

EXEGESIS AND THE GOSPELS

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Change of covenants deals only with what people do. That is why (a) there is no change regarding the nature of things (ontological matters) or matters of history (events, including prophecy). (b) Civil and ceremonial observances fall out because national Israel (Moses) and the Old Testament priesthood (Aaron) have been replaced by the interpersonal church with its ministry and message. (c) There are few new ceremonial matters—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—that have come in with Christ. (d) Some modifications in the moral code come in with progressive revelation. Marriage expectancy shifts from polygamy and divorce-remarriage possibilities to permanent monogamy standard. (See the broad arrow diagram in “Old Testament Backgrounds and the Messianic Covenant.”)

In reading the gospels, we follow some guidelines for distinguishing between what of Jesus’ words applies to us and what applied only to his immediate hearers, who were still under the Mosaic Law (Matthew **23:2-3**). The issue is not what is true in what he said, but to whom the truth applies in what he said. Jesus’ ministry represented a transition period when he—as well as John the Baptist before him—was declaring that the kingdom of heaven was at hand but still future. Technically, he carried on his work during the Mosaic dispensation. Theoretically the Law was “nailed to the cross” at his death (Colossians **2:14**). Dispensationally the gospel began at Pentecost when the apostles could preach the gospel for the first time in its historical reality, that is, as an accomplished fact in the finished ministry of Christ. Politically the Mosaic system ended at A.D. 70 at the fall of Jerusalem, when God allowed the Romans to bring the Old Testament system to an end. There was a forty-year overlap between the beginning of the church and the end of national Israel.

The following guidelines distinguish between what does and does not apply to Christians in the teaching of Christ. It applies to us

- (1) when Jesus is describing the nature of the kingdom he came to establish;
- (2) when Jesus is describing an item implemented in Acts and taught in the epistles;
- (3) when Jesus is contrasting his teaching with Old Testament expectancies.

Conversely, it does not apply to us if it is teaching material associated with matters elsewhere known to be distinctive to the Mosaic covenant and abrogated with the coming of the New Covenant, matters associated with national Israel (civil, Moses) and the priesthood system (ceremonial, Aaron). Since we know that national Israel has been removed, we say civil matters in the Old Testament as well as in the gospels do not apply to non-Jews and non-Jewish

Christians. Since we know that the Aaronic priesthood has been changed (Psalm **110:4** + Hebrews **7-10**), we say ceremonial matters (for the priesthood and the temple) do not apply beyond the national-Israel dispensation. Examples in these areas include (a) tithing commandments (Matthew **23:23-24**), (b) legitimacy of Jewish rulership (Matthew **23:2**), (c) offerings on the altar, (d) the Israelite festival cycle (Colossians **2:16-19**).

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