

An Attempt To Listen To God

Introduction To The New Testament
and the Gospels
Part 1

By

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Structure

My dad was saved at seventeen years of age, and despite being brought up in the North of Ireland, only once had he ever heard the gospel preached. Apart from a few bible stories taught in school, he knew nothing about the Bible, not even that there was an Old and New Testament. It may be that some of the readers of this paper are unaware of such a division, or wonder what is the difference and why have two. This paper is to give some of the basic truths on this subject. The following is a brief survey of them and is meant for a believer to get a broad grasp of the developing thoughts, similarities, and contrasts of the two Testaments.

a) Backgrounds and results

- i) From Genesis 1:1 to Exodus 24:7 it is a narrative of the historical background for the Sinai covenant. This was not the first covenant God made with man, for He had made a covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:11, 15) and all humanity, and with Abraham (Gen. 15:12-18). However, the Sinai covenant was the first one He made with a distinct group of people. (After they had heard the terms of the covenant and said: "All that the Lord hath said we will do" (Ex. 24:7), they were under law.)
- ii) The balance of the Old Testament is the history of God's people, their wilderness experiences being brought into the land, and the mountain peaks and dark valleys of their spiritual and national life.
- iii) I recall as a child of about 9 years of age asking my Sunday School teacher why did we have these two? He instructed me that from Genesis 1:1 to Malachi 4 is the background for the New Covenant, and from Matthew 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 is the blessings of that New Covenant. It was a good enough answer but with my inquisitive mind it only led me to other questions. Through the passing years other questions have been brought to mind, and the following are my varied questions and answers.

The Questions

1) Why are they called these names?

- a) It was in the eleventh century they were first called Old and New Testaments, a decision based largely on the divine function of the dispensations, law and grace.
 - i) In the Old Testament man was always under law, even in Eden where he was told what he could eat and not eat of (Gen. 2:16-17). In Exodus 20:24 man brought himself under the law, agreeing with God on its terms, both for blessing and cursing.
 - ii) The New Testament deals with man being brought into the sphere of grace by God sending His only Son to go to Calvary and there be the final sacrifice for sin. There was a time when law and grace were both operable, the law up to Calvary yet grace being shown, and from Calvary grace ruled but man still is to live by the laws or principles of the New Testament (note 3). Lest there is any misunderstanding, this is the day of grace and we are not under law with its blessings and cursings (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:18).

2) How is it a better covenant?

- a) The book of Hebrews is set in comparison to the book of Romans. The Roman epistle presents the only way of salvation, whereas Hebrews presents the "better" way of salvation. The word "better" is used because of the constant contrast between the blessings and foundation for the New covenant and that of the Old.
 - i) Christ is made "so much better than the angels" (Heb. 1:4)
 - ii) "The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did" (Heb. 7:19)
 - iii) "Jesus was made the surety of a better testament" (Heb. 7:22)
 - iv) "He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6)
 - v) "The heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Heb. 9:23)
 - vi) "God having provided some better thing for us" (Heb. 11:40)
 - vii) "The blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24)

- b) Christ has a superior priesthood (Heb. 6:17-8:1)
 - c) Christ officiates in a superior place (Heb. 9:11)
 - d) Christ offered a superior sacrifice (Heb. 9:12-10:15)
- 3) Why are they called laws? (Heb. 8:10-12; 10:16-17)
- a) The first observation is that the principles of the New Covenant are a combination of laws, not options and promises.
 - b) The Old Covenant was a covenant in particular, a suzerain covenant. This was a covenant between a great monarch and his vassals in which had several distinct features which were:
 - i) The name of the great monarch
 - ii) That which He had done to or for them
 - iii) That which the vassal kings or persons were to do
 - iv) The consequences if they did not do as He commanded
 - v) It was to be written in a book and put in a safe place
 - vi) Was to be brought out periodically and read.
 - c) It was this sort of covenant God made with Israel and its purpose was to give the vassals principles by which they should have to live lest they should incur the wrath of the King. The above features can be readily seen in Ex. 20:1-17; 17:14; Deut. 31:26. By keeping its principles the individuals were conformed to the character of the King, in Israel's case they became holy.
 - d) The new covenant is also a suzerain covenant by which if kept in spirit and not as a mere religious activity, will conform the believer to the character of God and Christ. As I keep and live by them there will be a displaying of the character of God. It also shows how far I am from God when despite these divine features within, I still have to be told right from wrong.
- 4) Why have two testaments?
- a) In the Old Testament God looks down the ages, and in His wisdom and knowledge reveals to man certain truths.
 - i) When Adam sinned God was not taken unawares and indeed there is no surprise situation which can arise which God did not foresee. God is all knowing God and knowing that man would sin, and having a heart of love He provided a remedy for it. When Adam and Eve sinned, the animals to make their coats were already there. (Gen. 1:24)
 - ii) The truth that God can never be taken by surprise gives quietness to the heart and mind in knowing things were not out of control, God is sovereign and is moving things along, and letting happenings develop for His glory. (Gal. 4:4)
 - b) The Old Testament can be divided into three groups:
 - i) Group 1: The Historical section, Genesis to Esther
 - ii) Group 2: The Poetical section, Job to Song of Solomon
 - iii) Group 3: The prophetic section, Isaiah to Malachi
 - c) The New Testament can be divided into sections:
 - i) Group 1: The Historical section - Matthew to Acts, the evangelistic writings
 - ii) Group 2: The Literary section - Romans to Revelation, the doctrinal writings
 - iii) The lessons we can learn:
 - 1. Progression based on:
 - (a) Development of Revelation
 - (i) However, when the scriptures were complete there is no further revelation. One might be given an understanding of a passage, it may even be called a revelation, but it is a revelation of that which God has already given.
 - (b) Development of Events

(i) Lesson: Nothing stays the same, everything and we are changing every day.

