

# **A Gift From Heaven**

*The Old and New Testament*

*His Return*

*The Secret*

## **Lesson 16**

REFORMED  
EVANGELISM  
TASKFORCE

# The Old and the New Testament

In the Old Testament, the coming of the Saviour, the Messiah, is announced. By quoting the Old Testament, Jesus convinced His disciples of the fact that He was the promised Saviour, and that He had to suffer in order to make the peoples' deliverance from sin possible (*Luke 24:25-27*).

The New Testament describes the coming of the Saviour, Jesus, to this earth, how He lived and worked, how He suffered and died, and how He rose and ascended. Furthermore, the New Testament describes how the apostles spread the Gospel on earth, the essence of their preaching, and finally announces Jesus' return in royal majesty.

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## You Need Both

You cannot understand the New Testament without the Old; you cannot understand the Old Testament without the New. The two parts of the Bible are inseparable.

In their New Testament letters the apostles refer time and again to Old Testament passages, to show what was written there about Christ. That is why the Old Testament is so important for a clear understanding of the New Testament, but it also works the other way around. The Old Testament can only be clearly understood when read in the light of the New Testament. God revealed Himself in one book. The two sections that make up this book are inseparably connected. The one cannot be fully understood without the other.

## No Contrast

Often the Old Testament has been demoted to second place compared to the New. Sometimes it is even forgotten. Even if people do accept the Old Testament they still usually direct a lot of criticism at it.

The Old Testament is said to be a book filled with hatred, revenge, horror stories, bloodshed, and immorality. The Old Testament "god" is called a harsh and cruel god, unforgiving and out for revenge. The Old Testament contrasts with the New Testament, in which love for one another is central and "god" is only loving and patient. Some churches bypass the Old Testament and only use the New Testament. Some even go as far as removing Old Testament quotes from the New Testament.

Of course there are differences between the Old and New Testament, but there is no contrast. In the Old Testament, sinful situations, relationships and events are often described very realistically. The Old Testament does not try to hide things. All kinds of actions, done by believers and unbelievers alike are not hidden but candidly depicted. God's anger over sins is graphically described.

In this way, the Old Testament clearly shows what life is like when man separates himself from God. It shows that God makes frequent use of the godlessness of other nations to punish His own people. God makes His godless nation experience its dire consequences (*Is. 10:5-19*).

Contrary to popular opinion, the New Testament also mentions God's anger over sin. Jesus becomes very angry when He meets the Pharisees' hypocrisy and false piety (*Matt. 23*). The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira's sins is severe

(Acts 5:1 -11). And in John's Revelation, terrible punishments are announced to the world and the unfaithful church (Rev. 8, 9, 16:5,6).

The punishing God of the Old Testament is also the punishing God of the New Testament. Likewise, the loving God of the New Testament is also the loving God of the Old Testament. In the first part of the Bible, God does not just reveal Himself as a God who is only angry with sin (Ex. 34:6,7; Ps. 103). The Old Testament is also filled with a loving, merciful, forgiving, and gracious God (Is. 1:18,19; 35; 54).

The God of the Old and New Testament is a God who is angry with sin and who punishes sin severely, but He is also a God who is merciful and who forgives sins. The following are just a few of the many Old Testament texts that describe these qualities of God:

*Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:10; Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13; John 4:2; Neh. 9:17*

## **The Old Testament and Rock Music**

It seems as if the Old Testament is being rediscovered in our times. The dust is being shaken off, and it is being polished up to make it shine with a new light. After all, isn't the Old Testament filled with a longing for a better future? Does it not sound like a contemporary social critic? The book of Ecclesiastes and the Psalms seem particularly suited for powerful hymns of war and protest-songs to encourage the repressed masses of this world. Armed with the Old Testament, one can expose all discrimination, all subjection and all abuse of justice. The Old Testament has even made it to the top of the rock charts.

However, this is not what the Old Testament was meant for. It is true the Old Testament protests against many ills, injustices and violence. A new future is prophesied in the Old Testament, but this new future will only be for those who want to serve God in everything (Is. 1:10-17; 1:18-20; 1:21-23; 2:1-5,11). Many rock groups leave this aspect out. The unity of the Bible may not be broken. The Old and the New Testament must be kept the way God gave them to us-as a whole.

