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*Law and Gospel:
The Unity of the Testaments**



Steve Schlissel

You've heard it said, "The Jews have the Old Testament and Gentiles have the New Testament." Not so. The meaning of the Old is today inaccessible apart from the New, and the New is utterly incomprehensible without the Old. Better to say that *Christians alone have the Scriptures*, for the Old and New Testaments constitute the one Word of God. Yet I shall use our traditional terms, Old Testament and New Testament, throughout this address, for there is not yet a convenient alternative.

It was less than five hundred years ago that the complete Bible was divided into chapters and verses. No question about it, this has been very helpful. It is convenient, for example, when talking to a fellow believer to be able to tell him, "You know, it says in such-and-such a place. . . ." Or, if we are in church and the minister says, "Turn to such and such a passage," everyone, because of this division of chapters and verses, can turn there together. And concordances would be a tough sell without chapter and verse numberings. The convenience is obvious. Not so obvious, perhaps, is the grave danger this splicing poses to our mindset toward the Bible itself.

For it often feels as though we've come to look at the Bible

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as if its contents were actually and inherently divisible into these clumsy little portions, these highly artificial impositions upon the texts which we call chapters and verses. Thus we hear arguments that begin, "I have a verse that says . . ." wherein the arguer believes his snippet has value even though it has been wrested from its context. Because the verse has its own identifier, such wresting appears quite justified to our snipping friends. It seems never to have occurred to some that when a verse is taken out of the sentence and the sentence is taken out of the paragraph and the paragraph is taken out of the passage and the passage is taken out of the chapter and the chapter is taken out of the letter and the letter is taken out of the general context altogether, *meaning* is affected. Lest we forget, Paul never wrote *a verse*. He wrote letters to churches, each of which had histories and contexts.

More deeply affecting than chapters and verses, however, is man's grandest scission: that little page that *divides* the Old and New Testaments. Who can measure the impact that little page has had on our thinking concerning the Bible?

The Bible is the Word of *God*. But that page between the Old Testament and the New Testament has been placed there *by man*. If one desires to keep the page there to mark a relative place within Scripture, I suppose that's fine. Yet, is it not commonly looked upon as the divider between two separate revelations? Surely it is—and surely that's wrong. Such thinking fundamentally alters the character of *tota scriptura* as a medium and thus necessarily alters its message.

For even in the "New Testament" people did not think of themselves as "New Testament Christians." They rather said, "We believe the Scriptures. The Scriptures have been fulfilled in our presence." Saint Peter is, if anything, casual in noting that Paul's inspired writings have taken their rightful place among "the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

New Testaments bound separately from Old Testaments are common. Yet (and one might view this as an irony, or even as an eloquent protest left there by God!) when we turn to the New Testament, the very first thing it says is, "This is a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the

Son of Abraham." Now, who is David and who is Abraham? Where can I find out? The Old Testament, of course! It is as if the New Testament is saying, "What are you doing here? You must begin at the beginning." For the New Testament is not just pregnant with the Old Testament, rather it is everywhere giving new birth to its thinking, hope, ideology, worldview, orientation, language, promise, and texts all over the place!

When Mary is given the great news about her divinely appointed role, she goes to visit her relative and talks about her soul glorifying the Lord and her spirit rejoicing in God her Savior, all in "Old Testament" words. All (future) generations will call her blessed, she says. All the promises given to all the people of Israel in the past, i.e., in the Old Testament, are finding fruition in what she shall bear! All that the fathers of the faith looked for is to begin its fulfillment on earth through her. The seamless theme of the covenant is coming to fullness in a most special way, and her role is unspeakably blessed. She shall "deliver" the Deliverer into this world—a most extraordinary thing indeed.

But people say, "No. The New is altogether new, and from Mary's story on we really don't need the Old Testament." Yet such an idea could not possibly have existed in the mind of any New Testament-era believer, let alone Mary. See how Mary expresses her joy? She exclaims that what is happening to her is nothing other than God helping his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendents forever. For Mary (or better, Miriam), her experience was simply the fulfillment and the continuation of Scripture. In the same manner do Elizabeth, Zecharias, Simeon, and Anna praise the God of Israel.

