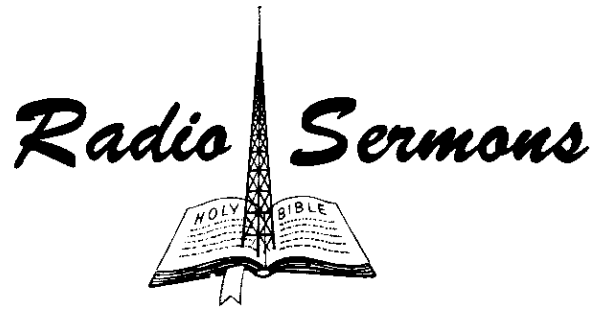


JDB

Christianity and God's Word to Israel



Radio Sermons

by
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Foreword

The ability to discern “the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” is given to all true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. See I John 4:1-2, 6. In these days there are many who teach a false Gospel. There are others who seem to be fundamental on the essentials of the faith, but emphasize only the parts of the message of the Bible that seem to harmonize with their particular viewpoints.

This brief study seeks to be informative and helpful to all believers who want to exercise discernment in the power of God. People who love the Word of God appreciate the importance of sound doctrine. They won't fall for the seductive message of the ecumenicist, who says, “Let's forget doctrinal differences and all unite in the love of God.”

Such “unity” would be man-made and deceptive. Differences continue to exist. One key question illustrates this point:

“How are the messages of the Old and the New Testaments to be reconciled?”

Though this seems an easy question, sharp controversy exists as to the correct answer to it. In the various answers given, one will find some of the differences in emphasis that perplex students of the Word today.

“Discernment” means the ability to look at and evaluate differences between viewpoints. May the Holy Spirit illuminate our hearts on the vital subject of *Christianity and God's Word to Israel*.

1.

The Old and the New Testaments: Are Both of Equal Value?

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour." II Peter 3:1-2.

The difference in character between the two Testaments was of sufficient importance, even to the church of the first century, to give rise to controversy. To this day, this controversy has never been resolved by means of a common solution acceptable to all concerned.

Many readers perceive the God revealed in the Old Testament as a God of wrath and judgment only. To support their view, they cite passages such as Exodus 19:16-19 describing an unapproachable God veiled in a thick cloud from whence come thunderings and lightnings. There are Old Testament Scriptures that describe a God of vengeance and which mandate a rigid governmental code of conduct. In addition, many Old Testament passages describe in detail the rules regarding the system of animal sacrifices that God demanded. Thus, a superficial reading of these passages describing our God in His necessary role of judgment could lead one to conclude that He is a God to be feared, not a God to be loved.

Unregenerate man rejects the concept of a God of

judgment. He wants to believe that the Old Testament presentation of this God is "primitive," and certainly *not* of equal value to the "higher" revelation of God in the New Testament.

It is true that the God revealed in the New Testament is primarily a God of love, as expressed in the familiar verse: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" John 3:16. He is a God that was so concerned about His creatures that He was willing to take upon Himself the form of a man, so that He might reveal to sinful mankind His nature of love. In order to do that, He willingly suffered the death of the cross so that "whosoever will" may be saved.

The Old Testament Mentions the Love of God

The supreme love of the God of Sinai (not only for His covenant people Israel, but also for all mankind) is plainly revealed in the Old Testament. Psalm 23 describes the tender care of the Good Shepherd. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is a marvelous picture of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though the name of God does not appear in the Book of Esther, it is nevertheless a remarkable reflection of the love of God. The disobedient remnant of the Jewish people that remained among the splendors of Persia was protected by His loving hand.

The New Testament Mentions the Judgment of God

In such New Testament passages as I Thessalonians 5:2, 3 and Revelation, Chapters 6-19, the righteous wrath of a long-suffering God is revealed. Also, John 3:36 pronounces the wrath of God upon him "that believeth not the Son."

The differences between the revelations in the two Testaments become less distinct when these respective sections of the canon are studied in depth. However, the fact remains that differences exist. The "problem" associated with these differences has been "solved" in several different ways during the course of church history.

For liberal scholars who are not constrained by a belief in the plenary verbal inspiration of all Scripture, the solution to the controversy usually involves the rejection of any Scripture that does not conform to their preconceived notion of what they think God should have revealed. For conservative scholars who realize that the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles taught that all Scripture of the Old Testament was verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, and that it is on an equal basis with the Scripture of the New Testament, the solution is not so simple. The doctrinal framework that is erected must account for the full validity of every verse of Scripture from Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21.

