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Why I Am a Dispensationalist *Today*

by Glen Burch

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Please feel free to quote me; attribution would be a blessing.

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Dedication

To my friend, brother and first Bible teacher, Bill Millett, now fallen asleep in Christ, and awaiting our manifestation with Christ in the Glory (Col.3:1-4)

First Edition – Aug 2024

Also by the author:

- *Why I Am a Prophetic Futurist*
- *Why I Am a Trinitarian*
- *The Dispensational Basis of John's Gospel*
- *Abraham's Progress in the Covenants of God*
- *The Mystery of Godliness*
- *Notes on Titus*
- *Tithing and Other Gifts*

Prefatory Note:

Most of the text translations in the following work are my own, aided by the *BibleWorks* software application, which is itself based on the Masoretic Hebrew text and the American Bible Society Greek New Testament text. I have tended toward literal translations, because patterns and parallels of teaching often become clearer in the literal text. I have striven to be literal, except where the idiom is too obscure to make good English sense. As an example, where I have used “surely” in a text, it likely represents the figure *Polyptōton*, which does not translate well

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literally (see *Figures*, p.276). I have also relied heavily upon the lexicons of Brown-Driver-Briggs, Thayer, and Bullinger, and the vocabulary of Moulton & Milligan for insights on meaning and usage.

I find the use of exclamation points (!) in Bible studies mostly annoying, and have avoided their use myself. However, where God has spoken the word “**behold**” in His word, I have bolded and double-underlined it. These beholds mark words of divine emphasis about to be spoken.

Where I have supplied an elliptical word, or words, to make for smoother English, I have used *italic* font. I have also used *italic* font for Hebrew and Greek words cited, and I have transliterated them into Roman alphabet primarily using the spelling conventions of *Strong’s Concordance* (the Dictionaries at the back). This is a serious study – I think you will find it worth your while if you persevere with it.

Abbreviations Used and References Cited:

acc. – accusative case for Gk. nouns, pronouns and adjectives

adj. – adjective

BDB – Brown-Driver-Briggs – *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford University Press

Companion Bible – *KJV* with extensive notes and appendices by
E.W.Bullinger, Zondervan

cp. – compare

dat. – dative case for Gk. nouns, pronouns and adjectives

Dispensationalism Today – Charles C. Ryrie, Moody Press

fem. – feminine gender

Figures – *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, E.W.Bullinger, Baker

gen. – genitive case for Gk. nouns, pronouns and adjectives

Gk. – Greek

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GNT – *The Greek New Testament*, American Bible Society, 3rd Edition

hapax – Gk. “once”, i.e., a single, unique occurrence of a word or phrase
in the Heb. or Gk. (Gk. NT, unless *LXX* is specified)

Heb. – Hebrew

imper. – imperative mood

Lexicon – *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek
New Testament*, E.W.Bullinger, Bagster

lit. – literally

LXX – Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, as edited by
Alfred Rahlfs

masc. – masculine gender

Moulton & Milligan – *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*,
Eerdmans

n. – noun

neut. – neuter gender

nom. – nominative case for Gk. nouns, pronouns and adjectives

NT – New Testament

Number – *Number in Scripture*, E.W.Bullinger, Kregel

OT – Old Testament

part. – participle

plur. – plural

sing. – singular

Stars Also, The - E.W.Bullinger, Kregel

Strong’s Concordance – *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* –
James Strong, Thomas Nelson Publishers

Thayer – *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph Henry
Thayer, Zondervan

v. – verb

Webster – *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, G.&C. Merriam Co.

KJV, *NIV*, *NKJV* – common abbreviations of English Bible versions

Introduction

Introduction

The debate between covenant theology and dispensational theology is centuries old, and still it goes on. This has not been a particularly nuanced disagreement, but a contrast between divergent paradigms for how God has been dealing with mankind. What these diverse viewpoints have in common is an understanding that God's revelation has been progressive. No argument there. They also agree that God has established covenants from time to time. The really big issue is – Are we today under the governance of a divine covenant? Or is “the dispensation of the grace of God” (Eph.3:2) covenant-free, and purely of grace?

The goal of a Bible teacher should be to shed light on God's word, and it is my hope that I can shed such light. The title of this book already declares me to be a dispensationalist. Other dispensationalists, like Charles Ryrie (author of *Dispensationalism Today*), have outlined some of the divergences in these two points of view. I agree with much that Ryrie teaches. However, I will endeavor what I would call an “engineered” approach to the subject, starting with Scripture definitions as building blocks to build my didactic edifice upon. Ryrie devotes a whole chapter in his book to “Ultradispensationalism”, which the coiners of this term likely meant as a slur. In his treatment of the subject, Ryrie regards as ultradispensationalist some doctrinal elements of the Grace Gospel Foundation – i.e., those who teach the church of today began at Acts 13, rather than Acts 2. The present book will produce Scripture evidence for why Acts 13 dispensationalism is not “ultra” enough to adequately describe what beliefs and religious practices should apply today.

So, enabled by the understanding that God's word has been progressive, I will begin at the beginning, with Moses' account in the

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book of Genesis. I will explore the nature of the various divine covenants in some depth, because most of the OT and NT divine plan are based on covenantal truth. Although the word “dispensation” (Gk. *oikonomia*) is restricted to NT usage, I will explore its meaning and how its sense overlaps the various “seasons” of God dealing with his stewards in the OT.

By the way, please put the modern sense of “covenant” from your thinking in reviewing this study. A covenant today is typically an agreement to abide by certain conditions, and it may, or may not, qualify as a contract between parties. The covenants of Biblical times were usually not put in writing, but they had a moral force far surpassing the obligation to keep a contract in our times.

What Is a Covenant?

What Is a Covenant?

The word “covenant” in the OT is Heb *b_erîyth*, and it applies to both man-to-man and God-to-man covenants. *BDB* (p.136) derives it from an unused Heb. root *b-r-h*, meaning to “bind”, and gives it as equivalent to the English words “treaty”, “alliance”, “league” and “covenant”. If the Heb. root were found in OT usage, its perfect tense form would be *bârah*. And a homonym of *bârah* is *bâra’*, which can be seen as altering the final letter *hê* into an *aleph* (both silent). *Bâra’* is the principal Heb. word for “create” and I believe this similarity in pronunciation is no coincidence. The whole physical creation of heavens and earth has been “bound” under divine covenants of different kinds. Today, we refer to these as the physical laws governing the universe.

Heb. *b_erîyth* occurs 284 times in the OT, so there are plenty of covenant texts to shed light on the practice of covenanting. I found the number of occurrences to be enlightening also. $284 = 4 \times 71$. The number 4 is indicative of the creation, in particular the earth and earthly things (*Number*, p.123). Seventy is the number of the nations according to the Gen.10 listing, so seventy-one would represent Israel and the nations. Keep that combination in mind, because it represents a fundamental relationship through which God by Jesus Christ will rule the earth. But do not try to draw the heavenly sphere too deeply into this – for their part in the creation, the stars were given for signs to those who dwell upon earth –

“And Elohim said, ‘Let there become lights in *the* firmament of the heavens to divide between the day and the night. And let them become for signs and for seasons and for days and for years. And let them become for lights in *the* firmament of the heavens to shine upon the earth. And it became thus.’” Gen.1:14-15

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Note how the heavenly creation's purpose was given a four-fold expression, and its focus was toward what they provided to the earth. That earth-bound focus of blessing remained throughout the OT revelation, and it is fundamental to God's covenants.

While God was generally viewed as being "in heaven", His meeting with men occurred upon earth. And even at the dedication of His earthly meeting-place (First Temple), Solomon declared –

“But will indeed Elohim dwell upon the earth? **Behold**, the heavens and *the* heaven of the heavens do not hold You. How much less, then, this house which I built?” 1 Ki.8:27

Was there a covenant in effect in the creation of Genesis 1? None is mentioned in Gen.1:3-2:1, but much later God revealed that it was so –

“And the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, saying, ‘Thus said Yahweh – if you may break **My covenant of the day and My covenant of the night**, even for not the coming of day and night in their time, *then* also My covenant may be broken with David My servant, from him not to come a son reigning upon his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers.’” Jer.33:19-20

At that point in history, God had been sustaining a predictable day and night for about 3,500 years, so the covenant emphasis here was on –

- the durability of God's creation, and of His elections (David, Aaron)
- physical laws governing the material creation

Just as God will one day deliver new blessings in a “new heaven and new earth” (Rev.21:1), even these humanly unbreakable covenants will pass away when God has finished with them. Only God can legislate their end. The Son turning over the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor.15:24-27)

What Is a Covenant?

after the last enemy, death, has been subdued, will mark the end of the Davidic Covenant. Then similarly, the need for sacrificial ministers (Levites) will have been outlived in the earth, for death and sin will be vanquished.

The very first Biblical mention of covenants concerns Noah, and the context includes the whole earthly creation –

“But I will establish (Heb. *qûwm*) **My covenant** with you. And you will go into the ark, you and your sons, and your wife and *the* wives of your sons with you.” Gen.6:18

This covenant with Noah was a covenant of salvation, and God said He would “set”, or “establish” it with him. This is initially how God made covenants with men – He just declared them into existence, like the initial creation, without ceremony, unilaterally.

The next mention of a covenant was after the Flood waters had receded. In a sense, when Noah set foot upon the earth after a year in the ark, his salvation was completed. Noah’s next act was doubtless based upon instructions given to fallen Adam (see Gen.3:21; 4:4) –

“And Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and he took from every clean animal and from every clean bird, and he offered burnt offerings upon *the* altar. And Yahweh smelled *the* aroma of soothing. And Yahweh said in His heart, ‘I will not act again to **curse** again the ground on account of the man, for the imagination of *the* heart of the man *is* evil from his youth. Nor will I act again to destroy again every living thing, as what I have done. *For* yet all days, the earth – seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and winter and summer, and day and night will not cease (or ‘rest’).” Gen.8:20-22

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While there is no mention of “covenant” above, there is the divine promise neither to curse the ground, nor to destroy the living as He had done previously. Note how the earthly preservation is expressed in four duets. Moreover, the initial statement of this promise was from God speaking in His heart – i.e., He promised it first to Himself. This promise is expanded upon in Gen. 9:1-17, where God then spoke to Noah, and the word “covenant” is used 7 times. There, the covenant with Noah was said to be “established” (Heb. *qûwm*), “set” (Heb. *nâthan*), and “remembered” (Heb. *zâkar*). So far in the early centuries of man, everything in the divine covenants were unilateral, and without ceremony – unless one includes Noah’s burnt offering that Yahweh found “soothing”. I will have more to say about the Noahic Covenant later.

But I want to focus now on a parallel with the initial 6-day creation, followed by the 7th day of God’s “rest”, before the curse that befell Adam. This parallels Noah going forth to re-people the earth. Noah was a sort of 2nd Adam, taking charge of the earth under a literal covenant with Yahweh. There is a suggestion here that, earlier, from Yahweh’s providing animal sacrifices (for the ‘coats of skins’ to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness, i.e., sin) to His promise of Satan’s destruction by “the Seed” of the woman in Gen.3:15 (i.e., by Christ), there was a prototypical covenant with mankind. Although God pronounced curses upon Adam and Eve, the greater curse spoken against Satan was really a promise of blessing to mankind. Although the Flood was called a “curse” at Gen.8:21, the promise to Noah afterwards was a covenant of continuity and “rest” – certainly a blessing to mankind despite his inveterately evil heart. Although Noah had found salvation because of his righteousness before Yahweh (Gen.7:1), yet he too was prone to sin (e.g., his drunken state at Gen.9:21). The divine promises so far were acts of grace on God’s part, unmerited by men. At their heart they were blessings for a helpless mankind.

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The attributes of divine covenanting up to this point were –

- gracious promise
- salvation
- continuity – i.e., Yahweh’s remembrance, and the sign of the covenant (rainbow) so that man would remember it too

The 9th mention of “covenant” in Gen.14:13 concerns the manmade covenant that Abram made with certain Amorite neighbors. The number 9 rather marks it with the stigma of judgment, because 9 is the number of judgment in Scripture (*Number*, p.235). But the question here is ‘Was there an implied judgment upon Abram for going into “league” with Canaanites?’ Or was God implying that manmade covenants in general were untrustworthy, because of faithless men? What this human covenant required of men was that if any covenanter was attacked, the others were to go to war on his behalf. This covenant aspect is emulated in today’s NATO Treaty, with the important difference that the Treaty does not invoke God as witness (instead, it affirms faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations).

In mentioning the episode with Abram and his neighbors, I have skipped over a unilateral, divine promise previously made to him –

“And Yahweh said to Abram, ‘Go for you from your land and from your family and from *the* house of your father, to the land that I will show you. And I will fashion you into a great nation, and I will bless you and magnify your name. And become (imper.) you a blessing. And I will bless those blessing you, and one trifling you I will curse. And all the families of the ground will be blessed by you.’”

