

The New Testament Light on the Old Testament Revelation of the After-Life

MONROE PARKER, PhD, DD

General Director of Baptist World Mission, Decatur, Alabama

Dr. A. H. Strong said, "The Old Testament is the life of a nation; the New Testament is the life of a man. The chief end of the nation was to produce the man; the chief end of the man was to save the world."¹

Consistency between Old and New Testaments

It is often said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament unfolded. How true it is that both the Old and New Testaments are inseparably linked together and form one Book.

The writer has normally endeavored to divorce his thinking from the New Testament at least for the most part while dealing with the Old Testament revelation of the doctrine of a future life. Now it is his purpose to view Old Testament passages in the light of the New Testament. In studying any Old Testament doctrine there is nothing written that will furnish a better commentary on the subject than the New Testament.

Jesus' teaching based on Old Testament. New light broke upon the minds of the people and illuminated the Old Testament when Jesus put to silence the Sadducees saying: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt 22:31,32).

Apostles followed same principle. Light from the New Testament opens to us the fuller significance of Old Testament promises in the preaching of the Apostles. In Peter's second sermon after the coming of the Holy Spirit he unfolds the hidden meaning of certain Old Testament passages. He addressed the men of Israel saying, "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus" (Acts 3:13). He told them that it was through ignorance on their part and on the part of their rulers that they rejected and crucified Jesus.

Jesus and the Apostles preached resurrection from Old Testament texts.

It was not simply ignorance of the identity of Jesus but of the deeper significance of their Scriptures. This is borne out by the fact that Peter went on to say, "But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled" (Acts 3:18).

After calling upon them to repent, Peter then announced that God shall send Jesus Christ who was preached to them; says Peter, "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21).

Following this statement he unfolded Old Testament prophecies including the promise that God would raise up a prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22) and fulfill the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 3:25).

The first persecution came as a result of this sermon, for as the apostles preached, including Peter, whose sermon was completely grounded in the Old Testament, the priests, and the captains, and the Sadducees came to them. Luke says that they were greatly grieved because the apostles "taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2).

The apostolic preaching was characterized by an appeal to the Old Testament. Paul also preached the resurrection of Jesus, saying, "And as concerning that He raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Because He saith also in another psalm, Thou wilt not give thy Holy One to see corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by Him everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:34-39).

Dr. Kerr says of this message of Paul's: "Here again we have the same repetition of the Gospel facts. They are, however, set in a larger frame of history. There is more color but not more content. The approach is more cautious, more preparatory, more interpretative. The Old Testament is drawn upon to furnish corroborative evidence for more and more of the life and work of Christ. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the true interpreter of Scripture, the preacher was enabled to illuminate and adorn the message he proclaimed." ²

Paul testified before Felix that the doctrine which he preached was Old Testament doctrine. He said: "This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they 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).

Apostolic preaching was characterized by an appeal to the Old Testament.

What Paul speaks of here as the way he worships the God of his fathers is after the way of the law and the prophets. He does not mean the fathers of Judaism who developed the Old Testament doctrines in the Inter-Testament period, but the fathers of the Hebrew nation. The doctrine of resurrection he declares to be an Old Testament teaching and avows that it was accepted by his accusers. He continues: "And have hope in God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection from the dead, both the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15).

Dr. Ironside says of Paul's defense before Felix, "Here was a man who believed for years in the Old Testament economy. When he got the fuller revelation, he believed that. He said, 'I believe, therefore have I spoken.' God pity the men who stand in pulpits today ministering to people and have not themselves real faith in the truth revealed in this blessed Book! 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the dynamics of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written' (in the Old Testament), 'The just shall live by faith.' ... You see he recognizes the close link between Judaism and Christianity, so that Christianity is the full flower of which Judaism was the bud." ³

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, written to the Hebrew nation, the writer in speaking of the doctrine of the resurrection classifies it with Old Testament doctrines. "Therefore leaving the primary things of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Heb 6:1-2).

The writer of Hebrews is found following the same principle which characterized the teaching of Peter, Paul, Matthew and the other apostles. He appeals to the Old Testament as his highest authority for doctrine although transcending some of its teachings on the basis of the more complete revelation which God has given in His Son (Heb 1:1).

God pity the men who stand in pulpits today ministering to people and have not themselves real faith in the truth revealed in this blessed Book!

Correlation of Old and New Testaments

In this principle the apostles are truly followers of Christ. It may be safely stated that the Old Testament Scriptures form, if not the necessary, yet surely the actual presupposition of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, by whom they are throughout honored. Dr. King⁴ said that even when Jesus transcends the teachings of the law and the prophets, as He from time to time does, He does not so much break with them, as bring to light what has been all along their underlying principle, disengaging it from temporary obscurations and traditional glosses.

King gives the following particulars of Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament Scriptures: (1) He accepts their narratives when He has occasion to refer to them as historically true. (2) He asserts their authority. (3) He affirms their instructive character. (4) He claims for them an element of strict prediction. (5) He protests against their replacement by tradition or by human glosses.⁵

The most frequent reference by far which the Savior makes to the Old Testament Scriptures is by way of citing them as authoritative, as determinative of both doctrine and duty. In the manner in which He refers to them there is every reason to lead His followers to prize them highly; and there is nothing to cause His followers to take the attitude some men sometimes assume, relegating the Old Testament to a place of very subordinate importance or dispensing with its use practically altogether, on the plausible ground that having the full light from the New Testament it is useless to grope among the shadows of the Old.

Scripture passages are not from any single translation.

Endnotes

¹ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1927), p 697.

² Hugh Thompson Kerr, *Preaching in the*

Early Church (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), p 29.

³ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers), pp 569, 570.

⁴ John M. King, *The Theology of Christ's Teaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p 1.

⁵ King, *op cit*, pp 1-12.

Christ brought to light the underlying principles of the Old Testament Scriptures.