Today, two such frameworks are accepted by two general groups of conservative Bible scholars. Both systems claim to give full validity to God's Word as given both in the Old and the New Testaments. Although there are many points of agreement between the two concepts, there are several major points of disagreement. The differences arise because of a basically different concept of the prime purpose of God in His dealing with His creatures. Only one of the concepts can be correct. The Scriptures themselves provide the authority by which judgment can be made.

2.

Views Not Acceptable To Conservative Theologians

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." II Tim. 3:16.

Certain of the so-called "solutions" that supposedly establish a proper relationship between the Old and the New Testaments violate the teaching of II Timothy 3:16. They are therefore totally unacceptable to conservative theologians. These solutions fall into three general categories, each of which violates principles that must be affirmed by a person who holds the conservative orthodox view of the nature and purpose of Holy Scripture.

Error No. 1:

The Old Testament Is of Little or No Value to the Christian

There have always been those who advocate complete rejection of the Old Testament on the basis that it is of no value to the Christian. (Some have even held that it is positively harmful to the Christian!) While others of this general school do not go so far as to reject the Old Testament completely, they nonetheless feel that it is less authoritative than the New. This latter group regards the Old Testament as literature that may have some value in a Christian economy, but when comparing it to the New Testament, they view the Old in a definitely secondary position.

The origin of this view can be traced back to the writings

of a second century scholar named Marcion. Although Marcion was branded as a heretic by the church, he planted a seed of thought that, down through the centuries, has influenced many liberal biblical scholars who hold to liberal interpretation. Marcion derived many of his ideas from the Gnostics, a group that came on the scene before the death of several of the apostles during the first century A.D. The Gospel of John was written during a period when Gnosticism was a strong perverting influence on the Christian church. The teachings of John's Gospel are largely directed against Gnostic ideas.

The Teaching of Gnosticism

Basically, the Gnostic believes in what has been labelled the "dualistic notion of the universe." Gnosticism is a form of polytheism that visualizes a series of divine beings which "emanated" from the supreme, holy, true God. Each "emanation" possesses some of the divine essence, but as these emanations are farther and farther removed from the true God, they manifest less of the divine essence.

This heretical group believed that one of the distant emanations had become so far removed from the true God and possessed so little divine essence that He had taken on an evil nature. This emanation (called the "demiurge") was the creator of our physical universe, which is a place of evil. He was the "god" of the Old Testament, which was his revelation.

The Gnostic believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was the highest of the emanations, and that He was sent to reveal the nature of the true God to mankind. The New Testament is His book. This concept, of course, splits the two Testaments and makes them two separate works. According to the Gnostic concept, the Old Testament comes from a source that is imperfect and evil; the New Testament, then, is a

perfect revelation of the true God.

Marcion's teachings split the two Testaments asunder. Although the church rightly considered his works as heresy, the ideas that he formulated continued through the centuries to be of considerable influence. Liberal scholars of the last century, such as Schleiermacher, Goethe, Schelling, Feuerbach, and others of like thought show strong Marcionist tendencies. Although these scholars varied in their degree of Old Testament rejection, all believed that part of our canon should be relegated to a secondary position.

Advocates of This Teaching in Our Day

A 20th century advocate of the Marcionist view, Adolf Von Harnack, published a work in 1920 rejecting the Old Testament as Scripture, but advocating it as part of the Apocrypha. Other recent authors that supported Harnack in his Marcionist stand were Friedrich Delitzsch and Emanuel Hirsch.

Perhaps better known than those mentioned above is another 20th century liberal theologian, Rudolph Bultmann. Although of very strong Marcionist tendencies, Bultmann did not advocate complete rejection of the Old Testament. He did, however, strongly insist that it be afforded a secondary position in the Christian's Bible.

This view cannot be accepted by a conservative theologian. The rejection of the Old Testament Scriptures, or even the placing of them in a secondary position relative to the New Testament, is also a rejection of the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures. It is clearly taught by both the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles that the Old Testament Scriptures are the infallible and inerrant Word of the one true and living God. Christ was referring to the Old Testament canon when He said, "The Scripture cannot be broken." See John 10:35.

