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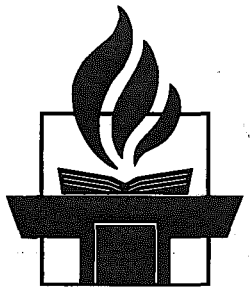

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The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–37

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It is a great privilege to be covenantal with God! It involves being the objects of God's election, commitment and faithfulness. The concept of covenant is dominant in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 54 and 55 alone we may see divine, covenantal loyalty (*chesed*) in association with covenants made with Noah, Abraham, Israel and David. Some suggest that there is a fade-out of the concept because there are only sixteen uses of the term in the New Testament. We argue that its ceremonial use in the Lord's Supper continues to make it a dominant idea. The bifurcation of the Scriptures, in dealing with the old and new covenants, seems natural. One belongs to the age of preparation, the other to that of the fulfillment.

What, then, is the biblical significance of the term covenant (Heb. *berith*) as employed by Jeremiah? W.J. Dumbrell argues well:

> To judge from secular biblical examples—and these are more than likely representative of the general ancient world picture—covenants presupposed a set of existing relationships to which by formal ceremony they gave binding expression. They operated between two parties, though the status of the parties varied considerably. The language of covenant was carefully prescribed by convention. One "cut a covenant," oath and witnesses were moreover involved, and often there was an associated sign.[1]

Dumbrell further asserts: "The very fact of creation involved God's entering into relationships with the world. . . . The world and man are part of one total divine construction and we cannot entertain the salvation of man in isolation from the world which he has affected."[2] Thus the idea of perpetuating a relationship is important to the concept of

covenant.

We are introduced to the expression in Genesis 6 in reference to Noah. Here it is a sovereign, unconditional, gracious prediction and promise. God initiates the action and determines its terms. The beneficiaries are Noah, his family, and every living thing. So the giraffes were included in this natural *berith*. The seal of the covenant is the rainbow, and the promise is that there will never be another universal flood. Salvation history may henceforth flow uninterruptedly. Immediately we run into a semantic problem as our word "covenant" is often associated with a bilateral compact with the parties of equal standing. Although the Old Testament gives us bilateral examples of men covenanting with men, as David did with Jonathan, and covenants which men made with God, as Jacob at Bethel, the usage with Noah was essentially unilateral. As we look at the divine covenants made with Abraham, Israel and David, again the initiative is always taken by God, and He sovereignly dispenses blessing on His own terms. Features common to these divine covenants then would include the sacred oath, as in Genesis 15 where God takes a self-maledictory vow as the theophany passes through the severed carcasses of animals (cf. Jer. 34:18). Also redemptive covenants usually have the shedding of blood, as in Exodus 24:6ff. So we have a sworn, solemn, religious engagement by God graciously to bestow blessing on a people already in a special relationship. Leon Morris stresses that the unilateral emphasis does not deny the aspect that the people have to accept or reject the covenant, but the emphasis is not on this aspect.[3]

Significantly, the Septuagint regularly translated *berith* with *diatheke*, so emphasizing the sovereign, unilateral nature of the covenant. As we move into the New Testament the word employed again is *diatheke* rather than *suntheke*. The latter would suggest a bilateral compact, while the former often was associated with the unilateral last will and

testament of a person.[4] Hebrews 9:17 plainly suggests that meaning. To be the beneficiary of such a covenant was a great advantage: to think that a sovereign Creator commits Himself to be gracious to a fallen world is a marvel of marvels.

In the days of the Babylonian exile of the sixth century B.C. three prophetic voices were raised: Jeremiah in the land of Palestine, and Ezekiel and Daniel in captivity. They witnessed the death of the old theocracy.[5] Never again in biblical history would Israel be an independent nation. It would have to exist under the rule of the Babylonians, the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks or the Romans. That which was conceived of as impossible had occurred, and the sacred temple had been polluted and destroyed. Israel in exile is treated as uncircumcised. Jeremiah, after counseling submission to the divinely decreed judgment by the Babylonians, now could disclose that the God of grace would restore the nation. Something much more effective than Josiah's revival was envisaged. There would be a second exodus (Jer. 23:7f.; 32:37ff.). This was to be accompanied by spiritual blessing. It would also involve the Gentiles, for Jeremiah's call made him a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5,10). The time of the Gentiles was dawning. He then gives the new covenant teaching. Ezekiel and Daniel also predict a similar program (Ezek. 34:25; Dan. 9:27).

