

Chapter 10

The Son of David and the Seed of Woman

The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the vipers den.
-Isaiah 11:8 NASB

Nowhere is the intergenerational regard of Scripture more apparent than in God's covenant established with David. When David offered to build the LORD a house, God communicated the following covenant through the prophet Nathan:

The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (2 Sam. 7:11b-16).

This covenant is a remarkable revelation of David's Greater Son Jesus Christ who is also the Son of God. Through him God's purposes for the church have been fulfilled and are yet to be consummated in an even greater way. The Davidic covenant, in its various aspects, is stated in several places in the Old Testament. It plays a prominent place in the Psalms--many of which were written by David himself, in the book of Isaiah--

the evangelical prophet, and it served as the basis for God's continued mercy upon the covenant nation in spite of their disobedience and idolatry. God dealt mercifully with Israel and with Judah "for David's sake" (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19). The Davidic covenant is particularly instructive for the church providing insight into God's promises to Christian parents. We have in Psalm 89:35-36 a promise that David's "seed" or "line" shall continue forever.

Eternal Generation

At the heart of the Davidic covenant is the principle of *eternal generation*: "I will be a Father to him and he will be my Son." The Nicene Creed affirms the eternal generation of the Son. He is the eternally begotten of the Father --"begotten not made, being of one substance of the Father." He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary"; and the virgin Mary was legally betrothed to Joseph, a descendant of David (Luke 1:27).

Jesus's Virgin Birth has been called into question by many in the modern institutional church, but it is affirmed as a fact by the New Testament witness and as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophesy. Some have rather cavalierly suggested that the Hebrew *almah* of Isaiah 7:14 should be translated "young woman," rather than "virgin." While many have attributed this idea to modern linguistic study, it was actually introduced in opposition to the Christian faith during the middle of the second century A.D. The outstanding apologist of the second century, Justin Martyr, dealt with this Jewish assault on the Christian faith in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. The *almah* argument, therefore, is not the brainchild of modern textual scholarship, but represents an ancient attack on the faith. That the preference by some translators for "young woman" (RSV) instead of "virgin" (NIV) has been supported by the Greek Old Testament versions by Theodotian, Aquila, and Symmachus,

does not mitigate the element of religious assault involved, for these were all Jewish versions written during the second century A. D.--well after the Gospel events.

In the seven uses of the word *almah* in the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures, not once does it refer to a woman who was not a virgin. The official Jewish commission, sent to Alexandria in the third century B. C. to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek (the Septuagint), surely must have known the meaning of the word *almah* when they translated it by the Greek *parthenos*, a word which can only mean "virgin." The New Testament writers were quoting the Septuagint when they recorded that Jesus' conception within the womb of the betrothed Mary took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel--which means "God with us" (Machen [1930] 1977, 288-291).

That Deity should experience human conception, gestation, birth, and infancy is a glorious wonder of the Incarnation. The apostle John wrote,

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (1:14).

This glorious mystery was later revealed to John in apocalyptic terms:

A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. . . . The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne (Rev. 12:1-2, 4b-5).

The above passage reminds the Christian of the perpetual strategy of Satan during this present evil age to destroy the holy seed of the church (Exod. 1:15-22; 2 Kings 11:1; Matt. 2:13-18), but it also assures the Christian of God's triumph though the One whose birth was announced by angels to shepherds. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12). The prophet Isaiah had foretold this event.

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on
his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

God's identification with human infancy offers great encouragement to Christian parents to present their infant sons and daughters to the Lord in baptism, consistently with Irenaeus' classic statement.

...He [Christ] came to save all through himself; all, that is, who through him are born into God, infants, children, boys, young men and old. Therefore he passed through every stage of life: he was made an infant for infants, sanctifying infancy; a child among children, sanctifying those of this age, an example also to them of filial affection, righteousness and obedience; a young man amongst young men, an example to them, and sanctifying them to the Lord. So also amongst the older men; that he might be a perfect master for all, not solely in regard to the revelation of the truth, but also in respect of each stage of life. And then he came even unto death that he might be `the firstborn from

the dead, holding the pre-eminence among all' (Col.1:18), the Prince of Life, before all and preceding all (Bettensen 1963, 43).

