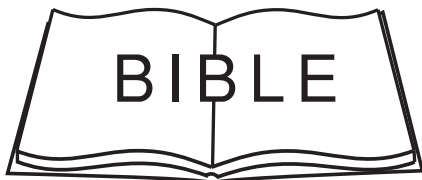


# AUTHORITY

Before we can proceed, we must agree on a common authority. We could not even agree that “c-a-t” spells “cat” unless we first agreed that a standard English dictionary is our authority in spelling. If we are to agree in religion, we must first agree on what our authority will be.

## GOD'S WORD IS OUR AUTHORITY

What should be our authority in religion? The world acknowledges many religious authorities, ranging from the Muslims' Koran to the proclamations of television evangelists. God, however, recognizes only one authority: His Word, the Bible.



The apostle Paul said, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). He further wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be . . . equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

The word “Scripture” refers to “that which is written.”<sup>1</sup> In 2 Timothy 3 “Scripture” refers to the written Word of God. The “Scriptures” include both Old Testament writings (2 Timothy 3:15) and New Testament writings (2 Peter 3:15, 16). Another way of referring to the Scriptures is “the word” (Matthew 13:23; Acts 6:4). A term we

use today is “Bible.” “Bible” is basically a Greek word that means “book.” The Bible is “the Book of books.” Many Bibles have “Holy Bible” printed on their covers. The word “holy” means “sacred.”<sup>2</sup> The Bible is the “sacred Book” because it is inspired by God.

The word “inspired” literally means “breathed in.”<sup>3</sup> The phrase “inspired by God” means that the Bible is “God-breathed.” Even as God breathed into the nostrils of man and man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7), so God, in effect, “breathed into” the Bible and it became a living Book (see Hebrews 4:12). This is a figurative way of saying that God had control over the writing of the Bible. He made sure that the Bible contains exactly what He wants it to contain—no more and no less.

Reread 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. These verses make clear that the Bible contains everything we need to please God: It is “profitable for teaching”; it tells us how we should live. It is profitable “for reproof”; it informs us when we are wrong. It is profitable “for correction”; it urges us to change our lives. It is profitable “for training in righteousness”; it helps us to grow spiritually. Notice that it does not equip us for *some* good works, but “for *every* good work.”

Many good books have been written, many great sermons have been preached, and much helpful advice has been given—but our only religious authority is the Bible. Before we continue in our study, we must agree on this:

- Our parents are not our authority.
- No human preacher is the authority.
- No great religious leader is the authority.

- David Roper is not the authority.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is not the authority.  
(Fill in your own name.)
- No volume other than the Bible is the authority.
- Only the Bible is our authority.

If you are not 100 percent sure that the Bible is God’s special revelation to man, read the supplementary article “The Challenge to Believe” at the end of this publication. If you still have questions about this, talk to the friend who gave you this book. It is possible, of course, that you simply need time to learn more about the Bible. After all, Paul said that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). If that is the case, read on.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT IS OUR GUIDE

To the question “What is our authority in religion?” we have thus far answered, “The Bible.” We must, however, restrict our answer even more.

The Bible has two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Take your Bible and locate the beginning of the New Testament. The King James Version has “The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” on the dividing page. Observe that the New Testament starts around three-fourths of the way through the Bible. The Old Testament is about three times as big as the New Testament. There are several reasons for this.<sup>4</sup> One is that the Old Testament is packed with specific “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” commands, while the New Testament concentrates more on principles.<sup>5</sup>

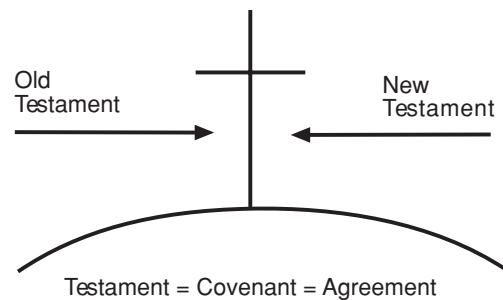
As you study the two sections of the Scriptures, you will find that they do not always give the same instructions:

- In the Old Testament, worshipers went to a physical building called the temple (Psalm 5:7; Habakkuk 2:20); in the New Testament, the location is unimportant as long as we worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:21, 23, 24).
- In the Old Testament, animal

sacrifices were offered to the Lord (Leviticus 1—5); in the New Testament, Jesus is our perfect sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 10:12), while we are to offer the sacrifice of our lives (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15).

