

# What Every Muslim Should Know About The Old and New Testaments

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### 1. Muslim Misconceptions about the Christian Bible

It has been my pleasure and privilege to have met many Muslims in South Africa over the years and to have engaged in profitable discussion on the claims and merits of Christianity and Islam respectively. Many of these discussions have, naturally, centred on the Bible and the Qur'an, the revered scriptures of our two respective faiths. As a result I have been strongly challenged in my own spirit, as a Christian, to acquaint myself with the Qur'an and its teaching. I believe that a Christian cannot carry on a meaningful conversation with a Muslim on religious topics unless he is familiar with the beliefs and customs of Islam.

At the same time, however, I have been surprised to find that there is a considerable degree of ignorance among Muslims in this country regarding the character of the Christian Bible, especially in respect of its two major sections known as the Old and New Testaments. On numerous occasions I have been confronted with questions like these:

1. "Why do you have an Old and New Testament? What was wrong with the Old Testament that you had to replace it with a New Testament?"
2. "We Muslims accept the Old Testament which was the same as our Qur'an, but we do not accept the New Testament which you Christians have changed".
3. "Why are there four Bibles in your New Testament?"
4. "Where is your old, old testament? Why have all you Christians replaced the original scripture with a brand new testament?"

5. "Why did your priests change the original testament and bring out a new testament?"

These questions have been repeated exactly as they have been put to me and some of them have come up again and again in conversation with Muslims. The prevailing view, generally, is that the very existence of a New Testament presupposes that the Old Testament has been changed and that the former is a corrupted version of the latter. So often Muslims have said to me "Your Bible has been changed" and, when I have asked for proof, the answer has invariably been "Well, you have an Old and New Testament". The assumption is that the very fact of a New Testament proves that the Old Testament, presumed to be the original scripture, no longer exists in its original form and has been interpolated.

I have often been dismayed at the level of ignorance that exists in the Muslim community regarding the very basic character of the Christian Scriptures. In discovering that most Muslims do not even know what the Old and New Testaments are and live in the fond illusion that the latter has displaced or corrupted the former, I have come to realise that there exists a vast ignorance of the very basic structure of the Bible which presupposes an equally extensive ignorance of its contents. All the questions I have recorded and the attitudes I have mentioned expose a fundamental series of errors in the Muslim approach to the Christian Bible. It seems that as Muslims are generally ignorant of its contents, they become vulnerable to a number of illusions about it. There is no merit, profit or wisdom in maintaining an illusion, no matter how much such an illusion may appear to support the Muslim dogma that the Bible has been changed. Such a belief cannot be true when it requires false notions for its support.

In this booklet my sole desire is to bring enlightenment to Muslims regarding the true nature of the Old and New Testaments and to set forth basic facts to dispel the illusions currently prevailing in the Muslim community. There *is* merit and profit in gaining a true understanding of the nature of the Christian Bible and I have no doubt that every Muslim will benefit from a true presentation of the facts such as he will find presented in the pages of this booklet.

2. What are the Old and New Testaments?

The Christian Bible is divided into two parts known as the Old and New Testaments. It needs to be pointed out and emphasized right from the outset that the Old and New Testaments *are two entirely separate books* and that the latter is not a corrupted or altered version of the former. Within the Old Testament there are thirty-nine books and within the New Testament there are twenty-seven. The sixty-six books in all constitute the Christian Bible

Let us begin with a description of the Old Testament. This is the *Jewish Scripture* and if you were to go into a Jewish bookroom and request a copy of their Holy Scriptures you would be given the Old Testament. The Jews

themselves do not use this title for their Scriptures, it is a Christian title which we use to distinguish them from the exclusively Christian Scriptures known as the New Testament.

