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SHORT TITLE

THE CHURCH A COVENANT COMMUNITY; Copeland; S.T.M., 1967

This Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of the Graduate School, St. Louis,
Department of Divinity, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

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THE CHURCH A COVENANT COMMUNITY AS SEEN
IN THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

Edgar Clark Copeland

May 1967

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Approved by:

Victor Bartling

Adviser

Leinhardt Spitz

Reader

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The church of Jesus Christ is not a voluntary organization which a man may "join" or ignore as he wishes. She is the body of Christ to which God adds (προσετίθει, Acts 2:47) according to His own good pleasure (εὐδοκία τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, Eph. 1:5) and grace (χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι, Eph. 2:5). As is clearly shown in the New Testament, the Lord does this through His church, so that the church must determine who is acceptable as a member of the body and from whom the body must be purged (I Cor. 5:7; see also the letters to the churches of Asia, Rev. 2,3). What the church must require by way of profession and life of those whom she receives as members, and what she must require them to abstain from is, and always will be, a matter on which there is sincere difference of opinion.

Scripture is inspired salvation-history, God's own account of how He is creating a people for Himself and what He would have them to be and to do. That history speaks just as authoritatively as do the specific "Thussays-the-Lord's" to the church concerning her life today. It is with this conviction that I have chosen to examine the account of the church's first attempt at a solution to this very important question; for in the way she came to decision and then used it, as well as in the actual wording of the decision, we shall find its meaning and significance. R. B. Rackham describes the contemporary significance of the Jerusalem Council:

It was the temporary form of a problem which man will always have to face in this world. While he is in the body he cannot live

without some law nor can he worship without some form; as long as the church is in the world, spirit and matter, law and gospel, are inextricably bound together and cannot be divorced. . . . The problem present to the church at all times is to find the practical balance between the two principles of liberty and obedience, and the two conflicting claims of the inward and the outward.¹

We shall first examine the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles to discover the church's awareness of her essential nature and the imperatives she must place upon her members as well as the limitations on her power to demand.² Then we shall examine the way the church used the decision reached in the Council so that we may understand what it meant. Inasmuch as the church's reasoning and action show that she saw herself to be the New Israel of God, the new covenant people, the realization of the promised kingdom of David, we shall examine extensively the covenant concept in the Old Testament. Considerable space will be given to show that the original relationship established by God with man in Eden was a covenant relationship, and that all that follows is developed from it. Only if the covenant made with Abraham is a step in the reestablishment of that original relationship does Christ become necessary to the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham.³ And only

¹Richard Belward Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 241.

²Adolf Schlatter says that the Council resulted "in agreement about the demands which the Church must make on all her members and the observances to be required of every convert." The Church in the New Testament Period, translated by Paul P. Levertoff (London: S. P. C. K., 1955), p. 130.

³Because this is so, Dr. Roehrs' summary makes good sense: "But it is clear that what sinful man could not do, God would do Himself in the Woman's Seed, in the Seed of Abraham, in the Messiah, in the Man of Sorrows, upon whom was 'the chastisement that made us whole.' (Isa. 53:5)." Walter R. Roehrs, "Covenant and Justification in the Old Testament," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXV (Oct. 1964), 589.

then can the covenant features of Israel's life have significance for the people of God under the New Covenant. It will be our purpose to show to what extent the covenant shaped the life of Israel,⁴ and to what extent the life of Israel became a pattern for the life of the church. The length of the last section has been influenced by the fact that some of these elements of the covenant are lacking in some excellent studies,⁵ and the significance of the covenant concept to the understanding of the nature and action of the church has been somewhat neglected.

⁴Dr. Roehrs, p. 586, says that Israel "had no history apart from this relationship (covenant)."

⁵The following studies of the covenant begin with Abraham and either ignore or deny a covenant relationship in Eden: D. Douglas Bannerman, The Scripture Doctrine of the Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955 reprint), chap. 2. Roderick Campbell, Israel and the New Covenant (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1954), chap. 3, especially notes 1 and 3. G. Quell, "Ἀλαθῆκη in the Old Testament," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by G. Kittel, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), II, 106-124. E. F. Kevan, "The Covenants and the Interpretation of the Old Testament," Evangelical Quarterly, XXVI. 1 (January 1954), 19-28.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH DETERMINES

THE BASIS OF HER FELLOWSHIP

Problem: The Essentials for Fellowship in the Church (Acts 15:1-5)

The Situation in Antioch (Acts 15:1)

Paul and Barnabas, returning from their mission in Cyprus and South Galatia, reported "all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). As earlier Jerusalem (Acts 11:18), so now Antioch rejoiced that God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life. In this largely Gentile congregation Jew and Gentile ate together and broke the bread of the sacrament together. Peter came from Jerusalem and joined in this fellowship with no problem of conscience (Gal. 2:12).¹

However, the principle of separation was clearly drawn in the Old Testament and too fundamental to the religious life of the pious Jew for it to be set aside at once. There was no doubt of the conversion of the Gentiles and their reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. But, had not God placed the law as a wall of separation between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14)? Did it not shut them up to their God as a special possession? Was it not a protection from heathen influences

¹David Smith, The Life and Letters of St. Paul (New York: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), p. 75. F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles, The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (London: The Tyndale Press, 1952), p. 288.

that would defile their covenant relation with God and make the covenant unholy? Was not circumcision the essential mark of God's covenant, the sign of sonship and synonymous with the covenant itself (Gen. 17:9,10)?

Peter's vision preceding his visit to Caesarea and the coming of the Spirit on Cornelius and his household made it clear that God had accepted these Gentiles into His people through faith in Christ. The Church at Jerusalem, on hearing Peter's report, made no suggestion that Cornelius should receive circumcision and observe the Mosaic customs (Acts 11:1-18). Though there were Greeks in the Antioch Church from the very beginning,² neither Barnabas, who was sent from Jerusalem to encourage the Church at Antioch, nor the prophets who came later (Acts 11:22-24,27) made any such demand. But apparently not all were persuaded of the correctness of this position.

The question was raised abruptly at Antioch by "some from Judea" who "were teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses,³ you cannot be saved.'⁴ They are to be

²Acts 11:20. Eberhard Nestle, Novum Testamentum Graece, novis curis elaboraverunt Erwin Nestle et Kurt Aland (Editio 24, Stuttgart: Privilege. Wurt. Bibelanstalt, 1960) adopts Ἑλληνας, p. 333. Hereafter referred to as NTG. R. J. Knowling, The Acts of the Apostles, The Expositor's Greek Testament, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), II, 266; and Bruce, pp. 235, 236, both adopt Ἑλληνιστῶς as the better reading, but they consider it refers to Greek speaking Gentiles in view of Ἰουδαίους (v. 19).

³ἔθος (v. 1) is used by Luke three times in the Gospel and seven times in the Acts of the Apostles in the sense of "custom," "usage," "national custom," Knowling, pp. 177, 316. "Of Moses" (v. 1) in the sense made explicit in Acts 6:14, "handed down by Moses," author of the Pentateuch.

⁴Σωθῆναι (v. 1) and πεπλουτευσότες (v. 5) indicates that they believed and taught Jesus as the Messiah and fulfiller of the law, but still as the head of a glorified Judaism, ibid., pp. 316, 318.

identified with the "believers who belonged to the party⁵ of the Pharisees"⁶ and those "who came from James" (Gal. 2:12).⁷ These "zealots for the law" (Acts 21:20) were continuous and persistent in their teaching.⁸

The Reaction of Antioch (Acts 15:2)

Paul, Barnabas and the Church at Antioch recognized in this teaching a contradiction of the gospel that would lead to deserting Christ (Gal. 1:6-9). The "debate" that followed is also called a "riot," the same word used of the mob demonstrations against Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:40).⁹ The disturbance was such that the Council in their letter called it a "plundering of your faith" (v. 24).¹⁰ Paul's polemic

⁵ Ἀἵρεσις (v. 5), six times in Acts and three times elsewhere in the New Testament in the sense of a "school" or "party" that has adopted particular principles. It is applied to doctrines or groups that tended to cause divisions in the church, but need not be used in a bad sense, *ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶ Ψ, 283, 614, pc, syhm, (representing the Western Text) add in v. 1 from v. 5 τῶν πεπλουτευσκότων ἀπὸ τῆς αἵρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων, *NTG*, p. 344. Though the reading cannot be accepted, it clearly represents early tradition.

⁷ Bruce, p. 290, identifies these groups mentioned in Gal. 2:12; Acts 15:1,5; 21:20, though the last incident is later.

⁸ The force of the imperfect. Knowling, p. 315. W. F. Burnside, The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes for the Use of Schools (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1916), p. 171.

⁹ Ἐτάσεως (v. 2), "suggests a state of strife and disunity," G. W. H. Lampe, "The Acts," Peake's Commentary on the Bible, edited by M. Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1962), p. 908. Hereafter referred to as PCB.

¹⁰ Ἀνασκευάζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν. Ἀνασκευάζω is a military metaphor for plundering a town, says Bruce, p. 302.

is to be found in the Epistle to the Galatians who were also being similarly "plundered" at this time.¹¹ John Calvin has summarized the

¹¹Ibid., p. 38. The interpretation adopted in this paper is that the disturbance in Galatia coincided with that in Antioch, that the letter to the Galatians was directed to the churches established on the first missionary journey (Acts 13 and 14) in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, and it was written just prior to the meeting of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul's trip to Jerusalem and consultation with the "pillars" there concerning Gentile liberty (Gal. 2:1-10) is identified with the famine-relief visit (Acts 11:30 and 12:25). John Calvin made this identification in his commentary on Galatians, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, in Calvin's Commentaries, translated by T. H. L. Parker, and edited by David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 24. See also G. S. Duncan, The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians in The Moffatt New Testament Commentary, edited by J. Moffatt (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1934), pp. xx, xxix, xxxii. D. Guthrie, The Pauline Epistles: New Testament Introduction (London: The Tyndale Press, 1961), pp. 72-88. K. Lake defended this position in The Earlier Epistles of Paul (2nd edition; London: Rivingtons, 1919), pp. 279-304. He later modified his position, The Beginnings of Christianity (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933), V, 195-204. Here he suggested that Acts 11:30 and 15:1-29 relate to the same visit, but were derived from different sources, so differ in details. This calls in question the accuracy of Luke's account. Guthrie in the place noted above and Bruce, p. 38, list others taking the same view. The defense of our position and the significance of the chronology to our discussion is found in chapter two. It is readily recognized that this is a vexed question with capable exegetes defending various views. There are two main views besides the one taken here.

1. Identification of Galatians 2:1-10 with Acts 15:1-29, north Galatian destination of the epistle written after the third tour through Asia Minor (Acts 18:23) from Ephesus (19:1) or Macedonia (20:1). The classic defender of this view is J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (8th edition; London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), pp. 18-56, 123-128. James Moffatt, Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), pp. 90-106. P. Schmiedel, "Galatians," Encyclopaedia Biblica, edited by T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), II, 1617-1626. E. D. Burton, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, in The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), pp. xvii-lviii. Paul Feine and Johannes Behm, Introduction to the New Testament, reedited by W. G. Kümmel, translated by A. J. Mattill, Jr. (14th revised edition; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 191-198.

2. Identification of Galatians 2:1-10 with Acts 15:1-29, the destination

objections:

He therefore took up the fight not on behalf of the external uncircumcision of the flesh, but for the salvation of men by grace; secondly, to set godly consciences free from the curse of the Law and guilt of eternal death; and finally that, with the removal of all obstacles, the splendour of the grace of Christ might shine out again as though in a clear and serene sky.¹²

Not only was the peace of Antioch in jeopardy; the very foundations of the church were under attack. The seriousness of the situation is demonstrated by the defection of Peter under the influence of the teachers from Jerusalem.¹³ His example led "the rest of the Jews" including Barnabas to join in hypocritical separation from their Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:11-13). Paul discerned two questions: the fundamental one of the way of salvation, and the practical question of fellowship between Jew and Gentile believers. He "was clear sighted enough to see that in the long run the concession on the question of fellowship

of the epistle being the south Galatian churches established on the first missionary tour (Acts 13-14) and visited again on the second (16:1-5), written from Corinth (18:1-18a) either before the arrival of Timothy and Silas, or after their departure. The classical exponent of this view is W. M. Ramsay, A Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), pp. 1-234. Ramsay dates the letter from Antioch between the second and third missionary tours. Also, T. Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, translated from the 3rd German edition by John Moore Trout, et al., under the direction of Melancthon W. Jacobus, assisted by C. S. Thayer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), pp. 164-179. F. V. Filson, A New Testament History (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 220, 241-242. H. N. Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, editor (2nd edition; London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1954), pp. 30, 31. F. Rendall, The Epistle to the Galatians, in The Expositors Greek Testament, edited by W. R. Nicoll (London: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.), III, 141-147.

¹²The Acts of the Apostles, in Calvin's Commentaries, translated by John W. Fraser and edited by David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), II, 26.

¹³Calvin, Galatians and Ephesians, p. 47. Bruce, p. 288. Smith, p. 75.

compromised the fundamental principle of salvation by grace,¹⁴ and he confronted Peter with the fact that he was not being "straightforward about the truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2:14). We can confidently say that it was the Holy Spirit that led the church to send Paul, Barnabas and certain other representatives to bring this matter to discussion and decision by "the apostles and elders at Jerusalem."¹⁵

The Journey and Reception at Jerusalem (Acts 15:3-5)

That the chief concern was not a debate about externals is seen in the spirit and conduct of the representatives in the journey and upon arrival at Jerusalem. As they journeyed through Phoenicia and Samaria, apparently taking a devious route,¹⁶ they brought great joy to all the brethren¹⁷ as they reported the conversion of the Gentiles. They were more conscious of the nature and significance of the church's being than of the debate. Their life did not depend on the outcome of the debate, but upon the communication of the wondrous works of redemption God had

¹⁴Bruce, p. 288.

¹⁵No subject is expressed for ἑτάξαν, but our conclusion seems obvious. The Western reading which makes the Judaizing teachers the subject with their demand that these men go for trial to Jerusalem is obviously an interpolation of a pro-Jerusalem editor. See W. D. Davies, "The Apostolic Age and the Life of Paul," PCE, p. 885. A. T. Robertson says the verb suggests a formal appointment by the church in regular assembly. The Acts of the Apostles, in Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), III, 224.

¹⁶Suggested by διήρχοντο (cf. Acts 20:25) and a look at the map. There was a good Roman road from Caesarea direct to Jerusalem.

¹⁷G. W. H. Lampe, p. 908, says these were evidently Jewish Christians and indicates the general support on which Paul and Barnabas could count: Judaizers were few and confined to Judea.

wrought. This sense of the church's being in Christ is to play a significant role in the Council to follow.

Upon arrival at Jerusalem the delegation from Antioch was welcomed by the whole church along with the apostles and elders. When the church comes together, her first concern is worship; so the apostles again bear witness to "what God did." If God's wonderful works in delivering Israel from Egypt were made known to the heathen (Josh. 2:9-10), how much more should the church rejoice in God's wonderful works delivering the heathen from the bondage of sin to the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

The report is, however, the occasion for the raising of the question of essentials for participation in the Messianic salvation by some from the Pharisee party.¹⁸ The reality of their conversion is not questioned; their Pharisee background explains their concern for the strict observance of the law, and there is no suggestion that they were insincere in it. Zeal is never a substitute for truth, however. Those who recognized that the ultimate end of their doctrine was the perversion of the gospel and cause of division in the body of Christ had called for a thorough examination of the whole matter.

The Examination of the Problem (Acts 15:6-21)

The Constituency of the Council (Acts 15:6)

Following the welcoming assembly, "the apostles and the elders,"¹⁹

¹⁸Bruce, p. 291, thinks the question may not have been carried so far here as at Antioch where the Mosaic customs were required as the basis for salvation, but here possibly only "for recognition by and fellowship with Jewish Christians."

¹⁹In verse 2 one article was used indicating the unit; here two

to whom the delegation had been specifically directed by Antioch, met to consider the matter. "Elders" are first met in the New Testament church when Antioch sent relief to the church at Jerusalem and it was handed over to "the elders" by Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30). Paul established elders in the churches of Galatia (Acts 14:23). In the Septuagint πρεσβύτερος usually translates עֲלֵי "usually used in plural as having authority; term technical (100); elders of a people, especially of Israel."²⁰ The New Testament church was apparently following the pattern of Old Covenant Israel in the establishment of order and authority. F. F. Bruce calls attention to the joint mention of apostles and elders here in contrast to elders only at chapter 11:30. There he remarked that the reason for elders only was "probably because the business of the Twelve was not this διακονία but the διακονία τοῦ λόγου (v. 2-4)."²¹ This is surely more probable than the usual suggestion that the apostles were absent from Jerusalem.²²

The reading of some representatives of the Western text, σὺν τῷ πλήθει after πρεσβύτεροι in verse 6 cannot be defended.²³ The use of πλήθος (v. 12) and σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ (v. 22) should be

articles, indicating distinct classes of delegates making up the unit.

²⁰W. Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, translated by E. Robinson, edited by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 278. Hereafter designated by BDB.

²¹p. 290.

²²C. S. C. Williams, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, in Harpers New Testament Commentaries, general editor, Henry Chadwick (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), p. 145.