- In the Old Testament, a special group of men were designated as “priests” (Exodus 28:41; 40:15); in the New Testament, all Christians are called priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9).
- In the Old Testament, the seventh day was to be devoted to God (Exodus 20:8–11); in the New Testament, our special day of worship is the first day (Acts 20:7),<sup>6</sup> Sunday.
- The Old Testament forbade the eating of certain foods, such as pork (Leviticus 11:7); those prohibitions have been removed in the New Testament (Acts 10:9–16).

These contrasts could be continued almost indefinitely. There is no way we could completely keep the instructions in both testaments. Which, then, are we to keep? The diagram below will help to answer that question:



First, look at the words at the bottom of the chart: “Testament = Covenant = Agreement.” The KJV sometimes uses the term “testament,” as in “old testament” (2 Corinthians 3:14) and “new testament” (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 9:15). More commonly, the KJV translates the Greek word found in those passages as “covenant.” (Read Hebrews 8:6, 7, 13; 9:1; 12:24.) The NASB has the word “covenant” in all these verses. When we talk about the Old Testament, we are talking about the old *covenant*. When we talk about the

New Testament, we are talking about the new *covenant*.

What is a covenant? A covenant is an *agreement* between two parties. The old covenant was the agreement between God and the Jewish people (Deuteronomy 5:1–4). It was never bound on anyone except Jews<sup>7</sup> (and proselytes who embraced the Jewish religion). The New Testament is the agreement between God and Christians (Hebrews 10:16).

Now look at the top part of the illustration. The cross stands for the cross of Jesus. The area to the left of the cross represents the Old Testament period of time, while the area to the right is the New Testament Era. Notice that the arrow on the left points forward to the cross, while the arrow on the right points back to the cross.

First, you should understand that the Old Testament looked forward to Jesus. God never intended for the old covenant to be permanent. Jeremiah wrote,

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a *new* covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (Jeremiah 31:31, 32a; emphasis mine).<sup>8</sup>

How long was the old covenant to last? Paul told Christians in Galatians 3 that the old law was “added” to the promise made with Abraham “*until* the seed would come to whom the promise had been made” (v. 19; emphasis mine). Verse 16 of the same chapter tells who “the seed” was: “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your *seed*,’ that is, *Christ*” (emphasis mine). In verse 24 Paul said, “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ.” The Old Testament was to bring mankind to Christ—and was to last until Jesus came. That is why the lefthand arrow in the diagram points forward.

Why, however, does the arrow point to *the cross*? In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul said that Jesus’ death “canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14). Figuratively speaking, Jesus

nailed certain decrees to the cross, announcing that they were no longer in force.<sup>9</sup> Of what decrees was Paul speaking? He mentioned some of them in that same context: He said that since the decrees had been abolished, no one should judge them (that is, condemn them) “in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day” (Colossians 2:16). The distinctive element here is the Sabbath. Many decrees had been made concerning food, drink, and festivals, but only one set of laws had instructions about the Sabbath: the Old Testament, which revolved around the Ten Commandments. Commandment number four reads, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Thus (to use Paul’s terminology) the Old Testament was nailed to the cross.

Now let us look at the right side of the cross in our illustration. The death of Christ not only signaled the end of the Old Testament (covenant), but also heralded the beginning of the New Testament (covenant). Hebrews 9:15 refers to Jesus as “the mediator of a new covenant.”<sup>10</sup> Then the text explains, “For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives” (9:16, 17). The “covenant” spoken of here is a special kind of agreement that we call a “last will and testament.” (This is one time that the KJV use of the word “testament” makes the passage easier to understand.) When does a man’s last will and testament go into effect? *When he dies*. Even so, Jesus’ last will and testament went into effect when He died on the cross.<sup>11</sup>

A common misunderstanding is that Jesus’ birth was the beginning of the New Testament period; that is not true. Jesus Himself lived under the Old Testament. He was a good Jew and always kept the Old Testament laws. (In fact, He was the only One who ever kept them perfectly.) This confuses some. For instance, there are those who point to the fact that Jesus kept the Sabbath (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16) and insist that we should therefore worship on the Sabbath (the seventh day of the week). During His lifetime on earth, however, Jesus encouraged the keeping of *all* the Old Testament laws (Matthew 19:17), including the offering of animal sacrifices (Matthew 5:23; 8:4). The beginning of the New Testament was

not marked by the birth of Christ, but by His death.

Study the diagram. Jews who lived before Jesus' death lived under the Old Testament arrangement; those of us who live this side of the cross live under the New Testament arrangement. The death of Jesus is the dividing point.

Some early Christians, especially those who had been reared as Jews, struggled with the fact that they were no longer subject to the laws of the Old Testament. Some Jewish Christians even tried to persuade Gentile<sup>12</sup> Christians that they had to keep the Law—or at least parts of it, such as circumcision.<sup>13</sup> Several New Testament books deal with this problem, including the Books of Galatians and Hebrews. I have already mentioned a few passages from the Book of Galatians; let me share a few more.

