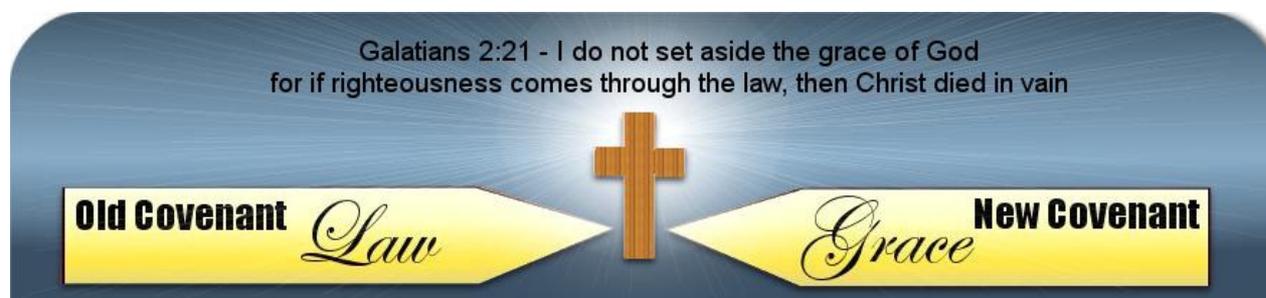


# Understanding the Purpose of the Old and New Covenants



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# Three Covenants

There are many covenants in the Bible, but here we will only focus on three, the first two being covenants which God had made with man and the third one which was made within the Trinity itself. If we comprehend these three covenants it will make the Bible much clearer and simpler to understand. Firstly however we must understand the difference between a covenant and a promise:

When God makes a promise, we have to put our faith in that promise for it to come to pass:

*...but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb 6:12 NKJV, emphasis added)*

*...who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. (Heb 11:33 NKJV, emphasis added)*

However, when God makes a covenant it *will* come to pass, whether we believe it or not. God can not lie and when He takes an oath, He always does what He says. Let's look at those three covenants:

## First Covenant

God appears to Abraham and makes a covenant to be Abraham's God and to multiply and bless him.

*Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. (Gen 17:3-7 NKJV)*

There were no strings attached. Abraham also didn't do anything to deserve any of this; he didn't keep any laws or live unusually holy. As a matter of fact, some theological scholars believe Abraham was an Iraqi who worshipped pagan Gods! He disobeyed God by sleeping with his wife's servant (Hagar) and through this single act of disobedience gave birth to Ishmael, who became the father of all the Arab nations as we know them today. His wife Sarah later gave birth to Isaac, the son who was born according to the promise and who became the father of the Israelites. And we know that up to this day there exists a continuous conflict between these nations.

Abraham also lied twice about his wife Sarah (once to the Pharaoh in Genesis 12 and once to Abimelech the king of Gerar, in Genesis 20) and alleged that she was his sister. Abraham was afraid that they would kill him due to the fact that she was a very beautiful woman.

Now even though Abraham was clearly in the wrong here, God didn't rebuke him for it but instead rebuked the pharaoh!

*But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. (Gen 12:17 NKJV)*

And later *again* God rebuked the king of Gerar and *not* Abraham:

*But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife". (Gen 20:3 NKJV)*

Who was in the wrong here? Abraham! Who did God rebuke? The king! This was because God had established a covenant with Abraham and neither with the pharaoh nor the king. And because God *always* keeps His part of the bargain, Abraham was favored by God because of this covenant.

We just saw that Abraham had lied about his wife, but because of God's blessing on his life he came out of Egypt (and later also out of Gerar) laden with slaves and cattle and wealth! Now by this we are not saying that people should go out and lie to other people and deceive them in order for God to bless them! We are by no means endorsing immoral living, but this just serves to illustrate that God blessed Abraham regardless of his level of obedience. God blessed Abraham even though he lied!

There was no moral standard to live up to, since the Law of Moses which included the 10 Commandments was only introduced 430 years later, which brings us to the second covenant.

## **Second Covenant**

This is described in the Bible as the "Old Covenant", where God gave the law and the 10 Commandments to Moses.

Israel had kept on murmuring and complaining ever since God had led them out of Egypt with mighty signs and wonders. They also didn't want to have a personal relationship with God, but instead always asked Moses to speak to God on their behalf. They were uncomfortable with having to "deal" with God personally and preferred to remain at a distance. Despite of all the goodness that God had shown them they always kept on murmuring and complaining, even saying that God and Moses wanted to kill them!

