

**THE CHURCH AND THE NEW COVENANT
OF JEREMIAH 31:31-34**

by
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Jeremiah 31:31-34 announces the promise of a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. This covenant is set up in contradistinction to a previous covenant. That previous covenant was contracted with Israel in the day when God "took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." This is a clear reference to the Mosaic covenant. The new covenant is contrasted with the Mosaic and seen to be fundamentally dissimilar to it. There are three things which make this new covenant dissimilar to the former one. First is the fact that under the new covenant, God's law will be inscribed on the hearts of the participants. Second is that there will be a universal knowledge of God. Third, there will be a complete and final obliteration of sin.

Since the fundamental promise of the new covenant is a new heart, the implication is that under the old covenant, the elect did not experience a new heart. The transformation described by the words "new heart" refers to regeneration. Arguments in favor of seeing regeneration in the Old Testament are not conclusive. In the light of the clear declaration of the new covenant prophecy coupled with the evidence of Deuteronomy 5:29, the arguments become even more suspect and it may be concluded that regeneration has only been experienced since the cross. This does not mean that Old Testament saints were any less saved than New Testament saints. It does mean that God's soteriological plan is to be viewed as relating to time (cf. Gal 4:4). Therefore the efficacious work of the atonement may be best seen as applying only since the cross.

Concerning the application of the new covenant, there are three views. The first, insists that Israel has been permanently displaced by the Church. Therefore, the new covenant is completely fulfilled in the Church. This view is rejected on the grounds that it ignores the teaching of many passages that there will be a literal restoration of national Israel. The second view sees two new covenants; one for the Church and one for Israel. This view is rejected for lack of convincing evidence that two new covenants exist. The third view sees one new covenant with applications for the Church and for the nation Israel. This view is accepted as most adequately representing the biblical data on the new covenant. It also presents the least hermeneutical problems.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BAGD Bauer, Walter; Arndt, William F.; Gingrich, F. Wilbur; and Danker, Frederick W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature
- BDB Brown, Francis; Driver, S. R.; and Briggs, C. A. The New Hebrew and English Lexicon
- TDNT Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important issues of Christian theology is the proper understanding of the soteriological scheme of God as it relates to the elect throughout all the ages. There are several schools of theological thought which have differing opinions on just how God's plan and means of salvation should be viewed in terms of the overall historical panorama portrayed in Scripture. This issue is of great import, since it can influence deeply one's total system of biblical interpretation. The problem is particularly evident with regard to the biblical distinctions between Israel and the Church.

At the very heart of the debate over Israel and the Church is the matter of the biblical teaching concerning God's covenants with man. Many are the works which have been produced dealing with this subject, yet the discussion has not ceased. All this serves to alert the Bible student that this is a most complex subject which demands no little study in order to intellectually penetrate its secrets.

Of primary importance to the study of God's soteriological scheme is the biblical teaching concerning the new covenant. The present investigation addresses itself

to the matter of the new covenant and its relationship to God's overall plan. At the mention of a new covenant, a number of issues immediately arise. The first most obvious question has to do with the nature of this new covenant. What does it involve and why is it new? As will be seen, the Bible teaches that the essence of the new covenant is the promise of a new heart. Equally important to the discussion is the matter of the extent of application of the new covenant. Is it just for Israel or just for the Church or for both? Here it will be demonstrated that the new covenant has applications for both, though the primary fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah thirty-one will be with Israel.

Jeremiah thirty-one, thirty-one to thirty-four has been chosen as the primary passage for investigation because it is the only Old Testament text where the new covenant is mentioned by name. It is, furthermore, quoted in its entirety in Hebrews 8:8-12. Consequently, the passage is determinative in answering the question concerning the application of the new covenant to the Church. Equally important is the substance of the prophecy of Jeremiah. Since the passage describes two of the covenants which God has made with Israel it provides a basis for comparing the two. This comparison establishes the grounds for understanding the nature and the substance of the new covenant.

As research on this project progressed, the investigation took a radically different course than what had first been envisioned. It had been the original intention of the writer to deal only with the relationship of the Church to the new covenant. But it soon became evident that any treatment of the subject would be woefully inadequate if it did not embrace a study of the substance of the new covenant. In reality, the application of the new covenant can only be understood in the light of the essence of its promises.

This change was made with considerable reluctance because of the nature of the discussion required. The passage speaks very definitely of the law of God being "written on men's hearts." The language employed here is a clear description of the divine work of regeneration. This raises some serious questions concerning the nature of regeneration under the Old Covenant. Therefore it was necessary to include a section on regeneration in the Old Testament. This section does not pretend to settle all the complex issues involved with the subject for that would require an entire thesis in itself. It is included in order to establish a foundation which will provide credence for the author's view concerning the substance of the new covenant.

The study develops in the following manner. The contrast between the old and new covenants is presented

first. Then the issue of regeneration in the Old Testament is addressed. Finally, the fulfillment of the new covenant is considered, with a brief survey of various theological views concerning the new covenant.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD COVENANT

The Lord speaking through the prophet Jeremiah mentions two covenants. One is the "new covenant" with which the former covenant is contrasted. It is necessary at the outset to establish some facts about the previous covenant. The expressions employed by the prophet Jeremiah concerning the old and new covenants will be closely examined in this section in order to establish what the Bible teaches concerning the old covenant.

The concept of God making a covenant with man is not uncommon in Scripture. He made a covenant with Noah in Genesis nineteen, sixteen and with Abraham in Genesis seventeen, nine to fourteen. Another covenant was made with David in Second Samuel seven, nine to sixteen. Since God made several covenants in the Old Testament, it is needful to establish which one is under discussion in Jeremiah chapter thirty-one. Furthermore, these covenants are not all the same in content or purpose. Consequently, it is necessary to determine the nature and the identity of the covenants being discussed in order to correctly understand their function and meaning.

The Identity of the Old Covenant

The previous covenant is commonly referred to as the old covenant, since it is contrasted with the new covenant in Jeremiah thirty-one. However, this covenant is not named, in terms of a proper title, anywhere in the context.

The identity of the old covenant is not often debated. There are several factors concerning the old covenant given in the passage in Jeremiah thirty-one which make possible the positive identification of the previous covenant. The most convincing of these factors is the time reference given in the passage. Most commentators agree that the old covenant refers to the law which was given by God to Moses.

The Time of the Old Covenant

The previous covenant spoken of by Jeremiah can be identified by the time indicated in verse thirty-two. It is spoken of as the covenant which was made "in the day" that the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt. Keil correctly suggests that the word "day" here should not be viewed in the restricted sense. It more properly refers to "the whole time of the Exodus."¹ Naegelsbach concurs, stating that "there is no grammatical necessity of taking 'day' in

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, vol. 2, trans. by James Kennedy, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 37.

a literal sense."¹ He further states that it is justifiable to view this covenant as all that "Jehovah concluded through the mediation of Moses in different acts with the people Israel," and not just what was delivered at Sinai.² Jeremiah referred to this covenant earlier in chapter eleven, verses three and four:

Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of the covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace.

The previous or old covenant, then, can be positively identified as the covenant which was mediated by God through Moses at Sinai, that is, the Mosaic law. This covenant is spoken of in Exodus nineteen, five and ratified by the people of Israel in chapter twenty-four, verse seven. It was confirmed by the sprinkling of blood on the people in verse eight.

The Recipients of the Old Covenant

The old covenant was contracted between God and the nation of Israel. The recipients of the old covenant are identified by Jeremiah in verse thirty-two as אֲבוֹתָם. In speaking of their fathers he is referring to the fathers of the house of Israel and the house of Judah (c.f. verse 31).

¹C. W. Naegelsbach, "The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah," trans. by Philip Schaff, in vol. 12 of A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, 25 vols., ed. John Peter Lange (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 274.

²Ibid.

The old covenant, then, was addressed to the same nation of Israel to which Jeremiah ministered. It had been originally given to an earlier generation but was still in effect for the Israel of Jeremiah's day.

The Nature of the Old Covenant

There are several outstanding things about the old covenant. First, as Pfeiffer has suggested, "the heart of this covenant was the ten commandments."¹ Beyond the ten commandments, however, there was a whole set of laws by which the nation was to be governed. With regard to worship, there was an elaborate sacrificial system with a special tribe of priests who were to minister to the people. While it is true that there was much emphasis on externals and adherence to a sacrificial system, it should not be assumed that there was no concern for the internal attitude. There was a definite command for the memorization and internalization of the law in order to promote the obedience of it. Notice the emphasis on the internalization of the law:

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them to thy sons, and thy sons' sons. (Deut 4:9).

This was the heart prayer of the Psalmist in so many of the

¹John K. Pfeiffer, "God's Holy Covenants," The Journal of Theology 19 (March, 1979):15.

Psalms (e.g. Ps 1:2; 19:8, 14; 26:2; 51:10, etc). God knew that just seeing His mighty works was not enough to ensure their complete obedience of His law. This was the reason for the rehearsal of the law in the book of Deuteronomy. Again notice the emphasis on the continual need for memorization and review of the law:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut 6:6-9).

Under the old covenant it was evident that the law was to be internalized and needed to be internalized if there was to be any successful obedience of it. Naegelsbach has good summary statement concerning this matter:

It is true that men knew even under the Old Covenant that the law, in order to be fulfilled must not be merely externally before the eyes or merely in the head, but that it must be in the heart.¹

A second outstanding feature about the old covenant was its orientation toward one nation of people. McClain, observing this phenomenon, has stated that the old covenant was "directly related to Israel and primarily involved a people, the land and a religious system."² The old

¹Naegelsbach, "The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah," p. 275.

²Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 60.

covenant, then, had a very definite corporate relationship to an entire nation. The contracting of the covenant was corporate with the whole nation of Israel observing the power of God at Sinai (Exod 20:18-21). All of the nation agreed to the conditions of the covenant (Exod 19:8; 24:3). The whole nation was sprinkled with the blood of the covenant (Exod 24:6-8). The blessings of the covenant were dependent upon corporate obedience (Deut 28:1-14). The disobedience of the nation would also bring a curse upon the entire nation (Deut 28:15-68). Ezekiel, referring to this, states that the following proverb had been spoken in Israel: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek 18:2). Jeremiah makes use of the same proverb (Jer 31:29). This is an indication of just how intrinsically corporate the conditions of the old covenant were.

One more feature of the old covenant needs to be observed here. The old covenant was designed to bring the people of the nation Israel into a special relationship with God. Notice the words of Exodus chapter nineteen, verses five and six:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

The end result, then, which God intended to produce through the old covenant was a special relationship with the people

of Israel. It will be observed later that this is also the great goal of the new covenant.

The Conditions of the Old Covenant

As has already been noted, the old covenant was conditional. It was conditional in the sense that obedience brought blessing and disobedience brought a curse (Deut 28). The obedience of the covenant people was essential if they were to enjoy the blessings it promised. But Jeremiah makes clear that Israel broke the covenant. Calvin says, "they made void that covenant."¹ This does not mean that by their actions, they annulled God's covenant. It means that their disobedience disallowed the blessings of the covenant and invoked its judgment. The deficiency, therefore, was not in the covenant but in the men with whom it was made.