Look again at Galatians 3: Paul said that “the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (vv. 24, 25). As noted earlier, a major purpose of the old law was to lead mankind to Christ. Once that purpose had been accomplished, people were “no longer under” that law.

In Galatians 5 Paul emphasized this even more strongly. In verse 3 he said, “And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.” The word “circumcision” here refers to circumcision as a religious rite, not as a medical option. Some Jewish Christians were teaching Gentile Christians (like those in Galatia) that Gentile men had to be circumcised as the Old Testament taught. Paul's point in Galatians 5:3 is that if you are obligated to keep *part* of the old law, you are obligated to keep *all* of it.

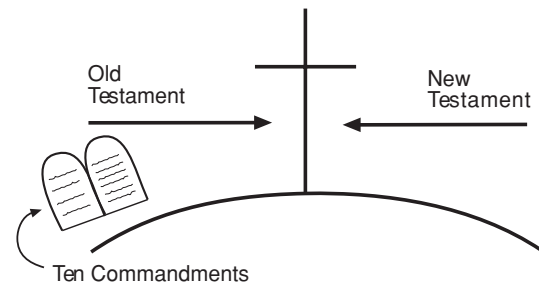
I do not know anyone who wants to keep all of the Old Testament commandments (going to Jerusalem three times a year, making animal sacrifices, keeping the dietary laws, and so on). Many, however, want to “pick and choose” certain Old Testament commandments, such as keeping the Sabbath, having a separate priesthood, or using instrumental music in worship. Paul explained that we cannot do that. If we keep part of the Old Testament as law, we must keep the whole law. If we bind part of it, we must bind it all.

That consequence of binding the Old Testa-

ment is bad enough, but the next result mentioned in Galatians 5 is worse. In verse 4 Paul said, “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” The Old Testament was basically a law-and-works system, while the New Testament is basically a grace-and-faith arrangement. Paul told the Christians in Galatia that if they submitted to the Old Testament ritual of circumcision, this would sever them from Christ—because no one can be under two different religious systems at one time. They could be under the law system or under the grace arrangement, but they could not be under both.

Let me put this another way: If they chose the law arrangement (by accepting the Old Testament rite of circumcision), they could not be saved. No one can be saved by a law arrangement, because no one can keep the law perfectly (Romans 3:23; 7:15, 18, 19). If we are to be saved, it must be through the grace and mercy of God (Ephesians 2:8, 9; 1 Peter 2:10). If the Galatians chose to go back to the old law instead, they would “fall from grace”; they would be “severed from Christ.” How tragic!

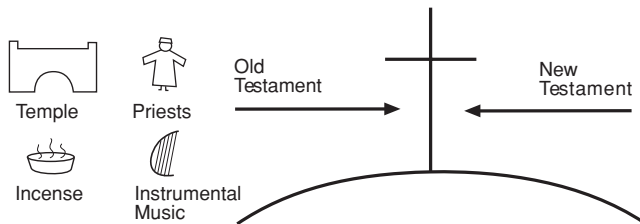
It is important to understand that today we are under the New Testament, not the Old. Just so there is no misunderstanding, I should stress that this means that *we are no longer under the Ten Commandments*.<sup>14</sup> The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5) were the heart and core of the old covenant that was nailed to the cross.



Someone may protest: “If we are not under the Ten Commandments, that means that we can kill and steal and do the other things prohibited by those commandments.” No. Today, people are not to kill or steal because it is prohibited *in the New Testament* (Romans 13:9; Ephesians 4:28). As a matter of fact, nine of the Ten Commandments have, in effect, been repeated in the New

Testament.<sup>15</sup> The only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Testament is number four: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Today, our “special” day of worship is the first day of the week, not the seventh.<sup>16</sup>

This principle—that we are under the New Testament, not the Old—will answer many religious questions that arise. Someone may say, “The Bible speaks of a sacred place of worship called the temple. Why shouldn’t we have a sacred building in which to worship?” The answer is “Because that is in the Old Testament, not the New.” Someone else may say, “The Bible speaks of a separate priesthood with special robes. Why don’t we have these?” The answer is “Because that is in the Old Testament, not the New.” Still another may say, “I read in the Bible about the burning of incense and the playing of instrumental music as acts of worship. Why shouldn’t we observe such practices?” The answer is “Because that is in the Old Testament, not the New.”



As we continue our study, then, we will be going to the *New* Testament to find out how to please God and how to go to heaven when we die.