*And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. (Ex 16:3 NKJV)*

The tragedy of this is that in Exodus 15 (the previous chapter) Israel had just sung a song about the goodness of God and about how He had delivered them from the Egyptians when the waters of the Red Sea closed over them. And here in the very next chapter they accuse Him of wanting to kill them!

This happened again and again, time after time. Eventually, because Israel refused to believe that God was on their side, He gave them the law and all the other commandments to keep, something that didn't require any faith from their side (faith in God's goodness):

*Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they [Israel] said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words". (Ex 24:7-8 NKJV, annotations added)*

## **The Sin of Unbelief**

In Galatians 3 we read more about *why* the law was given to Israel:

*What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made. (Gal 3:19 NKJV)*

Israel's transgression was their persistent unbelief in the goodness of God. They blindly refused to acknowledge that God wanted to bless them, love them, care for them and be their God. So the law was given unto them, but only for a *certain period*. God already had a master plan to restore mankind back into unbroken fellowship with Himself and He knew that the Old Law Covenant would only be in power *until the Seed* should come. This Seed, of course, was Jesus Christ.

*For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He [God] angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He [God] swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (Heb 3:16-19 NKJV, annotations added)*

Note in the previous verses it talks about "those who sinned" and "they could not enter because of unbelief" (still talking about the same people, namely Israel).

Israel should never have agreed to living under the law! God would have accepted and loved them regardless of how holy (or unholy) they lived, because they were Abraham's descendants and we just read about God's amazing covenant with Abraham. God declared Abraham to be righteous simply because he believed God:

*And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness. (Gen 15:6 NKJV, annotations added)*

But instead, Israel in their pride said:

*"All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." (Exo 24:7b ESV)*

*Cursed is he who does not rise to all the Words of this Law, to do them! And all the people shall say, Amen! (Deut 27:26 LITV)*

They agreed to something they would never be able to do! This must rank right up there with the Garden of Eden in the list of all time dumb things said or done. Even God said about them:

*And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! (Ex 32:9 NKJV)*

God never originally meant for us to try to relate to Him in this way. Just after God's commands were written on stone and He set the choice of curse (for disobedience) or blessing (for obedience) before Israel, He said the following to Moses:

*And the LORD said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. (Deut 31:16 NKJV)*

Does this look like God's best plan for mankind? If even God Himself said that He *knew* Israel would break the Old Covenant Law, does it really seem logical that He would still want people to base their relationship with Him on the basis of how well they are able to obey a set of rules?

## **The Characteristics of a Covenant**

One of the characteristics of a covenant is that it cannot be withdrawn from by either of the parties that made it, since a covenant is a life-long contract or agreement. For a covenant to end, either one of the parties that entered into it literally has to die. Since Israel was never able to fully keep up their side of the covenant and remain 100%

obedient to *all* its stipulations, they were in breach of its requirements which meant that God had to keep up His side of the covenant and punish them for their disobedience.

All the horrible curses that would strike Israel for disobedience can be found in Deuteronomy 28:15-68. If God hadn't punished them for their sins, He would have been in breach of His side of the covenant, thereby making Him a liar and of course we know that God can not lie.

There was also another problem: Since God has an indestructible life, He could not bring an end to this covenant by dying Himself. He therefore had His Spirit conceive a child through a human woman and the man Jesus Christ was born into this world. Jesus Christ lived a 100% perfectly obedient life, thereby fulfilling *all* the requirements of the Old Covenant Law, which brings us to the third Covenant:

## **Third Covenant**

This is the most amazing New Covenant under which we now live! This covenant was cut within the Trinity with no human influence or intervention, but purely out of God's heart of love towards us.

God took away the laws He gave to Moses, canceling the written code that stood opposed to us:

*...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:14 NKJV)*

He made Jew, Greek and Gentile equal - God's church has now become spiritual Israel.

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly... (Rom 2:28-29a NKJV)*

God's relationship with Israel *before* the introduction of the Old Covenant was a type and shadow of what He wants to have with the whole world today.