The problem with the law was the incapability of the people to fulfill its demands. Kent remarks that "the inadequacy of the covenant was its inability to insure that the people could live up to it."² It is clear from Hebrews eight that God was fully aware of the problem and that He never intended for the law to perform the function of

¹John Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations, vol. 4, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 129.

²Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Epistle to the Hebrews (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972), p. 151.

empowering the people to live up to the demands of the law. Kent makes this further statement concerning the old covenant:

The Levitical system must have been envisioned by God as inadequate, inasmuch as He announced a replacement with a different kind of priest. Here the reasoning is that the Mosaic covenant must not have been able to accomplish all that was needed, since God saw fit to plan another covenant.¹

However this statement is somewhat problematic. The Levitical system and the Mosaic law were only inadequate in the sense that they could not produce a changed heart. They did accomplish that which was intended for them to accomplish. It is necessary, then, to understand that this is what is meant by the "inadequacy" of the old covenant.

The Limitations of the Old Covenant

When the limitations of the old covenant are considered, the purpose and design of it must be kept in mind so that references to its inadequacy are not misunderstood. Hebrews chapter eight calls the new covenant a "better covenant" (verse 6). Furthermore, the writer indicates that the first covenant was deficient (verse 7) and that because a new one has come into being the former one grows old and is passing away (verse 13).

This does not mean, however, that the law was somehow imperfect or in any way lacking. It should not be

¹Ibid.

viewed as being in opposition to the new covenant. Calvin has pointed out that God could never have made new covenant in the sense of one contrary to the old covenant.¹ The old covenant was not deficient in terms of what it was intended to accomplish. Exell gives this very lucid explanation:

The old covenant was a faulty one, never intended to be the means of their salvation, but only to remind them of their sin and show them their helplessness. Not faulty in the thing it was intended to accomplish, but in its final ability to save.²

Therefore, when the writers of Scripture speak of the faultiness of the law, they do not mean that God authored a law which was imperfect. They mean it was not able to finally save nor was it ever intended to do so.

The Need for a New Covenant

Because Israel did not live up to the requirements of the law which would have brought them blessing, it became necessary to establish an entirely new covenant. This new covenant would be different from the old covenant, since Israel demonstrated that it was incapable of fulfilling the requirements of the old covenant. The new covenant would make obedience to God's will possible by an inward change in man's heart.

¹Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations, p. 126.

²Joseph Exell, "Jeremiah" in vol. 2 of The Biblical Illustrator (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 124.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW COVENANT IN JEREMIAH 31:31-34

The most important passage in the Old Testament concerning the new covenant is Jeremiah 31:31-34. It is important not only because it gives the clearest statement on the new covenant of any Old Testament text, but because it is the only one in which the expression "new covenant" is found.

Contextual Considerations

Because of the significance of this passage to the understanding of the new covenant, an examination of its contextual setting will be made here.

The Historical Background

This passage was written at a point a little more than half way through Jeremiah's ministry. The scene in Jerusalem was one of spiritual decline and general indifference toward God. The first group of captives had already been deported to Babylon and the vessels from the house of the Lord had been carried away. In chapter twenty-seven, Jeremiah advised the people who had not been taken captive, to submit to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar in order to remain in the land. But the message was ignored.

The false prophet, Hananiah, announced to the people that yoke of Nebuchadnezzar would be broken and that the captives would be returned to the land (chapter 28).

Because the people continually rejected the word of God by His true prophets and because of their continual failure to live up to the conditions of the old covenant, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians became inevitable. By the time spoken of in chapter 32, the siege had already begun. It is interesting to note that these are the exact conditions that God promised would come upon Israel if they disobeyed His covenant (c.f. Deuteronomy 28). Now in this setting God gives Jeremiah the prophecy and the promise of the New Covenant.

The Wider Context

Chapter twenty-nine of Jeremiah contains a message from God which Jeremiah sent to the Jews already in captivity in Babylon. He instructed them to build houses, plant gardens and give their sons and daughters in marriage, for their captivity in Babylon was to last for seventy years. They were told to pray to the Lord and seek peace in Babylon until the time when God would restore them. He warns them specifically not to listen to the false prophets who were among them prophesying a soon end to the captivity.

In chapter thirty, Jeremiah begins a prophetic section foretelling the future glory and restoration of

Israel. This section extends through the end of chapter thirty-one. Verses one through seventeen describe a time of great distress called the time of Jacob's trouble. The remainder of the chapter elaborates upon the future deliverance of Israel. There will be "thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry" (vs. 19).

Chapter thirty-one, verses one through seventeen foretell of the great joy that will replace the mourning. Though the whole chapter is written in the spirit of this great restoration of Israel, verses eighteen to twenty-six review God's chastisement of His people. The balance of the chapter describes the new covenant which serves as a basis for the long awaited restoration to the land. It is in this context that the passage under discussion is found.

The Immediate Context

Verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight tell how God will bring about the rebuilding and restoration of Israel. He indicates that there will be fruitfulness both of man and beast by likening this restoration to the planting of seed. Verse twenty-nine describes a new spiritual principle for dealing with sin in Israel. Previously the whole nation suffered for the sins of people. Now individual responsibility is stressed: "Everyone shall die for his own iniquity" (verse 30). This will prove to be an important point in subsequent discussions.

It is at this point that the promise of the new covenant is introduced. Verses thirty-five to thirty-seven, in a beautiful poetic section, affirm God's determination to fulfill this promise. The remainder of the chapter predicts the literal reestablishment of the city of Jerusalem.

Features of the New Covenant

The new covenant proclaimed by Jeremiah is described by contrast with the previous one. Therefore, the study of the new covenant will involve the same basic issues discussed under the old covenant. It should be stressed that the new covenant is contrasted with the Mosaic covenant, not the Abrahamic or Davidic covenants. The promises made to Abraham and to David will finally be carried out. These covenants are not annulled by the old covenant (Galatians 4:17). Chafer has pointed out that the new covenant does not affect either of these covenants, since they were both unconditional.¹ Pfeiffer goes even farther and states that "the faithful of Israel could always look above the Sinaitic covenant and find their comfort in the Abrahamic covenant."²

¹Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Dispensationalism," in Bibliotheca Sacra 93:372 (October-December, 1936), p. 437.

²Pfeiffer, "God's Holy Covenants," p. 15

The Time of the New Covenant

The time of the new covenant is a not an easy matter to establish. There are two important time indicators in the passage. First, Jeremiah definitely places the new covenant as future to his own time with the use of the expression לְמֵימֵי בְּאֵיִם which starts verse thirty-one. Second, the phrase אַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים in verse thirty-three reinforces the eschatological nature of the prophecy. The question arises as to the specific time indicated by these words. When the prophet says, "after those days," to what is he referring? Keil states that the expression is inexact, but that it probably owes its origin to the phrase in 23:20 "in the latter days."¹ The antecedent of "those days," however, is certainly to be found closer than chapter twenty-three. It has already been noted under the discussion of the contextual setting that chapters thirty and thirty-one make up a prophetic section which discuss the final restoration of Israel. Throughout the whole section there are various references to future days.

The most significant time indicator in the whole section is found in thirty-one, verse seven. This verse speaks of the time of Jacob's trouble. Chapter thirty-one begins with the phrase "At the same time. . . ." indicating a continuation of the events of chapter thirty. Therefore

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 38.

the time of the ultimate fulfillment of the new covenant as predicted by Jeremiah can be placed after the time of Jacob's trouble. This passage, taken alone, definitely makes the fulfillment of the new covenant promise eschatological. However, it cannot be denied that in some senses the new covenant has already begun. Jesus indicated at the last supper that the new covenant began with the shedding of his blood (Matthew 26:28-29). This issue is dealt with more completely in a later chapter.

The Recipients of the New Covenant

The identity of the recipients of the new covenant is established in verses thirty-one and thirty-three. God says that He will make His new covenant אֶת בְּרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל and וְאֶת בְּרִית יְהוּדָה . There can be no mistaking that God means the literal nation of Israel. This prophetic message was directed to the nation of Israel which existed at that time. Govett comments that "the new covenant shall be entered into with the same people with whom the old covenant was made."¹ Because the term אֶת בְּרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל is used alone in verse thirty-three, it is clear that God intends to unite the divided houses of Israel into one nation. Calvin has also observed this truth: "God then promises

¹Robert Govett, *Govett on Hebrews* (Miami Springs, Florida: Conley and Schoettle Publishing Company, 1981), p. 238.

that there would be again one body, for he would gather them that they might unite together, and not be like two houses."¹ The new covenant, then, will involve all twelve tribes of Israel. Kent elaborates further stating, "The clear impliction is that there will be a reunited nation."²

If viewed strictly from this passage, there is no warrant for seeing the new covenant as being promised to anyone but the united nation of Israel. This is not to say, however, that certain blessings of the new covenant cannot be extended by God's grace to other peoples. God promised Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). It will be seen later that, indeed, the church does enjoy the soteriological benefits of the new covenant.

The New Covenant in Relation to the Old Covenant

An issue that demands attention before the nature of the new covenant can be discussed, is the new covenant's relationship to the previous covenant. It was established in the preceeding chapter that the old covenant was not faulty in that which it was intended to do, but in the final ability to save lost men. However, Jeremiah sets the new covenant in contradistinction with the old. Excell

¹Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations, p. 126.

²Kent, The Epistles to the Hebrews, p. 152.

says that the two are placed in opposition to each other.¹ Calvin, after having affirmed that the new covenant is not contrary to the old,² later declares that Jeremiah "assumes that the new was opposed to the old."³ This is a clear example of just how difficult it is to establish a consistent view of the relationship between the two covenants. Habel states that "the 'not like' of v. 32 makes the anti-thesis explicit."⁴ There is a general recognition, then, that the new covenant is to be seen as better than the old covenant. It is presented by the prophet Jeremiah as finally superseding and replacing the old covenant.

However, there is no warrant for affirming, as Vanden Busch does, that the law of God will one day be more perfect than it was as originally given.⁵ The prophecy does not state that God's moral law will be changed. What changes under the new covenant will be discussed later in this chapter. For the moment, it can be established that there is a difference between the old and new covenants.

¹Exell, "Jeremiah," pp. 121-122.

²Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations, p. 126.

³Ibid., p. 140.

⁴Norman C. Habel, "Jeremiah, Lamentations," in the Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 246.

⁵Roger J. Vanden Busch, "Jeremiah: A Spiritual Metamorphosis," Biblical Theological Bullentin 10 (January, 1980):20.

The phrase לֹא כַּבְּרִית in verse thirty-two is especially significant. It demonstrates a fundamental dissimilarity between the new covenant and the former one. Most commentators admit the passage teaches that this dissimilarity exists between the old and new covenants. The problem is in determining those areas of dissimilarity between the two covenants.

The Nature of the New Covenant

In order to determine the differences between the two covenants, it is necessary to study the nature and the essence of the new covenant. This is a most important study since the nature of the new covenant necessarily sheds light on the meaning, application and extent of it.