²³614, pc, syh, Ephr., NTG, p. 345.

understood to indicate that the debate and decision of the apostles and the elders took place in the presence of other members of the church of Jerusalem.²⁴ Verse 6 states clearly the constituency of the body, "the apostles and the elders," and the official statement of conclusion supports this, οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοὶ (v. 23), as does the record in 16:4, "the decision which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem." In verse 23 ἀδελφοὶ stands in apposition to οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι, not compounded to them.²⁵ It indicates that

the same parties who came together to consider the matter also framed the decree. The apostles and elders, brethren were the only individuals officially concerned in this important transaction.²⁶

Principal Cunningham considers that the preposition "with" in verse 22 "plainly implies" that the church members "stand upon a different platform" from the apostles and elders in the matter but that

it does imply that after the apostles and elders had made up their minds as to what was the mind and will of God in this matter . . .

²⁴The use of πλῆθος is not decisive here. K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury say that its use in v. 12 does not necessitate the presence of a larger group than the apostles and the elders, The Acts of the Apostles: English Translation and Commentary, in The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I, edited by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and K. Lake (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1933), IV, 172, and larger note, pp. 47, 48. Bruce, p. 295, says it is probably the Christian community as in 4:32; 6:2,5. Since he considers that the debate and decision rested with the leaders (see infra, p. 13, n. 28) he must see the contrast in the attitude of the opposition (v. 5) after the speech of Peter (vv. 7-11).

²⁵Lake and Cadbury, p. 180.

²⁶W. D. Killen, The Ancient Church: Its History, Doctrine, Worship, and Constitution, Traced for the First Three Hundred Years (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., 1833), p. 76.

they (the church) were called upon to attend to it . . . to make up their mind regarding it.²⁷

We conclude with F. F. Bruce that although it seems that other members of the Jerusalem church were present, deliberation and decision rested with the leaders, the apostles and the elders.²⁸ Representative government as seen here was also a feature of the Covenant community in the Old Testament, and the discussion is pertinent here in view of this continuing feature of the life of the people of God.²⁹

The Argument (Acts 15:7-21)

The apostles exercised appropriate restraint in withholding from debate until others had opportunity to speak. Πολλῆς ζητήσεως γενομένης, the genitive absolute seems to indicate that considerable

²⁷William Cunningham, Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church since the Apostolic Age (4th edition; London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), I, 55-56.

²⁸"The Acts," in New Bible Commentary, edited by F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, E. F. Kevan (Second edition; London: The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1954), p. 920. So also Calvin, p. 31; Cunningham, pp. 50, 56; Burnside, p. 172. On view that this was a general assembly made up of the whole Jerusalem church, the apostles and the elders, see Knowing, pp. 19, 20; R. B. Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition, in Limited Editions Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 249. That verse 6 describes the private consultation of Gal. 2:2, Robertson, p. 225.

²⁹That God deals with men through their representatives is a basic feature of the Divine-human relationship as seen first of all in Adam, the first man, and Christ, the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-21). The priest and the king must be one of the people. Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant represented God to the people, and with him in this responsibility often stood the elders of the congregation (Ex. 19:7-8; Deut. 31:9-13). He also represented the people before God, as in the instances of his intercession for them. This feature of the covenant life will be taken up in chapter three where the Old Testament people of God will come under examination.

"investigation"³⁰ had taken place before Peter spoke.

Four speakers give two arguments, Paul and Barnabas speaking to the same point as Peter, but drawing no conclusion. The purpose of the apostles and elders was to determine the will of God for the Gentiles in relation to the Mosaic dispensation. They examined two sources, the providence and the Word of God. Peter, Barnabas and Paul spoke to God's work of adding Gentiles to the church, and James showed that this work was anticipated in the prophets.

Peter's Evidence and Conclusion (Acts 15:7-11)

The key event in the bringing of the Gentiles into the church was the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18). A summary forms the substance of Peter's evidence. As G. W. H. Lampe remarks, "the speech of Peter is couched in strongly Biblical language."³¹ He emphasizes the fact and the method of God's work, and brings us directly to the heart of the covenant of grace historically set forth in God's covenant with Israel. Ἐκλέγομαι is used constantly of God's choice of the patriarchs, the tribe of Judah, David, Zion, Jerusalem, and so on. Election is the basis for Israel's being the people of God, His servant and witness to "the ends of the earth" (Is. 44:1,8; 45:22). God was working in pattern in sending Peter to Cornelius, the Gentile. Hence the reception of

³⁰Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (4th revised and augmented edition, 1952, Cambridge: The University Press, 1957), p. 339. Hereafter BAG.

³¹p. 908.

Cornelius by Peter into the church was due to the will of God, for Peter was God's chosen instrument.

The infinitives ἀκοῦσαι and πιστεῦσαι are of purpose. God chose and sent a spokesman that Cornelius should hear and believe the Gospel. Note the similarity of the angel's word to Cornelius in telling him to send for Peter: "to speak to you words by which you may be saved" (Acts 11:14).

As H. A. W. Meyer, we take δοῦς as contemporaneous with ἐμαρτύρησεν "expressing the mode of it"; and the action of καθάρισας as previous to οὐθὲν διέκρινεν,³² expressing the cause of it. God, "who knows the heart," gave them the Holy Spirit; so what happened there did not rest on Peter's judgment, but on the infallible judgment of God who sees His work and is pleased. In manner it was a second Pentecost plainly manifesting that there was no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile who had been cleansed by faith. (See Acts 11:17.)

Καθάρισας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν recalls God's word to Peter in the vision, "What God has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:15), and the core of the present problem. Under the Old Covenant circumcision was God's promise to purify the heart of Israel; without this cleansing they could not be God's people.³³ Now God has indicated that He had done for the Gentiles by faith in Christ what He had for Israel by promise

³²H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles, translated from the fourth edition of the German by P. J. Gloag, revised and edited by W. P. Dickson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), p. 285.

³³Gen. 17:14; Deut. 30:6; cf. Lev. 26:41 and Jer. 4:4.

in circumcision, namely, removed their defilement;³⁴ they were therefore accepted into His people. God had removed the distinction; the church must no longer make a distinction.³⁵

Τῇ πίστει, dative of means. What the Judaizers expected "would be effected by circumcision and obedience to the Law is performed by God in granting them the gift of faith."³⁶ Cleanness of heart is the work of the grace of God alone; which He has chosen to bring about through faith. As Calvin says,

And it is certainly the function of faith to transfer to us what belongs to Christ, and to make it ours by imparting it freely; thus there is a mutual relation between faith and the grace of Christ; for faith does not cleanse us as a virtue or quality poured into our soul, but because it receives the cleanness offered in Christ.³⁷

To refuse to accept the work God has done as sufficient is "to put God to the proof," that is, to question His ability. Thus Peter recalls Israel's unbelief, rebellion and disobedience in the wilderness as a warning in the present circumstance.³⁸

Any requirement for admission into the church placed upon them whom God had accepted as His people would be an offense to God and a "yoke" to them. "Yoke" in Jeremiah 5:5 and Lamentations 3:27 is a synonym for

³⁴"This day I have rolled the reproach of Egypt from you," Josh. 5:9.

³⁵Cf. God's οὐθὲν διέκρινεν with His command to Peter to go to the house of Cornelius μηδὲν διακρινόμενος "without scruples" (Acts 10:20) because what God has cleansed man is not to call unclean.

³⁶Lampe, p. 908.

³⁷Pp. 35, 36. Cf. Psalm 50(51):12; 23(24):4.

³⁸Psalm 78:18-20. "They tested God . . . Can God spread a table . . . give bread . . . provide meat?" Cf. vv. 4, 56; LXX Ex. 17:2, 7.

the Law, the instrument by which Israel was united with Yahweh in the accomplishment of His will in the world, that is, the realization of His kingdom. Likewise, Jesus used it of man's acceptance of the responsibilities of union with Himself that he might find the Messianic rest and peace (Matt. 11:28-30). Peter's use here, however, is more in harmony with Paul's in the Epistle to the Galatians (5:1) and with Jesus' condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees for binding heavy burdens (φορτία βαρέα) on men's shoulders (Matt. 23:4). Instrument of grace though it was, the law was an unbearable burden from the time of Moses. Christ had come and borne it for men. This fact made the insistence upon continuing to bear it a refusal of the efficacy of God's grace in Christ, a new "Can God . . . ?" Lampe's remark that since "faith takes the place of the Law in this respect, then the Law is an unnecessary yoke"³⁹ betrays a false distinction between the testaments, for faith underlies all proper response to God's revelation in the Law and promises of the Old Dispensation just as it does the proper responses to the Gospel in the New Dispensation. We cannot therefore say that "faith replaces the Law."

Ἄλλ᾽, Peter's only use of the word, marks a triumphant contrast as he concludes that the salvation of all men is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. His statement is most emphatic as he inverts the comparison made in verse 8: "God gave to them the Spirit as to us;" "We believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus even as they." Note that Peter has virtually used the argument Paul used

³⁹p. 908.

in reproving him for his improper conduct at Antioch. H. A. W. Meyer's remark is worth repeating

That Peter in the doctrine of the righteousness of faith was actually as accordant with Paul as he here expresses himself, is, in opposition to Baur, Schwegler, Hilgenfeld, and Zeller, to be inferred even from Gal. ii. 15ff., where Paul acknowledges his and Peter's common conviction, after he had upbraided the latter, v. 14, for the inconsistency of his conduct at Antioch.⁴⁰

Barnabas and Paul Speak (Acts 15:12)

Peter's speech had the same effect in the Council his report of the conversion of Cornelius had on those who criticized him for entering a Gentile's house and eating with Gentiles; they were persuaded that he spoke the wisdom of God, and they "got quiet"⁴¹ (as previously, Acts 11:2, 17-18). All were now prepared to listen to Barnabas and Paul as again they recounted the mighty works of God indicating that His will was being accomplished among the Gentiles through them. They were "mighty works," τέρατα; but they were more; they were σημεῖα, indications that the work had been accomplished by God Himself. Barnabas was the better known in Jerusalem, the senior believer who had introduced the former persecutor to the church in Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 9:27). He therefore speaks first. That Luke records this order here and in the letter (v. 25) may indicate that he is using original sources. In any

⁴⁰p. 286. Cf. Bruce, Acts: Greek Text, pp. 34-35, 295, and his citation from K. Lake: "The figure of a Judaizing St. Peter is a figment of the Tübingen critics with no basis in history," p. 292. Lake, p. 116. M. Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles, edited by Heinrich Greeven (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 95, seems to cling to F. C. Bauer's interpretation.

⁴¹The aorist may be inceptive, Lake and Cadbury, p. 175.

case, it indicates he is representing true history, not a reconstruction favoring Paul,⁴² for Luke would have been naturally inclined to place Paul first as in verse 2.

James' Argument and Proposal (Acts 15:13-21)

We consider this James to be the son of Mary and Joseph to whom Christ appeared directly after His resurrection (I Cor. 15:7), who early became a recognized leader of the Church at Jerusalem along with John and Peter (Gal. 2:9).⁴³ Parallels between this address and the Epistle of James support common authorship.⁴⁴ He is usually considered on the statement in Galatians 2:12-13 to have held to a stricter position than Peter regarding Jewish separation from Gentiles; but if the Pharisee party expected his support they were to be disappointed, for James reviewed in a sentence of approval the address of Peter, and proceeded to support his conclusions by showing that this action of God in bringing the Gentiles into His people was anticipated in the Old Testament prophets.

Luke records James' use of the Aramaic form of Peter's name, Συμεών, another indication of his use of original sources. Luke uses

⁴²M. Dibelius, pp. 95-96, considers Acts 15 a significant literary rendering, but not significant in its understanding of historical events.

⁴³J. F. Foakes-Jackson, The Acts of the Apostles, in The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), p. 141.

⁴⁴J. B. Mayor, The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes Comments and Further Studies, Classic Commentary Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954 reprint of revised third edition, 1913), pp. ii-iv.

it elsewhere only in the mouth of one of the two reporting the appearance of the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:34).

James uses significant words in commenting on Peter's arguments. Ὁ ΘΕΟΣ ἘΠΕΣΚΕΨΑΤΟ occurs three times in the Gospel, twice of Christ's coming (1:68,78), and once of His work as a visitation of God (7:16). W. Bauer says that it is used "of God's gracious visitation in bringing salvation."⁴⁵ In the Old Testament it is usually used in connection with covenant blessing or judgment.⁴⁶

Λαβεῖν ἐξ ἔθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ applies to the Gentiles God's covenant relation to Israel, "My people . . . your God" (Ex. 6:7). At Sinai Israel was the λαὸς περιούσιος above πάντων τῶν ἔθνῶν not in a vacuum, but for the accomplishment of God's purpose, for ἐμὴ γὰρ ἐστὶ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ (Ex. 19:5). Peter later uses this expression to describe the Christian church (I Peter 2:9) indicating that there was but one covenant people from the beginning to be made up finally of all nations. (Compare Titus 2:14.) The church was just coming to realize this fact, though it had been indicated to Abraham, "and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."⁴⁷ Paul identifies this

⁴⁵p. 298.

⁴⁶E.g., Gen. 21:1; Ex. 34:34. Ἐπισκέπτομαι in the LXX translates ἴδω describing an act of God drawing near to His people in sin and distress, showing Himself to be the Lord of history. It may be an act of mercy or of judgment. Herman W. Beyer, "Ἐπισκέπτομαι," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by G. Kittel, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), II, 602. Beyer does not connect it directly with the covenant, however.

⁴⁷Gen. 22:18. The covenant promise, "in thee/thy seed shall all the nations/families of the earth be blessed" is found three times in

agency (ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου) as Christ, emphasizing the use of the singular in the original promise (Gal. 3:16). Paul becomes God's instrument for gathering in God's λαὸν in Corinth from both Jew and Gentile (Acts 18:10). Jesus had anticipated this gathering of "other sheep" to be added to those in the fold of Israel who "hear my voice" so that both become "one flock" under "one shepherd" (John 10:16).

"A people for his name," that is, who should bear His name "as their ruler or proprietor,"⁴⁸ or "for Himself," "a covenant people, a renewed Israel."⁴⁹

"The words of the prophets agree," thus James states his purpose

the niphāl (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 28:14) and twice in the hithpael (22:18; 26:4). The Septuagint, followed by the American Standard Version, renders all in the passive. The Revised Standard Version, renders them all in the reflexive, but the New Testament quotations (Acts 3:25 and Gal. 3:8) in the passive, as the Greek text in quoting the Septuagint. Keil and Delitzsch insist that the niphāl has only a passive significance, not its original reflexive sense. We must not, however, attribute the passive signification, they say, to the hithpael in 22:18 and 26:4 where the prominence is given to the subjective attitude of the nations in desiring the blessing promised to Abraham and to his seed, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch, translated by J. Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), I, 195. As E. D. Roels properly points out, "even if the nations do seek a blessing, the blessing is given them." God's Mission (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 32, n. 55. O. T. Allis presents a detailed study of the niphāl and hithpael and concludes there is evidence for a passive meaning of the hithpael in the Old Testament, and for a passive meaning of the niphāl in Semitic languages as early as Abraham, and that therefore, the LXX translators were on solid ground in translating all five Genesis passages with the passive. The New Testament quotations of the Old Testament should guide our interpretation of the Genesis passages rather than the religious ideas of higher critics. "The Blessings of Abraham," The Princeton Theological Review, XXV (April 1927), 2, 263-298.

⁴⁸Meyer, p. 286.

⁴⁹Lampe, p. 909.

to verify what Peter has reported by the Scriptures. Although this may refer to the Book of the Twelve Prophets which includes Amos,⁵⁰ it seems more likely that J. B. Pusey is right in saying that

James purposely uses the plural, the words of the prophets, in order to include, together with the Prophet Amos, other prophets who foretold the same thing. The statements, that the Jewish Church should inherit the Gentiles, that the Name of God should be called upon the Gentiles, and that the Gentiles should seek the Lord, are parts of one whole; that they should be called, that they should obey the call, and obeying, be enrolled in the one family of God.⁵¹

In the Septuagint translation of Amos 9:11-12 James had chosen a strategic text concerning the realization of God's purpose for His people Israel through the "house" of David.⁵² The prophecy of Amos was spoken to the northern kingdom on the eve of her destruction by Assyria. The northern kingdom came into existence by the revolt led by Jeroboam against the house of David. Jeroboam also established a rival altar at Bethel to God's altar at Jerusalem. Amos (9:1-10) declared the utter destruction of Jeroboam's altar and of the sinful kingdom, but promised the preservation of the faithful in Jacob as the farmer sifts out and preserves every good grain⁵³ before burning the chaff. The house of David will also come to ruin.⁵⁴ Then God will come and restore the

⁵⁰Bruce, p. 297. Williams, p. 182.

⁵¹E. B. Pusey, The Minor Prophets (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), I, 338. So Knowling, p. 321.

⁵²Bruce, p. 298, notes that James in his Epistle, addressed to Jewish Christians nearly always quotes from the LXX rather than from the Hebrew. The case for a Judaizing James is weak.

⁵³The Hebrew word is "stone." Pusey, p. 334, translates, "solid grain."

⁵⁴Amos (2:5) had earlier prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem.

Davidic empire over the twelve tribes and all the vassal states including Edom.