*...that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:19 NKJV, emphasis added)*

It is required that when making a covenant it has to be sealed with blood. God had also confirmed His covenant with Abraham with blood (Genesis 15:9-18) and had Israel do the same:

*Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the*

*blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. (Heb 9:18-22 NKJV, emphasis added)*

In the Old Covenant Israel slaughtered animals to appease the wrath of God. In essence they were only postponing the punishment for their sins for another year, because the blood of animals could never fully serve as payment for the sins of mankind:

*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. (Heb 10:4 NKJV)*

So God sent His only Son, allowed Him to be crucified by the very people He came to save and accepted His blood as the full, perfect and complete payment for *all* the past, present and future sins of all mankind. The Father then entered into a New Covenant with His Son Jesus, stipulating that the righteousness and all the blessings that Jesus had earned through His perfect obedience were to be given as a free gift to mankind on one condition: They had to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Every person that accepted Jesus' sacrifice as a full and complete payment for their sins would be imputed with the perfect righteousness of God Himself:

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. (Isa 61:10a NKJV)*

God would also wipe out their sinfulness through the perfect offering of the cross, imparting His perfection unto all who believe in Him:

*For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (Heb 10:14 KJV)*

Many people call this the "divine exchange" - our sinfulness was laid on Jesus and His righteousness was given to us as a free gift. Actually He was MADE to BE sin. Righteousness therefore wasn't just given to us: we BECAME righteousness!

*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor 5:21 NKJV)*

In fact the Bible is so full of references to the reality that the Old Covenant has passed away and that it has been replaced by the New Covenant, that it is very hard to miss it! The following verses clearly tell us that the Old Covenant (referring to the Law of Moses), which was only a type and a shadow of the New Covenant, has passed away:

*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah [remember how we spoke a little earlier about all believers being "Jews"?] - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.*

*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts [this means God will give us the desire to please Him and have fellowship with Him, to seek His heart for us]; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. [This means gone are the days where we need a priest or someone else to constantly tell us about God, now we can know Him personally and intimately!]*

*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." [Do you really need any more proof that God won't ever punish you again?] In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. (Heb 8:7-13 NKJV, annotations and emphasis added)*

## **Beneficiaries of Two Covenants!**

Now, when a person becomes born again through simply putting their faith in Jesus, they are grafted into "spiritual Israel" and God plants His own Seed inside them:

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26-29 NKJV)*

Here is verse 29 again, read it slowly:

*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

We not only become partakers of the New Covenant, inheriting all its wonderful benefits, but through our faith in Jesus we also become heirs of the promises that God made to Abraham! Talk about a double portion, shabba! Here are some more verses:

*...just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the*

*Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. (Gal 3:6-9 NKJV)*

*You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Acts 3:25 NKJV)*

*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:13-14 NKJV)*

God will never again refrain from doing good to us and even when He chastens us (Hebrews 12) it is an affectionate reproach from His heart of love.

## **Old Testament Prophecies**

Some of the Old Testament prophets were given visions of the New Covenant and they painted an amazingly clear picture of the unconditional love of God towards His children; of a God that has chosen to blot out their sins and relate to them on the basis of the perfect obedience of His Son, Jesus Christ:

*And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. (Jer 32:40 NKJV)*

*And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the LORD ...when I provide you an atonement for all you have done," says the Lord GOD". (Eze 16:62-63b NKJV)*

The blood of Jesus was the atonement:

*For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matt 26:28 NKJV)*

Probably the most well-known prophesy that an Old Testament prophet made about the coming New Covenant is found in Isaiah 54:

*"For a mere moment I have forsaken you [when people were still under the law], But with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment [God had to serve punishment for man's disobedience to the Old Law Covenant]; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," Says the LORD, your Redeemer. [What part of "everlasting kindness" is so hard to understand?] "For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; For as I have sworn that the*

*waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you [There goes a whole heap of “angry God” theories and doctrines right out the door]. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has mercy on you. (Isaiah 54:7-10 NKJV, annotations added)*

Under which covenant will we choose to live?

# When Did the Old Testament End?

The Bible speaks numerous times about believers being *heirs* of God, or about them having an *inheritance*.

