

The New Testament: An Introduction

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A “testament” can refer to two things:

(1) a will, by which one gives instructions, usually in writing, concerning the disposal of his possessions after death. In Hebrews 9, “testament” is used with the meaning of “will”, as in “last will and testament”, but that usage is rare in Scripture.

(2) a covenant between God and man. In the Bible, the word “testament” is almost always used in this second sense of “a covenant between God and man”.

What is the New Testament (NT)? How does one enter into this covenant between God and man? Why is there a need for a new covenant to replace the old one God made with Israel at Mount Sinai? When did this NT begin, and what were the conditions of it? As with everything concerning the kingdom of God, we must allow God Himself to answer these questions.

(1) **WHAT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT?**

Through Jeremiah (31:31-34), God answered this question:

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that 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 that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.”

So, the NT is the writing of God’s laws onto human hearts rather than on tablets of stone or pages of a book. To “write laws on hearts” means simply to give the knowledge of and to make one conscious of God’s will. This knowledge of God’s will cannot be injected into our physical hearts by natural means, of course. It must be accomplished spiritually, for “*no one knows the things of God except the spirit of God*” (1Cor. 2:11).

Jesus told his disciples that when the spirit of God came, it would guide them into all truth (Jn. 16:13). This would mean that the spirit of God, teaching us from within, replaces the OT’s written tablets and scrolls containing the laws of God. So, in this covenant, God’s people are not led by written documents but by God Himself, by His spirit. This is why Paul would write (Rom. 8:14), “*For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*”

The author of Hebrews agreed, quoting Jeremiah’s ancient prophecy concerning what the NT is. In this NT, “*they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his*

brother, saying ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the LORD.” Isaiah said the same thing: “And all your children shall be taught of the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children” (54:13). John wrote it this way, “But as for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, and so, you have no need for anyone to teach you, but the anointing itself teaches you concerning all things, and it is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, you will continue in him” (1Jn. 2:27).

Therefore, the NT, by God’s definition, is the indwelling presence of God’s holy spirit, bringing the knowledge of God’s law into our hearts.

(2) HOW DOES ONE ENTER INTO THIS COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND MAN?

Since Paul said, “If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9), the simple answer to the question is that one must receive the spirit of Christ in order to enter into covenant with God. And since the spirit comes only in the name of Jesus (Jn. 14:26), it is obvious that we must believe on the name of Jesus in order to receive the Spirit. This is what John suggested in the opening chapter of his gospel (1:11-12), “He came to his own home, and his own people did not receive him; but to as many as did receive him, to those who believe on his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” The phrase, “to become a child of God” means to be “born again” into God’s family. And to be “born of God” (Jn. 1:13) is to be born of the spirit (Jn. 3:5-8), which is God’s blessing for those who believe in His Son Jesus, as John explained (Jn. 7:37-39): “On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture said, from deep within him will flow rivers of living water. (He spoke this concerning the Spirit, which those who believed on him were going to receive.)”

Therefore, one enters into the NT between God and man by believing on the name of Jesus and receiving the spirit of God.

(3) WHY WAS THERE A NEED FOR A NEW COVENANT TO REPLACE THE OLD COVENANT THAT GOD MADE WITH ISRAEL AT MOUNT SINAI?

The fundamental difference between the Old and the New Testaments is that the OT was a covenant of symbols, a covenant of external prophetic signs and ceremonies, while the NT is an internal covenant of the spirit. For one example, physical circumcision of the flesh was an OT prophetic symbol of the spiritual circumcision that the spirit of God now accomplishes in the hearts of those who believe. This is what Paul said about the OT ritual of circumcision (Rom. 2:28-29): “For he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, who 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 NT takes the words of Psalm 127:1 to the extreme: “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain who build it. Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain.” For the NT tells us, “Except the Lord circumcise, they labor in vain who circumcise. Except the Lord baptize, they labor in vain who baptize. Except the spirit bear witness, they labor in vain

who testify”, etc. The NT concerns itself entirely with the condition of the heart. It is a covenant of the spirit, not the flesh.

