

CHAPTER 2

MYTH 2: THE OLD TESTAMENT IS JUST AS BINDING AS THE NEW TESTAMENT

2.1 WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

I expect that after reading this chapter many members of denominations will readily agree and affirm that they have *always* believed that we are under the New Testament today. However, I spent the first 18 years of my life in a denomination faithfully attending bible study and services where preaching was performed. For some reason there was never any emphasis on the difference between the testaments. We often hear of people picking up their bibles and opening it at random and reading a passage in a mystical attempt to obtain a communication with God. This chapter will provide a sound basis from which we can begin to organize our understanding of the bible to see what applies to us and what does not.

God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35): "Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." He requires the same thing of you and me that he required of Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses; namely *that we be faithful and diligently seek after Him* (Hebrews 11:6): "But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

However, it should also be clear that the *way* in which this faith was sought after and demonstrated was considerably different for some than for others. It is obvious that God's law for us is not that we refrain from eating the forbidden fruit (as it was for Adam), or that we build an arc (as it was for Noah), or that we sacrifice our son (as it was for Abraham). We realize that not only are these things not commanded of us today, but *if we were to teach them for God's law today, it would be sin*. If some church leader today were to insist that the congregation undertake the task of building a huge ship in preparation for a flood, we would question his sanity.

The reasoning in the paragraph above is common sense. However, as this chapter unfolds we will see that such sense was (and is) not always held in common. The major point that we are trying to make is that just because something was commanded by God at one time does not make it a command for us today. While this is generally understood with regard to Adam, Noah and Abraham, the differences between the Old and New Testaments are not very well understood.

We will see that when men practiced and attempted to bind a part of God's law that no longer applied, this was considered to be sin. It was not an act of faith, nor was it

diligently seeking after God. Thus, it was impossible for those who practice(d) such things to be pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:6 quoted above).

In 1 Timothy 2:15 we read: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The command to rightly divide or handle the word of truth correctly infers that it can be wrongfully handled. This would include misquoting, misapplying, taking scriptures out of context and applying commands to ourselves which God does not intend for us to apply (such as taking it upon ourselves to build an arc today).

Thus, we can no more pick and choose what it is that we want to accept out of the bible than we can discard it altogether. The picking and choosing is, in fact, both adding to and taking away from God's word, both of which are definitively condemned (Revelation 22:18-19): "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and [from] the things which are written in this book."

In this chapter we will see that it has not been left to us to determine that part of God's word which applies to us today -- the bible clearly indicates what applies and what does not. In addition, we will further validate that to go beyond that which applies to us is sin.

2.2 WE ARE UNDER THE NEW TESTAMENT

We recognize that many in the denominations believe this. However, the degree to which they go to the Old Testament to authorize some current-day practices convinces us that many do not fully understand this rightful division of the word of God. This was a very serious problem within the church in the first century. It seemed to arise in almost every church, mainly because of the influence of Jewish converts. We will divide our presentation into three categories: (1) Jesus' teachings in the gospels, (2) inspired apostolic examples throughout the book of Acts, and (3) the teachings of the Holy Spirit through the writings of the apostles. Once this is complete we will demonstrate that the *Old Testament is totally true and that it serves an essential purpose for us today.*

2.2.1 THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Jesus lived under the Old Testament law. As we shall see, this was essential, since He had to obey the Old Testament law in every possible way in order for it to be taken out of the way for us. He totally fulfilled it for us so that God's justice can still prevail

despite the fact that we have not obeyed it. All of this will be proven scripturally as this chapter unfolds.

The paragraph above is to enable us to understand the reasons that Jesus did not teach that the Old Testament was done away prior to His crucifixion. It is essential that we understand that certain information could not be understood, and therefore it was not fully revealed until *after* the Holy Spirit was sent to inspire the first century apostles and prophets. This occurred *after* Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Consider the message of the transfiguration as recorded in Mark 9:2-9:

"And after six days Jesus taketh [with him] Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead."

Moses and Elias represent the Old Testament law and the prophets. Jesus recognized that the message of the transfiguration (that Jesus' words would take precedence over the Old Testament) could not be fully understood until after His resurrection. This appears to be the reason that he charged them to tell no one about it until then.