*And if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; so that if we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together. (Rom 8:17 NKJV)*

*...giving thanks to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. (Col 1:12 NKJV)*

Now it logically follows that in order for us to become heirs of God, He had to have a testament that specified that we would inherit from Him. The Bible has two Testaments, namely the Old and New Testament. Both the Hebrew and Greek words used for “testament” in the Bible can also be translated to mean “covenant”. Whenever the context had to do with relationship, it was translated as “covenant”. Whenever the context was about inheritance, it was translated as “testament”:

**G1242** διαθήκη *dee-ath-ay'-kay*

From G1303; properly a *disposition*, that is, (specifically) a *contract* (especially a *devisory will*): - covenant, testament.

It is common logic that if a person goes to their attorney and requests to draw up a new testament or to make changes to their current one, that the old one is rendered invalid. In the same way God drew up His Old Testament, but later established a new one to replace it! We'll get to the scriptures to prove this shortly.

In Genesis 12, 15, 17 and 22 we see God instating a covenant / testament with Abraham. It is important to see that initially the *only* heirs of this testament were Abraham and his natural descendants, who were called the Hebrews, who later also become known as Israel and still later were called Jews. The inheritance that God gave to them was the Promised Land, a geographical area called Canaan.

In short this was the entire Old Testament. Neither the Philistines, the Assyrians, the Egyptians nor any other nation became heirs under the Old Testament, because we see God in numerous instances acting *against* these nations *in favor* of Israel – the only nation who inherited under the Old Testament.

Moses later also became the mediator of the Old Covenant made between God and the nation of Israel. God gave them the law which enforced the Old Covenant and it was upheld by the blood of animal sacrifices:

*Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself, and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you". (Heb 9:18-20 NKJV)*

## **Jesus' Superior Blood**

In Hebrews 9 we see a stark contrast being drawn between the blood of animals (which in essence kept the Old Covenant alive) and the blood of Jesus, the spiritual "animal" (have you ever wondered why Jesus was called the Lamb of God?) offered as a perfect *once for all* sacrifice for sin:

*For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:13-14 NKJV)*

And also in Hebrews 10:

*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. (Heb 10:4 NKJV)*

*And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (Heb 10:11-14 NKJV)*

## **All Nations Included In The New Covenant**

Later in Galatians 3 we see that God made a New Testament that drew all the nations of the earth into the covenant which God had made with Abraham:

*Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. (Gal 3:16 NKJV)*

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:28-29 NKJV)*

Nowhere under the Old Testament was any command given to Israel to spread and preach the gospel to any other nation on the earth, because only Israel were heirs under

the Old Testament. But under the New Testament in Matthew 28:19 (after the cross) we have the great commission where the disciples were commanded to take the gospel to *all* the nations. Jesus became the mediator of a New Covenant or Testament, writing it in His own blood (not the blood of animals):

*And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:15, emphasis added)*

## **When Does a Testament Come Into Effect?**

A testament or will only comes into power whenever somebody dies. In essence an heir cannot inherit if the testator (person who wrote the testament) is still alive.

*In the case of a will it is necessary to prove that the person who made it has died, for a will means nothing while the person who made it is alive; it goes into effect only after his death. (Heb 9:16-17 GNB)*

Now consider this: During the 30 years or so that Jesus lived on the earth and the three years that He ministered before He died, under which testament did He live? Under the old of course! He was still alive and we just saw in the previous two verses that a testament does not come into effect while the person who wrote it is still alive.

Some people claim that they still have to obey the Old Covenant Law simply because Jesus did it. Well Jesus *had to* obey it because He was born under the Old Testament and had to fulfill it!

*But when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law. (Gal 4:4 GNB)*

During His time on the earth we never see Jesus preaching the gospel of the Kingdom to anybody other than the Jews, because He was still living under the Old Testament and He wasn't allowed to share any of Israel's inheritance with non-Jewish people. One time though we see Jesus venturing to a geographical area outside of Galilee and running into a Canaanite woman, who wasn't a Jew:

*Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord,*

*yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (Matt 15:21-28 NKJV)*

In essence the woman was saying: "Lord if there is any surplus left of God's blessings, please help me!" And by faith this woman was grafted into the New Covenant even before it was time for the Gentiles to become partakers! We also see a few other similar examples in the Bible like Rahab the prostitute who hid the spies in Jericho, Ruth the Moabite, Naaman the Syrian who was cleansed of leprosy after washing himself seven times in the Jordan at the instruction of Elijah, etc. By faith these people transcended time and received their inheritance long before it was actually due to become theirs.