Gen.12:1-3

Abram obeyed Yahweh’s command and His blessings began to unfold upon him, as Abram later became a man rich in earthly goods. Note how

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this divine promise (not yet called “covenant”) had the earmarks of a one-way human league. Yahweh was binding Himself to fight Abram’s enemies, but not vice versa. Recall how an implied attribute of the OT divine covenants was their application both to Israel (seen as seed of Abram, a “great nation”) and to the nations (“all the families of the ground”). This relationship based upon a unilateral promise was later expanded into the Abrahamic Covenant –

“After these things came *the* word of Yahweh to Abram in a vision, to say, ‘Fear not Abram. I am a shield to you, your exceedingly great reward.’ But Abram said, ‘Adonai Yahweh, what will You give to me? And I go childless, and *the* son of *the* heir of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.’ And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have not given to me seed. And behold, a son of my house *is* dispossessing me.’ And **behold**, *the* word of Yahweh *came* to him to say, ‘This one will not dispossess you, but rather one who will come out from your own body, he will inherit from you.’ And He brought him *to* the outside and He said, ‘Look, I pray, *to* the heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘Thus will your seed become.’ And he comes to believe in Yahweh, and He esteemed it to him for righteousness. And He said to him, ‘I *am* Yahweh Who brought you out from Ur of *the* Chaldeans to give to you this very land to inherit it.’ And he said, ‘Adonai Yahweh, by what *means* will I know that I will inherit it?’ And He said to him, ‘Bring to Me a heifer being threefold (in years) and a female goat being threefold (in years), and a ram being threefold (in years), and a dove and a nestling.’ And he brought all these to Him, and he cut them in two (Heb. *bâthar*) in the middle. And he placed each piece opposite the companion, but the birds he did not cut in two. And the vultures came down upon the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. Then came the sun to go down, and a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And **behold**, a terror of great

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darkness fell upon him. And He said to Abram, ‘Surely you know that your seed will become strangers in a land not theirs. And they will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. Moreover, the nation they serve, I will judge. And, therefore, they will come out with great possessions. And you, yes, you will go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried at a good age. But *by the* fourth generation they will return here, for *the* iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete here.’ And it happened the sun went down, and it became dark, and **behold**, a smoking furnace and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. In that day Yahweh cut (Heb. *kârath*) with Abram a **covenant**, to say, ‘To your seed I have given this land, from *the* stream of Egypt up to the great river, River Euphrates – the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim, and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgasite and the Jebusite.’” Gen.15:1-19

This progression from a promise to a covenant here includes these additional attributes –

- blessings and curses
- the covenant’s purpose: to assure, to solemnize the promise
- Yahweh, as Abram’s (Israel’s) “shield” in battle
- sacrificial animals – Abram in the part of the priest
- a numerous posterity
- a long life
- peace
- inheritance of a land not yet in his possession
- the dispossession of nations currently possessing the land
- riches for the nation coming out of Abram
- a horror of darkness concerning a 400-year slavery of that nation

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- Abram receiving the divine counsels in a vision, becoming a prophet, with futuristic prophecy revealed to him

It also includes a formal covenant ceremony that showed how covenants were formalized in that day. It included Abram separating the pieces of a sacrificial offering, and Yahweh alone passing between the pieces, as the lone guarantor of the covenant. Additionally, Abram's example of belief would become the quintessential model of righteousness being reckoned on a faith basis. The boundaries of Abram's inheritance included a river and a stream, which marked the northeast and southwest boundaries. The remaining boundaries must have included the Mediterranean shore, in part, but were further defined by the lands possessed by the Canaanite nations.

On 77 occasions in the OT, a covenant is said to be "cut" (Heb. *kârath*), indicating the separation of the sacrificial pieces. That number 77 is interesting in that its factors are 7×11 . Seven is the number of completeness and fulfillment in Scripture, as the Heb. word to "swear" is literally to "seven". Bullinger identified the number eleven as signifying "disorder, disorganization, imperfection, and disintegration" (*Number*, p.251). While I agree with his definitions concerning *some* numerations of 11 in Scripture, I believe there may also be a more positive side to number 11 – "the glass half-full", as it were. Eleven is the number of the Twelve Apostles with Judas removed. It may have left the full government of the Twelve deficient, but temporarily it also left them purged of a traitor. Perhaps "awaiting completion, or fulfillment" is another way of looking at Biblical things marked by the number 11, i.e., a positive side. Eleven is also a factor in the number of years Jesus ministered on earth (33), before sitting at the Father's right. He certainly completed something in those 33 years, but His work is not yet

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altogether completed. He still has a kingdom to take charge of – the Millennium and beyond.

And consider these references to God in the Babel prophecy of Jeremiah chapters 50-51 –

Mentions of God:

- Yahweh (58)
- Adonai, Yahweh of armies (3)
- Elohim (5)
- Elohim of Israel (2)
- El (1)
- the King, Yahweh of armies (1)
- Yahweh, Holy One of Israel (2)
- their Redeemer (1)
- Portion of Jacob (1)
- Staff of their inheritance (1)
- Abode of justice (1)
- Hope of their fathers (1)

Total 77, or 7 x 11

Here God Himself is marked by the number 11 in a great declaration concerning Babel and Israel. Does that indicate that God is somehow “disorganized”? I believe a better view would be that God’s work concerning both Babel and Israel are “incomplete” so far.

Another aspect of covenanting is revealed in the following manmade covenant –

“And Abraham brought sheep and oxen, and he gave them to Abimelech. And the two of them cut a covenant. ... Accordingly,

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thus, he called that place Beersheba (‘well of *the* oath’), because there swore (lit. ‘sevens’) the two of them.” Gen.21:27, 31

We will see in other texts that the words “covenant” and “oath” (or “swearing”) are used interchangeably. A covenant was no mere contract or treaty, because the solemnity of an –

- oath

calling on God as witness, made the agreement much more binding than a mere promise. This also highlights why breaking the 3rd commandment was such a serious offense –

“You will not lift up *the* name of Yahweh your Elohim for vanity, for Yahweh will not acquit one who lifts up His name for vanity.”

Exo.20:7

In effect, invoking “as Yahweh lives” in swearing to a covenant was bringing in God as both a witness and a guarantor of the manmade covenant. Thus a covenant also has the feature of –

- divine sanctions against the covenant-breaker

And another manmade covenant between Isaac and a later Abimelech is also instructive –

“But they said, ‘Surely we have seen that Yahweh has come with you, so we said, let there come now an oath in the midst of us, between us and you, and let us cut a covenant with you that you will do us *no* harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done with you only good and have sent you away in peace. You are now blessed of Yahweh.’ So he made to them a feast and they ate and drank. And they arose early in *the* morning, and they swore one to another.”

Gen.26:27- 31

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Although the feasting together preceded the oath here, one could infer that they feasted upon the covenant sacrifice. Also, it was rather implied in Eastern hospitality that a man sharing a meal with another was an assurance of peace between them. Later, Jacob and Laban did similarly –

“And now, come. Let us **cut a covenant**, I and you. And let it become for a witness between me and you.’ And Jacob took a stone and he set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his relatives, ‘Gather stones.’ And they took stones and they made a heap, and they ate there upon the heap. And Laban called it Jegar-Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed (‘heap of witness’). And Laban said, ‘This heap *is* witness between me and you today.’ Therefore its name was called Galeed. Also the Mizpah (‘watch-tower’), because he said, ‘May Yahweh watch between me and you, that when we are absent one from another, if you afflict my daughters, or if you take *other* wives besides my daughters, no one *is* with us. God sees *as* witness between me and you.’ And Laban said to Jacob, ‘Behold, this heap, and behold the pillar which I put between me and you. A witness *is* this heap, and a witness *is* the pillar, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me for harm. God of Abraham and God of Nahor, may He judge between us, the God of their father.’ And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. And Jacob sacrificed a sacrifice upon the mount, and he called his relatives to eat bread, and they ate bread and they passed the night *upon the* mount.” Gen.31:44-54

So add these covenantal features –

- a legally binding witness
- meal-sharing at a common feast
- peace between conflicting parties

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- symbolic witnesses chosen (witnessing during the absence of the covenanters) – ultimately, God as witness
- a boundary of separation set between conflicting parties

I would note here that the sacrificial aspect of covenants had an implied meal-sharing with Yahweh, because He referred to the sacrificial altar as His “table” (Eze.41:22; 44:16; Mal.1:7-8, 12-13).

Even as Abram’s vision had Yahweh (as ‘a burning torch’) passing between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice (Gen.15:17), so it was with human covenants –

“And I will give the men transgressing **My covenant** (enacted at v.12), who have not established *the* words of the covenant which they cut before Me, the calf which they cut in two and they passed between its parts, princes of Judah and princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs and the priests and all *the* people of the land, passing between the parts of the calf, and I will give them into *the* hand of their enemies and into *the* hand of those seeking their life. And their corpse will become for meat for *the* bird of the heavens and for *the* beast of the earth.”

Jer.34:18-20

It is not difficult to discern that the ceremonial passing between the sacrificial halves had an implied, “May God so do to me, if I should break this covenant.” Because the oath of the covenant was sworn to God, God was being called upon as “witness” to the things agreed to in the covenant – He was a Third Party, Who was called upon to “enforce” these manmade covenants.

Some years after Yahweh had made the covenant with Abram, He reappeared to him to strengthen him in the covenant –

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“And Abram became ninety and nine years old. Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I *am* El Shaddai (i.e., ‘God Bountiful’). Walk before Me and become sound (Heb. *tâmîym*, used of perfect animals for sacrifice – thus Noah had been found “perfect in his generations” – Gen.6:9, and untainted by the Nephilim in his lineage). And I will establish **My covenant** between Me and you, and I will multiply you in muchness muchly.’ Then Abram fell upon his face, and Elohim talked with him, saying, ‘*As for* Me, behold, **My covenant** *is* with you, and you will become a father of many nations. And your name will not be called any longer Abram, but your name will become Abraham, for a father of a multitude of nations I have appointed you. And I will make you fruitful in muchness muchly. And I will appoint you for nations, and kings will come out from you. And I will stand up **My covenant** between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations, for a covenant of an age, to become to you for Elohim and to your seed after you. And I shall give to you and your seed after you a land of sojourning, all the land of Canaan for a possession of an age. And I will become to them for Elohim.”

Gen.17:1-8

In this first part of the message, God strengthened His covenant, not just promising posterity to a childless man, but –

- nationhood and multiple nations for his posterity
- a new name given
- a continuous land inheritance
- covenant renewals were to become the norm

Abraham’s new name signified a new beginning, a new birth, because at birth is when names are given. So this covenant included a symbolic –

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- giving of new life

But further, He was promising to become -

- his and his nation's personal God
- more active in the affairs of His covenant people

And the text continues –

“And Elohim said to Abraham, ‘*As for* you, you will keep **My covenant**, you and your seed after you to *all* their generations. This is **My covenant** which you will keep between Me and you and your seed after you, every male child to be circumcised for you. And you will be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins. And it will become for a sign of *the covenant* between Me and you.’” Gen.17:8-11

So an additional feature of this covenant was its sign, something with a significance meant for these selected covenanters –

- the sign of circumcision

The meaning of this sign was an elimination, or even degradation of flesh, and it was a sign meant to be borne in the flesh of every male descended from Abraham. It was both a mutilation of their flesh, but also their mark of distinction. And like the sign of God's covenant with Noah (the rainbow – Gen.9:12-16), it was meant as a *reminder* of the covenant. In the case of Abraham, the sign of circumcision also became a great unifying symbol for his seed. In addition to the sign, Abraham was instructed to –

- keep the covenant, so circumcision was a commandment as well as a sign
- thus the covenant progressed to a collateral agreement at this stage

What Is a Covenant?

Another aspect of some divine covenants was the marriage aspect –

“**Behold**, days are coming – an utterance of Yahweh – and I will cut with *the* house of Israel and with *the* house of Judah a **new covenant**. Not like *the* **covenant** that I cut with their fathers in *the* day of My taking them by the hand to bring them from *the* land of Egypt, when they broke **My covenant**, and I was a husband to them – an utterance of Yahweh.” Jer.31:31-32

In this statement there is an implied marriage between Yahweh and the Nation under the new covenant, just as there had been under the old. This mirrors the human covenant that had existed between a husband and wife since the beginning –

“the one leaving the companion of her youth, and she forgot *the* **covenant** of her Elohim.” Pro.2:17

“And you say, ‘Upon what *basis*?’ Because that Yahweh has testified between you and *the* wife of your youth, whom you have betrayed against her. But she is your companion and wife of your covenant.”

Mal.2:14

Thus the unity that Adam first saw in his marriage to Eve (Gen.2:23-24) was meant to bind all husbands and wives. So Yahweh also viewed this –

- unity of partners

as an attribute of His covenant relationship with Israel.

