



Storming Fortresses

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,
but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

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Editors Note

With this issue we begin a six part series dealing with the Unity of Scripture.

The articles were published in "Chalcedon" some time ago. To those who have read them previously we apologise for this duplication.

It is, however, our conviction that the message of these articles needs to be spread to and ingested by as many people as possible.

Scripture is denied by many today.

Those who subscribe to the belief that the Bible is God's Word can often be found to have scissors in one hand and a glue stick in the other.

In these articles, Rev. Steve Schlissel, debunks much of this modern heresy and reasserts: One God, One Faith, One Lord, One Message; One Bible!

All I Really Need to Know I Learned in the Old Testament (Part 1)

By

Steve M. Schlissel

You've heard it said, "The Jews have the Old Testament and Gentiles have the New Testament." No. The meaning of the Old is today inaccessible apart from the New and the New is utterly incomprehensible without the Old. Better to say that *Christians alone have the Scriptures*, for the Old and New Testaments constitute the one Word of God. Yet I shall use our traditional terms, *Old Testament* and *New Testament* throughout this article, for there is no convenient alternative.

It was less than 1000 years ago that the Bible was divided into chapters and then verses. No question about it, this has been very helpful. It is convenient, for example, when talking to a fellow-believer to be able to tell him, "You know, it says in such-and-such a place...." Or, if we are in church and the minister says, "Turn to such and such a passage," everyone, because of this division of chapters and verses, can turn there together. And concordances would be a tough sell without chapter and

verse numberings. The convenience is obvious. Not so obvious, perhaps, is the grave danger this splicing poses to our mindset toward the Bible itself.

For it often feels as though we've come to look at the Bible as if its contents were actually and inherently divisible into these neat (or clumsy) little sections, these highly artificial impositions on the texts which we call chapters and verses. Thus we hear arguments that begin, "I have a verse that says...." when the arguer believes his snippet has

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independent value even though wrested from its context. It seems never to occur to some that when the verse is taken out of the sentence and the sentence is taken out of the paragraph, and the paragraph is taken out of the passage, and the passage it taken out of the chapter, and the chapter is taken out of the letter, and the letter is taken out of the general context altogether, that *meaning* is affected. Lest we forget, Paul never wrote *a verse* in his life. He wrote letters.

The Erroneous "Great Divide"

More deeply affecting than chapters and verses, however, is the grand divide imposed by man: that little page which *divides* the Old and New Testaments. For even in the "New Testament" people did not think of themselves as "New Testament Christians." They did not say, "We are New Testament Christians," nor would the thought ever have

entered their minds! They rather said, "We believe the Scriptures. The Scriptures have been fulfilled in our presence."

The Bible is the Word of God. That page between the Old Testament and the New Testament was placed there by man. If someone wants to keep it there to mark a relative place within Scripture, I suppose that's fine. Yet it is commonly looked upon as the divider between two separate revelations. That is wrong. Such thinking fundamentally alters the character of Scripture as a medium and thus necessarily alters its message. Though the saints in "the second section" never thought like that, *we* have come to think like that.

We commonly bind the New Testament separately from the Old Testament. Yet (ironically!) when we turn to the New Testament, the very first thing it says is, "This is a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." Now who is David and who is Abraham? Where can I find out? The Old Testament. It is as if the New Testament is saying, "What are you doing here? You must begin at the beginning." For the New Testament is not just pregnant with the Old Testament; it's giving birth to its thinking, hope, ideology, worldview, orientation, language, promise, and texts all over the place!

And so when Mary is given the great news about her appointed role, she goes to visit her relative and talks about her soul glorifying the Lord and her spirit rejoicing in God her Savior in "Old Testament" words. All (future) generations will call her blessed, she says. And by this she does not mean that from now on she

is going to be portrayed wearing blue and hanging out in gardens with lambs and little children around her, all kneeling before her and worshipping her. She means that everyone will say that she is unique because the promises given to all the people of Israel in the past, *i. e.*, in the Old Testament, are finding fruition in what she shall bear! All that the fathers of the Faith looked for is to begin its fulfillment on earth through her. The seamless theme of the covenant is coming to fullness in a most special way and her role is unspeakably blessed. She shall "deliver" the Deliverer into this world. A most extraordinary thing.