As a Jew, Jesus lived under the Old Testament law. As one who had faith in His heavenly father, He obeyed the law that was in effect -- the Old Testament law. Most of His interactions were with other Jews who were similarly under the Old Testament law. So, generally throughout the life of Christ (i.e., the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), we find Jesus encouraging his fellow Jews to keep the law under which they lived. For example (Matthew 23:1-3): "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, [that] observe and do." However, Jesus alluded to a time when this would not be the case.

For example, His very appearance on earth marked a dramatic change in the way that God would deal with man. This concept was not foreign to the Old Testament, but it

was only revealed in prospect. Now it was becoming a reality. Thus, in Luke 10:23-24 it says in reference to Jesus: "And he turned him unto [his] disciples, and said privately, Blessed [are] the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen [them]; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard [them]."

A second example is given in John 4:7-26, a lengthy reading which is commonly called the story of the woman at the well. Being both a woman and a Samaritan, she was quite surprised that Jesus would address her "for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (vs. 9). Jesus got her attention by revealing that He knew about her personal life, after which she quickly changed the subject to that of the doctrinal differences which existed between the Jews and the Samaritans (vs. 20): "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." It is clear that Jesus was not excluding Samaritans, as the portion of the Old Testament that the Jews were living under would have. Further, He indicates that the temple worship mandated by the Old Testament would no longer be in effect.

Jesus gave the most insightful instructions with regard to the revelation of the New Testament to His apostles the last night that He spent with them. The entire sequence of events and instructions is in John 13-16. In John 14:25, Jesus indicated that He had initiated a new revelation which would continue with them: "These things have I spoken unto you, being [yet] present with you. But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." This clearly indicates that the Old Testament would (and will) no longer suffice. It is important to realize that this statement is made to the apostles (minus Judas Iscariot); it should be clear that all Christians do not have the capacity to *remember* "whatsoever I [Jesus] have said unto you."

As we proceed to review the book of Acts and the epistles we shall see that it was through the apostles that the New Testament was revealed. This is further affirmed by Jesus in John 15:26-27: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, [even] the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." Interestingly, being "with me [Jesus] from the beginning" was the primary qualification for the apostle who took the place of Judas Iscariot (see Acts 1:21-22). Thus, to be a *witness* in this sense, one had to be an eye witness. However, these eye witnesses would also be endowed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to assure that their human memory limitations would not get in the way. There is also an inference that in due time additional information would be required (e.g., to assist with the work and organization of the church).

Now keep reading into the 16th chapter as Jesus continues (John 16:1-3): "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me." Clearly, if Christians were to be expelled from the synagogue, there is *no way* that they could obey the Old Testament law. The prophecy that the killing of Christians would be viewed (by the Jews) as service to God was fulfilled (at least in part) by Saul of Tarsus prior to his conversion and becoming the apostle Paul.

Without the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the gospel could not become reality, and the full truth of God's justice, righteousness and mercy toward man could not be told. Jesus put it this way (John 16:7-11): "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."

Jesus went on in the next few verses to indicate that they needed to observe the events which were about to transpire in order to fully understand the essence of the gospel (John 16:12-13): "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."

In addition, there would be a clarification -- the general terms, or proverbs, in which he spoke to them would be specifically detailed (John 16:25-28): "These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father."

When Jesus' disciples argued with him about this, he indicated that they were just too weak at this point to fully understand. Continuing our reading (John 16:29-33): "His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: but this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

The arguments presented above do not definitively prove that the Old Testament was set aside as the standard of authority under which we live today. However, they do provide a firm basis by which we can understand the history revealed in the book of Acts and the epistles with regard to this subject. These are considered in the next two subsections.

2.2.2 THE APPROVED EXAMPLES OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

The book of Acts (Acts of the Apostles) provides the record of the historic fulfillment of the promises that Jesus made to His apostles. By seeing how these were fulfilled we can understand which part of God's word applies directly to us today. The book of Acts begins after the resurrection of Jesus, when He "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The first chapter covers his ascension into heaven and the replacement of Judas Iscariot. The events of Acts 2 occurred on the first Pentecost after the resurrection, which would be about 50 days after the resurrection, and thus 10 days after the ascension. The Holy Spirit was poured out onto the apostles at this time, and Peter preached the first sermon inspired by the Holy Spirit. While this sermon did not specifically indicate that the Old Testament law had been set aside, it did indicate that there was a new way that men were to become acceptable to God, and that was through the blood of Jesus (Acts 2:37-42). (We will return to a more detailed discussion of Acts 2 when we discuss baptism under Myth 4.)