Thus far covenants were made between husband and wife, military allies, conflicting parties, God with men of His choosing, and God with the creation. And summarizing, these are elements found with various of the covenants –

- gracious promise

What Is a Covenant?

- salvation
- continuity and remembrance
- blessings and curses
- the covenant's purpose: to assure, to solemnize the promise
- Yahweh, as a shield in battle
- sacrificial animals – man in the part of the priest
- a numerous posterity
- a long life
- peace
- inheritance of a land not yet in possession
- the dispossession of nations currently possessing the land
- riches for the nation coming out of Abram
- divine counsels in a vision, futuristic prophecy
- oath
- divine sanctions against the covenant-breaker
- meal-sharing at a common feast
- peace between conflicting parties, even a boundary of separation set between the covenanters
- symbolic witnesses chosen (witnessing during the absence of the covenanters) – God as the ultimate legal witness
- nationhood
- a new name given, signifying new life
- a continuous land inheritance
- a personal God belonging to the covenanter
- His personal activity in the affairs of His covenant people
- the sign, also seen as a seal
- commandments to be kept
- unity of partners

What Is a Covenant?

In the next chapters I will delve more deeply into the individual covenants.

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The creation

We looked previously at Jer.33:19-20 and what Yahweh called “**My covenant** of the day and **My covenant** of the night”. This rather makes God’s physical laws of the creation, which provide stability and life to men, a great overarching covenant that God has made unilaterally with all living things. This covenant included the stars as “signs” (Gen.1:14). Those “signs” have continued up to the present, albeit their significance was meant to point the way to Christ’s coming (see *The Stars Also*). And note that this significance was put there even before Adam’s fall. Sin had pre-existed the six-day creation event, because Satan and his crowd were already doing their evil work when Adam was created. God’s foreknowledge of Adam’s fall was evident in placing these star-signs before Adam’s creation. This foreknowledge teaches us that God’s “plan of the ages” has been perfect since the beginning, and is not an ad hoc plan that must be reinvented whenever His creatures go astray.

The advent of new heavens and new earth at the beginning of the Millennium (2 Pet.3:10-13) and afterwards (Rev.21:1) will usher in changes to some of the specifics of the creation covenant. There are some indications of changes to the creation covenant that occurred after the Flood too. The rainbow being new to man’s experience shows there were atmospheric changes in the new world that Noah populated. Walt Brown, in his book *In the Beginning*, gives scientific arguments for the earth having had a year of 360 days pre-Flood. That is, the earth is spinning on its axis slightly faster now, due to cataclysmic changes that have gone right to earth’s core. But whatever the specific regime that governs life on earth, the covenant effects have lasted, or will last, for an age or ages. For the living creatures in every age, life is fairly predictable. And today,

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even some deadly phenomena, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, are somewhat predictable. Knowing that we have to live with them, men have devised counter-measures and warning systems to deal with them too. It is likely that such disasters did not affect the pre-Flood age. I suspect they will be eliminated from “new heavens and new earth” also.

So I would “age” the divine covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 33 from the Flood up to the advent of the Millennium. That has been one long age so far. Some may disagree with “age” as a proper translation of Heb. *ʾôwlâm* and Gk. *aiōn*, but research these for yourself in the Heb. and Gk. concordances. You may be surprised to find how often these words are applied to a man’s lifetime, or simply the remainder of his adult life – that is, the part he has no clear insight into (see Thayer, p.19, 2nd line, “a human lifetime”).

The Fall

Let us look at some things that befell Adam after his sin and expulsion from Eden. Previous to this he had one commandment: eat not from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Implied in this commandment was an overarching commandment: obey God your Creator and Benefactor. But in order to obey Him, one must also believe Him.

After Adam’s disobedience, his nakedness (i.e., sin) was covered by animal skins sacrificed by Yahweh. Was this possibly a covenant sacrifice? Adam was expelled from a land of ease and fell under the curse of having to labor to stay alive. However, as I pointed out above, the promise of “the Seed” of the woman and the destruction of Satan, was a great blessing to mankind – a deferred blessing for him and all the generations following Adam. Apparently, a commandment to make blood sacrifices of animals was given to Adam. Else, why was Abel’s sacrifice accepted and Cain’s rejected (Gen.4:3-7)? The initial permission

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for man to eat the “herb bearing seed” (Gen.1:29) continued after the Fall (3:18). Implied in this allowance was a prohibition against eating animals. I would catalog this as a commandment – similar to the prohibition not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Cain’s murder of Abel was certainly a great sin (Gen.4:10-12), but God putting His mark on Cain to spare him being killed in revenge (Gen.4:15) implied a commandment of “thou shalt not kill” (not even to kill murderers). That the earth eventually became “filled with violence” (Gen.6:13) shows that this commandment was forgotten by men of later generations. So there were promises of blessings, curses, signs, commandments, and sacrifices of acceptance during the pre-Flood age. But it is difficult to say for sure whether these matters constituted a divine covenant with mankind. They have a semblance of a covenant.

The Flood – Covenant with Noah

God’s relationship with Noah was definitely called a “covenant”. There was the initial pronouncement of a curse against all the living, but salvation for Noah’s extended family and the animals he brought under his protection in the Ark.

After Noah’s salvation was complete, he built an altar and made sacrifices, in continuation of what God had instructed Adam. But in Gen.8:20 we learn that even here there was a distinction between clean and unclean animals. Only the clean could be offered as an acceptable sacrifice – I suspect this was already ancient doctrine, dating back to Adam’s time. After Noah’s sacrifice, God promised not to strike again every living thing of the earth, as He had just done.

At Gen.9:3 God uttered further blessing, giving man all the animals for his food, in addition to “the green herb”. The one prohibition was to

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drain the meat of its blood – no blood was to be consumed. And another commandment was added also –

“One pouring out blood of man, by man his blood will be poured out”
Gen.9:6

Further, the blood of a man was deemed so precious, that God extended this requital even to the dumb beasts (Gen.9:5). The new age was to be governed by a law of capital punishment – the “mark of Cain” no longer applied to manslayers.

This covenant was also God’s unilateral blessing to the earth – to spare it a future global flood (Gen.9:11). Another creation covenant change was to put the fear of man into the animals (Gen.9:2) – they were delivered into the hand of man, but they would become food to him only with an effort. What’s more, if a man were to falsely believe another great flood was imminent, he would be prevented from gathering the animals again so readily as Noah did.

The rainbow was given as a sign of covenant-remembrance to both mankind and to every living thing (Gen.9:12-17). The rainbow shows another of earth’s changes – instead of being watered by a mist rising from the earth (Gen.2:5-6), rains would be sent from the clouds of heaven. Another such change was the progressive reduction of man’s lifespan, apparent in the chapters which followed Genesis 9.

Noah was sent out to repopulate the earth, as a sort of second Adam. But the earth had changed, and some of the divine commandments to man had changed. Although man was given a part to play in this new earth, it is difficult to avoid concluding that this was another unilateral covenant. I cannot find any quid-pro-quo provisions in it, except that if you commit murder your life is forfeit. Also, it was a completely oral covenant – not recorded in a book until Moses wrote Genesis (approx.

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850 years after the Flood). Given the horrific consequences to the earth during the Flood, God was relying on man's recollection of these to also reflect on its aftermath (covenant with Noah) and the utility of its "sign" (the rainbow). The time of this oral tradition from Noah to Moses would be comparable to the Magna Carta being passed down by word of mouth to the present day and beyond. But there are other written Flood traditions, like the Babylonian Gilgamesh, which is largely mythological. So Moses' historic account may have been meant to correct the record, that an idolatrous mankind was already falsifying.

Covenant with Abram

I have already remarked at some length, with lengthy quotes from Genesis 15 and Genesis 17, on the characteristics of this covenant, so I will not repeat all that here.

I will repeat that this began as a promise to Abram, which later became solemnified by a unilateral covenant. One could argue that had Abram disobeyed the command to leave Ur (Gen.12:1), there would have been no fulfillment of the promise and no covenant. And Abram did fail to separate himself from his father's household (Gen.11:31). It took the death of his father, and the discord with Lot over grazing rights, to get complete fulfillment of this command. I believe this was Yahweh's doing, His enablement, even as He claimed to have brought Abram out from Ur (Gen.15:7). So Abram cooperated with that enablement, but it took some years to get him fully disentangled from his family ties.

The covenant with Abram was the most formal covenant that God had established so far with man. It had the dividing of the covenant sacrifices, with Abram playing the priestly role, in part. Abram was given a new name, Abraham, as both a commentary on the divine promise of many nations coming from him, and also noting the relevance of his new birth.

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The sign of this covenant, circumcision, was a mutilation of the flesh of all males descended from Abraham – a sign to point to more spiritual longings, like Abraham’s looking for “the city having the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God” (Heb.11:10). So even at this early stage in His relationship with “a people for a possession” (1 Pet.2:9), God was pointing the way to His New Covenant, i.e., a covenant of putting off the old man, and putting on the new.

But the sign of circumcision was also a command to circumcise, so here was also an element of cooperation with man, taken aside as a partner of God. Failure to obey the command would result in being cut off from the people – either disinheritance, or in more egregious cases death. Fulfillment of the covenant promise would require the power of God alone. Any man’s participation in the blessing would require his obedience to the divine commands. And God had foreknowledge of all men’s obediences, such as this foreknowledge concerning Abraham –

“For I have known him, for which sake he will command his sons and his house after him, and they will keep *the* way of Yahweh for doing righteousness (Heb. *ts,dâqâh*) and justice (*mishpât*), for the sake of Yahweh bringing to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” Gen.18:19

Prior to this there was little explanation in Scripture as to what constituted “righteous” behavior and “justice” in human society. The breaking of oaths (covenants) was an implied breach of righteousness, and Abraham’s faith was declared to be his righteousness (Gen.15:6). Noah was pronounced “righteous” also (Gen.6:9; 7:1), and what distinguished him from his generation of men was their violence (Gen.6:11-13), and his keeping his blood-line pure (Gen.6:9). While Yahweh declared Abraham would teach his children righteousness and justice, He sent fiery judgment upon the very grievous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.18:20). Abraham likely knew the reputation of these

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cities as he dickered for the salvation of “the righteous” in those cities. Only later is a window opened to see their utter depravity (Gen.19:5-7). Previously, God had commanded Noah to punish murder with capital punishment, so we get an inkling here what violence the pre-Flood earth had been filled with – widespread war and murder.

Also, Gen.18:19 contains the first occurrence of “justice” (Heb. *mishpât*) in the Bible. This “justice” was to become a very prominent word under the Covenant of Law, but it was rarely used in Genesis (3 occs.). My point in these loose definitions of “righteousness and justice” in the early covenants is that there was already an oral tradition stretching back to Adam that illuminated men’s consciences. Just look at Pharaoh’s reaction to the sin of adultery that he might have committed (Gen.12:17-19), and Abimelech’s (Gen.20:2-6) – also Abimelech’s capital judgment against anyone committing adultery with Isaac’s wife (Gen.26:6-11). “Thou shalt not kill”, and “thou shalt not commit adultery” were understood as righteous behavior from the very beginning. In fact, I would venture to say that marriage was always understood as a covenant between husband and wife going back to Adam and Eve. Therefore, God expected a bedrock standard of righteousness in all those He covenanted with. Then other commandments, such as circumcision, were added later.

Unique to the Abrahamic Covenant was the test God put him to – the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen.22) – because God’s relationship with special people includes testing what is in their hearts. Righteous commandments may come easy, even becoming a wooden ritual for some, but the testings are not so easy to endure.

Although God repeated His covenant promises to Isaac, they are not called covenant there (Gen.26:2-5, 24). Note that the reason for this promise to Isaac was –

“Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My statutes, My commandments and My laws.” Gen.26:5

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This rather reinforces what was previously implied – that God had already revealed to men a body of laws whereby they should serve Him.

Isaac's blessing of Jacob repeated Yahweh's blessing of Abram (Gen.27:29; 28:3-4). Afterward, Yahweh repeated the blessing Himself (Gen.28:13-15). Although no covenant was mentioned, the implication is that the Abrahamic covenant passed to Isaac, then to Jacob. Jacob's vow to give a tenth of his wealth to Yahweh (Gen.28:20-22) rather implies that the practice of tithing was also practiced from ancient times (and see Gen.14:18-20).

The blessing of Jacob by the unnamed Wrestler has an element of covenant associated with it, because of the new name given to Jacob, which was Israel (Gen.32:24-30). Then Jacob, answering the call to go up to Bethel and build an altar, commanded his sons thus –

“And Jacob said to his house and to all who *were* with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you. And purify yourselves and change your garments.’” Gen.35:2

Idolatry was a sin preceding Abram's call, and even Rachel had an inclination towards it (Gen.31:19). Purifying oneself, and changing garments anticipated Mosaic Law, but they were already practiced before that law. The blessing of Abraham and Isaac was repeated to Jacob at Bethel (Gen.35:11-12). Although there was no mention of “covenant”, this was rather a covenant renewal to the next generation. Each new covenant generation needed to be brought into conviction concerning the inherited covenants. What seemed good to their fathers needed to be “brought home” to the sons.

