be a **tutor** to magnify man’s sinfulness and to **bring him to Christ**, where in “faith” he would “put on” Christ’s righteous fulfillment of all of the law on his behalf. Christ would be the “**end of the law**” to all who would believe (as we saw above in Rom. 10:4).

THE LAW FOR ISRAEL

The Old Covenant Law was “addressed to and given to” one people, and only one - Israel.

Deut. 4:1, 7-8 Moses asked Israel: "And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?"

Deut. 4:44-45 He specified further that "Now this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel. These are the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which Moses spoke to the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt"

John 15:24-25 The Lord Jesus in His upper-room discourse with His disciples, said, "But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ..."

(Read) Rom. 9:3-5 Paul, listing the advantages of Israel before Christ's ministry, declares: "...my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."

(Read) Tit. 2:11 The law was shown that it was not given to all men, however, to whom is grace offered? "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,"

This may come as a difficult saying for some, but the Bible clearly states that the Ten Commandments were not given for all mankind, but for Israel alone. One proof of this fact is seen in the salutation, or heading, in the very scriptures of the Ten Commandments themselves:

Exod. 20:1-2: "And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'"

Then after the commandments were written and given to Moses:

Exod. 20:20 says, "Moses said to the people (Israel), 'Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.'"

How this Old Covenant was not meant for the Gentiles is further seen from the study of the following passages:

(Read) Eph 2:11-12: “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

(Read) Deut. 4:12-14, “And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.”

(Read) Deut. 9:9-11 “...I went up into the mountains to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you...the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.”

(Read) Exod. 34:1; 27-28 “Then the Lord said to Moses,...I have made a covenant with you and with Israel...He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

(Read) Deut 5:1-5; 15 & 22; 1 Kings 8:9 The Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel of that time, and not with their fathers. This covenant was not in existence before that time, for anyone, including the Patriarchs.

- We could go through verse upon verse in the next many chapters which all say “You – referring to Israel alone.”

**** (Read) Psa. 147:19-20** is one of the clearest and direct passages in the Bible explaining how it was “only” OC Israel who were given the law, “He declares his word to Jacob, His statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know His rules.”

Let’s turn next to **Exod. 31:12-18**, “Speak to the children of Israel...my Sabbaths you shall keep...sign between Me and you...holy to you...the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath...sign between Me and the children of Israel...”

Ezek. 20:5-20, “I chose Israel...to bring them out of the land of Egypt...and gave them my statutes and showed them My judgements...I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me...”

So, the Sabbath, as we just saw, was a special sign of the Old Covenant between God and Israel. Let’s keep all of this in context and understand the importance I have been reminding us on many occasions, how we need to read the Bible with the audience being spoken to in mind, and their culture/mindset, and the purpose of what is being spoken, and by whom.

Let us now look into the New Testament (remember “Audience Relevance”):

Matt. 12:1-2; 6-8 Jesus, a Jew, was speaking to the Jews about their covenant between God and them, and He is showing that within Him is the fulfillment of all law requirements, and He is the Lord of “even” this strictly enforced sign of their covenant, AND He is confirming that all those who are His true followers, are not under any of the law. Jesus was a Jew teaching the Jews.

Matt 5:17 notice it says “Christ” came to fulfill the law – NOT us – as this is NOT possible. He was a Jew speaking to Jews, under the Jewish Old Covenant, and saying He would fulfill the earthly requirements they could not. So then the New Covenant, written upon the hearts of God’s children – Jew/Gentile, would be the Forever/Eternal “better promises” covenant. Look how in the New Testament every one of the 10 commandments, except the Sabbath, are re-stated, and affirmed for the New Covenant believer – but also notice how they are re-stated to a far deeper level internalized now, and written upon our hearts, and not Tablets of Stone. The Sabbath, as we saw was a special sign of the Old Covenant between God and the physical earthly nation of Israel.

** Let us now look in context and the audience relevance for the teachings on all of the law, including the Sabbaths, **to the Gentiles** (which in the New Covenant will now be for the entire world, as there is neither Jew nor Gentile anymore):

Let's read again **Rom. 9:3-5**, "...my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."

