

Not all the Old Testament is actually “Testament.” What in the world does that statement mean? Well ... the word “Testament” or “Covenant” has to do with a “Contract” or “Agreement.” The 39 books of “The Old Testament” contain many agreements between God and different people. God made “covenants” with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and others; but “The Old Testament” is not named for any of these. It is the covenant with the nation of Israel that we have in mind when we say “The Old Testament,” and the terms of that testament are not found in all 39 books. You will find the conditions and provisions of God’s agreement with Israel in the section of scripture from Exodus 20 through Deuteronomy 34. Everything prior to these verses explains the need for that contract and the people of the contract. Following these verses, we find the books of History - a performance log of how well Israel kept the covenant; we find the books of Poetry - dealing with attitudes about God and His Law; we find the books of Prophecy - warning God’s people to turn back to the covenant they had made with God. Indeed, everything in these 39 books has something to do with The Old Testament, but not all is actually “testament.”

Moses explained the nature of God’s “covenant” with Israel in Deuteronomy 4:13. After recounting how God had met with Israel at Mount Horeb, Moses said, “So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.” In all, there were 613 commandments in the Law of Moses, but every one reflected the general precepts found in the Ten Commandments.

The Old Covenant was a System of Law, and it was a System of Priesthood. Moses’ brother, Aaron, was anointed as High Priest to Israel. His sons were also anointed, as Moses explained ... that they might be “a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations” (Ex 40:15). This means that only Aaron and his descendants could serve as High Priest according to the Law of Moses. However, the book of Hebrews teaches that we now have a new high priest who is not a descendant of Aaron. The lineage of Jesus was clearly through the tribe of Judah, not Levi; yet, Hebrews 3:1 declares Jesus to be the “High Priest of our confession.” The writer of Hebrews understood that it would be a violation of Moses’ Law for a descendant of Judah to hold this position. “For when the priesthood is changed,” he said, “of necessity there takes place a change of law also” (Heb 7:12). Long before the coming of Christ, the prophet Jeremiah had foretold a day when the Old Covenant would be replaced with another. “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” (Jeremiah 31:31).

The writer of Hebrews explained the need for a “New Testament” when he said, “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second” (Hebrews 8:7). When he declared the Old Covenant to be faulty, he no way implied that God had made a mistake in giving it. In fact, the “faults” of the Old Covenant were built-in and intentional. Paul explained that the Law of Moses was intended to be temporary when God first gave it (Galatians 3:19-25). He said that “promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed” which is Christ (Galatians 3:16). Then, in verse 19, he said the Law “was added ... until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.” In other words, it had always been God’s intention that the Old Covenant would only last until the coming of Christ. Not only that, but God had also promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). This promise could never be realized as long as the Law of Moses was left in place, for it strictly forbade interaction between the Israelites and the Gentiles (Exodus 23:32-33; 34:12; Ezra 10:10; Nehemiah 13:23). Paul said “the blessing of Abraham” came to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:14). He said that Christ “broke down the barrier of the dividing wall” while making both groups into one (Ephesians 2:14). That “dividing wall” was the Law of Moses, Paul said in verse 15.

The Old Covenant was temporary, it was restrictive, and, it was weak because of the flesh (Rom 8:3). Nevertheless, it had a purpose and it served its purpose well. It taught mankind that we were sinners and that sin could not be ignored. In Romans 7:7, Paul said, “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, You

shall not covet.” 1500 years of the sacrificial system made God’s people very conscious of their sinfulness. The Old Covenant was also a cohesive agent, a tie that bound the people of Israel to God in a special relationship. Yet, it continually pointed the people of Israel to their savior. The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24).

God’s covenant with Israel was a very important part of His plan of salvation. It unified a nation through whom the savior would be born. It kept them ever conscious of their sins; thus, ever conscious of their need for a savior. It tutored them right up to the coming of salvation. But it had its limits. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). The Old Covenant was always intended to be temporary. It only applied to one nation and alienated others from the promises to Abraham. And, it was weak because of the fleshly nature of man. The Hebrew writer said that it became “obsolete” (Heb 8:13). Paul said it ended when Christ died on the cross (Rom 7:1-4). He said that God has “taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:14). God has made a “New Testament” with mankind ... and that is the subject of the next “Bible Talk.”



Bible Probe

THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. What do we mean when we say: “Not all the Old Testament is actually testament”?
2. Where and when did God establish His covenant with Israel? (Deut 4:13)
3. In what Biblical books and chapters will we find its conditions and provisions?
4. What seems to be the purpose of scriptural accounts which precede and follow it?

5. The Old Covenant was a System of Law and a System of _____.
According to Ex. 40:15, only the descendants of _____ could serve as High Priest.
However, Hebrews 3:1 declares _____ to be the “High Priest of our confession.”
6. Hebrews 7:12 explains that since the priesthood has been changed, “of necessity there takes place a change of _____ also.”
Jeremiah 31:31 says, “Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, “when I will make a _____ with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”
7. What kinds of “faults” might the author have had in mind in Hebrews 8:7?
Galatians 3:19-25 _____
Ephesians 2:14-15 _____
Romans 8:3 _____
8. Name two purposes the Old Covenant served during the time of its validity.
Romans 7:7 _____
Galatians 3:24 _____
9. What happened to the Old Covenant?
Hebrews 8:13 _____
Romans 7:1-4 _____
Colossians 2:14 _____