

Old Testament vs. New Testament



"The distinction between the Old and New Testaments arose in a historical context where, under Roman rule, the existing religious leaders colluded with the empire and thereby burdened the great majority of the people. In reaction, a new set of teachings—'good news' that naturally emerged in opposition—developed into the Gospels, i.e., the New Testament. In John 8:42–45 Jesus says: 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God and am here. I did not come of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to listen to my word. You have the devil (Yahweh) as your father, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning; he has never stood on the side of truth, because there is no truth in him. He speaks lies as a matter of nature, for he (Yahweh) is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.' Some Christians will refuse to believe that 'the devil' here points to Yahweh; yet, seeing Jesus' consistently oppositional stance toward the Old Testament throughout the Gospels, it is reasonable to understand 'the devil' as Yahweh." 1)

Most Christians will deny that the devil Jesus mentions refers to Yahweh. However, Jesus takes a stance opposed to the Old Testament (especially the Pentateuch, i.e., the Law of Moses), and in the dialogue above he clearly distinguishes "your father

(Yahweh)" from "my Father (God)," denouncing Yahweh as the devil. In antiquity, Jews would call no being "father" except the Absolute—God. Thus when Jesus says "your father," he is referring to Yahweh, the deity of the Pentateuch in whom the Jews believed. Because Jesus does not use the plural (i.e., "your fathers"), the claim that "your father" means the priests is mistaken. One even wonders whether, to distort and conceal the truth Jesus so plainly states, the Catholic Church instructed the faithful to call priests "Father."

The New Testament, by proclaiming Jesus as savior, voiced the common people's cry for liberation from the entrenched interests that had built their power on the Old Testament. It sought to deliver a new gospel concerning order and norm ("the kingdom of God has drawn near"). In this sense, the New Testament was a kind of religious revolution—resisting the selfishness and monopoly of privilege held by the already established ruling bloc, including the priesthood, and aiming to reclaim inalienable rights.



Depiction of the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew's Church, Copenhagen

In the days when Jesus was born and raised, Judaism was riven by factional conflict over priestly legitimacy. Social demand for new doctrine, suited to changing times,

gave rise to “new good news” that stood in contrast to the Old Testament. In particular, during the Hasmonean kingdom, when a Jew who did not meet Moses’ criteria for the priesthood seized the priestly office, those of the legitimate priestly line protested, and a petty struggle over the office ensued—disillusioning many.

People came to demand a gospel distinctly different from the Old Testament. To meet this need, society matured toward a setting in which early Christianity could form: Jesus was elevated to the status of “Son of God,” placed above the priesthood, and presented as the bearer of God’s word.

“A ritualistic Law that prized form and outward appearance was changed into a pure and spiritual mode of worship, equally applicable to every climate and every condition of humankind; and the rites once sealed in blood were replaced by more harmless ablutions of water. Promises of divine favor—once restricted in part to the descendants of Abraham—were offered alike to freemen and slaves, to Greeks and barbarians, and to Jew and Gentile.” 2)

When Were the Gospels Written?

“The Gospel of Mark (broadly dated between AD 50 and 150, more likely 65–75) was written first; Matthew and Luke are generally placed around AD 85–90.” 3) John’s Gospel appears to have been written later. Some hold that Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, was composed about forty years after Jesus’ death; that Matthew was written by a Jewish author c. AD 90–100; and that Luke–Acts were both written c. AD 100–120 by a single non-Jewish author.

The results of three centuries of concentrated study of the Gospels by German Protestant scholars overturned fundamentalist assumptions about Jesus. After exacting investigation, they concluded that John’s Gospel was written so late it cannot be an eyewitness account. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus teaches by

means of apt parables; but in John, he delivers long, direct, and eloquent discourses in polished Greek—hardly what one would expect from the son of a Jewish carpenter. John also records events entirely different from the Synoptics.

“Prominent scholars, including the German philologist Karl Lachmann, showed that despite their differences, Matthew, Mark, and Luke share many common elements. This similarity arises because Matthew and Luke used the briefest and earliest Gospel—Mark—as a source. If John was written very late, and if Matthew and Luke were composed on the basis of Mark, then only Mark could possibly be an eyewitness account. Scholars believe Mark was written sometime between AD 70 and the early second century. If we take the earliest date, Mark could be an eyewitness. Curiously, however, Mark never says he knew Jesus.” 4)

Sources

1. **Spirit and Spirit** (영과 영), Byung Youn Kim, Dures Management Research Institute Co., Ltd., 2010: 359–360.
2. Edward Gibbon, **On Christianity** (1737–1794), Prometheus Books, 1991: 6–7.
3. Earl Doherty, **The Jesus Puzzle**, Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999: 193 & 196.
4. Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, **The Jesus Mysteries**, Three Rivers Press, 1999: 146.