The New Testament, looked at this way, is a thoroughly *Jewish*, though not a *provincial*, document. It is a covenant document, just as the Old Testament books form a covenant document. Together they are one document. The two testaments are not two separable covenants. The new is a *realization* of that which had gone before, not a negation. For verification of this we have the words of Jesus Christ himself: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have

not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). He had eagerly desired to eat a specific Passover meal with his disciples, and it was at that meal that the new covenant in his blood was seamlessly ratified within the contexts of the old: the new covenant was planted in Old Testament soil.

It says in Acts 17:2-3, "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead." Note well Paul's methodology. How did he witness? Did he take out Colossians and say, "Look, I wrote this letter to Colossae, and I want you to see what I wrote. Give me a minute while I exegete it for you." No. He pulled out a scroll and unrolled it, and he reasoned with them *from the Scriptures*. What Scriptures? Whatever Scriptures were there. At the time, that happened to be the Old Testament. *No problema!*

The New Testament is simply the completion, the finalization of the Scriptures that we already had. *It is not a new and separate book*. It is new only in terms of fulfilling, of realizing the old book. Such language ought not to surprise us. A new moon is never a *new* moon, but rather a new phase of the same moon that had been there all along.

Interestingly, it is the Scriptures of the New Testament which testify to the adequacy of the Old Testament. The old book was perfectly capable of testifying to Jesus Christ, even before there was a New Testament. The "early church" (I put this in quotes because the *true* "early church" was founded in Eden) did not have a New Testament. They had only what we call the Old Testament Scriptures, yet never did anyone, much less Saint Paul, say, "You know, these are so inadequate."

Of course, in the plan of God we certainly came to need what we call the New Testament Scriptures. Among other benefits, we have in the New Testament, ripe for all the world, the inspired interpretation of what Christ has done in history, the perfect explanation of what it means for all the world that he has come. Therefore, God has given it to us in writing, in permanent form, available to the whole world.

But at first there was no such thing as a New Testament. And even for a couple of centuries afterward it wasn't called the New Testament. "It" was called the *Writings of the Apostles*. The early Christians had a mindset different from ours. They saw God's revelation as consisting of the Scriptures (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) and the Scriptures (the Writings of the Apostles). They had sections within their Bible, and God, in the first century, was adding one more. *The Bible, therefore, is not the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, and the Apostles. One Scripture, one Word of God.*

Thus Christ bore witness to the testimony of the Old Testament. "Search the Scriptures," he said, "for they are those which testify of me." Search the Scriptures, he told them. What Scriptures would they look up—1 Corinthians? What would they look up?—The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings: that is all they had—and all they needed.

Jesus frequently discoursed about that which concerned himself in the Scriptures. In fact, that was the note upon which he began his preaching ministry: "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21—Can you imagine having been there at that moment?). At the end of his ministry we hear the same note: After his resurrection he opened the minds of the apostles so they could understand *the Scriptures*. In perhaps the most pertinent passage proving our point,

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

We are talking about a mindset here. Failure to grasp the mindset of "New Testament believers" regarding "Old Testament Scripture" has led to a radically wrong view encountered all too often some twenty-one centuries down the pike. Many think, "The Old Testament, well, that tells of one way

of salvation. And the New Testament, that teaches another way of salvation." We must be careful to distinguish between corrupt views of the Old Testament's teaching, and God's actual teaching found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Many in the time of our Lord may have been very mistaken in their view of the Old Testament, but Jesus was not mistaken. And neither were the apostles. The Old Testament, when read properly, did in fact teach the way to eternal life. When somebody asked the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus did not reply, "I haven't inspired Paul yet. You must wait until Paul answers that question for you." No, he said, "What do the Scriptures say?" And the questioner proceeded to quote what they said. Jesus affirmed his answer, saying, "You are right. Go do this and you will live." But the man responded, "I have done all that." So Jesus said, "Let's see if you really have."

