

God of NT vs. God of OT

BIBLE BASICS

Why does the Old Testament seem so different then the New Testament?

During the time of the Old Testament, humanity was at a relatively early stage of development, both morally and spiritually. As humanity progressed and grew, God gradually adapted His laws to better suit the evolving needs and understanding of His people. This adaptation is evident in passages such as Matthew 5:38-39, where Jesus Christ teaches a higher standard of conduct than that prescribed in the Old Testament: "You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." He instructs His followers not to retaliate with violence but rather to turn the other cheek when faced with an affront. In other words The Old Testament is not written according to God's standards. It is written according to the human standards of the people at the time with the objective of bringing them one step closer to God's ultimate spiritual Law.

It is thus important to recognize that the Old Testament is not solely a reflection of God's unchanging moral standards. Rather, it reflects the human standards of the people at that time, with the primary objective of guiding them towards a deeper understanding of God's ultimate spiritual law. The Old Testament served as a stepping stone, helping humanity to gradually ascend towards a more refined and compassionate system of ethics and spirituality.

In the New Testament, God stooped down to humanity's level to bring about a greater good. This act did not indicate a change in God's nature from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Instead, it was humanity that changed after choosing to separate from God. Consequently, humanity sank to a profound level of sin.

Throughout the Old Testament, as humanity progressed, God dealt with people differently based on their specific state. This approach is evident in the verse from Malachi 3:6, which reads, "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob." This verse emphasizes God's unchanging nature and the preservation of humanity despite their sinful actions.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the history of humanity is replete with violence. This violence is not unique to Christianity or Judaism but was prevalent among all human societies of that era. Ancient civilizations often engaged in brutal warfare, practiced slavery, and tolerated societal injustices. The Old Testament reflects the harsh realities of human history. It does not shy away from depicting the violence and moral failings of humanity. However, it also presents God's unwavering love, mercy, and desire for reconciliation with His people.

In the New Testament, God took a significant step toward mending the broken relationship between humanity and Himself. Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God offered humanity a way to experience forgiveness, restoration, and the promise of eternal life. Jesus Christ came as the ultimate sacrifice, bearing the sins of humanity upon Himself. His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection provided a path for individuals to be reconciled with God and receive His grace and salvation. While the history of humanity may be marked by violence and sin, the New Testament offers a message of hope, redemption, and the opportunity for a transformed life. It invites individuals to embrace God's love, turn away from sin, and experience the fullness of life in communion with Him.

Marcionism

Marcionism, a religious movement that originated in the 2nd century, was founded by Marcion of Sinope, a heretic who challenged the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures for Christians. Marcion held numerous unorthodox beliefs, but his primary contention was that the God portrayed in the Old Testament differed from the God presented in the New Testament.

According to Marcion, the God of the Old Testament embodied wrath and punishment, whereas the God of the New Testament represented love and mercy. "God of the OT is a god of wrath, whereas the God of the NT is a god of love", he said. He suggested that the Old Testament deity was a lesser, imperfect being, distinct from the supreme God revealed through Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Furthermore, Marcion argued that Jesus was not the fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies and that these prophecies were not applicable to him.

Marcion's followers, known as Marcionists, took his teachings a step further, depicting the wrathful Hebrew God as a separate and inferior entity compared to the all-forgiving God of the New Testament. Similar to Gnosticism, Marcionism portrayed the God of the Old Testament as a tyrant or "demiurge," responsible for creating the material world but lacking the benevolence and compassion attributed to the God of the New Testament.

In response to Marcionism, the Christian scholar Tertullian wrote a five-book treatise entitled "Adversus Marcionem" in 208. Tertullian sought to refute Marcion's heretical teachings by defending the unity of the Old and New Testaments and by arguing that the wrath of God depicted in the Old Testament was consistent with the love and mercy revealed in the New Testament. Tertullian's treatise played a crucial role in countering the influence of Marcionism and preserving the integrity of Christian doctrine.

Does God Change?

The Bible consistently portrays God as immutable, or unchanging, in His nature, character, and purposes. This immutability is a fundamental aspect of God's sovereignty and perfection. Throughout Scripture, we find numerous passages that affirm God's unchanging nature.

Consistency in His Character:

God's character is eternally consistent. He is always faithful, loving, just, merciful, and holy. Malachi 3:6 declares, "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob." This verse highlights that God's unchanging nature ensures His people's preservation and protection.

Reliability of His Promises:

God's promises are unwavering and reliable because He is unchanging. James 1:17 affirms, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." This verse emphasizes that God's gifts and promises are constant and trustworthy, free from any fickleness or inconsistency.