The Old Testament begins with the five books of Moses known as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These books cover the history of mankind from the beginning of creation and then concentrate specifically on the history of the Israelites from the time of Abraham through to the great exodus of the Israelites from Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

The following ten books cover the history of the nation and the rise of its prophets up to the time of David. Up to this point the books are all primarily historical. Then follows the second major part of the Old Testament, namely five books that are commonly known as the wisdom books because they concentrate on teaching about the knowledge of God and true, discerning faith in him. They include the Book of Job (*Ayoub* in the Qur'an), the Psalms of David and the Proverbs of Solomon. Finally there are the remaining seventeen books of the Old Testament which are known as the books of the writing prophets as they record the prophecies of the later prophets of Jewish history (such as Jonah, Daniel and Ezekiel) before the Old Testament scriptures were completed some four hundred and fifty years before Christ.

It needs to be noted that the Old Testament is a book defining God's dealings with the nation of Israel from the time of creation up to four hundred and fifty years before Christ. The Old Testament is thus a book which was completed nearly *Rive centuries before* the time of Jesus and the rise of the religion which he founded, namely Christianity.

Before moving on to the New Testament let us mention briefly the Christian attitude to the Old Testament. We accept it as the unchanged, authentic Word of God dating from the times of the prophets of whom it speaks (Moses, David, etc.). Our attitude is exactly the same as the attitude of the Jews. Unlike the Muslims, Christians do not believe that God's Word can ever be changed or corrupted and we therefore accept the Old Testament as the unchanged, genuine Word of God of pre-Christian times.

What then is the New Testament? It is the *Christian Scription* dating from the time of Jesus Christ. The Jews, unlike the Muslims, do not believe in Jesus at all and for this reason alone they reject the New Testament. But as Christians believe that Jesus was genuinely a man sent from God, they acknowledge the scriptures of his era likewise as the authentic Word of God.

The New Testament contains four major sections. The first covers the four Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit as the revealed Word of God. They record the life and teachings of Jesus and the events surrounding his birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension to heaven. One book makes up the second section, namely the Book of Acts which records the development of the early Church through the

preaching, activities and accompanying signs of the immediate disciples of Jesus who became apostles.

The third section covers twenty-one books of the writings of these apostles to various churches setting out the basic teachings of the Christian faith as revealed by the Holy Spirit. The last book makes up the final section and it is a book of prophecy known as the Revelation which outlines the events to follow during the whole of the Christian era and the eternal age to come after the Day of Judgment.

There is, therefore, a clear distinction between the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament was compiled during the first sixty years after Christ's resurrection and thus dates up to five hundred years after the Old Testament. It is not a corruption' adaptation or alteration of the Old Testament. It is an entirely separate book and is placed alongside the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. In fact the Old Testament is up to four times the Length of the New Testament (the New Testament being slightly longer than the Qur'an) and there can thus be no possible suggestion that the New Testament is a changed version of the Old Testament.

### 3. Has the Old Testament Ever Been Changed?

There are numerous evidences available to this day to prove that the Old Testament has never been changed. As pointed out already, the Old Testament is the text of the sacred scripture of the Jews. A Muslim who is willing to consider the implications of this fact will realise immediately that the Old Testament could never have been changed by the Christians and replaced with the New Testament. For the Jews do not believe in Jesus Christ at all, nor do they believe that his crucifixion has atoning value. In this respect they are similar to Muslims who, while they do acknowledge Jesus as a man sent from God, do not believe that he was the Son of God or that he died for our sins. There is no other major point of difference between Christians and Muslims on the person and work of Jesus. This means that their denials of Christ's divinity and atoning work are held in common with the Jews. As the Old Testament has been carefully guarded by the Jews since before the time of Jesus, it becomes almost impossible to believe that Christians could have changed it at any time in their history.

The Old Testament could only have been changed if the Jews and Christians at some time in history had come together and agreed to falsify it. Not only is the possibility of such a mutual conspiracy untenable in the light of the great differences between the two faiths but there is no evidence of a factual nature anywhere in history to testify to such a perversion of the Old Testament scriptures. Muslims must seriously think about this fact - the Old Testament is held to be the Word of God by two very different religions and has been scrupulously maintained by each one independently of the other. There is thus no possibility of a perversion of the text by either of the two faiths, for the very fact of an alteration by the one would have been immediately exposed by the other.