Mosaic Covenant - the Law

At the beginning of Exodus God referred back to His covenant with Abraham (Exo.2:24; 6:4,5), but then chapter 19 introduces a new covenant with the People at the foot of Sinai –

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“But now, if surely you will hear My voice and keep **My covenant**, then you will become to Me a possession out from all the peoples, for the whole earth is Mine. And you will become to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These *are* the words which you will speak to *the* sons of Israel. Then Moses came and called for *the* elders of the people and laid before them all these words, which Yahweh commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, ‘All that Yahweh has spoken we shall do.’ And Moses brought back *the* words of the people to Yahweh. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘**Behold**, I *am* coming to you in *the* darkness of the cloud so that the people may hear by My speaking, and moreover they may trust in you for *the* age.’ So Moses declared *the* words of the people to Yahweh. Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes.’” Exo.19:5-10

Here the covenant conditions were changed from Abram’s covenant experience –

- this covenant was bilateral from the start
- it depended upon keeping Yahweh’s words
- it required a human mediator (Moses)
- it would make of the Nation a kingdom of priests, implying they would serve “all the peoples”
- it would make the Nation Yahweh’s “possession out from all the peoples” – i.e. a privileged nation above the other peoples

And like Jacob’s sacrifice at Bethel, it included the covenanters’ being consecrated (i.e., abstinence from the marital bed, per Exo.19:15) and having on freshly washed clothes.

There followed Moses’ ascent of Sinai to receive “all the words” that Yahweh spoke to him. This included much more than the first ten commandments, but three full chapters of commandments. Upon his return, Moses consecrated what he had written, “the book of the

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covenant”, with sacrificial blood (Exo.24:3-8), and the people again affirmed, “all the words which Yahweh spoke, we shall do”. Many more commandments were added later concerning sacrifices, feasts and purification. What may not be apparent to a casual reader is that this covenant applied collectively and nationally. Thus, when ten of the twelve emissaries sent to spy out the land of Canaan, objected to invading that nation, the People rebelled (Num.14:1-4). Yahweh punished Israel nationally with forty years of wandering in the wilderness – afterward, only Caleb and Joshua from their generation were permitted an inheritance in Canaan.

Exodus 19, already cited, showed how God wished to make a “holy nation” out of this people. Punishment for breaking this Covenant of Law was often threatened or inflicted nationally. Here are some examples –

“And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and **behold**, it is a people of stiff neck. But now, give me peace and My wrath will burn hot on them, and I will consume them, and I will make you for a great nation.’” Exo.32:9-10 (after the golden calf worship)

“But if you will not listen to Me, and will not do all these commandments, and if you reject My statutes, and if your soul loathes My judgments, not to do all My commandments **for you to break My covenant** – indeed, I will do this to you. I will even commit over you a sudden terror: the wasting disease and the eye-consuming fever and a soul pining away. And you will sow your seed to vanity and your enemies will eat *it*. And I will set My face against you, and you will be smitten before your enemies. And those hating you will rule over you, and you will flee even *when none is* pursuing you. And if even up to these you will not listen to Me, then I will add to chasten you seven times on account of your sins. And I will break your pride of strength, and I will set your heavens as iron and your earth as bronze. And your strength will be spent for vanity, and your land will not give its

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produce, nor the tree of the land give its fruit. Then if you walk contrary with Me, and are not willing to listen to Me, then I will add to you seven blows according to your sins. And I will send among you the wild beast, and it will make you childless, and it will cut off your cattle, and it will make you *so* few, that your roads will be deserted. But if by these things you are not chastened to Me, but walk contrary with Me, then I will walk – even I Myself – with you in contrariness. And I will smite you – even I Myself – seven times according to your sins. And I will bring upon you a sword, **avenging a covenant-vengeance**. And *as* you are gathered into your cities, then I will send out pestilence in your midst and you will be delivered into *the* hand of *the* enemy. When I have broken for you *the* staff of bread, then ten women will bake your bread in one oven and they will return your bread by weight. Then you will eat and not be satisfied. But if by this you will not listen to Me, but walk with Me in contrariness, then I will walk with you in a rage of contrariness, and I will chasten you – even I Myself – seven times according to your sins. And you will eat *the* flesh of your sons, and flesh of your daughters you will eat. And I will annihilate your high places and cut off your pillars, and I will appoint your corpses upon *the* corpses of your idols and My soul will loathe you. And I will appoint your cities a ruin and devastate your holy places, and I will not smell your soothing odors. But I Myself will devastate the land, then your enemies that dwell in it will be appalled over it. And **I will scatter you among nations** and draw out a sword after you, and **your land will become a waste and your cities will become a ruin**. Then the land will be pleased with its sabbaths, all *the* days of its being devastated. When you *are* in *the* land of your enemies, then the land will rest and be pleased with its sabbaths. All *the* days of its being devastated it will rest – *for* when it rested not on your sabbaths, when you dwelt upon it. And *for* those who are left

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among you, I will even bring in weakness in their heart in their enemies' lands. And *the* sound of a driven leaf will pursue them, and they will flee a flight *as* of a sword. And they will fall when none *is* pursuing. And they will stumble each one upon his brother, as from before a sword when none *is* pursuing, and it will not come to pass for power to stand before your enemies. Then **you will perish among *the* nations, and the land of your enemies will consume you.** And those who are left over among you will rot away in their guilt in your enemies' lands. And even in *the* guilt of their fathers with them, they will rot away. But *if* they confess their guilt and their father's guilt in their unfaithfulness which they were unfaithful against Me, even which they walked with Me in contrariness, also I Myself walked with them in contrariness and brought them into *the* land of their enemies, if perchance then their uncircumcised heart is humbled, and then they accept their guilt, **then I will remember My covenant *with Abraham*** and I will remember the land. But the land will be forsaken from them and will be pleased with its sabbaths in its being devastated from them. But *if* they accept their guilt because, even because they rejected My judgments and their soul loathed My statutes, then even also this: in their coming into *the* land of their enemies **I will neither reject them nor loathe them to finish them off, to break My covenant with them,** for I *am* Yahweh their Elohim. But I will remember for them *the* **covenant of *the* first ones,** whom I brought out from *the* land of Egypt **in sight of *the* nations** to become to them for Elohim. I *am* Yahweh. These *are* the statutes and the judgments and the laws which Yahweh appointed between Himself and *the* sons of Israel on Mount Sinai by *the* hand of Moses." Lev.26:14-46

In this lengthy passage note how often devastations of the land and the people are mentioned. And Yahweh addressed them plurally – “you” and

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“your” pl. (82 occs.), and “they”, “them”, “their” (40 occs.). And a similar lengthy set of curses against the rebellious nation was given at Deu.28:15-68. Devastations like these did befall the nation, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and carried off the Southern kingdom, Judah. And note above that upon their repentance, God would remember His “covenant *with* Abraham”, showing that the covenant of Moses was built atop the earlier covenant. Under the Mosaic Covenant, God was seeking –

- a circumcised heart in addition to the fleshly circumcision of the Abrahamic Covenant

The basic promise of the Mosaic Covenant was –

- the Land for their nation
- growing population
- health
- riches
- the favor of Yahweh
- headship over the nations
- priestly service to the nations

But if they were disobedient, then the curses –

- conquest and dispersion by the nations
- depopulation
- constant fear
- sickness and death
- famine and poverty

Then there were all the do’s and don’t’s of the Law, that were in addition to the “righteousness and justice” that Abraham was expected to keep. Thus, the Mosaic Covenant is again seen to be layered upon the Abrahamic.

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Then, in addition to the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision, Yahweh gave to Moses these additional signs –

“Seven days you will eat unleavened bread, and on day seven *will be* a feast to Yahweh. **Unleavened bread** will be eaten seven days, and no leavened bread will be seen among you, nor will be seen among you leaven in all your borders. And you will declare to your son in that day, saying, ‘Because Yahweh did this for me in my coming from Egypt. And it will become for you a **sign upon your hand**, and for a reminder between your eyes, so that *the* law of Yahweh may come to be in your mouth. For by a mighty hand Yahweh brought you out of Egypt. Then you will keep **this ordinance** for its season from years of its years.’” Exo.13:6-10

Note how this sign of unleavened bread was also an ordinance, ending in a feast. And many of the feasts were declared to be sabbaths (Day of Atonements – Lev.16:29-31; Trumpets – Lev.23:24-25; Tabernacles – Lev.23:33-42), and other events (the Land at rest – Lev.25:2-4; Jubile – Lev.25:8-9). But concerning sabbaths as signs –

“Then you speak to *the* sons of Israel, saying, ‘Surely, **My sabbaths you will keep**, for it *is* a **sign** between Me and you for your generations, to know that I *am* Yahweh making you holy. Then you will **keep the sabbath**, for it is holy to you. And one profaning it will surely be killed, for everyone performing work in it, that person (‘soul’) will be cut off from *the* midst of his people. Six days work will be done, but on *the* seventh day is a sabbath of rest, holy to Yahweh. Everyone who *is* doing work on the sabbath day, surely he will be killed. Then *the* sons of Israel will keep the sabbath to accomplish the sabbath for their generations, as a **covenant of an age**. Between Me and *the* sons of Israel it *is* a **sign**, for *in* six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day He rested and refreshed Himself.’” Exo.31:13-17

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The significance of this sign had two meanings. The first was to signify Israel as a holy people to a holy God (“You will be holy, because I am holy” – 1 Pet.1:16). And the second was a reminder of the pause that God took after re-creating heavens and earth – thus it was a reminder to men of their need for a rest-day also. This ordinance was very strict, bringing a capital judgment upon the law-breaker. And note how the sabbath-sign itself was labelled “a covenant of an age”. Thus, even pieces and parts of the Law are seen as covenants in themselves – the parts reflected the whole.

“And this is the commandment – the statutes and the judgments, which Yahweh your Elohim commanded to teach you to accomplish *them in the* land which you are crossing over to seize, so that you will fear Yahweh your Elohim, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I *am* commanding you and your son and your grandson all the days of your life, so that your days will be prolonged. Then Israel will hear. Then he will keep to observe it, that you will become numerous greatly, as what Yahweh God of your fathers spoke to you – a land gushing milk and honey. Hear Israel – Yahweh our Elohim *is* one Yahweh. And **you will love Yahweh your Elohim with your whole heart, and with your whole person, and with your whole strength - these words which I am commanding you today upon your heart.** And you will teach them sharply to your sons, and you will speak with them in your sitting in your house, and in your walking in the way, and in your lying down, and in your arising. And you will bind them for a **sign upon your hand**, and they will become for phylacteries between your eyes. And you will write them upon *the* doorposts of your house and in your gates.” Deu.6:1-9

These words about loving Yahweh altogether from the heart were to become a **sign** upon hand and head, doorpost and gate. Above all, Yahweh sought heart-service from His people. Serving from the heart was not something newly introduced by Jesus, but what He taught must

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have *seemed* new because of all the rote servants in His day, who made themselves out to be the pillars of the Law. And even non-Jews might satisfy this heart-law.

“And the circumcision from nature will judge you, the one accomplishing the law, who through letter and circumcision *are* a transgressor of law. For one on the outside is not a Jew, neither the circumcision on the outside in *the* flesh, but he *is* a Jew who *is* one on the inside, and circumcision *is of the heart in the spirit*, not in letter, of whom the praise is not from men, but from God.” Rom.2:27-29

But as we shall see in later sections, Gentile blessings under Israel’s covenants was not a new initiative introduced during Acts.

Davidic Covenant

Although the Law of Kings (Deu.17:14-20) mentions no other covenant besides the Mosaic Covenant that contained it, it had this proviso for an obedient king –

“to not raise his heart out from his brothers, and to not turn from the commandment right or left, so that he may prolong days over his reign, himself and his sons in *the* midst of Israel.” Deu.17:20

This dynastic promise was provisional, and part of the bilateral covenant of Law. We know from the history of the books of Samuel that the first king, Saul, did not measure up to this provision in the Law.

Saul’s successor David turned to both right and left, it seems, in his committing adultery and murder. That he was forgiven these great sins is a mark of both God’s mercy and David’s sincere repentance. But David also had noble impulses, such as wanting to build Yahweh a magnificent house, like his own cedar-paneled palace. Nor was he reticent in laying off royal robes and dancing humbly before the ark of Yahweh. He also showed mercy toward his enemy King Saul, when he had opportunities

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to kill him. It was his heart generally that the Lord found desirable in him:

“And having removed him (Saul), He raised up David for king, to whom also He said, having witnessed, ‘I found David of Jesse, **a man according to My heart**, who will perform My whole desire.’”