The fundamental reason a new covenant was needed is that no outward standard imposed upon sinful mankind can ever make people holy. Ceremonies cannot transform a sinful heart into a sanctified one. The spirit of man remains untouched and “desperately wicked” even in the midst of elaborately designed religious rites.

God wants real fellowship with His people; that is, He wants His children to be like Him, inwardly. He gave Israel holy laws written on stone and paper, but those laws on the outside of people did not give them thoughts like God’s thoughts; nor did those laws make their hearts tender and good like God’s heart. In short, external ceremonies and commandments cannot do away with the sinful nature of man.

The author of Hebrews referred to this inability of the Law to keep us holy when he said, “*For the Law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year, continually, make the comers thereunto perfect*”(10:1), and “*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, 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*” (8:7-8).

Therefore, the reason a new covenant was needed is that the old covenant, being on the outside of us, was incapable of purging us from sin and making us holy.

(4) WHEN DID THIS NEW TESTAMENT BEGIN,

AND WHAT WERE GOD’S CONDITIONS FOR ENTERING INTO IT?

The OT did not begin in Genesis, and the NT did not begin in Matthew. The OT began in Exodus 24 at Mount Sinai, after the people of Israel had accepted God’s terms and Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the people. The NT begins in Acts 2, when God sprinkled the blood of the NT, the holy Spirit, on about 120 disciples who were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. The book of Genesis, along with the first twenty-three chapters of Exodus, tell us why and how the old covenant came to be. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, together with the first chapter of Acts, serves the same purpose for the new covenant. Those books tell us why and how the new covenant came to be.

God’s conditions for making the first covenant with Israel were summarized in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17), and then were expanded upon in Exodus 21-24. The people were required to agree with these conditions before God would agree to enter into covenant with them. Agreeing with these conditions is impossible without believing in the one whom God sent to deliver those conditions. It would have been impossible for Israel to agree to God’s conditions if they did not first believe in the man God sent to deliver those conditions to Israel - Moses. The basic conditions for entering the NT are the same as the old, but the messenger is

different; it is Jesus, the Son of God. Moses told Israel that new messenger was coming (Dt. 18:17-18) “*The LORD said to me, ‘ . . . I will raise them up a prophet from among their brothers, like you, and will put my words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not give heed to my words which he speaks in my name, I will require it of him.’ ”*

Only by believing in Jesus will we offer to God a repentance that He will accept, but by believing in him, we agree with God that His conditions are just. God then adopts us into His family by giving us His spirit. In sum, the conditions of the new covenant are that we love God and keep His commandments, and His first commandment would be, to use Jesus’ words, “*to believe on him whom God has sent*” (Jn. 6:29). For His part, God promises to protect and teach us as His special people and to save us from harm in the Final Judgment.

The NT began in Acts 2, when the spirit of God was first given to men, and its conditions can be summarized by saying that we are to love God and keep His commandments, and believe in His Son Jesus.

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The following truths are essential to a right understanding of the New Testament. No one can understand the New Testament of Jesus Christ without understanding these simple truths:

FUNDAMENTAL #1

JESUS LIVED AND DIED UNDER THE OLD COVENANT, THE LAW (GAL. 4:4).

The New Covenant did not begin until after these things happened:

(1) Jesus died (Heb. 9:16-17):

“For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise, it is of no strength at all while the testator is living.”

(This was in reference to the necessity of Jesus’ death in order for the NT to be established.)

(2) Jesus rose from the dead (1Cor. 15:13-17):

“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not raised, and if Christ is not raised, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain, and we are found to be false witnesses of God because we have borne witness, as being from God, that He raised up Christ, whom He raised not up if, in fact, the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither is Christ raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is pointless, and you are still in your sins.”