Another evidence to prove that Christians have never changed the Old Testament is the translation of the whole text from the original Hebrew into Greek some two centuries before the time of Jesus Christ. This translation is known as the Septuagint and was widely distributed in the Greek-speaking world at the advent of Christianity. To this day it is thoroughly consistent with the oldest Hebrew Massoretic texts that are in the possession of the Jews and various museums. These texts are nearly a thousand years old and have been preserved by the Jews independently of Christian access or availability.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls shortly after the Second World War led to the recovery of portions of other manuscripts of the Old Testament including two complete scrolls of the prophecy of Isaiah. All of these manuscripts were written out some decades before the time of Jesus Christ. We therefore not only have an independent translation into Greek but also have a number of handwritten texts in the original Hebrew likewise predating the Christian era.

There can, therefore, be no possible suggestion that the Old Testament has been changed or corrupted by the Christians, least of all that the New Testament is an altered version of it or has replaced it. The Old and New Testaments are separate books, both of which have been scrupulously preserved by the Christian Church. The Old Testament, as we have already seen, has also been jealously preserved free of corruption by the Jews independently of the Christians. Muslims would do well to read these two books rather than to base false assumptions that the Bible has been changed on their illusions about their contents.

#### 4. The Taurat and Injil in the Qur'an.

A brief perusal of the Qur'anic teaching about the former scriptures will also help to clarify the nature of the Old and New Testaments. The Qur'an speaks of the *Taurat* and *Injil*, the "Law" and the "Gospel", of the Jews and Christians respectively. Throughout the Qur'an the Taurat is spoken of as the Jewish scripture and the Injil as the Christian scripture, and both scriptures are regarded with unqualified reverence.

In the Qur'an itself, therefore, we find that there *is a distinction* between the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians and that they are regarded as two separate books. Thus Muhammad himself was aware that the Jews and Christians possessed two different scriptures, so a Muslim should not be surprised to find this situation unchanged down to the present day. As pointed out already, the New Testament has not replaced the Old Testament, nor is it a corrupted or altered version of it, but it is an entirely separate book and, as the Qur'an speaks of the Taurat and Injil as the two distinct scriptures of the Jews and Christians respectively, so today we have the Old and New Testaments as our separate books. Muslims who believe that the New Testament is a changed version of the Old Testament are therefore right out of touch with their own book, the Qur'an.

The question, then, is whether the Tauraat and Injil of the Qur'an can be identified with the Old and New Testaments. While the Qur'an speaks of the Tauraat as a scripture given to Moses and the Injil as one given to Jesus, which would make it appear as though it is speaking of books different to the Old and New Testaments, it does nevertheless regard both the Tauraat and the Injil as those books which the Jews and Christians themselves regarded as their own holy scriptures. The Qur'an accordingly says of the Jews:

Yet how will they make thee their judge, seeing they have the Torah, wherein is God's judgment, then thereafter turn their backs? *Surah 5.47*

The passage teaches quite plainly that the Jews (named specifically as the subjects of this passage in verse 44) "have the Torah" (Tauraat in Arabic), a statement which can yield only one possible interpretation - the book was in their possession at the time of Muhammad.

Now right throughout their history, from centuries before the advent of Islam, the Jews have known only one scripture - the books of the Old Testament as we know them today. No less than eight hundred years before Muhammad the Old Testament was first translated into the Greek text known as the Septuagint. Thus the Qur'an, in speaking of the Tauraat which the Jews have with them, can only be speaking of the Old Testament which it confirms as the unchanged Word of God. The same applies to the Injil, the Christian Scripture. The Qur'an says:

Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. *Surah 5.69*

The "people of the Gospel" (*ahlul-Injil*) throughout the Qur'an are regarded as the Christians and here, like the Jews, they are commanded to decide matters according to their revealed scriptures. As this exhortation is addressed to the Christians of Muhammad's time, the question obviously arises - how could they judge by the Injil if they were not in possession of it? The Qur'an is clearly referring to the book in their possession which the Christians themselves regarded as their holy scripture, and throughout the history of the Church we have known and possessed only one scripture - the books of the New Testament as we know it today.