Jesus affirmed in no uncertain terms that the Old Testament held the keys of life, and that affirmation is ubiquitous, found throughout his teaching ministry as recorded in the Gospels. In the story (Luke 17) of Lazarus and the rich man, for example, he tells of a wicked rich man, calloused to the needs of a poor righteous man who lay outside his gate. When they both died, the rich man went to hell and was in torment; the poor man, Lazarus, went to Abraham's bosom (note his chosen figure of speech for paradise!). When Lazarus arrived, the rich man looked over to his side and begged, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my relatives so they won't have to come to this place. Send somebody." But Abraham said, "No, they have Moses and the Prophets. If they want to avoid hell and inherit eternal life let them listen to *the Old Testament*" (Authorized Brooklyn Version [ABV]).

That man in hell said, "No, no, but if someone rises from the dead, then they will really believe. Do a miracle and they will really believe, I know it." And Abraham said to him, "If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they won't believe even if someone rises from the dead." Even if someone does zippity-do-da's through the air, even if someone circumnavigates the globe on fire and comes down with

unsunged clothing, no matter what happens, no matter what is done right in front of their faces, if people will not listen to and be saved by the Word of God—and what is the Word of God here? It is Moses and the Prophets—they will not listen to or be saved by independent evidence—not even by miracles. The problem then and now is not in the Scriptures, it is in the hearers. It is because their hearts were hard that they heard not the Word of God. This is the uniform testimony of Jesus Christ. The notion that the Old Testament Scriptures are inadequate is held by men quite apart from, and contrary to, the Bible's own testimony about Moses and the Prophets.

Jesus even told the unbelieving Jews, "I don't have to condemn you at the Last Day. You know who I am going to call as a witness against you? Surprise! I am going to call *Moses*. You talk a lot about Moses. But guess what? Moses is going to be in the accuser's box, not in the defender's box. Moses is going to say to you, '*I don't know you. I never justified the way you think of things. I testified of Jesus Christ*'" (ABV).

It is impossible to maintain, in light of the New Testament, that there is the slightest disparaging or disrespectful attitude among the righteous toward the Old Testament, any attitude that regarded it as in any way inferior, inadequate, or imperfect. Just as Moses is not any less perfect for the Prophets having been added, so the Old Testament is not a whit less perfect for the New being added.

There is really only one book: the Bible, the Scriptures. This is Jesus' teaching. This is Peter's teaching. This also is Peter's preaching. And what does he preach on Pentecost? "Listen up! Everything that the Bible talked about is happening here right now." He didn't say, "Let's have a New Testament." He said, "this is it. This is the Old Testament come into its own" (ABV). And Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:14–15, tells the one who is going to follow in his steps that he should continue in what he has learned and become convinced of "because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Really, that ought to settle it, don't you agree?

(It's a wonder that many converts today start their Christian life by reading the book of Revelation. "I am a new Christian, and I have read Revelation. I know that Ronald Wilson Reagan is the 666 because there are six letters in each of those names. I know." Well, such people do not know as they ought to know. The New Testament-era Christians received the book of Revelation as an encouragement *to them*, and it is uninterpretable apart from a thorough familiarity with Old Testament imagery. So if you want to understand Revelation—just like Matthew's genealogy—go back to the Old Testament and start there.)

The Bible is one book, no matter what you may have been told to the contrary. The book itself—except for that page between the testaments—testifies that this is the case. Remember, "from infancy" Timothy had "known the holy Scriptures which are able" to make him and all his contemporaries "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15–16).

Exactly what was it that made Timothy "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"? It is what we would call the Old Testament. Of course, once the New Scriptures are extant, that is to say, once they exist, they are fully and equally authoritative with the Old Testament Scriptures, and naturally are bound together in the same way that the Prophets were bound together with Moses, or that the Psalms were bound together with Moses and the Prophets. They form one book as the one Word of God. Therefore, all I really need to know I learn in the Old Testament.

Doesn't the New Testament teach me that Abraham believed in Jesus Christ? Jesus said, "Abraham saw my day and he rejoiced." The father of the Jews, therefore, was a Christian. This sounds funny, right? Because people insist on these imposed divisions.