Despite the fact that there were men from a wide diversity of nations present for the Jewish celebration of Pentecost (Acts 2), at this point the gospel was only preached to Jews, and the newly-formed church was localized to Jerusalem. Chapter 3 presents the story of a man healed by Peter and John, and their taking advantage of this occasion as an opportunity to further preach the gospel. However, in Chapter 4 we find the first persecution of the church was initiated by the very ones to whom the gospel was first directed -- the Jews.

Acts chapters 4 and 5 continue to demonstrate this persecution, while Chapter 6 gets into their concentration upon a single individual: Stephen. Chapter 7 is a very interesting chapter from the point of view of the topic of this chapter. It clearly demonstrates that it was not the position of the apostles or first-century prophets that the Old Testament was in any way erroneous. Great pains are taken throughout this chapter to document the fact that *Stephen believed every word of the Old Testament*. However, before he could show how the Old Testament led logically to our being under a new covenant after the death of Christ, he was brutally murdered by the Jews to whom he was preaching.

This led to a general persecution of the church and, as a result, most of the Christians were scattered (Acts 8:4): "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." This led to the conversion of many Samaritans, who were a type of half-breed race that were not considered by the Jews to be in the general classification of gentiles. Acts 8 also records the conversion of an Ethiopian Jewish proselyte with the help of Philip (one of the Christians scattered from Jerusalem). This was one of the first (if not the first) black persons converted to Christ, further fulfilling the "all the nations" clause of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19).

The character Saul is introduced in Acts 7:58 and 8:1 in connection with his contribution to the death of Stephen. His conversion is detailed in Acts 9, and he will henceforth be called Paul -- the apostle Paul. Recognize that considerable time could have passed in this chapter as attention is given to the miracles performed by the apostle Peter in the latter part of chapter 9.

Acts chapter 10 is a very significant event with regard to our subject -- the conversion of Cornelius' household, who were the first gentiles converted to Christ. If the Old Testament were still binding, the apostle Peter would have great difficulty in visiting one of another nation (Acts 10:28): "And he [Peter] said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." However, God sent several visions to convince Peter that no person was to be considered lower than another.

The racial significance of the differences between the Old and New Testaments are quite important, and they explain the reason that this issue presented such difficulty for the church in the first century. The Old Testament was very adamant that God wanted His chosen people to be separate from other nations. The only way for those of other nations to be in any way accepted by the Jews was for them to become proselytes to the Jewish Nation and religion, which were practically one and the same. As we continue, we will cite a number of Old Testament prophecies which indicated that this practice (attitude) was to cease. However, at this point, this was not generally understood by many of the Jews who had been converted to Christ. Acts 10:34-35 summarizes Peter's conclusion with regard to racial and national qualifications: "Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Peter had brought some of the skeptical Jewish Christians with him from Jerusalem, and the 11th chapter of Acts is largely devoted to documenting the fact that gentiles were converted directly to Christ without first becoming Jewish proselytes (which would have required that the males be circumcised). Acts 11:25-26 also ties up a loose end with regard to the apostle Paul: "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass,

that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

Herod's murder of the apostle James (the brother of John) is described in Acts chapter 12. After this, attention returns to Antioch -- the church which would be the major center for sending preachers to the gentile world. Paul and Barnabas were sent out specifically to gentile areas of the world from Antioch, although they generally initiated their work by preaching at the synagogues first. When rejected and then persecuted by their fellow Jews (with some notable individual exceptions), they turned to the gentiles. Acts 13 and 14 describe what is usually called Paul's first missionary journey.