If you believe there is a contrast between the Old and New Testament, you in fact deny all of God's revelation. Especially in the New Testament God's wrath is clearly shown (Heb. 10:26-31). God's anger with the sin of all mankind comes down upon Jesus on the cross (Heb. 12:28,29). When He dies He carries this anger in our place and blots out our guilt. The Old Testament points to this sacrifice on Golgotha, and the New Testament reveals this sacrifice. Both sections of the Bible contain the good news that there is forgiveness of sins, and that God's anger is turned away through the suffering and death of His only begotten Son.

The meaning and the richness of the Old Testament can only become clear through the New Testament. This does not make the New Testament more important than the Old Testament because the New Testament cannot be read or understood without the Old Testament.

## **Call for Submission**

The Old Testament issues strong warnings against social ills and injustice. The Old Testament also shows where the cause lies. The rebellion against God is shown to be the source of all wickedness in the world. This rebellion against God is shared by all people, without respect for race or color, standing or status. God only laughs at this rebellion with holy mockery (Ps. 2). He laughs at the weakness and vanity of rebellious mankind. Through His anger though, God calls them to repentance and to submission to His Son. Those who do not listen to this call will be punished with God's just anger. God gives Jesus all power in heaven and on earth, and God requires obedience to Him (Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25; Rev. 2:27,19:11-16)

## **The Source of the Names**

The names "Old Testament" and "New Testament" are taken from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In 2 Cor. 3:14 the phrase "Old Testament" is used and in 2 Cor. 3:6 the words "New Testament" are found.

The Old Testament centers around the Old Covenant: the covenant God made with His people Israel at Mt. Sinai. This covenant looked forwards to both the coming and the work of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. In the New

Testament, the new covenant is central. It is not different from the old covenant, but it is fulfilled in and through Christ. The old covenant was renewed not outdated.

Christ united the old and the new covenant. This is even more proof that Old and New Testament belong together. To be sure, there are differences between the old and new covenant; but they do not form two Bibles. The Bible as God's Word starts in Genesis and ends with Revelation. Blessed are they who read God's Word and keep it.

# His Return

## *Article 7*

Jesus is in heaven now, and from there He continues His work on earth. Since He is a Mediator He has to work on two fronts. He champions the cause of the believers before the Father, and He works in the hearts of believers with His Word and Spirit. He governs the earth in such a way, that everything that happens, turns to the believers own good. And He will return to earth. When His mediatory work is finished, He will return on a cloud, the same way He left earth, with one small difference. When He ascended into heaven only eleven people saw Him depart, but when He returns everyone will be able to see Him. On that day, unimaginable and incomprehensible as it may be, all people will see His enormous power and glory. That day will be full of His majesty.

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### **Looking Forward to His Return**

The day of Jesus' return is called "the day of the Lord" in the Bible (*Acts 2:20; Joel 1: 15; Zeph. 1:7-14*). It is an appropriate name because He will be the center of attention. Everyone will be able to see Him. Also all those who did not believe in Him will see Him with their own eyes. They will be able to see that God's Word is true, and that He, who once was sent by God as the Saviour of mankind, is sent to earth for a second time, but now as judge of the living and the dead (*2 Tim. 4:1*).

God has already determined when that day will be, but for everyone else it remains unknown. The day of the Lord will be an ordinary day. Life will be just like it is today. This means Jesus' return will be a very big surprise to many people (*Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:37-41*).

Remember when Noah built his ship? People were busy working, eating, drinking and marrying. No one expected the flood, but it came. Likewise, nothing will hint that the end of the world is near, but it will come (*1 Thess. 5:2,3*).

The day of Jesus' return cannot be calculated by using Biblical facts. The Old and New Testament texts that apply to Jesus' return, cannot be fitted together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It is impossible to calculate how many more years it will still be because this data simply does not exist. The Bible itself prevents any calculation of this type. Establishing the time of this day is strictly up to God (*Acts 17:30,31*). Jesus corroborates this when He says that the day of His return will be as unexpected as the arrival of a thief (*Luke 12:35-40*). Therefore, be alert, and make sure that you are ready to meet Him everyday of your life. You have to look forward to His coming in faith. You have to be able to receive Jesus today, not sometime in the distant future when it suits your purposes.