ΜΕΤὰ ταῦτα is a free translation of ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ an equivalent for "the Day of the Lord." It looks back to the acts of God in history. The Old Testament brings those acts into the perspective of the promises of God's future acts when He will bring His purposes to their consummation.⁵⁵ Beyond "that day" lies the Kingdom of God, Israel restored and redeemed and the Gentiles sharing the blessings of God. This era is sometimes also called "the last, or latter, days"⁵⁶ to "designate the final goal of history in which God's redemptive purpose is completed. In a word there are two periods of history divided by the Day of the Lord."⁵⁷

For the apostles the day of redemption had entered into history in the person and work of Jesus and in His sending of the Spirit. The blessings of the Kingdom were no longer exclusively future. They were experiencing the fulfillment, and hope was roused for the final consummation.

The house (οἶκος) promised to David⁵⁸ had indeed become like a forsaken "hut" (σκηνὴ) in the vineyard in winter. (See Is. 1:8.) Two participles describe its desolation, πεπτωκυῖαν and κατεστραμμένα. But God had built it up again in the exalted Son of David, according to the preaching of both Peter and Paul (Acts 2:32-36; 13:23-37). He was

⁵⁵Joel 2:31; 3:14; Amos 9:11; Zeph. 3:11,16; Zech. 14:9.

⁵⁶Is. 2:2-4; Hosea 3:5; Ezek. 38:16.

⁵⁷George E. Ladd, The Young Church in Bible Guides, edited by W. Barclay and F. F. Bruce (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 35.

⁵⁸II Sam. 7:11; I Chron. 17:10; Ps. 89.

beginning to restore the ruined walls of the hut and to bring the Gentiles from the ends of the earth into it. The new age called for a reevaluation in terms of the realities anticipated in the prophets and now being realized.

The certainty and extent of the restoration of the fallen hut of David is emphasized in the use of "ἀνά" compounded with two different verbs in verse 16: ἀνοικοδομήσω (twice) and ἀνορθώσω. God is the subject of each and the tent of David is the object.

The restoration of τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ is to be understood as prophesying the restoration of David's kingdom, not to the nation of Israel, but as the new universal people of God.⁵⁹ The Hebrew text spoke, of course, in terms of David's reign over all Israel and over vassal states of whom Edom is representative as being his bitterest enemy. J. B. Pusey grasps the universal scope of the prophecy from the variety of genders and numbers in the Hebrew text of the passage; the hut of David, their (feminine) breaches, his ruins; God will build her up, that they (masculine) may inherit.

(He uses) apparently this variety of genders and numbers in order to show that he is speaking of one living whole, the Jewish Church, now rent in two by the great schism of Jeroboam, but which should be reunited into one body, members of which should win the Heathen to the true faith of God.⁶⁰

F. F. Bruce recognizes in "the Church the legitimate continuation of the old Church of Israel."⁶¹ Thus church and kingdom are equated as

⁵⁹Lampe, p. 909.

⁶⁰p. 337.

⁶¹p. 297.

the visible people of God, redeemed by Christ, purified and governed by His will.

Verse 17 expresses the purpose for the restoration, introduced by ὅπως ἄν: "so that the remainder of men may seek the Lord, even all the nations upon whom my name has been called." The Messianic restoration of the kingdom of David is not alone for the blessedness and prosperity of Israel, but of all the nations. The universal extent of this Kingdom of God is emphatically stated by joining οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων with πάντα τὰ ἔθνη by an exegetical καί, "even." "The rest of men," specifically, all the heathen "without respect of persons and works," as R. J. Knowling comments,⁶² will seek the Lord. But not without the sovereign electing grace of God: ἐφ' οὗς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου "upon whom my name has been called" is a Hebraistic formula of ownership or conquest.⁶³ The universal kingdom is not universalism; as the Hebrew of Amos 9:12 has it, it is God's work.

This Septuagint rendering of Amos 9:11,12 is an interpretation rather than a translation of the Hebrew; but from verse 28 (ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ we are to understand that the Spirit directed James in using it, and that He approved the rendering. The

⁶²p. 322.

⁶³Deut. 28:10; II Sam. 12:28; Jer. 14:9. See especially Is. 63:19 where submission to the rule of Yahweh is parallel to being called by His name. H. E. W. Fosbroke: "'called by my name' signifies simply that these people had been conquered by Jahweh and so had passed into his possession." H. E. W. Fosbroke and S. Lovett, The Interpreter's Bible: The Book of Amos, G. A. Buttrick et al. editors (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), VI, 851. It anticipates conquest by the Spirit. Cf. "Your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies," in the promise to Abraham, Gen. 22:17.

Hebrew reads, "that they (Israel) may possess (אֶשְׂרֹף; LXX requires אֶשְׂרֹף "seek") the remnant (clearly accusative after אֶשְׂרֹף) of Edom (אֶדְוֹם; LXX requires אֶדְוֹם) and all the nations upon whom my name is called." Certainly the meaning of the Hebrew is preserved, the changes making it fit the situation of the apostles rather than the exact situation of the time of Amos.

Israel became the people of God through the Covenant: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God" (Ex. 6:7). This was essentially an inward relationship whereby Israel was made to manifest the holy character of God by being holy as He was holy. "The Lord shall establish you as a holy people unto himself, . . . if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in his ways. All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord" (Deut. 28:9,10). The enlargement of Israel to "possess the gate of their enemies" (Gen. 22:17) by the restoration of the Davidic kingdom over Israel and tributary nations cannot have a mere outward submission, but as Calvin says,

God promises the restoration of the tabernacle that had fallen in ruins, that in it the Gentiles may be subject to the Kingdom of David, not merely to pay tribute, or to take arms at the king's command, but have a common God and be His one family.⁶⁴

Although the Gentiles are said to "seek the Lord" (confer Is. 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-4), we do not lose sight of the fact that God is doing this work most graciously: the perfect tense and passive voice of ἐπικέκληται

⁶⁴Calvin, p. 47. Cf. John Marsh, "Amos and Micah: Introduction and Commentary" in Torch Bible Commentaries, general editors, David L. Edwards, John Marsh, and Alan Richardson (London: S. C. M. Press, Ltd., 1959), p. 74.

states the divine order. The call of God precedes the seeking of men: He arrested Saul of Tarsus, the rebel (Acts 9); He told Cornelius to send for Peter (Acts 10); so it was with the Gentiles of Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:48). Man's seeking is but his response to God's "conquest." In this prophecy quoted by James God returns, rebuilds (twice), and sets up so that men may seek; throughout there is "that constant feeling of the primacy of the activity of God which again finds expression in the clause 'who does this' at the end of the verse."⁶⁵

The Hebrew of Amos 9:12 ends, "says Yahweh doing these things." David's conquest of Edom and other nations was Yahweh's conquest. The sifting of the northern kingdom (Amos 9:9) and the captivity of Judah were providences of the Covenant God. Now the rebuilding was also His work, as the apostles had been saying so clearly.

James adds to the end of the quotation from Amos, "γνωστὰ ἀπ' αἰῶνος," reminiscent of the Septuagint of Isaiah 45:21, τίς ἀκουστὰ ἐποίησεν ταῦτα ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. The use of ἀπ' αἰῶνος is peculiar to Luke in the New Testament. He uses it in the Gospel (1:70) and in the Acts of the Apostles (3:21) in a similar reference to God's having revealed His eternal purpose by His prophets "from the beginning."⁶⁶ The textual evidence supports the reading, "says the Lord who has been making these things known from the beginning,"⁶⁷ and we think it also most

⁶⁵Fosbroke, p. 851.

⁶⁶Amos 3:7 indicates that God always reveals by His prophets what He intends to do with His covenant people.

⁶⁷The Western text is similar to the Byzantine which appears in the Authorized Version, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." A summary of the textual evidence is given by Knowling, p. 322.

emphatically represents James' thesis. He has successfully shown that the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God, the church, is the work of God in accord with the plan He had revealed through His prophets from the very beginning.⁶⁸

Διό (v. 19), James has completed his formal argument and is now to make a proposal. He formulates a motion which he puts to the assembly. Although there is good authority for taking κρίνω as "I decree," a definite sentence put forth on the personal authority of the leading apostle of Jerusalem,⁶⁹ it seems more in keeping with the spirit of the passage to consider it to mean "I think."⁷⁰ In view of verse 22, "It pleased the apostles and the elders with the whole church," it cannot reasonably be understood to establish an authoritarian position of James.⁷¹

Μὴ παρενοχλεῖν "we must stop troubling them."⁷² James "throws his voice on the side of liberty"⁷³ as Peter had by his τί . . . ἐπιθεῖναι ζυγόν (v. 10). Those who "are turning" (the present participle indicating a work recognized to be now in process) to God from

⁶⁸Cf. Paul, in Rom. 15:8-9; Peter, Acts 3:21.

⁶⁹So Lake and Cadbury, p. 177.

⁷⁰So Bruce, p. 299; Rackham, p. 254. Calvin, p. 49, translates "my judgment is" as expressing his own (James') opinion. The perfect passive participle is used of the decrees in 16:4 giving us "the united opinion," or "the one mind" of the apostles and elders.

⁷¹F. J. A. Hort, The Christian Ecclesia (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1900), p. 80; Knowling, p. 323.

⁷²Force of the negative present infinitive, Bruce, p. 299.

⁷³Hort, p. 80.

among the Gentiles are not to have any hindrance placed upon them, any obligation whether as a basis for salvation or for entrance into the church. The "παρ" compounded with the verb may foresee the fourfold abstinence proposed to facilitate Jewish-Gentile social and religious relationships and to display approved Christian deportment.⁷⁴

Ἐπιστεῖλαι, "inform or instruct by letter."⁷⁵ The four things to be refrained from are listed with slight variation again in verse 29, and in chapter 21:25 where James states them to Paul in Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary tour. The Western text omits καὶ πνικτοῦ and adds the negative golden rule, making the decree a purely ethical one forbidding idolatry, fornication and bloodshed, and "reflecting a time when the Judaizing controversy was gone and forgotten," according to F. F. Bruce.⁷⁶

"For Moses" . . . the reason for proposing these abstentions to the Gentiles was to avoid offence to both Christian and non-Christian Jews scattered in every city.⁷⁷ The variety of interpretations by careful scholars warns against dogmatic conclusion. It seems that γάρ introduces a general reason for the proposal James is making. His reason focuses the action of the Council upon Jewish-Gentile relations. But we cannot avoid the conclusion that the Council also had the wider context of Gentile society in mind as well. So it appears in the later

⁷⁴C. W. Carter and Ralph Earle, The Acts of the Apostles, The Evangelical Commentary, G. A. Turner, Chairman editorial board (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 215.

⁷⁵BAG, p. 300.

⁷⁶p. 299.

⁷⁷Foakes-Jackson, p. 142.

Pauline correspondence, especially the first epistle to the Corinthians, and the epistle to the Romans.⁷⁸

The Solution of the Problem (Acts 15:22-16:5)

A Delegation Chosen to Deliver the Decision (Acts 15:22)

"Ἔδοξε" is used by Luke in the prologue of the Gospel (1:3) in the sense of "determined."⁷⁹ K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury say it is a technical term in Greek of all periods for "voting" or passing a measure in the assembly, having as much suggestion of parliamentary procedure in Greek as "voted" in English.⁸⁰ It is used twice in the letter, once of the apostles and elders with the concurrence of the whole church, and then of the Holy Spirit as a party with the apostles and elders; thus the decision rests in the final analysis upon the action of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹

Since the action taken confirmed the position of Paul and Barnabas, the wisdom of reporting by a delegation is evident. They wished to bring an end to dissension. They chose unanimously (γενομένων τε δημοθυμαδόν, v. 25)⁸² two "leaders," "prophets" (v. 32), of the Jerusalem

⁷⁸A fuller discussion appears in infra, chapter 2.

⁷⁹J. H. Thayer, translator and revisor, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, by Grimm (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892), p. 154.

⁸⁰p. 178.

⁸¹David Smith, p. 114, translates v. 28, "It was the Holy Spirit's decision and ours," and explains in n. 4, "A characteristically primitive expression. The voice of the Spirit-guided Church was the Spirit's will articulate."

⁸²BAG, p. 569.

Church: Judas, not mentioned elsewhere; and Silas, soon to become active as the companion of Paul on his second missionary journey.

The Decision Written in a Letter (Acts 15:23-29)

The letter was written by those who had formed the Council (v. 6) and alone had been responsible for the decision, οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί.⁸³ This "faultless Aramaic idiom"⁸⁴ was a genuine expression of brotherhood, translated in the New English Bible, "We, the apostles and elders, send greetings as brothers to our brothers of gentile origin in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia." J. F. A. Hort comments that the wording suggests that they who hold office are to be regarded as bearing the characteristics from which the title itself had arisen, and that they are but elder brethren to a great family of brethren.⁸⁵ The letter was addressed to the Gentile believers as it concerned their liberty in Christ and their obligations in love for the brethren in Christ.

First, they are put at ease. Οἷς οὐ διεσπειλάμεθα (v. 24), those who had been teaching disturbing doctrine in Antioch had no instructions from the Jerusalem Church. Ἀνασκευάζοντες means "unsettling"; but it also means "reversing what has been done, tearing down what has

⁸³The Antiochian reading "and the brethren" is clearly an emendation" for the Western text supports the B-text, Lake and Cadbury, p. 180.

⁸⁴Bruce, p. 302, n. 1. Lake and Cadbury, p. 180, however, "It would be hard to prove that it is not an idiom of the koine Greek."

⁸⁵p. 71. Smith, p. 113, "The Apostles and Presbyters, your brothers, to the Gentile Brothers"

been built, or cancelling what has been agreed upon."⁸⁶ It may refer back to the church's approval of the reception of Cornelius without circumcision or imposition of the law, or the agreement reported by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians (2:1-10).⁸⁷ It is clear that the Judaizing party did not have the approval of the church.

Second, they highly praised the devoted (παραδεδωκόσι) ministry of "our beloved Barnabas and Paul," implying full confidence in what they had done, and approval of it. Judas and Silas will orally report the Council's proceedings as well as deliver the Council's letter, διὰ λόγου ἀπαγγέλλοντας τὰ αὐτά.

Third, assurance is given that the Holy Spirit decided this matter; the Council is but His spokesman. "Ἐδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῶν (v. 28), "causa principalis" and "causa ministerialis" of the decrees.⁸⁸ The Spirit and the brethren in Jerusalem lay the burden of a positive witness to their faith and a loving concession to their Jewish brethren on the Gentile believers. Immediately, the ἐπανάγκες were for "mutual intercourse, that Jew and Gentile Christians might live as brethren in the one Lord."⁸⁹ F. F. Bruce suggests that the original omitted τῶν before ἐπανάγκες and read ἐπανάγκες with ἀπέχεσθαι, "to lay no burden on you except these things: you must abstain from

⁸⁶Lake and Cadbury, p. 180.

⁸⁷We identify this meeting of Paul with the leading apostles in which they approved his gospel with the famine relief visit, Acts 11:30; 12:25, so before the Council. Supra, p. 7, n. 11.

⁸⁸Knowling, p. 328.

⁸⁹Ibid.

things sacrificed to idols, etc."⁹⁰ If so, we have a strong imperative.

"The fourfold prohibition of the Alexandrian Text is no doubt original."⁹¹ Others have only championed the priority of the Western text with its threefold moral prohibition of idolatry, fornication and murder.⁹² C. S. C. Williams argues that the apostles would hardly have solemnly decreed "abstinence" from "murder and fornication."⁹³ The Jewish-Gentile situation was such that the apostles and elders, directed by the Holy Spirit, decreed basic principles of conduct for Gentile Christians whereby they would manifest pure devotion to God in contrast to their former idolatrous way of life, and would avoid offense to their Jewish brethren. These demands were nothing more than the imperatives of grace: love for God and for their brethren. Love demands concrete action in specific situations and the Holy Spirit directed the church to specify these four things in this situation.⁹⁴ In the next chapter

⁹⁰p. 303.

⁹¹Williams, p. 183; so Bruce, p. 44; Foakes-Jackson, p. 142.

⁹²Smith, pp. 671-674. See summary in Foakes-Jackson, p. 140.

⁹³p. 183. It "would be slightly absurd," he says.

⁹⁴See Calvin's brief definition of these demands under v. 19, pp. 49-50. Adolf Schlatter, The Church in the New Testament Period, translated by Paul P. Levertoff (London: S. P. C. K., 1955), chap. 15, pp. 125-138, draws the following conclusions: "the negotiations did not conclude simply in abrogation of the Mosaic Law, but in agreement about the demands which the church must make on all her members and the observances to be required of every convert" (p. 130). The decrees were not just a theoretical matter; they did not formulate dogma, but regulated behavior of the gentiles and showed them what the Christian ethic was. That ethic "originated from the aim which inspired the whole of the early Church. The first Christians turned to Jesus because they renounced deliberate sin, devoted themselves to the service of God, and made His will their motive and their sin. They gathered round one who, as the Author of reconciliation, had prepared an end to human sin and

we will discuss the meaning of the decrees as it appears from the literature of the New Testament.

Fourth, compliance is encouraged. For εὖ πράξετε (v. 29) Bauer gives "act rightly, do well, get along well."⁹⁵ Others prefer "do right."⁹⁶ With the introductory "necessary things" and the imperative "abstain" we have strong expressions laying a demand on those to whom they are addressed. F. J. A. Hort has probably best expressed the meaning, "a strong expression of opinion, more than advice and less than a command, respecting certain salutary restraints."⁹⁷ It is clear that the preservation of unity in the church made compliance necessary; and we have no doubt that the apostles and elders expected and received conformity to the decrees; otherwise the rejoicing and strengthening experienced (v. 31; 16:5) cannot be accounted for.