Error No. 2:

The Old Testament Is to Be Interpreted Allegorically

The heresy of Marcion provoked the Early Church fathers to serious thought. They came to the conclusion that the proper way to retain the Old Testament in the canon of Scripture was to read a Christian message into these Hebrew writings. They resorted to a method of hermeneutics that involved wholesale allegorizing of the Old Testament canon. (Hermeneutics is a somewhat unfamiliar term referring to the following of rules in the interpretation of Scripture.)

There are, indeed "types" in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Apostle Paul calls attention to certain "types" in the Old Testament in the opening verses of I Corinthians 10. He refers to historical happenings that are contained in Old Testament writings, and then specifically states, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples (types): and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world (age) are come" (I Corinthians 10:11).

By the Apostle Paul's statement, New Testament sanction is given to the reading of such meanings into the Old Testament. But there is a vast difference between the finding of typical significance in Old Testament scriptural passages and the utilization of allegorical interpretation as a method of hermeneutics. The problem with using allegory as a method of interpretation is that the human mind becomes the standard against which the correctness of the interpretation is measured. Thus, a passage of Scripture can be made to take on any meaning that the interpreter chooses to put upon it.

Early Church fathers such as Augustine and Origen were key figures in the allegorical form of interpretation. There is no doubt that they did uncover a great deal of truth related to intended types in the Old Testament Scriptures. However, they also made some wholesale blunders. The 16th and 17th

century reformers refuted the allegorical form of Old Testament interpretation, and considered this answer to the problem of the proper position of the Hebrew Scriptures to be unacceptable. Modern scholars who considered the allegorical form to be the proper method of Old Testament interpretation included Karl Barth (the originator of "Neo-Orthodoxy") and Wilhelm Visher.

Fundamental Bible scholars cannot accept the allegorical method of Old Testament interpretation (which really is a method of reading New Testament revelation back into the Old) as a legitimate solution to the interrelationship between the two Testaments. Any method of hermeneutics that relies on human logic as the standard for the interpretation of God's Word must be viewed as faulty. The only standard against which Scripture can be judged is Scripture itself.

Error No. 3:

The Bible Is to Be Viewed as "Religious Literature" and Studied by the Critical Method

The "higher criticism" of the 19th century brought its own particular solution to the problem of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New. These critics of the last century, of whom Julius Wellhausen is perhaps the best known spokesman, were not restricted by a belief in the infallibility and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. Therefore, they had no trouble in developing what they considered to be a correct relationship between the two Testaments.

From the point of view of Wellhausen, the Bible is just a collection of "religious literature." As such, it can be studied by the same critical and historical methods that are applied to other literature of the ancient peoples.

An Evolutionary Concept

Wellhausen considered the human authors of the Old

Testament as men with different backgrounds, and thus different perspectives and different depths of understanding. He assumed that biblical literature had developed along an evolutionary pattern. Thus, he could easily account for the differences in the revelations contained in the two Testaments. The Old Testament contained religious concepts from a former age. He felt it represented the evolutionary development of the Hebrew people in their concept of religion and ethics. This former development paved the way for Christianity, which represents religion in its highest evolutionary form.

The Wellhausen solution to the problem of the interrelationship of the Old and New Testaments is generally the solution accepted by liberal protestantism today. The Man, Jesus, His ethics, and His teachings, are the highest and noblest things in the Bible. Thus, the New Testament as it reveals Jesus Christ and His ministry is the highest level of biblical authority. The Old Testament represents simply the outgrown evolutionary stages in religious development of our Christian religion.

This solution is, of course, not acceptable to the conservative Bible scholar of today. It denies the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, and it makes Christianity a humanly-devised religion. The individual is placed in authority over the Bible, rather than the Bible being placed in authority over the individual.

3.

Views Acceptable to Conservative Theologians

"Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." I Cor. 10:32, 33.

Today there are two different views that establish a relationship between the Old and New Testaments without downgrading the authority of either, and without violating the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration and infallibility of any portion of the Word of God. The two differing views are embraced under the respective systems of "covenant theology" and "dispensational theology."

Although these two interpretational systems share a number of points in common, they also contrast in several important areas. One of the areas of contrast is the view of the relationship between the two Testaments.

Covenant Theology

"Covenant Theology" is the name applied to a system of theology that conceives of the eternal purpose of God as concerned primarily with the salvation of the elect. Within this system, all Scripture is considered within the realm of two covenants, which are referred to as the "covenant of works" and the "covenant of grace."