The Bible does not tell us when that great day will be. That means it could be today, tonight, or tomorrow.

However, the Bible is not totally vague on this subject. It does mention signs of Jesus' impending return. Godlessness, apostasy, and false teachings will all increase (*Luke 21:6-17*). There will be wars and earthquakes and the church will be severely persecuted. But now the question comes back. Can we use this information to learn something about the time of Jesus' return? Again the answer is "no". Throughout history these things have happened in many places in the world. It is

as if the knocking on the door is getting louder and louder. And yet, only God knows when the knocking will be loud enough.

Before the return of Jesus, the gospel will have to be preached everywhere. Jesus told His disciples this. Christ will not return until this task is finished and He alone will determine when this is done. Just like the apostle Paul, we also have to keep in mind that we may be alive when Jesus returns. Jesus wants us to look forward to His coming, full of expectation, and to ask Him to return soon.

Come, Lord Jesus! (*Rev. 22:17,20*)

## **His Return Is a Celebration**

When Jesus returns to earth, there will be a great celebration for all the people who believe in Him. This celebration will also include everyone who died as a believer. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (*1 Thess. 4:16,17*).

All people, whom God has invited to this never ending celebration, will be gathered together by Christ. The Bible calls this celebration "the wedding feast of the Lamb".

The reunion of God and man will be such a joyous and happy occasion, that the Bible uses the image of a wedding feast (*Rev. 19:6-9*). But this is only a human picture. The real event will be much more impressive, joyous and glorious than we ever can imagine. The heavenly glory which God's children are to receive will be the fulfillment of God's promises. In the Old Testament days, God lived among His people in the temple of Jerusalem. This temple has been destroyed and has completely disappeared. In the "New Jerusalem" God will be with His people forever (*Rev 3:12, 21:1-3*). The temple of the Old Jerusalem was only a very weak reflection of how it will be in the New Jerusalem. Only then our life with God will be a real, complete, and a happy life, a life even more beautiful than life once was in paradise (*Rev. 21:22-27*).

## **Life Becomes a Celebration**

On the day of Jesus' return heaven and earth will be purified with fire (*2 Pet. 3:7,10*). That is why they are called: the new heaven and earth. Heaven and earth will be one and God's children will be with Him forever. Eternal life will not know sin or its consequences. It will be a life of light and joy and holiness, in complete harmony with God and with Jesus.

Man's full potential will finally be realized. Man will finally develop to the extent God had intended at creation. This is unimaginable right now, but in the new life it will be a fact - a very exciting fact.

## **His Return Brings the Final Decision**

The day of Jesus' return will mean the end of this world. On that day all the dead will rise from their graves. No one, not even Satan and all his demons, will be able to stop this event. You can be sure, though, that they will try because the day of Jesus' return is also Judgment Day. The Son of God will pronounce a judgment on everyone: He is the supreme Judge (*Matt. 25*). This judgment will result in either eternal joy or eternal sadness. His judgment will mean eternal acquittal, or eternal condemnation.

There will be a final verdict. There will be a final decision (*Rev. 20:11-15*).

Every human being will hear this final decision pronounced over him (*Luke 16:22-23, 23:43*). And Jesus' verdict will be totally just, and in total agreement with His Word. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (*John 3:17,18*).

Christ will judge according to this rule. For the one this will mean acquittal and eternal joy, for the other this means eternal condemnation and punishment. Jesus discussed this during His stay on earth. Read what He says about this in *Matt. 25:31-46*.

Today there are many people, even though they do not realize it, who frequently ask for God's condemnation. Cursing and swearing has become such an acceptable custom that it hardly offends any one. This horrible habit is, however, totally unacceptable. This horrible habit is also the type of action that brings God's judgment down on a person. The Bible describes God's judgment over the unbelievers just as it describes the joyous life of those who are His. And just as we cannot imagine the joys of life eternal, we cannot imagine the wretchedness of eternal condemnation. These unbelievers will suffer eternal pain, eternal horror, and will continually be crying and gnashing their teeth in regret and vexation. They will experience God's anger like the flames of a fiery oven (*Matt. 13:41-42; Dan. 12:2*).