Such unity of purpose and action derives, as we shall see in chapter three, from the nature of the society of God's people. They are a covenant community brought into existence by the grace of God in Christ.

created a community obedient to God. Hence the prevention of wrongdoing in the Church was secured not by doctrinal pronouncements but by ethical norms" (p. 130). The eating of food sacrificed to idols was prohibited because "entry into the Church involved the complete abandonment of pagan rites. It was not possible to be a guest at Jesus' table and still take part in pagan sacrificial meals, nor to pray both to the Father of Jesus Christ and to Zeus" (pp. 130-131). Christian freedom does not "include the satisfaction of man's natural desire for erotic pleasure" (p. 131). There is no conclusive evidence for the reason behind the other two prohibitions (p. 136) but they seem to point to opposition to gnostic heresy.

⁹⁵p. 705.

⁹⁶Bruce, p. 304; Lake and Cadbury, p. 181. Cf. James 2:8 for similar situation and idiom.

⁹⁷p. 83.

His grace unites them first to Himself and then to one another, the latter union coming only by virtue of the former. They are in agreement and submission to one another because they are subject to His lordship. Their directives carry no authority of themselves; but they bear authority as His royal decrees. They may also rightly be called "the decrees of the apostles and elders" (16:4) because they are His commissioned officers.

The Letter Delivered (Acts 15:30-35, 40-16:5)

Judas and Silas, being properly sent off (ἀπολυθέντες, v. 30) from Jerusalem, do their job with business-like dispatch. The content of the letter is against considering ἀπολυθέντες in the sense of the sending away of an accused person (as in 3:13; 4:21,23; 5:40) as indicating the representatives of Antioch now returning. It does not support the Western text of verse 2 in its suggestion that the representatives of Antioch were taken to Jerusalem by the Judaizers for trial. It is used in the ordinary sense of "sending away" as in Acts 13:3 of the departure of Paul and Barnabas from Antioch. It is used again in verse 33 of the departure of Judas and Silas for Jerusalem when they had completed their assignment in Antioch.

Ἐπέδωκαν (v. 30) is a technical term indicating that the deputation officially handed over the letter from Jerusalem⁹⁸ to the assembled congregation (τὸ πλῆθος) of the believers. It brought encouragement and rejoicing, ἐχάρησαν ἐπὶ τῇ παρακλήσει (v. 31). Παρακλήσει

⁹⁸Bruce, p. 304.

anticipates the use of the verb παρενάλεσαν in the next verse and indicates what does not appear in the English, that "encouragement" or "consolation" (AV) is the result of "exhortation." Judas and Silas encouraged and strengthened the brethren (v. 32); their mission was accomplished.

After these two brethren had returned to Jerusalem,⁹⁹ Paul and Barnabas remained at Antioch teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord.

As the result of a disagreement between Barnabas and Paul over John Mark, the missionary outreach of the church was doubled as these two leaders separated, and in the company of new associates, became two teams going in two directions. Paul and Silas, one of the envoys from Jerusalem, now returned from Jerusalem, began a tour through Syria and Cilicia for the purpose of strengthening the churches established there earlier. They "handed over" to them (παρεδίδοσαν, 16:4) "the decrees" (τὰ δόγματα) "to keep" (φυλάσσειν). Παρεδίδοσαν expressed the authority of the apostles in handing on what they had received from the Head of the Church. Τὰ δόγματα were what it seemed appropriate (ἔδοξε) to the Holy Spirit and the apostles and elders to decree (15:22,25,28). Luke uses δόγμα for imperial decrees (Lk. 2:1 and Acts 17:7). Authority in the church does not rest on the legal form of her decisions, but on the Word and the inner imperative of the grace of the Head of the church. In handing on the decrees, Paul and Silas

⁹⁹Verse 34 of the Authorized Version is omitted in the B-text. The Western and antiochian texts should be considered interpolations because of v. 40. Lake and Cadbury, p. 182.

"enjoined their observance."¹⁰⁰ Ὁυλάσσειν is taken as an infinitive of purpose. There is no reason to assume that Luke is not here recording the genuine action of the apostle Paul, or that there is a conflict between this action and the position of independence from the Jerusalem apostles Paul maintains in the epistle to the Galatians. Rather, the deliverance of the decrees after the Epistle manifests true apostolic authority, and mutual respect. Because of their direct appointment by the Lord they were independent of one another as regards authority; but when they consulted, they would be in agreement under the direction of the One Lord and One Spirit. The position of the apostle was thus independently supported in the eyes of the Judaizing teachers and of the Galatians who had been deceived by them.

The setting right of doctrine always results in consolation and confirmation, strengthening in the faith of the body of Christ. This leads to "increasing in numbers." "Disputes over opinions" (Rom. 14:1) weaken the church. The truth of God received in love gives unity and power, so that there is continual fruit-bearing.

¹⁰⁰The New English Bible, New Testament (Oxford: The University Press, 1961), p. 227.

CHAPTER III

THE SUBSEQUENT USE OF THE DECREES IN THE CHURCH

The Judaizers are Officially Repudiated

Luke's account makes the Council of Jerusalem the solution of the Judaizing controversy.¹ "The church had definitely decided against the Judaizers, and the truth must prevail."² But not without a struggle. The turbulence of the storm is still evident in Luke's "tranquil style" as he writes some years afterwards "when peace had long been established. But the storm was weathered, and the schism averted."³

The Importance of the Chronology

The chronology of events related to the Council is pertinent in two respects. First, it bears upon Paul's claim of independence from the apostles in his epistle to the Galatians. He rests his claim not only on his direct appointment by Christ and instruction by revelation, but also on his little contact with them--two visits to Jerusalem meeting only three of them. If one of these visits is to be considered the Council, the numerous references to the apostles make it difficult to suppose that Paul met only Peter and John of the apostles and James,

¹W. L. Knox, St. Paul and the Church of Jerusalem (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1925), pp. 188, 228.

²Richard Belward Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition, Limited Editions Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 258.

³Ibid., p. 238.

the chief elder. Also, Paul's deliverance of the decrees to the Galatian churches (Acts 16:4) "represents Paul as a delegate of the apostles in Jerusalem in a manner incompatible with the Epistle to the Galatians"⁴ if the Council preceded the writing of the epistle.

Second, it bears upon the integrity of the church in the separation of Peter and Barnabas from fellowship with Gentile Christians at Antioch under influence of "certain men who came from James." The decrees plainly implied that Gentile Christians who observed them were to be received in fellowship by Jewish Christians, so the action of these three leaders and the whole Judaizing group constituted a breach of the directive of the Holy Spirit through His representatives the apostles and elders (Acts 15:28). The report of Paul directed to Peter (Gal. 2:11,14-17), though he were an apostle, can hardly be said to have cleared the case for the church. For the church to allow such an action to go unnoticed would constitute a tacit repudiation of the decrees and would endanger her very life. If the church would not act in such a case, we would ask how "schism was averted"⁵ and peace achieved. "There is no evidence that it was more than a moral authority, but that did not make it less real."⁶ The church does not keep silent when the "real" authority of the Holy Spirit has been ignored. If, however, Gal. 2:1-10 is identified with the famine-relief visit of Paul and Barnabas to

⁴Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I, The Acts of the Apostles: English Translation and Commentary, edited by F. J. F. Jackson and K. Lake (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1933), IV, 185.

⁵Rackham, p. 238. See supra, p. 38.

⁶Fenton John Anthony Hort, The Christian Ecclesia (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1900), p. 83.

Jerusalem (Acts 11:30 and 12:25), and the visit of Peter to Antioch followed the return of Paul and Barnabas from the first missionary journey at the same time that the Judaizers extended their activity beyond Antioch to Galatia, and Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians in the heat of the debate at Antioch (Acts 15:2), then we have progress towards a settlement that ends in averting schism, and brings peace and encouragement to the church (Acts 15:32; 16:5). But "if the Galatian letter is later, the controversy is left raging between Paul and Peter,"⁷ with no settlement recorded.

R. B. Rackham describes an intensification of activity by the Judaizers following the Council. Determined to defeat the policy of Gentile liberty from the law of Moses established there, they followed Paul to Antioch and wherever he established churches attacking his doctrine of salvation by faith and his claim to apostleship. This evoked his letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Romans.⁸ This is difficult to harmonize with his statement that "peace had long been established" when Luke wrote his account of the Council⁹ if we are to date the writing of Acts during the first Roman imprisonment.

W. L. Knox objects to this chronology that it

leaves unexplained and inexplicable the fact that while at Corinth St. Paul's opponents include Jewish Christians of high standing . . . yet we have no trace of any attempts to persuade the Corinthians to observe the Law. This is natural if the Council was, as St. Luke represents it, the end of the controversy as to circumcision,

⁷Philip Carrington, The Early Christian Church (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1957), I, 106.

⁸pp. 258, 259.

⁹Ibid., p. 238.

and subsequent to the writing of Galatians, but incredible of it was still a living controversy at the time of the Epistle to the Romans.¹⁰

An examination of the epistles of Paul supports the conclusion of George Ladd that we hear only little of the controversy in the epistles.¹¹ W. Sanday and A. Headlam express the opinion that in the discussion of eating meat and observing days in Romans 14:1-15:13 Paul is "not thinking of any special body of people, but of special types." There is no special reference to arguments, they say. "Both in the controversial portion and in the admonitory portion, we find constant reminiscences of earlier situations, but always with the sting of controversy gone." Paul is working out the proper attitude of Christians toward over scrupulousness and over conscientiousness, not because situations "have arisen, but because they may arise."¹²

Philip Carrington has pointed out concerning the Corinthian correspondence that "though Jewish 'apostles' may create division in Corinth between Paul and Peter, they do not argue that the Gentile Christians should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses."¹³ With this we agree and find in this fact an indication of the conclusion of an organized Judaizing controversy.

The matter of circumcision in Corinth was not a controversial one

¹⁰Pp. 228-229.

¹¹George E. Ladd, The Young Church (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 30.

¹²William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), special note, "What sect or party is referred to in Rom. XIV?" pp. 399-403.

¹³Ibid.

as in Galatia and Antioch. Paul speaks of it in general terms of personal liberty: "Was anyone at the time of his call circumcised? Let him not seek circumcision" (I Cor. 7:18). He gives the general rule that one should remain in the state in which he was called, and uses circumcision as an example.

Paul's reference to circumcision in Philipians (3:2-5) indicates that there was a Judaizing element there, but he makes no attempt to oppose it. Apparently it was not taken very seriously.

The question of the observance of days, circumcision, eating and drinking in Colosse (2:8-23) was not the result of a Judaizing element of the sort described in Acts 15:1-5, but a combination of Judaic and pagan elements,¹⁴ and so does not properly fit into our discussion.

Our conclusion is that the evidence from the epistles supports Luke's account that the Council gave the official conclusion of the Judaizing controversy; that the church accepted the decrees as the charter of Christian liberty for both Jew and Gentile believer; and that it "formed in St. Paul's hands a powerful weapon whereby the freedom, the unity and the catholicity of the church was finally achieved."¹⁵ This strongly favours the placing of Peter's failure

¹⁴C. F. D. Moule, The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1957), p. 92. E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1957), p. 228. T. K. Abbott, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), pp. xlviii, 247. John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 173.

¹⁵G. T. Stokes, The Acts of the Apostles, The Expositor's Bible, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1892), II, 221.

in Antioch and Paul's letter to the Galatians previous to the Jerusalem Council.

Idol-Meats in Corinth and Rome

The discussion in Romans 14:1-15:13 is more general than that in I Cor. 8:1-11:1. In Romans Paul is discussing the proper attitude toward the censorious or over-scrupulous person in matters of food (βρωσις) and drink (πόσις).¹⁶ The vegetarian is probably one who fears "uncleanness" from meat that has been offered to an idol, though not necessarily so.¹⁷ In the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul is replying to questions concerning eating food offered to idols εἰδωλόθυτος and βρωσις purchased in the market, served at a friend's home, or at a feast given by an unbelieving friend in the idol's temple. The Corinthian matter is, therefore, more specific, but the treatment is basically the same.

The question is approached as an ἀδιάρητον calling for the exercise of the individual conscience and of loving deference within the church. The fact is, Paul says he is persuaded by Christ in this, that nothing is unclean in itself,¹⁸ nor does an idol have any real existence.¹⁹ The mind and conscience of believers, being unclean, defiles

¹⁶Murray, pp. 173-174.

¹⁷Charles Hodge, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Philadelphia: Wm. S. and Alfred Martien, 1858), p. 317.

¹⁸Rom. 14:14; cf. words of Christ, Mark 7:19.

¹⁹I Cor. 8:4, οὐδὲν εἶδωλον. This was the insistence of the O. T. Deut. 32:21 and Jer. 2:5; 10:15; 16:19; 51:18, etc.

everything.²⁰ As the mind and conscience of a believer may not be fully liberated from the bondage of idolatry and ceremonialism, he may still look on the eating of that which was offered to an idol as an act of idolatry. Those who have this weakness are to be received into the confidence and fellowship of the church,²¹ and each must "be fully assured in his own mind" and follow his conscience in respect to such usages.²²

The determining factor in the exercise of personal liberty in these matters is the Lordship of Christ over all men. All inward motives and outward actions of all believers are governed by the fact that they belong to and acknowledge the One Lord. Christian liberty is not primarily to eat and to drink, but to live a new life dominated by the Spirit of God.²³ The Christian's objective will then be not to please himself, but to serve Christ by seeking the edification of the weak brother (I Cor. 10:23) and the peace and unity of the church of Christ (Rom. 14:17-19).

In I Cor. 10:14-22 Paul uses the Lord's Supper in a significant

²⁰John Calvin, The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1961), p. 299. See Mk. 7:21-23 and Titus 1:5.

²¹Παραλαμβάνεσθε "receive into full Christian intercourse and fellowship." Sanday and Headlam, p. 384. Used of God receiving man, Ps. 27:10. The imperative rests on God's having received him (Rom. 14:3). Used of Christ and the Church in receiving, Rom. 15:7. This is the reasoning of Peter and the rest at the council.

²²"The injunction (v. 5), refers not simply to the right of private judgment but the demand." Murray, p. 178.

²³T. W. Manson, "Romans," Peake's Commentary on the Bible. General editors, M. Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1962), p. 951.

argument for carefully "shunning the worship of idols."²⁴ The "loaf" (εἶς ἄρτος) of the communion demonstrates the unity of the church (ἐν σῶμα, v. 17). Σῶμα in distinction to σάρξ contains the thought of unity; "it refers to an organism."²⁵ Israel believed that the worshiper in eating of the sacrifice was in fellowship with God, to whom the sacrifice was made; likewise when they turned to idols (Lev. 17:7). Pagans sacrificed to demons which were no gods (Deut. 32:17,21; Ps. 96:5). So they who sacrifice to them are "in communion with demons . . . , (are) partners of, belong to the world of evil spirits, (are) connected with the powers of darkness."²⁶ It is impossible to be in communion with God and the powers of darkness at the same time. By contrast the Lord's Supper demonstrates the horrible character of idolatry and is a striking example of the necessity to "make a practice of flying at once" from it.²⁷

The final appeal is made for a voluntary limitation of the exercise of personal liberty for the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31) and the salvation of both Jew and Gentile (I Cor. 10:33) according to the example of Christ (I Cor. 11:1; Rom. 15:3-13).

Conclusion: Paul has not met a Jew-Gentile problem, as the Council

²⁴F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Second edition; London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, Ltd., 1954), p. 230.

²⁵Ibid., p. 232.

²⁶Ibid., p. 236.

²⁷Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians in The International Critical Commentary, edited by S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, C. A. Briggs. (Second edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), p. 127.

had, but a strong-weak Christian problem. The question in Corinth concerned those "accustomed to idols" (8:7). Paul shows that the matter rests on the Christian's relation to God. The command is "shun the worship of idols" lest you "provoke the Lord to jealousy."²⁸ Rather than invoke the decrees of the Council, Paul has defined the principles behind the Council's action. He may have been influenced in this direction because he is not combatting a problem of social relations between Jews and Gentiles, but a problem of moral influence of one Christian upon another. As the decrees had called for submission one to another in love to preserve the organic unity God had established between Jew and Gentile by the gift of the Spirit, so now Paul defines the principles involved, calls for everyone to be persuaded in his own mind, and to act in love for the glory of God, the salvation of men and edification of the church.

Immorality in Corinth

Paul discusses immorality after the surprising introduction, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful . . . but I will not be enslaved by anything." (I Cor. 6:12). He seems to place the appetite for food and immorality in parallel as both ἀδελφότητα possibly because the Gentile Corinthians practically did so; but immediately he distinguishes clearly between them. Food and the stomach were made for one another. But both are of temporal significance only, for God will bring them both to an end. The body was made, not for

²⁸I Cor. 10:14,22. The latter quotes Deut. 32:21.

sensual satisfaction, but for the Lord. It belongs to Him; its goal is not in itself, nor in time; for God will raise it up. The body is not for destruction, but for transformation, for glorification.²⁹ It ceases to be ψυχικόν and becomes πνευματικόν (1 Cor. 15:44). At the present time it is joined to the Lord as His temple. The one who enters into fornication joins his body, not just an organ of the body, to a harlot, according to the ordinance of God (Gen. 2:22-23), whether he considers it so or not. Κολλάω is used in verse 18 "to express a loyal and permanent adherence, resulting in a complete spiritual union" with God.³⁰ Paul has stated unequivocally the permanent prohibition of fornication for the Christian because it is completely out of harmony with the nature and goal of his body and the institution of marriage.