Citing this passage from Irenaeus, Baxter argued that if the infant Christ could be the head of the church, then surely infants could be members (1651, 79; Isa. 9:6). Irenaeus grasped the mystery of the Incarnation in a way not shared by Kirkegaard or Kingdon. Had Kirkegaard grasped it, he would not have pontificated (albeit, with the best of intentions!) that only "grown-ups" could really qualify as candidates for the Christian faith:

The truth is, one cannot become a Christian as a child; that is just as impossible as for a child to beget children. Becoming a Christian presupposes (according to the New Testament) being fully a man, what one might call in a physical sense maturity of manhood--in order then to become a Christian by breaking with everything to which one clings. Becoming a Christian presupposes (according to the New Testament) a personal consciousness of sin and of oneself as a sinner (Law 1988, 91:116-17).

Had Kingdon grasped the full regenerative significance of the Incarnation, perhaps he would not have apologized for rejecting its baptismal significance:

I happen to believe that God continues to work, though not exclusively so, along the lines of generations (descent) but I fail to see that because I reject the baptism of infants that I am obliged to deny that God works in families (Hanko 1981, 44).

Mary was indeed blessed among women, and blessed is the fruit of her womb (Luke 1:42)! Every generation of the church acknowledges that fact (Luke 1:48b), for David's "Offspring" is also David's "Root" (Rev. 22:16), and gives hope

and purpose to Christian parenting in a way previously unparalleled. For the Son did not begin his existence with his Virgin Birth--as wonderful as that was! Micah wrote that "his goings forth" or "his origins" are "from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2).

The book of Proverbs describes the preexistence of the Son (the Wisdom of God [cf. 1 Cor. 1:31]):

I was appointed from eternity,
from the beginning, before the world began. . . .
I was there when he set the heavens in place. . . .
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.
Then I was the craftsman at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind
(Pro. 8:23,27, 29-31).

Jesus is the Son whose generation is *eternal*. "The Son is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3).

Because of this factor the Paulician movement that began in the sixth century poses no substantial challenge to Christian baptism of infants. For how can the Paulicians, who based their practice of baptizing adults at age 30 upon the Adoptionist notion that Jesus only became the Son of God as an adult at his baptism, have any credibility for Christians who know that the incarnation of the eternal Son began in the womb of Mary (Bridge & Phipers 1977, 91-93; Latourette 1953, 299).

Jesus did not overthrow the intergenerational principle and infant baptism with it. Rather he established it on the foundation of *eternal generation*! Karl Barth was wrong! It was precisely because the Father-Son relationship was ruptured at the cross that faith become an intergenerational reality to a degree unparalleled in the Old Testament. When Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46),

the atoning moment had come. At that appointed hour the Father actually turned his back upon his Son in order that the Son might bear the wrath that was the sinner's due. Surely in this sense, if not in any other, the church must confess those words from the Apostles Creed: "he descended into hell"; for he "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). In that propitiatory act the spotless Lamb of God bore the sinner's guilt. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). When the Lord "laid upon him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6b) the redemption of the elect was accomplished. Because the Davidic Messiah was "cut off from the land of the living" "stricken for the transgression of my people" (Isa. 53:8 NRSV), the church chosen by God is spared the tragedy described by the Psalmist when he wrote, "The offspring of the wicked will be cut off" (Ps. 37:28). Because the New Testament has fully revealed the eternal generational relationship between the Father and the Son, the spiritual transmission of the faith from generation to generation within families has a solid basis to continue uninterruptedly to a degree unknown under the weaker and more obscure economy of the Old Testament (Ps. 78:8).

Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you
will make them princes throughout the land (Ps.
45:16).

Then we your people, the sheep of
your pasture,
will praise you forever;
from generation to generation
we will recount your praise (Ps. 79:13).

The Gospel, does not overthrow the intergenerational principle--it upholds it! The "righteousness" that is "from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17) has not supplanted the "righteousness to children's children" (Ps. 103:17)--in fact, they are one and the same.

Mary herself exclaimed,

My soul glories the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me--
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation (Luke 1:46b-50).

Through Christ, God's intergenerational purposes for the church are fulfilled. Because Christ became the Son of David, being born into the household of Joseph who was of David's line, the intergenerational aspects of the Davidic covenant--i.e. the *regeneration* of successive generations within Christian family lines--have now become a glorious reality for the church. Jesus Christ is the foundation upon whom the church may build godly homes that will endure as the faith is transmitted from one generation to the next (Matt. 7:24-27).

They will not toil in vain
or bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they are a people blessed by the LORD,
they and their descendants with them (Isa. 65:23).