## **So When Did The Old Testament *Really* End?**

The crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ is described in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23 and John 19. If we take for example the book of Matthew and note that chapter 27 is where the New Testament came into effect (because this is where Jesus died), this implies that everything before Matt 27 was Old Testament because the New Testament hadn't been established yet! Therefore according to its legal validity the New Testament actually only begins in Matthew 27 (and Mark 15, Luke 23 and John 19, after the crucifixion). Everything before these chapters is *Old Testament*.

So if the New Testament began at Golgotha with the death of Jesus Christ (remember Hebrews 9:16-17 above), it must mean that the Old Testament had to have been cancelled somewhere before that. God would not just leave a covenant hanging up in the air. And if He did end the Old Covenant, then there is no more reason to *want* to live under the Old Testament Law. We find a prophecy pertaining to this made by the prophet Zachariah at about 520BC. We'll share the story interwoven with the scriptures:

God was the shepherd of the flock of Israel under the Old Covenant, caring for them with His staff that He called "Favor" (and another one called "Union").

*Those who bought and sold the sheep hired me, and I became the shepherd of the sheep that were going to be butchered. I took two sticks: one I called "Favor" and the other "Unity." And I took care of the flock. (Zech 11:7 GNB)*

The staff called "Favor" symbolized the covenant He had made with the nation of Israel. The problem with this flock of sheep was that they were continually running after idols and persisted in rebelling against their Shepherd. Now the Shepherd had just about had enough and told them that He was going to quit.

*Then I said to the flock, "I will not be your shepherd any longer. Let those die who are to die. Let those be destroyed who are to be destroyed. Those who are left will destroy one another" (Zech 11:9 GNB)*

He also requested that they pay Him for the services He had rendered, but if they didn't want to pay Him that they could just leave it.

*I said to them, "If you are willing, give me my wages. But if not, keep them." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver as my wages. (Zech 11:12 GNB)*

And on the day that Jesus was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver by Judas Iscariot, God broke His staff and ended the covenant He had made with Israel.

*Then I took the stick called "Favor" and broke it, to cancel the covenant which the LORD had made with all the nations. (Zech 11:10 GNB)*

If we look at the context of Zechariah 11 we will see "all the nations" only refer to Israel and Judah.

*Then I broke the second stick, the one called "Unity," and the unity of Judah and Israel was shattered. (Zech 11:14 GNB)*

Now here's a real gem: Over five hundred years before Christ was betrayed, the prophet Zechariah spoke these words:

*And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter" - that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter. (Zech 11:13 NKJV)*

Thirty pieces of silver was the commonly agreed price paid to an owner if his slave was injured while working for someone else and also the price that Jesus was betrayed for by Judas Iscariot. So we see God sarcastically say that they paid a "princely price" for Him. The Son of God was betrayed for the price of an injured slave! And then we see the following scripture in Matthew 27 (note the part about the "potter"):

*Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. (Matt 27:3-7 NKJV)*

See Zech 11:13 above again - the prophecy even described the potter's field!

We see therefore that the Old Testament came to an end when Jesus was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver and in the spiritual realm broke His staff that symbolized His covenant with Israel. But praise be to God that only several hours later He wrote a New

Covenant with His own blood, a Testament that included all the nations of the earth and allowed us to become His children and heirs through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

# Reading the Bible in Context

Whenever the Bible is read today it has to be read in its correct context, or we can be conned by the text (con - text, get it?). The Word is life; the Word is truth; the Name of the Word is Jesus.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1 NKJV)*

When people quote Bible verses out of context, it is almost as though they are writing their own version of the Bible, creating their own God! Today *seemingly* condemning verses are thrown out of context at believers of the grace message, or to keep entire church congregations “under control”. Although those who do this won’t admit it, they are actually operating in partnership with the devil, attempting to bring God’s children under the fear and control of man (the pastor / preacher).

It’s easy to spot this phenomenon in a church: Since such preachers constantly desire to be in control, they will very seldom or almost never make room for the Holy Spirit to move unhindered in their services. There will always be a set program to follow and the whole thing will be precisely orchestrated from start to finish. These leaders have their grip firmly clenched around the neck of the church, but a time is approaching where God will say to these modern day Pharaohs: “Let my people go!”

