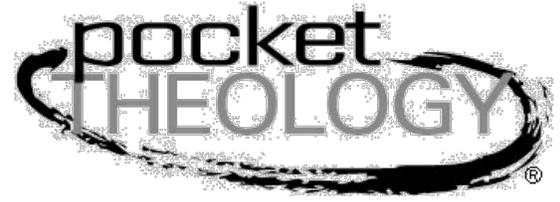


Week 3 - The Two Testaments



The Context of the Bible

“What’s in it for me?” we ask when considering a job, a class, a marriage. We approach the Bible in the same way. We invest time in it, expecting to get something concrete and measurable out of it. Then we open the Bible up one day and find a dry list of begets. And we ask, “Huh?”

Yes, God reveals Himself to us in His Word. And yes, the Bible was written to specific audiences at specific points in history. Understanding contexts helps us grasp and apply the Word. A genealogical table, for example, mattered to the Jewish readers targeted by the gospel of Matthew. Matthew 1 assured them that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah, as He came from the people of Israel, from the tribe of Judah, and from the line of kingship. Understanding the audience and time period helps us understand why something was included in the Word.

God speaks through specific circumstances in the Bible to tell us, today, about Himself and His ways.

The Old Testament

Look at your Bible’s table of contents. Note that the Old Testament consists of 39 books. It was originally written in Hebrew, over a thousand-year period beginning at or before the 12th century B.C.

Christians and Jews honor the Old Testament as inspired by God. These books are included in the Hebrew “Tanakh,” which synagogues use today as authoritative Scripture. These 39 books can be grouped into subsections, each with its own style and purpose.

The Law (also called Books of Moses, or Torah): Genesis through Deuteronomy

The first five books of the Bible contain: the account of creation and the early history of man; the history of the people of Israel, from the founder, Abraham, through his great-grandson Joseph; and the laws of God for mankind in general and the people of Israel in particular.

The History Books: Joshua through Esther

These twelve books contain a history of God’s people, Israel.

Poetry and Wisdom: Job through Song of Solomon

These five books contain practical instruction for attaining godly wisdom. They are beautiful literature, often poetic, expressing how we relate to God and to one another.

Prophets: Major (five books, Isaiah through Daniel) and Minor (twelve books, Hosea through Malachi)

These seventeen books contain direct messages from God's special messengers, the prophets. (The Major Prophets wrote longer books than the Minor Prophets.)

The New Testament

The New Testament contains twenty-seven (27) books, written throughout first century A.D. It was written in Koine (or "Common") Greek, the language used throughout the Roman world at that time. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament has natural groupings of its books.

History: Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and Acts (also known as Acts of the Apostles)

Written between 60 and 100 A.D. The Gospels (from the Old English meaning "good news" or "good word") recount the life story of Jesus as He walked the earth. Acts describes the spread of the gospel in the first century and the development of the church and Christian doctrine.

Epistles (or Letters): Romans through Jude

Written between 48 and 60 A.D. These twenty-one letters, written primarily by the apostles Paul, Peter and John, addressed the needs and concerns of the early churches springing up throughout the Roman world. The letters also expound on doctrinal and practical issues.

Apocalypse (or Revelation): Book of Revelation

This book is an account of the revelation given to the apostle John when he was exiled for his faith on the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean. The revelation contains encouragement and warnings for specific first-century churches, many of whom were experiencing severe persecution. It also contains images of the battle between good and evil, the triumph of the saints, and the glory of God.

The Continuity of the Testaments

The Bible's 66 books were written over thirteen centuries. They were not dictated from a cloud. Rather, God sovereignly used men to record inspired thoughts at different points and in different situations, and even with different styles of writing. However, the consistent communication of God's grace and His love for His creation throughout both Testaments attest to the unity of God's Word and purposes throughout history.

The entire Bible describes how God reaches out to His covenant people. This governing motif defines the Bible as a book (Latin, "biblia," means "The Book"), rather than a collection of books. Scholar F.F. Bruce wrote, "The central message of the Bible is God's covenant with men

... the mediator of the covenant, the basis of the covenant, and the covenant people. God Himself is the Savior of the people” (The Origin of the Bible, F.F. Bruce, p. 11).

The Old and New Testaments are joined in Spirit, message, and meaning. In the Old Testament Christ is concealed; in the New Testament He is revealed.

The Bible is unique because it is the only self-revelation of God which can lead any open-minded and open-hearted person to a vital relationship with Him. We do well to devour the Bible and to live according to it.

Review:

1. Why is it important to understand the context of the bible?
2. Is the Old Testament inspired by God? Is it outdated?”
3. Explain why there is continuity of the Old and New Testaments.