Before looking more closely at Jeremiah 31, let us remind ourselves of the nature of the inspired Scriptures. The revelation is progressive (John 16:12, 25; Eph. 3:5; Heb. 1:1f.). That which appears in germinal form in the Old Testament fully blossoms out in the New. As Augustine said: "The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed."

The Old Testament can even be titled "Great Expectations," for it is replete with promises of ultimate deliverance. There is but one salvation history, based on the determinate counsel of God's will (Eph. 1:11).

In Jeremiah 31:32 the old covenant is identified as that which God made with Israel in the day He "took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," referring to that made at the birth of the nation (Ex. 24). This deliverance is also associated with the covenantal arrangement made previously with Abraham in Exodus 2:24. The family of seventy-five had multiplied to about 1.5 million in Egypt. After cruel oppression God granted them supernatural redemption. A theocracy was established. The anticipated new covenant is unlike it, we are distinctly told. Here, like Odysseus, we must avoid both Scylla and Charybdis. On one side there is identification of the old with the new and on the other the dispensational, fragmentary approach to the Scriptures which sharply contrasts law and grace. We should remember that in the gracious covenant God made with Abraham there was yet an element of obligation introduced with circumcision. Also in the old covenant there is a gracious element with redemptive mercies and the gospel types and shadows. We must remember that the Sinaitic covenant did not cancel the promises made to Abraham and his seed (Gal. 3:21). In a genuine sense it engineered an incipient fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises.[6] The nomadic family had become a multitude; as a nation they were now organized to enter the promised land, and the "mixed multitude" (Ex. 12:38) that went up suggested the beginning of Israel's blessing on the Gentiles. This is in sharp contrast with a statement by Randy Seiver: "God's purpose in giving the Mosaic law was to erect a barrier in the fulfillment of the promises that He might demonstrate more clearly the gracious nature of the covenant that He had made with Abraham and his seed."[7]

Continuity of the Old and New

To be faithful to Jeremiah's teaching we must note the continuity between the old and new covenants, before we

examine the discontinuity. Let us now show that both are marriage covenants; both refer to Israel; both deal with inscription of the law (*Torah*). Both have the goal that Jehovah should be their God and they His people. Both provide means of grace and involve precious promises. Let us examine matters more closely.

The term *berith* is applicable to both and the emphasis in each case is on God's sovereign dispensation. Hosea, with his parable of the prodigal wife, reminds us that Israel entered into a marriage covenant with Jehovah at Sinai (Hos. 1:2). So Jeremiah 31:32 speaks of a broken covenant, "although I was a husband to them." The Hebrew word *baal* can mean owner, possessor, husband or Baal. In commenting on Jeremiah 3:14, C.F. Keil notes, "whence come the meanings, take to wife, have oneself married, which are to be maintained here and in xxxi.32."[8] The perfect tense requires here a past action, in the light of the reference to the covenant having been broken. Keil continues:

> though Jahveh had united Israel Himself, they have broken the covenant and thereby rendered it necessary to make a new one. God the Lord, in virtue of His unchangeable faithfulness, would not alter the relation He had Himself established in His love, but simply found it anew in a way which obviated the breaking of the covenant by Israel. For it was a defect connected with the covenant made with Israel at Sinai, that it could be broken on their part. This defect is not to exist in the new covenant which God will make in after times.[9]

The new covenant's reference, "for they shall all know Me," may involve the Hebraic concept of the intimacy of marriage (Gen. 4:1). Certainly in Ephesians 5:28-32 the new Israel is married to Christ and the idea of a covenant is clearly associated with marriage in Malachi 2:14.