This brings us to the first major passage which deals specifically with our subject: Acts 15. While we will quote some of the most salient passages from this text, we urge the reader to review the entire chapter before proceeding. The stage is set by Paul returning to Antioch after his first missionary journey and continuing to work with the Christians there. While he was there (Acts 15:1): "... certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, [and said], Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." This certainly was a primary edict of the Old Testament law, and if Christians were under this law (i.e., if the Old Testament were binding on them), then this would certainly be something which should be taught and practiced.

However, this was not the case, and the apostle Paul through inspiration of the Holy Spirit knew that this was false doctrine. All throughout Acts 13 and 14 (i.e., the first missionary journey) he had taught otherwise. The word *therefore* in verse 2 indicates that the reader would expect Paul to have a problem with these brethren trying to bind something which God had loosed at the cost of the death of His dear son. Acts 15:2: "When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

Many believe and teach that it was necessary for this issue to be resolved by a "church council." This terminology is foreign to the bible. Paul was directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and needed no church council to tell him what was right or wrong. Notice the next few verses (Acts 15:3-4): "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and [of] the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them." Indeed, if anything, Paul was going to Jerusalem to set them straight. In reality, however, it was to dispel the lie told by the false, i.e., that they were authorized by the apostles in Jerusalem.

As we continue reading, we see this (Acts 15:5): "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and

to command [them] to keep the law of Moses." Here was the crux of the matter. Circumcision was just a marker for the entire law of Moses. There was nothing wrong with these individuals practicing these Old Testament teachings as they felt appropriate. But it was completely wrong for them to bind them on other Christians; and it still is today.

Following this, the apostles and elders gathered together with regard to this matter and, weighing the evidence presented by Peter (recall Acts 10-11), Paul, and finally James quoting from the Old Testament (Acts 15:13-17): "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." The Old Testament reference is from Amos 9:11-12.

It is quite significant that even in the time when the New Testament was in the process of being revealed and written, the value of the written Old Testament scriptures in validating doctrine was never questioned. If, in fact, the doctrines of the New Testament were not totally consistent with those of the Old Testament, then there would be just cause to doubt them. The fact that the Old Testament was no longer binding did not mean that it was any less true, any more than the fact that God does not now want us to build arcs invalidates the story of Noah.

The resolution of the matter was totally consistent with the doctrine originally taught by both Paul and Peter; to review Peter's words (Acts 10:34-35): "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." While I hope that most of the readers can readily accept this, it was not an easy pill to swallow in the first century. From the racial divisions that exist in most religious organizations today, we should readily understand the reason that this is true. As we continue we will see that Christians are to recognize no racial distinctions as they "go into *all* of the world." All of the world begins within our own communities.

This theme continues throughout the book of Acts as we follow the remainder of Paul's journeys. However, we will terminate this line of thought and leave it to the reader to study through the rest of the book of Acts with this in mind. There is tremendous evidence that we are no longer bound by the Old Testament law in the epistles, so it is advantageous that we move on to that phase of our proof.

2.2.3 THE TEACHINGS OF THE EPISTLES

The epistles were written by the inspired apostles (Paul, Peter and John) and one by a prophet (James). Generally they were written to the church that existed in a particular city (Rome, Corinth, etc.) or area. In some cases they were written to individual Christians (Timothy, Titus, Philemon), and sometimes to Christians in general. One was written to an entire nation (Hebrews). In all cases these writings have the full weight of the authority of Jesus, as we showed in Chapter 1 (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:37).

It is important to recognize that the early churches which were established by the preaching of the word (see Acts 13-14) were made up of men and women just like you and me. We all have our weaknesses. Even those churches today which are in fellowship with the Lord will have problems as these churches did. It is not our job to determine who is and who is not in fellowship with the Lord -- and this is not our intent. However, we know that the churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, etc. which had inspired letters written to them were indeed considered to be in fellowship with the Lord even though it is clear that certain of their members were in error.

Recognize that our intent, and the intent of this chapter, is to dispel the myth that we are still bound by the Old Testament law. We do not have the space to cover all of the New Testament teaching which deals with this subject. However, the ones that we will cover will compel anyone who believes the New Testament to understand what the inspired writers wanted their readers to comprehend. The subsections below will be ordered according to the epistles from which the scriptural proof is taken.

2.2.3.1 ROMANS

It is difficult to know where to start. The subject starts in Romans 2:17 and really continues through chapter 11. We will try to pick out some of the most definitive arguments.