(3) God’s spirit was sent from heaven and given to man (Heb. 8:8-10, quoting Jer. 31):

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Notes:

- Joseph and Mary had the baby Jesus circumcised on the eighth day, according to the Law, and they offered the appropriate sacrifice for Mary’s purification after giving birth to a son (Lk. 2:19-24).
- Jesus obeyed Moses’ Law because it came from God. Even when he healed lepers, Jesus commanded them to make the sacrifices required of healed lepers by the Law (Mt. 8:1-4).
- It was Jesus’ refusal to hold the “traditions of the elders” on a par with the Law that angered the rulers of Israel (Mt. 5:17-20; 12:1-14; Mk. 7:1-13).
- Jesus lived and died as a servant. He never had a rebellious attitude. He did not scorn the traditions of his people, and he did not provoke Israel’s leaders by showing contempt for their traditions. Where the traditions of the Jews did not conflict with the Law of God, Jesus observed them (Jn. 10:22).

Therefore, the NT was not in effect during the events described in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the first chapter of Acts.

FUNDAMENTAL #2

NO ONE UNDERSTOOD WHAT GOD WAS DOING IN CHRIST WHILE JESUS WAS HERE ON EARTH.

When we open the book of Matthew to begin a study of the NT, it helps us to understand the characters and the events if we think in terms of Abraham, David, Samuel, and Moses, rather than to think of Paul the apostle. When we open the book of Matthew, we are still in OT time. Remember that, regardless of how holy any OT character was, he was ignorant of the salvation that God would bring about through Christ: *“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come to you, searching who or when the spirit of Christ that was in them signified, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow”* (1Peter 1:10-11). *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the holy spirit”* (2Pet. 1:21).

Nobody in the OT could possibly imagine the love that God would show through Jesus. Men would be made aware of that kind of love only after Jesus came and gave himself to purchase the spirit of God for us: *“For God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”*, and because of what Jesus did for us, *“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy Ghost which He has given to us”* (Rom. 5:8; 5:5).

Nobody understood what Jesus was here for because the wisdom and love that sent him did not exist within man before the spirit of God came to dwell in him.

Rom. 16:25: “Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began.”

Eph. 3:3-5, 9: “. . . by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as also I briefly wrote before . . . which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. . . . to proclaim to the Gentiles the incomprehensible richness of Christ and to enlighten all men *as to* what *is* the disposition of the mystery which has been hidden from the Aeons, in God who created all things . . .”

Col. 1:26: “. . . the mystery hidden from Aeons and from generations but now revealed to His saints . . .”

Mt. 11:25-26: “At that time, Jesus answered and said, I do praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the learned and intelligent, and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for so it was pleasing in your sight.”

Mt. 13:44: “. . . the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field . . .”

A LIST OF EXAMPLES OF JESUS BEING MISUNDERSTOOD

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

Mk. 6:1-6

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the people in Nazareth, his hometown, rejected him and his teaching.

Lk. 4:16-31

The people at the synagogue in Nazareth attempted to kill Jesus after he delivered his first sermon. Then he left Nazareth and adopted Capernaum as his hometown.

“WHOM DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

Mt. 14:1-2

Herod the Tetrarch thought Jesus was John the Baptist returned from the dead.

Mt. 16:13-14

Others thought Jesus was Elijah (found at last, after all those years!). Others thought he was Jeremiah (whose death is never recorded in the OT) or that he was “the other prophet” (whoever that was).

Jn. 10:33-36

Even though Jesus denied doing so, the elders were outraged because they thought he was claiming to be God.

Jn. 8:41, 48

The elders also suggested that his birth was the result of his mother Mary's fornication with a Samaritan.

“WHAT I AM DOING, YOU DO NOT NOW KNOW”

Jn. 2:19-22

Some Jewish elders thought Jesus was in the construction business.

Jn. 6:51-52, 66

A large group of Jesus' disciples thought he was introducing cannibalism into the Jewish religion. These disciples forsook Jesus and never came back.

Jn. 3:1-4

Nicodemus thought Jesus was teaching reincarnation.

Jn. 4:13-15

The Samaritan woman thought Jesus had a secret well of magical water that could enable her never to have to draw water from the city well again.

Jn. 7:33-35

Some of the rulers of Israel thought that Jesus had a secret plan to travel abroad to teach the Gentiles.

Jn. 8:21-22

Others thought that Jesus was planning to commit suicide.

Jn. 13:4-7

Peter thought Jesus was washing his feet.

Jn. 4:31-33

When Jesus said, "I have meat to eat you know not of," the disciples wondered if someone had secretly brought Jesus some food.