The Covenant As New

The covenant is said to be new and different from the former covenant. The word employed is הַשֵּׁנִי which is the ordinary Hebrew word for new. The verb form of this word sometimes carries the idea of renewal but such a semantic significance is not demonstratable in the adjectival form. The adjectival form is often simply the opposite of the word for old.¹

¹See the discussion of this word in The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. "הַשֵּׁנִי," by Rome North, 4:225-244.

But perhaps the most difficult question concerning the new covenant relates to the essence of its newness. What is it, exactly, that makes it new? The definition of the word שָׁדָרָה does not of itself determine the reason why the new covenant is to be viewed as different from the old. The question, then, must be resolved by an analysis of other factors in the passage.

The Unconditional Nature of the New Covenant

As has been mentioned before, the old covenant was conditional. Jeremiah says that the former covenant was broken by Israel. The word is הִפְרָה , which is the hiphil form of the verb פָּרַר meaning "to break, frustrate, make ineffectual or annul."¹ It has already been shown that this "breaking" of the covenant had to do with the disobedience of the covenant people. Their disobedience excluded them from the blessings of the covenant and incurred for them the curses of the covenant. This exclusion from the promised blessings of the covenant necessitates the formulation of a new covenant in order for God to fulfill His promises in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.

The new covenant, however, is unconditional, and, in that sense, it could be regarded as new. But the reason why the new covenant is unconditional is that God will

¹BAGD, p. 830.

insure the obedience of His people this time. This is what really makes the covenant new.

The Implantation of the Law Upon the Heart

The real essence of the new covenant is introduced in verse thirty-three by the words *כִּי זֶה הַבְּרִית* , "But this is the covenant. . . ." Leaving out the subordinate clauses, the verse reads: "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel . . . I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts." This new covenant is said to affect the *קֶרֶב* which is the "inward parts, the midst or that which is within"¹ and the *לֵב* which is the "heart, the mind the will or the inner man."²

The major difference in the two covenants, then, is that the former one was written in stone (Exod 24:12). It was given through Moses and physically laid before them in written form for their acceptance and for the application of it to their lives. The latter covenant will be written on their hearts. This is widely recognized as the primary distinction between the two covenants. Keil describes it this way:

The difference between the two consists merely in this, that the will of God as expressed in the law under the old covenant was presented externally to the people,

¹BAGD, p. 899.

²Ibid., p. 524.

while under the new covenant it is to become an internal principle of life.¹

Habel states that "the new covenant will not have an external set of laws, no decalog inscribed in stone, but an innate sensitivity to the will of God."² Nevertheless, it should be noted that no change in God's moral law is promised. The change is not in the essence of the law but in the location of it. Whereas the former covenant was written on stone, the new covenant will be written on hearts. Therefore Owens' analysis is more explicit:

So far as the law is concerned Jeremiah's new covenant is not promised to contain a new law which will replace the old laws of Moses and the Decalogue. Instead, it promises a new power and possibility of obedience to the law, made real because God will inscribe the laws in the heart of every Israelite.³

Calvin remarks that this change is not in the substance of the law of God but in its form.⁴ He clarifies what he means by stating that God does not say, "'I will give you another law' but I will write my law, that is the same law, which had formerly delivered to the fathers."⁵ Gray agrees with Calvin stating, that "the difference is in form, not

¹Keil and Delitzch, p. 38.

²Norman C. Habel, "Jeremiah and Lamentations," p. 247.

³J. J. Owens, "Jeremiah, Prophet of Hope," Review and Expositor 78 (Summer, 1981):356.

⁴Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations, pp. 131-132.

⁵Ibid., p. 132.

essence."¹ It can be seen, then, that there is agreement among Bible scholars that the central issue of the new covenant, that which makes it new, is the promise of a new heart. Under the old covenant, Israel was unable to live up to the demands of the law. The law was powerless to effect the inward spiritual metamorphosis of man's heart. But a transformed heart is what is promised to the nation of Israel in the new covenant of Jeremiah thirty-one.

A problem immediately arises at this point with respect to the regeneration of the Old Testament saints. The language of the new covenant speaks very clearly of regeneration. In fact, Kent states that "the transformation described here is the essence of regeneration."² This issue is covered in detail in the next chapter.

The Knowledge of God

Another outstanding feature of the new covenant is the promise of a universal knowledge of God. Jeremiah chapter thirty-one, verse thirty-four states that, "they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord." Under the old covenant there was a special group of priests in Israel who

¹Richard Gray, "A Comparison Between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant," The Westminster Theological Journal 4:2 (November 1941):11.

²Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 153.

were consecrated for the specific purpose of teaching God's law to the people. In the book of Malachi the Lord speaks of the consecration of Levi for this special task. He states that His covenant was with Levi to minister to the people (Mal 2:4-5). Levi was especially set apart for the purpose of teaching the people, and they were to receive instruction from him: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal 2:7).

However, the system did not insure success. Even from the start there was failure. At the beginning of the book of Judges it is stated that a generation arose "who knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judg 2:10). God had to destroy Hophni and Phineas, the sons of Eli because they abused the office of priest and led Israel to sin (1 Sam 2:27-36). Later on, Hosea complained, as Bruce has observed, "that there was no knowledge of God in the land" (Hos 4:1).¹ Govett suggests concerning this matter that "the priests and the people both forgot their duty."² They were to have memorized the law, as seen in Deuteronomy chapter six, in order to assure their obedience to it. However, Bruce correctly notes that

¹F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, vol. 14, in New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 174.

²Govett, Govett on Hebrews, p. 241.

"even the memorizing of the law of God does not guarantee the performance of what has been memorized."¹

The promise given through Jeremiah is that under the economy of the new covenant the knowledge of God will be universally enjoyed by the covenant people. It will no longer be communicated by the external teaching of "every man his brother." Habel comments that "the advent of the new covenant will mark the end of the old modes of education."² This statement is valid with one qualification. The new covenant was established with the work of Christ on the cross, yet biblical instruction has not ceased. God does say, however, "they shall all know me." This will be true when the covenant is fulfilled in the ultimate sense. Pfeiffer explains that "this new covenant would, of its own accord, fill the people with a knowledge of God."³

The universality of this provision is seen in the phrase מִן הַיָּסוּדִים וְעַד הַגְּדֹלִים; "from the least of them unto the greatest of them." Everyone in Israel will know God and be in submission to Him. The words of Ezekiel suggest that this teaching of man by God will be accomplished by the Spirit of God that He has promised to put within man. "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in

¹Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 172.

²Habel, "Jeremiah and Lamentations," p. 248.

³Pfeiffer, "God's Holy Covenants," p. 17.

my statues, and ye shall keep mine ordinances, and do them" (Ezek 36:27).

It will be noticed, furthermore, from the passage in Jeremiah, that the source of the knowledge will be different. It will be, as Keil has suggested, "knowledge based on an inward experience of the heart."¹

The Blotting Out of Sins

The last major feature of the new covenant involves a permanent forgiveness of the sins of the covenant people. This part of this new covenant is set forth in the last portion of verse thirty-four of Jeremiah thirty-one. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The new covenant involves more than just the internal change which places God's laws upon man's heart. It also involves, on God's part, an obliteration of the memory of the sins of the people. In fact, Exell has correctly pointed out that, although this characteristic is stated last, "it is really the precedent condition of the other two."² It is the pardoning of sins that makes the implantation of God's law on the heart possible. It is only because the sin problem has been cared for that man can be taught of God.

¹Keil and Delitzsch, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 40.

²Exell, Jeremiah, p. 122.

One of the features of the old covenant was that the sacrificial system made a yearly remembrance of the problem of sin (cf. Heb 10:3). The annual sacrifices brought up again and again the issue of the sins of the people under the old covenant. Govett has called this "the great fault in the old covenant of justice . . . It yearly remembered the sins of its covenanted people."¹ This can not properly be called a fault, however, since part of the purpose of the law was to point out sin. The law could not take away sin nor could it give life (Gal 3:21). The only thing it could do was to show sin to be sinful (Rom 7:13). The apostle Paul affirmed that the law is holy (Rom 7:12). Nevertheless, it was not intended to provide for the forgiveness of sins.

However, the new covenant does make provision for the ultimate covering of sins. The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross was efficacious to provide the final payment for sins (Rom 8:3). Repeated sacrifices are no longer needed for the purpose of atoning for sins. On the basis of the sufficient sacrifice of Christ, God can and does finally blot out all remembrance of the sins of His people. Dr. Kent gives a good summary of this particular truth:

Sins will be remembered no longer with repeated sacrifices because the mediator of the new covenant has

¹Govett, Govett on Hebrews, p. 241.

provided the once-for-all sacrifice which expiated sin completely.¹

This ultimate pardoning of sins is the characteristic which makes the new covenant so unique. God will remember their sins no more, and they will no longer need to be reminded of them by means of animal sacrifices.

Attendant Blessings

There are some features of the new covenant which come mainly as a result of those factors which are produced by the new covenant. The most prominent of these is the promise that the Lord will be their God and they will be His people (Jer 31:33). As has been mentioned, this was also the goal of the old covenant (Exod 19:5).

Other blessings involved in the new covenant have to do with the physical restoration of Israel to the promised land (Jer 31:35-40).

Summary

To this point both the old and the new covenants have been considered as to their identity and essence. The old covenant was shown to be the Mosaic covenant which was made with the people of Israel upon their deliverance from Egypt. There are several notable features about that covenant. First, it involved a written law and a sacrificial system. Second, it was oriented toward one nation of

¹Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 153.

people and had a definite corporate emphasis. Third, the old covenant was conditional in that its blessings were dependent upon the obedience of the covenant people. Their disobedience invoked the curses of the covenant. Finally, the old covenant did not provide for the inability of man to obey God's laws. The law only commanded, it did not have the power to change the heart.

The new covenant is contracted with the same nation of people as the previous covenant was. The covenant is primarily eschatological in its application. It will be concluded ultimately with national Israel after the time referred to as the time of Jacob's trouble. Other applications of the new covenant will be observed in succeeding chapters.

There are three major distinctives of the promised new covenant which distinguish it from the old one. Bruce has summarized these distinctives nicely:

- (a) the implanting of God's law in their hearts;
- (b) the knowledge of God as a matter of personal experience;
- (c) the blotting out of their sins.¹

These distinctives taken together accomplish what the old covenant was not able to effect. Under the former covenant the emphasis was upon externals. Exell amplifies this thought by stating that, "The whole relation was as between

¹Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 172.

an outward law and an outward obedience. The law commanded and the subject had to obey."¹ Though the former covenant emphasized externals, the latter one will emphasize an inward transformation of the heart. The law itself is not changed but the motivation for obedience is. The new covenant does not depend upon man's obedience for its success, but it gives man an inward desire to obey God's law. The new covenant, then, assures the internalization of God's law. Keil states it this way:

It thus appears that the difference between the old and the new covenants must be reduced to this, that what was commanded and applied to the heart in the old is given in the new, and the new is but a completion of the old covenant.²

The hope, then, of the new covenant is founded squarely upon God's ability to carry out the covenant. Exell's statement is excellent:

The prophet's hope of permanent well-being in the future will not be based on any expectation of the people doing better, but rather on the faith that God in His grace will do more for them and in them.³

The basic promise of the new covenant, then, is an inward transformation in the heart of man. Since this is true, it is necessary to determine to what extent, if any, the Old Testament saints enjoyed a changed heart.