Thus the Qur'an likewise testifies to the New Testament as the unchanged Word of God. Centuries before Muhammad's time the New Testament was defined as the sole scripture of the Christians and, as the Qur'an speaks solely of the book in their possession, it can only be referring to the New Testament.

Therefore the Qur'an itself acknowledges that the Old and New Testaments are the revealed scriptures of the Jews and Christians respectively. Certainly, by carefully distinguishing between the two holy books of these two major religions, Muhammad has given evidence to support the distinction found between them to this day and given the lie to the illusion that there was formerly only one scripture, the Old Testament, and that it has been substituted by the New Testament.

## 5. The Qur'an in relation to the Two Testaments.

I have often met Muslims who tell me they accept the Old Testament but not the New Testament. We have just seen that the Qur'an itself draws a distinction between the two books and acknowledges both of them to be the Word of God, but here we shall briefly consider further evidences to prove that no Muslim can say he rejects the New Testament without at the same time denying key teachings in the Qur'an.

A Muslim is told to believe in all the prophets, it is one of the basic articles of *iman* in Islam. If he was asked to name some of them, he might begin with *Ibrahim* (Abraham), *Ishaq* (Isaac), *Yakub* (Jacob), *Dared* (David), *Suleiman* (Solomon) and *Yunus* (Jonah). All these are key prophets in the Old Testament in whom every Muslim is commanded to believe.

Each one is a distinct Old Testament prophet. The Old Testament covers the history of mankind, and especially the history of the Jewish nation, from the time of Adam until about four hundred and fifty years before the time of Jesus Christ. These prophets appear in the Old Testament in the chronological sequence we have given, just as they were born in the order in which they came into human history. No Muslim will reject these Old Testament prophets.

But what about the following prophets who are also specifically named in the Qur'an, namely *Zakariyya* (Zechariah), his son *Yakya* (John the Baptist) and *Isa* (Jesus)? And what about *Maryam* (Mary the mother of Jesus), the only woman mentioned by name in the whole of the Qur'an? Would any Muslim dare to suggest that he does not believe in these holy personalities as well?

The important thing here is to consider that all four of these great personalities lived some five hundred years after the Old Testament had already been completed. They do not appear by name in its pages. Each one of these four, in terms of their lives and historical identification, is a New Testament personality. It is in the New Testament that a Muslim will find the stories of John the Baptist and his father Zechariah and of Mary and her son Jesus. So the Qur'an names prophets and holy personalities from both the Old and New Testaments. No Muslim, therefore, can reject the New Testament without rejecting four of the holy personalities in whom the Qur'an compels Muslims to believe. Thus we have further evidence in the Qur'an to counter the illusions of those Muslims who say they will not accept the New Testament.

Nevertheless, as pointed out earlier in this booklet, there are many Muslims who believe that the Old Testament is the same as the Qur'an but that the New Testament is different to both. The assumption remains that the Old Testament was the original scripture and is therefore consistent with the Qur'an, but that the New Testament is a corrupted text which therefore differs from them both. We shall present a brief comparison of facts relating to the Old Testament's relationship to the New Testament and the Qur'an which should dispel any

remaining illusions about this subject and which prove that the Old and New Testaments are consistent with each other and that the Qur'an is the odd one out. Consider these facts about the Old Testament:

The style of revelation of the Old Testament, namely where holy men of God have written down the scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, compares as follows, in its character and form, with:

The New Testament : Exactly the *same*. The Qur'an : Substantially *different*.

