

# Why Do We Need Two Testaments?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] May I, in the season of Advent, remind us of the collect for the second Sunday, which happens to be today. Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

And just a brief introductory prayer. We ask, our Father, that you would guide our thoughts this morning.

We ask that all error may be expunged, and any light that you may provide will remain with us and influence our lives from this day onwards.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Now the topic today is the Bible, the whole of it. So we have, what, 45 minutes? But the disturbing thing, for those of you who are very close to the front, will see that on this board there's an empty sheet that says possible answers.

[ 1 : 5 2 ] So I'm going to depend on you, as a learner, advising me on what the answers to this particular question that I have in mind might be.

As you all know, I am not a theologian, and I may well be stepping on some toes, even corns. But I rely upon you to be helpful. Now the first point I wish to make is that when I've shown you the exciting prospect, which you can't read at the back, but nevertheless, I've tried to initially talk about the nature of the problem as I perceive it.

It may not be a problem for you, and so I prepare you for the possible disappointment that I'm talking about a problem that you really are not interested in. But I shall try to express it as I see it as a problem.

Then there's the opportunity for possible answers to this problem before I've said anything profound, or otherwise. close look at one possible explanation suggested by the speaker.

[ 3 : 1 1 ] That is to say, I have a prejudice, and I'd like to explore that with you, as to how I perceive this problem. Then there will be some examples of the word from the Old Testament and from the New Testament.

One with respect to the Old Testament's teaching about minerals, vegetables, and animals. Some of you will remember a famous program on the BBC called Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral, which is a quiz program.

It meant to imply everything that is around us except for people. So, there's a an allusion here to that emphasis. Particularly starting with Genesis chapter 9, which you all know as the Noahic Covenant.

And then, second part, looking at teaching about man. Finally, practical implications. So, I can just leave that on the screen for the moment, for those of you who can see it.

And I preface these remarks with the quotation from Hebrews. The letter to the Hebrews seems to me to carry the clue for the interpretation of both Testaments.

[ 4 : 3 6 ] You will remember, now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it, the people of old, that's not just us, people of old, received their commendation.

By faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Hebrews is a clue to so much in the sense that it links the Old Testament and the New Testament so profoundly. It's my sense that there are two issues around the matter of the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament.

Many of you may know of many other issues, but these are two that are common. Firstly, the consistency between the Old Testament and the New Testament. And secondly, the distinctive

emphases of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

I personally have no problem with the question of consistency of Old Testament and New Testament. From the time when I was knee-high to a grasshopper, I was taught the ditty, 66 books in God's Holy Word telling the story of Jesus the Lord.

[ 6 : 04 ] That particular ditty then is a prelude to a recitation of all 66 books and it's the only way that I have ever been able to remember the order of the books.

And whenever there is an announcement in church that we have to turn to page 563, it seems to me shocking that people have to be told which page that particular book is on.

Oh, that's an aside. The issue of consistency has been a considerable problem in certain circumstances. Some of you of more mature years will remember the name of Jode.

Professor Jode, I see that Dr. Packer is a close friend of his, spent much of his time in the 1930s pointing out the inconsistencies in the Bible.

He totaled up to about 2,000 of these inconsistencies and then God caught up with him and he was converted. And it seems to me to be a very interesting parable.

[ 7 : 14 ] One can look for all kinds of trivial inconsistencies and become particularly concerned and aptight about them but when you come to look at the total picture the consistency seems to me to be absolute.

So it's not a question I want to even broach with this group. I assume that we're absolutely on triple track with this position. If not, please see Dr. Packer afterwards.

However, it seems to me that the problem which I'd like to have some help with is the matter of the distinctive emphases of the two testaments. And it seems to me that whilst the New Testament with its history of redemption the salvation story is full and adequate in all respects.

The nature of our condition as sinful humanity the provision that has been made for sinful humanity and the confidence that we have in the life death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are all plain to see and dominate the New Testament.

What is it however that dominates the Old Testament? Well we've said it's consistent and I do believe it's consistent but there does seem to me to be a distinctly different set of emphases some of which I think we might explore.

[ 9 : 00 ] So if I were to ask this group please don't all speak at once what is your sense of the dominant emphasis of the Old Testament?

Could I have a few volunteers? God's rescue plan?

God's rescue plan?

Okay. Okay. Okay.

Anything else? Genealogy. Genealogy. Yeah. Well that's a good one. How should God's people live?

[ 10 : 37 ] How should God's people live? I think we have to restrain the enthusiasm I think we have to restrain the enthusiasm of the congregation.

Man's propensity for sin and his inability to get out of that mode. Well, this is a very helpful list.