To have Christ as the Lord of one's house is to have a household within the Kingdom and the Kingdom within the household. Such was the privilege of Zacchaeus when Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). The vision of Psalm 78:1-8 *can* be fulfilled--indeed, why should it be otherwise?

King David and the Covenant of Grace

The Davidic covenant offers instruction and encouragement for Christians regarding, not only their own salvation, but also the salvation of their offspring. God promised in Psalm 89:35-36 that David's "seed" or "line" would endure forever. Although he would discipline David's sons when they violated his decrees, and failed to keep his commands, he would *never* violate his covenant with David (Ps. 89:30-34). According to this covenant, God would deal with David and his offspring in a different manner than he had dealt with Saul. Following David's sin with Bathsheba and the prophet's exposure of that sin, David was chastised by the LORD. Indeed, the sword never departed from his family, and his infant son born of adultery would die according to the Word of the LORD (2 Sam. 12:10, 14). The thing that David feared the most, however, was the thought that God might withdraw the Holy Spirit from him as God had withdrawn the Spirit from Saul (Ps. 51:11; 1 Sam. 16:13-14).

God did *not* withdraw his Spirit from David, for he had promised that his love would never be taken from David. The Hebrew word translated "love" in 2 Samuel 7:15 is *chesed*. *Chesed* is a very strong word and is variously translated as "mercy," "lovingkindness," and "steadfast love" (Ladd 1963 Notes). It refers to God's *covenant* love by which he binds himself to his people by an oath, and promises to be their Advocate and Defender against all that would seek to harm them. Though God lifted his *chesed* from Saul, he would never lift it from David.

If you can break my covenant with the day
and my covenant with the night, so that day and
night no longer come at their appointed time, then
my covenant with David my servant...can be broken
(Jer. 33:20-21).

God would deal with David on the basis of his covenant of grace. In Psalm 32:1-2, David attested to God's gracious provision for his sin and to the blessing of justification apart from human effort or good works (Rom. 4:4-8). This was the glorious mystery of the *imputation* of David's sins to the Greater Son who alone would bear them and the corresponding *imputation* of the Son's righteousness to the sinner's credit (Isa. 53:5-6, 11-12).

That the Davidic covenant was an expression of the eternal covenant of grace is quite apparent from Isaiah 55:1-3, that gracious invitation to the spiritually thirsty and bankrupt to "come to the waters," to "come buy and eat," and to "delight" one's "soul" in "the richest of fare." In these verses God promised to extend the "everlasting covenant"--his "faithful love promised to David" to the one who hears. On the basis of God's gracious covenant, David and his "seed" were promised a relationship that is eternally secure and a "kingdom" that will endure forever.

Certainly Christ is the Son of David as much as he is the Seed of Abraham. The international purposes of God in the Abrahamic covenant are carried forward through the Davidic covenant. "All nations will be blessed through him" was spoken in reference to David's Greater Son (Ps. 72:17b), as well as Abraham's Seed (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8). This is evident from the feature of the Davidic covenant expressed in Isaiah 55:5:

Surely you will summon nations
you know not,
and nations that do not know you
will hasten to you,
because of the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor.

The international dimensions of the Davidic covenant are seen in the appeal of the Jerusalem conference to Amos 9:11-12 to the resolve the circumcision issue (Acts 15:1-2, 14-19).

Jesus, as the Seed of Abraham and the Offspring of David, gathered these two respective covenants into his own person and work. Since putting on Christ through baptism into Christ makes Christians Abraham's seed, irrespective of ethnic background, social status, or gender (Gal. 3:26-29), then the same baptism also makes them David's sons.

Christ and David's House

The "key of David" which Christ possesses (Rev. 3:7) is the key to David's household (Isa. 22:22). This can only mean that Christ has full access to David's house, and to all the Kingdom blessings associated with that house according to the terms of the Davidic covenant. For the "key of David" is identical with the "keys of the Kingdom" (Matt. 16:19; 18:18) which Christ wrested from the Devil's hand when he descended into Hades and rose victoriously to lead captivity captive (Eph. 4:8-10; 1 Pet. 3:19). For Christ was not only descended from David "as to his human nature," but "through the Spirit of holiness" he was "declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1: 3, 4). Christ's designation as "the firstborn from among the dead" (Col. 1:18) followed as a matter of divine necessity in that he is the *eternally begotten* of the Father.

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:24).