The Old Testament is read right through annually, as a complete book from Genesis to the last book Malachi, by the followers of the two religions Christianity and Islam respectively as follows:

By Christians : *Millions* of believers. By Muslims : *None* at all.

The Old Testament has been translated into other languages the following number of times by Christians and Muslims respectively:

By Christians : Well over *a thousand*. By Muslims : *None* at all.

The Old Testament is accompanied by the respective scriptures of the Christians and the Muslims, namely the New Testament and the Qur'an, and is thus published annually as a single book:

By Christians with the New Testament as the Bible: *Millions* of copies. By Muslims with the Qur'an: *None* at all.

The scriptures of the Old Testament are actually quoted the following number of times in the Christian and Muslim scriptures respectively:

In the Christian New Testament : *244 times*. In the Muslim Qur'an : Just *once*.

There are prophecies in the Old Testament to Jesus and Muhammad, the founders of Christianity and Islam respectively, the following number of times:

To Jesus : About *300 prophecies*. To Muhammad : *None* at all.

The Old Testament is read every week in churches and mosques, along with the New Testament and the Qur'an respectively' in the following numbers:

In Christian Churches : All of them. In Muslim Mosques : *None* at all.

Copies of the Old Testament are printed, published and sold annually worldwide:

By Christian Publishers : *Millions* of them. By Muslim Publishers : *None* at all.

In the light of these incontrovertible facts it is impossible to understand how Muslims can continue to maintain the illusion that the Old Testament is the same

as the Qur'an and not the New Testament. The facts speak for themselves - the Old and New Testaments together make up the cherished Christian Bible and are jointly published, sold, read and avidly followed by millions of Christians worldwide. The Qur'an stands by itself.

## 6. The Christian Character of the Old Testament.

The reason for the Christian investment in the Old Testament as evidenced in the last section, and the Muslim disinterest in reading or publishing it, becomes apparent when one considers the fundamentally Christian character of its prophecies and contents. Although it is the scripture of the Jews, it is in fact far more consistent with Christianity than with Judaism or Islam.

Firstly we find in the Old Testament that the coming Messiah, God's Anointed One, said in both the New Testament (John 4.25-26) and the Qur'an (Surah 3.45) to be Jesus, was foretold as the coming Son of God. In a typical Messianic psalm we find the anticipated Saviour speaking through his forerunner, the prophet David, in the following words:

I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you". *Psalms 2.7*

On a number of occasions in the New Testament these words are applied to Jesus Christ (Acts 13.33, Hebrews 1.5, 5.5). So likewise we find God himself speaking of the coming Messiah in the same terms:

"He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son". *1 Chronicles 17.12-13*

Not only does the Old Testament confirm that the coming Messiah, Jesus, would be the Son of God, but it also affirms the other feature of his life which the Qur'an denies (Surah 4.157), namely his crucifixion. On numerous occasions the Old Testament predicts the crucifixion of Christ, such as in the following verses:

All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; "He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" *Psalms 22.7-8*

These words were fulfilled when the chief priests of the Jews and others stood about Jesus, mocking him:

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross". So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others, he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" *Matthew 27.39-43*

The Psalm goes on to speak of the agonies of the Messiah, such as would commonly be experienced by a man on a cross: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou hast laid me in the dust of death" (Psalm 22.14-15), and proceeds to a plain evidence of the fact that he had been nailed to the cross: "They have pierced my hands and feet" (v.16). Yet again it continues in these words: "They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots" (v.18), a prophecy which was duly fulfilled at the crucifixion of Jesus:

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be". *John 19.23-24*

In another similar Messianic psalm which sets out the cries of the anointed one of God in his travail on the cross, we find these words: "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69.21), a prediction likewise fulfilled at the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27.48, John 19.28-29).