It doesn't correspond to the one that I was thinking about. But all of it seems to be very good. So. I'll add to a very simple idea, a basic idea.

The Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible, they would say, is really the history of the Hebrew people, which in today's term, we can think of not as the people who live in Israel today, but the people who live in the Negev, or dead, or this is the history of the Bedouin era, as we would call them today.

May I abbreviate that to just history? Really? Well, not actually, because... Well, I've done so. We're talking about a very different kind of people.

[ 12 : 32 ] No, no, there are lots of subdivisions at this point, I'm sure. It just seems to be that we can all agree that the profound nature of the history of the Old Testament is something highly significant.

So let me just say that all those are good things, but if I were to say that we had only the New Testament available, how much of this would we be unaware of?

The foretelling is well confirmed. Matthew starts off the Gospels with his confirmation of the foretelling. God's faithfulness is completely adequately discussed in the epistle to the Romans and elsewhere.

God's rescue plan in Romans also is very clear. The question of genealogy are important, which, of course, is the first chapter of Matthew, linking the genealogy of Jesus to both the Jewish and the

Gentile lines.

How should God's people live? Clearly this is covered in the New Testament. Man's sinfulness is very prominently discussed. History, that in a sense is the most substantive difference of emphasis as we look at it.

[14:10] I'm going to accept all this as being valid and helpful, but want to explore what I think is an important matter that has been neglected.

And again, you may not agree, but I will pursue it anyway, and you can tell me what's wrong with it after. And the real thrust of this presentation is to take a look at some of the places in the Scriptures, and I apologize for the quality of this overhead, but the BBC budget for emeritus professors is very neagant, and it seems we're left with a lot of overheads that get smudged.

But I'm sure that someone here could have done a better job. However, looking at my thought for this morning is that the uniqueness of the Old Testament is the way in which God's creative activity is expressed, both in terms of the history and the Psalter, and in terms of the way in which folks in the Old Testament reveled in the beauty and magnificence of God's creation.

But it was in terms of the Noahic covenant. This is chapter 9 of Genesis.

And God said, This is a sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations. I have set my bow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

[16:16] When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

God said to Noah, This is a sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth. As you will know, there's a series of covenants that God signed with his people various times in the Old Testament.

But this one is kind of unique in terms of its focus on all living creatures. And it is an ecologically profound covenant in which God's concern over his own creation and his involvement in it is expressed in a very direct way.

Subsequent covenants, as you know, narrow down into the focus upon the people of God in the Old Testament and gradually become less focused on the ecology or the animals, vegetables and minerals associated with the ecology.

[17:55] But nevertheless, starting off, Garius apparently God's first attempt. Now, some suggest that the Adamic covenant is the first attempt, but it seems to me that this is really the first of the series of covenants.

in which God expresses his real interest in and commitment to his own creation. This theme, of course, is followed up in many ways in the Pentateuch, book.

But most spectacularly, it seems to me, in Leviticus, where we have a little less smuggy, this statement.

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord.

For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits. But in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land.

[19:23] A Sabbath to the Lord. You shall not sow your field or prune your vine or the vineyard. You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest or gather the grapes of your undressed vine.

It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself, and for your male and female slaves, and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, and for your cattle, and for the wild animals that are in your land.

All its yield shall be for food. Not only do we have the Sabbath as the day on which God rested after his work of creation, celebrated, noted that the work of creation was good, but here we have a Sabbath year which is to take care of the land, stewardship of the land is prominent, and of course there is the Sabbath of the 50th year, which is the year of Jubilee.

That represents the way in which the children of Israel were expected to celebrate the way in which the land had brought forth its prosperity and maintained the focus of the people on God's creation.

So I'm trying to make the case here that there is something quite unique in the Old Testament. I'm not arguing for inconsistency, I'm totally committed to consistency, but I am arguing that there is something quite different in the Old Testament which focuses on the importance, majesty, magnificence, beauty, and wonder of God's creation.

[ 21 : 25 ] And to reinforce that, we could think of umpteen examples between us here, but we don't have time to go into something, but Psalm 8 is another remarkable reinforcement of this animal, vegetable, mineral theme, which I think sounds a little bit prosaic, but actually to me it's fundamental.

It's a Psalm of David. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

the focus upon the heavens, the earth, all that is contained within God's creation, the magnificence, the sense of God's overwhelming power, presence, and care for us as a creation.

[ 23 : 10 ] It seems to me to be somewhat unique. Some of you will attack me on this and say, well, you know, Paul gets quite rhapsodical about the nature of God's creation in several spots.

