

## Chapter 12

### Infant Baptism and the Church's Identity

Gather the people  
consecrate the assembly;  
bring together the elders,  
gather the children,  
those nursing at the breast.  
-Joel 2:16-

#### The Church and Israel

One can hardly hold to infant baptism while either surrendering the New Testament church's *identity as* the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), or its *continuity with* the Old Testament people of God (1 Cor. 10:1-4; Heb. 11:26). It was just such an awareness that prompted nineteenth-century Baptist scholar, Alexander Carson, to ask the following question:

Is the Christian church that rejected the body of the Jewish nation, the same with the Jewish church, which by God's appointment, contained the whole nation? . . . The church of Israel was the nation of Israel, and as a whole could not no more be called the church of Christ, in the sense of that phrase in the New Testament, than the nation of England can be called the church of Christ ([1853] 1981, 233).

While Carson denied the Christian church's identification with the nation of Israel, he was enough of a Greek scholar to concede that the word "church" was applicable, in some sense, to Israel; hence he referred to the "Jewish church."

Ulrich Zwingli, Swiss Reformer at Zurich, affirmed this identification by including the Old Testament people of God within his definition of the "Church."

I believe also that all belong to this Church who give adherence to it according to the rule and promise of God's Word. I believe that to this Church belong Isaac, Jacob, Judah and all who were of the seed of Abraham, and also those infants whose parents in the first beginnings of the Christian Church, through the preaching of the apostles, were won to the cause of Christ. For if Isaac and the rest of the ancients had not belonged to the Church, they would not have received the Church's token, circumcision. Since these, then, were members of the Church, infants and children belonged to the primitive Church. Therefore I believe and know that they were sealed by the sacrament of baptism. For children also make a confession, when they are offered by their parents to the Church, especially since the promise offers them to God, which is made to our infants no less, but even far more amply and abundantly, than formerly to the children of the Hebrews (1922, 45).

Some modern evangelical Christians, especially those of the dispensationalist school, have resisted the use of the word "Church" to describe ancient Israel. Hal Lindsay in *The Road to Holocaust* denied such an identification as he confronted *dominionist* theology.

The Church in no way can be identified with the Israelites who were led out of Egypt by God through Moses (1989, 113).

Lindsay simply rejected the *dominionist* error on the basis of the *dispensationalist* error -- hardly a satisfactory solution to the issue of how the church is related to Israel. One does not have to be a member of the dispensationalist school to counter the notion that "the physical Jew was eliminated and had no further place in God's plan" (1989, 266).

Premillenarian Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (80, 81) predicated "two seeds of Judah"--"one begotten by blood and flesh, the other by faith and the Spirit" (Beckwith 1910,

7:374-378). On this basis, the second-century Christian apologist affirmed the church's true spiritual identification with Israel.

For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ... (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 1:200).

Justin Martyr again underscored this identification:

As, therefore, Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, even so we, who are quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelite race (Roberts & Donaldson 1885, 1:267).

Paul did not limit the context of his remarks to physical Jewry when he affirmed "the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16, or when he stated,

A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code (Rom. 2:29).

In both cases Paul was writing to churches composed of Jews and Gentiles, and on that basis alone, the dispensationalist interpretation of the above passages is too restrictive, and hence without foundation. The church's identification and continuity with Israel, however, does not hinge on these two passages alone. Indeed, the entire motif of the New Testament establishes such an identification.

Jesus declared himself as the true "bread of life" which gives "life to the world," and of which the Old Testament "manna" under the administration of Moses was but a type or foreshadow (John 6:32-35, 41, 48-58).

On the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus' death as a "departure" (lit. "exodus") thus relating his redemption to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. Matthew applied Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son," to Jesus' early childhood sojourn in that land (Matt. 2: 14-15) thereby implying that those who are "in Christ" have imputed to them a kind of spiritual "exodus," and are one with ancient Israel.

The New Testament letter to the Hebrews describes Moses as having "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). Similarly the New Testament church is granted the same privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ (Phil.1:29). Is there then no identification of the Christian church with those whom God led out of Egypt by the hand of Moses?

Paul designated the New Testament church the true "circumcision" (Phil. 3:3), a term previously used of the Jews. The apostle depicted Christ in terms of the church's Passover Lamb, and the church's sanctification in terms of Israel's Feast of Unleavened Bread.