Elsewhere in the Old Testament there is another lengthy passage speaking of the atoning work of the Messiah to come. It contains plain statements to the effect that he would die for our sins, such as the following:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. *Isaiah 53.5-6*

These words are directly applied to Jesus in the New Testament (Matthew 8.17, 1 Peter 2.24). The next two verses, which also speak of his affliction, suffering and death, are also applied to Jesus in Acts 8.35. The following verse, which reads "And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth" (v.9), was likewise fulfilled in Jesus as his grave was prepared among the malefactors, but a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea took him down and buried him in his own tomb instead (Mark 15.46). The second part of this verse is also applied to Jesus in 1 Peter 2.22. The following verses speak plainly both of his willingness to die for the sins of men and his subsequent resurrection:

When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities. *Isaiah 53.10-11*

No statement in the New Testament about the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins is more emphatic than this one from the pages of the Old Testament. The whole passage concludes:

He poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. *Isaiah 53.12*

Jesus himself stated that the words which declared that he would be "numbered with the transgressors" would be fulfilled in him (Luke 22.37). Elsewhere in the New Testament we find these words again quoted as being fulfilled in Jesus when he was crucified between two robbers (Mark 15.28). The last expression, "and made intercession for the transgressors", was likewise fulfilled in Jesus when he prayed for the forgiveness of all those who had wrongly crucified him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23.34).

In all these texts we have abundant evidence to show that the Old Testament has a principally Christian character and that its teaching regularly contradicts the teaching of the Qur'an about Jesus. We could give further evidences (for example, both the Old and the New Testaments plainly state, in Genesis 22.2 and Hebrews 11.17 respectively, that the son whom Abraham was called upon to sacrifice was Isaac, whereas the Qur'an is silent on the identity of the son in its narration of the event in Surah 37.100-112, and Muslims wrongly hold it to have been Ishmael), but we have surely by now produced more than enough evidences to dispel the Muslim illusion that the Old Testament is the same as the Qur'an and not the New Testament, or that the New Testament has replaced or corrupted the Old Testament. All the evidences prove that the Old and New Testaments are in perfect harmony with each other, while the Qur'an is found to be at variance with both of them on numerous occasions.

It is for this reason that Christians publish the Old and New Testaments together as one book, the Holy Bible, and read both of them avidly throughout the year. This is why Christians print and publish millions of copies of the Old Testament annually while Muslims make no similar attempt to do so. The Old Testament was fulfilled in the New Testament, not in the Qur'an, and a brief perusal of its contents will soon persuade any Muslim that the general idea prevailing that the very existence of a New Testament suggests a change in the Christian scriptures, is an untenable fallacy. There is no substance in that belief whatsoever.

## 7. The Old and the New Covenants.

We are still left with one question, however. Why, it might well be asked, do we call them the Old and New Testaments respectively? The answer lies very simply in the fact that the two books deal with two distinct covenants made by God, one through Moses and one through Jesus. The former is known as the old covenant and the latter as the new covenant.

When the Israelites left Egypt under Moses' leadership, God made a covenant with them in the wilderness. He gave them the ten commandments, set out in the Old Testament in Exodus 20.1-17, together with a number of other laws, both ethical and ceremonial. These commandments placed the full responsibility of maintaining the covenant on the Israelites themselves with a plain warning that any disobedience of these laws would violate the covenant. Moses said:

"Cursed be he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them".  
*Deuteronomy 27.26*

The ten commandments and the other laws placed the responsibility on the Israelites by being introduced with the words "You shall" or "You shall not". For example, God said "You shall do my ordinances and keep my statutes and walk in them" (Leviticus 18.4), "You shall be holy" (Leviticus 19.2), "You shall keep my sabbaths" (Leviticus 19.3), and, on the negative side, "You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exodus 20.13-16), to mention just a few. (A perusal of the books of Exodus and Leviticus in the Old Testament will soon show how many dozens of commandments start with the words "You shall" or "You shall not").