Bible verses are also used out of context to formulate excuses and doctrines for our lack of power and to legitimize the absence of signs and wonders in our lives and ministries. The truth is that we should never water the Bible down to our own level of experience, but rather live to see the supernatural realm of heaven break into our own lives!

*Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. (Rom 3:4 NKJV)*

Truth is measured by the standard of the Word of God and not by man’s experience! The supernatural signs and wonders and the miracles of God were not just meant for the times of the Bible, they are for today as well – the Word is just as powerful today as it ever was!

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Mark 13:31 NKJV)*

## Getting the Covenants Right

When reading any Bible verse, we have to know under which covenant it falls. To recap (from the chapter entitled “Three Covenants”), there were largely three important periods in the Bible:

First Period: From the Garden of Eden up to Mount Sinai where the law was given. During this period which lasted several thousand years, people were not under the law and God bestowed unconditional love and kindness on them apart from their works.

Second Period: From Mount Sinai up to the cross. Just because certain Bible books fall after the blank page that the Bible Society put in our Bible, it doesn't necessarily mean they are in the New Covenant. When reading the four gospels as well as certain scriptures further in the New Testament, it has to be established if the text refers to the Old Covenant Law or to New Covenant grace. Jesus spoke predominantly about the kingdom of heaven, but most of the time He spoke to crowds of people that were still under the mindset of the Old Covenant Law that God had given to Moses and Israel. Jesus had to counter their religious thinking, sometimes using very harsh words. On the contrary we mostly see Him extending compassion and grace whenever He addressed sinners who humbled themselves.

Third Period: From the cross onwards, what we know as the New Covenant. In the New Covenant God does not deal with us as believers based on our level of obedience, but on the basis of Jesus' obedience on our behalf. God loves us and blesses us regardless of our performance.

There are also further means to establish what the context of scriptures are, such as studying Bible history or Bible commentaries to know by whom the specific book was written, to whom it was addressed, why and when it was written, etc. Here are three examples of misquoted scriptures:

## **Example 1**

*And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. (Matt 18:9 NKJV)*

*But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt 5:28 NKJV)*

To establish the context for these verses, let's look at which period it falls into. Jesus spoke these words before He went to the cross and in this instance He was addressing people who prided themselves in having the law and commandments that God gave to Moses and Israel. So generally we would expect His words to be as sharp as a knife.

Through the centuries these people had watered the law down to a standard that they could "keep". Here Jesus was simply telling them that the standards of the law were much higher than any man could ever hope to keep and that mankind really needs a Savior! In essence He was saying "The standards of the law are so high that you'd have

to mutilate yourself if you wanted to fulfill its requirements". These verses are Old Covenant Law and not meant for believers to try and live by.

## Example 2

*Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. (1 John 3:4-6 NKJV)*

These verses are almost near the end of the Bible, which means they could possibly be New Covenant. But at a first glance they seem so condemning! Whenever this happens, it's always good to read the surrounding verses and if need be, the entire book as well. Let's read the next few verses too:

*Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:7-9 NKJV, emphasis added)*

The apostle John was writing to his "little children" to encourage them and establish them in the revelation of just how secure they were in Christ. They had just come out from under the influence of teachers of Gnosticism and John was by no means trying to scare his beloved flock or point out their mistakes. Instead he was speaking about their sheltered position in Christ. The key is the first part of verse 9: "*Whoever has been born of God does not sin*".

But how can this be? Since we *all* make mistakes sometimes, does this mean that *nobody* is born of God? The reason why John can make such a statement is evident: Any person that has been born of God is made a partaker of the nature of God; such a person derives their life and very inner character from God.

*But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. (1 Cor 6:17 NKJV)*

This principle of divine life (called the Seed of God) remains spotless and untainted in that person regardless of their behavior, because it is impossible to corrupt the nature of God. So it is clear that the context of this book is not about man's *behavior*, but about their *position*. In a later chapter we will discuss the issue of whether a believer still has a sinful nature.

A born again believer is the righteousness of God and whether we do good or bad, we remain righteous. That's how Abraham stayed righteous even though he lied to Pharaoh

about his wife. That doesn't make lying or sinning right, but it explains how we stay the righteousness of God even when we make mistakes.