There is indeed a very clear emphasis in Jesus' own ministry of the importance of the flowers, the birds, the fields around him.

And yet, it seems to me there is a significant difference in terms of the kind of, I think the word is, reveling in the glory of God's creation, which is present in my, at least in my sense, of the Old Testament.

The second aspect is the creation of man. And here we have a parallel set of references starting with this reference from the second chapter of Genesis.

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature.

[ 24 : 36 ] And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he put the man whom he had formed and out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's kind of a sobering last verse as we are reminded of what was about to happen.

But we focus here upon the creative work of God in infusing that organic being with his spirit.

The fact remains seems to me that when you find a watch in a field that this is still clear evidence of the presence of a watchmaker.

Seems to be the whole discussion about evolutionary randomness has sidetracked us from the point that God has intervened in creation of a very special kind of being which has no compromise with any of the technical scientific details on evolution that has a great deal to do with the purposiveness of God and his creation of man.

[ 26 : 16 ] So I think that for the last 150 years we've spent a lot of wasted time on this side-tracking of evolutionary theory important as it is but falsely stated to be the result of random processes and that seems to me quite a simple way in which we can redress the balance by denying such processes.

Anyway that's another story which you may wish to explore but let me get to the second example in respect of this is the second of the covenants that you're familiar with from the Old Testament God's covenant with Abraham there's of course another detail of covenant with Abraham all of which are consistent after these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision fear not Abraham I am your shield your reward shall be very great but Abraham said O Lord God what will you give me for I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus and Abraham said behold you have given me no offspring and a member of my household will be my heir and behold the word of the Lord came to him this man shall not be your heir your very own son shall be your heir and he brought him outside and said look toward heaven number the stars if you are able to number them then he said to him so shall your offspring be and he believed the

Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness it's a remarkable passage which of course is taken up again in Hebrews 11 in the discussion of the great men of faith in the Old Testament but here is in relation to the creation of man this is a reinforcement of the seriousness with which God takes his

created people the whole sequence of covenants that we read in the Old Testament in a sense is an evidence of the seriousness with which God takes his created beings and in a sense the story of the Old Testament is the series of evidences of the frustration if I could put it reverently frustration of God as he makes such gracious provision at a number of stages to try to desperately to get people to respond to his purposes and yet the immediate response of each of the covenants is the whole sequence of ways in which God was seriously addressing the importance to him of his created people so we can follow that theme through as we've been privileged to do in our Bible study this fall looking at different ways in which these covenants have been formulated and it's just an awful lot of helpful material for reflection then the third of these illustrations you see now why I read the collect for the second subject Sunday in Advent because all of these plus ten times more can be helpfully examined in the context of the distinctive emphasis in the Old Testament on our creation by God Psalm 139 is a well known illustration and I just take a few verses out of this I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made wonderful are your works my soul knows it very well my frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret intricately woven in the depths of the earth your eyes saw my unformed substance in your book were written every one of them the days that were formed for me when as yet there was none of them how precious to me are your thoughts

O God how vast is the sum of them this God's sense of the importance of his created people is a tremendous counterbalance to the dominant perspective on people in our positivistic reductionist society since the time of Copernicus and before we've been told we're increasingly small that's a correct way I believe increasingly big so tiny specs in the universe and now tiny specs in the multiverse is possibly products of evolution over billions of years were completely unimportant with respect to the formal reductionist perspective on human beings precisely the reverse is the [ 32 : 56 ] Old Testament emphasis and of course so it's the New Testament so I'm again not trying to make for inconsistencies here I'm just suggesting that there's a very strong difference in emphasis and the wonder of this is that God should be so concerned about us and should take such an interest not only in us as individuals but in our ecological context and it seems to be a lot of nonsense is written by some conservative Christians about tree huggers and the like I'm not a tree hugger and I can certainly be accused of being an environmentalist but it seems to me that those offhand comments about the lack of orthodoxy of those who take the creation seriously are unfortunate so I'm using my

I'm exploiting my privilege standing in front of you by saying that this seems to me to have been an unfortunate development whereas our whole perspective on the New Testament I don't think there'd be a shadow of disagreement in this room there's a great deal of controversy associated with our perspective on the Old Testament not about the importance of the Old Testament again because it's a consistent story that we have not about the kinds of emphasis and I thought it interesting that good as all these answers are there's not one of them that really addresses the point that seemed to me to be most important for us to think about now let me then move on to reflections on this so my suggestion for your consideration and I don't wish to be pontificating here I'm open to challenge and correction my suggestion is that we need two testaments on the ground that they contain two totally different but complementary aspects of God's activity in the world each testament contains overlapping material of course it does how else could we judge consistency but creation and redemption are two sides of the same coin they're clearly two sides and require separate treatment the prologue to John's gospel establishes the absolute importance both of creation and redemption because Jesus is both word and redeemer as I have mentioned the uniqueness of the new testament is widely understood agreed upon as the final word on redemption history any conservative