And they will say, "If you are a Jew you are not a Christian." Well, okay; I understand what that *might* mean. But

really now, if you are a true Jew, you are Christian. And if you are a Christian, you are a true Jew, because you are a child of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ—the one in whom Abraham believed. Abraham believed *God* and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he became the father of all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile. When he believed he was not circumcised. God justified him as a Gentile to show that the way of salvation and justification *has always been*, is now, and shall always be, by faith, irrespective of race.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11 that Moses had faith. And guess who was the object of his faith? Christ! Isn't that peculiar? Moses was a Christian. *Moses was a Christian*. He believed on him in whom we also believe. Thus, those who say they are Jews but who do not believe in Jesus Christ are not consistent Jews. Isn't that a painful thing to think about? The power of self-deception is great! And we all know how powerfully we can deceive ourselves. Some will no doubt protest, "We are the people of the Book—the people of the Book!" But they merely echo their fathers in the times of the ancient temple. When the prophets came and indicted the people of Israel, some of them who were "religiously observant," yet resistant to God's Word, cried out, "The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord!" What they were actually saying was, "the temple is among us and therefore nothing can happen to us." And so, people think that if they merely are in possession of a book, that is religion enough and they are therefore safe. But there is no safety outside of a true belief in Jesus Christ and compliance with his Word—and *there never was*. This is taught *throughout* the one Book.

All I really need to know I learn in the Old Testament. Here is what I really need to know.

LESSON NUMBER ONE

God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He created the world in the space of six days, and all very good. He rested on the seventh day and blessed that day, setting it apart. This would become the pattern for all people to follow, though only his people could appreciate the fullness that the seventh-day

rest implies, for it is a rest *from* other things and *unto* God.

He created the heavens and the earth, the seas, and all that is in them. Therefore he owns everything and is Lord of all. This is the first lesson that everyone must learn. If one doesn't get this lesson down, nothing else will make sense. This lesson is taught, of course, in the Old Testament, and it is *the* foundational lesson of everything that follows. That is why it is put on the first page. "In the beginning, God. . . ." Our God, the God who is revealed there, *that* God and no other, is the one who created the heavens and the earth. He is the owner. Everything has his stamp on it. To him belong all things. He defines all things, and all things discover their meaning and purpose only when his rights form our first assertion about any given thing, whether that be institutions—such as marriage—or individuals, such as me or you. For his pleasure all things were and are created. Yes, this theme of the first book is echoed in the last book, Revelation. One Book. One God, the Creator. That is my first Old Testament lesson.

LESSON NUMBER TWO

In the Old Testament I learn of *sin and its consequences*. I learn that *sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God*. Where do I learn this? In Genesis 3.

I don't need to go to Ephesians 2 to learn this lesson, although it is helpful and expands my understanding of it. But the lesson is learned very early on. God gave a command. Our first parents violated it, and that violation, that failure to live up to it, that transgressing of what he said not to do, was sin. And sin brought death. And death was separation—separation from God, from the garden, from other humans, and even from the self. The character of sin is powerfully pictured in the creation account as a fundamental alienation, a self-imposed banishment from God. Adam and Eve couldn't run fast enough from God when they heard him walking in the garden.

It is in Genesis where I discover that if the breach between us would be healed, it would require a radical solution which

God alone could provide. This is powerfully displayed in the contrast between man's attempt to cover his shame with fig leaves, and God's subsequent, gracious provision of an efficacious covering, first given in the type of "garments of skin." Thus here, right at the very beginning, is found the fundamental difference between the true religion of the Bible and *all the other (false) religions* of the world. In the religions of man, he self-righteously and arrogantly proclaims that he, by himself, will make a way back to God, somehow or other, and that he will, somehow or other, be vindicated. Then there is the true religion, the one religion of the Bible, which insists that man cannot justify himself—that being in sin man only increases his debt, and that he therefore stands in need of being justified by God. That is humbling. It puts us in the low position of beggars seeking mercy. This I learn in Genesis 3: sin has terrible consequences, even separation from God. And our condition is so bad, we tend not even to be concerned about our condition, unless and until we hear God calling, "Where are you?"

LESSON NUMBER THREE

It is early on in the revelation that I learn of the *antithesis*, that God-placed dividing line of hostility between the "seed of the serpent" and the "seed of the woman." From the garden there would exist in this world two groups of people: the people on this side of the antithesis, those who possess God as their God and his Word as their guide, and the people of the world, the wicked who reject God's Word.