Mt. 20:20-24; Lk. 22:24

The disciples thought that Jesus was sent by God to set up an earthly kingdom, and they were constantly maneuvering against one another for the highest positions.

Jn. 6:9-15

The multitudes were so certain that Jesus was sent by God to re-establish Israel's ancient political independence that they wanted to take him by force and make him their king. Jesus had to go up into a mountain to escape from them.

Acts 1:6

The disciples expected, even after Jesus's resurrection, that his mission was to set up an earthly kingdom.

"YOU NEITHER KNOW ME NOR MY FATHER"

Mk. 3:21, 31-35

Jesus' relatives thought that he had lost his mind. The relatives who came to take him away included his mother and brothers, apparently (see also Jn. 7:5).

Mk. 15:16-20

The Roman soldiers thought Jesus was a pathetic joke.

Mt. 14:26; Lk. 24:36-41

The disciples thought Jesus was a ghost on at least two occasions.

Mt. 11:16-19

Many thought Jesus was a glutton and an alcoholic.

Mt. 9:1-3

The scribes thought that Jesus was a blasphemer.

Isa. 53:3-4

Many of God's people thought Jesus was cursed by God, and judged him to be of little worth.

Jn. 7:45-49

The highest ranking elders in Israel thought that anyone who believed Jesus was cursed.

Jn. 10:20

Some Jewish elders thought Jesus was demon-possessed and insane.

Jn. 9:24

The ruling elders in Israel said that they knew Jesus was a sinner.

MIRACLES

Mk. 4:35-41

The disciples did not expect him to perform some of the mighty miracles which he performed.

Mt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:15-17; Lk. 8:26-37

Others were frightened by his miracles, even when they were benefitted by them.

Mk. 8:14-21

Even after Jesus fed the multitude with a few loaves and fishes, the disciples thought Jesus was worried about having enough food.

Mt. 15:16; 16:5-12

Sometimes, Jesus seemed frustrated at his disciples' inability to understand what he was saying. A common phrase from the lips of Jesus to his followers was, "Are you still without understanding?"

Mt. 9:32-34; 12:22-24; Mk. 3:22

The Pharisees and scribes thought Jesus was an instrument of Satan and that he worked miracles using Satan's power.

JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Mt. 16:21-23

Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that he would suffer and die.

Lk. 18:31-34; Mk. 9:9-10; 30-32

No matter how plainly Jesus spoke, the disciples could not understand that he was going to be tortured, crucified, and then rise from the dead the third day.

Lk. 24:1-21a

After Jesus died, some of his disciples concluded that they had been mistaken to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Mk. 16:9-11

The disciples did not believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead, even when Mary the Magdalene reported that she had seen him.

Jn. 20:24-25

Thomas refused to believe his fellow disciples when they told him that the Lord had appeared to them.

Acts 11:15-16

Jesus said some things which his disciples did not understand until years after they were born again.

“YOUR EYES ARE BLESSED . . .”

Minds and hearts can still be blinded to the gospel, even during this NT time. Even now, God has hidden the truth from many men because it is not given to all men, even now, to comprehend the beauty of the gospel of Jesus (see 2Cor. 3:14-15). When we consider that no one has ever, or can ever, comprehend the gospel without first receiving grace from God, we should tremble even as we rejoice if we are allowed to look into the holy things of God. When Jesus said these same things to his disciples (Mt. 13:10-17), it is unlikely that they understood just how true his words were because they were still in the dark as to what he was really doing, right before their eyes:

“And his disciples approached him and said, Why do you speak to them in parables? He answered and said to them, Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him shall be given, and he will overflow; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. For this reason, I speak to them in parables, because they, seeing, do not see, and hearing, they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, saying, You will certainly hear, but will in no way understand, and you will certainly see, but will in no way perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull and they have heard with deaf ears, and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand in their heart, and return, and I heal them.

“Your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things you hear, and did not hear them.”

FUNDAMENTAL #3

JOHN THE BAPTIZER WAS SENT ONLY TO THE JEWS.