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.  
Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5: 7b-8).

The church cannot be understood apart from the "Jewishness" of her "Foundation" and "Head." Matthew associated Jesus' miraculous deeds with "the God of Israel" (Matt. 15:30-31) and, in the very next chapter, depicted Jesus as the one who would build his church (Matt. 16:18).

The salvation of the church is expounded in the New Testament epistles in terms which reflect the sacrificial imagery associated with the Mosaic institution of Israel's worship. Christ's death is described in Romans 3:25 as a "propitiation" (ASV) or "sacrifice of atonement" (NIV). The Greek word behind the "propitiation" of Romans 3:25 is the identical word used in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) for the "mercy seat"--the solid

gold cover of the ark of the covenant upon which Israel's high priest sprinkled blood once per year on the Day of Atonement (Morris 1955, 125).

The church's seals or sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, share an historical/typological connection with ancient Israel:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the rock which was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

Christian baptism is described by Paul as an initiation into God's covenant with Abraham and his Seed (Christ [Gal.3:16]). Christian believers are similarly designated "Abraham's seed" (Gal. 3:27-29).

Nineteenth-century Methodist scholar, Jacob Ditzler, pointed out that both Abraham, the pre-Mosaic covenant man, and David, the post-Mosaic covenant man, were saved by *faith* according to Romans 4. Galatians 3:8 and Hebrews 4:2, respectively, indicate that the Gospel was proclaimed during both the pre-Law period and the post-Law period (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 562).

Dutch Reformed scholar, Herman Hanko, pointed to the unity of the church under the Old and New Covenants as clearly established by such passages as Hosea 1:10-11; Jeremiah 31:33-34; and Amos 9:11-15 (1981, 27-30). When English Reformed Baptist, David Kingdon, disputed this, Hanko pointed out Kingdon's failure to see that

the land of Canaan was but a type and picture of heaven. . . . that Israel itself was a picture of the church in every age. How else is it possible that the church in the new dispensation can also be called

Israel? The nation itself was a picture of the whole church of God. Of course, contrarily, all the types and shadows of the old dispensation and all the pictures which Israel looked upon pointed ahead to Christ (1981, 22).

To impose a restrictive interpretation on Galatians 6:16, as Lindsay has done, and then to deny that the church is ever identified with Israel is to overlook Paul's grand contrast of the pre-conversion alien status of the Church of Ephesus with its new covenant status in Christ.

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:12-13).

Clearly the exclusion "from citizenship in Israel" was a thing of the past in the lives of those Gentile Christians. So as to remove any doubt, the apostle further stated,

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:19-20).

This newly established identification of Christian believers with the Jewish temple itself sufficiently proves the New Testament church's identity as "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). But there is still more to be said.

Hosea 2:23, a verse which in its original context referred to the restoration of unfaithful Israel, Paul applied to the Gentiles called by God into the church:

I will call them "my people" who are  
not my people;  
and I will call her "my loved one"  
who is not my loved one (Rom. 9:25).

Peter likewise alluded to the same prophecy (1 Pet. 2:10) in his description of the church, and when one considers Peter's testimony in Acts 15:7-11, Peter's reference to the Hosea prophecy cannot summarily be dismissed on the assumption that Peter was writing to the "elect exiles of the dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1) as an "apostle to the Jews" (Gal. 2:8). The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, no less than Hosea, had placed unfaithful Israel in the same category as the "uncircumcised" Gentile nations around them:

"Behold the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised merely in the flesh--Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who live in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart (Jer. 9:25-26 ESV).

Consistent with the perspective of the Old Testament prophets, Peter was insisting that the Jews were not the people of God prior to their conversion to Christ. Rather they *became* the people of God through their faith in Christ, just as did the Gentiles.

Even if the "elect" (1 Pet. 1:1), to whom Peter addressed his letter, consisted exclusively of Jews, in keeping with Peter's "call" (Gal. 2:8), they were not on that account any less a part of the church. Like the apostle Paul himself, they were part of the believing "remnant chosen by grace" (Rom. 11:1, 5) and, hence, part of the church. The salvation that Peter described in his letter was the same salvation that the apostle Paul proclaimed and expounded for the benefit of the Gentiles (1 Pet. 1:2-9; Acts 15:11). Salvation makes a person part of the church (Ephes. 3:6, 10; 1 Cor. 12:13), whether he be Jew or Gentile.

