

### **Various Methods of Interpreting the Old Testament and the New Testament** Covenant Theology, Dispensationalism, and New Covenant Theology (NCT)

The question of the relation of the Old and New Testaments is complex because it involves questions of *hermeneutics* (e.g. "the interpretation of texts"), *eschatology* (e.g. "one's view of the end times"), and *systematic theology* (e.g. "a systemized view of God and His purposes"). Every person who interprets the Scriptures has a *bias of interpretation*. Good teachers will let you know their bias up front.

Here's mine: *The entire Bible, including both covenants, center on Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. (Read Luke 24:27)*. There are at least three other ways to view the relationship between the Covenants.

I hold to what is called New Covenant Theology (NCT), which sees Jesus Christ as the center of both testaments. The Old Covenant with Israel (the Law) has faded away and has been "abolished" because Jesus fulfilled it, but the New Covenant (eternal covenant) is through faith in Christ, for both Jews and Gentiles. There are some religious denominations who interpret the Scriptures differently:

#### **I. Covenant Theology** (Calvinistic Presbyterians, Lutherans, and others)

It is called "covenant" theology, *not* because of an emphasis on the Biblical/historical covenants as such, but on certain *theological* covenants – the covenant of redemption (between the Trinity), the covenant of works (between God and Adam), and the covenant of grace (everything since Adam). If you belong to a "covenant theology" church, there is no difference between Israel's old worship and the church's worship of today. All of history is viewed as a progressive unfolding of the covenant of grace. Thus, the New Covenant, in Covenant Theology, is not understood as a new covenant actually; it is rather a new "administration" of the covenant of grace, as was the Mosaic Covenant before it. One covenant with various administrations is the essence of Covenant Theology on this point.

#### **II. Dispensational Theology** (Southern Baptists, Assembly of God, etc...)

It is called "dispensation" theology because it emphasizes the various differences in God's dealings with men. A "dispensation" has to do with the various administrations of Divine truth. With *new revelation* comes *new responsibilities* and/or privileges. This change results in a new "economy" or dispensation. With this emphasis on the various changes in God's program, Dispensationalism labors to show the differences between the old and new economies or dispensations. For the (traditional) dispensationalist, there are two separate peoples of God running through all history and even eternity. They say the law isn't relevant to the believer, and so Israel and the church never meet!

**New Covenant Theology** (NCT) is a middle ground between the two theologies above. The Old Testament is extremely important because of what it reveals about Jesus Christ and God's plan of redemption for sinners. The New Testament is important because of what it teaches us about God's grace in Christ Jesus.

From the Garden of Eden, to the Feasts of Israel, to the closing chapters of Malachi, the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of Jesus, revealing the Savior of the world. Let's illustrate with the Feasts of Israel.

**Passover** – the day Jesus died for our sins as "the Passover Lamb."

**Unleavened Bread** – Jesus put an end to sins by "sweeping them away" through His death.

**The Feast of Firstfruits** – the day Jesus rose from the grave (the Father's acceptance).

**Pentecost** – the giving of the Holy Spirit and life from within (not the external code).

**Trumpets** – warning of impending judgment (the destruction of the Temple).

**Atonement** – the day when the High Priest went behind the curtain to "atone for sins."

When Jesus died the curtain was rent. No more atonement was needed.

**Tabernacles** – Christ came as "the Water of Life" and "the Light of the World."