To some covenant theologians (of whom Louis Berkhof

could be considered a representative spokesman) there is a third covenant from which the above two covenants were derived. This is designated as the "Covenant of Redemption." This covenant is defined by Louis Berkhof as "the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given Him."

Covenant theologians consider the covenant of works as an agreement between God and Adam that promised life to Adam for perfect obedience to God's commands, but imposed the penalty of death for his disobedience. Adam failed to meet the requirement of perfect obedience and therefore fell heir to the penalty of death. As a result of Adam's failure in this first covenant, God brought a second covenant into operation. This second "Covenant of Grace" is defined as "that gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience."

A Single, Unifying Framework

These two covenants (or three covenants, in the reckoning of some theologians of this persuasion) become the standard framework and unifying structure within which all Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is interpreted. The chronological record furnished by Scripture of the successive ages of God's dealing with men is, to the covenant theologian, the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose contained in the covenant framework. This view of a single unifying framework of interpretation leads to a general merging of the concept of God's dealing with man both before and after the Cross, and thus during the time periods covered by both Testaments.

Therefore, the covenant theologian sees little basic difference between God's dealing with man in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. He considers the New Testament church to be just a continuation of Old Testament Israel, a point of sharp contrast between covenant theology and dispensationalism. Berkhof confirms the position of the covenant theologian in the following words:

The Covenant of Grace, as it is revealed in the New Testament, is essentially the same as that which governed the relation of Old Testament believers to God. It is entirely unwarranted to represent the two as forming an essential contrast, as is done by present-day dispensationalism.

Berkhof then goes on to make the following points concerning what he refers to as the "New Testament Dispensation":

(1) It "differs from that of the Old Testament in that it is universal, that is, extends to all nations."

(2) It "places greater emphasis upon the gracious character of the covenant."

(3) It "brings richer blessings than the Old Testament dispensation."

Essentially, covenant theology relates the two Testaments by reading New Testament interpretation back into the Old Testament. This is accomplished by literal interpretation of historical events recorded in the Old Testament, and then applying a typical meaning that conforms to New Testament doctrine. Prophetic passages of the Old Testament are frequently given a "spiritual" meaning, since covenant theologians believe that the church has inherited Israel's promises and these promises are either being fulfilled, or will be fulfilled, in a spiritual sense. Dispensational theologians accuse covenant theologians of using inconsistent

hermeneutics. That is, they use literal interpretation where possible within the covenant framework, but spiritual or allegorical interpretation where literal interpretation becomes a problem.

Covenant theology normally takes the point of view which considers the Old Testament, the present age, and the future millennium essentially parts of one progressive purpose.

Dispensational Theology

“Dispensational Theology” or “Dispensationalism” is the name applied to a system of theology that conceives of the eternal purpose of God as a revelation of His own glory. In the words of Dr. Charles Ryrie, “He manifests His character in the differing stewardships culminating in history with the millennial glory.”

Dispensationalism does not consider that the salvation of the elect is the primary and all-encompassing purpose of God in His relationship with His creation. However, this does not mean that salvation of the elect is not given a vital place within the eternal purpose of God as visualized in this theological system.

Rather, dispensationalists recognize several programs of God that are being worked out in the course of the earth's history. Those programs that deal directly with mankind do involve the salvation of the elect. The various programs encompassed within God's prime purpose of manifesting His own glory include the program for Israel, the program for the church (the “body” and “bride” of Christ), the program for the Gentile nations, the program for the unsaved of all dispensations, and the program for Satan and the wicked angels.

Ryrie summarizes the general concept of dispensational theology in the following words:

The essence of dispensationalism is (1) the recognition of a distinction between Israel and the church, (2) a consistently literal principle of interpretation, and (3) a basic working conception of the purpose of God as His own glory rather than the purpose of salvation.

Within the above framework, the dispensationalist erects his concept of the various dispensations, or stewardships, by interpretation of the Old and New Testaments in the light of the progressive covenants as they are revealed by Scripture. He does not conceive of one all-inclusive "covenant of grace," but sees instead God's grace manifested in different ways during the progressive stewardships of world history.