### Example 3

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal 6:7-8 NKJV)*

It seems as though these verse are saying that God will ensure that every person who commits a transgression will receive their just reward for it, namely punishment. This doesn't seem to fit the context of the New Covenant and the picture of a God of love, grace and kindness. Secondly it also seems contrary to the fact that Jesus had already been punished for the sin of the entire world. It seems to contradict the principles of the New Covenant, saying that we will get good if we do good, but that we will get bad if we do bad (which of course is exactly what the Old Covenant Law says). Lastly it also doesn't seem to fit the context of the book of Galatians - one of Paul's masterpieces on justification through faith apart from the works of the law; that a person is declared righteous on the basis of their belief in Jesus and not through their level of obedience. Therefore we need to read the other verses around this verse to get a better understanding of what it is saying. Let's go back as far as the end of the previous chapter:

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal 5:16-23 NKJV)*

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:7-10 NKJV, emphasis added)*

When we as New Covenant believers sow to the flesh (which means to follow after the desires of the unrenewed part of our mind) and according to Galatians 5:19-21 we indulge in the "works of the flesh" (which includes envy, murders, fornication, etc), we

are certain to run into trouble with other people or even at some point with the laws of the local government or country that we live in. Our wrong actions have consequences in the earth, which is what the “corruption” refers to in Galatians 6:8a:

*For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption... (Gal 6:8a NKJV, emphasis added)*

Note that it says “...will of the flesh reap corruption...” which refers to natural, earthly consequences.

All the eternal judgment and punishment was carried by Jesus on our behalf, and therefore the corruption is not referring to a spiritual corruption. The Seed of God living on the inside of a believer can never be corrupted!

*...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Pet 1:23 NKJV)*

So whenever we encounter verses in the Bible that seem “scary” or condemning, we need to put on our “grace lenses” so we can read these verses through the filter of the blood of Jesus by which we have been forgiven and perfected:

*For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (Heb 10:14 KJV)*

We can never reduce the Bible to our level of experience, but we should rather contend for our experience to be raised up to the level of the everlasting Word.

# The Purpose of the New Covenant

The main purpose of the New Covenant was not primarily for God to come and change our external behavior; the primary purpose was that God changed the way He related to mankind, namely through grace, resulting in an spontaneous change in behavior due to mankind receiving revelation about God's vast and infinite love for them.

Under the Old Covenant God dealt with people on the basis of their external behavior, namely their level of obedience to the law. Under this system God left people to their own devices and judged them according to their works. People were punished and cursed when they broke the law. But then came the New Covenant and God dealt with the internal problem, namely people's fallen sinful nature. Those who put their faith in Him were changed from the inside; God bestowing them with the very nature of his Son, Jesus Christ. He also credited the perfect obedience of Jesus to their account.

The believer's old sinful nature has been crucified with Christ and their spirit made 100% righteous:

*...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Rom 6:6-7 NKJV)*

This is the way He now sees believers: blameless and fully righteous in His sight:

*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight. (Col 1:21-22 NKJV)*

Before we were born again, we were enemies of God and we were alienated from Him in two ways:

1) We had a sinful nature inside us and we were slaves to this sinful nature, running after every evil thing that gratified its desires:

*...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Eph 2:3 NKJV)*

We were alive to sin because of our sinful nature, and dead towards God.

2) We were also under the law, which utterly condemned us and showed us how sinful we were:

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those 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 no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19-20 NKJV)*

But Romans 6:6-7 (above) says that we have now become dead to sin. We've become the friends of God and we were also united with Him in two ways:

1) Our sinful nature was crucified with Christ and our spirit made alive towards God; in other words: we were born again. The perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ was imputed to us and all the benefits and blessings of His obedience have been credited to us because of our faith in Him:

*Therefore as by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life (Rom 5:18 KJV).*

2) The law has been nullified, nailed to the cross with Jesus:

*...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:14 NKJV)*

God now relates to believers on the basis of the obedience of Jesus Christ. God does not attribute their sins to them, but instead delights in them with the love and passion of a proud Father. Now God doesn't just see us as if we've never sinned - He sees us as if we have perfectly obeyed all the laws our entire life!

But how can all of this be true when none of us could ever deserve to be given a gift like this? That's exactly it: *Nobody deserves grace*. It is a free gift from God, given to those who believe in Him. If we were ever able to earn it, it wouldn't be called a "gift" anymore, would it?

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. (Eph 2:8 NKJV, emphasis added)*