Though the wicked may prosper for a time, they are assuredly going to go down—my God says they are going down. This tension will become a recurring theme in the revelation of God throughout the Book, and one which often requires appeal and inquiry: "My feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:2). The temporary peace of the wicked, and the very real grief borne by the righteous in this life, form a core conflict for the faith of the righteous throughout the ages. "If God is truly on our side,

why are the benefits of his created order with those who are against him?" Job wanted to know, so did David and Solomon and Asaph and the apostles. So do we. This gives occasion for the exercise of faith indeed.

I must be found among those who have the Word, believe the Word, and obey the Word, even if despised by the people of the world. Take your starting point with the Word of God: "In the beginning God." All alternatives to this starting point are wrong. They amount to, "In the beginning [something else beside the true God]." Fill in the blank. It doesn't matter with what: career, public opinion, friends, experts, family, New York Times editorials. All idols will go down. Only those who live in and by the Word of God will abide. This is an Old Testament lesson to all the people in the world. It is the very frontispiece of the Psalter.

LESSON NUMBER FOUR

In the Old Testament I learn about *sin's cure*. I learn more than the fact that it will be God-initiated (that is, of grace). I learn that God's remedy will be a person: the seed of the woman sent to conquer the seed of the serpent. God promises, in the *protevangelium* recorded in Genesis 3:15, that there would be one to come into the world who would crush the serpent's head. This was made known by Word.

But God would enhance his Word, his promise, by attaching to it a picture, a token, an emblem of that promise, something which improves our understanding of the promise and confirms it. Word has always been joined to sacrament in God's gracious communication to his people. *Right away* God gave to our first parents a picture of the one to come. By exchanging their fig leaves with garments of skin, God did more than tell our parents that their own "righteousness," their own covering, was inadequate. He showed them that the one who would crush the serpent's head would be sacrificed in order to provide adequate covering for our race. This truth came by way of a type, since the one from whom garments of skin were made was an innocent victim.

All of this occurred before the New Testament, yes, before

Abraham, before Moses. This is even before Noah. This is as old as you can get. God promised a Savior, and in his deed said, "Your righteousness is not adequate. I will make coats of skin for you. I will cover you. I will justify you" (ABV). And he offered a blood sacrifice—blood had to be shed in order to provide covering for our first parents. God himself made the covering for our parents. I learn in the Old Testament that (1) there is a promised one, (2) until he comes there will be various ways in which justification is spoken of or set forth, and (3) common to all administrations is this: it is always through blood, a God-provided, blood substitute.

Thus, right away in Genesis 4, two worshipers come to God. One of them brings what *he* thinks is right—an offering without blood. The other brings what God said was right, a choice blood offering. God accepted the blood offering and rejected the one that was the product of man's own vain imagination. Man must be justified by a substitutionary death. This is taught throughout the Scripture. It is taught in the offering system of Israel: come with a blood offering for sin before you come with anything else. It is taught in the holidays, with Passover at the head. *Pesach* begins with the substitute lamb who is slaughtered and whose blood is put on the door post of the house. It is because of the blood that God passes over. It is not, "When I see your native goodness," but rather, "When I see *the blood* I will pass over you." I learn this from the Old Testament. Before I get to the New Testament I can see all this. It is very understandable that the apostles reasoned from the Scriptures and persuaded people that Jesus was the Messiah. Every Christian doctrine is in the Old Testament. There is no Christian doctrine that is not in the Old Testament. Because the Old Testament is the Christian book, just as is the New Testament.

LESSON NUMBER FIVE

In the Old Testament I learn that *sanctification* is in the way of submissive, obedient surrender. This is seen a bit later. Among other places, it is found in *the burnt offering* which (instructively) *followed* the sin offering. First God provides the

blood. Then he requires a wholehearted response. The Israelite was to put *the whole offering* on the altar as a sacrifice to be consumed. There is no better picture of sanctification. It is entire. The justified man is to love the Lord with *all* his heart, soul, mind, and strength. Sanctification is offering everything you are to God and his service. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" was found in Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy before it turned up in Matthew!