2. God longs for the development of His people:

(a) Of Barnabas it is said: "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:24)

(i) The parable of the seed that died and a multitude came from it. (Jn. 12:24)

(ii) Committing the truth to others so that they can teach it to another generation. (2 Tim. 2:2)

(b) "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow." (1 Pet. 2:2)

(c) "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18)

(d) "Your faith growth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." (2 Thess. 1:3)

5) What is the difference between the Testaments?

a) For our consideration there are two different types of testaments\covenants.

i) A two person covenant is one in which each party has a part to play, a responsibility. For instance, if I was getting a house built an agreement would be made with the builder. It would be a two party agreement. ie; if he builds a certain amount of the house, I will give him so much money, but if he fails, then he will get no money.

ii) A one party covenant is one in which all depends on one person. For instance, I told my grandson that I was sending him money for his birthday. He did nothing for it. It all depended on me. A one party covenant was when God made the covenant with Noah and promised He would never again destroy the earth with a flood.

iii) The New covenant is a one sided agreement between God and man, primarily to Israel and then to the Gentiles. (Jer. 31:31; see note 4)

6) What are its pledges?

a) "I will put my laws in their mind." (Heb. 10:16)

i) Mentally they will understand them and why they are given.

b) "And write them in their hearts." (Heb. 10:16)

i) Emotionally they will be guided by them.

c) "I will be to them a God." (Heb. 8:10)

i) Not "a" God as one among others, but I will be to them the source for their every need, and I will be the One they worship exclusively.

d) "They shall be to me a people." (Heb. 8:10)

e) "They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know (ginosko) the Lord: for all shall know (oida) me, from the least to the greatest." (Heb. 8:11)

f) "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness." (Heb. 8:12)

g) "Their sins and iniquities I will remember no (ou mē) more." (Heb. 10:17)

i) There are two ways of expressing a negation in Greek: "ou" indicates a full and absolute negation; "mē" indicates a conditional negation. When both are used together, it is the strongest negation possible: "They shall never perish". (Jn. 10:28)

7) Who is a New Covenant between?

a) It is a covenant between God and Israel as the following references make clear:

i) "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt . . . For this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel." (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-10)

8) How am I, a Gentile, brought into the New Covenant?

- a) Since the new covenant is between God and Israel, how am I a Gentile brought into it? I cannot just add my name to someones Will, it is a legal document! Therefore, as a Gentile that covenant has nothing to do with me, unless God puts me in a place where I can be put into it. Thank God we are put into it as can be seen from several avenues:
 - i) Ephesians 2 is divided into two sections, part 1 being verses 1-10, and the second part from verse 12 to the end of the chapter. Verse 12 makes it clear that we have no claims because of the covenants, then in verse 13 Paul writes: "But now". Things have changed, we have been made nigh by the blood of Christ and thus being in Christ Jesus, with the emphasis on "Jesus" we have been brought into the covenant.
 - ii) The Corinthian epistles were written to a church mainly consisting of Gentile believers. To them Paul writes of the New covenant and the Lord's Supper. In chapter 10:21 there is no reference to the covenant because the Holy Spirit is dealing with a different theme. However, in chapter 11:25 the covenant and the cup at the Lord's Supper are linked together (v.25). The Lord's Supper was initiated by the Lord, practiced by the early church, and is for us today for it is to be done "until He come (1 Cor. 11:26). By uniting the cup and the covenant and our being to that it is something we are to do, it indicates we are in that new covenant.
 - iii) The theme of the covenant is again taken up in the second epistles chapters 3, when Paul is speaking about the gospel and his work for God.
 - iv) Since I believe that every word inspired by God is important and every change of term equally important, it is interesting the changes in the terminology used of the recipients of the new covenant between Hebrews 8 and 10. In Hebrews 8:8 the recipients are specified: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah", but in Hebrews 10:15-16 the terminology is changed. "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us" and it is expanded to all who can enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19); who have a high priest and are the house of God" (Heb. 10:21). We Gentiles are that house (Heb. 3:6-7 and Eph. 2:19-21).

9) Why is it viewed as a will?

- a) It is recognized there is a distinction between a covenant and a will. A covenant is only valid as long as an individual is living and is totally inoperable when an individual dies. A will is the opposite being only effective when a person is dead and inoperable while they are alive (Heb. 9:15-21). Because Christ died it is a will which is left for our blessing, but because He lives, it is a covenant. He is the Surety and Mediator (Heb. 8:6) for our blessing.

10) What is the difference between Christ as the Surety for the New Covenant and the Mediator of the New Covenant?

- a) As the Mediator Christ is seen as the One who came between God and man in ratifying the new covenant, whereas as the Surety He is the Guarantor for the fulfilling of the promises of it.

11) What is meant by "The new covenant in my blood"?

- a) When God made a covenant with Abraham it was ratified, sealed by blood, this signifying that only the death of the Ratifier could disannul it. It was a one sided covenant with only God making the commitment. When Moses and the people entered into the covenant with God, there was the shedding of blood. The blood sealed the covenant. When our Lord offered Himself as the sacrifice for sins cleansing, God through Him ratified, secured, and sealed the covenant, thus it was "the new covenant", (sealed by His blood).

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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