- A. Gabriel, the angel of the Lord, spoke of John's commission to Zacharias, his elderly father, even before John was conceived. From Luke 1:16-17:

Many of the sons of Israel will he turn to the Lord their God, and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to prepare a people [from among the Israelites only] made ready for the Lord.

John himself was quite aware of his calling. From John 1:29-31

The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world! This is the one of whom I said, 'The man coming after me is made greater than I, for he was before I was.' And I did not know him, AND THE REASON I CAME BAPTIZING WITH WATER IS SO THAT HE MIGHT BE MADE KNOWN TO ISRAEL."

Please note! John's purpose was not to introduce baptism to Israel, but to introduce the Messiah to Israel. To introduce the Messiah does not mean merely to reveal to Israel who the Messiah is; it means to introduce to Israel to what the Messiah would do for those who repent; namely, that he would baptize them (with holy spirit instead of water).

- B. Jesus testified that John's baptism truly was ordained by God. From Luke 7:24-30 (see also Luke 20:1-8):

*Then, after John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, "What did you go out to the wilderness to see? A reed being shaken by the wind? Nonsense! What did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft garments? But those clothed in fine garments and living in luxury are in king's houses! So, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and **more than a prophet**. This is the man concerning whom it is written, 'Behold! I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'*

*"I tell you, there is no one born of a woman greater than John the baptizer. Still, the least important person in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And all the people who heard him, even the publicans, **justified God, receiving the baptism of John**. But the Pharisees and experts in the Law frustrated the purpose of God for themselves, not receiving his baptism."*

If John was "more than a prophet," then John's baptism was more important than what the prophets said. And if John was more than a prophet, then God's people were more blessed to hear John than they had been to hear Isaiah or the other prophets. And if John was more than

a prophet, then God's people were given a greater reward for believing John than for believing the prophets, and more worthy of damnation if they refused John than if they refused the prophets. The messages of the prophets and of John were both a matter of life or death for Israel, but those who believed John received the Spirit of God (after Jesus ascended in Acts 1), while those who believed the ancient prophets received only the promise of it, and those who rejected John received a greater damnation after death than those who refused the prophets.

- C. John's baptism was for Jews only, *but it was not for all Jews*. It was only for Jews who believed John and obeyed his message, which was that they must confess and forsake their sins and begin doing the will of God.

From Matthew 3:5-9:

*At that time, Jerusalem and all Judea were coming out to him, as well as the whole region around Jordan, and were being baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit worthy of repentance! And do not think to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I say to you that God is able to raise up from these stones children for Abraham."***

According to Luke, the Pharisees and Sadducees were not the only victims of John's stern rebuke. From Luke 3:7:

John said to multitudes who were coming out to be baptized by him, "You offspring of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

John upheld God's standard of holiness and refused to baptize anyone who refused to meet that standard, and he made it perfectly clear to everyone what God's standard for them was:

From Luke 3:10-14:

And the people asked him, saying, "Then, what are we to do?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two shirts, let him share with him who has none. And he who has food, let him do the same."

Tax collectors also came to him to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to collect."

Soldiers also questioned him, saying, "What about us? What shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by force nor accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

- D. John's baptism was a prophetic symbol of the baptism Jesus would give.

From Matthew Mt. 3:11:

*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but after me, one mightier than I is coming, whose sandals I am unworthy to remove; **he will baptize you with holy spirit.***

- E.** Jesus' baptism was intended from the beginning to replace John's baptism.

From John 3:28-30:

*John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear witness that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I am sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is complete. **He must increase, but I must decrease.**"*

Please note! How was John to decrease? Certainly not physically. John was speaking of his work. In time, John's work would fade to nothing, just as all the works of the Law were made nothing by the "surpassing glory of Christ" (2Cor. 3:7-11).

Now, if Jesus, the one coming after John, was mightier than John, then the baptism that Jesus would give was greater than John's baptism. To answer the question, "How much greater was Jesus baptism than John's baptism?" one need only answer this question: "How much greater was Jesus than John?"¹

John himself seemed to know that his baptism was inconsequential in comparison to the baptism the Messiah would give, even if John did not understand that Jesus had to die before he could give it.