"Shun immorality" (present imperative). "Do not stop to dispute about it. . . . So also of idolatry, which was so closely allied with impurity, x. 14."³¹ Rather, "Glorify God" (aorist imperative, x. 20); a "sharp practical injunction" enforced by δῆ, meaning "Be sure to glorify God."³²

We should not be surprised at the placing of a permanent prohibition beside a temporary request for abstention in the decrees of the Council, or next to an ἀδιάρητον as in the first epistle to the Corinthians. Nor should we seek a narrow definition of such as "breaches

²⁹Note the contrast between σῶμα and σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα in I Cor. 15:37-38, 50.

³⁰Robertson and Plummer, p. 126; cf. LXX, 4 Kings 18:6.

³¹Robertson and Plummer, p. 127.

³²Ibid., p. 129.

of Jewish marriage law (Lev. 18)."³³ Israel's departures from the Covenant God usually involved both idolatry and immorality.³⁴ They went hand-in-hand in pagan religion which sprang from man's rebellion against God and his deification of his own passions (Rom. 1:18-33). Thus they are closely related in their underlying principle as well as in their outward manifestations. Paul places them side by side at the head of his lists of enslaving sins that bar men from the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 9:6; Rom. 1:24,26-27; Gal. 5:19). In writing to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:3-12) he says, "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality." He then exhorts to go on in loving the brethren. So again he has placed a permanent moral injunction side by side with the matter of brotherly love, for this is a primary matter distinguishing Christian morality from pagan morality. In the final picture of restored paradise we have the contrast that "outside are . . . fornicators . . . idolators." (Rev. 22:15).

Idolatry and Immorality in Asia

Three references in the letters to the Seven Churches in Asia, Rev. 2:6, 14-15, 20-25, reveal a problem of a different nature from that in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles. In the Asian churches idolatry and immorality were being subtly encouraged as they had been in the Old Testament by Balaam and Jezebel.³⁵ The

³³F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (Second edition; London: The Tyndale Press, 1952), p. 300.

³⁴Ex. 32:6; Num. 25:1-3,17; I Kings 14:24; 15:12, etc.

³⁵Num. 25:1-3,17; 31:16; I Kings 16:30-33; II Kings 9:22.

accusation is in the language of the Council decrees: the false teachers are "beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols." Those who are threatened with death if they do not repent (ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ, v. 23). The doctrine seems to have been espoused by a group known as the Nicolaitans which had been condemned by the Church of Ephesus, but persistently followed in Pergamos and Thyatira.³⁶ It was almost impossible to live in Asia in the last quarter of the first Christian century and not be involved in this problem.³⁷ The Imperial government had ranged itself definitely in opposition to the church of Christ. Pergamos, a Temple-Warden since 29 B. C., was the center of the Imperial cult. The test of loyalty recognized alike by public opinion and government policy was willingness to offer incense to the Imperial god, the Divine Emperor. Those who refused were condemned to death as enemies of the state.³⁸ In the rapidly growing city of Thyatira membership in the business guilds was essential to maintaining one's business and social position. These guilds were all dedicated to patron deities and the condition of membership was willingness to join in the worship of the deity through the sacrificial meal

³⁶R. H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John in The International Critical Commentary, edited by S. R. Driver, A. Plummer and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), I, 64. James Moffatt, "Revelation," in Expositor's Greek Testament, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), V, 357.

³⁷Charles, p. 69.

³⁸W. M. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia: and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), pp. 283, 293-294.

which all too often ended in unbridled licentiousness.³⁹ The Nicolaitans proposed broad compromises with the established usages to retain as much as possible of established social and political order and attempted "to reconcile contradictory principles in practical conduct through subtle philosophical reasoning."⁴⁰ W. M. Ramsay has formulated the problem:

Should the Church accept the existing forms of society and social unions, or declare war against them? Should Christianity conform to existing, accepted principles of society, or should it force society to conform to its principles?⁴¹

He answers with equal precision,

nothing could have saved the infant Church from melting away into one of those vague and ineffective schools of philosophical ethics except the stern and strict rule that is laid down here by St. John.⁴²

"The Christian could not comply with a demand which was expressly made to test his faith."⁴³

This was no longer a matter of conscience in the exercise of Christian liberty as at Corinth. Participation in these pagan rites under these circumstances meant identification with paganism against the Lord of the Church, as adoption of circumcision in the Judaizing controversy in Syria and Galatia in the days just before the Council would have

³⁹Ibid., p. 346. Charles, p. 70.

⁴⁰Ramsay, p. 299. Cf. Peter's condemnation of a similar situation, II Peter 2:1-3.

⁴¹Ramsay, p. 350.

⁴²Ibid., p. 300.

⁴³Ibid., p. 345.

meant "turning to a different gospel," being "severed from Christ" (Gal. 1:6; 5:4).

Conclusion: The Meaning of the Council's Decision

Outstanding in the history of the apostolic church is this apostolic convention at Jerusalem and the spirit and the manner in which it settled the great question regarding what was necessary for salvation and thus for membership in the Christian church. Underlying the entire situation and the way it was handled was the conviction that the church was one, no matter how many and how widely scattered throughout the world were its members Jews and Gentiles remained one church; a right and Christian modus vivendi was established. . . . Their living together in full unity was mediated by Christian love in the domain of liberty in the adiaphora or nonessentials.⁴⁴

Two significant elements in the life of the church come to light in the meeting of the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem. They are complementary and determinative. The first was the consciousness that the church had come into being by the wondrous act of God in granting to Jew and Gentile alike the grace of repentance and the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. By his conclusion, "says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old," James drew attention not only to prophetic statements, but to the order, consistency and certainty of all Divine activity to the end of one universal people of God.⁴⁵ The rejoicing of Jerusalem, Antioch, Syria and Samaria over God's granting repentance to the Gentiles indicates that this awareness of their being was not limited to the apostles, but was common to

⁴⁴R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 585.

⁴⁵M. Baumgarten, The Acts of the Apostles: or The History of the Church in the Apostolic Age, translated from the German by A. J. W. Morrison (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1863), II, 45.

the vast majority, even the circumcision party by Peter's persuasion.⁴⁶

The other was the conviction that this unity must be preserved and become increasingly evident. The shaping of the "Israel of God"⁴⁷ must be accomplished by articulating the imperatives of grace, not the establishment of an outward form. The latter would "pervert the gospel." By the former alone could a unified body emerge, for "union can only be attained where it proceeds from an internal unity of Christian consciousness."⁴⁸ The problem was not local, but "as broad as the dispersion."⁴⁹ It could not be solved by a mere "temporary compromise," but must be "a charter of liberty for continual living."⁵⁰ "The particular subject of debate--circumcision--had only a temporary significance, but the principles involved were fundamental and perpetual."⁵¹ The Gentiles must understand "that the new method of seeking after God included that complete severance from the religions of the Gentiles which (severance)

⁴⁶Acts 11:18; 13:48; 15:13.

⁴⁷Gal. 6:16. Together Jew and Gentile form one *πολίτευμα* of heaven, Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20.

⁴⁸Augustus Neander, History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by the Apostles, translated from the third edition of the original German by J. E. Ryland (London: Henry G. Bohm, 1851), I, 127.

⁴⁹A. T. Robertson, The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. III in Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 237.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 245. Robertson says the present active infinitive *φυλάσσειν* (Acts 16:4) accents the continual aspect. I have used Robertson's words in quotation marks, but with a different view. His view was that the decrees were permanent; mine is that the "charter of liberty was for continual living" but that the actual requirements may change.

⁵¹Rackham, p. 238. Cf. Carrington, I, 105, for similar view.

was inculcated by the law,"⁵² and must, in loving concession to their Jewish brethren brought up under the law, abstain from acts offending their consciences in respect of the law. At the same time, the Jewish brethren must receive the Gentiles into fellowship, for it is not ceremony that removes barriers between man and God and between man and man, but the Spirit of God by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13-18).

It therefore "pleased the Holy Spirit and the apostles and the elders" to lay four "necessary things" on the church. John Calvin says that the necessity arose from the danger of destroying the unity, and that the action taken was in accord with Scripture:

So, properly speaking, that necessity was accidental or extrinsic, that is to say, it did not depend on the substance, but only on avoiding a stumbling-block. And it is seen more clearly from the immediate abrogation of the decree. . . .

They are employing a remedy which was suitable for promoting brotherly peace and concord among the churches, so that the Gentiles may accommodate themselves to the Jews. But, if anything else, we shall certainly admit that it is in accordance with the Word of God for love (caritas) to bear rule among us in neutral things, which are in themselves under no restriction, be directed according to the rule of love. To sum up, if love is the bond of perfection and the end of the Law, if God's command is for the faithful to strive after mutual unity, and for each one to serve his neighbors for their edification, nobody is so ignorant as not to see that what the apostles enjoin here is contained in the Word of God; only they adapt the general rule to their own times.

Moreover . . . it was a politic law, in order to provide no snare for consciences, and introduce no fictitious worship of God; two faults in human traditions which are condemned all through Scripture. . . . Let the readers grasp . . . that the apostles do not go beyond the limits of the Word of God, when they propose an external law, according to the circumstances of the time, by which they may reconcile the churches with each other.⁵³

⁵²Knox, p. 226.

⁵³The Acts of the Apostles, in Calvin's Commentaries, translated by J. W. Fraser; edited by David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), II, 55-57.

When Paul grants liberty to eat meat offered to idols at Corinth

The facts do not prove any discrepancy between the apostles gathered in Jerusalem and Paul; nor that the decisions of the council were not obligatory on the church. They only serve to explain the true intent and meaning of those decisions. They show, 1. That there was no permanent moral ground for the prohibition of meat offered to idols. 2. That the ground of the prohibition being expediency, it was of necessity temporary and limited. It had reference to Christians in the midst of those to whom eating such meat was an abomination. It therefore ceased to be binding whenever and wherever the grounds of prohibition did not exist.⁵⁴

Paul was laying solid foundations for maturity in the church for all time. The Council had dealt with an immediate situation of delicate nature, and they were led of the Holy Spirit to make specific "decrees," for the achievement of peace and unity in the church. However, the church is to be subject to the Lord and to one another in the Lord, not to regulations (Eph. 5:21; James 4:7; Col. 2:20-23). He was laying the basis for development of individual and community conscience before God in the light of a new situation. "Decrees" may be necessary in particular situations, but they are not to become a substitute for the conscience. Then they become a goal instead of a means. The church must keep herself free of a substitute lord. Every act of the individual and the community must be performed as in the presence of God. Paul has emphasized this in pointing out the seriousness of one's actions: to cause a weak brother to sin against his conscience is not just a sin against him, but against the Lord who died for him (I Cor. 8:9-12).

Life is never static. The outward pattern of the church's life must change to meet the Lord's imperatives relative to a changing world,

⁵⁴Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), pp. 135-136.

just as the church in the New Testament changed from Jerusalem to Antioch to Galatia to Corinth to Rome to Colosse and to the Seven Churches of Asia. Her constant concern must be, as when Antioch sought the counsel of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, that the people of God, having determined what pleased the Spirit, submit one to another in love, and act and speak with one voice as "the one new man" in Christ (Eph. 2:15) in order that all men may be saved (I Cor. 10:33).

CHAPTER IV

THE PEOPLE OF GOD, A COVENANT COMMUNITY

Covenant Relation Established: The Covenant of Creation

The roots of the Christian church lie in the first society God established, in Eden. "The Lord God planted a garden," and "the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden" (Gen. 2:8,15). So Eden was a place specially prepared where Adam lived with God, caring for the garden and having dominion over God's creatures (Gen. 1:28). This "Garden of God" (Ezek. 28:13; 31:8,9) was more than a place, it was none other than the state of man's free, unbroken fellowship with God. As Luther said, "if nature had remained perfect, Paradise would have been the temple of the entire world."¹

Adam's life was directed by the specific word of revelation and his communion with God. He also possessed the law of God inscribed on his heart (Rom. 2:14-15). This "primary" law, often referred to as "natural law" is "not merely perceivable in nature, much less produced by nature, but rather it is a law determinative of it."² It is the expression of

¹Martin Luther, Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5, in Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, translated by George B. Schick (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), I, 230. Luther connected the institution of the church with the command God placed on Adam concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Had not sin entered, this tree would have been the place of worship, after man had refreshed himself from the tree of life, pp. 105-110.

²E. F. Kevan, Keep His Commandments (London: The Tyndale Press, 1964), p. 6. He prefers "primary law" to avoid conclusion that this law is the result of man's nature.

the will of the Sovereign Creator, "the Lord God" of Genesis 2 and 3, being "a transcript of his love as well of his holiness."³ It produced in man "the awareness of the sovereignty of the Creator who has the right to command the spiritual beings whom he has made in his own image."⁴ This law "was at no time a means of securing life, it was the expression of a life that was already possessed. God gave man spiritual life and then gave him his law."⁵ This law "is the same in substance with the decalogue."⁶ It bore witness to his nature as the image of God, and was the primary instrument to his development of true liberty.

But "freedom is pre-eminently the power to obey God because of one's trust in Him."⁷ Therefore, "the Lord God placed a command upon the man."⁸ By imposing a limitation upon his creaturely freedom, Adam's Creator and Lord designed to exercise, develop and test his capacities for moral and religious attainment.⁹ The commandment concerned an arbitrary and

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 19.

⁶Herman Witsius, The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity, translated from the Latin and revised by William Crookshank (New Edition; London: T. Tegg and Son, 1887), I, 39.

⁷Wilhelm Vischer, The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ, Vol. I, The Pentateuch, translated by A. B. Crabtree (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), p. 54.

⁸E. J. Young gives this as a literal rendering of the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים-עַל-יְדֵי. The Study of Old Testament Theology Today (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1958), p. 41.

⁹S. R. Driver, The Book of Genesis with Introduction and Notes,

indifferent matter added to the moral law written on the heart, and concentrated on a single point: Would man obey God implicitly or would he follow the guidance of his own judgment.¹⁰

The command was enforced by the death penalty which would not fail of application.¹¹ No promise of reward for obedience is mentioned, but it may be assumed as corresponding to the penalty. Although the law written upon the heart could not secure life, yet the Lord God may make the "grant of life raised to its highest development of perennial bliss and glory" a reward for perfect obedience of His servant under trial.¹² As the servant of God, Adam had no basis to hope for increased satisfaction or reward except on the ground of a special promise of God, for

Westminster Commentaries, edited by Walter Lock (8th ed.; London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1911), p. 41.

¹⁰L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (3rd ed. revised and enlarged; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945), pp. 216-217. So also A. A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology, rewritten and enlarged (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 312.

¹¹"As surely as thou eatest thereof" (Gen. 2:17). "Close conjunction in time is figuratively used for inevitable eventuation." Geerhardus Vos, Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 49.

¹²Berkhof, p. 216. For further discussion of the distinction between the natural and the covenantal relationship between God and Adam, see p. 215. Berkhof further describes the implied promise of life as consisting in "the removal of all limitations to which Adam was still subject, the raising of his life to its highest degree of perfection." He gives these references: Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11,13,20; Luke 10:28; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12. Luther describes Adam in his innocence as in a "middle position" from which he could be carried to an immortality that could not be lost if he obeyed. If he did not obey, "he would become the victim of death and lose his immortality." In the state of innocence he would be nurtured and matured by eating of the tree of life so that we would be ready to be carried to that final state of immortality. Luther does not speak of "reward" in connection with the realization of that final state of immortality (pp. 111-113).

the servant, when he has done all can but say, I am only an unworthy servant (Luke 17:10). The manifest goodness of God's preparation for Adam's welfare and the daily communion with him in Eden strongly suggest the design of the commandment was the good purpose of providing occasion in man's experience for the bestowal of immortality. To this good end God stirred Adam to obedience by giving him a promise of hope corresponding to the threat. There is no reason to suppose that Adam did not willingly accept this offer and enter in hope upon the relationship.¹³

All the elements of a covenant are present.¹⁴ The absence of the name is no argument against the presence of the substance.¹⁵ There are two contracting parties: God approaching man with a sovereign disposition, and man, a free moral agent who may either accept or reject, but with no bargaining power. The terms are sovereignly imposed and sanctioned by promise and threat. We may call this a covenant "because

¹³Hodge, p. 310.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 309. Witsius, p. 35. The signification "covenant" for God's arrangement with Adam in Eden (Gen. 2:15-17) did not originate with Reformed, or Federal, theologians. Augustine says, "Now there are many things called God's covenants besides those two great ones, the old and the new, which any one who pleases may read and know. For the first covenant, which was made with the first man, is just this: 'In the day ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die.' Whence it is written in the book called Ecclesiasticus (15:17), 'All flesh waxeth old as doth a garment. For the covenant from the beginning is, Thou shalt die the death.'" The City of God, translated by Marcus Dods (Modern Library Edition; New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), p. 550.