The Sinaitic covenant was with national Israel, and now Jeremiah refers to the house of Israel, the northern kingdom, and to the house of Judah, the southern kingdom, being reunited after returning from exile. However, the new covenant is with a new and enlarged Israel. The passage makes no direct mention of the Gentiles (cf. Jer. 3:16-19; 16:19), yet Jeremiah, in referring to Abraham's seed and to a land flowing with milk and honey which was promised to the forefathers, alludes in the context to the Abrahamic covenant (Jer. 32:22; 33:26). The apostle Paul declares that Abraham was pre-evangelized: "All the nations shall be blessed in you" (Gal. 3:8). So we are not surprised when the author of the epistle to the Hebrews directly relates the church with this blessing (Heb. 8:6-13). Already the believer has come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). There is one household of faith embracing God's servant Moses and us, "if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end" (Heb. 3:1-6). As with Israel there is only a remnant of the apostate nation which is to be rescued, so, after the opposition of the heathen world is subdued by God's destructive judgment, only those "left of all the nations" (Zech. 14:16) would survive.[10] This inclusion of the Gentiles is in harmony with what Isaiah had earlier predicted, as he spoke of all nations flowing up to Zion and of Israel being "the third party with Egypt and Assyria" (Isa. 2:2f.; 19:24f.). Yes, the new covenant is still with Israel, but it is a new Israel. As the old Israel was not without its share of grace, it was qualified to typify the new. According to Dumbrell:

> In substance the message of his book is that the time of the gentiles has arrived with the hegemony of Babylon. The end of the political history of Israel has thus virtually come. The facts of exile will bear this out. The political connections which were established with Israel by covenant thus stood in need at this time of theological restatement. . . . Jeremiah's new covenant theology was therefore intended to provide for the necessary transition from Israel as a nation to Israel as a theological ideal.[11]

Another element suggesting continuity is the reference to the writing of the law. The Decalogue had been thundered forth at Mount Sinai to the consternation of Israel. Immediately they felt the need of a mediator (Ex. 20:19). God reminds them: "You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven" (Ex. 20:22). For a permanent record God later engraves the Decalogue upon two stone tablets (Ex. 31:18). After Moses' rash act of breaking the tablets, God's finger again engraves the Torah upon stone. This reminds us of the unique position the Decalogue had in the theocracy. It could represent the whole covenantal arrangement. In the complex of civil, ceremonial and moral laws, it alone was given audibly and directly to the people. It was inscribed by God. It was placed in the ark of the covenant.

From the New Testament we see the abrogation of some elements of the Mosaic law: Christ pronounced all food clean (Mark 7:19), God rent the veil of the temple, and we observe the switch from nationalism to internationalism. This suggests that all legal elements were not of the same eternal value. In denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, Christ made mention of "the weightier provisions of the law" (Matt. 23:23). When He was interrogated by a lawyer demanding which was the great commandment of the law He extrapolated from the Pentateuch and declared: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37). Then He referred to Leviticus 19:18 for the second commandment. How ably do these summarize the Ten Words in a positive way, for he who loves God worships no rival, does not misrepresent and slander God with an idolatrous repre-

sentation, does not resort to blasphemy or to word magic,[12] thus taking His name in vain, and sanctifies time for the worship of God. Likewise, he who loves his neighbor starts in the family by lovingly obeying his parents. Love prevents murder, adultery, theft, false accusation and covetousness. We are not surprised that in Romans 13:10, "love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" and applies to the church enactments from the Decalogue. We admit that some local and temporal elements may be involved in the Decalogue itself. Reference is made to Palestine and to marriage for instance, matters suited for this life, but unsuitable for the heavenly state. Likewise, the largely negative presentation may have been necessary as these were the transgressions likely to disturb the relationship between God and Israel, but the positive expression demanding love is much more comprehensive. As thus interpreted, do we not have morality of eternal and universal application? Is this not the morality of heaven? The royal law of love will, no doubt, find new applications in the eternal state. The God of love (1 John 4:7) has given us a transcript of His divine nature in His moral law. The One with whom there is "no variation" (James 1:17) does not change His standards of righteousness.

It should be remembered that the Decalogue itself is not just a legal arrangement. Von Rad reminds us, "Israel was elected by Jahweh before she was given the commandments. As a result of this election she became Jehovah's chosen people, and this, in fact, happened before she had had any opportunity of proving her obedience. . . ."[13] Still, the saving event of the Exodus "is indissolubly bound up with the obligation to obey certain norms which clearly mark out the chosen people's sphere,"[14] just as occurs in the early Christian community. The same author further reminds us that in antiquity "a special relationship with a god was inconceivable without the acceptance and binding recognition of specific ordinances."[15] It was culturally and

morally fitting that Israel accept God's sovereign rights over them. There can be no doubt that Israel came to interpret the law in a legalistic manner, for Paul can indict them: "not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). In all of this we should be reminded that the law/grace controversy may be in danger of oversimplification. There is law in grace and grace in law.