I understand that some people don't want to give God an hour a week—or two. I understand that. That is because they are wicked. But it is not because it isn't what God requires. God requires more than two hours a week. He requires 168 hours a week. Sanctification is a whole offering of yourself unto the Lord. This is seen in the "Old Testament" burnt offering.

And it is seen in the major feasts. Passover, the feast of God-provided blood, is followed by Pentecost, the feast eventually recognized as memorializing the God-provided Law, the pattern for pleasing God. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, only that is good which arises out of true faith, is done for his glory, *and* "conforms to God's Law."

LESSON NUMBER SIX

Speaking of his glory, it is in the Scriptures of the Old Testament that I learn *the goal of life*: to enjoy God. The Shorter Catechism contains no new doctrine when, in reply to the question, "What is the chief end of man?" it answers, "To glorify God and to enjoy him forever." That is right out of the Old Testament. The chief end of man is to enjoy God.

This I learn, again, in the offering system. The first offering, focusing on the blood, is for sin, i.e., for justification. The burnt offering bespoke sanctification. To what was this all leading? What was at the end of the offering scheme? *The friendship offering, the fellowship offering*, wherein Jehovah and man would *eat* at the same table. God would welcome the sinner to his table after he had been justified and sanctified. This is the Old Testament teaching: my goal is to get to fellowship with God. That is the goal of life.

And just as it is revealed in the system of offerings, so it is seen once again in the major feasts. The third and final major feast is Succoth—Tabernacles—the most splendid picture found in Scripture of man dwelling together with God in peace and perfect safety. The prophets never tired of placing the goal of history under the figure of the Feast of Tabernacles. Isaiah 4 and Zechariah 14 leap to mind here .

LESSON NUMBER SEVEN

How do I attain unto the goal of life? The way is to *trust and obey*. How simple! How uncomplicated—before being abducted by systematians. The Bible makes no effort to "reconcile" the totally gracious character of God's justification of sinners with the equally total character of his demand that reconciled sinners respond to his Word obediently. The Christian religion reveals a God who is simultaneously and equally one and three. It tells the story of his Son who is 100% God and 100% man. There is no requirement to *understand* these antinomies—only to honor them. Similarly, the insistence upon a gracious salvation that *works* when it meets man is ubiquitous and assumed true, without apology.

The message is not to trust and disobey, not to mistrust and obey. The message is to trust *and* obey, no modifications allowed. That is it. Trust God—believe what he says about himself—and obey him, honor his law. It is forbidden to hear this dual teaching as if one part may be sacrificed on the other. God does not permit twisting his requirement for obedience into a demand for *perfect* compliance with his law if we would be saved. Nor does he tolerate the notion that his gracious coverings for sin are ever truly worn by those who would wear them as if a license for sin.

Listen to what God says in his law:

And now, O Israel, what does Jehovah your God ask of you but to fear Jehovah your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

Has that changed? Absolutely not. That is the abiding Word of God forever. God requires that we love him with all our hearts and walk in his ways—trust and obey.

LESSON NUMBER EIGHT

I learn from the Old Testament that throughout history God has chosen to have a people with a strong obligation upon them: *the obligation to offer him a new heart*. "To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. And yet the Lord set his affection upon your forefathers and loved them and chose you, their descendents, above all nations as it is today. You are God's people." Therefore what? "Therefore circumcise your hearts and do not be stiff-necked." *Because God chose you*, you have an obligation to give him a new heart. That is not only a New Testament teaching. I have heard people say, "In the Old Testament you just have to be born; in the New Testament you have to be born again." No, no, no, no, no! You had to be born again in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. Every *believer* in history is a born-again believer. This is what the Bible teaches and not just in the New Testament! This is the Bible, the Scriptures. Jesus upbraided Nicodemus for being puzzled at the teaching on regeneration: "You are Israel's teacher and you do not know these things? Outrageous!" (ABV).