But people say, "No. This is altogether new. And from Mary's story on, we really don't need the Old Testament." Yet such an idea could not possibly have existed in the mind of any New Testament believer, let alone Mary. See how Mary expresses her joy? She exclaims that what is happening to her is nothing other than God's helping his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever. You see the way she thought? She didn't say, "Wow, I hope this 'Magnificat' makes it into the New Testament!" No, for her this was simply the fulfillment and the continuation of Scripture. And so Zechariah also praises the God of Israel. The New Testament, looked at this way, is a thoroughly "Jewish" document, *i. e.*, a covenant document, just as the Old Testament is a covenant document, together forming one document. The two *testaments* are not two *covenants*. The new is a *realization* of that which had gone before, not a negation. For verification of this we have the words of Jesus Christ himself. "Do

not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

It says in Acts 17, “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.” Note well Paul’s methodology. How did he witness? Did he take out Colossians and say, “Look, I wrote this letter to Colosse, and I want you to see what I wrote. Give me a minute while I exegete it for you.” No, he pulled out a scroll and he unrolled it and he reasoned with them *from the Scriptures*. Which means what? It means, whatever Scriptures were there. And at the time, it happened to be the Old Testament.

The New Testament is simply the completion, the finalization of the Scriptures that we already had. *It is not a new and separate book*. It is new only in terms of fulfilling, of “realizing” the Old Book. The Old Book was perfectly adequate to testify to Jesus Christ in its own right, on its own feet without a New Testament. Why, the New Testament itself testifies to the adequacy of the Old Testament!

The Unitary “Two” Testaments

The “early church” did not have a New Testament. They had only what we call the Old Testament Scriptures, yet never did anyone say, “Boy, these are so inadequate. I wish I had some New Testament.”

Of course, in the plan of God we certainly came to need what we call the New Testament. Among other benefits, we have in the New Testament, ripe for all the world, the inspired interpretation of what Christ has done in history and what it means that he has come. Therefore, God has given it to us in writing, in permanent form, available to the whole world. But at first there was no such thing as a New Testament. And even for a couple of centuries afterward it wasn’t called the New Testament. It was called the writings of the apostles.

The early Christians had a different mindset, consisting of the old Scriptures—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—and the new Scriptures, the writings of the apostles. They had “divisions” in the law. They had “divisions” of the Bible, to which God has added one more. *The Bible is not the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, and the Apostles*. One Scripture, one covenant, one Word of God.

Thus Christ bore witness to the witness of the “Old Testament.” “Search the Scriptures,” he said, “for they are those which testify of me.” Search the Scriptures, he told them. What Scriptures would they look up? 1 Corinthians? What would they look up? The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings: that is all they had.

A Single Book, a Single Message

Jesus spoke about what concerned him in the Scriptures and opened up the minds of the apostles after his resurrection to what the Scriptures taught so that they might understand

the Scriptures. In one of the most telling passages in this regard, “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lk. 24:25-27).

We are talking about a mindset here. Failure to grasp the mindset of “New Testament believers” regarding “Old Testament Scripture” has led to a radical mindset too often encountered twenty centuries down the pike. People think, “The Old Testament, well that tells of one way of salvation. And the New Testament, that teaches another way of salvation.” Many Jews at the time of our Lord were very mistaken in their view of the Old Testament, but Jesus was not mistaken. And neither were the apostles. Read properly, the Old Testament taught the way to eternal life.

The Old Testament Gospel

When somebody asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?,” did he say, “I didn’t inspire Paul yet. You have to wait until Paul tells you.” No, he didn’t. He said, “*What do the Scriptures say?*” And the man quoted what they said. Jesus said, “You are right. Go do this and you will live.” Now the man said, “I have done all that.” Jesus replied, “Let’s see if you really have.” And then Jesus told him something that didn’t sit as well with him. Jesus referred over and over again to the Old Testament Scriptures as containing the keys of life. In fact, in the

story of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus tells of a wicked rich man who was calloused to the needs of a poor righteous man outside his gate. When they both died, the rich man went to Hell and was in torment, and the poor man, Lazarus, went into Abraham's bosom (quite a figure for heaven!). And when Lazarus got there, the rich man was looking to him longingly, saying, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my relatives so that they won't have to come to this place. Send somebody. If you want, send me; I don't much like it here myself." But Abraham said, "No, they have Moses and the Prophets. If they want to avoid hell let them listen to *the Old Testament*" (Authorized Brooklyn Version).

It is one Bible, one Word of God. Now the man in Hell, the rich man—church history has given him the name Dives—said, "No, no, but if someone rises from the dead, then they will really believe. Do a miracle and they will really believe, I know it." And Abraham said to him, "If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they won't believe even if someone rises from the dead." Even if someone does zippity-do-da's through the air, even if someone circumnavigates the globe on fire and comes down with unsinged clothing, no matter what happens, no matter what is done in their faces, if people will not listen to and be saved by the Word of God—and what is the Word of God here? It is Moses and the Prophets—they will not listen to and be saved on the basis of independent evidence or even by witnessing a miracle. The problem then and now is not in the Scriptures; it is in the

hearers. It is because their hearts were hard that they heard not the Word of God. This is the uniform testimony of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "I don't even have to condemn you at the last day. You know who I am going to call as a witness against you? Surprise! Moses. You talk a lot about Moses. But guess what, Moses is going to be in the accuser's box. Not in the defender's box. Moses is going to say to you, '*I don't know you. I never justified the way you think at things. I testified of Jesus Christ*'" (ABV again!).