Christian commentary will confirm this and all born again Christians will affirm this to be true as a central part of their experience nothing more needs to be said to this group at this point about that fact the uniqueness of the old testament I'm suggesting is the way in which it rejoices and even revels in the detail of God's handiwork in creation creation both of man and all the other living constituents of his creation animal vegetable and mineral a thought from Kona Cunningham in his book the pious Darwin's pious idea is that creation initiates material processes of growth and change redemption enables spiritual growth and change change so this as a kind of pithy summary of the old testament the creation initiates material processes of growth and change and the new testament redemption enables spiritual growth and change change again don't over emphasize

these contrast the practical outcome is that the old testament demonstrates that faith in God's promises and the evidence of his involvement with his creation can lead to righteousness you might ask yourself at this point if you had been alive at the time of the exodus for example what would be your awareness what would be the level of awareness of God's activity in the world you had no direct revelation from the life and work of Christ but you did have the evidence of the promise of God through his covenant and you did have you were able to look around and see the glory of his creation and as Paul says people are without excuse on the basis of what [ 39 : 06 ] God has presented to us in his creation so the I understand that there is a technical theological discussion which I wouldn't wish to make too much comment about the fact that the faith that was exercised in the Old Testament was in lieu of and in anticipation of the redemption provided in Christ in the New Testament but it seems to me that that's a matter that others should take up it seems to me that the New Testament is primarily and distinctively about God the Father the creator of heaven and earth and all living things the New Testament is primarily about God the Son the redeemer of fallen men and women we need both emphases even though we know that the

Trinity is present in both activities both of creating and of redeeming so this is the the case that I'm presenting and the implications of the discussion I suggest are as follows the creation history which involves looking seriously at the created universe should be taken seriously and be the source of much joy and celebration by Christians there's nothing to be afraid of in reveling in God's works and thanking him for this and I'm not suggesting please don't misunderstand me I'm not suggesting that that we don't thank God it's a matter of emphasis the extent to which we really take advantage of God's provision in this respect seems to me that we need to recover the sense of God's imminence in creation and here

I come to fairly controversial observation that comparing if we compare our neoliberal consumer society with the innate respect for land displayed by our First Nations people there is a remarkable contrast I know we're not a Christian society we have gone off the rails but it's interesting that the First Nations people in a general sense have got this great respect for land and this sense of the importance of stewardship of the land I refer you again and I've done this before to the Arosha group and their environmental stewardship there is a book called Under the Bright Wings which is a history of the first nine years of Arosha which you should all read it's written by a man called Peter Farris written in 1993 and in order to make it even more digestible John Stott approves of this book or did approve of this book and what it shows is the emphasis that they have developed on the five C's of stewardship of God's creation first one is Christian second one is conservation not conservative third one is community fourth one is cross cultural and the fifth one is cooperation in the concern to work for environmental stewardship and a higher priority amongst Christians to encourage the biblical faith in the living God who made the world loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society as a final reference point I would encourage you to look sometime at Dennis Alexander's book rebuilding the matrix in which he talks about the way in which the creation story has taken a lower priority in our contemporary Christian society Christian community he says at one point there are three essential understandings of God which are explicit in the Old [ 44 : 47 ] Testament God's transcendence God's imminence and God's personal involvement with his creation Dennis Alexander this is a book written in 2001 he's written a lot of books since then which are increasingly widely read but if you haven't read this one it forms the sort of baseline of his thinking and rebuilding the matrix as it implies suggests that we've lost half of the matrix that the redemption part is in good shape but the creation part seems to have got neglected so you can see I'm really on a somewhat biased statement here because it's something that is so deeply concerning me having spent so many years of my life researching and studying

God's creation and the gap between those who are pursuing deeper truths in creation deeper sense of God's provision for us and the lack of instruction or really lack of conversation in our everyday Christian interactions so sisters and brothers I did mean what I said when I prayed that error might be eradicated from what I'm saying and my bias obviously coming through but I just think that these words from the Old Testament do convey a very different sense of the intimate relationship between God and his creation and not in any way reducing our sense of the critical nature of the redemption story which are essentially entirely consistent in their analysis so that's my presentation for you please feel free to hook me right and I pray to feel the emphasis has gone wrong thank you