Acts 13:22

The covenant that Yahweh made with David and his dynasty is usually traced to the following promise that He made to him –

“But now, you will speak thus to My servant, to David, ‘Thus said Yahweh of armies, I took you from the sheepfold from following the herd to become prince over My people, over Israel. And I came with you in everything where you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like *the* name of the great ones who *are* upon the earth. And I will appoint a standing-place for My people, for Israel. And I will plant them, and they will dwell under their own *place*, and they will not move again, nor will sons of iniquity continue to oppress them, as in *the* former *time*, and since the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel. And I have caused you to rest from all your enemies. And Yahweh declares to you that **Yahweh will make for you a house**. When your days are filled and you lie down with your fathers, then I will raise up your seed after you, who will come out from your inward parts, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for My name, and **I will establish *the* throne of his kingdom for an age**. I will become to him for a father, and he will become to Me for a son. Whenever in his committing iniquity, then I will chasten him with *the* rod of men, and with *the* blows of sons of man. But My kindness will not turn aside from him, as I turned it from Saul, whom I have removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom will be established for an age before you. Your throne will be established for an age.” 2 Sam.7:8-16

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Although this promise does not speak the word “covenant”, apparently it was given with the force of a covenant. And it was referred to afterwards as a covenant –

“I have **cut a covenant** toward My chosen one; I Myself have **sworn to David** My servant. Up to an age I will establish your seed, and I will continue your throne to a generation of generations.” Psa.89:3-4

“For thus said Yahweh, ‘David will not be cut off *for* a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel.’ ... Thus said Yahweh, ‘If you can break My covenant of the day and My covenant of the night, so that will not come day and night in their season, then also **My covenant might be broken with David** My servant, from him not to have a son reigning upon his throne...’” Jer.33:17, 20-21

We might surmise whether Yahweh spoke this oath to David in private, but unrecorded in 2 Samuel. Perhaps. But the simple statement above in 2 Sam.7:8-16 is forceful enough. And it comes from the God Who cannot lie, so this may be sufficient to classify it as the Davidic Covenant.

The Davidic Covenant was based on the covenant of Law, so we should view them as inextricably bound together. Notice how I have translated Psalm 89 literally “up to an age” and “a generation of generations”, and not the “for ever” and “all generations” of the *KJV*. This covenant will reach its zenith when Christ reigns in the earth, but we know that He will eventually turn over His kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24) – so His kingdom will not be “forever”. We also know from the OT that –

“Then you will know that Yahweh your Elohim, He *is* the Elohim, the faithful God, **keeping the covenant and the mercy** to those loving Him and to those keeping His commandments – **for a thousand generations.**” Deu.7:9

“Remember for an age (possible meaning here, an age of a thousand generations) **His covenant**, *the* word He commanded for a **thousand**

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generations, which He cut with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel a **covenant of an age**, saying, “To you I will give *the* land of Canaan *as the* lot of your inheritance.’ ” 1 Chr.16:15-18

“He remembered **for an age His covenant**, *the* word He commanded for a **thousand generations**, which He cut with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel a covenant of an age.” Psa.105:8-10

This “age” of a thousand generations is mentioned three times in Scripture for emphasis, so I am taking it literally, not hyperbolically. How long might a thousand generations be – perhaps 25,000 years? That would be a very long time for the covenants to last. And these other OT covenants should be viewed as adding more to the Abrahamic covenant of inheritance, as time progressed. Although separate covenants were mentioned with Phinehas (Num.25:7-13) and Jerusalem (Eze.16:3-14), these should also be viewed as addenda to the basic Abrahamic covenant. The Davidic covenant added these characteristics to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants –

- a ruling dynasty and dominion
- sonship to God
- for an age, but not forever

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The Core of the New Covenant

The OT is mostly a history of Israel walking contrary to Yahweh, and His abandonment of Israel to be subjugated by their enemies. On the eve of their worst disaster, Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah and Jerusalem, God gave this summary of their national behavior, along with the promise of a "new covenant" –

“Behold, days *are* coming – an utterance of Yahweh – and I will cut with *the* house of Israel and with *the* house of Judah a **new covenant**, not like *the* **covenant** which I cut with their fathers, in *the* day that I strengthened them by *the* hand, to bring them from *the* land of Egypt, which **My covenant they broke**, and I was a husband among them – an utterance of Yahweh. For **this is the covenant** which I will cut with *the* house of Israel after those days – an utterance of Yahweh – I have given My law within them and upon their heart I will write it. And I will become to them for Elohim, and they will become to Me for people. And they will not teach each his fellow, and each his brother, to say, ‘Know Yahweh’, for all of them will know Me, from least of them up to greatest of them – an utterance of Yahweh – for I will pardon their guilt, and their sin I will not remember any longer.”
Jer.31:31-34

This repeats some covenant characteristics seen before –

- Yahweh as Israel's personal God
- Israel as God's personal people

and these new characteristics –

- the law internalized in men by an act of God – heart-law, spirit-law
- universal knowledge of Yahweh
- pardoning guilt, apparently without the requirement of repentance

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Note how this covenant is “with *the* house of Israel and with *the* house of Judah”, affecting the whole nation. And it did not rescind the Law of Moses, but internalized it in the consciences of **chosen** Israelites. This would not make a man sinless, but would greatly reduce the inadvertent sins he might commit.

I used the word “chosen” above, because this covenant was implemented piece-meal. During Acts, there was a chosen remnant –

“What, then? What Israel seeks, this it did not obtain. But **the chosen obtained it**, and the rest were hardened. Even as it has been written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to not see, and ears to not hear, until the present day.’” Rom.11:7-8

So, alongside this spirit-law in the chosen was a spirit of stupor in the hardened. Paul was writing of this hardened state late in the Acts period. But at a future time, this will change –

“For I desire you not to be ignorant, brothers, of this secret, lest you may be wise among yourselves, that hardening in part has come to Israel, until when the fullness (i.e., ‘a full pre-determined number’) of the nations may enter. And so all Israel will be saved, even as it has been written, ‘Will come out of Zion the One Rescuing. He will turn away impiety from Jacob. And this *is the covenant* from Me to them, whenever I may remove their sins. Indeed, according to the gospel *they are* enemies, but according to the election, beloved on account of the fathers, for irrevocable *are* the gifts and the calling of God.”

Rom.11:25-29

I would not confuse “all Israel” in the passage above with everyone calling himself a Jew, and practicing some form of Judaism, because Paul had previously said –

“But *it is* not as that the word of God has fallen out. For not all who are out of Israel *are* these Israel.” Rom.9:6

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The text goes on to compare Isaac, the seed of the promise, with all of Abraham's physical sons.

And earlier in the Acts period, Paul had warned that the return of Christ would be preceded by an apostasy (2 Th. 2:3), and certain OT prophecies foretold of great apostasy to come. I think we should view the "chosen" of Israel, i.e., "the Israel of God" (Gal.6:16), as another "fullness", like that of the nations spoken above – i.e., a full number, known to God, but not every last one of them by man's reckoning. However, I also believe that the Israelite Christians of the Acts period were but a trickle, compared to a flow that is yet to come. Early harvest, followed by late harvest – but the latter harvest season is typically the more bountiful.

The New Covenant was new in terms of the Spirit-led heart-change that men were endowed with. What did not change was Mosaic Law – there is no mention of its being rescinded. Although a Jew could not be justified by keeping the law, that law was still part of his covenant heritage and we have no evidence that it was nullified. Further, there was no mention in the Jeremiah 31 text of the need for a new and perfect sacrifice, but that is what the types and shadows of Mosaic Law were pointing to – "our pedagogue toward Christ" (Gal.3:24).

Some might think that the New Covenant made a complete break from the Old, and that it applies from the beginning of the so-called "New Testament". But throughout the Gospels, Acts and early apostolic epistles, we find Jewish believers complying with the law of Moses. In fact Jesus Himself said –

"You should not reckon that I came to abolish **the law or the prophets**. I came not to abolish, but to fulfill. For, amen I say to you, until perhaps the heaven and the earth should pass away, one *yôd* (Heb. ך, the tiniest letter) or one brush-stroke may in no wise pass away from the law, until perhaps all things should come to pass. If

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therefore, one should break one of **the least of these commandments**, and should teach the others thus, he will be called least in the kingdom of the heavens. But whoever should keep and should teach *them*, this one will be called great in the kingdom of the heavens.” Mat.5:17-19

“Therefore, all things whatsoever you may desire that men may do for you, thus even you do (imperative mood) for them, for **this is the law and the prophets.**” Mat.7:12

Yes, Jesus taught what we might call heart-law, but He did it in the context of Mosaic Law – i.e., it was an additional requirement for those who wished to enter the New Covenant relationship with Yahweh. Note how one breaking “the least of these commandments” “will be called least in the kingdom of the heavens.” But that kingdom has not yet come to fulfillment.

The New Covenant was ratified by sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Son of God – but this was revealed much later than Jeremiah 31.

“this is **My blood of the covenant**, which *is* being poured out on behalf of many, for the pardon of sins.” Mat.26:28

I know there are some who teach that the New Covenant did not come into effect during Acts, because the whole nation Israel did not repent (only a remnant of them did). Then *what covenant* was Jesus referring to with the pouring out of His blood? Was His sacrifice just another Mosaic sacrifice? Hardly. And the Acts period apostles applied that blood to believers of *that time* – it was not restricted to some future time.

“For if the blood of goats and bulls, and ashes of a heifer, sprinkling *the* profane does sanctify *them* for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more **the blood of Christ** Who offered Himself unblemished through the aionian Spirit, will cleanse our conscience from dead works, for to serve *the* living God.” Heb.9:13-14

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“By that desire, we are sanctified **through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ**, once for all.” Heb.10:10

“Therefore, brothers, having boldness for the entrance of the holies **by the blood of Jesus**, which (entrance) He made new for us by a way, recently made and living, through the veil, that is **of His flesh.**”
Heb.10:19

“to chosen pilgrims of *the* dispersion ... according to *the* foreknowledge of Father-God, by *the* sanctification of *the* Spirit, for obedience and ***the* sprinkling of *the* blood of Jesus Christ**”
1 Pet.1:1-2

“**the blood of Jesus**, His Son, cleanses us from all sin” 1 Joh.1:7

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not fellowship in **the blood of Christ**? The bread that we break, is it not fellowship in **the body of Christ**?” 1 Cor.10:16-17

Especially the quote above from Heb.9:13-14 shows how Christ’s sacrifice both resembled Mosaic sacrifices, but was far superior to them. While the Mosaic sacrifices needed to be offered continuously, Christ’s was required only once.

Then why continue Mosaic Law? For several reasons. Firstly, Messianic Christians in those early days would hardly have gained a hearing among the unbelieving Jews if they had denied Moses. But certainly those early Christians no longer required the sin offering or trespass offering for themselves – they were under the new “law of Christ” (Gal.6:2) as the basis for righteous deeds.

But further, even as Christ had said that the whole law would be fulfilled, consider these unfulfilled aspects –

- Only the early Feasts of the law have been fulfilled – Passover (1 Cor.5:7), Firstfruits (1 Cor.15:20), and Pentecost (Acts 2:1) –

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but Atonements, Booths and Trumpets, these latter harvest (Gk. *sunteleia*) feasts await the return of Christ.

- Christ's return will establish His kingdom, throne and glory in Israel and the whole earth – but while here on His first visit, He wore only a crown of thorns.
- His return will establish the Millennium on earth, the time when His house-law will become as an “iron staff” to break the rebellious and subdue all enemies (1 Cor.15:24-26).
- Why did Acts-period saints anticipate His coming so eagerly, unless they believed that “all will be fulfilled”? His kingdom has not yet come in fullness, although that is what they were expecting.

So the New Covenant was linked to, and grew out of the Old.

Zacharias was correct in declaring of the coming Redeemer –

“And Zacharias his (John's) father was filled of holy spirit and he prophesied, saying, ‘Blessed *is* the Lord God of Israel, because He oversaw and performed a ransom for His people. And He raised up a Horn of salvation for us, in *the* house of David His servant, even as He spoke by *the* mouth of His holy prophets from the age, salvation from our enemies and from *the* hand of all those hating us, to perform mercy with our fathers, and **His holy covenant to be remembered, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham**, to grant us to serve Him fearlessly, having been rescued from *the* hand of our enemies ...” Luk.1:67-74

Zacharias was speaking here of Jesus (the “Horn of salvation”). Salvation from enemies was an ancient promise through all the covenants, since Abraham's day. Thus Jesus' covenant was also Abraham's covenant, with a completely effectual sacrifice added to it – to perfect it. For believers, that sacrifice superseded all the sin and trespass offerings that Mosaic Law required.

The Rest of Jeremiah on the New Covenant

Yes, we love to quote Jer.31:31-34, as though that fully contains the New Covenant. But I have already pointed out how it lacks revelation of the perfect sacrifice, and now look at the didactic structure on the next page for what our abridged quote on p.39 leaves out.

The greatest blessings of the Acts were indeed spiritual, and this was also according to the Jeremiah 31 prophecy – how God’s spirit would touch their heart and teach their mind – this is the central part of the covenant.