With the new covenant God inscribes the royal law upon the heart and not upon stone tablets. The stony heart is to be softened and the unclean heart circumcised (Jer. 4:4), for God "will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised" (Jer. 9:25). Though Israel washed itself with lye and used much soap the stain of their iniquity would not be removed (Jer. 2:22). They needed the ministry of Jehovah Tsidkenu (Jer. 23:6). Now the heart is to be programmed for righteousness. The law would be internal and not just external. However, the law itself had spoken of circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6). Again the writing is the work of God.

Another feature suggesting continuity is the common goal of both covenants. This should not be surprising if we recognize that there was a lamb slain from the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19f.) and a people chosen in Christ, also in eternity (Eph. 1:4). The one way of salvation involves one household of faith (Heb. 3:2ff.) and one olive tree (Rom. 11:17). Justification is by grace through faith for Abraham before the Mosaic law was given, and for David who lived in the days of the theocracy (Rom. 4:1-8). Likewise, it remains the same for the church. All was possible in ancient time because of the retroactive influence of Christ's act of propitiation (Rom. 3:25f.). Old Testament saints got to heaven on credit! We read in Leviticus 26:12: "I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people." Likewise, in Jeremiah 31:1 God declares: "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people." Again

in verse 33: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." While all of creation belongs to the Creator, yet His people are His special possession, who are "the riches of the glory of His inheritance" (Ex. 19:5; Eph. 1:18). At the same time the Lord yearns for a reciprocal response from the recipients of grace. This obtains under both the old and new covenants.

The last similarity to be mentioned is that both provide means of grace and both are associated with precious promises. Many blessings were promised to the obedient in Deuteronomy 28, but while many of these were physical there were also spiritual promises of a coming Messiah (Deut. 18:18ff.). The many types and shadows further elaborated on these. Repentance and forgiveness were experienced by the saints, as the Psalter testifies. Forgiveness is to the fore in the new covenant also, as well as all the blessings of a Spirit-filled life. Let us not forget that Christ saw that the law, the prophets and the Psalms all testified to His death and subsequent glory (Luke 24:44). The saints will recline in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11). In the light of these similarities we are not surprised to read that a glory was attached to the old as well as to the new covenants (2 Cor. 3:7f.).

T.E. McComiskey discusses this well in a section dealing with law and grace. He writes:

> Law and grace are not opposing concepts. Faith and legalism are. If law is regarded as a covenant of works, on the basis of which one may receive eternal life, then law and grace are competing modes of salvation.
>
> The law does not command one to work in order to achieve a relationship with God. It assumes an established relationship with God. It commands one to obey in order to maintain their relationship. Leviticus 18 makes it clear that disobedience will sever one's relationship to the promise (vv. 28-29), but the relationship is presumed to have been established. The great statements of the law are preceded by a consciousness of a relationship established solely on the basis of grace. The magnificent cadences of the law should not be allowed to drown out the major theme expressed in words such as, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:6); "I have remembered my covenant. . ." (Exod. 6:5). The relationship was established by a gracious oath on the part of God. It would be realized regardless of human success or failure. One had only to respond to that affirmation in trust. If that promise was to be realized it had to be protected and obedience had to be encouraged. It was the function of the law to do this. Legal obedience is a manifestation of faith in the promise.
>
> The grace that shines with such magnificence in the new covenant is not different in essence from the grace that obtained through the era of law. It guarantees the same promise. It elicits the same faith and it requires obedience for the maintenance of the promise.[16]

So God is concerned with maintaining a special, gracious relationship with Israel.

The Covenant in Jeremiah: Renewed? Or New?

In the light of the foregoing should we see that Jeremiah is talking of a renewed covenant, or of a new covenant? The Hebrew word for new has both meanings. Unhesitatingly we say that it is a new covenant. Christ came to bring new wine and this required new wineskins (Matt. 9:17). The great divide was reached with the coming of the messianic age and the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We pass from the age of preparation to the time

of fulfillment. The least in the kingdom is greater than John, Christ's herald (Matt. 11:11). So the old is obsolete and ready to vanish away, possibly referring in part to the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple in A.D. 70 (Heb. 8:13). This left most Israelites dumbfounded. They could see no continuity. Their religion was being polluted!

