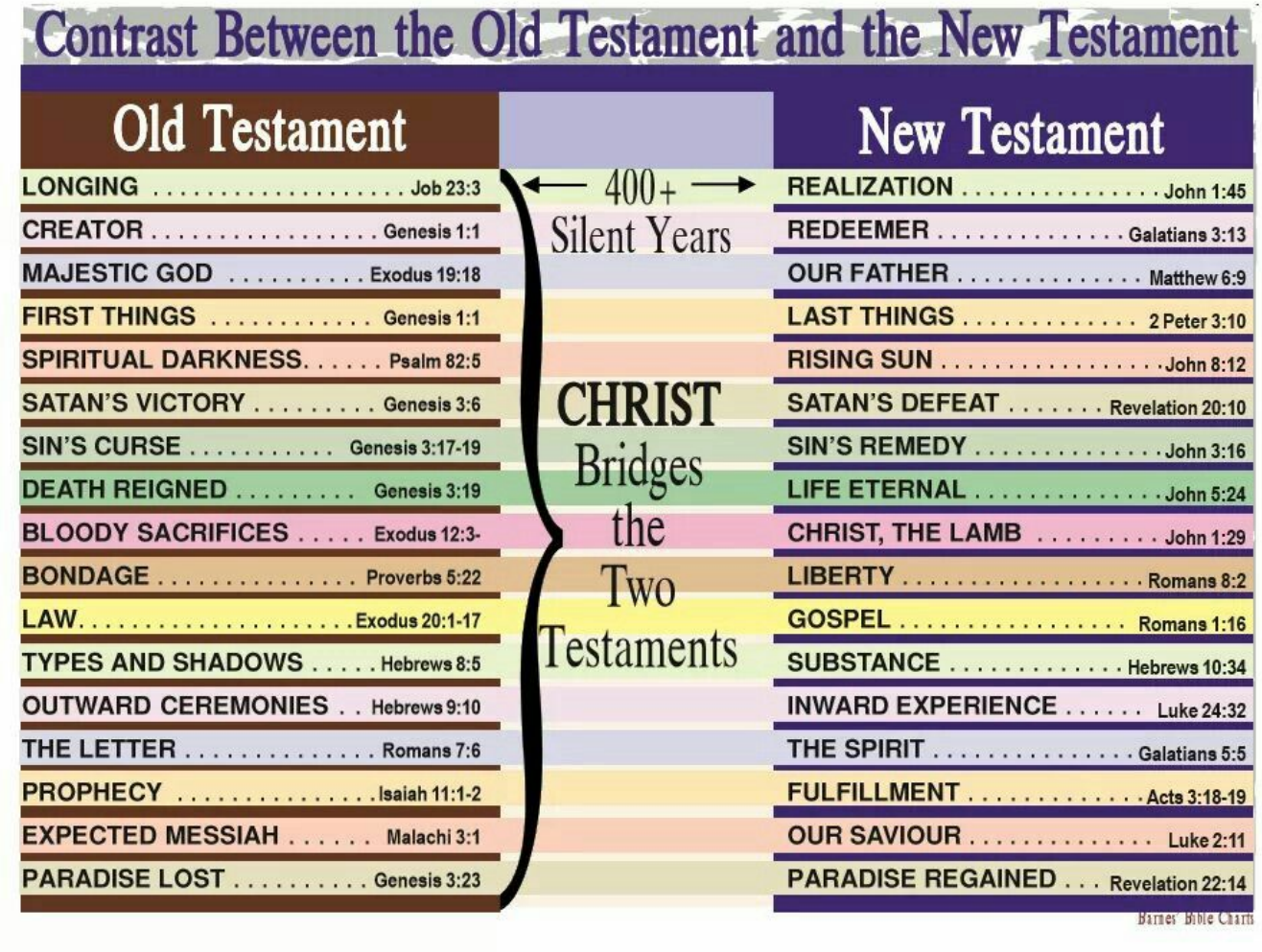
The Christ of the Old and New



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Burk Parsons

We have all heard the ancient maxim about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments: “The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed.” While the words *concealed* and *revealed* do not entirely accurately describe the relationship between the testaments, they do help us grasp the fundamental truth that the New Testament is found in seed form throughout the pages of the Old Testament and that the Old Testament blossoms forth as a flower in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the New Testament is called the “New Testament” for the simple reason that it is, in fact, new. It is new revelation, not merely commentary on previous revelation. It is not simply a collection of Apostolic reflections on the Old Testament from the first century. In real space and real time, in the history of God’s redemption of His people and by His superintendence of His appointed, sinful, human authors, God revealed to us His new testament, accompanying our long-awaited Messiah and His promised kingdom. However, it’s not as if the coming of the Christ and the continued revelation of God was a surprise to those who understood the Old Testament and, more importantly, the God of the Old Testament.