## VALUE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Having said that, let me hasten to emphasize that this does not mean that the Old Testament has no value for the Christian. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul reminded his readers of an Old Testament event and then said, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (v. 11). The Old Testament is full of examples from which we can learn. For instance, in the New Testament, we are told that we are to “live by faith” (Romans 1:17; Galatians 2:20), but what does that mean? One way we can find out is to look at Old Testa-

ment examples of faith like Abraham (see Hebrews 11:9, 17).

Paul told Christians in Rome, “For whatever was written in earlier times [that is, the Old Testament] was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). The New Testament covers less than one hundred years of history and only about sixty years of Christianity. It has a few examples of instant reward (for a negative example, see Acts 5:1–11), but mainly it tells us how to live and promises blessings if we obey God. We may wonder if God really keeps His promises. The Old Testament assures us that He does. Since the Old Testament covers several thousand years of history, we can see clearly the long-range consequences of obedience and disobedience: When people obeyed God, they were indeed blessed; when they disobeyed God, they suffered the consequences. Thus, through the Old Testament Scriptures, we are assured that “God is faithful” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Many other benefits come from studying the Old Testament: If you want to know about the origin of the world and the origin of man, your prime source is the Old Testament (Genesis 1; 2). Much of the New Testament (for example, the Book of Hebrews) presupposes some knowledge of the Old Testament. The study of the Old Testament will help you to understand the New Testament. I therefore encourage you to include the Old Testament in your reading and study program. Always keep in mind, however, that *today* we are under the new covenant of Jesus Christ. It is in the New Testament that we find the specific instructions we need to reach our goal of eternal life.

## CONCLUSION

The Bible is our religious authority. Specifically, the New Testament is the covenant that is binding on us today. For this reason, the New Testament should be our prime source of information and instruction. Do you agree? If so, you are ready for the next lesson. ❖

<sup>1</sup>You may be familiar with the word “scribble,” which is related to the word “Scripture.”

<sup>2</sup>The Greek word translated “holy” or “sacred” means “set apart for a special purpose.” When I teach children, I

tell them that “holy” means “special.”

<sup>3</sup>When someone dies, we say that he has “breathed his last” or “expired.” “Expire” means “to breathe out.”

<sup>4</sup>Among the reasons is this: The Old Testament covers several thousand years of history, while the New Testament covers less than one hundred years.

<sup>5</sup>This does not mean that there are no specific laws in the New Testament. Specific laws—both positive and negative—are given in the New Testament, but the emphasis is on *principles* that God expects us to apply to our own lives. An illustration I use is how we deal with our children. When they are young, we give them very specific instructions on how to behave. As they get older, we say, “Be good” and expect them to apply that general principle to whatever they do.

<sup>6</sup>We will discuss this in lesson 9.

<sup>7</sup>The Jews were (and are) the descendants of Jacob, who was the grandson of Abraham and Sarah. Since Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, the Bible also refers to these people as Israelites. Occasionally, since they spoke the Hebrew language, they are called Hebrews in the Bible.

<sup>8</sup>See also Jeremiah 31:33, 34 and Hebrews 8:6–13.

<sup>9</sup>Different societies have different ways of publicizing legal agreements. In some, the agreements are read in public; in others, the agreements are published in the newspaper. Apparently, it was a practice in Bible times to post certain agreements in a public place to announce to one and all that the agreement had been fulfilled and

therefore was no longer in force. This seems to be the imagery used by Paul when he spoke of the debt (of sin) and the decrees (which made men aware of sin) being “nailed to the cross.”

<sup>10</sup>The rest of Hebrews 9:15 explains that the blood of Jesus not only saves those under the new covenant, but also saved those under the old covenant.

<sup>11</sup>The illustration can be expanded. For example, after a man’s death, there is generally “a period of probation” before the terms of the will are read and implemented. Almost fifty days passed between Jesus’ death and the first time the terms of His will were revealed. Jesus died during the Jewish feast of Passover (John 13:1), and the Jewish feast of Pentecost came fifty days after the Passover. The first gospel sermon was preached during Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 14–40).

<sup>12</sup>“Gentile” refers to those who are *not Jews*. By this definition, I am a Gentile, and probably you are too.

<sup>13</sup>Jewish boys were to be circumcised as a religious rite when they were eight days old (Leviticus 12:3).

<sup>14</sup>See 2 Corinthians 3:3, 7, 8; Romans 7:4, 7.

<sup>15</sup>Some are repeated in the New Testament word-for-word as they were in the Old Testament; others are found in principle. Most of the Ten Commandments involved basic values needed in any age. Thus nine were included in the new covenant that God made with His people.

<sup>16</sup>We will discuss this in lesson 9.

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