Arguably, Peter's letter was designed for the whole church, including the Gentiles. Though Peter's ministry had been described earlier as a ministry to Jews, his Jewish prejudice against Gentiles was substantially challenged and overcome by God's revelation enabling an expansion of his ministry in the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48). If that experience were not sufficient, the apostle Paul's public rebuke of Peter at Antioch for vacillating in his fellowship with Gentiles may have rendered the cure of his bigotry permanent (Gal. 2:11-14). Whatever the case, Peter did not hesitate, in his second epistle to endorse the letters of the apostle Paul as being on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

In designating his readers "a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9), Peter was saying no more than Jesus had said following his delivery of a scorching parable to the Jewish leaders:

Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone;  
the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes’

Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God  
will be taken away from you and given to a people  
who will produce its fruit (Matt. 21:42-43).

The parable was an unmistakable reference to Israel's sin in putting the Messiah to death, her rejection as a nation, and the institution of the New Testament church inclusive of Gentiles. The New Testament church, accordingly, is the new "holy nation," or "chosen people" (1 Pet.2:9) whose "citizenship" is of a heavenly nature (Phil. 3:20).

Hal Lindsay's statement that "the Church in no way can be identified with the Israelites who were led out of Egypt by God through Moses" is quite misleading. The church can rejoice before God in her exalted status, according to the new covenant institution of Christ. As the covenant people, she can sing such

stanzas as "Ye chosen seed of Israel's race, ye ransomed from the Fall," "Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah," and "I love Thy Kingdom, Lord." And, she can continue to apply the covenant sign to her infant offspring--and with greater expectation and spiritual fulfillment since the Seed of Abraham has come and God "seals" his covenant people with the promised Holy Spirit!

### **Israel and the Church**

Not only was the New Testament church identified with Israel, but the converse was true as well--Old Testament Israel was identified as the church and was so designated. The dispensationalist claim that Matthew 16:18 represents the Lord's first mention of "His Church" (Lindsay 1989, 261) must be tempered by the fact that the Greek word for "church" is frequently found in the Greek version of the Old Testament commonly known as the Septuagint, and by the fact that the Old Testament use of the word refers to the nation of Israel.

The Greek word for church used in Matthew 16:18 and frequently in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. This Greek word appeared throughout the Septuagint (frequently quoted by the New Testament apostles) to refer to the nation of Israel. It was used to render two Hebrew words: (1) *kahal*, which is translated variously into English as "congregation," "assembly," "multitude," or "company"; and (2) *adah*, also translated as "congregation," "assembly," or "company" (e.g., Exod. 12:6; Num. 15:5; Josh. 8:35). To be sure, the New Testament itself designates the very nation of Israel that came out of Egypt as "the *ekklesia* in the desert" (Acts 7:38), and so the King James Version rendered it "the *church* in the wilderness."

The use of *ekklesia* in Psalm 22:22 is particularly instructive inasmuch as the author of Hebrews identifies the Lord Jesus himself as the speaker: "In the midst of the *ekklesia* I will sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12). This clearly demonstrates the continuity between the people of God in the Old and New

Testaments. Psalm 40:9 declares, "I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly [*ekklesia*]." Hebrews 12:23 applies *ekklesia* to the people of God spanning both Testaments, as it follows the description of the Old Testament heroes of faith in chapter 11 (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 563). These Old Testament saints represent the "great cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 12:1 who can only "be made perfect" by being "together with us" (Heb. 11:40).

As for Christ's declaration that he will "build" his "church" in Matthew 16:18, Ditzler pointed out that the Greek word *oikodomeo* can mean "rebuild," "build up," "establish," or "confirm," and that Wahl's lexicon (2d edition of 1829) suggested other possibilities as well, e.g., "augment," "give increase to," "cause that the structure shall be continued," etc. Christ's building of his *ekklesia*, therefore, may be viewed in terms of restoration or increase. The "restoration" view certainly allows for the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 58:12; 60:1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 15. Acts 15:16 depicts the New Testament church consisting of both Jews and Gentiles as the rebuilding of "David's fallen tent" (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 566-67).

The "increase" view of *oikodomeo* finds solid scriptural support in Isaiah 9:6-7 in which a "Son" is promised to Israel "and the government will be on his shoulders."

Of the increase of his government  
and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this (Isa. 9:7).