The common refrain of the New Testament, “according to the Scriptures,” is by no means to be taken lightly but is to drive us over and over again to behold the faithfulness of God.

On nearly every page of the New Testament, God sovereignly reminds us that everything He has done, is doing, and will do is in accordance with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The common refrain of the New Testament, “according to the Scriptures,” is by no means to be taken lightly but is to drive us over and over again to behold the faithfulness of God, the trustworthiness of His revelation, and the beautiful harmony of the testaments as God shows forth His sovereignly woven scarlet thread of redemption from creation to glorification, all according to the covenant of redemption of our triune God. In each of the three portions of the Old Testament—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—the Lord majestically sets forth that which Jesus Himself set forth when He was with the two men on the road to Emmaus interpreting to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

That doesn’t mean, however, that Jesus is hiding under every stone in the Old Testament, nor does it mean that we need to overturn every stone in our pursuit to find Him at the cost of

sound exegesis. Nevertheless, it does mean that every stone points to Christ and beckons us to examine the manifold ways in which Christ is in the foreground and background of the landscape of every stone in all the Scriptures, by God's sovereign orchestration and for our redemption in Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The Old is in the New Revealed, the New is in the Old Concealed

Dr John Frederick
Lecturer in New Testament

As a New Testament lecturer, I frequently hear folks saying things like "I prefer the New Testament over the Old Testament." And, "the God of the Old Testament is angry, whereas the God of the New Testament is love." A popular mega-church pastor in the United States made the claim recently that we should 'unhitch' Christianity from the Old, because the Old Testament presents so many impediments to belief for contemporary people.

When I hear this sort of thing, I have to confess: I'm perplexed. Perhaps, my head-scratching confusion comes from the fact that the church through the ages and across denominations has never conceived of the Christian faith as one that focuses on a de-Judaized Jesus or an anti-Old Testament Gospel. As the great theologian Augustine once said about Holy Scripture: "In the Old Testament the New is concealed, in the New the Old is revealed." The canon of Scripture is not meant to be approached like a television series: "I liked season 6 of The Office better than season 2." The story of God's grace through his people Israel to bring salvation to the world as the light of the world is a story that began, not with the "in the beginning" of John 1 in the New Testament but with the "in the beginning" of Genesis 1 in the Old Testament. In fact, when John begins his Gospel with

those words (“in the beginning was the Word”) he is intentionally echoing the creation account of Genesis. Through Jesus, the good creation that God began in Genesis is being transformed into a new creation by means of a new exodus led by a new Moses who brings us not out merely out of slavery in Egypt, but out of the slavery of sin, satan, and death. Jesus is a new Adam, who recapitulates, resets, and recalibrates humanity from a trajectory of decay and death toward the path of redemption, reconciliation, and eternal life.

Without the Old, we cannot understand the New, and without the New, we have an incomplete understanding of the Old. The Old Covenant is like a gripping, powerful epic movie eternally set on pause without its climax and culmination in the Christ. And, the New Covenant is incomprehensible apart from what preceded it. The Old is in the New Revealed, the New is in the Old Concealed.

I have the privilege of lecturing the Gospel of John in semester 2 at Trinity, and I am really looking forward to seeing the shadows of the Son in the Old and the fulfillment of the Old in the suffering and glory of the Christ in the New. You know: there’s a little line in John 1:16 that really brings out this theme of the coherence of God’s covenantal grace from Old to New, from Genesis to Revelation. There John writes of Jesus that “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” This is a beautiful line as-is, but the original Greek reveals an even deeper meaning. By stating that we receive “grace upon grace” through Jesus Christ, John is not trying to communicate that we receive heaps of grace, so to speak, in Jesus, unlike in the Old Testament where we received little or no grace. No! The original language here is *charin anti charitos* which literally means “grace *instead* of grace” or “grace *in the place of* grace.” What preceded the Gospel was not an inferior grace-less religion, but a covenant of grace yearning for its completion in Christ Jesus. The Old is not the negative foil for the New; the New is the

fulfillment of the Old. The God of grace has been fighting for us from the beginning, running into the fray with us, so that through his people Israel, grace could extend to all nations through Israel-in-person Jesus Christ, the completion and perfection of God’s covenantal love and grace for life of the world.