Sovereignty Over Creation:

God's sovereignty over creation is rooted in His immutability. Psalm 102:25-27 poetically describes God's enduring existence and His role in creating and sustaining the universe. "Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will have no end." (Psalm 102:25-27) The passage affirms that while creation may change and decay, God remains eternally the same, unchanging in His majesty and power.

Constancy of His Nature:

Hebrews 13:8 proclaims, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." This verse underscores the unchanging nature of Jesus, who is the perfect embodiment of God's character. Jesus' consistency in His actions, teachings, and ministry reflects the unchanging nature of God Himself.

God in the OT vs. God in the New Testament

In the Old Testament, God's wrath against sin is a manifestation of his justice and holiness. He cannot ignore or tolerate sin, as it goes against his perfect character and nature. This wrath is not arbitrary or vengeful but rooted in his love for righteousness and his desire to protect and restore his creation.

The same God who pours out his wrath against sin in the Old Testament is the one who, in the New Testament, offers grace and forgiveness through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth to reconcile humanity with God, taking upon himself the punishment for sin so that those who believe in him can be forgiven and granted eternal life.

This does not mean that God's wrath against sin has disappeared. Rather, it has been satisfied through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. For those who reject Jesus and his offer of salvation, the consequences of their sin remain. They will face God's eternal punishment, which is described as "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

"which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a

righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.” - 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

The apostle Paul emphasizes in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 that God's righteous judgment will be manifested when Jesus returns in glory. He will come to be glorified in his saints and admired among all those who believe. However, those who do not know God and disobey the gospel of Jesus Christ will face his vengeance in flaming fire.

On the other hand, the God who revealed himself to Moses as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7) is the same God who sent his Son to save the world. This love is not merely sentimental but grounded in his unchanging character and unwavering commitment to his creation.

As St. Augustine insightfully observed, "The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed; the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed." This statement underscores the continuity and progression of God's redemptive plan throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament, we see glimpses of God's grace and mercy, but it is in the New Testament that these attributes are fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, God's wrath against sin and his love for the world are not contradictory but complementary aspects of his character. His justice demands that sin be punished, while his love provides a way for sinners to be reconciled to him through faith in Jesus Christ.

Progressive Revelation

The concept of progressive revelation highlights the dynamic and unfolding nature of God's self-disclosure to humanity. Throughout history, God has gradually revealed more of Himself, His character, and His plan for the world. This process has been a journey of discovery through scripture for believers, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of God's nature, will, and ways.

Imagine a sunrise on a misty morning. As the darkness fades, the first faint rays of light break through the fog, revealing glimpses of the surrounding landscape. As the sun continues to rise, more and more of the scene becomes visible, and the details and colors become more distinct. In a similar manner, progressive revelation has been like a gradual sunrise, illuminating our understanding of God over time.

The truth was there all along, but perception was limited. So it is with God. Man's understanding of God progressed through the Old Testament and into the New. Progressive revelation can also be understood in terms of humanity becoming more and more responsible to God for our actions. This

process is akin to the development of a child's understanding of their parents. As the child matures, their comprehension of their parent's expectations and values evolves.

In the Old Testament, God's interactions with humanity were characterized by a certain level of permissiveness. Practices such as polygamy, while not ultimately God's ideal, were tolerated due to the immaturity of the people. God recognized that humanity was still in its infancy, lacking the capacity to fully grasp His will. However, as humanity progressed spiritually and intellectually, God's expectations evolved. Just as a parent imposes higher standards on a maturing child, God began to demand more of His people. This shift is evident in the New Testament, where practices once tolerated are now seen as incompatible with God's will for His people.

This principle of progressive revelation can be observed on both a micro and macro level. Within the Old Testament itself, those individuals who possessed a deeper understanding of God were held to a higher standard of accountability. Figures like Abraham, Moses, and David were entrusted with greater responsibilities and were expected to adhere to a more stringent moral code. On a broader scale, God's dealings with the nation of Israel throughout history demonstrate this pattern. Despite their frequent disobedience and unfaithfulness, God exhibited remarkable patience and longsuffering. However, as the parable of the vineyard illustrates, a defining moment arrived when God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as the ultimate revelation of His love and grace.

Through the life, teachings, and sacrificial death of Jesus, humanity's understanding of God reached its pinnacle. In Jesus, we encounter the perfect embodiment of God's character and the fullness of His salvation. From that point forward, the standards set forth in the New Testament became the benchmark for God's followers, reflecting a more profound understanding of His will and a deeper commitment to His ways.