First recognize that Paul sometimes uses the term circumcision to refer to the entire Law of Moses under which the Jews lived prior to Jesus' death on the cross. At other times he uses it to refer to the binding of this particular article of the Old Testament. For example, in Romans 2:25-29: "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither [is that] circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he [is] a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision [is that] of the heart, in the spirit, [and] not in the letter; whose praise [is] not of men, but of God." The *law* referenced

above is the Law of Moses by which the Jews were attempting to gain salvation.

This is important in understanding what Paul was attempting to communicate with them over the next several chapters. For example, picking up the reading in Romans 3:19-26:

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law [is] the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God [which is] by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, [I say], at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Paul asserts that the "righteousness of God without the law [of Moses] is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Thus, there is absolutely no inconsistency between the Old and New Testaments. However, it is clear from what Paul states here that we are not under the Old Testament law: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Any attempt to gain salvation thereby is vain. Indeed, if we could be saved by the Old Testament law, then there would be no reason for Christ to have died on the cross.

Paul's argumentation along this line continues through Chapter 11. We urge you to read it in its entirety. The following typifies the doctrine which the Holy Spirit was inspiring the apostle Paul to write to the Christians at Rome (Romans 10:1): "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ [is] the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Paul's assertion here is that a zeal for God is not enough -- it must be according to the knowledge that "Christ is the end of the law." Since Jesus fulfilled it for us, our attempts to satisfy God by obedience to the Old Testament law is an appeal to our own sense of righteousness, not that of God.

2.2.3.2 GALATIANS

The confusion between Old and New Testaments was the major reason for Paul writing to the churches of Galatia. He expressed his concern early in the letter (Gal. 1:6-9): "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any [man] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Paul could have been talking about any perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The remainder of chapter 1 and chapter 2 were dedicated to validating Paul's authority as an apostle. (This was essential if the letter were to be believed as being authoritative). However, once he completed this, he returns to the specific perversion which had motivated him to write the verses given above (Gal. 3:1-5):

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if [it be] yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, [doeth he it] by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

It is clear that there were some Jewish converts who were attempting to get their fellow Christians to return to the practices of the Old Testament.

Paul's argumentation along this line continues through chapters 3 and 4. Along the way he dealt with the question of the role that the law played: "Wherefore then [serveth] the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). Thus, the provisions of the law would be removed once "the seed should come." The seed, of course, was Christ (Gal. 3:16): "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Paul uses the word faith to refer to the entire system of faith in Christ Jesus, i.e., the gospel of Jesus Christ. Again discussing the duration of the Old Testament law (Gal. 3:23-29):

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that

faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Once again, see how tightly coupled the cessation of binding of the Old Testament law is to the entry into the church of all races, nations, or any other division between Christians.

Some of the most definitive verses which condemn the regression to the Old Testament are in Galatians 5:2-12:

"Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion [cometh] not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you."

Consider the following with regard to this most definitive set of verses:

1. Paul was not teaching against circumcision per se (see 1 Cor. 7:18-19); he was teaching against the *binding* of circumcision by those who wanted to force all Christians to observe the Old Testament (recall Acts 15).
2. Apparently they were just starting at circumcision and acting like they were not going to bind anything else. However, from Acts 15:5, it was clear that they had in mind to bind the entire law of Moses.
3. Paul makes it clear that consistency demands that you cannot pick and choose what you want even from that which was once bound on God's people. No practice within the Old Testament was wrong in and of itself, and therefore men are still free to practice those things as individual traditions. However, when they bind them on their fellow Christians they fall under some of the harshest condemnation

pronounced in the New Testament.

4. Those who would go back under an inferior law have made the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross a valueless act: "Christ is become of no effect unto you."
5. Those who believe that it is impossible to fall from grace must make an exception here, since Paul said: "ye are fallen from grace." This certainly shows the condemnation of those who would legislate for God.
6. "I would they were even cut off which trouble you" is a rather mild way of translating the underlying Greek text. Literally it means that Paul wished that they would mutilate themselves. Some interpret it "go beyond circumcision." This could have a wide variety of meanings, and it is one of Paul's scriptures of which Peter may have said "are some things hard to be understood" (1 Pet. 3;16). The meaning could range from Paul's wish that the false teachers would totally expose their position by going beyond their binding of circumcision to bind the entire law; in this way they would not be so apt to deceive. The other extreme is that Paul actually wished them to literally, physically mutilate themselves -- which is unlikely.

