

Where Did The New Testament Begin?

Introduction. A lot has been made of the fact that the page Bible publishers insert between the Old and New Testament sections of our Bibles is not inspired. Dan Billingsly has called this “the most misunderstood page of the Bible.” He asserts that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and the first part of Acts is in the Old Testament and contains no New Testament doctrine. According to Billingsly, not only did the events recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John occur during the Old Testament period, but he also asserts that Jesus “did not personally reveal or establish New Testament doctrine during His Old Testament ministry to Israel as described in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John” and that “While we today should believe the accounts of the first two biblical Patriarchal and Mosaical ages, we must realize that only the teaching of the New Covenant of Christ in Acts 2 through Revelation 22 is the basis for new covenant salvation, faith and worship for this New Testament age.”

Usually when someone makes a statement like this, it is a prelude to their trying to justify something that Jesus condemned in the gospels. This is no different, as we will see later. Fishing line can be tangled into a terrible knot in a split second, but it may take hours to unravel it. Likewise, a false teacher can quickly make a mess of the truth, but straightening everything out is a long and laborious task. Jesus often answered questions by asking more questions, so it is my hope that correct answers to the five following questions will clarify truth in this case.

I. May A Testator Express His Will Before His Death?

- A. A testator often expresses at least part of his will before his death. This was no different with Jesus (Hebrews 9:16-17).
 - 1. The fact that it has no power “while” the testator lives necessarily implies that it exists in some form while the testator lives.
 - 2. Men write their wills before their deaths. The will may not be fully revealed until later, but it must exist and may be expressed before death.
- B. The Old Testament went out of force when Jesus died on the cross.
 - 1. It was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14).
 - 2. It was abolished in Jesus' death (Ephesians 2:15).
- C. The New Testament went into force after the death of Christ (Hebrews 9:17), but some expressions of the content of Jesus' New Testament were definitely made before His death.
 - 1. Love for God (John 14:23-25).
 - 2. The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:28).
 - 3. The new birth (John 3:5, 16). Dan Billingsly claims that “the world” in John 3:16 refers to the Jews.
 - 4. The building of the church of Christ (Matthew 16:18).
 - 5. Teaching all nations (Mark 16:15-16).

II. How Do The Writers Of Acts-Revelation Treat The Words And Actions Of Jesus?

- A. The apostles and prophets who wrote Acts through Revelation indicate that Jesus' words and actions are binding on those of the New Testament.

1. Giving and receiving (Acts 20:35).
 2. Suffering injustice (1 Peter 2:19-21).
 3. Marriage (1 Corinthians 7:10, 12).
 4. The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
- B. The apostles and prophets reveal that our salvation was first spoken by the Lord (Hebrews 2:3).
- C. We must consent to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:3-4). Therefore, they bound the words of Jesus!

III. Who Wrote The Gospels?

- A. The apostles were promised guidance in remembering and testifying to what Jesus said and did (John 14:26 15:26-27; 16:13).
- B. There is no doubt that, using this guidance, Matthew and John, both apostles of Jesus (Luke 6:13-16), wrote their accounts of Jesus' life.
1. It is generally believed that John wrote his gospel very late in the first century.
 2. Certainly both Matthew and John were written well after the events they record, at least after the day of Pentecost when they received the promised Spirit to guide them.
 3. John 21:21-25 indicates that "brethren" among the "disciples" had circulated a rumor by the time this was written.
- C. Mark and Luke were both helpers of the apostles and prophets of Christ.
1. Mark was a companion of Peter (Acts 12:12, 1 Peter 5:3), and of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25; 15:37-39), and Barnabas's cousin (Colossians 4:10).
 2. Luke was a companion of Paul's, a physician, and an evangelist (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24).
 3. As men who wrote at least three inspired books of the Bible (after the cross), Mark and Luke would have to be regarded as prophets of Christ.
- D. The work of both the apostles and prophets of Christ forms the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:19-20; 3:3-5). When we read from the apostles and prophets of the Lord we must be reading the New Testament.
- E. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were all written after Jesus died on the cross and after the events of Acts 2. These four books were delivered to believers, not to unbelievers under Moses' Law (Luke 1:1-3).

IV. What Was The Mission Of John The Baptist?

- A. John's coming signaled the beginning of "preaching the kingdom of God" (Luke 16:16; cp. Matthew 11:12-13).
- B. It was prophesied that John would be a preparatory messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3:1).
- C. John preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2). The focus of his preaching was to prepare people for what was coming, not to point them back to what had been. He was the prophet of transition.
1. His practice of baptizing disciples was certainly not a part of the Old Covenant (Mark 1:4-5).
 2. The specifics of John's demand for repentance in Luke 3:10-14 did not echo the Old Law, but pointed to a whole new arrangement. These were not

demands of the Old Law and prove that John's mission was oriented toward the coming of the New Covenant.

V. What Contrasts Exist Between Jesus' Teaching And Old Testament Teaching?

- A. Jesus' teaching also pointed to the coming kingdom, not back to the Law of Moses (Matthew 4:17, 23). Dan Billingsly says, "Jesus never compared the Old Testament law of Moses to New Testament doctrine."
- B. In the Sermon on the Mount particularly Jesus contrasts His teaching with that of the Old Law.
 1. Our righteousness was to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20).
 - a) To exceed is to be greater than and different from.
 - b) The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees rested on the Old Law (Matthew 23:1-3; Acts 26:5).
 2. The Sermon on the Mount contains contrasts between Jesus' teaching and the Old Law, not just contrasts between what the rabbinical fathers said and what the Law really said. "You have heard that it was said" frequently introduces exact Old Testament quotations against which Jesus contrasts His own teaching.
- C. Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:1-9 is also plainly contrasted with what Moses allowed. In fact three distinct doctrines from three dispensations are contrasted:
 1. In the context of Matthew 19, Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce in v. 9 is set in direct contrast to what Moses said and to what was allowed at the beginning:
 - a) Mosaic Law — "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives."
 - b) Adamic Law — "but from the beginning it was not so."
 - c) Christ's Law — "And I say unto you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery."
 2. This, of course, is the true reason why anyone tries to prove that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are a part of the Old Testament. They want to try and prove that Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage is not applicable to us now; therefore there is nothing prohibiting non-Christians from bringing their present adulterous marriage into Christ with them when they obey the gospel.

Conclusion. New Testament teaching is found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Jesus could and did reveal portions of His testament before His death. The writers of Acts and the epistles appeal to Jesus' words and actions while on earth as authoritative New Testament doctrine. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written by apostles and prophets of Christ after the cross for the benefit of Christians. John the Baptist's ministry, recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, was not a reiteration of Moses' Law, but the preface to the New Covenant. Jesus contrasted His New Covenant teaching with Moses' Law — it was different.

Jesus nailed the Old Testament to the cross when He died there. No man has the right to take books that were not even written at the time and tack them to the cross too.