From Matthew 3:13-15:

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan and came to John to be baptized by him. But John stopped him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you are coming to me?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "For now, let it be; for this is the right way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John allowed him to be baptized.

- F.** As Matthew 3:11 (above) indicates, an essential part of John's baptism was his message of Christ and his baptism. In other words, without John's message, water baptism is not John's baptism.²

- G.** If they were anointed by God to do so, other men could baptize Jews with John's baptism.

From John 3:26:

And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the man who was with you on the other side of Jordan, to whom you have borne witness – look, the same man is baptizing, and everybody is going to him!"

And from John 4:1-3:

Then, when Jesus learned that the Pharisees heard it said, “Jesus baptizes and makes more disciples than John” (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but his disciples), he left Judea and departed to Galilee.

FUNDAMENTAL #4

JESUS WAS SENT ONLY TO THE JEWS.

Jesus was not sent to preach the gospel to Gentiles or to Samaritans (whose culture was a mixture of Jewish and Gentile customs). To illustrate this, we need only to consider the broken-hearted Gentile mother who came to Jesus, begging for mercy for her suffering daughter. Upon hearing her plea, Jesus refused to show her any mercy at all. In fact, Jesus walked away from her, refusing so much as to speak to the pathetic woman. When the desperate woman refused to leave and pressed his disciples, they came to Jesus, asking him to send her away, but Jesus replied that he was sent only to the house of Israel. Here is the story, from Matthew 15:21-27:

Leaving there, Jesus departed into the regions of Tyre and Sidon [Gentile areas]. And, behold, a Canaanite woman from those parts came out and cried out to him, saying, "Lord! Son of David! Have mercy on me! My daughter is terribly demon possessed." But he answered her not a word. Then his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Make her go away! She keeps crying after us."

But he answered and said, "I was sent only to lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Then she came and fell down before him, saying, "Sir, help me!"

But he answered and said, "It isn't good to take children's bread and throw it to dogs."

Then she said, "Yes, master, but even dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Then Jesus answered and said to her, "Woman, your faith is great! It is done for you just as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

What should be especially noted here is that Jesus' attitude may surprise modern readers, but it would not have surprised his disciples at all. He had already told them enough for them to understand what his mission was, or at least the scope of his mission. When Jesus anointed his disciples and sent them to preach in the cities of the Jews, he strictly commanded them to carry his message of salvation to no one but Jews (Mt. 10:5-6):

Do not go to the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into a city of Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

THIS MEANS:

. . . that *all* of Jesus' commandments were *only* for the Jews, for they were the only people to whom God sent him (Rom. 15:8). This does not mean that the Jews were the only ones who eventually benefitted from Jesus' coming; the whole world has benefitted from Jesus' ministry. It means only that the Father limited the scope of Jesus' ministry on earth to those of the Jewish nation.

THIS ALSO MEANS:

. . . that the Samaritans and Gentiles were excluded not only from the blessings Jesus bestowed while on earth but also the curses Jesus bestowed. All the cities mentioned below were Jewish cities:

From Matthew 11:20-24:

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles were performed because they did not repent. “Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works wrought in you had been wrought in Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. And I tell you, it will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you shall be driven down to Hades, for if the mighty works wrought in you had been wrought in Sodom they would have remained to the present day. And I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you.”

THIS ALSO MEANS:

. . . that Jesus did not teach his followers that the Law of Moses was at an end, or even that it was coming to an end. On the contrary, he came to reinforce the Jews’ confidence in his Father’s Law:

From Matthew 5:17-19:

Do not suppose that I’ve come to destroy the Law or the prophets; I didn’t come to destroy but to fulfill. I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or serif of the Law shall by any means pass away until all things have come to pass. Whoever, therefore, breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.^{3,4}

CONCLUSION

This, then, is the state of things when we open the books of the New Testament:

(1) God is still dealing only with His chosen people.

And one of the last things Moses said to Israel before he climbed Mt. Nebo to die was this: *“What nation is there so great, who has God so near to them as the LORD our God is, in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this Law, which I set before you this day?”* Moved by the Spirit, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” said it best: *“He shows His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt this way with any nation”* (Ps. 147:19-20).