Regardless of the interpretation of the last verse of this passage, the meaning is quite clear. The binding of any part of the Old Testament law upon Christians under the present dispensation violates God's will and causes the perpetrators to fall from grace.

2.2.3.3 COLOSSIANS

The church at Colosse apparently had the same problem as those of Galatia. In the following passage of scripture the apostle Paul uses the term circumcision figuratively. Recognize that circumcision was that ritual which legally converted a male gentile to be recognized as a Jew. Similarly, the male Jewish child that was circumcised on the eighth day of his life was then recognized to have met the requirements which God had established for him to qualify as being a citizen of "God's chosen people." In addition, the removal of the foreskin was also considered to be a type of cleansing and separation from the rest of the world.

With this in mind we can understand what Paul was trying to communicate in Colossians 2:8-15:

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom

also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; [And] having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

The substitution of the Old Testament law for Christ demeans the One in whom "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," who is the "head of all principality and power." The circumcision not made with hands that Christians are subject to is baptism. Baptism is that single act which puts the alien into Christ (Romans 6:3), which is analogous to circumcision putting the alien gentile into the Jewish nation.

A second figure is employed by the apostle as he speaks of the law as being a "handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us." In fact, it could not save us without the life of Christ which fulfilled it; and once He fulfilled it He "took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." What more definitive terms could be used to indicate that it is no longer binding on us?

After this, Paul goes on to further illustrate some of the things under the Old Testament law that they were being deceived into observing as matters of faith (Col. 2:16-23): "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [days] ... why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh."

The regression of Christians back to the Old Testament law reflected the wisdom of man, not the wisdom of God. God's wisdom is totally manifested in Christ and the fulfillment of the law. That which is fulfilled does not need to be fulfilled again.

2.2.3.4 HEBREWS

Those familiar with the New Testament might question why we did not start with this letter which has the differentiation of the Old and New Testaments as its major concern. We thought it best to demonstrate the breadth and clarity of the scriptural evidence before getting into this more abstract treatment.

As its name implies, this letter was written to that part of the nation of the Jews who had been converted to Christ. They were the ones who had particular problem in recognizing that their traditional religious practices were no longer binding (despite their being allowed on an individual basis). Can you imagine changing all of your religious practices? Can you imagine the shock of those whose status and authority depended upon their position within the synagogue? While we often condemn the Jews for their inflexibility, perhaps we can sympathize with them in this regard. Indeed, Hebrews presents the same type of challenge to the denominations that the apostles presented to the Jews. We expect the very same reaction.

From the very beginning of the letter to the Hebrews we find the writer emphasizing the superiority of the revelation which came through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2): "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by [his] Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." The remainder of Chapter 1 is dedicated to demonstrating the extent to which Jesus, the son of God, was superior to all created beings, including those who were perceived to be the most exalted -- angels.

After demonstrating the superiority of the messenger, he concludes (Heb. 2:1-4):

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let [them] slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard [him]; God also bearing [them] witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?"

The "word spoken through angels" is referring to the diverse revelations of the Old Testament. The Hebrews knew that under the Old Testament law "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward" even with the inferior messengers. Now that God has spoken through His own son, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Note further how this salvation was revealed. It was first spoken by the Lord himself when He was on this earth. The He sent the Holy Spirit to complete the revelation once the principles of the death, burial and resurrection could be fully understood historically. Recall our discussion of John 14 and 15 in Section 2.2.1. This revelation was confirmed by miracles to prove that it was, in fact, from God and not just a fabrication of some religious leader.

The remainder of Chapter 2 shows how Jesus became a perfect sacrifice for our sins by the things which He suffered. Chapter 3 shows the superiority of the revelation of Christ over that of Moses (Heb. 3:3): "For this [man] was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house." There is a clear statement here that to go back under the law as given by Moses will dishonor Christ. Chapter 3 goes on to give a stern warning that Christians can fall just as those of Moses' time fell.