The Father's declaration, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you," represents the theological link between Christ's resurrection in space and time and his eternal generation (Heb. 1:5, Note; Ps. 2:7). This is a notable truth for the church in terms of her infant sons and daughters.

The Davidic covenant, to put it quite simply, is a further development of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, as apparent by the words of Psalm 132:11:

One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne--
If your sons keep my covenant
and the statutes I teach them,
then their sons will sit
on your throne for ever and ever.

This prophesied enthronement of one of David's descendants provided the Psalmist with great confidence to pray in the following terms:

Increase the days of the king's life,
his years for many generations.
May he be enthroned in God's
presence forever (Ps. 61:6-7a).

It is clear that David's reign, in terms of its covenantal fulfillment, was to be an eternal establishment of his throne in God's presence. This can be nothing less than what was accomplished through Christ's resurrection and ascension, and it perfectly fits the details as described by Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. In reference to Psalm 16:8-11, Peter made it clear that David was not speaking of himself.

But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear (Acts 2:30-33).

Moments after making this prophetic connection between David's throne and Christ's resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter was assuring his audience

that "*the promise is for you and for your children*" (Acts 2:39, italics mine).

Reduced to simplest terms, the Davidic covenant represents an extension of the proto-Gospel of Genesis 3:15. This covenant, associated with the "Root of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1) pervades the portrait of the Kingdom in Isaiah 11:8:

The nursing child will play
by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put
his hand on the vipers den (Isa. 11:8 NASB).

Here the Evil One has been conquered and brought into subjection to the seed of the woman--a glorious picture of life in the Kingdom, but with spiritual application for the church. Infants and toddlers indeed have an important place in God's Kingdom. The Isaiah promise is immediately followed by another:

They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the
knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9a).

The "holy mountain" mentioned here can be none other than the "holy mountain" of Psalm 99:9:

Exalt the LORD our God
and worship at his holy mountain,
for the LORD our God is holy.

The "holy mountain" represents God's appointed place of worship, and since the Psalms are appointed for singing in the church (Eph. 5:19), this clearly implies that infants, by God's design, have their place in the church. Like the rest of the saints, infants are granted victory over the serpent through their ascended Lord (Rev. 12:5; Rom. 16:20; Luke 10:19) and are to

be present in the worshipping community where the Word of God is regularly proclaimed.

Many nations will come and say,
"come, let us go up to the mountain
of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us of his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from
Jerusalem (Micah 4:2).

In keeping with Christ's universal reign (Ps. 72:8-11; Zech. 14:9), it is appropriate for professing Christian believers to present their infants to the Lord before the church in holy baptism even as the Israelites brought their little ones to Jesus (Luke 18:15-16).

This is what the Sovereign LORD says:
"See, I will beckon to the Gentiles,
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;
they will bring your sons in their arms
and carry your daughters on their shoulders (Isa. 49:22).

The church is spiritually joined to that "Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22) by virtue of her betrothal to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32). Her sons and daughters are to reflect the purity of that union by choosing a life partner who belongs to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:39) lest the "holy seed" be corrupted (Gen. 6:1-5; Neh. 13:23-27). In this regard, A. E. Winship's study of the remarkable Edwards's clan in 1900 is significant, for he noted that the family had "never lost tone through marriage, for its members have chosen men and women of like character and capacity" (Dodds [1971] 1976, 39). Baxter argued quite convincingly that the "godly seed," which the LORD himself regarded to be the fruit of his people's marital fidelity, proved

infant church membership (1651, 67; Mal. 2:10-16). Yet even in the case of the marital union of two unbelievers, when one partner becomes a believer, the children are "holy" though the spouse remains an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:14).

The obvious connection between Isaiah 11:9 and Hebrews 12:22 makes it indisputable that the Kingdom portrait of Isaiah 11:8 is not only millennial in its application but also *ecclesiastical*. Infants, as well as adults, accordingly belong to the church, and all the more because Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David.

The church, in Jesus' name, exercises the power or authority associated with those keys according to Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18. On this account, those who make up the church are included in the royal family (Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). They are receiving a "kingdom which cannot be shaken" (Heb. 12:28).

The Kingdom was granted to David's line in perpetuity.

The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath that he will not revoke:
"One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne--
if your sons keep my covenant
and the statutes I teach them,
then their sons will sit
on your throne for ever and ever.
For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling:
"This is my resting place for ever
and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I
have desired it" (Ps. 132:11-14).

