

# Bite Size Bible Study

Old vs New Testament #246

By Lee Logue

There has been an ongoing debate as to whether a Christian should follow the Old Testament. Some say it is outdated and obsolete and all we need is the New Testament. I would like to weigh in on this debate with my understanding of the issue.

The time when a Jewish boy becomes a man and the events surrounding that time, gives us some insight into how we should treat the Old and New Testaments.

in Jewish circles what we call the Old Testament is thought of as God's Instructions (Torah) for living. It is the promises God has given in a covenant relationship between them and Himself. As Christians we can learn from these instructions as well. God doesn't change and neither do his instructions.

When a boy reaches the age of 13, he participates in the Bar Mitzvah (literally "son of [the] commandment"). This is an important time in the boy's life. At this time a boy may participate, for the first time, in the public Torah reading as an adult. He is now considered ready to lead the synagogue in congregational worship.

His father also plays an interesting role within this ceremony. He pronounces a short blessing: *barukh shepetarani meonesh halazeh*. Loosely translated, it means: "Blessed is He who has released me from [the responsibility] of punishment over this one."

Until this time of becoming Bar Mitzvah, the father has responsibility over his son, teaching him the meaning and how to live by Torah (God's teachings, not Law). He is to closely guide the child until the time when he will be able to understand and use the Torah for his life's decisions on his own. The point here is not that the son is no longer in need of parental guidance. It does not mean that the boy is now permitted to stop honoring and obeying his father. But now it means that from here on he is now considered competent to use the Torah to guide his own life.

It is possible that the apostle Paul, who was steeped in Pharisaic Judaism of the first century, had a similar idea. He understood, together with some other Jews of his time, that the coming of the Jewish Messiah (Christ) brought about some kind of transfer of responsibility. In one of his letters to the Gentile followers of Yeshua (Jesus), the apostle Paul wrote about his countrymen's experience with the Torah:

*Now before the time for this trusting faithfulness came, we were imprisoned in subjection to the system which results from perverting the Torah into legalism, kept under guard until this yet-to-come trusting faithfulness would be revealed. Accordingly, the Torah functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came, so that we might*

*be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful. But now that the time for this trusting faithfulness has come, we are no longer under a custodian.* Gal. 3:23-25 CJB

Later, he writes that Gentiles are now in the same position as the Jews that are following Jesus. They too must be guided not only by God's instructions, but also through the interaction with the Holy Spirit sent by God at the request of Jesus. *But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not in subjection to the system that results from perverting the Torah into legalism.* Galatians 5:18 CJB

Paul believed that a new age had dawned with the coming of the Messiah. By this Paul meant that those who were following Jesus were no longer guided only by the Torah (like a tutor), but also through their personal faith in Jesus. However, just as in the case of the father and the Torah, the believers were not to disregard the Torah simply because they were now interacting directly with Jesus through God's Holy Spirit!

It is much like when we first learn to drive a car. Generally, we have someone who rides with us to teach us how to handle the car (accelerating and braking, steering, rules of the road, etc.). While we are learning the teacher is constantly monitoring our progress and giving us feedback as to our progress. His insistence in the way we handle the car is strict. We are not to deviate from his instructions. If we do there may be dire consequences, which he is quick to point out.

Once we have mastered all the aspects of driving a car, the teacher is no longer needed, because all the information that he taught us is now in our possession. Every time we get into a car to drive somewhere all that information is there in our heads to guide us safely to our destination. We can think of the training by the Torah (Law), and the time when we can drive alone as Grace.

Many Bible translations have statements like, "*For the Law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (John 1:17). Such readings unfortunately indicate a clear opposition between the Old and New Testament (Law and Grace).

A better understanding of the verse might be "*The Torah (training) came through Moses, and unflinching love and truthfulness came through Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ).*" The grace and truth of God can be clearly seen in the Torah, but while one is in the training session it is difficult to see the grace or even the truth of what is being taught. Only later, after the training, does the value become clear.