

Bible: Old and New Testaments

Dear parishioners, in my first article, I explained the difference between the 73 books of the Catholic Bible and the 66 books of the Protestant Bible. We will now examine the meaning of the word “Testament” together.

1. Bible: Definition

The word Bible comes from the Greek term *τὰ βιβλία* (ta biblia). *βιβλος* (biblos) means book, scroll, or writing. *βιβλία* (biblia) is the plural form of book. Therefore, the Bible literally means “the books.” However, the Bible is not just one religious book among many; it is part of Revelation. God told Jeremiah, “Behold, I put my words in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9). Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord (Exodus 24:3-4). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Deeds and words accomplish Divine Revelation intimately bound up with each other” (CCC, § 2). The Bible is therefore the Word of God because it transmits Revelation, not because every word was mechanically dictated.

2. Testament: Covenant

The word “testament” originates from the Latin *testamentum*, the Greek *διαθήκη* (Diathēkē), and the Hebrew *בָּרִית* (Berit); it means “covenant.”

The meaning of the word “testament” helps us better understand the Bible's structure and content. “Form” refers to the books, words, languages, and literary genres. “Content” relates to the Word of God, Revelation, and the message of salvation.

3. Why say “Old?”

The Church uses the word “Old” not to disqualify it but to refer to a time of promise that has now been fulfilled. The Old Testament is never abolished; it remains essential to the Christian faith. The letter to the Hebrews states: “By speaking of a new covenant, he implies that the first one is old” (Hebrews 8:13).



4. The Characteristics of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is an essential part of Holy Scripture. It tells the story of creation, sin, the election of Israel, the Law, the prophets, and the anticipation of the Messiah.

4.1 The Covenant: God's Free Initiative

Throughout the Bible, God reveals himself as the God of the Covenant. The word “covenant” conveys a spiritual truth: God personally commits himself to humanity. That is why the Covenant always begins with God: “The Lord our God made a covenant with us” (Deuteronomy 5:2). “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (Jeremiah 7:23). This covenant is never just a legal agreement; it involves life and faithfulness: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). It also involves love: “The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love” (Exodus 34:6). Therefore, the Covenant is not a negotiation but a gift.

4.2 The Old Testament: The Blood of Animals

The term “berit,” a Hebrew word for covenant, doesn't primarily mean a contract but an essential bond, a committed relationship, often sealed with the blood of animals. “This is the blood of the covenant” (Exodus 24:8). “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22).

4.3 The Old Testament: A Death

The Old Testament is sealed by death: “Where there is a will in question, the death of the testator must be established” (Hebrews 9:16). However, we must understand that, in the Bible, the word “testament” does not primarily mean “inheritance after death,” but “covenant.”

5. The Great Covenants and Concrete Signs

Concrete signs always accompany the great covenants in salvation history.



5.1 The Covenant with Noah: Universal

“I establish my covenant with you and with all flesh” (Genesis 9:11). God promises that there will be no more floods; this is the first sign of his mercy. A rainbow serves as a visual symbol of this covenant.

5.2 Covenant with Abraham: Promise

God promised to bless all nations with descendants, land, and blessings. “Look toward heaven and count the stars... so shall your descendants be” (Genesis 15:5). “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” This covenant is marked by circumcision.

5.3 Covenant with Moses: Law and Holiness

God forms a people: “You shall be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). The law is a path of life, not a burden: “I freed you before giving you the Law.” Blood and the Law accompany this covenant.

5.4 Covenant with David: Messianic Kingship

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever.” (2 Samuel 7:16). The throne serves as a tangible sign of this covenant.

6. The New Testament: Fulfillment in Jesus Christ

The Old Testament is a promise, and the New Testament is its fulfillment. Therefore, everything foretold in the Old Testament is revealed in the New, through Jesus Christ.

6.1 The New Covenant: The Blood of Jesus

The old covenant was sealed with animal blood; this was a step forward in revelation, but it could not wash away our sins. It is Jesus who saved us through his blood. “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant... for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). “He is the mediator of a new covenant.” (Hebrews 9:15)

6.2 Jesus, the Fulfillment of the Scriptures

“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Therefore, the Old Testament is understood through the lens of Christ.

- Adam foreshadows the new Adam (Romans 5:14)
- The Passover lamb foreshadows Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- The manna foreshadows the Eucharist (John 6:32-35)
- The bronze serpent foreshadows the Cross (John 3:14)

7. Unity of the Two Testaments

The Second Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, No. 16, paraphrases Saint Augustine and affirms: “God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, so arranged that the New Testament should be hidden in the Old, and that the Old Testament should be made manifest in the New.”

In brief, we refer to the Old and New Testaments because God established a progressive covenant that culminates in Jesus Christ without ever abandoning what He started. The Old Testament contains the promise, and the New Testament is the fulfillment.



Thank you to everyone who has agreed to walk with the parish on this biblical journey. We look forward to seeing you in the next article.

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