The Septuagint employed *oikodomeo* in the Bethlehem elders' prayer to convey "increase" on the occasion of Ruth's marriage to Boaz in Ruth 4:11:

May the LORD make the woman who is coming into  
your home like Rachael and Leah, who together *built*  
*up* the house of Israel.

Ruth was King David's grandmother (Ruth 4:17) and is included in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1:5.

The Psalmist expressed this longing for "increase" consistently with Genesis 17:7. "May the LORD make you increase, *both you and your children*" (Ps. 115:14, italics mine).

In Acts 9:31 the Greek *oikodomeo* is simply rendered "upbuild" or "strengthen" (NIV). It was used by Jesus' enemies when they slandered and mocked him (Matt. 26:61; 27:40) misrepresenting his figurative promise in John 2:19 to raise up the temple in three days after its destruction (Arndt & Gingrich 1957, 560-61). Here again the idea of continuity with Israel's past persists, for, in a sense in which the Jews failed to grasp, Jesus did "rebuild" the temple by drawing all men to himself as he was lifted up in crucifixion (John 12:32; 1 Pet. 2:4-7; Eph. 2:19-22); therefore, the church cannot shake its institutional identity with Israel, however new and more glorious be its status under the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:7-18).

The Septuagint used *oikodomeo* in Psalm 51:18, David's prayer to "rebuild the walls of Jerusalem"--a prayer of special figurative significance to one whose life had been invaded by sin. It is also used in Psalm 69:35, the victorious prophetic follow-up of the personal prayers of Jesus' redemptive suffering: "...for God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah." Even infant baptism opponent, Alexander Carson, acknowledged that the New Testament church was typologically portrayed in the Old Testament figure of "Zion" ([1853] 1981, 234). It is quite apparent, therefore, that Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:18 to "build" his church is properly understood within the context of Old Testament prophecy, and that it includes both ideas of *restoration* and *increase*. It must not be disassociated from its Old Testament derivation if it is to be understood consistently with Jesus' role as Israel's Messiah.

Carson, surprisingly acknowledged the unity between the New Testament church and Old Testament Israel.

As the church of Israel was the church of God, typical of his true church, and containing in every successive age a remnant of the spiritual seed of Abraham, according to the election of grace, the New Testament church is spoken of in the Old under the figure of Israel, Zion, Jerusalem, God's holy mountain, the tabernacle of David, & c. & c. This cannot possibly apply literally, and is explained by the apostles as referring to the calling of the Gentiles. In like manner, the book of Revelation speaks of measuring the temple. The reality is spoken of under the name of that which was its type. The restoration of the Jews, also, is spoken of as a re-union into their own olive-tree ([1853] 1981, 234).

Carson practically conceded his case by these words but chose not to pursue the matter "as it has no concern with this controversy." He insisted,

Whatever unity may be supposed to be in the Jewish church and the church of the New Testament, it does not consist in sameness of members, or of ordinances. The one, by its constitution, included carnal members; the other, by its constitution, admits spiritual members only ([1853] 1981, 234).

Carson obviously knew the paedobaptistic implications of the unity between the Old and New Testament church, especially in that infants were included in the Old Testament church. His only recourse was to insist that the Old Testament church had a different membership standard than the New Testament church. Bridge and Phipers argued that while circumcision and baptism marked the entry of the old and new covenants, respectively, the conditions applying to their administration were dissimilar (1977, 62).

In the Great Carrollton Debate of 1876 in Carrollton, Missouri, Dr. Jacob Ditzler was to make the following statement during his opening speech on infant baptism:

It is agreed by all parties to this question that infant membership, the greater matter, the genus, necessarily carries with it the less, the species, baptism, and therefore we are under no particular necessity to discuss the species, baptism, unless we prefer to do so" (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 553).

It is quite apparent that infants were included in the Old Testament *ekklesia*. When the people of Judah "came together to seek help from the LORD" during a fast proclaimed by King Jehoshaphat, the king "stood up in the [*ekklesia*]" (2 Chron. 20:5) and cried out to the LORD recalling the words of Solomon.

If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us. . . .

. . . . We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you (2 Chron. 20:9, 12b; cf. 2 Chron. 6:12-42).

The Chronicler then described the group that made up the *ekklesia*. "All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD" (2 Chron. 20:13). The "little ones" were specifically mentioned, as distinct even from the children, so as to leave no doubt that infants and toddlers were a part of God's *ekklesia* in the Old Testament!