¹Exell, Jeremiah, p. 124.

²Keil and Delitzsch, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, p. 39.

³Exell, Jeremiah, p. 125.

CHAPTER IV

REGENERATION AND THE OLD COVENANT

It has been established in the previous chapters that the fundamental promise of the new covenant is the assurance of a new or transformed heart. A discussion of regeneration in the Old Testament, therefore, becomes imperative.

The Biblical Terminology for Regeneration

The biblical word for regeneration occurs only twice in all of Scripture. Both occurrences are found in the New Testament. The word is *παλιγγενεσία*, meaning rebirth or regeneration.¹ In the most literal sense, it means a "new genesis."² The first occurrence of the word is found in Matthew nineteen, twenty-eight. Here it is used in an apocalyptic sense to refer to the final renewal or renovation of the world. It does not, in this context, carry the New Testament concept of spiritual renewal. However, Lange argues that "the first 'regeneration,' in principle, contains the second, and that it is continuously

¹BAGD, p. 606.

²TDNT, s.v. "*παλιγγενεσία*," by Bushsel, 1:686-689.

carried on and developed until the final stage shall be attained."¹

The second usage of the word is found in Titus 3:5 where it is employed to speak of spiritual renewal or rebirth. This is the only time in Scripture that the word regeneration is used in a soteriological sense. It is interesting that in terms of the precise word, regeneration, the biblical usage is very restricted. It is difficult, therefore, to propose a strictly biblical definition of the term.

There are other terms found in the Bible which scholars generally agree refer to the same concept. One such term is the concept of the new birth which the Lord used in talking with Nicodemus in John chapter three. The term He used is actually made up of two words. The first word γεννώω, means to beget² and the other word ἀνωθεν, means anew.³ Another such word is ἀναγεννώω, meaning to beget anew.⁴ This word is used in 1 Peter chapter one verses three and twenty-three. The idea expressed by this

¹John Peter Lange, Matthew, trans. Philip Schaff, in Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. John P. Lange, 24 vols. (reprinted ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 349.

²BAGD, p. 155.

³Ibid., p. 77.

⁴Ibid., p. 51.

word is very similar to idea behind term "born again" which is discussed above.

Regeneration as a Theological Term

Regeneration as a theological term has a broad spectrum of usage. Some theologians use it in the broadest sense to refer to the entire salvation process including the restoration of the divine image. Others use it only in the most restricted sense of the entrance into the new life brought about by the new birth.¹ Some authors seem to confuse regeneration with other processes in the salvation experience such as justification, conversion and sanctification.²

Regeneration, viewed in its widest lexical sense, can properly be employed to speak of the entire salvation process including glorification. The problem, however, is that there is a more specific soteriological phenomenon which needs the word regeneration in order to describe it properly. But even in a more restricted sense, regeneration is hard to define. The process of sanctification is spoken of in terms of renewal which are similar to the

¹For a complete discussion of the various usages of regeneration see, William G. T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 1:490-494.

²See Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), pp. 465-486.

terminology that is used for regeneration.¹ It is difficult, then, to divorce the notion of regeneration as renewal from the doctrine of sanctification. Killen, however, insists that the two must be kept distinct. He states that the latter is the process which the former begins.²

Because of the diversity of uses for the word regeneration, it is difficult to establish what any given author means by his usage of the term. In the discussion of regeneration in the Old Testament, therefore, it is necessary to establish what is meant by the term. However, it is typical of writers to discuss regeneration in the Old Testament and never define what they mean by their use of the term. One notable exception is Davis who devotes a whole chapter to the definition of regeneration.³ Yet, he frankly admits, at the beginning of his discussion, that it is his purpose to establish a definition of regeneration that "will prove applicable in all ages."⁴ Given such a definition, it would not be hard to prove regeneration in the Old Testament.

¹Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, s.v. "Regeneration," by R. Allen Killen, 2:1449.

²Ibid.

³John J. Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament," Unpublished Th.M. Thesis (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1964), pp. 38-66.

⁴Ibid., p. 38.

It is clear, then, that the word "regeneration" is used with a great deal of imprecision. Having established this, it will be advantageous to study the views on regeneration in the Old Testament before proposing a definition of the term.

Arguments in Favor of Regeneration
in the Old Testament

The effort to prove regeneration in the Old Testament springs from a desire to view the elect of all ages as having the same salvation experience. The problem, however, is far more complex than this, because God's plan involves not only a present experience of salvation but also the ultimate realization of that salvation. All would agree that there is something about the experience of New Testament saints which is different from the experience of Old Testament saints. The struggle to delineate the difference is apparent in many writers. Kuyper, for instance, states that "the Holy Spirit means to teach us that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was his first and real coming into the Church."¹ This would seem to prove that the Holy Spirit did not exercise such an operation previous to Pentecost. Kuyper, however, proceeds to

¹Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), p. 115.

affirm that the Old Testament saints did experience the same thing:

But in the Old Testament there was also an inward operation in believers. Believing Israelites were saved. Hence they must have received saving grace. And since saving grace is out of the question without an inward working of the Holy Spirit, it follows that He was the worker in Abraham as well as in ourselves.¹ (Emphasis mine.)

The evident problem is maintaining consistency in any position which is adopted.

The Major Arguments

Leon Wood demonstrates most carefully that nowhere in the Old Testament can the work of the Holy Spirit be shown to be that of spiritual renewal or regeneration.² Nevertheless, he argues for regeneration in the Old Testament. His argument is supported by three lines of reasoning. First, he states that you cannot account for the righteous lives of the Old Testament saints except by regeneration.³ Second, he argues for the regeneration of Old Testament saints on the basis of the experience of New Testament saints. He admits that this type of reasoning is contested because the validity of it is questionable.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 119.

²See Leon J. Wood, The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), pp. 49, 52-52, 65.

³Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁴Ibid., p. 66.

Third, he appeals to the effort put forth by Christ during His life to bring people to a state of righteousness. He says this proves regeneration in the Old Testament, since it was before the cross and Christ would not have preached righteousness if regeneration were not possible.¹

John Davis also affirms that regeneration was the experience of Old Testament saints on the basis of three main arguments. First, he argues for regeneration in the Old Testament on the basis of the doctrine of total depravity.² He says that if regeneration is denied in the Old Testament then, "Either there are two kinds of depravity in the Bible, one which the Old Testament people experienced and another which the New Testament people experienced, or there are two ways of salvation in the Bible."³ His second argument is based on the relationship of regeneration to justification.⁴ He sees regeneration and justification as inseparable, even though he makes a clear distinction between them. His third argument is the same as Wood's first argument; the righteous acts of the Old Testament saints.⁵

¹Ibid., pp. 66-67.

²Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament," pp. 68-85.

³Ibid., p. 76.

⁴Ibid., pp. 86-122.

⁵Ibid., pp. 122-130.

The Arguments Challenged

The arguments are indeed convincing and would probably go unchallenged except for one lingering problem. That is the problem of how to explain the newness of the new covenant if the "new heart" was also the experience of saints under the old covenant. The extent of that problem will become more evident later. A full critique of the above arguments will be impossible here. However, the main objections to the arguments will be presented in order to demonstrate that the proofs for regeneration in the Old Testament are not conclusive.

The issue of the righteous acts of the saints and the doctrine of total depravity can be treated together, since they are essentially the same argument. While the present writer strongly affirms the doctrine of total depravity, he does not believe that it implies that man is always as bad as he can possibly be or that he can never perform any good acts. Davis also admits this.¹ The apostle Paul affirms that wicked men do perform the acts of the law by nature:

For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another (Rom 2:14-15).

¹Ibid., p. 72.

No one would affirm that in this passage the "law of God written on their hearts" refers to regeneration. On the contrary, the whole point of the argument rests on the fact that these are pagans. They do, however, without being regenerated, perform the things contained in the law either out of fear or because of moral consciousness.

Now if those who do not have the law can do those things in the law, can it not be assumed that the elect of the Old Testament, who had the written law of God before them, had some ability to obey it? The oracles of God were committed to Israel (Rom 3:2). They enjoyed a special loving relationship to Him (Deut 7:6; 4:33-37). He was often externally present with them (Exod 19:11-25; 24:9-18; 40:34-38; 1 Kgs 8:10-11, etc). Is it not possible for the external presence of God to provoke obedience as much as the internal presence does? This is not a denial of total depravity. But regeneration does not overcome depravity in the present experience of the elect anyway. If regeneration eradicates depravity then it might well be asked how one can account for wicked acts in the lives of the regenerate saint. Therefore, it can be seen that the arguments from the righteous acts of the saints and from the doctrine of total depravity are not convincing.

Wood's argument for regeneration in the Old Testament on the basis of New Testament experience is a much less cogent argument. He states that the New Testament

teaches that Christ is the only way of salvation and that when one believes on Him, he experiences regeneration.¹ Then he argues that since Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness, he was therefore regenerated. He states that people in Old Testament times simply believed and "they were judged righteous by God, which is just another way of saying that they were regenerated."² However the words righteousness and regeneration are hardly synonymous. It is true that the salvation of the elect of all ages is always on the basis of the cross work of Christ. But Abraham didn't know that. He believed God and that belief was sufficient to procure his justification. Wood admits this.³ This does not, however, prove that he experienced regeneration. Proving Old Testament experience on the basis of New Testament experience is less than satisfying.

Wood's third argument is the least of convincing those presented. He argues that the effort put forth by Jesus to bring men to righteousness proves that regeneration was possible for them.⁴ Since the new covenant had not yet been inaugurated, he says, the Old Testament

¹Wood, The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, p. 66.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., pp. 66-67.

economy was still in effect. He reasons, therefore, that regeneration was possible for Old Testament saints. Again the problem is that he is equating regeneration with righteousness which are not synonymous terms. But a further question arises concerning the law and the prophets of the Old Testament. Did they not teach righteousness? How was Christ's message different? The argument is no more convincing than to say that regeneration had to be possible to the Old Testament because the law taught righteousness.

Wood concedes that his argument is further weakened by the fact that there are transitional elements involved during the time of Christ.¹ This is an important point because it demonstrates how problematic it is to try to prove Old Testament experience on the basis of Christ's soteriological teaching. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). The point is that Christ came announcing the change from the old covenant to the new covenant. It is coming, he says, and it has already started. Old Testament experience cannot not be argued conclusively on the basis of Christ's pronouncements, because He was introducing a change. Wood's concession is well made and it proves the basic weakness of this type of argument.

¹Ibid., p. 67.

The most convincing of the arguments in favor of regeneration in the Old Testament is the theological argument proposed by Davis. This reasoning states that Old Testament saints were justified (Rom 4:2) and therefore had to be regenerated, because you can not have justification without regeneration. In order to discuss the value of this argument, it is necessary first to establish the essence of regeneration and of justification and their relationship to each other.