The change is so great that it requires a change of priesthood and a change of law (Heb. 7:12). As James Stephens indicates: "The law which God gave to Israel made Levitical priestly service on their behalf indispensable, so that law and priesthood stood together, if the priest should be set aside it would involve the setting aside of the law also."[17] The Levitical priesthood was limited by the sin of the priests and by their limited life expectancy. So their atoning, sanctifying and intercessory ministries were only good as types. A priest after the order of Melchizedek was needed, one with an endless life who was immaculate, and Christ, of the non-priestly tribe of Judah, the God-man alone meets the need. The legal system was ultimately inadequate.

Then the nationalistic covenant with Israel was conditional. The people committed themselves, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Ex. 19:8). Obedience would bring nationalistic blessing; disobedience would bring a curse (Deut. 28). In this sense, "the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, he who practices them shall live by them" (Gal. 3:12). Blessing as a nation could be experienced only by loyalty to the covenant, as was similarly true of suzereign/vassal treaties of the Middle East. In Eden obedience to the Creator was demanded. In effect, Christ's exhortation, "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28), was operative. To survive in Paradise, Adam and Eve had to refrain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. All creatures owe their Creator this obedience. Release from this obligation is possible only through the gracious substitutionary ministry of Christ (Rom. 5:18f.). As with the lawyer who confronted

Christ, so Israel, in its period of instruction, had to be reminded of God's demand for perfection. Faced with its total inability to conform to God's law it was being reminded of the urgent need of grace. Yes, Moses was a faithful servant in the household of faith (Heb. 3:1-6), and far from being in opposition to the gospel given to Abraham he was active in helping to bring in the jubilee. He provided a testimony to the messianic age.

The old was thus lapsable and God can indict Israel, "My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them" (Jer. 31:32). God did not break the covenant and so the covenantal curses of Deuteronomy were still in effect in Jeremiah's day (Deut. 28:15ff.). God's original program would be accomplished on a higher plane (Ex. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9f.). Israel was the guilty party. However, the new is everlasting as the weakness of the flesh will be overcome. In the words of McComiskey, "The major difference is the facilitation of obedience through the gift of the Holy Spirit and the expression of the promise in a way more appropriate to the era initiated by the death of Christ and the ministry of the Spirit."[18] Only a miracle could enable an Ethiopian to change his skin (Jer. 13:23), and a supernatural work of grace is necessary for Israel to be in fellowship with Jehovah. The heart needed to be changed. In Hebraic usage it represented the mind, will, emotions and imagination. One purposes in his heart. The thoughts of the heart need to be forgiven. Today we might say that there is a need for a brain transplant. So instead of the law being "set before" Israel (Ex. 21:1), it needed to be internalized. In the light of the teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel the ignorance of Nicodemus about the rebirth from above was blameworthy (John 3:10). The inscription of the law on fleshly tablets of the heart was possible only by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, so Israel needed to be born of the Spirit. Ezekiel clearly enunciated this (36:26f.). The teacher of Israel should have done his homework.

In a sense the old was parenthetical, a time of schooling for Israel between the time of the gospel being given to Abraham and the time when Christ came to fulfill it (Gal. 3:17-19). However, this is not to deny that it was itself a tutor to lead us to and not away from Christ (Gal. 3:24). Its systematic teaching on the holiness and righteousness of God and the perfection demanded by its precepts enabled the believer to see how marred was God's image in him. Man's total inability to conform brought him under the ministry of condemnation and death (2 Cor. 3:7ff.). Man needs to feel lost before he is interested in salvation, illustrated by Christ's method of evangelism of the self righteous (Matt. 19:16ff.). Let us remember, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12).

Believers of the new covenant should be able to join the psalmist as he sang: "O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97), for they can relish it no longer just in its germinal form. It has now been freed, for the believer, from its curse. Notwithstanding, we must remember that fallen man was too weak to keep the law. It was never designed to rescue him.