By God's covenant, David was granted a perpetual dynasty. Now that David's Greater Son has been enthroned in heaven under the new covenant, Christians *and their seed* have been granted victory over sin and death (Rom. 1:3; 5:21; 6:14). The announcement of the Kingdom by John was accompanied by a baptism for the remission of sins (Matt. 3:2, 11; Mark 1:4-

5). And if Tertullian was correct in his understanding of John 3:5, Jesus linked baptism and spiritual rebirth in defining the entrance to the Kingdom.

Certainly Tertullian reflected the thinking of the second-century church when he equated the "water" of John 3:5 with baptism (Wall [1705] 1889, 43). Even if John 3:5 refers to the "water" of natural birth, however (a plausible interpretation), several other New Testament passages establish the same close identification of sign and spiritual reality (Mark 16:16; Eph. 5:26; Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Titus 3:5-6; and 1 Pet. 3:21).

"From the days of John the Baptist," Jesus declared, "the kingdom of God has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matt. 11:12)." Jesus' words can hardly be divorced from the extraordinary events associated with John's and his own births (Luke 1:69-70; 2:11). John's filling with the Holy Spirit within his mother's womb (Luke 1:15) signaled the arrival of the Kingdom promised in the Davidic covenant (Luke 1:32, 41-44). In fact, the Kingdom was later defined by the apostle Paul in terms of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). From Paul's perspective, all Christians are heirs of the Kingdom and are given the "Spirit of sonship" enabling them to address their heavenly Father "Abba" as Jesus himself did (Rom. 8:15-17; Mark 14:36).

Since David's sons are promised the Kingdom in perpetuity, are not the church's infant offspring prime candidates for this blessing? Must the church's covenant children be shut out, though John, who announced the Kingdom, entered in--even as an infant within the womb? If we say they must be shut out, because John's case was special, Jesus' own words remind us that "he that is least in the kingdom is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11).

If John's pre-natal enduement with the Spirit was *extraordinary*, is not the Kingdom of God which he announced also *extraordinary*? At the beginning of his public ministry Jesus said that this Kingdom was "near" (Mark 1:15), and

(later) that it belonged to those infants he received and blessed (Luke 18:15-16). Were there then no infants present among the crowds who thronged to the Jordan River when John announced the Kingdom (Matt. 3:2)? When the day of Pentecost came, were infants and small children not granted access to the Spirit who conveys that "righteousness, peace, and joy" in which the Kingdom consists (Acts 2:1, 39; Rom. 14:17)? Were they not permitted to cry "Abba" to their heavenly Father?

Jewett answered, "John warned the Pharisees not to say, 'We have Abraham as our Father'; how, then, can one suppose that he baptized infants by virtue of their parental connection" (1978, 67)? J. R. Graves argued that John's ministry had nothing to do with infants, for John called adults to a baptism of repentance for their sins.

But has it never occurred to you that the Pharisees and lawyers did reject the baptism of John, for the identical reason that pedobaptists now reject it--because he would not receive them as the children of believing parents, but repudiated all their claims and rights based upon the old Abrahamic Covenant or Church? For this very reason the Pedobaptists reject the doctrines of baptism held by the Baptists! (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 702).

Commenting on Matthew 3:7-10, Graves stated,

The Pharisees and the Sadducees . . . came and demanded baptism at his hands, under the impression that John's baptism belonged to the legal dispensation or old Abrahamic church and being included in that, they claimed his baptism, not by virtue of *repentance*, but by their relation to Abraham and his Covenant, and the *old* Church--the very reasons the advocates for infant baptism urge for their practice now (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 714).

Graves asked,

Where are we now to look for the laws to govern his kingdom, into the new constitution, (New Testament,) or back to the old constitution? (Old Testament.) If into the New Testament . . . then the first sentence of the first law of the new constitution abolishes infant rights, John's *pruning* ax cuts them off forever" (1876, 716).

When John the Baptist insisted on repentance, Graves argued, "he cut off infants as certainly as he did infidels. . . . When he baptized only upon confession of sins, he cut off infants. . . . John abolished all hereditary rights and privileges, and established those only belonging to *character*--the believer in Christ, and thus again he cut off infants" (1876, 718).

Oscar Cullman took issue with such an argument:

We have not the least ground for believing that John had . . . , in contrast to Jewish proselyte baptism, shut out children who were brought to him at Jordan by repentant parents for simultaneous reception into the messianic fellowship (1950, 63).

