

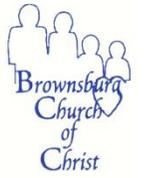
# Rightly Handling the Old and New Covenants

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AM Assembly



Using the Standard Properly (Part 4)

## Introduction:

In **Exodus 23:14-17**, the Bible says we are supposed to keep three feasts per year in which all the males appear before the Lord. Why don't we do that? In **Leviticus 4**, the Bible says if any one of us sins we are to offer a sacrifice at the tent of meeting. Why don't we do that? In **Psalms 150:3-5**, the Bible says to praise God with trumpets, lutes, harps, tambourines, dancing, and cymbals. Why don't we do that? For a people who claim to follow the Bible, we sure disregard a whole lot of it. Or at least it seems that way to some on the outside. The reality is while we learn from these passages and we need to study them, we do not follow these passages "religiously" because they are not part of our covenant. The Bible actually contains the records of several covenants. We are only part of one of them. **II Timothy 2:15** says we must handle the Bible rightly. One of the first tasks to accomplish that is recognizing the difference between the Old and New Covenants or Testaments.

## Discussion:

- I. An overview.
  - A. The first thing we notice about the Bible is that it is not a book, but a book of books divided into two major sections. The Old Testament contains 39 books, which we typically break down into 5 major sections:
    1. *The Law* – **Genesis** through **Deuteronomy** (5 books)
    2. *History* – **Joshua** through **Esther** (12 books)
    3. *Wisdom* – **Job** through **Song of Solomon** (5 books)
    4. *Major Prophets* – **Isaiah** through **Daniel** (5 books)
    5. *Minor Prophets* – **Hosea** through **Malachi** (12 books)
  - B. The New Testament has 27 books, which we typically break down into 4 major sections.
    1. *Gospels* – **Matthew** through **John** (4 books)
    2. *History* – **Acts** (1 book)
    3. *Epistles (Letters)* – **Romans** through **Jude** (21 books)
    4. *Apocalyptic (Prophecy)* – **Revelation** (1 book)
- II. Note several differences between the two testaments.
  - A. The two testaments were written to two overlapping but different groups of people.
    1. The Old Testament was written to the nation of Israel (**Deuteronomy 4:1, 7-8**). Take note that this was a physical nation. People were a part of this nation by physical birth.
    2. The New Testament was written to the church of Christ (**Hebrews 12:22-24; I Timothy 3:15**). This is a spiritual nation. People are a part of this nation by rebirth (**John 3:3, 5**).
  - B. The two testaments promise that the coming Messiah will do different things.
    1. The Old Testament promised the Messiah would come to be a sacrifice for sins (**Isaiah 52:13-53:12**) and to establish His kingdom (**Isaiah 2:1-5**).
    2. The New Testament promised the Messiah will come to bring judgment on the wicked and save His own (**I Thessalonians 4:13-17; II Thessalonians 1:6-10**).
  - C. The two testaments promise different things to occur at the closing of each.
    1. The Old Testament promised that there would be a New Testament (**Jeremiah 31:31**).
    2. The New Testament promised that God will bring judgment, destruction, and salvation (**II Peter 3:10-13; John 5:28-30**).
  - D. Consequently, the two testaments are different and produce two different results.
    1. If we follow the Old Testament, we will be Jews bound by the Law (**Romans 2:17; Galatians 3:12**).
    2. If we follow the New Testament, we will belong to Jesus Christ (**Galatians 2:15-16; 3:26-29**).
- III. The New Testament has superseded the Old Testament.
  - A. We have already noted that the Old Testament was written to a particular people, the Jewish nation (**Deuteronomy 4:1, 7-8**). We must also note that the Old Testament was for a particular time. According to **Ga-**

**Galatians 3:19**, the Law or Old Testament was put into effect until the offspring should come. The offspring, having already come (**vs. 16**), the time of the Old Testament is over.

- B. The Old Testament was given for a particular purpose. According to **Galatians 3:21-25**, it was given to prepare the way for Christ, Who has already come. The Law was not given to save anyone (**Galatians 3:10-12**), but to prepare the way for the one who would save us.
- C. The Old Testament promised a New Covenant, by which it would be superseded (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). This promise is brought up again in **Hebrews 8:6-13**. The Hebrew writer explained that this New Covenant made the first obsolete and was ready to vanish away, which it did when Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple lost and the priesthood dispersed.
- D. Today, many get hung up saying that since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, He would not change His law. Note two very important things. First, God being the same yesterday, today, and forever does not mean His law was not allowed to change, but that His nature never changes. Secondly, God actually said that the Law had changed in **Hebrews 7:12**. This change occurred with Christ's sacrifice. He removed the Old Law, replacing it with a new and better one; therefore, we are not to be judged based on the Old Law (**Colossians 2:13-17**).
- E. How does all this fit within our main heading—rightly handling the word of truth? If we are going to apply the word correctly we must handle the Old and New Testaments properly. The Old Covenant has been superseded by the New Covenant. The Old Testament is not our law, the New is. We must not go to the Old Testament to find our pattern for worship and service. We must go to the New. The fact that something was allowed under the Old Covenant does not authorize it under the New Covenant. Consider polygamy, contrasting **Exodus 21:10** and **I Corinthians 7:2**. Additionally, the fact that the Old Law condemned something does not mean it is condemned under the New. Consider the eating of certain meats, contrasting **Leviticus 11:4-8, 10, 13** and **Acts 10:12-16**.
- F. The choice is clear. If we want to be in Christ, we need to surrender to His New Covenant. If we go back to the Old Covenant, the Law to be justified, we will fall from grace and be severed from Him (**Galatians 5:4**).

#### IV. How do we rightly handle the Old Testament?

- A. The Old Testament is not our law. That does not mean we are not to use it. The issue is how are we to use it? **Romans 15:4** explains that the Old Testament was written for our learning. We can learn from it even though it is not our pattern for serving God.
- B. Note four ways in which we can learn from the Old Testament.
  - 1. In those areas in which the Old and New Laws coincide, we can certainly still read the Old Testament to further understand what God expects of us. For instance, the New Testament also declares that we must honor our father and mother (**Ephesians 6:2**). We can read from the Old Testament and learn what honoring our parents entails.
  - 2. As Paul did in **I Corinthians 10:1-11**, we can learn from Old Testament examples. We learn how God deals with His covenant people. We learn how He expects us to interpret His will. We learn how He feels about obedience and disobedience, etc.
  - 3. We can use the Old Testament the same way Peter did on Pentecost, looking to the prophecies to know who is the Messiah (**Acts 2:25-28; Psalm 16:8-11**). Additionally, we can use it as James did learning about the Messiah's kingdom through prophecy of it (**Acts 15:15-18; Amos 9:11-12**).
  - 4. In those places where the Old Testament wisdom literature simply demonstrates how to live wisely in this world, the teaching today would be the same. Wise living is the same today as it was then. When the proverbs advise us against becoming surety for a stranger (**Proverbs 6:1**), we can bank that doing so is unwise even under the New Covenant.

#### Conclusion:

We are using the proper standard. We must make sure to use it properly, understanding the differences between the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament is for our learning, certainly, but it is not our pattern for serving God. That is the New Testament. We need to remember the ominous warning and glorious solution presented by Paul in **Galatians 3:10-14**. If we go back to the Old Law, we are cursed and must strive to live by it entirely. However, Christ has redeemed us from that Law. Why not live in Christ and submit to His better covenant based on better promises (**Hebrews 8:6**).