Again, the old was incomplete and even the prophetic supplementation still left the prophets realizing that they ministered to a future race (1 Peter 1:10). Christ, in the last days, must complete its revelation (Heb. 1:1f.). Its incompleteness in part was associated with much being typical and symbolic. Typical men, objects, events, institutions and offices all pointed ahead. Von Rad reminds us, "That the things which happened to Israel on her way were always types, and that this Old Testament saving event was full of pointers forward to the New, was, of course, only revealed through the coming of Christ."[19] Types were inadequate and beggarly, but in directing to the messianic age they did become means of grace to the believers of that day.

Since God pronounced a blessing on those who blessed

Abraham, the father of the faithful, and a curse on those who cursed him (Gen. 12:3), "faith is clearly the prerequisite for receiving the benefits of the promise."[20] This applies under both the old and the new covenants. A pure pedigree from Abraham is insufficient. Forgiveness was obtainable under the old regime, although the blood of animals could only "sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh" and not the conscience (Heb. 9:13f.). Yet the trust in the messianic hope could enable David and others to cry: "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!" (Ps. 32:1). However, as the sacrifices themselves were a perpetual reminder of sin (Heb. 10:3), the degree of assurance enjoyed by the saints in Israel must have been inferior to those who can look back to the cross.

A key element of the new covenant is the promise, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). It assumes a time when the holy wrath of God has been fully appeased and a complete atonement for the people of God has been achieved. The forgiveness is so complete that sin would no longer be remembered. According to Dumbrell "sin would not be a factor in the new age under consideration."[21] The old covenant had been ratified with the shedding of blood, so also is the new (1 Cor. 1:25). The passage also suggests a sinless society. Often in the Prophets notes of finality appear. In other words we have justification, sanctification and glorification all completed and Israel in a state of consummation.

When one compares Exodus 19:5f. with 1 Peter 2:9, one realizes that the kingdom of Israel was a typical representation of Christ's kingdom. Both are designed to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Both are regarded as God's special treasure. Paul also asserts that the

> fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the

> sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

Their history was an example (*tupos*), for instruction to those upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10:11). The antitype does away with the type: Christ's sacrifice must end animal sacrifices and the veil of the temple has to be rent, for believers now form God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16). In passing to the antitype we must expect it greatly to surpass the type. Thus Abraham looked for spiritual counterparts when he failed to possess the land personally (Heb. 11:16).

Another significant difference is that the Holy Spirit had not been given under the old covenant (John 7:39). His coming in power had to await the glorification of Christ and His throne gift. This is not to deny a cosmic ministry of the Spirit (Gen. 1:2), nor an anointing of the agents of the theocracy. Neither does it deny the personal regeneration and sanctification of the elect in the days of the Old Testament, but it refers to Pentecost, when Joel's prediction was realized. Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah, in speaking of the everlasting covenant of peace which God will establish, shows how it will be activated by the Spirit of God (Ezek. 16:60; 34:25; 36:25-29). This suggests a new Israel, an Israel 100 percent regenerate. All will know the Lord. There will be an intimate loving, trustful and obedient relationship. There will be no need of evangelists, for it is a holy community. The old Israel fell into apostasy in the first generation, and we are not surprised when we recall that they had left Egypt as a mixed multitude. Israelites and Gentiles were assembled, and the godly and ungodly journeyed together. No longer will adults and their offspring automatically form the Israel of God. The Lord has sons but no grandsons.

As we consider the implications of Israel being totally regenerate we see that the application to the church age is somewhat limited, even though the Epistle to the Hebrews in part does so apply it. The church universal is far removed from this ideal, but so are most local churched. What pastor can guarantee, even after the most stringent regulations, that every member is truly born from above by the Holy Spirit? We have another instance of the "now" and the "not yet." In the words of Von Rad, "the 'today' of the fulfillment (Luke 4:21) at the same time opens faith's eyes to a new consummation of salvation."[22] Surely this teaching, as much other prophetic teaching, can be actualized only in the time of consummation. So Isaiah anticipates new heavens and a new earth (65:17f., 25) and looking past any millennium sees death being swallowed up (25:8). As death is the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), we are thrust into the eternal state. If one sin in Eden brought a curse upon creation, that curse surely cannot be lifted until sin is finally dealt with. Thus we are in the time of consummation and not in a temporary Paradise. Certainly, in the meantime, we should aim at a regenerate membership for our churches, but not being omniscient we have to rely on people's professions, and they may not be accurate.