LESSON NUMBER NINE

In the Old Testament we see that *God's people will not be made up of physical Jews alone*. Before Israel went through the Red Sea, God made explicit provision for Gentiles to join his people (Exodus 12:43–44). And God tells us in many places that the covenant people will ultimately include *great numbers* of Gentiles, (e.g., Amos 9:11–12 and Zechariah 6). In fact, St. Paul, reciting a litany of Old Testament quotations (found in Romans 15), says:

I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written,

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." And again, Isaiah says, "From him will spring up one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

Thus, throughout the Old Testament, the Scriptures speak about the fact that there will be among the people of God a great number of Gentiles. No mystery. No one should have been surprised. Simeon wasn't (Luke 2:32).

LESSON NUMBER TEN

I learn in the Old Testament a great many things concerning *the identity of the Messiah*, from the first promise made at sin's entrance, describing how he would destroy the devil's work (cf. 1 John 3:8), to the last promise/warning contained in—what is in our English Bibles—the last (or 39th book): Malachi. There in the last chapter of the last book the first figure of the new administration is anticipated: Messiah's fore-runner, John the Baptist, is foretold.

From the Old Testament I learn that the Messiah would come from Judah (Genesis 49:10). I learn that he will come from David in 2 Samuel 7. In fact, it is not just I who learned this: every Jew at the time of Jesus Christ had another name for the Messiah. That name was "Son of David." Everyone knew that he would come from the line of David. Everyone learned that from the Old Testament.

We learn that though he would come from David, humanly speaking, yet he would be David's Lord; David *called* him Lord. Speaking by the Spirit, David says, "The LORD said to my Lord. . . ."

And so Jesus asked them, "How is it that if the Messiah is the son of David that David calls him Lord?" They said, "Can we answer that Tuesday? We don't have the answer right now." Like waiting for Wimpy to pay for that hamburger, we are still waiting for the answer. They don't have one. But we do. Jesus is the Lord.

Rabbinical Judaism has retooled the revelation to adjust for unbelief and the destruction of the temple. Jesus' question to them remains unanswered. Rabbi Jacob Neusner, giving new dimension to the term *chutzpah*, contends that, "Where Jesus diverges from the revelation by God to Moses at Mount Sinai, he is wrong, and Moses is right."¹ But neither Moses nor Jesus is wrong. It is rabbinical Judaism that is wrong. For Moses testified of Jesus, and Moses *required* belief in him. As Saint Peter quoted shortly after the filled-full Pentecost, "Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people'" (Acts 3:22–23). The Lord Jesus also warned that looking to Moses to justify unbelief will result in a severe surprise: "Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set." It is frightfully remarkable how little has changed.

The divine Messiah was predicted in the Old Testament and visited his people in the New. As it says in Romans 1, "God promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son which, as to his human nature, was a descendent of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God." In the Messiah we will find two natures in one person forever. This is what the Bible teaches. This is the Old Testament teaching, that he would be Lord, the Root *and* Offspring of David.

We know from the Old Testament that he would be born of a virgin. Isaiah 7:14: "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and he shall be called Emmanuel, God with us." Two natures in one person: He will be virgin born but he will be *God with us*. I learn this in the Old Testament. In fact, I learn there that the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem. And I'm not the only one! When I open up what is called the New Testament, I find many asking, "Where is the Messiah going to be born?" and everyone answers alike: "Bethlehem" (Matthew 2:5). Everybody knew because it is in the Bible. Micah 5:2 (verse 1 in the Hebrew): "Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you

are small among the clans of Judah, yet out of you will come forth for me the one who will be ruler over my people Israel." The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

I learn in the Old Testament that the *Messiah has already come*. He will be born in the first century. Particularly, he will be born before the destruction of the second temple. In Daniel 9 there is a prophesy that measures the coming of the Messiah from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem—measures it as something which was to be accomplished in less than five hundred years. In other words, I not only know that he will be virgin born, and from the line of Judah, and from the line of David; I not only know that he will be born in Bethlehem; I also know that he will be born within five hundred years of the prophecy of Daniel, or rather from the fifth-century BC decree to rebuild Jerusalem. So he had to have come already. *I know that from the Old Testament*.