Note how this warning focuses on our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we read in Hebrews 4:1-2: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left [us] of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard [it]." The warning goes on through Chapter 4, which concludes with the following (4:14-16): "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

The assertion that Jesus is now our high priest is a major departure from the Old Testament. In fact, Jesus did not qualify to be a priest according to the law of Moses, since the priests had to be from the tribe of Levi and Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. This is a major point that the Hebrews writer deals with next.

The difference between those high priests taken from among men and the Son of God is the subject of Chapter 5, where the Hebrews writer introduces the legal precedent by which Jesus could be a high priest. The precedent goes back before the law of Moses to a priest who served Abraham. His name was Melchizedek. Speaking of Jesus, the Hebrews writer states (Heb. 5:8-10): "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek." Question: who did Jesus become the author of eternal salvation to? Was it to those who obey Moses or the prophets? or was it to "all them that obey" Jesus?

This appeal to a precedent demonstrates the great respect that the Hebrews writer had for the word of God as written in the Old Testament. The assertion that Jesus was now our High Priest would seem to be reasonable and acceptable to Christians. But the writer is trying to show to those who were attempting to impose that Old Testament that it was *that very document* that provided the evidence that were are no longer to be subject to it. Please keep this in mind as we continue our summary of this wonderful letter.

If this argumentation seems tedious, the Hebrews writer anticipated at this point

that it would be to many. He chastises them for becoming dull of hearing and for not taking their rightful position as teachers, since they had certainly been Christians long enough to have mastered these truths. But instead, they did not even understand the milk of the word. He goes on in the remainder of Chapter 6 and into Chapter 7 to further explain these concepts. He concludes Chapter 7 with the following (Hebrews 7:26-28): "For such a high priest became us, [who is] holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, [maketh] the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."

In Section 2.2.1, we introduced the concept above that Jesus could not reveal all of the truth while still on this earth. Certain things had to be accomplished by his death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven. This is confirmed by the Hebrews writer in Hebrews 8:4-7: "For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, [that] thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." The principle here is quite clear -- when God gives us a pattern we have no choice but to follow it until that point when God sets it aside. Even Jesus himself could not assume the role of High Priest as long as the Old Testament law was in effect. As we saw above in our discussion of Colossians 2: 8-15, it was His death on the cross that also caused the "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

The Hebrews writer further explains how a better covenant supersedes the Old Testament laws (Hebrews 8:6-7): "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first [covenant] had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." He continues to explain that the fault was not with the covenant but with those who would not follow it. The he quotes another Old Testament passage which clearly states that a New Covenant, or New Testament, would be established: Jeremiah 31:31-34. Finally he states it in absolutely no uncertain terms (Hebrews 8:13): "In that he saith, A new [covenant], he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old [is] ready to vanish away." Remnants of Old Testament worship was still being maintained by the Jews in the first century. However, with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the temple was destroyed and never rebuilt, making total compliance with the Old Testament *impossible*.

Lest we think that the Hebrews writer is not talking about worship under the Law of Moses, Chapter 9 is dedicated to a detailed description of exactly what he meant. Each

Old Testament detail is described as a part of the *shadow* that has now become *reality* in the revelation of the gospel of Christ. Note that often we speak of the New Testament as being more spiritually oriented and the Old Testament being more of an appeal to the physical aspects of man. This is true, and it demonstrates that the physical aspects of this life *are* the shadows -- the dark projections from objects that block the light. Reality is revealed by viewing these objects in the light of the New Testament.

Chapters 9 and 10 present a detailed contrast between the priesthood of Christ and the Old Testament law. Integrated into this is a detailed interpretation of Jeremiah 31:31-34. The eleventh chapter provides a clear definition of exactly what the bible means when it uses the word *faith*. It also clearly demonstrates that God has always required the same type of faith from all men and women of all times. The only thing that has changed is the particular law that we are under.

This rather large section of the chapter has provided but a small sample of the evidence within the bible which demonstrates that today we are under the New Testament. The next section will show, however, that the Old Testament is still essential to understanding the New Testament. A final section presents the reasons that all of this is important.