¹⁵Berkhof, p. 213. M. G. Kline, "Law Covenant," The Westminster Theological Journal, XXVII, 9. Walter R. Roehrs, "Covenant and Justification in the Old Testament," in Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXV (Oct. 1964), 585. See infra, p. 64, n. 32 and context.

that is the proper word to express a conditional promise made to a free agent."¹⁶

We do not have the full picture of this covenant, however, in the Old Testament. As John Milton rightly says, it is unfair to neglect the New Testament in interpreting the Old Testament or any text of the Old Testament.¹⁷ The use of Adam as "the figure" of Christ (Rom. 5:12-20; I Cor. 15:21-22) is justification for considering him a covenant character and the Edenic arrangement as a covenant.¹⁸ The two Adams schema and the divine covenants are very closely intertwined in Paul's thought patterns, and hold a significant position in his theology. By this schema Paul makes us aware that

God deals with the human race not with individuals but through representatives. There have been, according to the Bible, only two representatives, and these representatives were themselves men. They were the first Adam, the first man, who was of the earth and earthy, but also the second Adam, the second Man, who is the Lord from heaven.¹⁹

By this covenant Adam stands as the head and representative of mankind both federal and natural; "the whole human nature is considered in him."²⁰

¹⁶Hodge, p. 309. Cf. Berkhof, p. 213, for covenant elements present.

¹⁷John P. Milton, God's Covenant of Blessing (Rock Island: Augustana Press, 1961), p. 42. Dr. Roehrs brings out this fact throughout his article, especially pp. 584, 586. He summarizes, "Here (in the Old Testament) God initiated His rule by entering a covenant with man in which He justifies the ungodly who accept His mercy. In the blood of the new covenant all the promises of God have their Yea and Amen" (p. 602).

¹⁸Kline, p. 10.

¹⁹Young, p. 68.

²⁰Witsius, p. 35. Adam was made "a party in a covenant by which

This pre-redemptive covenant describes the perpetual relation of the Sovereign Creator, the Lord God, to His image-bearing creature. Man is perpetually responsible as the creature to acknowledge, worship, trust, love, obey God, and seek the fulness of his life from Him. "The commandment was to life" (Rom. 7:10). "The soul that sins shall die (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23). "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10). The covenant in Eden established God's sovereign Lordship. He is "just and true" in all His ways (Rev. 15:3). He does not change (Mal. 3:6) nor can He deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). He may, however, be merciful within His holy and righteous will, and the two Adams schema, which is the Covenant arrangement, provides the basis for mercy to triumph over judgment (James 2:13).

The principle of works--the responsibility of obedience--continues. The second Adam undertakes responsibility to become man, submit to the Father's will even to death to pay the penalty for the sins of His people, and so to purchase an elect people to the righteousness of faith; and God remains just in granting eternal life as a gift to those who were dead in trespasses and sins.²¹ This arrangement was made between the Father and the Son "before the world was made" and "finished" on the

the relation of federal headship was added to that of natural headship." T. Sproul, Prelections on Theology (Pittsburgh: Meyers, Shenkle & Co., 1882), p. 118. Chap. 9, Man in His Moral Relation to God. Chap. 10, Man in His Federal Relation to God. Very clearly presented. Pp. 105-129.

²¹Phil. 2:7-11; I Peter 2:9; Rom. 3:24-26; Eph. 2:1-9.

cross (John 17). The principle of works remains also in that the elect people must attain to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). "Human responsibility is compatible with divine sovereignty that is glorified in the immutable decree of election and its irresistible execution by the Holy Spirit."²² Again there is evidence that it remains in that an account shall be given on the day of judgment and reward will be given according to "what sort of work each one has done" (I Cor. 3:13; Matt. 25:34-40).

The cross where God pours out all His wrath on His only begotten Son is the final proof of our thesis that God has made one covenant with man requiring absolute obedience upon penalty of death. The penalty being paid, God in grace offers eternal life to all who come into that covenant of blessing.

God's Lordship is central and constant in the covenant. Covenantal sovereignty is manifested in His law and its dual sanctions of curse and blessing, promise and threat. The eventual visitation of both sanctions in the redemptive judgment consummating the New Covenant further reveals the divine Lordship and so confirms the covenant. Our terminology for these two covenants should maintain the theo-centric focus for the individual covenantal administrations of the Kingdom of God and manifest the over all unity of the covenants. Instead of the usual terminology of Covenant theologians, "Covenant of Works" and "Covenant of Grace," Meredith Kline suggests "Covenant of Creation" and "Covenant of

²²Kline, p. 14.

Redemption"²³ because both call attention to God's relation to His people and so effectively unfold the concept of His Lordship, and point to the fundamental distinction between the two covenants as to the kind of divine action by which each was established.²⁴

In the pre-redemptive covenant the enjoyment of life and the hope of greater blessing was made contingent upon man's perfect obedience to the divinely imposed commandment. The commandment and the covenant are synonymous. There is probably no clearer direction in defining the covenant, than that given in the covenant God gave "Israel to perform, even 'the ten commandments!'" "Such a covenant is a declaration of God's lordship consecrating a people to himself in a sovereignly dictated order of life."²⁵ The redemptive covenant adds promise to law. It is simultaneously a promise-administration of guaranteed blessings, and a law-administration of blessing dependent on obedience, with the latter foundational.²⁶ Promise covenant does not annul law covenant any more than law annuls promise (Gal. 3:17; Rom. 5:18-21), for "The satisfaction of the divine law underlies every administration of divine

²³"Covenant of Creation" is not new with Kline. "Covenant of Redemption" has long been used to describe the arrangement in the counsels of eternity whereby Christ became 'the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4), in distinction from the Covenant of Grace which is the offer of the redemption to men on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. Kline uses "Covenant of Redemption" to include the whole Redemptive work from its inception in eternity to its completion in glory.

²⁴For the expression of the material in this paragraph I have drawn heavily on Kline, p. 18.

²⁵Meredith G. Kline, "Two Tables of the Covenant," The Westminster Theological Journal, XXII, 2, 137. Roehrs, p. 587 et passim.

²⁶Kline, "Law Covenant," p. 13.

promise."²⁷ The addition of the promise is not an addition to the formal generic structure of the covenant, but provides within the offer of blessing a new mode of securing the blessing, namely, the principle of election bestowing guaranteed blessings.²⁸ This is precisely what the Covenant of Redemption does: it makes the promise of life in the Covenant of Creation dependent on the obedience of a new federal representative, Jesus Christ. Redemption, then, is seen for what it is, a two-sided judgment, the blessing coming through the covenant curse.²⁹ "God's covenant with man may be defined as an administration of God's lordship consecrating a people to himself under sanctions of divine law."³⁰ The Covenant may be described in broad general terms as the administration of the Kingdom of God.³¹

The Revelation of the Covenant of Redemption

"That old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan" (Rev. 12:9) invaded the Kingdom of God and dissuaded His vassal from unreserved loyalty and obedience. "Where are you?" Thus the Lord God approached Adam and Eve when they had transgressed the covenant.³² They are brought face-to-face

²⁷Ibid., p. 15.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 17.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid. Cf. Roehrs, last paragraph, p. 602.

³²Hosea reproves Israel's rebellion against God in his own day by saying, "Like Adam they have transgressed the covenant" (6:7, Luther and RSV), Roehrs, p. 585. See also, Witsius, p. 109; and Berkhof, pp. 214-215. If this is the correct reading we have the Edenic arrangement called a covenant in Scripture.

with the Covenant Lord from whom they had departed, and from whom they were seeking to hide. The ungrateful vassal was called before the judgment seat³³ of the Great King. Having secured an unwilling confession of his servant's disobedience, God pronounced sentence. The curse upon the serpent from whose deceit sin sprang was the prot-evangelion. Cryptic though it be, it shone as a ray of hope to stir the breast of her who had led her race to ruin. God, as an act of grace, will Himself place enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.³⁴ In the struggle to ensue, the seed of the woman will be stronger than the seed of the serpent, even as the bruising of the head is more effective in overcoming a mortal foe than the bruising of the heel.³⁵

"They were sent out of Paradise to go forth and endure the trials of their fallen state," but "They were not left to sink into the depths of despair."³⁶ "Man was driven from paradise, because it represented the place of communion with God, and was a symbol of the fuller life and

³³Luther, pp. 173-174.

³⁴"Here is not primarily an appeal to man but a divine promise. Nor does God merely instigate or promote enmity; His sovereignty puts it (cpr. Gen. 9:9-11; 17:27). The essence of the deliverance consists in a reversal of the attitude assumed by man towards the serpent and God respectively. God being the mover in the warfare against Satan, man, joining in this, becomes plainly the ally of God." Vos, p. 53. God declares war on the Devil and the assurance given is that the seed of the woman, he (the Hebrew masculine pronoun is emphatic) shall have the victory. It looks directly to "God sent forth His Son born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4).

³⁵Note the hope in a time of distress at the birth of Noah, "Out of the ground which the Lord hath cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands" (Gen. 5:29).

³⁶Sproul, p. 128.

greater blessedness in store for man, if he continued steadfast."³⁷ He had become "an unclean thing" (Is. 64:6), and the unclean defiles the sanctuary of the Lord (Num. 19:20). If communion with God is life, separation from God is death; so the man is sent forth to die.³⁸ But not without hope! Deliverance has been promised to "the seed of the woman."³⁹

(God) covered their nakedness; and the institution of sacrificing in which the bodies of the animals, whose skins were put on them for clothing, immolated in their presence, gave ground of hope of the ultimate recovery of what was lost."⁴⁰

The enemy of man is the Devil, not God; so that even the closing of the garden, and the setting of the angelic guard is a witness of hope: "to preserve the way of the tree of life." There is a way back to God's presence and life by His gracious permission, and the Devil cannot close it!⁴¹ Nor can man reach it but by the narrow door of God's grace. The day will come when the gate shall never be shut (Rev. 21:25).

From this point on, Scripture is the Divine record of the Words and deeds of God's grace as He seeks and draws to Himself "a people for His

³⁷Berkhof, p. 226.

³⁸Vos, p. 51.

³⁹"The phrase, 'seed of the woman,' indicates that the organism of the race will be drawn within the circle of redemption, which does not, of course, mean that all individuals are to become enemies of the serpent. The point is that God saves not merely individual men, but the seed of the woman." Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁰Sproul, p. 129.

⁴¹Luther, p. 230, seems to suggest the same thought when he says that Ezekiel speaks of the gate of the temple that faced the east (40:6), "obviously to have us realize that the temple was a figure of Paradise; for if nature had remained perfect, Paradise would have been the temple of the entire world."

name" and glorifies His name through them in the sight of the nations until "the kingdom of the world became the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). It is a checkered picture as God in wrath remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2).

After sparing nine persons at the flood, God "established" "His" covenant with them and all flesh for all future generations⁴² that He would not again destroy the earth and all flesh by a flood. For the first time we have met the term that is to be used 278 times in the Old Testament⁴³ to speak of God's guarantee of grace to men as He draws them to Himself and restores the broken relationship. With this covenant, manifestly a one-sided promise of blessing, God adds a sign, the rainbow, to encourage men with the knowledge that it is there to remind God of His promise.⁴⁴ God has bound Himself most graciously, and has laid no claim on his creatures.

The Covenant with Abraham

The call of God to Abraham is painted in brilliant colors against the panorama of God's sovereign direction of the Kingdoms of this world. After the flood the descendants of Noah went about their pleasure of making a name for themselves (Gen. 11:4) and establishing rival

⁴²God says, "I establish my covenant." The Hebrew hiphil indicates the monergism of God in making and maintaining His covenant of perpetual endurance with all creatures spared with Noah.

⁴³Milton, p. 1.

⁴⁴Gen. 9:9-17, especially v. 16, "I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."

kingdoms (Gen. 10:10) to the kingdom of the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth. But the Lord "scattered them" (Gen. 11:9) as it pleased Him in relation to His purpose of world blessing through Israel.⁴⁵

The call comes to Abraham in the same terms in which God had approached Adam: when the Sovereign Redeemer speaks it is in the imperative (Acts 17:30) just as when the Lord God spoke in Eden. Obedient response to the Divine command is encouraged by a four-fold promise of blessing: a great nation, a land, a great name, and protection. The goal of the blessing reaches beyond Abraham and his seed to "all the families of the earth." Abraham is both the object of God's blessing and the instrument of its extension; he is caught up with God in His purpose of blessing all nations. "Every facet of the blessing implies a mission."⁴⁶ In remarking that the blessing "was to be shared as well as received," John Milton comments that the passives, "shall be blessed," put the emphasis upon Abraham and his seed as the medium by which the nations will receive the blessing; and the reflexives, "shall bless themselves," put the emphasis on "the effect of the witness of the blessing of God on Abraham and his seed, in that others are drawn to seek a share in it."⁴⁷ A result of the blessing of God on Abraham and

⁴⁵Cf. Gen. 10:32 with Deut. 32:8,9. The latter is the song of God's kingdom in Israel in the midst of the nations among whom He would be glorified by Israel.

⁴⁶Milton, p. 52. He has a very informative and stimulating discussion of the call of Abraham, pp. 37-62.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 54-55. The Hebrew passives are found in Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 28:14; the reflexives, 22:18; 26:4. See chapter I, note 47 above.

his seed, they are assured, is that they will be effective as "God's fellow workers."⁴⁸

"He looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). Thus the New Testament witnesses that Abraham did not see the material things promised as the heart of the blessing. Abraham left country and father's house to cross the earth for an unknown land because of what was implied in the words, "I will show you." The breaking of old ties, affections and ways was separation to eternal companionship with God who had called him and was taking him by the hand to lead him into His kingdom. In this practical example we are introduced to the Divine method of the accomplishment of His holy will, His eternal purpose of universal redemption. God led Jacob (Gen. 48:15). He led Israel through the wilderness (Ps. 136:16). It is the universal experience and prayer of God's people (Ps. 23:2; 139:24). God with His people in all their experiences is a covenant promise and reality. He was with Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:19-20), in the wilderness (Is. 63:9), in the land (2 Chron. 5:13-14), in captivity (Ezekiel's visions of the Spirit) and in the renewed city (Ezek. 48:35). He was recognized in the incarnation (John 1:14). The promise of His presence confirmed the Great Commission: "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). The covenant is God's instrument for bringing man into closest union, fellowship and identity with Himself. This is the most significant thing about a covenant. The reality of it

⁴⁸The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Verse Reference Edition, Holman Study Bible (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1962), p. 1070, n. f, on I Cor. 3:9.

is seen in God's description of Abraham, "My friend" (Is. 41:8; James 2:23).

The material aspects of the covenant were necessary for the realization of the covenant by the "whole man" God had created (אדם שלם, Gen. 2:7). A nation must have land, food, neighbors, protection. The nation was organized as an army of fighting men as she marched through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. As God's temporal kingdom Israel was necessarily concerned with conquest, dominion, national boundaries, kings, palaces, international agreements. But inasmuch as they were the external manifestations of God's rule in the hearts and lives of men, they must be identified with that spiritual work of God which is the core of the promise. The land is Yahweh's mountain, the place of His abode, His sanctuary where Israel dwells with Him, "and the Lord will reign for ever and ever" (Ex. 15:17-18). For their worship of Him, God gave them material ordinances of altar, sacrifice, priesthood, and tabernacle. Circumcision, equated with the covenant, the outward sign in the flesh, the seal of the faith which Abraham had in advance of it, must be "seen and understood in the light of the central idea of the covenant, the universal promise of blessing."⁴⁹ Even the promise of a son to Abraham goes beyond Isaac and Israel, whom God calls, "My son,"⁵⁰ to God's only Son made flesh, that He may do what Isaac could not do, for they were necessarily recipients as well as channels of blessing.

⁴⁹Milton, p. 112.

⁵⁰Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; 32:5,6; Is. 45:11; Hosea 11:1.

It should not seem strange that out of the matrix of such a promise there comes finally an individual, Jesus Christ, who fulfills both the aspect of lineal and of spiritual descent from Abraham, and who in a unique sense fulfills also the vocation of Abraham's seed, whether viewed individually as when Isaac was born or collectively as in the history of the people of Israel. . . . The New Testament, of course, goes further and gives to this promise of a seed a pure religious application; first, to Christ, and then to those who are Christ's because they share the faith of Abraham (Gal. 3:7,16,29).⁵¹

These elements are, then, to be seen as the temporal terminology and media providing the basis for the conclusions of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem that the coming of the Gentiles to faith in Christ was the rebuilding of the kingdom of David. "Within the promise, 'to be God to you and to your descendants after you' (Gen. 17:7) lies hidden the whole mystery of the Gospel."⁵²

The covenant with Abraham is not given complete in any one pericope. Genesis 12:1-3 is the basic structure to which elements are added, particularly in chapters 15 and 17. In the former Yahweh bound Himself by a self-maledictory oath to bring the blessings of a numberless seed already promised.⁵³ Yahweh would Himself bring this to pass; Abraham was a witness only to the passing between the parts of the sacrifice. In circumcision, chapter 17, God showed Abraham that the natural seed was not the covenant seed, but the circumcised alone could be counted of the covenant (v. 14). Thus it spoke of a work God would do in removing their

⁵¹Milton, p. 44.

⁵²Ibid., p. 88.

⁵³Cf. Heb. 6:13-20, especially, "he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us" (17b-18).

uncleanness and affecting their hearts towards Himself.⁵⁴ God equates circumcision with the covenant (v. 10). It stands for the reality of the spiritual life of the covenant people, the life that is not by natural generation, but is of God (John 1:13).