No Old Testament Inferiority

It is impossible to think—upon reading the New Testament—that there is the slightest disparaging or disrespectful attitude among the righteous toward the Old Testament, any attitude that regarded it as in any way inferior, inadequate or imperfect. Just as Moses is not less perfect for the Prophets having been added, so is the Old Testament not a whit less perfect for the New being added. But that New Testament *title page*, that one page between the two Testaments, has changed the way we look at *the Bible*.

There is really only one covenant, one Book: the Bible, the Scriptures. This is Jesus' teaching. This is Peter's teaching. This is Peter's preaching. What does he preach on Pentecost? "Hey, everything that the Bible talked about is happening here right now." He didn't say, "Let's have a New Testament." He said, "This is it. This is the Old Testament come into its own" (ABV). And Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:14-15, tells the one who is

going to follow in his footsteps that he should continue in what he has learned and become convinced of "because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures."

What were these Scriptures? The book of Revelation? Hardly! Isn't it a wonder that people today commonly start their Christian life by reading the book of Revelation? "I am a new Christian, and I have read Revelation. I know that Ronald Wilson Reagan is the 666 because there're six letters in each of those names. I know." Well, such people know nothing. Because the New Testament Christians got the book of Revelation as an encouragement *to them*, and it is uninterpretable apart from a thorough familiarity with Old Testament imagery. So if you want to understand Revelation—just like Matthew's genealogy—go back to the Old Testament and start there.

The Bible's Testimony to its Unity

The Bible is one book, no matter what you may have been told to the contrary. The Book itself—except for that page between the testaments—testifies that this is the case. "And how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

What was the manual that Timothy carried around with him? It is what we would call the Old Testament. Of course, once the New Testament Scriptures are extant, that is to say, once they exist, they are fully, equally authoritative with the Old Testament Scriptures; and naturally they are bound together in the same way that the Prophets were bound together with Moses. Or that the Psalms were bound together with Moses and the Prophets. They form one book as the Word of God. Therefore, all I really need to know I learn in the Old Testament.

That is why the New Testament teaches me that Abraham believed in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said, "Abraham saw my day and he rejoiced." The father of the Jews, therefore, was a Christian. This sounds funny only because people insist on these imposed divisions.

And they will say, "If you are a Jew you are not a Christian." Well, okay; I understand what that might mean. But really, if you are a true Jew, you are Christian. And if you are a Christian, you are a true Jew, because you are a child of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ, the one that Abraham believed in. Because Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. And he became the father of all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile. Because when he believed he was not circumcised. And God justified him as a Gentile to show the way of salvation and justification has always been, is now and shall always be by faith.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11 that Moses had faith. And guess who the object of his faith was? Christ! Isn't that peculiar? Moses was a Christian. He believed on him whom we believe in. And so those who say that they are Jews but who do not believe in Jesus Christ are not really full Jews. Isn't that a painful thing to

think about? The power of self-deception is great. And we all know how powerfully we can deceive ourselves. But while screaming, "The Book, the Book!" they sound just like the people in the times of the prophets. When the prophets would come and indict the people of Israel, some of them who were "religiously observant" but wouldn't believe would cry, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!"—meaning that, "The temple is among us and therefore nothing can happen to us." And so people think that if they have some superstitious attachment to some book, or they say to somebody, "Hey, pray for me," that is very religious and that they are safe. But there is no safety outside a true belief in Jesus Christ and compliance with his Word. And that teaching is from the Old Testament on through the New Testament, the one Book.

Thus, all I really need to know I learned in the Old Testament.

PLEASE NOTE

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance of Rev. Steve Schlissel in granting us permission to reprint these articles on the unity of Scripture. We must ask, however, that you do not bind these articles or place them on any website. There are plans to have these articles bound and published and we are not to encroach on this. This off course does not apply to keeping them in the folder supplied for storing our articles.

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We pray that you will enjoy this series and that it will be of benefit to you in understanding one of the most critical issue of our day-The unity of Scripture!

Rev. Schlissel can be contacted at:

Steve M. Schlissel, Messiah's Ministries, 1600 Sheepshead Bay Road, Suite 3, Brooklyn, NY 11235, USA. 718-769-9272. [MessiahNYC@usa.net](mailto: MessiahNYC@usa.net).

Steve Schlissel has been pastor of Messiah's Congregation in Brooklyn, NY since 1979. He serves as the Overseer of Urban Nations (a mission to the world in a single city), and is the Director of Meantime Ministries (an outreach to women who were sexually abused as children). Steve lives with his wife of 24 years, Jeanne, and their five children.