As we mention the new Israel of God we must see the individualism involved. No longer can it be said: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer. 31:29). Unlike Noah's ark we enter the kingdom one by one. A personal response to the gospel is involved and God deals with those of every tribe, tongue and nation individually. Still we must not stop at this, for the whole passage on the new covenant stresses the corporate aspect. We are all to fit into one household and to form one nation. The bitter divisions in Israel of the past have all disappeared. So the new covenant involves the godly remnant of this Israel and the godly remnant of the Gentiles also

delivered from all its schisms. Paul in Romans 9-11 anticipates and prays for extensive revival blessing among all his kinsmen. In the light of the stress on the ethnic usage of "Israel" in these chapters, we personally see hope for a large-scale conversion in Israel in the words, "and thus all Israel will be saved." The fullness of the Gentiles did not involve every Gentile, so this does not deny remnant teaching for the Jews (Rom. 11:5). Paul goes on to allude, it would seem, to Isaiah 59:20; 27:9; Psalm 14:7 as well as Jeremiah 31:33ff. to prove, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26f.). The "mystery" of the regrafting of ethnic Israel into the one olive tree is seen as a resurrection from the dead (Rom. 11:15, 25). This is through the mercy showered on the Gentiles and thus relates to the church age. All is conditioned on their not remaining in unbelief (Rom. 11:23). The fullness of Israel can then cause blessing to flow over to the Gentiles as well, in this day of grace.

Jeremiah had many trials to face, but especially his lamentations were over Jerusalem. His tears prefigure Christ's weeping at a later day. Yet the prophet saw light at the end of the tunnel. The God of grace would remedy the chaotic conditions. A new Israel would appear in which He could delight. Jeremiah sees this as future. No mention is made by him of the covenant being ratified by blood. At the Last Supper Christ solemnly announces the inauguration of the new covenant. Now His people can rejoice that His loving-kindness and covenantal loyalty guarantee them access to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Conclusion: The Significance

In conclusion we may consider what is the significance of this teaching on the new covenant for the church. The Lord's Supper should remind us that our Old Testament heritage is greater than many realize.[23] The salvation history

commenced in Genesis logically leads to the New Testament. The patriarchs were more than types: they were the founding fathers of the true Israel. Down the ages there were seven thousand who did not bow the knee to Baal. God preserved an elect remnant. Pedagogic necessity required that God deal with those who were shut up to the coming faith (Gal. 3:23) in concrete rather than abstract forms. So the restoration prophesied by Jeremiah involved the repossession of Anathoth in Palestine (Jer. 32:8ff.), but elements were fused by Ezekiel to suggest a return to Eden (Ezek. 36:35). Earlier Isaiah had associated future blessing with the new heavens and the new earth.

The Old Testament needs the New to introduce fulfillment, but the New needs the Old for the beginnings of salvation history. The New relies on the categories of thought of the Old to represent the glorious ministry of the Messiah. So let us hold fast to the unity of the Scriptures and stress the progressiveness of revelation. The Jerusalem of Christ's day was so conservative of the old covenant and of its traditions that when Stephen was seen to speak in a derogatory manner of the law he was stoned. So Scripture was fulfilled: "And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says 'the old is good enough'" (Luke 5:39). The church for its authority and blessing has the whole canon of the Scriptures, so let us not go to the other extreme and discount the Old Testament. The New Testament standing alone is incomplete and in a sense incomprehensible.

Yes, the church is graced with both promise and oath (Heb. 6:13ff.). It is in covenantal relationship with Jehovah and this is everlasting. God has taken upon Himself to see that a new Israel will appear. Such a bestowal of grace calls for covenantal loyalty of His people. Instead of saying, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32), maybe we should now say, "Remember the fall of Jerusalem." The house of Israel has lain desolate for centuries, for it broke the covenant

with Jehovah. Through Christ's mediatorial work and the enabling of the Holy Spirit the elect of God will perseveringly remain faithful to the new covenant. The distinction between those who profess to be Israelites, and those who genuinely are, will be marked by covenantal loyalty.

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