Circumcision was a seal of an already existing covenant relationship and of covenant blessings already experienced. It belonged to the human response to the divine covenant. It did not change the spiritual character of the covenant blessing. It did not substitute a ritual law for the righteousness of faith. It added something to the covenant observance, but the addition did not contradict the spirit of the covenant: it, too, had a spiritual significance.⁵⁵

With the establishment of circumcision God made plain the character of the response expected from those in covenant with Him, "Walk before me and be complete."⁵⁶

⁵⁴See John Murray, "Covenant," The New Bible Dictionary, organizing editor, J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 265. Cf., "Circumcision obviously presupposes that the natural life is tainted by impurity, which must be removed in those who are called to covenant fellowship with God. . . . Thus it is a symbol of the renewal and purification of heart." R. F. Weidner, Biblical Theology of the Old Testament (Chicago: F. H. Revel, 1886), pp. 78-79. In view of these statements it is difficult to understand the assertion that circumcision does not operate as an individual means of grace, is no vehicle of sanctifying forces, does not constitute an immediate personal relation with God, but secures the individual's place as a member of the nation and his share in the promises and saving benefits guaranteed the nation as a whole.

⁵⁵Milton, p. 111. Milton recognizes that "it became for many an external substitute for the inner experience," but "there is no evidence it was so with Abraham" nor "that the addition of the law in the renewal of the covenant with Israel as a nation at Sinai altered the original spiritual purpose of the divine covenant of blessing," p. 112.

⁵⁶Gen. 17:1. קָמַל is defined, "Complete, sound, whole, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, having integrity, what is complete, entirely in accord with truth and fact." W. Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, edited by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 1071. Hereafter this lexicon will be identified by BDB.

Just as righteousness received in faith was necessary for the establishment of the covenant, so a blameless walk before God was required for the maintenance and confirmation of the covenant.⁵⁷

Although the covenant is a unilateral enactment initiated by God in grace, it was designed to produce the response of faith so as to become mutual.⁵⁸ The obedience of faith which Abraham displayed is given as the experimental cause of the continuation of the covenant with Isaac: "As a consequence (of the fact) that Abraham obeyed my voice, kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5).⁵⁹ Abraham's walk was directed by the objective word of the covenant promises, not the pious imaginations of his mystical heart. His faithfulness in his own life and in instructing his household is also the experimental cause of God's revealing to him His purpose concerning Sodom (Gen. 18:17-19).⁶⁰ Abraham was God's servant--prophet and priest--towards the nations (Gen. 20:7).

The Covenant Renewed with Israel at Sinai

As the covenant progresses and Israel becomes the people of God by

⁵⁷C. F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. I, The Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 223.

⁵⁸See Milton, p. 5; and Dr. Roehrs, p. 585, references to Gen. 17.

⁵⁹ וְכִי יִשְׁמַע אֱבְרָהָם "as a consequence (of the fact) that," BDB, p. 784.

⁶⁰BDB, p. 775, "Sq. inf. Gen. 18:19 / וְיָבִיא לְךָ בָנִים לְמַעַן יִשְׁמַע אֱבְרָהָם for the purpose of J's bringing = to the intent that J might bring." Abraham's instruction had wide consequences: "his sons and his house," (v. 18). He had 318 "trained men, born in his house," (14:14). His servant sent to choose a wife for Isaac sought the direction of the Lord as would his master, Gen. 24: espec. 12-14, 24, 52.

a new covenant at Sinai, we see these same features continued. In fact it is clear that we do not have a different covenant, but one that came in beside the promise of the covenant with Abraham to guard it and to secure its full realization in the end (Rom. 5:20 with 3:20).⁶¹ The covenant made with Abraham and his seed forever was neither "disannulled nor altered by adding new conditions."⁶² "The newness is not that of substitution, but of completion. The Sinai covenant did not annul the covenant of promise; it was a step forward in its fulfillment."⁶³ Professor Kline says that the Sinai covenant did not come alone, or as a substitute, but as an alternate.⁶⁴ It made law obedience by Israel the way of life-inheritance, yet the Mosaic covenant as a whole law was accompanied by promise sealed by divine oath and offering an alternate way of inheritance--forgiveness and acceptance through sacrifice. Hence the promise was renewed by the Mosaic Covenant, for it was made in pursuance and fulfilment of the covenants with Abraham,

⁶¹D. Douglas Bannerman, The Scripture Doctrine of the Church Historically and Exegetically Considered (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), p. 25.

⁶²Ibid., p. 61.

⁶³Milton, p. 137. P. Peters finds an essential difference between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants since in the Mosaic, law and commandment become synonymous with covenant, making it a conditioned covenant, a bilateral engagement involving reciprocal obligations between God and His people. He notes, however, that "covenant" and "mercy" are synonymous in Scripture, citing Deut. 7:9 which, he says, refers to the Sinai Covenant. He seems hesitant to say that the Abrahamic Covenant was contained in the Sinaitic. Article, "Diatheke in the Old and New Testament," Theologische Quartalschrift, XXXIX (1942), 258-262. Milton seems to have solved this difficulty.

⁶⁴Kline, p. 14.

Isaac and Jacob.⁶⁵ However, as Kline contends, even the promise alternate was itself ultimately a way of law, not the way of individual obedience to a law enunciated in the Mosaic Covenant, but "one implicit in the promise itself--the way of vicarious law-obedience and satisfaction by way of the Christ of promise."⁶⁶ Thus the Mosaic Covenant does not make void or suspend the Abrahamic, but comes as "an addition subserving the interests of the promise which found its focal point in the seed that was to come."⁶⁷

At the foreground of the Sinai Covenant stands the same concept of sovereign administration of grace based on electing love that was present in the covenant with Abraham.⁶⁸ At its center is the same concept of spiritual union with God. As God had promised Abraham "to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7), so He says to Israel, "I will take you for my people and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:6-7; compare Deut. 29:13). The election is to sonship: Yahweh is Israel's

⁶⁵Ex. 2:24-25; 3:6,15; 6:2-8; Deut. 4:31; Ps. 105:8-12.

⁶⁶Kline, p. 14.

⁶⁷Murray, p. 267.

⁶⁸"This was made with Israel as a people who had been sovereignly chosen in love unto redemption and adoption" (Ibid.). See John Milton's discussion of election as including a sense of continuity relating to the fulfilling of the goal as well as to keeping the promise, pp. 150-153. Cf. Weidner, p. 73, "The adoption of Israel as the covenant people is a free act of God, or in other words, an act of divine love, and necessary only so far as God has bound Himself by His oath,--that is, a proof of His truth and faithfulness--but is in no way dependent on man's desert. The propositions are expressly inculcated on the people at every opportunity." N. H. Snaith makes a helpful study of אָבְרָהָם and יִשְׂרָאֵל in relation to the covenant, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London: The Epworth Press, 1944), p. 95.

father, Israel is His first-born son (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 32:6). R. F.

Weidner emphatically says,

It is only on this ground (election as the free act of God's love) that the divine commands to the people are given, and therefore the Decalogue (Ex. 20:2) places at the forefront the fact of election.⁶⁹

So God says to Israel,

"Today you have become the people of Yahweh your God." The fact is stated; then is joined the demand to listen and obey, "Listen therefore to the voice of Yahweh your God" (Deut. 27:9,10).⁷⁰

In the Sinai Covenant commandment becomes synonymous with covenant (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:10-11).⁷¹ The "Ten Words" are but an epitome of the divine law, the whole of which made up the Covenant stipulations. However the demand of obedience, and the solemn oath to be obedient do not place it in a different category from the Abrahamic covenant, nor constitute it a covenant of works.⁷² The law was given to those who were already covenant sons, the redeemed people (Ex. 4:20; 6:6-7; 20:2). When Israel said, "All that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient" (Ex. 19:8; 24:3,7) they were formally "entering the covenant" (Deut. 29:12), but

⁶⁹Weidner, p. 73.

⁷⁰Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, in The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions, translated by D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 194.

⁷¹Roehrs, p. 585. "The covenant which God commanded," ἐνετείλατο (Ex. 24:8; Heb. 9:20); the new covenant in Christ "legally enacted," νενομοθέτηται (Heb. 8:6). See Witsius, p. 25.

⁷²R. F. Weidner says that in the covenant of promise God bound Abraham and his seed to a godly life and obedience to His will (Gen. 17:1-2; 18:19), the same condition laid on Israel and accepted by her (Ex. 19:5,8; 24:3,7), ibid., 73, 75.

It is a mistake to read Ex. 19:5,6; 24:7,8 as if the covenant had to wait for the promise of obedience on the part of the people. In keeping the covenant and obeying God's voice the covenant is conceived of as dispensed, as in operation, and as constituting a certain relation. What is conditioned upon obedience is the enjoyment of the blessing which the covenant stipulates.⁷³

In expressing the same view, John Milton emphasizes the fact that the basic provisions of the covenant at Sinai stress the inwardness of the obedience:

It is not to be understood as the external obedience to ordinances imposed from without, but as the inward response of the heart to the will of God who has graciously made a covenant into which we are called. . . . The obedience of faith is something permanent, a fruit that God always seeks in His redeemed people; for without it there can be no real appropriation of His blessings nor can there be any sharing of them with others.⁷⁴

He brings to mind a fact often overlooked in relation to Israel's obedience, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Though this is not stated in Ex. 19, we need not rule out "his holy Spirit" (Isa. 63:10,11), the Spirit of His presence, as being active also in this situation. At any rate the tone of the divine "if" in Ex. 19:5 is definitely not legalistic but spiritual, in harmony with the spirit of the covenant with Abraham.⁷⁵

The New Testament makes abundantly clear that only by the Holy Spirit may man bring forth the obedience of faith.

⁷³Murray, p. 266. Cf. Roehrs, p. 587, "the potential response to the covenant is in no way the basis for the establishment of the covenant."

⁷⁴p. 140. Cf. Weidner's view that the law does not demand only external conformity, mere legality, but morality. "On the contrary the law insists on the disposition of the heart, when it says, 'Thou shalt not covet' (Ex. 20:17). It demands the external as coordinate with the internal," p. 75. Similarly, Dr. Roehrs, p. 589, says that the purpose of the Sinai covenant stipulations and regulations was to teach that, in the restored relationship with God, man's one concern is to recognize and express the total claim of God upon him; it supplied many outward forms by which to express his inner life and communion with God.

⁷⁵Milton, p. 140.

The redemptive element in the covenant comes to the fore in the ratification sacrifice (Ex. 24:3-11). Here we have the proclamation of Yahweh by Moses, the Mediator of the covenant, in the reading of the Book of the Covenant (chap. 20-23). This consists of a review of Israel's redemption and their covenant responsibilities. Israel solemnly pledges loyal obedience to Yahweh. One animal is offered in sacrifice for each tribe, and altar, book and people are sprinkled with "the blood of the covenant" signifying the Lord's provision of mercy for Israel's covenant failures and Israel's confession of her need for mercy. Then the representatives of the congregation "saw God and ate and drank" (Ex. 24:11). In this confirmation ceremony we observe the efficacy of the covenant to bring men into real fellowship with God in that the representatives of the congregation saw Him, "not in all His reality and greatness, but in accordance with the dispensation which He thought best, and which he accommodated to the capacity of man."⁷⁶ God thus sealed His grace to His people in the covenant blood of bulls and goats until Christ should come and remove the shadow by presentation of the reality (Heb. 9:12).⁷⁷

It must be emphatically said that the Sinai Covenant was not a system of works-righteousness. Moses distinctly warned Israel against

⁷⁶John Calvin, Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854), III, 323.

⁷⁷In the words of Jesus in giving the cup, $\kappa\alpha\lambda\upsilon\tilde{\eta}\varsigma$ is omitted leaving $\tau\omicron\ \alpha\tilde{\iota}\mu\grave{\alpha}\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\tilde{\eta}\varsigma\ \delta\iota\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\eta\varsigma$ "my blood of the covenant" (Matt. 26:28). Novum Testamentum Graece, cum apparatu critice curavit Eberhard Nestle, novis curis elaboraverunt, Erwin Nestle et Kurt Aland (Editio vicesima quarta; Stuttgart: Privileg. Württ. Bibelanstalt, 1960).

that very thing:

Do not say in your heart, . . . "It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land;" . . . Not because of your righteousness or uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land. . . . "Know therefore that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people." (Deut. 9:4-6)

E. Heppenstall defines legalism as "the belief and practice that salvation by and acceptance with God are attained by conformity to law as distinguished from salvation by grace through faith." We agree with his conclusion that any interpretation that makes a system of works-righteousness of the Sinai covenant has perverted the meaning and purpose of that revelation.⁷⁸ Paul confirms this when he says Israel did not attain to the righteousness of the law "because they sought it not by faith, but as if it were based on works" (Rom. 9:30-33), and "seeking to establish their own righteousness they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3). John Milton draws an analogy between the faith obedience of Israel as God's ransomed people and the faith obedience of the Christian in relation to Christ:

It has its roots in either case in an act of redemption by God; the one symbolic and preparatory, the other "an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12); but both related to the same ultimate purpose of God.⁷⁹

It is important to note that law is also called "Torah"--guidance, direction, an authoritative rule of conduct--whose primary frame of reference is not a code of law, but a covenant relationship. "To

⁷⁸E. Heppenstall, "Law and Covenant at Sinai," Andrews University Seminary Studies, II (1964), p. 21.

⁷⁹p. 140. Cf. P. E. Hughes, Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary, edited by Ned. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p. 94.

interpret it as if it signified a pure legal relationship between God and Israel is to misinterpret it."⁸⁰ Code law regulates the relations among men as citizens of a state, as in the Code of Hammurabi. Covenant law regulates the relations of the subjects to their sovereign; their mutual relations are an aspect of their allegiance and obligations to him.⁸¹ Adultery is first a sin against God then against the individuals involved (Ps. 51:4).⁸² The commandment pointed Israel to their holy covenant God, not to a moral code. This "sums up the spiritual-educational purpose of the law with Israel."⁸³ It teaches that "all time, every place, all property, and every person should be sanctified to the Lord."⁸⁴

The Lord of the covenant demands that His sons be like Him:

Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the Lord your God. Keep my statutes, and do them; for I am the Lord who sanctify you Ye shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples that ye should be mine. (Lev. 20:7,8,26).

The performance of the covenant requirement was ever subject to the supply of covenant grace. The innocence of hands, purity of heart, and devotion of life to God which the covenant child knew were essential to standing in the holy place (Ps. 24:4; 25:1) were not a matter of

⁸⁰Milton, pp. 160-161.

⁸¹Kline, pp. 19-20.

⁸²Joseph was aware of this even before the Sinai Covenant. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). Here is strong evidence of the essential unity of the Abrahamic and Sinai Covenants.

⁸³Milton, p. 140.

⁸⁴Wilhelm Müller's summary of Leviticus quoted by Milton, pp. 145-146.

individual or corporate achievement except by the blessing of Yahweh.

Both separation and sanctification are the sovereign gift of God. "Purge me and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow," cries the sinner in confession and prayer for deliverance (Ps. 51:7).

Repentant Ephraim, the converted remnant, now turns to the Lord with sincere request: Turn thou me, and I shall be turned. So only a converted person can speak. Prayer is the fruit of faith, a proof of conversion (Acts 9:11).⁸⁵

The exhortation to keep the "Ten Words" was based on the appeal to cultivate a heart-relation to the Covenant Lord: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, . . . soul, and . . . might" (Deut. 6:5). This was to be done by having the words written where they could be seen in the home, by talking of them in relation to every activity of the day, but always with the objective of having them in the heart.⁸⁶

Israel's worship was designed by God to instruct them in the covenant relationship as well as provide them a means of individual and corporate approach to Him. The tabernacle was "(My) sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Ex. 25:8). There God met with Israel, spoke with Moses, the Mediator of the covenant, and received the offerings of His people at the hands of the priests (Ex. 40:1; 26:22; Lev. 17:5,6). There was Yahweh's throne on the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant containing the "two tables of the testimony" as witness both to Israel and to Yahweh of their covenant obligation. Here God accepted the blood

⁸⁵Theo Laetsch, Bible Commentary: Jeremiah (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), p. 251.

⁸⁶Cf. the Psalmist's use of the means of grace that he might be faithful to God, "I have laid up thy word in my heart that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11).

of atonement and Israel experienced forgiveness. The witness of the law against Israel could not come up from the "tables of the testimony" in the ark of the covenant to the Lord on the throne of mercy above the ark except through the blood of atonement on the mercy seat. Sacrifice, priest, and curtain, all spoke of the wall of separation sin raised between God and the worshipper; but they also stood for the removal of that separation by God Himself. There were also the laws concerning uncleanness which separated both from God and from the community. It is not the concept of the covenant that a ritual alone made a man acceptable. Life was one whole of spiritual and material elements; both ritual and religious-moral purity were essential to fellowship with God and the people of God. Outward purity is a manifestation of an inward condition. Innocent hands accompany a pure heart.

Ezekiel's parable of Israel's redemption strikingly sets forth this concept (chap. 16). God in redeeming love picked up the unwashed foundling, cleansed her from her impurity, brought her up and she became His wife. The subjective cause of the covenant was Israel's sin. The "wall of separation" between man and God and man and man is sin. Circumcision and the water of purification were means by which the unclean were qualified by God for entrance into His fellowship and into the congregation. It looked forward to the day when Christ would in His flesh remove this wall from between God and man, Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-18).