Davis very carefully establishes the fact that justification is the forensic act of God in which He declares the believing sinner to be righteous and treats him as such.¹ This analysis is quite correct and is certainly not being debated here. Again he correctly states that, "personal salvation must include both a declarative act which cares for the legal aspects of his case and an efficient act whereby his own disposition is changed"² (Emphasis mine). Herein is the distinction between justification and regeneration. Justification is the forensic act by which one is declared righteous. Regeneration is the efficacious act by which that spiritual metamorphosis of the new heart takes place. So Davis' analysis is correct that, "in regeneration man receives new life and a new

¹Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament," pp. 68

²Ibid., p. 96.

nature, in justification, a new standing."¹ Justification does not and cannot make a man righteous.² However, regeneration does make the one who is in Christ an new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

It is evident that both of these acts are based upon the atonement of Christ. The issue, then, reduces itself to how one views the atonement. If the atonement is viewed as entirely forensic then there is no problem in applying regeneration to the Old Testament saints. However, it is evident that the atonement provides for both the forensic declaration and the efficacious renovation. It is easy enough to understand how a forensic act could be effectuated upon the virtues of future achievements. However, it is difficult to see an efficacious work as being effective before the time when that which makes it efficacious has been accomplished. Davis admits that this is a problem.³ How can the efficacious benefits of the atonement be viewed as applying to men before the cross? Yet Davis would agree that regeneration is "an efficient act" by which man's "disposition is changed."⁴

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 91.

³Ibid., p. 108.

⁴Ibid., p. 88.

Nevertheless, he argues that the efficacious act had to be applied before the event of the cross, because he views it as "inseparably linked to the forensic act."¹ In other words, justification is not possible without regeneration. The reason he does this is because of two presuppositions. The first presupposition involves his definition of regeneration. As has been noted, he admittedly sets up a definition of regeneration which makes it a necessary adjunct to salvation in all ages.² His second presupposition is that regeneration precedes faith.³ Therefore, the faith of Abraham which caused God to count him righteous, was not possible until God regenerated him. If these presuppositions are assumed, then one must affirm regeneration in the Old Testament in spite of the fact that regeneration is efficacious through the cross work of Christ. Both of these presuppositions, however, are tenuous.

What has been established so far is that the major proofs for regeneration in the Old Testament are not incontrovertible. It will now be possible to discuss why regeneration in the Old Testament should even be questioned. But first a definition of regeneration must be proposed.

¹Ibid., p. 113.

¹Ibid., p. 38.

²Ibid., p. 107.

A Definition of Regeneration

It was noted earlier that the term regeneration has a broad spectrum of usage among theologians. The present writer concedes that in a technically lexical sense, regeneration can be applied to the entire renovative process of the salvation experience, including glorification. Therefore, it is hardly fair to disqualify the definitions of the other theologians.

The one soteriological phenomenon which is never lacking in the definition of regeneration is that work of spiritual renewal or the new life which is imparted to the believer. Since all the other phenomenon in the salvation process are adequately described by other terms (i.e. justification, sanctification, glorification, etc.), this writer prefers to reserve the word regeneration for spiritual renewal only. Regeneration is therefore defined as that efficacious act of God, performed by the effectual work of Christ in the atonement, whereby a spiritual metamorphosis takes place in the life of the believer imparting to him the promised new heart.

The Problem of Old Testament Regeneration and the New Covenant

It has already been stated that the issue of regeneration in the Old Testament would go unquestioned if it were not for the lingering problem of how to view the

newness of the new covenant. Commentators agree that the fundamental promise of the new covenant, which distinguishes it from the old covenant, is the promise of a new heart. Notice Kent's comment: "The transformation described here is the essence of regeneration."¹ Kuist explains the difference by saying that the new covenant is "not 'new' in 'substance' but in its springs of action."² Calvin also admits that regeneration is the new thing about the new covenant:

It was, then, in some respects, a new thing, that God regenerated the faithful by his Spirit, so that it became not only a doctrine as to the letter, but also efficacious, which not only strikes the ear, but penetrates into the heart, and really forms us for the service of God.² (Emphasis mine)

He reduces the force of his admission with the words, "in some respects," because he cannot allow a statement which contradicts his position that Old Testament saints were regenerated. He never states in which "respects" it was not a new thing. Nevertheless, he affirms that the fundamental difference between the Law and the Gospel is that the "Gospel brings with it the grace of regeneration."³

¹Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 153.

¹H. T. Kuist, The Book of Jeremiah, The Lamentations of Jeremiah, in vol. 12 of The Layman's Bible Commentary, ed. Balmer Kelly, 25 vols. (Richmond VA: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 95.

²Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations, p. 127.

³Ibid., p. 130.

Now, seeing the logical dilemma produced by the confrontation of his careful exegesis with his theological presuppositions, Calvin adjusts his interpretation to allow for his theology with the following arbitrary affirmation. "The power then to penetrate into the heart was not inherent in the Law, but it was a benefit transferred to the Law from the Gospel."¹ Notably lacking, as always, is Scriptural support for such an affirmation. So then, Calvin, who affirms the efficacious nature of the new heart and views it as regeneration, arbitrarily applies it backwards to those before the cross as though the cross had no relationship to time.

If theologians admit that the essence of the new covenant is regeneration, yet insist that this does not mean that Old Testament saints were not regenerated, how, then, do they explain the newness of the new covenant? The answer is that they move away from the essence of the new covenant to its application. This line of reasoning is less than satisfying as will be presently evident. The new thing, they say, is the extent of the application of regeneration. The emphasis is put on the words "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Jer 31:34). Calvin, for instance, argues that "this,

¹Ibid., p. 131.

then, is the reason why the Prophet calls it a new covenant, as it will be shewn more at large."²

A further argument has to do with the corporate application of the new covenant to the whole nation of Israel. Davis advances this view by referring to Ezekiel thirty-six, twenty-six. He says, "Ezekiel, under the inspiration of the Spirit looked forward to a day when Israel as a nation would look to their redeemer and be regenerated."²

These arguments at first seem to be logically admissible. They lose their cogency, however, when considered in the light of two very important issues. First, the extent of the application of God's grace under the old covenant or the new covenant, in any age, is always dependent upon God's sovereign election and His efficacious call. The extent of application has nothing to do with either the essence or the nature of the covenants. God could have made the old covenant uniformly effective in the lives of the people of Israel by simply broadening His efficacious call. This is even more evident with respect to the new covenant. In spite of the fact that it was inaugurated at the cross, it is still not uniformly efficacious for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah."

¹Ibid., p. 128.

²Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament", p. 53.

The second argument, concerning the corporate application of the new covenant, is equally dubious. As was already noted, the old covenant was also corporate in its application (Exod 19:5-8; 20:18-21; 24:3-8). Wherein, then, is the contrasting newness to be seen? Furthermore, the emphasis of Jeremiah thirty-one is definitely individual. Consider verses twenty-nine and thirty:

In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. (Emphasis mine)

The word employed in verse thirty for "every" is the Hebrew word, כָּל. It is the same word that in verse thirty-four is translated "all." It can be correctly translated by either word.¹ Therefore, verse thirty-four can just as well be translated, "they shall, every one of them, know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Hence, contrary to the contention that the new covenant has a corporate emphasis, it is clear that it has a very definite individual emphasis.

It is evident, then, that the newness of the new covenant can not be satisfactorily explained on the basis of its application. The newness of the new covenant must be explained in terms of its essence. The essence of the new covenant is the promise of a new heart for those who

¹BDB, p. 481.

participate in the covenant. In view of this, it becomes clear why the assertion that Old Testament saints were regenerated must be questioned. The issue needs to be reconsidered and the definition of regeneration must be adjusted to fit the biblical data.

The above evidence should be sufficient to demonstrate the serious difficulties in affirming that regeneration was the experience of the elect under the old covenant. But obviously a whole host of unsettled issues remain with respect to the salvation experience of Old Testament saints. It is impossible to resolve all of those issues here. Nevertheless, a number of the residual issues will be addressed in the following chapter. This is done in order to establish and give credence to the author's contention that the new covenant is distinct from the old covenant, because it promises regeneration to its recipients.

CHAPTER V

SALVATION UNDER THE OLD COVENANT

It was the contention of the previous chapter that in the light of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the new covenant, it is not possible to affirm that Old Testament saints experienced regeneration. A number of objections immediately arise. Several of these objections will be considered here.

Justification And The Old Covenant

The first and most obvious objection concerns justification in the Old Testament. Abraham was indisputably justified according to the clear statement of Scripture (Rom 4:2-3). Davis states that anyone who denies regeneration in the Old Testament has a problem with justification.¹ However, if justification is viewed as a forensic act (which Davis does), there is absolutely no problem with seeing it in the Old Testament. The elect before the cross believed God, and they were declared righteous. Justification has always been by grace through faith. Now the objection is made that justification would, then, be

¹Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament," p. 97.

incomplete.¹ But how can a declarative act be incomplete? A declarative act is complete upon the declaration.

It would be fair to say that salvation was in some sense incomplete for the Old Testament saint. But this is also true of the New Testament saint, since he has not yet received the consummation of his salvation in glorification. Even those who "have died in Christ" must wait for the second coming to receive glorification. Yet no one, to be sure, will sit down in the kingdom of heaven without a glorified body (Matt 22:11-13).

Salvation in Time

The fundamental premise, which causes one to insist that the efficacious work of the cross can only be applied after the cross, is that God's soteriological program has a definite relationship to time. Theologians agree that throughout Scripture there is an undeniable progress of revelation. However, the progress of revelation is not the only phenomenon which must be considered. There is also an evident progression or unfolding of God's soteriological program. This progression in the soteriological program of God has been recognized even by nondispensational writers. Notice Ladd's statement concerning this:

The message of the entire Bible is that God has acted in redemptive history; and the Gospels represent Jesus

¹Ibid., p. 101.

as the place in history where God's redemptive acts reached a definite climax.¹

The cross, then, had a specific place in history. God's soteriological program relates to the historical events which occur on this earth. This is clearly seen in the plain declaration of Scripture that there was a precise time designated for the coming of Christ and for the accomplishment of His efficacious work:

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal 4:4-5).

Thus it is evident that God's soteriological plan has a definite progression throughout history. There was a time in history for the cross. At that time the price was paid for the ultimate, eternal salvation of the elect of all ages. However, the level of the earthly realization of salvation does, in fact, change depending upon when a man lives upon this earth. The actualization of regeneration at the cross was a major step in the unfolding of the progression of the soteriological plan. This will become even more apparent later.

One Company of Redeemed

The next objection to be considered is the charge that the Old Testament saints were, then, saved by some

¹George Eldon Ladd, The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. xiii.

means different from that of New Testament saints if they were not regenerated.¹ It is incorrect to assume that such a view is the only option. All of the elect of all ages are always saved by grace through faith on the merits of the atoning work of Christ. No one is affirming anything to the contrary. What is being said is that salvation is comprised of a number of necessary components such as, predestination, calling, election, justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, glorification, etc.