Christ speaks of Progressive Revelation

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ discussed the concept of progressive revelation. In one instance, the Pharisees approached him with a question about divorce, seeking to test him. Jesus responded by asking them about the commandment given by Moses. The Pharisees referred to the Mosaic law that allowed a man to divorce his wife by issuing a certificate of divorce. Jesus acknowledged this law but pointed out that it was a concession made due to the hardness of their hearts. He emphasized that God's original intention was not for divorce and that it was a result of human failings.

The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" testing Him. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. – Mark 10:2-5

Another example of progressive revelation is found in the story of the scribes and Pharisees who requested a sign from Jesus. Initially, the scribes and Pharisees sought a miraculous display, representing their desire for immediate confirmation of Jesus' claims. However, Jesus chose to reveal his divine mission through his death and resurrection, signifying the ultimate act of redemption and the fulfillment of God's plan. This revelation occurred over time, allowing people to understand the significance of Jesus' sacrifice. He referred to the sign of the prophet Jonah, who was swallowed by a

large fish and later emerged from its belly. He indicated that this future event would be the only sign given to that generation.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. – Matthew 12:38-39

Furthermore, in the book of Acts, the story of Ananias and Sapphira illustrates progressive revelation. The couple, members of the early Christian community, sold a piece of property and claimed to have contributed the full proceeds to the church. However, they secretly withheld some of the money. The apostle Peter, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, confronted them, exposing their deceit. This incident highlights the importance of honesty and transparency within the Christian community and reinforces the message that God sees and knows all. The story of Ananias and Sapphira contributed to the progressive understanding of Christian ethics and morality. It taught the early believers that deception and dishonesty are not acceptable behaviors for followers of Christ, and that God requires His followers to be genuine and transparent in their actions.

These instances of progressive revelation demonstrate how God gradually reveals his truth and expectations to humanity. His teachings and actions adapt to the evolving needs and understanding of his people, guiding them toward a deeper comprehension of his character and will.

How do I see the Loving God of the New Testament in the Old Testament?

The Old Testament provides numerous examples that showcase the loving nature of God long before the birth of Jesus Christ. These instances reveal that God's love is not limited to the New Testament; it has always been a fundamental aspect of His character.

One such instance is the story of Jonah and the Ninevites. Despite their sinful ways, God chose to send Jonah to offer them a chance to repent and turn away from their evil deeds. This act of mercy demonstrates that God desires the salvation of all people, not just those who immediately embrace His teachings. Even when Jonah expressed frustration at God's decision to show mercy to the Ninevites, God gently reminded him of His loving and gracious nature (Jonah 4).

Another example of God's love can be found in His interaction with Cain after he had murdered his brother Abel. Understandably, Cain feared retribution from others, but God showed him mercy by protecting him and placing a mark on him, preventing others from harming him. This act of compassion and grace illustrates God's desire to redeem and restore, even in the face of great sin.

Furthermore, in the destruction of certain nations, such as the Amorites, God's love is evident in His patience and longsuffering. The Bible in Genesis 15 reveals that God endured their wickedness for four hundred years, waiting for an opportunity for their repentance and salvation. However, when their sin reached its peak, judgment had to be carried out. This incident underscores the balance between God's love and His justice. While He is always willing to offer forgiveness, His mercy has its limits, and sin cannot go unpunished. “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not

theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years... But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

The consistency of God's character throughout the Old and New Testaments is emphasized in Hebrews 13:8, which states, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." This verse assures us that God's love, mercy, and justice are unchanging attributes that permeate all of Scripture. As St. Augustine once said, "The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed; the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed." This profound statement reminds us that the love of God, revealed fully in the New Testament through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, has always been present, even in the pages of the Old Testament.

The loving God of the New Testament is not a new concept; His love has always been woven into the fabric of Scripture. The Old Testament is replete with examples of God's mercy, grace, and compassion, demonstrating that His love has been consistent throughout history. This understanding deepens our appreciation for the multifaceted nature of God's character and assures us of His unwavering love for all humanity.



Review Questions

- 11.** Who is the last Prophet of the Old Testament? Malachi
- 12.** In how many years was the Old Testament written? 2,000 Years
- 13.** True or false; God changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament. -False-
- 14.** What did Marcion believe in? The God of the Old Testament is not the same God of the New Testament
- 15.** What is the concept of Progressive Revelation? God reveals Himself to man in a progression manner just like the sunrise.