

## **IS THE OLD TESTAMENT ABOLISHED?**

THE view of some people that the Old Testament of the Bible has been done away with in the Christian Era is, to put it mildly, a misconception. Indeed, the advent of Jesus Christ brought about a modification of the Mosaic Law, yet, the change was not calculated to rule out the use of the Old Testament by Christians.

The Old Testament (otherwise known as the Hebrew Scriptures) is the first of the two great divisions of the Holy Bible containing God's covenants with man. It is made up of 39 books which are counted from Genesis to Malachi. The contents of the Old Testament include the accounts of the creation, the fall of man and the manifestation of God's justice, the Deluge, the Abrahamic promise, the laws of Moses to the nation of Israel, other typical incidents of far-reaching spiritual significance, the psalms, proverbs and prophecies.

Among those who profess to be Christians there are some who in their teachings discard the Old Testament and give their followers to understand that Christians have nothing to do with it in that it was intended to serve the natural Jews alone. For this reason, many people frown upon any reference to texts in the Old Testament.

In a Bible Correspondence Course by the "Church of Christ" it is stated: "The Old Testament was God's law to the Jew... It is most important for us to realize that God's will for us is found in the New Testament-not in the Old.

"Here are three reasons why we cannot today go to the Old Testament to find what God requires of us: (1) The Old Testament was God's law to the Jew. You were never under it. The ten commandments were given to the Jew only -never to the Gentiles (Read Exodus, chapters 19 and 20.) You cannot break the ten commandments any more than you can break the law of China. You are not and never were under them. (2) The Old Testament never contained a plan of salvation, not even for the Jew. At best, all he could do with his sacrifices was to postpone the punishment for his sins for a year. His sacrifices could not take away sin. (3) You are not under the Old Testament because Jesus took the law of Moses out of the way at his death. 'He taketh away the old (covenant) that he might establish the new (covenant) by the which will we are sanctified'. (Hebrews 10: 10)"

The foregoing quotes, no doubt, represent the argument of those who hold the view that the Old Testament is out of date.

### **Law and Prophets**

In the first place it is very wrong to equate the Old Testament with the Ten Commandments contained in the twentieth chapter of the book of Exodus. As we indicated earlier in this sermon, the Old Testament contains much more than just "God's law to the Jew". Jesus Christ referred to the Old Testament as "the law and the prophets" during his ministry on earth. (Matthew 5: 17; 11: 13; Luke 16: 16) When Jesus was addressing his disciples after his resurrection, he declared: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me." The account goes on, "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." – Luke 24: 44,45.

It is very misleading, therefore, to give the impression that the Ten Commandments are the only fundamentals conveyed in the Old Testament! The Scriptures which Christ opened the minds of his disciples to understand were not only the Ten Commandments. They included the prophets and the psalms as well.

The Old Testament is so linked with the New in such a flow of divine thoughts, symbolisms and rules that no true Christian can dispense with a thorough understanding of its significance. Christians are bound to believe the Old Testament but their belief must be backed with a good understanding of the modification of the law through the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. – John 1: 17.

St. Paul confessed before Governor Felix that he believed the Old Testament which he referred to as “the law and the prophets”. He said: “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they (the Jews who accused him) call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.” – Acts 24: 14.

### **Eternal Life**

The second point that “the Old Testament never contained a plan of salvation, not even for the Jews”, is a clear manifestation of lack of spiritual understanding. It is another way of saying that all those who lived before Christ would not be saved. The Bible does not support this view. In Hebrews chapter 11, there is a catalogue of some of the ancient faithful who had received God’s approval to inherit His everlasting perfect Kingdom.

As far back as the days of Abraham the Almighty God disclosed His purpose of the salvation of mankind. To Abraham He said: “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12: 3; 22: 18) It was in order to accomplish this magnificent purpose of blessing mankind-not only the believing Jews but the converted Gentiles also – with life, peace and happiness everlastingly that God sent Jesus Christ to the world. Concerning this St. Paul stated: “And Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, declared the Gospel to Abraham beforehand: ‘In you all nations shall find blessing.’ Thus it is the men of faith who share the blessing with faithful Abraham.” – Galatians 3: 8, 9. (New English Bible)

Space will fail us to expatiate on the significance of the prophecy of Moses concerning Jesus Christ whom he warned the Jews to obey. (Deuteronomy 18: 15; Acts 3: 23) What about Job’s declaration? “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” (Job. 19: 25-27) Could a man who had no knowledge of “God’s plan of salvation” speak in such a vein that reflected true confidence and faith in the resurrection of the dead with- out which the faith of Christians is vain?

A question-and-answer conversation between a lawyer and Jesus Christ in his days on earth, throws a ray of light on this matter. The lawyer put this test question to him: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus countered him with questions: “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” The law expert then answered: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” (The lawyer quoted from Deuteronomy 6: 5 and Leviticus. 19:

18.) And Jesus told him: "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." – Luke 10: 25- 28.

On another occasion when a certain ruler asked Jesus Christ as to what he should do in order to inherit eternal life, he (Jesus) told him: "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother." (Luke 18: 18-20) The point is that, if the laws were not necessary for salvation why did Christ refer to them? Mark you, the question was about salvation or eternal life. Will the anti-Old Testament preachers say that the book of Luke is in the Old Testament? Must Christians steal, commit adultery or bear false witness against people because the laws were for the Jews only?