It would be strange indeed if the one appointed "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers" (Malachi 4:6) would instead "cut off infants" as Graves insisted. Ditzler commented,

Why then seek to make so damaging a charge against, and fix a blot on the character of the Almighty, merely to support an untenable dogma? Why talk about religion "coming down by genealogy?" That Pharisees should err is one thing, but that God should have so blundered and pretended to teach for 4000 years that religion "came down by genealogy," is vastly different (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 685).

Ditzler's point was that God himself had established the intergenerational promise; yet God had required repentance of each generation (Psalm 24:3-10). To speak of religion "coming down by genealogy" is to understate, and therefore to misrepresent, God's institution (Rom. 3:1-3). And while John's ministry did, in one sense, represent the institution of a new sign for a new covenant, it can hardly be said to justify the repetition of the same covenant sign--as in the case of countless rebaptisms antipaedobaptists have foisted upon Christian believers previously baptized as infants.

John the Baptist was not repudiating the Abrahamic covenant, or cutting off "infant rights," for that would have put John's ministry at odds with Jesus' ministry which welcomed the infants. The friend of the Bridegroom cannot be pitted against the Bridegroom (John 3:29). John's pruning axe only cut off those who presumed that they and their children could participate in the covenant without repentance (Matt. 3:7-8). Unfortunately, however, Mr. Graves had overlooked the intergenerational promise associated with repentant adults:

"The Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,"
declares the LORD.

"As for me, this is my covenant with them,"
says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my
words that I have put in your mouth will not depart
from your mouth, or from the mouths of your
children, or from the mouths of their descendants
from this time on and forever," says the LORD (Isa.
59:20-21).

The above promise is simply a prophetic extension of Genesis 17:7. Just as the Genesis promise was sealed by circumcision to infants, so under the new covenant to which the Isaiah promise refers, it is appropriate that the promise be signed and sealed with water baptism--the New Testament counterpart of circumcision.

Had Karl Barth read the above Isaiah passage carefully, he could not have insisted that "the relationship between parents and children can no longer have the doctrinal significance which it had for pre-messianic Israel" (Marcel 1953, 114). The "Redeemer" of Isaiah 59:20 is clearly David's Greater Son. The "covenant" of Isaiah 59:21, an amplification of Genesis 17:7, is clearly the new covenant--the one that extends to Jews and Gentiles alike (Isa. 42:6). The blessing of that covenant is clearly the regenerative work of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit constituting people members of God's church (John 15:3, 7; Eph. 5:26; 1 Cor. 12:13). And the promise is at once *intergenerational* and *regenerational*!

Beasley-Murray claimed that the promise of Isaiah 44:3 served as part of the Old Testament precedent for John's baptism: "We also recall that Is. 44.3 conjoins with the future purification the gift of the Spirit" (1963, 42). Beasley-Murray made a remarkable concession in this case. If Isaiah 44:3 provided Old Testament precedent for John the Baptizer, this is no argument that infants were cut off by John's ministry. For while Isaiah 44:3 conjoins New Testament baptism ("purification") and the gift of the Spirit, it does so in reference to the believer's offspring! Isaiah 44:3, no less than Isaiah 59:20-21, is a prophetic amplification of the covenant established with Abraham in Genesis 17:7.

In the Genesis passage, the covenant was to be sacramentally appropriated on behalf of the infant sons via circumcision (Gen. 17:12). In the Isaiah passage, if Beasley-Murray's analysis of the "streams on the dry ground" is correct, the promise was sacramentally appropriated under John's ministry (and throughout the New Testament), on behalf of the covenant children via baptism. Sometimes Baptists share remarkable insights into infant baptism!

Covenant sons and daughters are to be ushered in, as "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these," and are to receive the purifying water which both Jesus and the apostles associated with such an entry (John 3:5; Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 3:21).

In both the Davidic and Abrahamic aspects of the new covenant in Christ's blood, the infants of believers are regarded as heirs, and baptism with water is to signify their participation (Gal. 3:26-29; John 3:5). Let's restore this ancient landmark!

Jesse's Rod and the Rod of Correction

These little ones are set apart from the children of the world by the promise of God, and sanctified by the Word and Spirit operating in the home of the believing parent and in the church of the living God (1 Cor. 7:12-14; 2 Tim. 1:5; John 15:3; 17:17-20; 2 Thess. 2:13; Eph. 5:26-27). They are to be nurtured, instructed, and disciplined according to God's pattern for the Christian home set forth in such passages as Exodus 12:26-27; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalms 78:1-7; 112:1-2; 127; 128; Proverbs 22:6, 15; 23:13-14; and Ephesians 6:1-4.