You may wonder sometimes whether it will really be that bad? Is this not a bit of an exaggeration? Do not fool yourself! The day of Jesus' return to earth will surpass our imagination. Eternal condemnation is not exaggerated, it is underestimated.

## **How Do You Wait for His Return?**

The verdict of Jesus when He returns to earth is closely connected with our present life. It is very simple. God offers His Son's salvation to anyone who has heard His Word and believes. The rest, who do not want to be saved will receive eternal condemnation.

How do you await the return of Jesus, today and tomorrow? Do you trust in His Word or do you reject it? It makes all the difference in the world to come!

# The Secret

## *1 Samuel 1-3*

"Every man did what was right in his own eyes" (*Jud. 21:25*). These words end the book of Judges. The problem was that what was good in their own eyes often contradicted God's laws. They often did what God had expressly forbidden, and they often did not do what God had expressly asked them to do. Yet every time they ran into difficulties because of their idolatry, God saved them by sending them a judge. Why did God not leave them in their misery? Why did God save Israel time and again? Despite everything, God allowed His disobedient people to continue their existence. Why?

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## The Blood of Redemption

God asked His people to construct a tent in which He could live among them (*Ex. 25:1-9*). The secret of the continuation of the people of Israel was this tent, the tabernacle. Through the worship service of the people in the tabernacle God indicated that He wanted to forgive the sins of His people and be reconciled to His people again. At the same time, the worship service in the tabernacle also indicated that God did not overlook or condone anything. In order to be able to receive forgiveness, redemption was needed first. Sin had to be paid for.

In order to open the way to God, sacrificial animals had to be slaughtered. The blood of animals pointed to redemption. The tabernacle, and later the temple, was the place where God met with His people for this purpose. Central in both the tabernacle and temple was the priest and the altar, since they were responsible for the all important sacrifices. Even more important than the altar, though, was the ark. This was the golden chest which stood in the most holy room of the tabernacle. The ark was, so to speak, the throne of God. It showed that God lived among His people. As a sign of His presence a big dark cloud hung above the tabernacle (*Ex. 40:34-38*). On top of the golden ark was the mercy seat. Nobody was allowed to come near the ark except the most important priest, and even he could only do so once a year. This happened on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest sprinkled the blood of a male goat on the mercy seat (*Lev. 16*).

The complete worship service of the people of Israel is elaborately and very accurately described in the Bible (*Ex. 29, 30*). In this worship service the sacrifices and the redemption through the sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat are central (*Lev. 16:15-19*). However, the secret of the existence and the continuation of the people of Israel was the fact that God lived among them, and He could live among them because of the blood of redemption. Nobody can fathom the way God works. That is why God has prescribed exactly how the worship of His people ought to be. God was not like the gods of the surrounding countries who could be worshipped in any manner. The Israelite worship service was totally structured according to God's plans.

The worship service of the people was a symbol of the suffering and death of Jesus, the Son of God, who would come to earth to give His blood, in order to establish the redemption of the people with God. However, the Israelites, who had trouble trusting God's promises, often forgot this important fact. They thought that the sacrifices themselves could save them. God had to remind them that He did not save people because they had sacrificed the prescribed number of bulls. It all depended on the one sacrifice of Christ (*Ps.40:7-9; Heb. 10:1-10*). Animal blood only served as a sign of the blood of redemption which once would be shed by Christ on the cross. Does that mean that all the sins of the Old Testament were

not forgiven until Christ died? No, in fact, where the worship service was faithfully kept, the children of Israel already received total forgiveness. Although the symbolic sacrifices and the one sacrifice of Christ are not the same, they are closely related. In advance the Son of God gave the salvation He would later earn on the cross.

Time and again God saves His people. The secret lies in the blood of redemption. The children of God live because God is merciful.