When every commandment of the law had been delivered by Moses to the people, he confirmed the covenant God had made with them in these words from the Old Testament:

And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient". And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" *Exodus 24.4-8*

It is important to note that the covenant was sealed by the shedding of blood, and we shall explain why when coming to the new covenant.

Immediately after this God called Moses to come up the mountain to receive the two tablets of stone with the law and commandments on them (Exodus 24.12). When he came down from the mountain forty days later, however, he found the whole nation worshipping an idol, a golden calf the Israelites had made, and discovered that they had already broken virtually all the laws God had given them in one awful act of rebellion against him. Moses shattered the two tablets of stone on the ground, painfully conscious that the covenant had been decidedly broken. He ordered a slaughter of the chief perpetrators and three thousand died in a single day (Exodus 32.28).

Throughout their history the Israelites continued to break the covenant. They turned to idols, they forsook the Lord, they broke his commandments, and they killed the prophets. The responsibility laid upon them to maintain the covenant proved to be too much for human nature. Many grew cold toward God. Any other nation would have done the same. The covenant became a burden which, as one of Jesus' disciples later was to declare, "neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15.10).

Centuries later, when the Israelite nation had so extensively transgressed God's laws that he removed them out of their land and took them into Assyria, Babylon and other countries to the east of Israel, God nevertheless declared in mercy that he would make a new covenant and spoke through one of the contemporary prophets, saying:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more".  
*Jeremiah 31.31-34*

He promised that the new covenant would not be like the old covenant, because his people could not keep it. Instead, this time, God undertook, in his grace and mercy, to *hold himself responsible* for its fulfillment. Five times he began a promise with the words "I will". It was not so with the old covenant - "You shall, you shall not" - now it was to be "I will". God declared that he himself would ensure that the covenant would be fulfilled and would take the responsibility for it. Formerly the law had been written on tablets of stone, now it was to be written on the hearts of his people, "Written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts (2 Corinthians 3.3). Through another contemporary prophet he made further promises regarding the new covenant:

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances". *Ezekiel 36.26-27*

The theme was maintained - I will, I will". God undertook to ensure that his people would keep his laws and his covenant. Up to six centuries passed before the covenant came into effect. On the last night that Jesus was with his disciples

he sat at table with them and as they were eating supper he began to speak to them.

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me". And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood". *Luke 22.19-20*

As he divided the cup among them he told them it was a symbol of his blood which would be shed on the cross the next day as he died for their sins and specifically spoke of it as the blood of the new covenant. Earlier we saw how Moses enacted the old covenant and sealed it with blood. Now Jesus said that the shedding of his own blood would seal the new covenant God had promised earlier through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, having risen from the dead, the Holy Spirit came down and entered the hearts of his disciples (Acts 2.1-4) and they became new men. They discovered power to keep God's laws and also knew they had been forgiven of their sins.

God's promise had been fulfilled. The old covenant made with Moses had been put aside and the new covenant, made through Jesus, had come into being for the salvation of all who believe in him. A "better hope" had been introduced "through which we draw near to God" (Hebrews 7.19). God had, by taking the responsibility upon himself, enacted a better covenant to ensure the salvation of all his people.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. *Hebrews 8.6*

This is why we Christians call our scriptures the New Testament - because they outline the enactment and fulfilment of the new covenant. We call the former scriptures the Old Testament for the same reason, namely that they contain the record of the old covenant. That covenant, made through Moses, was eventually abolished and the new covenant, made through Jesus, was introduced in its place. For this reason alone we speak of the Old and New Testaments. In fact many copies of the New Testament begin with the words "The New Covenant, commonly called the New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".

The *change*, accordingly, was not in the scriptures but in the *covenant* contained in the Old Testament. No alteration, corruption or substitution of the Old Testament scriptures by the New Testament has ever taken place. All that has happened is that the old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant, a replacement which the Old Testament itself declared and anticipated in the passages we have been considering from the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

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