Through the loving care of Christian parents, who combine godly example and instruction with the "rod of correction," these little ones begin to exhibit by grace, traces of the character that Jesus manifested by nature--exhibiting proof of the promise of God triumphing through the Seed of the Woman (Gen. 3:15). The covenant blessing of Abraham, conveyed to Rebekah (via her marriage to Isaac), is carried forward in the life of the church.

Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies (Gen. 24:60; Cf. Matt. 16:18; Rom. 16:20).

The key of David (Rev. 3:7) has been passed on to the New Testament church:

Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me (2 Sam. 7:16a).
I will maintain my love to him forever,
and my covenant with him will never fail.

I will establish his line forever,
his throne as long as the heavens endure.
If his sons forsake my law
and do not follow my statutes,
if they violate my decrees
fail to keep my commands,
I will punish their sin with the rod,
their iniquity with flogging;
but I will not take my love from him,
nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.
I will not violate my covenant
or alter what my lips have uttered.
Once for all, I have sworn by my
holiness--
and I will not lie to David--
that his line will continue forever
and his throne endure before me
like the sun (Ps. 89:28-36).

The covenantal provision for the chastisement of David's disobedient sons in the above passage represented a plural expansion ("sons") of 2 Samuel 7:14 where the original covenantal statement referred to David's "son" in the singular. This provision not only established discipline as normative for the Christian, and for the New Testament church (Heb. 12:5-11; 1 Cor. 5:4-5), but it also established discipline for the Christian home. As John Calvin observed,

There is a covenant still in force that God made with us in our true Solomon [II sam. 7:12-13]. He who cannot deceive has declared that its force will never be voided. "If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances, if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments. . . I will punish their iniquities with the rod and their sin with scourges, but I will not remove from him my mercy" [Ps. 89:30-33; 88:31-34, Vg.; but cf. Comm.]. To render us more certain of his mercy, he says that the rod, whereby

he will prove Solomon's posterity, will be of man; the stripes, of the sons of man [II Sam. 7:14] (1960, 1:661).

Samuel had witnessed the tragic failure of Eli in this regard (1 Sam. 3:13), and had anointed David, a "man after God's own heart" whose son Solomon would set forth many Proverbs concerning the parental use of the "rod," and whose greater Son would bear in his own body "the chastisement of our peace" (Isa. 53:6). David himself would bear the covenantal rod of God's displeasure because of his sin with Bathsheba, and Solomon, for his moral compromises with many idolatrous women (2 Sam. 13:10, 14; 1 Kings 11:7-13). Christ would bear the rod for their healing.

God's covenant with David, however, envisioned many sons being brought to glory, and anticipated their need and the need of their offspring, for that of which Eli's sons had been deprived. The tragic deaths of Eli's sons were decreed by God (1 Sam. 2:25) no doubt with a view to the instruction of the New Testament church "upon whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" 1 Cor. 10:11). Commenting on 2 Samuel 7:14, John Peter Lange stated,

David's seed will be free neither from sin nor from its human punishment. "Grace is not to release David and the David line from this universal human lot, is not to be a charter to sin" (Hengst)...Such chastisement will not be set aside by the cordial relation of David's seed as son to the Lord as father, but will rather follow David: The *father* will punish the *son* for his sins. The elevation of the latter to such glory above all children of men is not to be a reason for making him an exception in respect of punishableness, but in this regard he will be equalled with all men before God's righteousness (n.d., 5:432).

According to 2 Samuel 7:14, the rod was decreed for the children of the covenant. It is to be used within the context of the covenant of grace. Thus, the children who are declared "holy" by the Spirit of grace (1 Cor. 7:14) are not to be exempted in view of their covenantal status; rather the rod applies especially to them as the objects of God's love. Indeed, from a biblical perspective, those exempted from the rod are not "sons" but rather "bastards" (Heb. 12:8).

In his farewell address to the Northampton congregation Jonathan Edwards warned parents, "Take heed that it may not be with any of you as it was with Eli of old who *reproved* his children, but *restrained* them not [*italics added*]" (Dodds [1971] 1976, 52). As Elisabeth Dodds pointed out, Edwards believed that there was such a thing as anger that was consistent with good will. "A father may be angry with his child . . . yet at the same time he will not have any proper ill-will to the child" (Dodds [1971] 1976, 52-53).