This was still the situation in the gospels.

(2) Jerusalem is still “the holy city”

(3) The elders of Israel still have divine authority over the people of God because, as Jesus told his disciples, *“they sit in Moses’ seat,”* and God’s people are still obligated to do as Israel’s priests and elders command them to do (Mt. 23:2-3).

(4) Physical circumcision is still the door into the earthly family of God.

(5) No form of baptism is being practiced in Israel, for the Law of Moses is still in effect, and there is no baptism ordained for Israel in the Law that God gave them.

(6) Sabbath days are still holy.

(7) Animal sacrifices are still being offered to God and are still being accepted by Him.

The theological concepts of grace vs. law and of faith vs. works, does not exist. There was no grace without the Law and there was no faith apart from performing the works of the Law. Try to think that way when you read the gospels, or at least be aware that this is the way every Jewish character you are reading about was thinking. No one in Israel imagined in their wildest dreams that God would ever make a new covenant and bring to an end the holy ceremonies of the old one.

The notion that God had a Son at His right hand would have been regarded as vain idolatrous thinking, and any suggestion that God would ever love the Gentiles as He had loved the Jews was considered extremely blasphemous. The mere suggestion of such a thing almost cost Jesus his life when he first started to preach (Lk. 4:16-30).

Paul would later write that during the time of the gospels (before there was a gospel offered to Gentiles), the Gentiles were *“strangers and foreigners”* to God, that they were *“without Christ, aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world”* (Eph. 2:12). But Israel was God’s chosen nation, the only chosen nation on earth, and the Jews were God’s chosen people, the only chosen people on earth.

So, in the gospels, you are still in the Old Testament, reading about God’s dealing with His chosen people, the children of Abraham, just as when you read about David, Elijah, and Nehemiah. Other than the part Israel’s Roman conquerors play in this story, the Gentiles are completely irrelevant – just as irrelevant as they were when God was speaking to Israel through Moses, Elisha, Isaiah, and the other prophets.

Footnotes

¹ Paul answered that question for us in 2Corinthians 3:7-11:

*Now if the ministry of death [the Law] written in letters engraved on stones was so glorious that the children of Israel were not able to look steadily upon Moses' face because of the glory of his countenance (which glory is being brought to an end), how is the ministry of the Spirit not more glorious? If there was glory in the ministry of condemnation [the Law], much rather does the ministry of righteousness abound with glory! For indeed, that which was made glorious [the law] has come to have no glory in comparison to the surpassing glory of Christ. And certainly if **that which ends** [the Law] is glorious, much more glorious is that which endures is.*

Note: Paul said that the thing which ministered condemnation [the Law] was ordained to end. This means that John's baptism, being a ceremony under the Law, also ministered condemnation instead of life and, so, was also intended to come to an end.

This is made especially by statements Paul made after being sent with his gospel for the Gentiles.

From Ephesians 4:4-6:

*There is one body and one Spirit . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, **one baptism** . . .*

Again from Paul, in 1Corinthians 1:17, concerning John's baptism in water:

Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel . . .

Please note that Paul did not consider baptizing [with John's baptism] to be preaching the gospel! Paul's gospel was revolutionary for one thing: it held that the Law, including John's baptism, had finally come to a permanent end.

All of the Law's ceremonies pointed to the Messiah, Paul taught (Gal. 3:24), but none of the Law's ceremonies, including John's baptism, had the power to change people's hearts and make them pure before God (cp. Heb. 10:1), "*but the bringing in of a better hope did*" (Heb. 7:19). The cry of every righteous heart who lived under the Law, including those whom John baptized, was exactly as Paul described his own cry while living under the Law (Rom. 7:24): "*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from [the domination of] this body of death?*"

And God's wonderful answer is exactly as Paul described it in Romans 7:25: "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord!"

Thank God for Jesus!

² Paul taught that without this message, baptism in water is not the baptism that God sent John to preach. Following on the heels of Apollos, who misunderstood John's baptism on this

important point (Acts 18:24-28), Paul had to undo the damage Apollos had left behind at Ephesus:

From Acts 19:1-5:

And it happened that, while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the upper regions to go to Ephesus. And having come upon certain disciples, Paul said to them, "Did you receive the holy spirit when you believed?"