St. Paul stated firmly that the "commandment was ordained to life" and added, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good". It is sin in men that makes them unable to keep the perfect laws of God. (Romans 7: 7-17) St. Paul believed the writings of Moses and quoted him as saying, "That the man which doeth those things (of the law) shall live by them." (Romans 10: 5; see also Leviticus 18: 5; Nehemiah 9: 29; Galatians 3: 12).

The usefulness of the Old Testament to Christians is further portrayed in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans. He said: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for OUR learning, that WE (Christians) through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15: 4.) Can any Christian of today claim to be a better authority than St. Paul, the vastly talented apostle? He also said: "For we are saved by hope..." (Romans 8: 24, 25) This is the hope which we have through "the comfort of the scriptures" about which the apostle was referring to the Old Testament.

With regard to the third point that the law of Moses was taken out of the way at the death of Jesus Christ we agree; but only to the extent of the understanding of what in effect was taken out of the way or the proper spiritual understanding of what that implies. St. Paul stated without ambiguity that there was a change of the law consequent upon the change of the priesthood from the Aaronic system to the priesthood after the order of Melchizedec. It is this change that enabled Jesus Christ who sprang from the tribe of Judah to become a priest. But under the Law of Moses only the sons of Aaron from the tribe of Levi were qualified for the priesthood. – Read Hebrews 7: 11-19.

We must point out that this change of the priesthood and the law cannot be taken to mean the abolition of the Old Testament. The laws cancelled were those that were a shadow of things to come, many of which Christ had fulfilled, and those laws which stood against our nature such as relating to meat, drink, holyday, new moon and sabbath days.- Colossians 2: 14-17; Hebrews 10: 1-10.

It must be understood that the Ten Commandments were not the only laws of Moses; there were several others. Many of these laws are still effective up till now save that they are underlined by the grace of Christ through faith which permits of observing the spirit rather than the letters of the law. The apostles commanded the Christians not to eat blood or things strangled according to Acts 15: 28, 29. But these were some of the Old Testament laws though not among the Ten Commandments.

## **Amendment**

The opinion that the Old Testament is condemned has no basis in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ himself said: "Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened. If any man therefore sets aside even the least of the Law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, he will have the lowest place in the kingdom of Heaven, whereas anyone who keeps the Law and teaches others so will stand high in the kingdom of Heaven." – Matthew 5: 17-19. (New English Bible).

Even in modifying the laws Christ increased the degree of their strength. Some of the amendments of the Law by Christ are written in Matthew 5: 21-48. Here are few instances. He said to his disciples: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment..." (Matthew 5: 21, 22) By this amendment, it is not only when you commit murder that you become guilty but as soon as you nurse anger against your neighbour without cause you are in danger of judgment.

Again, Jesus said: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matthew 5: 27, 28) In fact, some of the amendments are additions which place the old laws on a firmer footing in the Christian Era.

There are numerous Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. Both Jesus Christ and his early apostles made references to texts in the Old Testament to support their statements. When Satan tempted Jesus Christ to get food by changing stones into bread so as to prove that he was the Son of God, it was the Old Testament Christ quoted to counter the devil. For Jesus said: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4: 3, 4) To be precise, Christ quoted Deuteronomy 8: 3. On that occasion, the devil also cited the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) which he twisted, as false prophets do, to suit his purpose, but Jesus Christ silenced him with genuine authorities quoted from the same Old Testament. (Matthew 4: 5-11).

St. Peter also quoted the Psalms of David (Psalm 41: 9; 69: 25; 109: 8) when he was addressing the disciples about Judas Iscariot, the traitor, whose office another was to take. -Acts 1: 15-20.

In most of St. Paul's epistles he made references to the Hebrew Scriptures. Exhorting the Roman Christians, he said: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." (Romans 12: 19) The apostle cited from Deuteronomy 32: 35. And in Romans 14: 11, he further cited from Isaiah 45: 23.

Instances of references made by Jesus Christ and the apostles to Old Testament texts are numerous and all cannot be cited here. But from the few of them shown in the foregoing it

will be preposterous for anyone to insist still that the Old Testament is of no use to Christians.

In first Corinthians chapter 10, St. Paul outlined some of the experiences and doings of the children of Israel. He stated that God was not well pleased with many of them because of their iniquities and they were overthrown in the wilderness. He then added: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." – 1 Corinthians 10: 11.

If we the Christians now at the end of the world are to do away with the Old Testament. how can what is written in it be "for our admonition"? In other words, how can we understand the spiritual import of those incidents and learn lessons from them?

### **Law of Liberty**

Some people quarrel with the Old Testament because of their lack of understanding in regard to the change of the Mosaic Law. Christians are expected to live a holy life; this calls for the practice of righteousness by adhering to the demands of God's word or law of liberty which purifies the worshipper who sincerely acknowledges and puts away his sins. – Acts 10: 34,35; Matthew 5: 20; 6: 33; James. 1:25; 2:12.

We do not by this ignore the fact that it is by God's grace through faith that Christians will be saved. Asked St. Paul: "Do we then make void the law through faith?" He himself answered: "God forbid: yea, we establish the law." – Romans 3: 31.

If we know how to use the laws, we will never under-estimate their value. It was St. Paul who said "But we know that the law is good if a man use it lawfully." – 1 Timothy 1: 8.

The truth of the subject matter has been made plain. Anyone who believes in the New Testament must equally believe in the Old because the New testifies to the vital importance, reliability and indispensability of the Old Testament. It is both the Old and New that make up "all Scripture" which St. Paul says "is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17) And remember that Jesus Christ said he came not to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill and complete their works. – Matthew 5: 17-19.