2.3 THE TRUTHFULNESS AND VALUE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

There is absolutely not one verse in the New Testament that indicates that the Old Testament is not totally true, or that it should not be believed today. Recall again where Jesus said "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18). Jesus believed in the validity of the Old Testament, and so should we.

Does this sound strange? Can we believe something to be true without believing that we are subject to it? Of course! We believe that Adam was told not to eat of the forbidden fruit, but we are not under that law. We understand that Noah was commanded to build an arc, but we do not build arcs today. God requires the same faith of us as he did of them (Heb. 11), but today our faith is revealed by obedience to His son.

Of what value is the Old Testament? First and foremost, it is important because it is essential to our understanding of the New Testament. The Old Testament is quoted throughout the New Testament to explain the full meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without an understanding of the Old Testament, these New Testament passages are meaningless; thus we cannot understand all of the New Testament unless we have some basic understanding of the Old Testament. This makes this understanding of and faith in

the validity of the Old Testament essential to our salvation today. Christians must dedicate themselves to a study and understanding of the Old Testament -- not because it is God's law for us today, but *to understand* God's law for us today, i.e., the New Testament. [In case you feel uncomfortable about calling the New Testament God's law for us today, read 1 Corinthians 9:21, where Paul said that he was "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ."]

A second reason that the Old Testament is important is that it contains timeless knowledge with regard to the nature of both God and man. How can we understand suffering without the book of Job? How can we sing songs of praise to God without the book of Psalms? How can we obtain the wisdom of the wisest man whoever lived without the book of Ecclesiastes? How can we know where we came from without the book of Genesis? We could go on and on, but Jesus said it best when he said: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). *Every word* includes the Old Testament.

Finally, we know that the Old Testament is a priceless treasure because the New Testament tells us that it is. In Romans 15:2-4 we read: "Let every one of us please [his] neighbor for [his] good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." First, Paul quoted an Old Testament scripture (Psalms 69:9) as proof that Christ pleased not himself. Then he stated the value of the Old Testament scriptures ("things ... written aforetime"). They are for our learning that we might have hope through patience and comfort of the scriptures.

As a second example, consider the writing of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10. This is a very powerful chapter that many people do not wish to hear. It states unequivocally that Christians (which implies that they are in a saved, covenant relationship with God) can be lost just as the Israelites who were saved (out of Egypt) fell from God's grace. After describing what happened to them in great detail, he stated (1 Corinthians 10:11-12): "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The Old Testament was written for our admonition. Remember, God is no respecter of persons. We can clearly and graphically see that those of old were clearly condemned for their disobedience. Do you think that we are better than they? On the contrary, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:3).

So the Old Testament should be believed because it is the truth revealed of God. Faith in its validation will lead us to conclude that we are not under its edicts today; with the death of Christ we are under the New Testament. However, the value of the Old Testament is in enabling us to understand the New Testament, helping us understand the

nature of God, helping us to have comfort in hope, and admonishing us to be faithful.

2.3 WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Let us apply what we have learned immediately above to answer this question. In Numbers 13 we read about Moses sending spies into the land of Canaan to spy out the land. It was God's will that they bring back a positive report and have faith in Him to take the land. However, we read that all but Joshua and Caleb brought back a report which demonstrated a lack of faith in God. God was extremely displeased with them and we read in Numbers 14 how he condemned them to spend 40 years in the wilderness, and that none of the unfaithful would cross over into the promised land. Toward the end of Chapter 14 we read about these men repenting themselves and deciding indeed to attempt to take the promised land. It says (Numbers 14:44: "But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, [even] unto Hormah."

Timing is everything. Had they demonstrated that zeal a few days before they would have been blessed by God. These things are written for our admonition ...

Consider a second example. It is recorded in Exodus 17:6 where Moses was commanded of God: "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." However, a later occasion is recorded in Numbers 20:10-12: "And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts [also]. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

Timing is everything. Moses could have argued that God had previously commanded him to strike the rock. What was wrong with that now? Moses could have, but he had more sense than to do such a foolish thing. Moses and Aaron both knew what they had done wrong -- they had not trusted God.

Today when we practice and bind the Old Testament rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ, it demonstrates that very same lack of faith in God. Is it important? Ask Moses.