They said to him, "We have never heard that there is a holy spirit."

Then he said to them, "Unto whom then were you baptized?"

They said, "Unto the baptism of John."

Paul then said, "But John just baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people they should believe on him who was coming after him, on Christ Jesus." And when they heard this, they were baptized unto the Lord Jesus.

³ No Jew would have followed Jesus if he had preached that the Law was coming to an end. Jesus did suggest more than once that the Law would be superceded by something grander, but as we have already seen, no one understood Jesus even when he spoke plainly; they certainly would not have understood his subtle statements about the incredible changes God was about to make.

Consequently, the people of God on earth, being exclusively Jewish, and following Jesus' example of submission to the Law, continued under the Law of Moses for decades after the NT began.

From Acts 21:17-26:

*And when [Paul and his company] were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following, Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, "**You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous for the law.** And they have been informed about you, that you teach all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.*

"What then is to be done? The multitude must needs come together, for they will hear that you have come. Do, then, what we say to you. We have four men which have a vow on them. Take them, and purify yourself with them, and pay their expenses, that they may shave their heads, and then all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only

that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from [eating] things strangled, and from fornication.”

Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them, entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until an offering should be offered for every one of them.

⁴ **THIS ALSO MEANS:**

. . . that when the NT began on the day of Pentecost, remission of sins and the new birth (the baptism of the Spirit) was available only to the Jews. Of course, the first ones who received the spirit, in Acts 2, on Pentecost morning in Jerusalem, were the Jews who had followed Jesus during his ministry. But even for several years after that, no one but members of the circumcised nation were offered “the gift of God”:

From Acts 2:1-5, 41:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with holy spirit, and began to speak with other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance.

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. . . . And the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls.

Recent Correspondence about the NT Course

06-20-08

Pastor John:

I have loved reading the notes from the New Testament, and the part of your translation of Matthew that we have. It is the Lord blessing or helping me with it, though, that has been so good. I pray to read it and take it in with my heart and not so much with my head, as we go through this class. I plan to do the headwork, but you know what I mean. I'm noticing things that I haven't noticed before, or things seem clearer, here and there.

When we were in the class Saturday night and we read in Jeremiah about what the new covenant is, I kept thinking of a Scripture that I remembered reading way back, but I couldn't remember all of it, just that it reminded me of what we read in Jeremiah. I didn't know how relevant it was to the topic, so I didn't mention it in class and wanted to look it up later.

So, looking through the Bible, and the concordance, trying to find that Scripture, I found so much wonderful stuff!

The Scripture(s) I was thinking of are in Ezekiel 11 and also Ezekiel 36, if I remember correctly. They talk about the Lord giving his people a new heart and a new spirit. In one place, God said "I will put my spirit in you," and in several places, it just repeats the same message, basically in the same order, i.e., that God will gather his people out from where He scattered them, that He will give them one heart, a new heart, a new spirit, His spirit, and that they will keep His laws, and that they would be His people, and that He would be their God.

That led me to Joel, where God said, "*I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh,*" and then to Acts 2 where it says that the people receiving the spirit was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. I also read where God said to the prophet (Ezekiel) to take two sticks (one for Judah and one for Israel) and put them together. Then, He said that He would put the two BACK TOGETHER and that the kingdom would no longer be divided, and that David would be the king over the nation. Well, I've just read in Matthew where Jesus was the son of David! and that he was born King of the Jews!

Well, I've loved this, John. I want to learn this! It makes me want to learn more of the Bible. I did not know that there were so many places in the Old Testament where God promised that He would give His spirit to his people. And then I thought about the verse in Romans, "*If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*"

There was also a place in the old testament, in those Scriptures, where it said something about sprinkling water and cleansing the people, and it was just a glimpse for me of the tabernacle and those symbols, representing something in our time. I didn't understand it, exactly, but I knew it was something. And, how much clearer and more sense it makes to read what the new testament writers are saying, with a little better picture of the old testament.

Well, just wanted to tell you about it.

Lyn H.