## The Way to Jesus

The history of the people of Israel reaches a low point in the book of Samuel. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli the high priest, did not bother with the precise ordinances which God had given them for the worship service. They took the sacrificial meat for themselves (*1 Sam. 2:11-17*). Through their ungodly actions in the worship service the Israelites' reverence for the sacrifices gradually decreased. The rulers of the people led the people astray. By doing what was good in their own eyes, they made atonement with God impossible. The worship service which was originally a sign of the redemption was demoted to a human ritual by Hophni and Phinehas.

God punished His people, but He did not abandon them. The book of Samuel in which the wrath of God is often described, also tells us how time and again, God saved His people. During the time when the people of Israel had completely turned their back on God, Samuel was born (*1 Sam. 1*). His mother Hannah, who, in answer to her prayers was allowed to become a mother, dedicated her child to God (*1 Sam. 3*). Samuel was educated in the holy place of Shiloh, a small city north of Jerusalem, where the tabernacle was kept and Eli was priest. God used Samuel to lead His stubborn people back to Him.

Samuel was the last judge of Israel. Later he received the task of appointing a king over Israel. The last thing the people merited was God's love. Still, because of His love, He gave them Samuel.

When you read the first chapters of the first book of Samuel, two things become clear. God did not let His people mock Him, but He did not abandon them either. When the love of God was scorned by His people, He punished them severely. Once, in defiance of God's command, Hophni and Phinehas moved the ark into the battlefield to compel God to help them in the war. They used the ark as a mascot. In the eyes of God that was idolatry, and as a punishment both of them died in battle. Their father, Eli, died the same day when he received the news that the ark was taken away by the Philistines. The Israelites dishonoured God greatly when they let the Philistines capture the ark, but God did not let His honour go to the enemies of His disobedient people. Before the ark was returned to the Israelites, God showed how impotent the gods of the Philistines really were (*1 Sam. 5,6*).

Samuel led the people of God back to the way of faith. God does not forget His promise and covenant with Abraham (*1 Sam. 5-12*). He saves and, at the same time, gives a future to His nation. When reading the Old Testament you should never forget that the coming of the Messiah is prophesied in all these stories. All of world history, the beautiful, but also the terrible events, was directed toward the coming of Jesus Christ on earth. Again and again God paved the way for the coming Jesus. Even if His own people blocked the way with their sin, God did what He had promised. "O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (*Ps. 130:7,8*).

# Questions 16

## The Old and New Testaments

1. Many of the Psalms deal with God's anger with sin, but also with His love for those who serve Him. Which verse of *Ps. 73* deals with God's anger, and which with His love?
2. The New Testament clearly states that the Old Testament is necessary in order to understand the Gospel. How is this shown in *Luke 24:25-29* and *44-47*, *Acts 28:24-29*?
3. The New Testament mentions different names for what we now call the Old Testament. What are these names, mentioned in the verses from question 2 and in *John 5:39*?
4. Which books are meant with the reference "Moses" or "the law of Moses"?

## His Return

1. More than once you read in the New Testament that the end of all things is near. Were the authors, the apostles, mistaken about this expectation of the future? (*1 Pet. 4:7*, *1 Cor. 7:29*; *1 John 2:18*)
2. Jesus now has all power in heaven and on earth. Since when does He have this power and when is He going to transfer it again to His Father? (*Matt. 28:18*; *Rev. 5*; *1 Cor. 15:23-28*)
3. In *Matthew 25:31-46* you can read what Jesus told His disciples about His judgment when He returns. Does Christ judge according to the measure of social consciousness one has reached in life? How does Christ judge this? (compare also *John 3:17, 18*; *1 John 2:3-6*)

## The Secret

1. There is another woman who made a song similar to the song Hannah made. Who was this woman and why was she so important? What could be the reason that these two songs are so similar? (*1 Sam. 2:1-10*; *Luke 1:46-55*)
2. The first king of Israel was Saul. In which two consecutive ways was he appointed by God as king? (*1 Sam. 9,10*)
3. What was the meaning of "anointing" a king of Israel? (*1 Sam. 10:10*, *1 Sam. 11:6*, *Isa. 61:1*; *2 Cor. 1:21,22*)