In making covenant with Abraham, God brought into the covenant all that were associated with him in his household as well as his own children (Gen. 17:12-14). In this way Abraham and his servants were "covenant brothers," in common bond with God. They would now be faithful

to him "as unto God," and he would be kind to them "as in the Lord." The covenant bond is, therefore, more than a mark of the nation, for it brings in those who are not natural seed, as well as natural born sons, and natural sons may be excluded, as were Ishmael and Esau. A "mixed multitude" went up with them out of Egypt (Ex. 12:38). Although they were hard to assimilate (Num. 11:4), one of such origin in Egypt, Caleb-- the Kenezite, an Edomite tribe--was a leader of the tribe of Judah, and one of the two faithful spies who realized a possession in the Land of Promise.⁸⁷ Israel cannot be explained by national, racial, or social criteria, for her society is grounded, not in nature, but in the covenant, in grace.⁸⁸

Israel's mission is prominent in the covenant at Sinai:

If you will obey my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6).

God's delight in Israel is set down beside His ownership of the whole

⁸⁷Num. 13:6,30-33; 14:24,30,38; Joshua 14:6-15.

⁸⁸John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 136. The legal covenant "makes participants brothers," is "a totality which can no more be broken than the blood relationship;" it is an actualization in law of the thought of brotherhood." G. Quell, "Διαθήκη in the Old Testament," in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by G. Kittel, translated from the German and edited by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), II, 114. J. O. Cobham quotes W. R. Smith that a covenant has no place where natural brotherhood of which it is an imitation already exists. J. O. Cobham, "Covenant," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1957), p. 55. The uniqueness of Israel does not consist in physical descent from Abraham, but the covenant descent of faith. Russell Phillip Shedd, Man in Community, A Study of St. Paul's Application of Old Testament and Early Jewish Conceptions of Human Solidarity (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 20.

earth, and is at least an implication of the ultimate goal of a universal people. Israel stands between God and the nations as His mediating priest in the establishment of a universal kingdom. As they keep covenant they will display wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations who will be attracted to the Lord their God (Deut. 4:6-7). The prophets anticipate the day when this attractiveness will increase and the nations will run to Israel to go with her to worship her God (Isa. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4).

That Israel was conscious of her calling to bring the nations into the same experiences of faith and love and obedience to their God is abundantly evident in the Psalms. "Sing unto the Lord, all the earth" (Ps. 96:1). "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice" (Ps. 97:1). "Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia--This one was born there" (Ps. 87:4). "May God be gracious to us and bless us . . . that thy way may be known upon earth and thy saving power among all nations" (Ps. 67:1-2). To remove from these words their ordinary meaning in the spiritual experience of Israel by saying that the Old Testament anticipates only a material kingdom under the sword of David and his dynastic successors, such as his control of Edom, is to rob language, and the Word of God with it, of all reasonable meaning. Nor does the language permit us to consider that the faithful in Israel were narrow nationalists lacking any sense of spiritual mission. It remains true, however, that the Lord's objective under the Old Covenant was a more limited objective, and His method was chiefly that of attracting the nations by the wonders of His grace to Israel.

Israel's religion was characterized by the knowledge and truth of

God as befits His image-bearer in covenant with Him. The maintenance of the covenant was by acquaintance with God through the covenant revelation. God says He chose Abraham, "that he may (purpose) command his whole posterity to keep the way of Jehovah, . . ." (Gen. 18:19).⁸⁹ Instruction began in the home where the "words" commanded would be the subject of daily conversation (Deut. 6:6-9, 29-25). The saving acts of Yahweh were celebrated at the annual feasts. Moses delivered the book of the law to the Levites and elders of Israel with the instruction that the whole was to be read at the Feast of Booths every seven years (Deut. 31:9-11). The priests were the regular teachers of the congregation (Mal. 2:7),⁹⁰ and the prophet was a special office through whom the Lord would make known His will (Deut. 18:15-21). By regular instruction the commandment was to be laid on the heart (Deut. 6:6) so that it would become the subject of long and delightful meditation (Ps. 119). The same objective covenant Word is certain to have been involved in bringing the nations to know and serve God (Ps. 100).

The Covenant with David

Under the covenant of "the sure mercies of David," God designed to display His sovereignty over Israel and the world. The kingdom of God with throne and temple in Jerusalem, the place where God chose to place His Name forever, was intended to bring righteousness and justice, peace and security to the ends of the earth (Ps. 72). But the sons of David

⁸⁹See Keil and Delitzsch, p. 229.

⁹⁰Rad, p. 261, discusses the use of the word and its significance in the tabernacle ritual in an enlightening manner.

did not keep the covenant and the Lord chastized them as sons (2 Sam. 7:14).⁹¹ He divided the kingdom, and finally sent them into captivity, but He did not take His steadfast love from them (2 Sam. 7:14-15). God would raise up David's house, restore Israel a willing people in the day of power, to whom the Gentiles would seek.⁹² The prophets declared that this would be accomplished by an eschatological "David" or "branch" of David.⁹³

The kingdom will not come apart from a change to be effected in the whole people. A New Covenant will be given whose work will be entirely of an internal nature. The law of God will be written on the heart; the knowledge of God will be made universal; sin and iniquity will be done away forever (Jer. 31:33-34). Ezekiel adds that God will do this work by placing His Spirit in man (36:25,26). We note the same law and the same relation--your God, my people--given at Sinai. In considering the newness of this covenant, we are not to contradict anything we have said about the reality of the Old Covenant religion, but to look for the New in the fulfillment of all the Old anticipated, and to recognize the consummation of the Old in the New.

⁹¹The king stands for the people and draws together the Old Testament figures of the Christ. "He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. I will make him the first born,'" (Ps. 89:26,27).

⁹²Amos 9:11-12; Ps. 110; Ezek. 37:24-28.

⁹³Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ezek. 34:24; 37:24,25; Hosea 3:5. Cf. Weidner (p. 80) that the final restoration is an act of God effected by ethical means through conversion of the people according to Deut. 30:1-6.

The Old Covenant Community

The covenant established a community of covenant-brothers under a common allegiance to the Lord God of heaven and earth. They had a common goal of serving Him that His name might be glorified in all the earth by the obedience of men to His will. Their relationship with one another was through Him, for they were "sons of the covenant." All individual directions are part of a basically indivisible revelation of the will of God.⁹⁴ Together they form a whole people, the people of God, possessing one mind and one heart, for they have chosen life which flows from Him (Deut. 30:15,19,20), they have chosen Him (Josh. 24:22). They are empowered in all that they do, even in their pledge of loyalty, by His grace; and they are acceptable to Him and to one another because of His cleansing and forgiveness. They are separated from the world to Him and to one another by their sanctifying Lord God. Could there by any stronger ties strengthening responsible individual action, and uniting in common life?

"All the members of a covenantal community are subordinate to the whole,"⁹⁵ both in the reception of covenant benefits and in the performance of covenant responsibilities. "No individual was a recipient of the benefits of the covenant except as a member of the nation."⁹⁶ To transgress a covenant stipulation, to be disloyal to Yahweh by idolatry, or

⁹⁴Rad, p. 200.

⁹⁵Shedd, p. 26.

⁹⁶Ibid.

by exalting personal interests over that of Yahweh or Israel brought on severe penalties, even to being cut off from the covenant and the covenant-making God. The case of Achan (Joshua 7) is an early example of the strength of community solidarity under the covenant. The record is that

the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things; for Achan the son of Carmi, . . . of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel (v. 1).

As a result the army suffered defeat and there was loss of life. The punishment of death was meted out upon the whole family, as one with him, and the destruction of all his goods.

There are instances of the whole people covenanting with the king in loyalty to him as the Lord's anointed.⁹⁷ These are significant as phases of the covenant people's life and further examples of community solidarity, but do not specifically serve our purposes. It should be noted in passing that faithfulness to the Davidic dynasty is faithfulness to the Covenant God and His purposes. The involvement of the king in the accomplishment of the mission of Israel is well illustrated in the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple. Incorporating the nation in himself as king and God's "firstborn" (Ps. 89:27) he prays for the accomplishment of God's purpose in the world, "that all people of the earth may know thy name and fear thee. . . ." (I Kings 8:43; 2 Chron. 6:33).

Following the original covenant inauguration ceremony at Sinai, the nation was led by Moses in renewing the covenant in the plains of Moab

⁹⁷I Chron. 11:3; 2 Chron. 23:3-7,16, etc.

(Deut. 30:11-20).⁹⁸ The covenant was again renewed at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim soon after they entered the land by a sacrificial ceremony and the reading of the sanctions. The law of Moses was written upon stones as a permanent witness that this was the Lord's kingdom (Joshua 8:30-35). Before his death Joshua called all Israel and exhorted them to be faithful to God in view of the redemption and His providential goodness to them in fulfilling the promise to give them the Land. They made a covenant renewing their loyalty to Yahweh, drawing up statutes and ordinances which were written in the book of the law of God (Joshua 24:26). What these statutes were we have no record, but from the instruction to Joshua to take care that he did all according to the law of Moses (Joshua 1:8) it becomes evident that from the death of Moses, Israel's life is to be directed by the covenant revelation Moses had mediated without addition or subtraction (Deut. 4:2). Public covenanting ceremonies will continue as the people of God commit themselves to doing the Lord's will in particular situations.

Josiah led Judah in making a covenant "before the Lord" "to keep

⁹⁸Meredith Kline, following G. E. Mendenhall, has greatly elucidated many points in the Sinaitic revelation by comparison with the Suzerain treaties of the fourteenth-thirteenth centuries B. C. in the Middle East. In this way he has very forcefully brought out the message of the book of Deuteronomy in his brief commentary entitled, The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963). See outline pp. 48-49. He presents strong evidence on the basis of this similarity that the book stems from Moses, p. 44, last paragraph (contra Rad, pp. 22-23). Cf. Kline's comment, pp. 29-30. Cf. similar remarks: John Bright, p. 134. G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), I, 718. He suggests that the blessing of Moses and Joshua's succession, ch. 33-34, is a last will and testament and its inauguration (pp. 39-41), which brings a parallel with Heb. 9:15-22.

his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, . . . to perform the words of the covenant that were written in the book" (2 Chron. 34:31,32). In Nehemiah's day the princes, Levites, priests and all the people made a "firm covenant" and wrote it; they entered "into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law which was given by Moses the servant of God" (Neh. 9:38; 10:28-39). They covenanted to keep all that God had commanded, and specified laws which had been neglected that they would now observe.

God did not confront His people in these cases in the personal way he appeared to Abraham or audibly speak to Israel at Sinai. He confronted them through His written testimony, the covenant revelation. The response of Israel in both these instances was of precisely the same nature as their response at Sinai, "all that the Lord hath spoken will we do and be obedient." John Murray describes them:

We cannot fail to note that what is in the forefront in these cases is not a contract or compact. Strictly speaking, it is not an agreement. Though persons entering into covenant agree to do certain things, the precise thought is not that of agreement by the people among themselves, nor a mutual agreement by the people and the Lord. We must distinguish between devising terms of the agreement or striking an agreement, on the one hand, and the agreement of consent or commitment, on the other. What we find in these instances is solemn, promisory commitment to faith or truth on the part of the people concerned. They bind themselves in bond to be faithful to the Lord in accordance with His revealed will. The covenant is solemn pledging of devotion to God, unreserved and unconditional commitment to His service.⁹⁹

This is the response to the continuing demand of the Divine Word: that the people of God should let it speak to the situation of the day and do what it commands.

⁹⁹John Murray, The Covenant of Grace (London: The Tyndale Press, 1954), p. 11. Roehrs, p. 587, n. 3.

The New Covenant and its Relation to the Old

"The analysis of the covenant concept inevitably leads us to the living reality of the Old Testament religion because it deals with the problem of man standing before God."¹⁰⁰ As the promise of the New Covenant testifies there was a need for something more. However, as the writer to Hebrews assures us, the necessity does not arise from a fault in God's promise but "in them," that is, in Israel (Heb. 8:8). God has one objective from the beginning: the kingdom of God, a willing people (Ps. 110:3). They are a people elect, called, chosen, justified, sanctified by the death and resurrection of Christ and the ministry of the Spirit. The Old Covenant projects the accomplishment of this into the New.

The Old Covenant was, and still is, a 'schoolmaster' to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). . . .

The New Covenant is designed to implement--to bring to fulfillment--the unfulfilled promises of the earlier covenants.¹⁰¹

The kingdom, purpose, revelation are thus one: and the later form of these things stands in relation to the former as the developed organism does to its embryo, or, to drop all illustrative language, as fulfillment does to promise.¹⁰²

Although during the period of their walk with the Lord the disciples were "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken" (Luke 24:25), the Holy Spirit taught them all things (John 14:26). In

¹⁰⁰Quell, p. 111.

¹⁰¹Roderick Campbell, Israel and the New Covenant (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1954), p. 222.

¹⁰²E. F. Kevan, "The Covenants and the Interpretation of the Old Testament," Evangelical Quarterly, XXVI, 21.

the days after Pentecost they declare plainly their understanding that they are the continuation of the people of God who came into being when God called Abraham and took him from Ur to lead him into the possession of eternal life. They recognized that they were living in the days when the old chrysalis was being cast off and the life within was bursting forth in new and more magnificent form. They sought to be true to the old and yet give full scope for the development of the new. They were experiencing the events that still baffle interpreters. They were acting within the "frame work" that made them the people of God. This was both internal power and external expression involving both the individual and the whole body.

What they recognized as the "frame work" was not a static pattern, a rigid structure, or a binding set of rules; but the extension of life to them from God through the Covenant. They were "the sons of the prophets and the covenant God gave to the fathers." They themselves were Jews to whom first God had sent His servant whom He had raised from the dead to bless them by turning them away from their wickedness, and then to the Gentiles to whom He "had given repentance unto life" (Acts 3:25-26; 11:18). Christ was the son of Abraham, the son of David whom God had raised to sit on his throne and send forth the Spirit to bring salvation to the ends of the earth, and that He might command all men everywhere to repent because the day of judgment has been already set.

God's covenant was not just a legal bond (Ezek. 20:37) that "witnessed against them" (Deut. 31:26). It was the instrument of their union and communion with God. God Himself called it "covenant of life" (Mal. 2:5). Outside the covenant the Gentiles were "without hope and

without God" (Eph. 2:12), but now that Christ had removed what separated man from God--sin, as revealed in the law of commandments--both Jew and Gentile by faith in Him had become together "one new man," fellow citizens and householders of God, and were being built up together by the Spirit as a dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:13-22). "The covenanted community is the temple in which the Spirit dwells and works."¹⁰³

Conclusions: New Covenant Community Life

When the fulfillment had come in Christ, as the apostles and church at Jerusalem, Samaria, Syria and Antioch realized it had, their task was to recognize what was merely temporary in what they had received from the past and let it fall as the fading petals of the blossom fall before the developing fruit. To do this they met as a covenant body to seek the mind and will of the Lord. This was not a meeting of minds, but a careful examination of "the words of the prophets" in relation to the present situation. Their submission to one another in the Lord was manifest in that the sharp difference at the beginning was resolved by a unanimous decision. "What seemed good to the Holy Spirit" was recorded and sent to the church for covenant action. The decrees can be described only as the Spirit's word, not "devising terms of agreement," but "solemn pledging of devotion to His service."¹⁰⁴ The people of God must be

¹⁰³Campbell, p. 228.

¹⁰⁴Cf. n. 99, p. 90, supra and compare the reading of the book of the covenant (Ex. 24:7), the rehearsing of the commandments before the act of covenanting in the plains of Moab (summary, Deut. 30:11), and the preparation of a written covenant from the Law of Moses by Joshua (chap. 24), and Nehemiah (9:38) and Josiah's use of the book of the covenant (2 Kings 23:23).

characterized by a clear-cut, open loyalty to Jesus Christ, as opposed to all that are no-gods and that which is of the world. Individual conduct must aim at glorifying God, strengthening covenant brethren, and the salvation of all men.

The church through union with Christ is characterized by "the mind of Christ," active for the interests of the brethren, and obedience to the Lord (Phil. 2:5-8). To Israel under the Old Covenant and to the church under the New, "the will of the Lord" was not received by subjective consideration, but by examination of the covenant revelation. "God spoke all these words. . . ." "These are the words. . . ." "Hear . . . the statutes and the ordinances. . . ." "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable . . . for training in righteousness. . . ."¹⁰⁵

The covenant concept bears witness most emphatically to an objective Word of God directing the lives of His people, and to His own immediate presence giving understanding and enabling response. The gift of the Holy Spirit does not liberate from the objective word of the covenants which God spoke and caused to be written, the Old and the New Testaments. He only enables man to receive and be shaped by it.¹⁰⁶ Community action in the church is not the result of "agreement," in the common understanding of the word; it is achieved by common submission to the revealed will of the Lord.

The apostle Paul is constantly urging to maturity, stability, solidarity in life and witness to the grace of Christ. Although this

¹⁰⁵Ex. 20:1; Deut. 1:1; 5:1,5; 2 Tim. 3:16.

¹⁰⁶I Cor. 2:11-14.

development must take place in the individual it is centered primarily in the corporate body of Christ, for the exhortation is directed to the whole, often in the figures of temple, body, vine. It is no more possible for the individual to receive the full benefits of the covenant promises or realize fully the covenant goal apart from the covenant body under the New Covenant than it was under the Old. This fact is clearly set forth in the New Testament at many places.¹⁰⁷ It demands that the church today strengthen her inner life and her mission to the world by corporately applying the words of Scripture to herself as the Bride of Christ, and to the world in which she lives. Her loyalty as Bride and faithfulness as Witness will be demonstrated by the extent to which she does corporately seek the Lord and live in love to Him and to one another.

¹⁰⁷John 15; I Cor. 3:16,17; 12; Eph. 4, espec. v. 13; Heb. 13:17; I Peter 2:5-6,9; etc.

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