But it is clear from the structure that the promise is stated in three parts, each part headed by an emphatic, “**Behold**, days *are* coming – an utterance of Yahweh“. Even so, these three parts continue a theme, because the earlier part, Jer.31:1-26, provides much context about restoration and blessing for a once divided and dispersed people. This restoration and kingdom blessing should not be dismissed lightly from our deliberations on the New Covenant. At the center of this covenant is Israel’s kingdom. I challenge you to consider – is Israel’s kingdom the church that your “church” teaches? But that is principally what the New Covenant is all about. The Gentile served only a secondary role in this.

I found it interesting that the phrase “utterance of Yahweh” occurs nine times altogether in the threefold structure of Jeremiah 31 – nine being the number of judgment (*Number*, p.235). So Yahweh’s injecting this phrase was a warning to stumbling Israel, even as He was revealing that this New Covenant was to overcome the faults in the Old Covenant (Jer.31:32; Heb.8:7; Rom.8:3). Despite the necessity of God’s intervention in making this New Covenant, the message here was *not*, “Sit back, take it easy, and I’ll take care of everything.” Israel was expected to *respond* to this heart-change. The implementation of the New Covenant was experimental, in the sense that it required men to *do*

Structure of Jeremiah 31:27-40

A₁. **Behold, days are coming** (utterance of Y' – 9 occs. here and below)

and I will sow with house of Israel and with house of Judah, a sowing of man and sowing of cattle

And it will happen as I watched over them to pluck up, and to tear down, and to throw down and to destroy,

so I will watch over them to build and to plant (utterance of Y')

In those days, they will not say any longer, “Fathers have eaten a sour-grape, and *the* teeth of sons are blunted,”

for each for his own guilt will die. Everyone of man who is eating the sour-grape will blunt his own teeth. [Eze.3:18-19]

A₂. **Behold, days are coming** (utterance of Y')

and I will cut with house of Israel and with house of Judah a new covenant

not as *the* covenant which I cut with their fathers,

in the day of My taking hold by their hand, to bring them from *the* land of Egypt,

when they broke My covenant,

and I was married to them (utterance of Y')

for this *is* the covenant which I will cut with house of Israel after those days, (utterance of Y')

I have given My law within them

and upon their heart I will write it.

And I will become to them for Elohim,

and they will become to Me for people.

And they will not teach each his fellow, and each his brother, to say, “Know Yahweh”,

for all of them will know Me, from least of them up to greatest of them (utterance of Y'),

for I will pardon their guilt, and their sin I will not remember any longer.

Thus said Yahweh, giving sun for light by day, statutes of moon and stars for light at night,

disturbing the sea and its waves roar – Yahweh of armies His name.

“If these statutes depart from before Me (utterance of Y'),

then also seed of Israel may cease from becoming a nation before Me **all the days.**”

Thus said Yahweh,

“If heavens from above will be measured, and foundations of earth downwards will be searched,

then also I will reject all seed of Israel regarding all that they have done (utterance of Y').

A₃. **Behold, days are coming** (utterance of Y')

and will be built the city for Yahweh, from Tower of Hananeel *to* the Gate of the Corner. [cp. Isa.60:14; Zec.14:10]

And will go out again the line of the measurement against it, upon height of Gareb, and it will turn around Goah.

And all the valley of the corpses and the ashes, and all the fields up to Wady Kidron, over to the Corner Gate of the Horse eastward

are holy to Yahweh. [cp. 2 Chr.20:24-26 – Valley Berachah filled with corpses]

It will not be plucked up nor torn down again **for an age**.

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something – that is, repent and live a spirit-led life. It was still possible for them to do otherwise. So for all its grace in pardoning their guilt, a potential judgment was still lurking in that covenant. Does your “church” try to claim the blessings, but leave to Israel the judgments of the New Covenant? See the section below **Some Ways the New Covenant Mirrors the Mosaic**.

The first promise in section **A₁** of the Jeremiah 31 structure (previous page), “I will sow with *the* House of Israel and with *the* house of Judah, a seed of man and a seed of cattle” had always rather baffled me, until I examined the contextual structure. Since sowing is a prelude to growth, what this says is that Yahweh will grow the population of the nation and its herds – i.e., social and agricultural prosperity. But the way this is expressed is unique, as both “seed of man (lit. ‘seed of Adam’)” and “seed of cattle” are *hapax*. So the whole passage is unique, and it ought to be studied *with care*. Remember, *hapax* words and phrases are “stand up and take notice” words.

Additionally, the complete phrase “with *the* house of Israel and with *the* house of Judah” occurs only two times in Scripture, and both are here – first they are said to be **sown with**, then they are **cut a new covenant with** (section **A₂**). The sowing may be concurrent with making the new covenant, or it will be a prelude to it. Note that the preposition “with” (Heb. *’eth*) is a homonym, the same word as “the mark of the accusative”, which marks off what we call in English the “direct object” (see BDB, p.84 for its various uses). I have chosen to translate it as the prep. “with” in both sections **A₁** and **A₂**, based on the parallelism of the two sentences employing it. A sowing “with” the two houses could express a state of New-Covenant-Israel being alongside “the seed of man” – that is, together and yet apart. This might convey two sets of

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people living alongside each other, one under the New Covenant and one under the Old, as was the case for Israel throughout the Acts period.

“Man and beast” figure prominently in the book of Jeremiah. Nine times they are mentioned as being destroyed or restored together in respect to Israel (and twice more in the destruction of Babel). The root sense of this phrase seems to be the totality of a city or a land. Given that the people of Israel and Judah were God’s own choosing, the sowing of man and beast attests to the fullness of God’s planting “with” (or ‘beside’) them.

Next, Yahweh’s “watching over” them has two opposite modes: 1) to pluck up and to tear down (past), and 2) to build and to plant (future). The latter rather depends upon the sowing mentioned in the second line. These two modes figure again in the third section **A₃**, but here it is “the city for Yahweh”, which: 1) will be built, and 2) will *neither* be plucked up *nor* torn down. This will be an enduring Jerusalem that will not be conquered.

Although there was a common saying in those days about sour-grapes, meaning the sons are punished for the fathers’ guilt, the principle of “each for his own guilt will die” was not a novelty of the New Covenant, as Eze.3:18-19 demonstrates. This principle of dying for one’s individual guilt may seem at odds with the New Covenant graciousness “I will pardon their guilt”. Yes, under the New Covenant their “sins were wiped away”, if they repented and turned back, as Peter preached at the Temple (Acts 3:19). But even under New Covenant blessing, they were still not sinless, and some types of sin *after repentance* had dire consequences –

“For *it is* impossible, those once having been enlightened, having tasted also the heavenly gift, and having become partners of *the* Holy Spirit, and having tasted *the* good word of God, and powers of a

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coming age, and having fallen away, to renew *them* again to repentance, having re-crucified to themselves the Son of God, and exposing *Him* to ridicule.” Heb.6:4-6

“This *is* the covenant which I will covenant with them after those days, says the Lord, giving My laws upon their hearts, and upon their mind I will engrave them. And their sins and their lawlessnesses I will in no wise be mindful of again. But where forgiveness of these *is*, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.” Heb.10:16-18

“If anyone should see his brother sinning a sin not for death, he will ask and he will give him life for those sinning not for death. There is a sin for death, not concerning this I say that he should ask.”

1 Joh.5:16

“So that whoever may eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord unworthily will be liable for the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man test himself and in this manner let him eat from the bread and let him drink from the cup. For the one eating and drinking judgment to himself eats and drinks not discerning the body. Because of this many among you *are* weak and sickly, and certain are fallen asleep (i.e., ‘died’). But if we were judging ourselves, we would not be judged. But being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we would not be condemned with the world.” 1 Cor.11:27-32

Yes, past sins were forgiven. But God’s expectation was that with His special gifts of outpoured spirit, their past life of sin would be put behind them. These were powers given some prophets of old, now distributed to all believers. So the consequences of apostasy under the New Covenant were just as dire as under the Old. A repentance of the past life was required to begin the new life – as in Peter’s call to Israel, “Repent...” (Acts 2:38). But a renewal to repentance after sinning certain sins was

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not possible (Heb.6:6 above). If you are a member of a “covenant church”, you should not only be teaching these things, but also observing them among your members. This was the covenant curse, as applied to the New Covenant.

Most studies concentrate on the central section **A₂**, because it explains the basis for the New Covenant: a heart-change in the People by an act of God, followed by an ubiquitous knowledge of Yahweh. This divine act will enable the fulfillment of Isa.11:9, when “the Land has been full of knowledge of Yahweh, as waters covering *the* sea.” It saw a beginning in the early harvest of the Acts period – but the full, end-time harvest should be much greater. That there would be a gap between these two harvests was not tacitly revealed in the OT, although it might have been inferred from the summer growth stage between the early and late harvests – the Feasts of Pentecost and the Ingathering (Exo.23:14-17).

There have always been those who insist that times go on as before without any change (2 Pet.3:4). Because the gap since the Acts-period Pentecostal harvest has become so wide, it has given incentive to preterism in recent centuries to adopt just such an attitude. But note how the central section of Jer.31:27-40 compares the lastingness of national Israel with the endurance of God’s ordinances of day and night. Words to ponder. Of note, the nation is called “seed of Israel” and “all seed of Israel”, drawing attention to the sowing “with” the house of Israel in the previous section. Therefore, a *sowing* of “seed of Israel” seems to be implied by that phrase, and that would be equivalent to their physical establishment in the Land. Logically this would accompany the spiritual birth of “sons of the kingdom” (see Parable of the Wheat and Tares).

The final section **A₃** concentrates on building the “city for (or ‘to’) Yahweh” (*hapax*), including some particulars about a tower and gate and other geographical features of a rebuilt Jerusalem. Some of these features

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are identifiable with historic Jerusalem, but what of “all the valley of the corpses and the ashes”? All three definite articles are present, making this a very definite place. A prime candidate for this valley could be the valley of the sons of Hinnom – the site of Jerusalem’s garbage dump and Potter’s Field, where “their flame is not quenched” (Isa.66:24).

However, in searching for parallels, I also found the episode of 2 Chronicles 20, when Judah was greatly outnumbered by an invasion from Moab and Ammon. This fight was Yahweh’s, while Jehoshaphat and his retinue were sent out merely to witness its outcome – a valley filled with corpses (2 Chr.20:24-25). They named it “Valley of Blessing” (‘Berachah’) at that time, but I have questioned whether this might also be the prophetic “Valley of Jehoshaphat” of Joe.3:1. In Joel, this place is where God will gather and judge “all the nations” who have scattered His people. Jer.31:40 may be another reference to the future significance of this valley.

“All the valley”, along with “all the fields” up to Wady Kidron over to the Corner Gate of the Horse, will be “holy to Yahweh”. But also declared “holy to Yahweh” will be a section of rebuilt Jerusalem 25,000 by 10,000 cubits measurement (Eze.48:13-14). Is Jeremiah’s description here speaking of Ezekiel’s measured portion?

A final word on the three sections of the Jeremiah 31 chart – they all bear the Lord’s exclamation point (!) “**Behold**”. And they all say “days *are* coming”, but one may question whether the three “days” will coincide. The prophetic word does not always reveal its time distinctions, as we see in how the “acceptable year” and the “day of vengeance” in Isa.61:1-2 have played out in time – the one has long passed (Luk.4:16-20), with the other still future. I have treated the three sections as essentially one in time, but there have been anomalies. The central section had an early application during Acts, but not the outer sections. It

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does seem to me that all three sections will apply to a future gathering of Israel, but in what order? Here it is not so clear.

To focus more deeply on the central section, we have these pairs of parallelisms –

I have given My law
 within them and
 upon their heart
I will write it.

And I will become to them
 for Elohim,
and they will become to Me
 for people.

First note that Israel is to “become to Me for people”, but the future realization of this will be delayed until after the end of Hosea’s Lo-Ammi (“Not My People”) prophecy. This period has run about two thousand years thus far. Yahweh’s law, as heart-law, may not include a rote keeping of the whole ritual law of Moses – and certainly during Acts that ritual law did not apply to the nations-graft (Rom.11:25). But now ask yourself, ‘Can Gentiles be a covenant-people of God, with covenant-Israel set aside?’ If the root is set aside, then so are the engrafted branches. The question remains, ‘Then what is going on today?’ I will provide the answer to this under the later section, **What Is a Dispensation?**

Considering the additional texts from Jeremiah 31, we must add the following items to the New Covenant promise –

- prosperity to feed a growing nation
- a rebuilt “city for Yahweh”, i.e., Jerusalem, His capital city
- a time of corpses and ashes put behind them (end of warfare)

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- an emphasis of individual guilt over national guilt
- this covenant was another unilateral, gracious promise

and then some NT clarifications, lacking from Jeremiah –

- ratified with the perfect blood sacrifice, once for all
- although received by grace, this high covenant promise could be lost by worthless service – the greater the grace, the higher the standard for God’s judging His servants’ works – “the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth” will apply to some
- the secret of stumbling Israel, and Gentile converts to provoke them to jealousy (Rom.11:25)

The Nations under the New Covenant

Now recall that the new covenant was specifically between Yahweh and “with *the* house of Israel and with *the* house of Judah” (Jer.31:31). Moreover, Jesus warned the Syro-Phoenecian woman –

“I was not sent, except to **the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**”

Mat.15:24

Then how do the nations fit into the picture? Did “the house of Israel” lose the covenant because of the cross of Christ? That would mean that His prayer, “Father, forgive them” was not heard. But who were present at the Greater Pentecost of Acts 2? **Jews only**. Why was Peter so reluctant to witness to the Roman Cornelius several years later?