In the ultimate, perfect, glorified state, all of the redeemed will have experienced all of these components. However, during the earthly pilgrimage of any given saint, it is not necessary to have experienced all of the components in order to be saved and to be assured of the ultimate consummation of that salvation.² As has already been noted, the redeemed under the new covenant have not yet experienced glorification. They are nonetheless saved by grace through faith. They are not saved because they are regenerated. They are saved because they believed.

Regeneration is now, since the cross, concomitant with justification. No one can now experience the forensic work of the cross without experiencing also the efficacious

¹Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament," p. 76.

²Davis agrees that "the experience of the individual believer before Pentecost is not the same as that after Pentecost, either experientially or positionally," p. 18.

work. This does not mean, however, that such was the case before the cross. It will be objected that the preceding statement is an argument from silence. There are two responses to the objection. First, even if it were an argument from silence, it would equally be so to state that regeneration was concomitant with justification before the cross. The greater burden of proof would be upon those who wish to see something which is not there. Second, it is not an argument from silence, because Jeremiah thirty-one clearly indicates that they did not experience a new heart before the cross.

A most interesting passage concerning this issue is found in the last two verses of Hebrews eleven:

And these all, having received witness through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Here is a clear statement that the Old Testament saints did not receive the full manifestation of their hope. At first it might appear that the word "promise" refers to the promised inheritance in the land of Israel (cf. verses 8-15). This cannot be true for three reasons. First, the word ἐπαγγελίαν is singular in verse thirty-nine whereas it is plural in verse thirteen. Second, verse thirty-three states that they "obtained the promises." Third, if it were speaking of land promises, it would bear no relationship to the ἡμῶν of verse forty. What, then, is the

promise spoken of here? Lenski's suggestion is credible that it is "the fulfillment of the great Messianic promise."¹ This would certainly include the Messiah's soteriological work. In fact, that would be the central issue since the passage is speaking of being made perfect. Bruce identifies the promise even more closely to the new covenant:

But now the promise has been fulfilled; the age of the new covenant has dawned; the Christ to whose day they looked forward has come and by His self-offering and His high-priestly ministry in the presence of God He has procured perfection for them--and for us.²

It is very clear from this passage that the saints of the Old Testament did not, during their life time, realize the complete fulfillment of their hope. Furthermore, it is evident that God did not plan to make them "perfect" without the presence of the new covenant saints. The passage clearly argues for one body of redeemed people, ultimately, who have known different levels of fulfillment of their salvation experience during their earthly sojourn. The argument, then, is not for different kinds of salvation, but for different degrees of earthly fulfillment of the salvation hope.

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 420.

²F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, in vol 14 of The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 17 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 343.

Salvation in Life

Another objection that has been raised by Davis, is that to view Old Testament saints as receiving regeneration after the cross would mean that men can be saved after death.¹ This is a most unfortunate objection. It demonstrates that he has totally misunderstood the position of those who do not hold to Old Testament regeneration. No one is contending for a "second chance." There is no need to argue for a postmortem salvation. No one is saying that wicked men can be justified after death. Salvation always occurs within life.

The answer to the objection can be reduced to a one sentence explanation. God's elect of the Old Testament, justified in life by their belief, did not receive the consumation of their salvation but patiently awaited the first advent of Christ for regeneration just as the New Testament saints await the second advent for their glorification. Salvation after death is not even in view.

Salvation and the Heart

One final objection that may be raised must be considered here. This objection has to do with the Old Testament emphasis on the heart. This matter was discussed briefly in chapter two. The Old Testament saints knew of

¹Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament," pp. 102-103.

the relationship of the law to the heart. The concept was very common to Scripture (cf. Deut 6:5-6). They knew that to receive the blessings of the old covenant, compliance to the law had to reach the heart.¹

It should be noted that the biblical usage of the word "heart" is not restricted to the physical organ called the heart. It is used in a much broader sense to refer to the center of thought and feeling in man. It is that metaphysical being of man, the place of contact between God and man. The heart is the real man that thinks, reflects and devises plans which are acted out through the vehicle of the body. Proverbs 4:23 states that "out of the heart flow the issues of life." Jesus identified the heart as the place where all wickedness and evil originates (Matt. 15:19). Jeremiah said that "the heart is desperately wicked above all things" (Jer. 17:9). Therefore, it is the heart, as defined biblically, that is in desperate need of this renewal which is brought about by the new covenant. The heart is the object of the new covenant.

The Bible teaches that man, of himself, is incapable of effecting this kind of a change in his wicked heart. This truth is not being denied by those who do not affirm regeneration in the Old Testament. Scripture makes this truth abundantly clear:

¹See quotation of Naegelsbach on page 9.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil (Jer 13:23).

However, such passages are speaking of man's incapability to ultimately and permanently triumph over the sin problem. It does not mean that the observance of the law and the careful memorization of it, would have absolutely no effect in counteracting the wickedness of the heart. Even under the new covenant, believers do not reach final sinless perfection until they are glorified.

But the law which was written on stone did have a purifying effect when properly internalized according to the instructions of Deuteronomy chapter six. A whole host of passages speak of the purifying power of the law (cf. Ps 19:7-11; 119:9; Prov 6:20-24, etc). Furthermore, it is not being denied that the Spirit of God could and did influence His elect to do good. In fact, it is being affirmed that even the external, visible presence of God among His people had a purifying effect.

There are a number of proofs for the fact that Old Testament saints did not know the regenerative experience of the new heart. First, shortly after the giving of the law God indicated that they did not have a new heart when He made the following statement:

Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and their children forever (Deut. 5:29)!

The reason why God expresses this deep desire that the people might have a new heart can only be understood when it is admitted that they did not yet have it. From the beginning it was God's plan that one day there should be an inward change which would cause their obedience to His law to spring from within. Deuteronomy five, twenty-nine looks forward to Jeremiah thirty-one, thirty-three.

Second, all the Old Testament passages which refer to regeneration, speak of it as a future promise. One such passage which is worthy of special note is the passage in Ezekiel 36:25-27. Ezekiel's prophecy is similar in content to that of Jeremiah:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart will I give you; and I will take away the stony heart our of your flesh. and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep mine ordinances, and do them.

There are many other such passages (cf. Jer 24:7; 32:38-40; Ezek 11:19-21).

Third, as has been argued throughout, God's prophecy through Jeremiah makes no sense unless the new covenant is new, because it brings with it the "new heart." The fundamental purpose of the new covenant is to provide for complete and permanent obedience by means of an inward transformation. This is why Hebrews chapter eight calls it a "better covenant." It is not better because of its

content or application, but better because of its efficacy. Notice the good statement Dods makes, "This 'better promise' involves a new spirit, effecting that man's own will shall concur with the divine."¹ It is evident, then, that the old covenant did not make provision for the incapability on the part of man to transform his own heart. Kent's statement concerning this matter is good:

The point is that the covenant itself did not provide this experience, and many lived under its provisions and yet died in unbelief. The new covenant, however, guarantees regeneration of its participants.²

The only way the wicked heart of man can be transformed is through the efficacious work of God in the new covenant. All of the participants in the new covenant have experienced that regeneration.

Having addressed the major objections to the view that Old Testament saints were not regenerated, it is now possible to discuss the advent and the application of the new covenant.

¹Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in vol. 4 of the Expositor's Greek Testament, 5 vol., ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 325.

²Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 153.

CHAPTER VI

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

The preceding chapters have discussed the time, the features and the essence or the nature of the new covenant. It has been established that the fundamental and distinguishing feature of the new covenant is the promised transformation of the heart. Now the inauguration and the application of the new covenant will be discussed.

It was stated in chapter three that the primary fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy will be eschatological. More specifically, it will be after the time of Jacob's trouble (cf. Jer 30:7). Nevertheless, passages in the gospels and in the book of Hebrews seem to indicate that the new covenant is already in effect in the present age.

The Inauguration of the New Covenant

The synoptic gospels all record the establishment by Christ of the ordinances of the bread and the cup on that last night before His crucifixion. As Jesus took the cup and gave it to the disciples He said: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). The words *καινή διαθήκη* would have immediately reminded the disciples of the prophecy of the new covenant

in Jeremiah thirty-one. Furthermore, the reference to the blood of the covenant, διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματι, would have reminded them of Exodus twenty-four verses six to eight. The old covenant was ratified by the sprinkling of blood upon the covenant people. So also, the new covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ. The symbolic relationship of this act of Christ to the passage in Exodus twenty-four is unmistakable. Robinson expresses it in this manner, "when He used the term covenant-blood He deliberately carried back the thought of His disciples to the earlier days when Israel and her God had first come into communion with one another."¹ The association was intentional on the part of Jesus. He was pointing to the fact that He was, indeed, establishing an entirely new covenant.

A number of questions immediately arise. Does this mean that the new covenant prophecies have already been fulfilled? Is the time of Jacob's trouble over? Is the new covenant now in force? Is there to be no literal fulfillment of the land promises? The answers to these questions will be considered more at length under the discussion of the various views on the application of the new covenant. But it can be established here that Christ did clearly intimate that He was initiating the new

¹Theodore Robinson, The Gospel of Matthew, in vol. 1 of the Moffatt New Testament Commentary, 16 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 215.

covenant. Albright and Mann explain, "Jesus, then, voluntarily pours out His life for the community of Israel, and in so doing inaugurates a new covenant for the covenant community already in being."¹ What Christ did at the cross accomplished the necessary work to provide for the ultimate fulfillment of Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy. It is in that sense the new covenant was begun. The final achievements of the new covenant, however, were not all accomplished at that time.

Another passage which indicates that the new covenant has already taken effect is Second Corinthians chapter three, verse six. The apostle Paul has already spoken of the Corinthians as being the epistle of Christ written on his own heart (2 Cor 3:2-3). Now he calls himself a *διακόνος καινῆς διαθήκης*, a minister of the new covenant. If the apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls himself a minister of the new covenant, then it would appear that the covenant must have been in effect by the time he wrote these words.

How is this passage to be understood? Is Paul simply using the language of the new covenant to describe his missionary work without suggesting that it is in force? Such a suggestion is hardly satisfying. Hughes contends

¹W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, in vol. 26 of *The Anchor Bible*, 44 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 323.

that, "This covenant, promised in the Old Testament, is realized in the gospel of Jesus Christ."¹ He is even more insistent on this view in referring to the prophecies concerning the new covenant:

This prophecy had come to realization with the pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent apostolic proclamation of the gospel. The change of heart that the Corinthian believers had experienced as a result of Paul's ministry among them was proof incapable of its fulfillment.²

It is evident that the case is strong for affirming that the new covenant has been in effect since the cross. Furthermore, it is not hard to see how one could suppose that the prophecy of Jeremiah thirty-one is fulfilled in the Church. However, to do so would leave the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the national salvation of Israel unfulfilled. It would also leave Romans chapter eleven unexplained.

Application of the New Covenant

It is apparent enough that the efficacious work of the new covenant was done at the cross. Christ in some sense inaugurated the new covenant at the time of His death. The task now is to determine to what extent, if

¹Philip E. Hughes, Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, vol. 8 of The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, 17 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 93-94.