I know that the Messiah would come to give his life as an atonement. I learn this from Isaiah 53: "He shall give his life as a sacrifice for many. By his wounds God's people would be healed. The punishment that would bring us peace was upon him." There is no clearer prophecy of substitutionary atonement than that found in Isaiah 53. In fact, in the providence of God, the Ethiopian who was on his way back home after going to Jerusalem was reading that portion of Scripture. And the Holy Spirit tells Philip to catch up with him. Philip runs and catches up with the chariot. He begins talking to the Ethiopian.

"What are you reading?"

The Ethiopian replies, "I am not sure what it means."

"Well, why don't you read it to me and I will tell you what it means," Philip says.

The Ethiopian is reading—of all things!—Isaiah 53. The Spirit says, "Tell him what it means." Philip tells him what it means. And the Ethiopian becomes a Christian. By what means? How did he become a Christian? By reading Galatians? No. By reading Isaiah 53. *By reading Isaiah 53 he became a Christian*. And he was not to be the last man so converted. It has been suggested that the synagogue liturgically "skips" the

reading of Isaiah 53 because it raises too many questions. On the contrary—it *answers* questions!

For example: from Isaiah 53 I know that the Messiah would rise from the dead. It is obviously a very important portion, this Isaiah passage. It says:

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence. . . . It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he [the Messiah] will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

Because "after the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many." Did you hear that? *After* he dies he is going to see the light of life. He is going to come back from the dead. The Old Testament tells me that his resurrection is certain.

And there is one more thing: the Old Testament teaches me that the *Messiah would rise to rule the world*. This, the all-important reign of God through David's heir, is predicted throughout the Old Testament. Psalm 2 says, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." Psalm 72 speaks of his kingdom extending over all the world. In his book, Daniel interprets the vision of the stone cut without hands by explaining,

Here is the interpretation: In the time of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end. But it will itself endure forever.

LESSONS LEARNED?

So what happens when we come to the New Testament? Do we find an eradication or dismissal of *any* of these things? Exactly the opposite! What we find when we come to the New Testament is the seamless recording of the *fulfillment* of these

things. *These things have happened among us*. It began with that marvelous annunciation, that speaking of the angel to Miriam: "O young maiden, pure daughter of Abraham! God has favored you and given you a calling above all other women. He's called you to bear the hope of the world first promised in Genesis." She bows down and humbles herself, saying, "How can this be?" The angel answers, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and overshadow you. And that holy one to be born of you will be called the Son of God, the Son of the Most High." *Baruch Ha'Shem!*

And she did conceive that child, and she did bear that child. But when that child was born, hovering over him was the shadow of the cross, the fate first set forth under the figure of a bruised heel. In the very act of crushing the serpent, he would suffer. He was marked for that death from birth. He said, "For this reason I came into the world, that I might give my life as a ransom for many."

Yet behind the shadow of the cross was a crown: He would be raised from the dead that he might wear it forever.

None of these teachings are new to the New Testament. They are realized and recorded there. What is recorded is the fulfillment of the hope of our fathers. The message of the New Testament, then, is nothing other than this: "What God has promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us, their children by raising Jesus . . ." (Acts 13:32ff.) And if you believe it, you too are a child of Abraham. If you do not, you are cut off. One word of God, one truth. One covenant, one promise, one fulfillment. This word, this truth, this covenant, this promise, this fulfillment, extends to and incorporates every believing family, Jewish or Gentile, world without end. Amen.

"Everything you need to know you learned in the Old Testament?"

"Yes."

"How could you say such a thing? The Old Testament is just the beginning."

"Yes, I know. But in the beginning was the Word—the very same Word which became flesh and dwelt among us."

"Hmmm."

"Not 'Hmmm.' Amen!"

"OK. I've got it! Amen!"

Author

Steve Schlissel has served as pastor of Messiah's Covenant Community Church since 1979. Born and reared a Jew in New York City, Steve became a Christian through reading the Bible. Steve and his wife Jeanne were married in a synagogue in 1974 by a rabbi and a priest. They have five children, have reared several foster children, and now have six foster grandchildren and three natural grandchildren. This is Pastor Schlissel's first contribution to *Reformation & Revival Journal*.

Note

1. Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus: An Intermillennial, Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), xii.