During the renewal of the covenant prior to Israel's entry into the Promised Land, the congregation or *ekklesia* was addressed by Moses in the following terms:

All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God--your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, together with your children and wives and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water. You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, to confirm you this day as his people (Deut. 29:10-13b).

In this case not only were the "children" mentioned as being part of the *ekklesia*, but they were clearly included in the covenant and confirmed as the LORD's people along with the adults. If ever there was a faithful generation of Israelites, it was this generation who covenanted with the LORD on the plains of Moab. Concerning this generation, the book of Judges was to record,

The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel. . . .

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel (Judges 2:7, 10).

Carson's point, therefore, that "the very constitution of the Jewish church recognized the membership of carnal persons" ([1853] 1981, 233) carries little weight in this case. Neither is it relevant in the case of the generation which followed, for the above commentary on that generation is hardly one of special recognition or commendation. To say that the Old Testament church "did not make the distinction between those born after the flesh, and those born after the Spirit" (Carson [1853] 1981, 233) is to misstate the facts. Even the New Testament church, however, contained "carnal persons" much to the chagrin of the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 3:1-2).

Perhaps the most striking statement of the composition of the Old Testament *ekklesia* is found in Joel 2:15-17. Ditzler pointed out three significant facts in this passage: (1) The appearance of the word *ekklesia* in verses 15 and 16 to designate the "assembly" of God's covenant people; (2) the specific mention of "those nursing at the breast" (vs. 16) as among the summoned *ekklesia*; and (3) the call to "consecrate the *assembly* (*ekklesia*)."  
Ditzler explained that Numbers 19:13; 8:7 and Hebrews 9:13 set forth the procedure for "sanctifying" or consecrating the *ekklesia* [They baptized the church] in anticipation of Ephesians 5:25-26 (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 598-99). It was, of course, to this *ekklesia* that the prophet announced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29). Small wonder that Peter, after confirming the New Testament fulfillment of the promise (Acts 2:14-21), should declare "the promise is for you and your children" (Acts 2:39a)!

There are two other passages which corroborate the inclusion of infants in the New Testament church. Psalm 40, which Hebrews 10:5-7 identifies with the speech of Christ himself, declares, "I do not conceal your love and truth from the great assembly [*ekklesia*]" (vs. 10b). These words strikingly parallel Jesus' words in Matthew 11:25-27:

I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,  
because you have hidden these things from the wise  
and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes,  
Father, for this was your good pleasure.

All things have been committed to me by my  
Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and  
no one knows the Father except the Son and those to  
who the Son chooses to reveal him.

It is quite apparent from a comparison of Psalm 40:10b with the above words of Jesus that his church [*ekklesia*] includes the infants and little children whom learned adults would not deem capable of spiritual understanding.

In Isaiah 54:11-12 the LORD promises to "build" the "afflicted city" of Jerusalem "with stones of turquoise," its "foundations with sapphires," and its "walls of precious stones." This is a prophetic reference to the glorious reality of the New Testament church which Jesus promised (in Matthew 16:18) He would build. What immediately follows is a covenant promise concerning the offspring of its citizens:

All your sons will be taught by the LORD,  
and great will be your children's peace (Isa. 54:13).

This prophecy insists that in the church the Lord Jesus builds, the covenant blessing pertaining to the believer's children is still in force, just as God had promised Abraham that he would be the God of his descendants after him (Gen. 17:7).

It is significant that neither Jesus nor the apostles ever rejected the infant offspring of believers from membership in the church, and that, on the occasion when the disciples tried to prevent their coming to Jesus, they stood corrected by the Lord. Jesus' rebuke of his disciples on that occasion had critical implications for the church, for as Ditzler noted,

Had the apostles rejected infants it would have given the Jews a special case of stirring up all possible hate against them on that point (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 707).

There was, therefore, no "subversion of the old church" in that regard. Richard Baxter's argument must be sustained, namely that while the Scripture plainly tells us of the cessation of circumcision, it "never speaks one word of the ceasing of Infants Church membership" (1651, 102).

If I prove, That all Church members must be admitted by Baptism, and then prove that Infants are Church members: Is not this as much as to prove, they must be Baptized? (Baxter 1651, 8).