²Ibid., p. 89.

any, that work is applicable to the Church. The most detailed treatment in Scripture of the application of the new covenant since the death of Christ is found in the book of Hebrews. The entire text of the new covenant prophecy of Jeremiah thirty-one is quoted in chapter eight of Hebrews. A study of these passages is necessary before the various views can be considered.

Jeremiah as Quoted in Hebrews

The theme of the book of Hebrews is the excellency of the priesthood of Christ. Throughout the book the key word is κρείττων , "better." The revelation that came through Christ is better than that which came through the prophets (Heb 1:1-3). Christ is better than the angels (1:4-14), He is superior to Moses (3:3-6) and better than the Aaronic priesthood (7:23-28). The new covenant is better than the old (chapter 8) and the sacrifice of Christ was superior to the Old Testament sacrifices.

Hebrews 8:6-13

In the first verses of chapter eight, the writer of Hebrews continues his arguments from chapter seven concerning the superiority of Christ over the Aaronic priests. As the section that starts in verse six opens, he describes Christ as "the mediator of a better covenant." It should not be understood that he is speaking of a covenant other than new covenant. The argument is that the new covenant

is better than the old covenant. Compare the statement in chapter nine, verse fifteen where it is stated that Christ is "the mediator of the new covenant."

In verse seven the writer states that if the first covenant had been faultless, there would be no need for a second covenant. This would seem to indicate that the old covenant was in some way faulty. It has already been noted that this passage should not be so understood. Hoyt explains this point:

But deficiency is not to be attributed to the covenant as such, nor to God, one of the contracting parties. The sole fault lay with the people of Israel. They were unable to keep their commitments, and they were unable to satisfy the righteous demands of the law which they incurred by their failure to keep the contract.¹

Verse eight makes this clear when it says, "For finding fault with them. . . ." The law was perfect but it could not insure obedience.

In verses eight to twelve, the author quotes the entire text of Jeremiah thirty-one, thirty-one to thirty-four. The quote is for the most part exact except for verses nine and twelve. In verse nine the word ἐνέμειναν, meaning to remain or persevere² is employed for the Hebrew, נִשְׁמְרָה . In the same verse ἡμέλησα , meaning neglect³ is

¹Herman A. Hoyt, Christ, God's Final Word to Man (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), p. 80.

²BAGD, p. 255.

³BAGD, p. 44.

used in the place of יִחְלֻצֶנּוּ. Finally, in verse twelve, the word ἔλεως, is used for the Hebrew, נְצֻחָה. In all of these cases the writer of Hebrews follows the rendering in the Septuagint. None of these variations are of any significant import.

The writer indicates in verse thirteen that the old covenant is antiquated by the very fact that Jeremiah announces a new one. This demonstrates that God envisioned an end to the previous covenant. Bruce suggests the possibility "that by predicting the inauguration of a new covenant Jeremiah in effect announced the impending dissolution of the old order."¹ By quoting the Jeremiah prophecy and by stating that Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, the writer of Hebrews declares that the new covenant has already been put into effect. However, it should be noted that throughout the book of Hebrews, the emphasis is upon the soteriological accomplishments of the ministry of Christ. He does not expound the millennial blessings of the new covenant.

Hebrews 10:16-17

In these verses the writer of Hebrews again quotes verses thirty-three and thirty-four of Jeremiah thirty-one. In chapter ten he has been making a case for the superiority of the sacrifice of Christ. Verse fourteen states that

¹Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 179.

"by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Then the writer quotes Jeremiah thirty-one. His argument is that Christ, by His sacrifice, has accomplished the spiritual promises of the new covenant. Because of that sacrifice, He has put His law in their hearts. Hoyt explains that "the Holy Ghost promised that as a result of this offering, the new covenant would come in and the laws of God would be written upon the heart and mind."¹ He further states that "the believer's subjugation to the power of sin was dealt with, because as a result the worshipers are regenerated."²

Verse nineteen encourages the Hebrew Christians to have boldness to enter the presence of God, because of the fact that this work has been accomplished. This is a very strong intimation that the work of the new covenant applies to the believers of the Church.

From all of the preceeding evidence it appears evident the the new covenant is, in some sense, fulfilled in the Church. The question that must be addressed now concerns how this can be explained in the light of Jeremiah's statement that the fulfillment will be literally with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah."

¹Hoyt, Christ, God's Final Word to Man, p. 94.

²Ibid.

Views on the Application of the New Covenant

There are three prominent explanations concerning the way in which the new covenant applies to the Church. Each of these views will be considered here.

Israel is Replaced by the Church

This view contends that the Church has permanently displaced Israel in the plan of God. Therefore, the new covenant has its complete and final fulfillment in the Church. This view is generally known as the amillennial view. It is held largely by those who adhere to the covenant system of theology. Covenant theology is built upon the premise that God's soteriological plan is based upon two covenants with man.¹ The first covenant was a covenant of works which was supposedly made by God with Adam. Had Adam not fallen, the human race would have been saved by this covenant of works. Because he fell, God established the second covenant called the covenant of grace. By means of this covenant God has redeemed the elect of all ages since the fall of Adam.²

There are several serious weaknesses to this system of theology. First, nowhere in Scripture is it stated that God made a covenant of works with Adam. Even Buswell

¹James Oliver Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 307.

²Ibid., p. 308.

admits this.¹ Second, the term "covenant of grace" is nowhere found in the Bible. Davis remarks ironically that "this is strange since this covenant is supposedly the central theme of the Bible."² The new covenant might well be called a covenant of grace, but the terminology is inaccurate since the new covenant involves more than grace and since the Scripture calls it the new covenant. Third, covenant theology confuses Israel with the Church, failing to distinguish between them in terms of future blessing and restoration of national Israel. In fact, the external, physical and national aspects of the new covenant are often ignored or denied.

According to this view, the fulfillment of all the promises of the new covenant is relegated only to the present age. Oswald T. Allis appeals to Hebrews 8:8-12 to prove that the new covenant applies to the Church. He argues that because the writer of Hebrews states that the new covenant has made the old one obsolete, it means that the new covenant is in force. He states that this passage clearly speaks of the "gospel age."³ Lenski, who also holds this view, points to Hebrews eight to demonstrate his contention that Israel is lost among the nations and that

¹Ibid.

²Davis, "Regeneration in the Old Testament," p. 17.

³Allis, Prophecy and the Church (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1945), p.154.

it enjoys the new covenant only as part of the Church. He argues as follows:

Chiliasts stress this double mention which runs through all the prophecies of the Messianic deliverance and make it a national conversion of Jews at the dawn of their millennium or during their millennium. But what about the northern kingdom, the ten lost tribes? Swept into exile, they disappeared and were amalgamated with the Gentiles. Right here we have the universality of the new testament. Lost among the Gentiles and turned to the Gentile, the gospel goes out to all the nations to bring the new testament in Christ's blood to all.¹

The other views do not deny, however, that the gospel has a universal reach. But the real thrust of Hebrews eight is not the universal extent of the new covenant. The whole emphasis of the writer's argument is upon the superiority of the new covenant on the basis of its efficacious work to transform the heart of its participants. Allis continues by denying any national application of the new covenant:

The New Testament is not intended for a nation. All that is national, temporal, preparatory, as far as preserving one nation as God's people is concerned, has disappeared. The New Testament is intended for all men.²

It is true that in the book of Hebrews there is no emphasis on the national or land promises of the new covenant. Obviously, such a discussion was not relevant to the point which the author was making. However, it is incorrect to assume upon such evidence that the new covenant has no

¹Lenski, R. C. H. The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James, p. 263.

²Ibid., p. 271.

national application for the people of Israel. The passage does not make such an affirmation.

This view is to be rejected, because it does not adequately handle the teaching of Old Testament Scripture that the nation of Israel will have a literal restoration to the land. Furthermore, it assumes the the Church has permanently displaced Israel which is incorrect according to the teaching of Romans chapter eleven. Walvoord describes the presuppositions upon which this position is based:

Its thesis is that the Church as a whole, composed of both Jew and Gentile, is the true Israel, and therefore takes over bodily the blessings promised to Israel. Hence, the new covenant for Israel is, in fact, identical to the new covenant with the Church and fulfilled in it.¹

Albright and Mann have made a most accurate observation concerning the inauguration of the new covenant and its relationship to Israel:

We have emphasized above that never in our NT sources is Jesus represented as inaugurating a separatist movement, and the Pauline letters, for all their insistence on the word "new" to describe God's act in Jesus, never describe the Church as "the new Israel."²

Therefore the contention that the Church has replaced Israel permanently in God's plan is totally unfounded.

¹Walvoord, John F., "The New Covenant with Israel," in Bibliotheca Sacra 103:409 (January-March, 1946):17.

²Albright and Mann, Matthew, p. 323.

Two New Covenants

Another explanation for the application of the new covenant to the church is offered by those who suggest that there are two new covenants discussed in Hebrews eight. This view is generally attributed to Lewis Sperry Chafer.¹ It has been perpetuated largely by John F. Walvoord and other men from Dallas Theological Seminary.² This theory recognizes that the biblical data insists upon a literal fulfillment of the new covenant for Israel. But it recognizes that Scripture applies it also to the Church.

In order to resolve the issue and still maintain the proper distinction between Israel and the Church, it is suggested that there are two new covenants, one for Israel and another one for the Church. Walvoord most clearly delineates the arguments for this view:

The passage states that a "better covenant" than the Mosaic covenant has been introduced (Heb. 8:6), but it does not state here or anywhere else that this better covenant is identical with the "new covenant with the house of Israel," or that the new covenant with Israel has been introduced.³

He argues further that in Hebrews eight:

There is no appeal at all to the content of the new covenant with Israel as being identical with the better covenant of which Hebrews speaks. The very absence of

¹Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Dispensationalism," Bibliotheca Sacra 93 (October-December, 1936):437-438.

²John F. Walvoord, "The New Covenant with Israel," Bibliotheca Sacra 103 (January-March, 1946):16-27.

³Ibid., p. 25.

such an appeal is as strong as any argument from silence can be.¹

This view has some certain advantages. First, it sees a definite literal fulfillment of the promises to the nation Israel.² Second, it correctly observes that the argument of Hebrews eight "does not depend upon the introduction of the new covenant for Israel, but only on the question of whether the Old Testament anticipates an end to the Mosaic covenant."³ Third, it views the new covenant as providing "a basis in grace for forgiveness and blessing secured in the blood of Jesus Christ."⁴

However, the view also has some serious weaknesses. These weaknesses are all related to the attempt to see two new covenants in Hebrews eight. The words *κρείττων* and *καινός* are not set up in antithesis to one another in the passage. The word *κρείττων*, as is true of its use in other discussions in the book, simply points to the superiority of the new covenant. It further describes the new covenant. It is incorrect, then, to suggest that the use of the word "better" suggests a different covenant than the new covenant.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³John F. Walvoord, "The New Covenant with Israel," Bibliotheca Sacra 110 (July, 1953):202.

⁴Ibid., p. 199.