Yes, there were differences in how the New Covenant applied to the nations. The nations were not even invited to this table until Peter first visited Cornelius’ household, followed some time later by the unique apostleship of Paul –

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“But on the contrary, having seen that I have been entrusted *with the gospel of the uncircumcision*, even as Peter *with that of the circumcision*, for the One having worked by Peter for *the apostleship of the circumcision* worked also by me **toward the nations...**”

Gal.2:7-8

Now let us ask the question, “Why did Paul’s being called to apostleship come so many years after the Greater Pentecost?” The specific reason is explained both by the OT and by Paul himself –

“But I say, ‘Did Israel not know?’ First, Moses says, **‘I will make you jealous by those not a nation, by a nation unwise I will anger you.’**” Rom.10:19

“Therefore I ask, ‘Did they not stumble so that they might fall’? May it not become *so!* But by their trespass, **salvation is for the nations, for to make them jealous.**” Rom.11:11

So God was using believing nations to provoke unbelieving Israel to jealousy. And God’s blessing of these nationals would be apparent by the spiritual gifts they all shared in (1 Cor.12:1-11). This secondary purpose of God in blessing the nations also explains why, during Acts –

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who *is* believing, both **to Jew first** and also Greek.” Rom.1:16

“tribulation and distress upon every life of man who *is* working out the evil, both **of Jew first** and also of Greek. But glory and honor and peace to everyone who *is* working out the good, both **to Jew first** and to Greek.” Rom.2:9-10

Thus, **during Acts**, wherever Paul visited anew, he always went to the *Jews first* in that city, a rule that he kept right up to his extradition to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 28:16-17). And to the Roman Jews he declared:

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“Therefore, on account of this cause I summoned you, to see and to speak to *you*, for **because of the hope of Israel** I am enclosed *with* this chain.” Acts 28:20

Right through from Acts 9 to Acts 28, the calling of the nations had a secondary role. Israel’s unique covenant relation to God was foremost throughout the Gospels-Acts period.

National Blessing under the Early Covenants

We should not be surprised by this secondary position under the New Covenant. The nations had a subservient position under all the covenants:

“And I will bless those blessing you, and I will curse him slighting you, and will be blessed by you **all *the* families of the ground.**”

Gen.12:3

“And it will come to pass, if you will surely obey *the* voice of Yahweh your Elohim, to keep, to accomplish all His commandments, which I *am* commanding you today, then Yahweh your Elohim will appoint you **high above all *the* nations of the earth.**” Deu.28:1

This was the promise to Israel concerning her neighbors. Even so, some of those neighbors would become attracted to the benefits God showered upon the nation and would become **sojourners** (Heb. *gêr*) within her. These nationals were protected under Mosaic law, and in most instances were required to keep the law themselves –

“Seven days no leaven will be found in your houses, for everyone eating what is leavened, even that person will be cut off from *the* gathering of Israel, from a **sojourner**, and from a native of the land.”

Exo.12:19

Here were no exceptions – during the week of Unleavened Bread the resident alien was also required to purge leaven from his house. There are

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many such applications of the law – I have cited them copiously in **Appendix A: Application of Mosaic Law to the Resident Alien**. There was even a provision for circumcision, if a foreigner wished to participate with Israel in the Passover Feast.

I believe it will come as a surprise to most people how God made so much accommodation under the law for resident foreigners. Thus, the blessing of the non-Israelite during Acts had a long tradition before it. Peter’s reluctance to go to Cornelius may have seemed justified to him on the basis of Cornelius being merely a foreigner – i.e., a foreign conqueror, and not one who had chosen to dwell in the midst of Israel. Even some of these devout Romans understood the legal distinctions that Mosaic Law made between the clean and the unclean. Another centurion’s reply, “I am not worthy that You should come under my roof” (Mat.8:8), showed an astute understanding of Mosaic concepts of purification. I suppose it seemed reasonable to Peter to be just as “fussy” about Mosaic observances as this earlier centurion. But Peter did not reckon with the great covenant change that was now about to bless foreigners in a special way.

During Acts, these were primarily foreigners outside the land, and not resident aliens who were covered by Mosaic Law. Because of the spiritual basis of the New Covenant, spirit-law would take precedence over body-law. Christ was the foundation of these blessings, not Moses. For anyone of the believing nations to want to build a Mosaic foundation atop this foundation of Christ was to turn His building upside down. Thus we find Paul, in the most strident terms, warning the Galatian saints of the grave error they were minded to commit, in submitting themselves to be circumcised –

“Fourteen years thereafter I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, having also taken along Titus. But I went up according to revelation, and I set forth to them the gospel that I proclaim among the nations – but in private to the esteemed – lest I might be running, or had run in

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vain. But **not even Titus**, who *was* with me, **being Greek, was compelled to be circumcised...**” Gal.2:1-3

“...for the esteemed imparted to me nothing. But on the contrary having seen that I have been entrusted **the gospel of the uncircumcision**, even as Peter *that* of the circumcision, for the One having in-worked Peter for *the* apostleship of the circumcision, also in-worked me **for the nations**. And having recognized the grace having been given me, Jacob and Cephas and John, those esteemed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas right hands of fellowship, that we *should be* **for the nations**, but they for the circumcision.” Gal.2:6-9

“I do not set aside the grace of God, for **if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing.**” Gal.2:21

“But now having known God, but rather having been known by God, **how do you turn back to the weak and poor principles**, to which you again desire **to be enslaved from above?** You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear you, **lest I have toiled in vain for you.**” Gal.4:9-11

“Behold, I Paul say to you that **if you should be circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.** And I testify again to every man being circumcised that he is a debtor to perform the whole law. **You are destroyed from Christ, whoever are justified by law. You have fallen out of the grace.**” Gal.5:2-4

When certain ones of the circumcised (i.e., Jewish, esp. Pharisaic) believers were insisting on circumcision for his Gentile converts, Paul resisted them vigorously.

“And certain ones having come down from Judea were teaching the brothers, ‘**Lest you should be circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.**’ And having come no small commotion and dispute by Paul and Barnabas against them, they

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appointed Paul and Barnabas and certain others from them to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this dispute.”

Acts 15:1-2

This was typical Pharasaic strictness to the letter, but it was putting far too much reliance on Mosaic Law, which had rather receded into its new status of types and shadows. The Apostle Paul spoke retrospectively –

“But before the faith came, we were under guard, being shut up together until the faith about to be revealed, so that **the law has become our pedagogue into Christ**, in order that we might be justified by faith.” Gal.3:23-24

It seems likely that some of what sparked this Judaistic zeal was the fact that many of the “Jewish” diaspora had become so lax in their religion as to abandon circumcision. Thus Timothy’s “Greek” father had failed to have him circumcised, which was a duty of Jewish fathers. That man had “gone Greek”, even as we might say that a man “went hoodlum”. But Paul’s warning *against* circumcision applied also to the apostate Jew.

After a conference was convened to decide the issue of circumcision for Gentiles, this verdict was pronounced by “James” –

“... I judge not to trouble those from the nations who are turning to God, but to instruct them by letter to distance themselves from the defilements of the idols, from the sexual immorality, from the strangled thing and from the blood.” Acts 15:19-20

The first, third and fourth of these dogmas were essentially dietary rules. While the law of Moses was chock full of such rules, the prohibition against blood was also a commandment of the Noachic Covenant – thus it was far more ancient than Moses. Considering all that the Judaizers wanted to impose upon Gentile converts, this was a very scant set of rules. Note how James did not mention keeping the sabbath. Actually there was a far larger repertoire of spiritual commands that Paul had been teaching these believers –

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“For the whole law has been fulfilled in one word, in this *one*, ‘You will love your neighbor as yourself.’” Gal.5:14

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, humility, self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Gal.5:22-23

One thing I do not find in Scripture is a counter-argument to the Pharasaic dogma, “without circumcision you cannot be saved”. At no time did any apostle teach a Jewish Christian, “unless you abandon Moses you cannot be saved”. For the Jewish Christian under the New Covenant his salvation was alongside of the Mosaic Covenant.

Although the consequences for Israel breaking the Mosaic Covenant in earlier times were pretty horrific (Lev.26:14-43; Deu.28:15-68), there was always a door left open –

“But *if* they accept their guilt because, even because they rejected My judgments and their soul loathed My statutes, then even also this: in their coming into *the* land of their enemies I will neither reject them nor loathe them to finish them off, to break My covenant with them, for I *am* Yahweh their Elohim. But I will remember for them *the* covenant of *the* first ones, whom I brought out from *the* land of Egypt in sight of *the* nations to become to them for Elohim. I *am* Yahweh.”
Lev.26:44-45

In Jer.31:32, previously quoted, it was Israel who had broken covenant with Yahweh. Nowhere does it say that Yahweh breaks the covenant of law and substitutes a new covenant for it. Both continued side-by-side each for its own purpose. And Paul even complied with the Mosaic covenant at times for practical reasons. He had Timothy, son of an apostate Jew, circumcised so that he could accompany Paul into the synagogues of the dispersion (Acts 16:1-3). He also taught Gentile believers not to flaunt their freedom from legal observances in the face of their weaker brothers – i.e., Messianic Christians who still clung to the

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law from old religious habit (Romans 14). He expressed his use of the law very succinctly to the Corinthians, at least some of whom were from a Jewish background –

“And I became to the Jews as a Jew, so that I might gain Jews, to those under law as under law – not being myself under law – so that I might gain those under law.” 1 Cor.9:20

On his last visit to Jerusalem, Paul took James’ advice to purify himself with some men fulfilling their vows. But this was done to show the Jews that the rumors about him abandoning Moses were false. One part of that account is remarkable in what it shows about Messianic Jews of that time –

“You see, brother, how many myriads (tens of thousands) there are among the Jews, those having believed, and all are jealous of the law.” Acts 21:20

This jealousy, or zeal for the law seems to have been the normal state for Jewish Christians of that day. Although Paul was quite clear that the covenant of law could not make a man righteous (Gal.2:21), it continued to be part of the Jewish Christian’s cherished heritage. If he leaned too heavily on it for things like justification from sin, he would become the stumbling, weaker brother of Rom.14:21.

Then how should we interpret such statements as –

“For as many as sinned without law, will also perish without law. And as many as sinned by (or ‘in’) *the* law will be judged by *the* law. For the hearers of *the* law are not righteous with God, but **the doers of *the* law will be justified**. For whenever nations, those not having law, may do by nature the things of the law, these not having law are a law to themselves, whoever indicate the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness together, and the reasonings of one another afterwards accusing, or even defending *them*, in the day when God will judge the hidden things of mankind by Christ Jesus,

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according to my gospel. But if you are named ‘Jew’ and rest upon law and boast in God, and know the (‘His’) will and approve the excellent things, being instructed out of the law, and you have been persuaded *that* you yourself are a guide of the blind, a light of those in darkness, an instructor of *the* foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of the knowledge and the truth in the law – therefore, one teaching another, do you not teach yourself? The one preaching not to steal, do you steal? The one saying not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? The one detesting the idols, do you rob temples? You who boasts in law, do you dishonor God by the transgression of the law? For *the* name of God is blasphemed among the nations by you, just as it has been written. For circumcision indeed profits, if you perform *the* law, but if you should be a transgressor of law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If therefore the uncircumcision keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? And the uncircumcision by nature, the one completing *the* law, will judge you who by letter and circumcision *are* a transgressor of law. For he is not a Jew, the one on the outside; neither *is* circumcision the one on the outside in the flesh, but he who *is* a Jew on the inside, and circumcision *is* of heart by spirit and not by letter, whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” Rom.2:12-29

I make no apology for the extensive quotes in this book. They are often necessary to gain contextual insight. Otherwise we end up with a sound-bite Christianity – able, perhaps to excite feelings, but not to truly build up the faith. The text above is all in praise of keeping the law, but not the outward part that men see. This is heart-law, like the kind God promised under the New Covenant. But this heart-law was not lacking from Mosaic Law. In fact, Jesus summed up the law as loving your neighbor, and this got to the very heart of the law. Even Mosaic Law embedded this love principle –

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“You will not hate your brother in your heart. You will surely rebuke your companion and not bear sin toward him. You will not avenge nor begrudge *the* sons of your people, but you will love your neighbor as yourself. I *am* Yahweh.” Lev.19:17-18

This same command applied also to the resident alien (Lev.19:33-34).