### **Israel's Ethnicity and the Covenants**

To say, however, that the church is spiritually and historically identified with Israel is not to suggest a loss of ethnic identity of the unregenerate physical descendants of Abraham; nor is it to insist on their once-and-for-all exclusion from the plan of God. Though in their present spiritual condition, the Jews as a whole do not share the same covenantal relationship as the Christian church, God's covenant with the physical Jewish nation remains in tact (Rom. 11:28-29). The Christian church's status as God's people does not rule out Israel's future spiritual recovery--nor even her geo-political restoration (Acts 1:6-7; 3:21). It does, however, rule out any loss of privilege on the part of the Christian church (Matt 19:28-30).

When the Dispensationalist considers God's covenant with Abraham, he either by-passes the third chapter of Paul's Galatian letter or subordinates it to the Old Testament promises of physical real estate to ethnic Israel (Pentecost 1953, 69-94; Showers 1984-85, 25-28). Galatians 3, according to Herman Hanko, clarifies the essential unity of the church under two different administrations--the Old Testament and the New.

Thus the covenant remains unchanged in essence. It remains unchanged in its blessings . . . unchanged in its basis. . . . unchanged in all its characteristics. Only its administration was changed in keeping with the spiritual development of the church (Hanko 1981, 24).

Jonathan Edwards had a biblical perspective on the Abrahamic covenant.

Indeed the main thing, the substance and marrow of that covenant which God made with Abraham and the other patriarchs, was the *covenant of grace*, which is continued in these days of the gospel, and extends to all his spiritual seed, of the Gentiles as well as Jews: but yet that covenant with the patriarchs contained

other things that were appendages to that everlasting covenant of grace; promises of lesser matters, subservient to the grand promise of the future seed, and typical of things appertaining to him. Such were those that annexed the blessing to the land of Canaan, and the progeny of Isaac and Jacob (1879, 1:462).

Reformed Baptist, David Kingdon asked why paedobaptists were generally willing to spiritualize the promise of the "land" while they refused to spiritualize the "infant seed" noting that the two were so closely related in Genesis 17. Kingdon argued that the New Testament "seed of Abraham" was limited to Christ himself and to those who share Abraham's faith (1973, 39-40, 51-52; Gal. 3:16, 26-29). John Calvin faced essentially the same argument as it was expressed in his day: "That those infants who of old were circumcised merely prefigured that spiritual infancy which arises from the regeneration of God's Word."

Calvin based his answer on Romans 15:8 insisting that "Christ" is "a minister of the circumcision, to fulfill the promises which had been given to the fathers."

Do you see how, after Christ's resurrection also, he thinks that the promise of the covenant is to be fulfilled, not only allegorically but literally, for Abraham's physical offspring? To the same point applies Peter's announcement to the Jews [Acts 2:39] that the benefit of the gospel belongs to them and their offspring by right of the covenant; and in the following chapter he calls them "sons of the covenant" [Acts 3:25], that is, heirs (1960, 2:1337).

Those who take the New Testament *literally* cannot escape the allegorizing of the "land" which a literal reading of Hebrews 11:9-10, 13-16 will reveal. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the Millennium of Revelation 20 should be allegorized., or if it is symbolic, that the prayer our Lord taught his disciples—"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:10)-- will go unanswered. For that reason, we cannot

consider credible or altogether relevant Jewett's argument that "the literal seed, like the literal land . . . is no longer covenantally significant" (1978, 114-15). In fact, a literal Millennium will be a fitting vindication of the martyred saints and a demonstration of Christ's rule over the earth. Even this temporal vindication, however, will be eclipsed by the greater uninterrupted glory of the New Jerusalem, following the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, described in Revelation 21 and 22, and coming down out of Heaven (2 Pet. 3:8).

With respect to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7 & Ps. 132), the Dispensationalist regards the promises of the physical temple and the earthly reign of David's physical progeny as the core of it (Pentecost 1953, 107-115; Showers 1985, 13-15). Edwards, on the other hand, stated, "If we consider that covenant with regard to its marrow and soul, it was the covenant of grace" (1879, 1:462), and he cited Isaiah 55:1-3 in support of this view (1879, 1:555). Edwards acknowledged that God's covenant with the physical nation of Israel remained "in some sense in force" on this side of the New Testament, but simply recognized that at the present time "they are not God's covenant people, in the sense that visible Christians are" (Edwards 1879, 1:463).

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