The Role of the Church

Dispensational theology provides a natural framework for correlating both the differences and the similarities that are noted in the revelation of God that are found in the two Testaments. The church of the New Testament is a special program of God that was foreseen but not revealed by Scriptures of the Old Testament, and which was inserted as a "great parenthesis" in the age between the first and second advents of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church intervenes as an "interruption" in the time flow of God's program for Israel, which is to be resumed when the church is removed from the world at the time of the rapture. The tribulation period and the millennial kingdom will be times of literal fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies relating to "the time of Jacob's trouble," and the kingdom blessings promised to the physical seed of Abraham. The church will have a place in the millennial kingdom as the resurrected "bride of Christ," but will be distinct from Israel.

Although most dispensationalists recognize seven dispensations as forming the total of human history, there are only

three dispensations that receive prominent treatment in the biblical revelation. These three include God's dealings with Israel from Moses to Christ, God's dealings with the church from the Day of Pentecost to the rapture, and the millennial kingdom. This latter dispensation is the golden age of the world's history, toward which all previous stewardships have looked.

Dr. H. A. Ironside refers to a dispensation as an economy, and he defines an economy as "an ordered condition of things." He goes on to say, "A dispensation, an economy, then, is that particular order or condition of things prevailing in one special age which does not necessarily prevail in another." This definition leads to perfect harmonization of all Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments. Both differences and similarities in the two revelations are expected phenomena. The consistent hermeneutical principle of literal interpretation of all Scripture can be followed without leading to apparent contradictions.

Literal interpretation of Scripture, of course, does not rule out typical meanings in the Old Testament that are related to New Testament doctrine. One of the greatest dispensational teachers of the last century, C. H. Mackintosh, found a rich treasure of typical meaning in the works of Moses. Dr. Ironside, who during his lifetime published expositions of all the books of the New Testament and all the prophetic books of the Old Testament, also found a great deal of typical meaning in the Hebrew Scripture. The dispensational framework within which Dr. Ironside worked did not require the sacrifice of literal hermeneutics in order to maintain harmony and consistency throughout all of his expository volumes.

Conclusion

"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Rev. 22:20.

Of all the "solutions" to the problem of the Old Testament and its relationship to the New Testament, only the solutions offered by covenant theology and dispensationalism are acceptable to conservative theologians. Both of these systems hold to the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible, and both systems give full and equal authority to both Testaments.

However, the concept of a unifying "covenant of grace" (based on the assumption that the eternal purpose of God is the salvation of the elect) that is progressively revealed through the various covenants recorded in Scripture does not provide an adequate framework for the interpretation of all Scripture in a consistent way. The existence of such a unifying "covenant of grace" is not actually confirmed by Scripture, and the assumption that God's eternal purpose is related solely to the salvation of the elect is entirely too restrictive to explain all the revelations of Scripture.

Promises in the Bible

Literal promises of a physical earthly inheritance of the Promised Land "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" was made to the physical seed of Abraham. See Genesis 15:18. Such a promise has never been fulfilled, and there is no hint in the New Testament that this promise was transferred to the church. The promise that the Lord made to the church is, *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to*

prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2, 3.

Scripture never indicates that the church of the New Testament is "spiritual Israel." In fact, there are many references to both the church and Israel as still in existence together throughout the New Testament. The only verse in the entire New Testament that can be interpreted as possibly equating the church with Israel is Galatians 6:16. The grammatical construction of this sentence does not answer the question as to whether Paul is referring to the church as the "Israel of God" or if he is simply extending his general blessings especially to that part of natural Israel that is a part of the church. In context, the latter interpretation seems preferable.

That the apostles were still expecting the promise of an earthly kingdom for Israel to be fulfilled literally at the time of the Lord's ascension is made clear by Acts 1:6, 7. They ask in Verse 6, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The question had to do with the *time*, not with the *fact* of the predicted restoration.

Israel to Be Restored

The Lord's answer (Verse 7) refers only to the *time* as He says, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." If the kingdom promises had been transferred to the church, this surely would have been the time for the Lord to have specifically told the apostles this fact. But rather, He directs their attention to the commission of the church (Verse 8), leaving the impression that the promise of the kingdom to national Israel is still to be fulfilled in due time.

The framework of dispensational theology offers the proper key to the understanding of the Scriptures of both the

Old and New Testaments. The tenets of this system of theology are being verified in this present day as national Israel is seen being regathered, and the world political situation is shaping up for the enactment of the events of the seven-year tribulation period that are so vividly described in the Book of Revelation.

The time does not appear to be far in the future when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." See I Thessalonians 4:16. Then the church will be taken away, and God will once again deal directly with His covenant people, Israel.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Rev. 22:20.

The End