Kent points out that the suggestion that there is a new covenant for Israel and another new covenant for the Church encounters problems in chapter twelve of Hebrews.¹ In verse twenty-three of this chapter there is the mention of the "church of the first-born" (a reference to the Church) and the mention of "the spirits of just men made perfect" (a reference to Old Testament saints). Verse twenty-four connects both groups to "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." It is difficult to see two new covenants in a passage where the two groups are so closely joined.

Again Kent objects that "if the Church has a totally separate new covenant, what is its 'old covenant'?"² To this Walvoord replies that "the new covenant for the Church is new in contrast to the Adamic or old covenant for the Church as a whole."³ But here Walvoord falls in to the same error of the amillennialists. He is postulating a covenant with Adam that is nowhere mentioned in the Bible.

One more argument is proposed by Walvoord. He points to the use of the word $\nu\acute{\epsilon}\alpha\varsigma$ in Hebrews twelve, twenty-four as used in reference to the new covenant to

¹Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 159.

²Ibid.

³Walvoord, "The New Covenant with Israel," Bibliotheca Sacra 103 (January-March, 1946):18.

argue for two new covenants. His contention is that this word νέος means "new" in the sense of "recent."¹ While such a translation is lexically admissible,² it hardly proves that a distinction is being made. The words καινός and νέος are near synonyms and it is extremely difficult to demonstrate any intended distinction on the part of the writer. Harrisville has argued convincingly that no distinction between these two words can be dogmatically affirmed.³ Therefore, upon close investigation, the argument is less than satisfying.

This view has a definite advantage over the first view presented in that it sees a literal fulfillment of the new covenant promises for the nation Israel. Nevertheless, it is quite inadequate, because it argues for a second new covenant without clear Scriptural support.

Twofold Application of the New Covenant

This view argues for one new covenant with two applications; one for the Church and one for Israel. Most discussions of this approach subdivide this view into two different views. They are commonly referred to as the John

¹Walvoord, "The New Covenant with Israel," Bibliotheca Sacra 110 (July, 1953):203.

²BAGD, p. 537.

³R. A. Harrisville, "The Concept of Newness in the New Testament," The Journal of Biblical Literature 74 (June, 1955):69-79.

Darby view and the Scofield Bible view. However, they will be treated together here, since there is little essential difference between the two views.¹ J. N. Darby holds that there is one new covenant in Scripture and that it deals only with "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." According to this theory, the new covenant is not for the Church but is restricted in its application to national Israel. However, it should be recognized that Darby's view is not nearly as restricted as some assert it to be. While he does insist that "in letter it was made with the house of Israel," he admits that "we (i.e. the Church) get the benefit of it."² In saying this, he essentially asserts that the Church participates in the new covenant.

The explanation of the new covenant that is identified as the Scofield Bible view is very closely related to Darby's view. This view also argues for only one new covenant.³ The primary application is viewed as being

¹J. Dwight Pentecost quotes Darby extensively but fails to demonstrate how his position differs radically from the "Scofield Bible view"; see his chapter entitled "The New Covenant" in Things to Come (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), pp. 121-123.

²J. N. Darby, "Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews," in vol. 1 of The Serious Christian (Charlotte, North Carolina: Books for Christians, 1970), p. 85.

³The Scofield Bible view is explained, amplified and delineated much more by those who write about it than what is contained in the note itself, see, C. I. Scofield, ed., The New Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 1317.

eschatological with reference to time and for the nation Israel only with regard to the recipients. However, it is recognized that the same new covenant is applied in the New Testament to the Church. Therefore, this view suggests that there is a twofold application of the new covenant. It should be noted that this view does not contend that any of the land promises apply to the Church. Kent adequately explains the view by saying, "There is one new covenant to be fulfilled eschatologically with Israel, but participated in soteriologically by the Church today."¹ Again, this is essentially what Darby is saying:

We enjoy indeed all the essential privileges of the new covenant, its foundation being laid on God's part in the blood of Christ, but we do so in spirit, not according to the letter.²

The Church, then, is viewed as receiving only the soteriological benefits of the new covenant. The final and complete fulfillment is viewed as being in the millennium with Israel. Wood explains that the fact that the complete and ultimate fulfillment of the new covenant is in Israel does not "preclude the Church from participating in the new covenant promises and blessings."³

¹Kent, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 158.

²J. N. Darby, "Hebrews," in vol. 5 of Synopsis of the Bible, 5 vols. (New York: Loizeaux Brothers Publishers, 1942), p. 330.

³James Clarke Wood, "An Exegesis of Jeremiah 31:31-34," Unpublished Master of Theology Thesis, (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), p. 19.

Of the views presented the twofold application view is to be preferred. This view has a number of distinct advantages over the other two views. First, it allows for the ultimate fulfillment of the new covenant with the literal nation of Israel. Second, it recognizes that the soteriological blessings of the new covenant do apply to the Church to some degree. It will be noticed, however, that even the soteriological promises are not yet totally fulfilled. A universal knowledge of God is still lacking. Third, it allows for a literal exegesis of all of the passages involved and offers the least hermeneutical problems.

The way in which the new covenant applies to the Church is most clearly understood in the light of the fundamental promise of the covenant. It has been contended throughout this study that the new thing about the new covenant is the promise of regeneration. The soteriological plan of God is seen as having a definite relationship to time (Gal 4:4). At the cross there was a major step taken in the progression of God's soteriological plan. The efficacious work of the cross was now a reality so that the new heart could be freely appropriated to all who believe. From that time forward all who would believe God for salvation would immediately experience regeneration regardless of whether they were of the house of Israel or of the Gentiles.

Understood in this sense, the matter of the recipients of the new covenant ceases to be a mystery. At the cross a soteriological principle went into effect. Because of the fact that the atonement was now accomplished in history, its efficacious benefits would thereafter be immediately effective upon all who receive God's saving grace. It is, therefore, the fundamental promise of the new covenant that is enjoyed by all the redeemed of the Church. The particular promises made to Israel, however, have not yet been fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

There are two main issues involved in the study of the new covenant. Those two issues are the essence and application of the new covenant. The complexity of the matter is evidenced by the number of different views which have been advanced. The primary Old Testament passage on the new covenant is found in Jeremiah thirty-one, thirty-one to thirty-four.

A study of this passage reveals the promise of God to make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The new covenant is set up in contradistinction with a previous covenant which has been demonstrated to be the law that was given at Sinai (Exod 19:5-8). The old covenant was made with Israel, written on tablets of stone and ratified with blood (Exod 24:6-8). It was corporate in its application being oriented towards one nation. The old covenant included the promise of blessing upon obedience and judgment for failure to obey. It was envisioned by God as temporary (Gal 3:23-24; Heb 8:13) and inadequate in the sense that it had no power to produce an inward transform the heart (Rom 8:3).

The new covenant was announced at the time when judgments of the old covenant were being invoked. It is

eschatological as to its ultimate fulfillment and will be established with national Israel after the time referred to as Jacob's trouble (Jer 30:7). This new covenant is to be made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It is seen as a radically different from the old covenant in that it will transform the hearts of those who participate in it. The new covenant also promises a universal knowledge of God. Furthermore, the new covenant promises a final solution to the sin problem. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34). But the primary and essential feature of the new covenant, which makes it fundamentally new and different from the old covenant, is that it promises a transformed heart to its recipients.

The immediate problem which arises from the preceding assertion is the issue of regeneration in the Old Testament. After considering the arguments for affirming that Old Testaments saints experienced regeneration, it was concluded that they are not sufficiently convincing to adopt that view. Even so, it might well be assumed that regeneration was experienced in the Old Testament were it not for the fact that the new covenant prophecy clearly indicates that it was not experienced previous to the time of the new covenant. If regeneration had been experienced in the Old Testament, then there is nothing new about the new covenant.

It has been demonstrated that the newness of the new covenant cannot be explained away on the basis of the extent of application or the corporate nature of the application of the new covenant. Furthermore, the expression of God's desire that they might have a new heart (Deut 5:29) makes no sense if they had already experienced such a transformation under the old covenant.

The view proposed here does not argue that Old Testament saints were not saved. Nor does it suppose that they were saved by some other means. It does not argue for some different kind of salvation. Nor does it contend that the Old Testament saints were saved by works. Salvation has always been by grace through faith. This view does, however, suggest that there can be different degrees of earthly fulfillment of what is, in the ultimate sense, a "complete salvation."

Another basic question about the new covenant has to do with the application of it to the Church. Christ inaugurated the new covenant at the cross (Luke 22:20). Paul indicated that it was in effect at his time by calling himself a "minister of the new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6). The writer of the book of Hebrews applies the prophecy of Jeremiah thirty-one, thirty-one to thirty-four to the Hebrew Christians. Nevertheless, the clear teaching of the Jeremiah prophecy is that it will be fulfilled after the time of Jacob's trouble with the house of Israel and with

the house of Judah. There are three views which are proposed to explain the application of the new covenant.

The first view sees Israel as replaced by the Church. The theory contends that the new covenant was never meant to apply to a nation. God's dealings with the nation called Israel have ceased. This view is rejected because it ignores the teaching of many passages which declare that God will restore Israel to the promised land. Furthermore, the prophecy of Jeremiah specifically states that the new covenant will be "with the house of Judah and with the house of Israel." This theory also fails to explain adequately the teaching of the eleventh chapter of Romans.

The next theory proposes the existence of two new covenants; one for Israel and another one for the church. This view has some important advantages over the previously mentioned theory. Most notably, it allows for a literal interpretation of the passages concerning the millennial blessings upon the nation of Israel. However, this view is also unsatisfactory because it fails to produce convincing evidence for the existence of two new covenants.

The twofold application view contends that there is one new covenant with two applications. The soteriological benefits of the new covenant are enjoyed by the Church. However, the land promises and the promise of universal knowledge of God are not fulfilled in the Church. This

theory sees a future eschatological fulfillment of the new covenant with national Israel. Furthermore, this view harmonizes nicely with the biblical data concerning the new covenant and offers the least hermeneutical problems.

The old covenant, then, was inaugurated at mount Sinai when God wrote his law in tablets of stone and ratified it with the blood of animals. It was given to the nation Israel through God's servant Moses. The law revealed the righteous character of God and His demands for man's compliance to His holy character. The keeping of God's laws was to produce certain benefits which were to relate to the prosperity of the nation of Israel in the land He promised them. The failure of the children of Israel to live up to the demands of the old covenant would and did cause the forfeiture of that prosperity, including the possession of the land.

The new covenant was inaugurated at mount Calvary and ratified with the blood of Jesus Christ. With the advent of the new covenant, the essence of God's law did not change, but its location did. It is now written on the hearts of believing men. At the time of the inauguration of the new covenant a major step was taken in the progression of the soteriological program of God. Now that the work of the cross was accomplished in history, God could apply its efficacious benefits to all believing men. Ultimately and finally that new covenant will have its full

completion with Israel in the millennium when all the items of the Jeremiah's prophecy will literally be fulfilled. At the present, however, the Church enjoys the blessings of the new covenant because soteriological dealings of God with man are now based on the principles of the new covenant system.

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