Rom 2:12-15, "...sinned without The Law (The Tablets of Stone) will also perish without law...sinned in the law will be judged by the law...for when Gentiles, who do not have the law,..." (Think of the heathen in the jungle tribes that have come and gone in history already – how will they be judged – **not** by the Old Covenant 10 commandments given to Israel – vs. 14 is clear that they did not have The Law (Mosaic Law). (Man was created in the image of God. He ate of the tree of the knowledge of Good/Evil and right and wrong was impressed in his conscience...varying degrees in different cultures. Embedded into his conscience was the **Law of Sin and Death** (you sin, you are condemned to eternal death). (That being true, it is also an important fact to know that of all the nations and peoples ever discovered throughout history – not a single one of them ever practiced a Sabbath, or even had a concept of one. This was never impressed upon the conscience of man, and we understand this now with the scriptures we have studied of how the Sabbath was given by God to **only** Israel at Mt. Sinai as a unique **sign (seal)** between Him and them of their Old Covenant)).

I ask if the Lord Himself does not shed some light on this in Luke 12:47-48?

- No one can state definitively how the Lord will ultimately judge those who had never had "the Law" (Mosaic Old Covenant). What we do know is that much is revealed in creation, and in the conscience of every human being, -- And we do know for sure that our God is a Just God and a Righteous God.)

Eph. 2:8-22 recall that before Christ the Gentiles were strangers from the covenants of promise...no hope and without God.

Gal. 3:7-8, 13-14, 16-19, 24-25, 28-29 (The Jews (Judiazers) were trying to bring in the Law to this Gentile church, and Paul was telling these Gentile Christians – NO! Our “better promises” covenant was in existence before the Jewish covenant, and we New Covenant Christians are not under any of that earthly system)

Heb. 10:1 “The law...shadow...” (Mosaic Law)

Col. 2:16-17 “Festival, New Moon, Sabbaths...shadow...the substance/reality/completion is Christ” (Written to the Jew/Gentile Christians in the church in Colosse regarding the entire Mosaic Law)

Acts 15:4-10, 19-20 The Old Covenant (OC) Law was a burden that even their OC Hebrew fathers could not bear. Gentile New Covenant believers were never, ever, put under the “Law.”

The Law of Sin and Death versus the Mosaic Law:

The Gentiles were certainly never under the Law of Moses, but they WERE under the “**Law of Sin and Death!**” That is a very important distinction that needs to be made.

In the book of Romans (chapters 1-8 especially), the Apostle Paul talks about these two different laws (the Law of Sin and Death, versus the Law of Moses). The Law of Sin and Death (if we sin, we are condemned to eternal death in the Lake of Fire) was given to Adam our federal head and applies to all of his descendants (both Israelites and Gentiles).

That universal Law of Sin and Death reigned over all men (Gentiles and Israelites) the whole time from Adam until Christ died on the Cross. All men were under the condemnation to eternal death in the Lake of Fire as a result of their sin. That is why God promised a descendant (kinsman-redeemer) who would deliver Adam and all of his descendants who had faith in that Coming One (Gen 3:15).

It was that faith which Adam, Noah, and Abraham had, *even before circumcision came along*, which temporarily covered (atoned) their sin and imputed righteousness to them while they awaited the redeemer who would take away (propitiate) their sin fully and permanently.

The arrival of the Mosaic Law did not change that. Nor did it change the fact of the “Law of Sin and Death” that all mankind was under, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul makes a big deal about this in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews. Adam had faith in the coming redeemer. He confessed his sin to God and was forgiven right there in the garden on the very day he sinned. He was justified by faith (imputed righteousness), just like Noah and Abraham and all other saints. Christ did not die just for the Israelites. He was the kinsman-redeemer who was promised to Adam in the very beginning (Gen 3:15), who would save all of Adam’s descendants (Gentiles and Israelites) who had the same kind of true faith as Adam.

Review all of **Hebrews 8** → The OC could not bring salvation and a NC was needed because:

- 1) It could not write on the heart the desire to be obedient to the Tablets of the Covenant.
- 2) It could not change the heart: Rom. 8:7 says, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”
- 3) It could not conquer sin in the flesh nor cleanse the conscience from the guilt of sin.

The greater glory of the NC is not that the standards or laws have been done away with, but that the Lord has given us a “new” heart, and has written His laws on this new heart, and given believers His Spirit and we now have both the ability and desire to obey God.

Added to that, here also is the greater glory of the NC: there is now **NO** obedience at all required of us in terms of “being saved,” simply because the very terms of the Tablets of the Covenant have been finally and fully met in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ to all of those who believe in faith. The glory of the new NC is in the words, “IT IS FINISHED.”