John Wesley issued some words of wisdom for parents concerning the matter and importance of discipline of children.

A wise parent . . . should begin to break their will the first moment it appears. In the whole art of Christian education there is nothing more important than this. The will of the parent is to a little child in the place of the will of God. Therefore studiously teach them to submit to this while they are children, that they may be ready to submit to His will when they are men. But in order to carry this point, you will need incredible firmness and resolution; for after you have once begun, you must never more give way. You must hold on still in an even course; you must never intermit your attention one hour; otherwise you will lose your labor (Naglee 1987, 210).

Larry Christenson, in *The Christian Family*, offered the following advice to parents regarding the use of the "rod":

A child who has just received a sound spanking will not at once be the soul of broken repentance. That is not the important thing at this point. The important thing is that the child make a clear-cut identification, namely that sin must be forgiven by God. No amount of spanking will take away sin, but only the blood of Jesus. A child who has learned this has learned a profound spiritual truth (1970, 118).

Christenson went on to say that

a spanking is aimed at controlling *outward behavior*. It does not, of itself, change the inner life of the child. It merely creates a better atmosphere in which that inner life can be healed. Forgiveness, on the other hand, deals directly with the inner life. And the point is this: God alone can effect change in the inner life. My spanking will change a child's actions; only the Holy Spirit can change his heart (1970, 119).

Lest the Christian religion be reduced to austerity, Horace Bushnell cautioned,

When they assume every thing which can be called play in a very young child is wrong, or an offense against religion, they try, in fact, to make Galatians of their children; incurring a much harsher, Christian rebuke, than if they had only turned to the beggarly elements themselves, and laid their souls under bondage ([1888] 1903, 356).

Play is the symbol and interpreter of liberty; and no one could ever sufficiently conceive the state of free impulse and the joy there is in it, save by means of this unconstrained, always pleasurable acceptivity, that we call the play of children ([1888] 1903, 339-40).

Samuel Hopkins observed that Jonathan Edwards consistently took a full hour break from his afternoon study to engage the world of his children "relaxing into cheerful and animate conversation frequently with sprightly remarks and sallies of wit and humor" Dodds [1971] 1976, 48-49). In the Christian home, as in the Christian church, mercy must triumph over judgment (James 2:13). Otherwise infant baptism amounts to the mere imposition of a covenant of works upon the covenant child and nothing more! Christian parents, no less than the apostles, are called to be "ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). Fathers are specifically cautioned by the apostle not to embitter their children "or they will become discouraged" (Col. 3:21).

Unless the home abounds with the fruit of the Spirit, the children will remain in the covenant only in the sense of being under the obligation of it. While they will seek to be free from it, and even rebel against it, they will most likely never comply with its terms. If indeed the professor was right who described the children of Christian believers as "little vipers in covenant diapers" (Gerstner 1991), then the wisdom of the Preacher also applies: "If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer" (Eccles. 10:11).

The prophet Isaiah also was instructed in the ways of God's wisdom that have great relevance for Christian parents who are convinced of the need for God's appointed rod in their parenting.

Listen and hear my voice;
pay attention and hear what I say.
When a farmer plows for planting,
does he plow continually?
Does he keep on breaking up and
harrowing the soil?
When he has leveled the surface,
does he not plant wheat in its place,
barley in its plot,

and spelt in its field?
His God instructs him
and teaches him the right way.
Caraway is not threshed with a sledge,
nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin;
caraway is beaten out with a rod,
and cummin with a stick.
Grain must be ground to make bread;
so one does not go on threshing it
forever.
Though he drives the wheels of his
threshing cart over it,
his horses do not grind it.
All this comes from the LORD Almighty,
wonderful in counsel and
magnificent in wisdom (Isa. 28:23-29).

Jonathan and Sarah Edwards must have imbibed this wisdom. Elisabeth Dodds wrote, "Sarah's way with the children did more for Edwards than shield him from the hullabaloo while he studied. The family gave him incarnate foundation for his ethic" ([1971] 1976, 54). Joseph Emerson, pastor at Pepperill, Massachusetts, and who suffered the pangs of unrequited infatuation over the Edwardses' daughter Esther, recorded the following in his diary after visiting the Edwards home: "The most agreeable Family I was ever acquainted with. much of the Presence of God here" (Dodds [1971] 1976, 115).

The Ancient Landmark

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