Further, this law has not changed since the beginning of time. God has always been a God of law, and He has been consistently so. He may have changed how He has called His servants down the ages, but His heart has not changed. And He desires our hearts to imitate His. Thus His moral law – how we should deal with our fellow-man – has not changed appreciably. When Jesus taught men to love their enemies, it was not a novel doctrine (Mat.5:43-45) – and it certainly did not exclude the rebuking that Lev.19:17 advised.

Civil, or governmental law in the earth did undergo a major change after the Flood. God had put His mark on Cain to protect him from a revenge-killing (Gen.4:15), but eventually the earth became filled with such violence (Gen.6:11-13). A change came with the Noahic Covenant and the command to execute anyone who killed a man (Gen.9:5-6). Mosaic Law ameliorated this command to Noah by establishing cities of refuge for anyone who had killed a man unintentionally. While the New Covenant did not countenance murder (Rom.1:28-2:3), it left the punishment of such crimes to civil authorities (Rom.13:1-7).

But Romans continues, making another astounding statement about the Jews –

“What therefore *is* the superiority of the Jew? Or what *is* the profit of the circumcision? – Much, according to every way. First indeed because they were entrusted the utterances of God.” Rom.3:1-2

and also –

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“who are Israelites, whose *are* the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the law-giving and the sacred service and the promises, whose *are* the fathers, and from whom *is* the Christ according to the flesh, God being over all, blessed for the ages. Amen.” Rom.9:4-5

I have made these extensive quotes from Acts period doctrine to show how favorably the Jew stood under the New Covenant – God’s covenant “with *the* house of Israel and with *the* house of Judah” (Jer.31:31). That it became extended to the nations was a later development with a special purpose –

“I say then, ‘Did God not push off His people?’ May it not come to pass! For I also am an Israelite, out of *the* seed of Abraham, of *the* tribe of Benjamin. God did not push off His people whom He foreknew.” Rom.11:1-2

“But I speak to you, the nations. Therefore indeed by as much as I am an apostle of nations, I glorify my ministry. If somehow I shall provoke to jealousy *some* of my flesh, and shall save some of them. For if their rejection is *the* reconciliation of *the* world, what will be the (*their*) acceptance except life out from *the* dead? But if the firstfruit *is* holy, also the dough. And if the root *is* holy, also the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were engrafted among them, and you became a fellow-partaker of the root of the fatness of the olive tree, boast not against the branches. If you boast against *them*, you do not support the root, but the root you.”
Rom.11:13-18

Again we see that the emphasis is on Israel’s salvation – throughout Acts, and even after a door was opened to Gentiles, it was ever “Jew first” where covenant blessings were concerned.

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Some Ways the New Covenant Mirrors the Mosaic

I want to focus a bit on the blessings and curses of the Law. Here follows a summary of them –

Blessings:

- abundant crops (Lev.26:4-5,9-10; Deu.28:4-5,8,11-12; 30:9)
- abundant families (Deu.28:4,11; 30:9)
- peace and safety in the land (Lev.26:5-6)
- wild beasts expelled (Lev.26:6)
- undefeatable in battle (Lev.26:7-8; Deu.28:7)
- rule the nations (Deu.28:1,10,12-13)
- Yahweh in their midst (Lev.26:11-12)
- a holy people (Deu.28:9)
- life (Deu.30:15-19; 32:47)
- health and healing (Exo.15:26)

Curses:

- sorrow and dread (Lev.26:16,36-37,39; Deu.28:20,28-29,32,34,65-67)
- enemies will plunder and slay (Lev.26:16-17, 25; Deu.28:20,25,31,33,51)
- fewness of people (Deu.28:18,32,41,62)
- no abundance of crops, starvation (Lev.26:20,26,29; Deu.28:16-18,24,30-31,38-40,42,53-57)
- enemies will rule them (Lev.26:17; Deu.28:36-37,43-44,48-52)
- destruction of cities (Lev.26:31-33)
- dispersion among the nations (Lev.26:33-34,36,38-39,41,44; Deu.28:25,63-64,68)
- Yahweh will cease to answer them (Lev.26:19,32; Deu.28:23)
- wild beasts will tear them (Lev.26:22)
- death (Deu.30:15-19)

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- pestilence and disease (Lev.26:21, 25; Deu.28:21-22,27,35,59-61)

While the New Covenant promise did not entirely duplicate these lists, there continued to be blessings and curses under it –

Blessings:

- abundant crops (Jer.31:27, “seed of beast (Heb. *b_ehêmâh*, ‘cattle’)”
- abundant population (Jer.31:27, “I will sow the house of Israel”)
- peace and safety (Jer.31:28, “I will watch over them to build and to plant”; Jer.31:40, “it will not be plucked up nor torn down again”)
- Jerusalem rebuilt (Jer.31:38, “will be built the city for Yahweh”)
- freedom from disease (Acts 5:15-16; 19:11-12)

Curses:

- each will die for his own guilt (Jer.31:30)
- willful sin – no more sacrifice (Heb.10:26)
- a fearful looking for judgment (Heb.10:26-27)
- sin unto death (1 Joh.5:16; 1 Cor.3:17; 11:30; Acts 5:1-11)
- disease (1 Cor.11:29-30)

Those Gentile Christians who claim their church began at Acts 2, Acts 9, or Acts 13 cannot truly believe these claims, because where is “the Jew first” in their doctrine and practice. At best, it is a greatly muted tenet. How many Messianic Jews have you known, or heard about in your lifetime? I myself can name only two. Today is emphatically not a dispensation of “the Jew first”, as the converted Jew today is part of a miniscule lot – not even the word “remnant” can apply to him.

Then What Is Going on Today?

Yes, as we see in Paul’s later, post-Acts epistles, he looked back upon Israel retroactively –

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“Therefore remember that **formerly**, you the nations in the flesh, the ones being called uncircumcision by that being called circumcision, hand-crafted in *the* flesh, that you were **in that season** apart from Christ, **alienated from the citizenship of Israel**, and **foreigners to the covenants of the promise**, having no hope, and God-less in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you the ones **formerly** being far away, became near by the blood of Christ.” Eph.2:11-13

And there is a lot more in the remainder of this Ephesians 2 passage that needs a detailed examination. But I will save that for the chapter **What Is a Dispensation?** What is important to note here is that Paul is addressing Gentile believers in general, and not just a few recent converts. Their **former** status under the covenants rendered them non-citizens. They were not the primary focus of the covenants – only the resident alien had some standing among the Nation.

Colossians also takes a negative stand against a legalistic faith with no exceptions, and this next passage has much to consider –

“Beware lest there will be anyone making spoil of you, through **the philosophy and empty deception**, according to the tradition (Gk. *paradosis*) of men, according to **the arrangements** (Gk. *stoicheon*) **of the world**, and not according to Christ.” Col.2:8

“The philosophy and empty deception” are further explained as “the tradition of men”, a phrase also found in Jesus’ condemnation of Jewish traditions (Mar.7:8). They are further expounded here as “the arrangements (or ‘elements’) of the world”, which Paul had previously used to admonish Galatian Gentiles not to become enslaved under (Gal.4:3) – there he also called these ordinances “the weak and beggarly elements” (*KJV*, Gal.4:9). This is a Judaistic “philosophy” that Paul is condemning. The passage continues –

“Because in Him down-dwells all the fullness of the Deity bodily, and you are filled by Him, Who is the Head of all principality and

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authority. By Him also you were circumcised by a circumcision not hand-crafted, by the stripping off of the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in the baptism, in which also you were raised together, through the faithfulness of the in-working of God, the One having raised Him out from *the* dead. And you *then* being dead to the trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He enlivened you together with Him, having forgiven us all the trespasses, having erased **the hand-writing of the ordinances** (Gk. *dogma*) against us, which was opposed to us, and He has taken it away out of the midst, having nailed it to the cross. Having stripped off the principalities and the authorities, He made a show in boldness, triumphing over them by it (i.e., the cross). Therefore let no one judge you **in food and in drink, or on the part of a feast or new moon or sabbaths**. These are a **shadow** of the coming things, but the body is of Christ. Let no one de-prize you, desiring *it* by **the humility and religion of the angels**, entering into **the things he sees**, vainly puffed-up by the mind of his flesh, and **not grasping the Head**, from Whom the whole body, being supplied and held together through the joints and ligaments, increases the increase of God. ” Col.2:9-19

The antidote for this useless philosophy is “all the fullness” that is in Christ. When we grasp (Gk. *krateō*, as one grasps a sword) Him and His baptism, all that busy-work contained in laws and ordinances recede into the shadows, where they belong. The commandments given by James for the Gentile church in Acts 15, were later referred to as “ordinances” (*dogma*) in Acts 16:4 as Paul and his company were delivering them to the churches of his apostleship. At the time of writing Colossians, even these few ordinances had passed away. But when in the Acts period did James or Peter or John rescind them? They remained in effect throughout the Acts period, but did not continue into the present dispensation. Therefore, we today are not part of any Acts-period church. If you claim your church began at Acts 2, then why are you not endeavoring to keep the feast of Pentecost as Moses instructed? What did we just read in

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Colossians about not being judged concerning keeping of feasts? But we are not yet done with Colossians 2 –

“If you died with Christ from **the arrangements of the world**, why as though living in the world do you **follow ordinances** (Gk. *dogmatizomai*)? – **you may not touch, neither taste, nor handle** – which things are all for corruption by the (*‘their’*) use, according to the commandings and teachings of men, whatever are indeed having a matter (*‘word’*) of wisdom in **self-willed-religion and humility and severity to the body**, not of any value for satisfying the flesh.”

Col.2:20-23

“Touch not, taste not, handle not” were at the heart of Mosaic dietary and purification laws, and figured to a much lesser extent in the ordinances delivered to Acts-period Gentile churches. Like Ephesians, Colossians makes no distinctions between two classes of believers, Jew and Greek. These late injunctions applied to all, as they do to this day.

At the time Paul’s prison epistles (Eph., Phi., Col., 2 Tim.) were published, a Jew, even a Messianic Jew clinging to the covenants, had become a doctrinal enemy–

“Beware of **the dogs**. Beware of **the evil workers**. Beware of **the mutilation** (*KJV* ‘concision’). For we are the circumcision, those worshipping God in spirit and boasting in Christ Jesus, and not having relied on the flesh -” Phi.3:2-3

Is this the same Paul who became as a Jew to a Jew (1 Cor.9:20), and counseled to give no offence to Jews (1 Cor.10:32), and wished himself accursed for his people’s sake (Rom.9:3)? Was it putting “the Jew first” to call him a “dog” (their ugly word for a Gentile) and “mutilated”, not truly (spiritually) circumcised? Obviously something had changed in the church’s relationship with Jews by this time. But search through all the Scriptures and you will find not a word on Gentiles supplanting Israel from the covenants. Therefore, trying to trace the origin of today’s

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church to anywhere in Acts is a colossal mistake. And as we shall see under **What Is a Dispensation?**, the hope of the church today is not “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). I have heard the epithet “spiritual hog” applied to those claiming every blessing in the Bible as personally their own. Perhaps, after Paul’s example above, “spiritual dog” would be the better term.

But the Philippians text continues –

“although I *am* having confidence even in *the* flesh. If any other considers to have confidence in *the* flesh, I more – circumcision *the* eighth day, from *the* race of Israel of tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, according to law a Pharisee, according to zeal persecuting the church, according to *the* righteousness which is in *the* law having become blameless. But whatsoever things were gain to me, these I have considered loss on account of Christ. But therefore indeed, I even consider all things to be loss on account of the surpassing knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord on account of Whom **I lost all these things and consider them garbage**, so that I might gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* of *the* law but which *is* by *the* faith of Christ, the righteousness from God upon the faith.” Phi.3:4-9

Although righteousness on a faith basis is what Paul taught during Acts – esp. Romans and Galations – here Paul was speaking for himself and his Jewish roots. To call this heritage “garbage”, as he does here, is an extreme – not something in keeping with his becoming as a Jew to the Jews during Acts (1 Cor.9:20; 10:30). The text reads further –

“Brothers, become joint-imitators of me, and regard those thus walking, even as you have us *as* a pattern. For many are walking, whom I told you often, but now even weeping I say, *they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is loss, whose god is the belly, and the (‘their’) glory is in their shame, those minding the*

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earthly things. For our commonwealth exists in the heavens, out of which (commonwealth) also we eagerly await a Savior, *the* Lord Jesus Christ.” Phi.3:17-20

This is a very serious condemnation. “The enemies of the cross of Christ” and “whose god is the belly” are far from the delicate terms that Paul had once advocated in becoming “without offense to Jews and to Greeks” (1 Cor.10:31-32). Paul was certainly drawing a line in the sand here. And I believe that “minding earthly things” has a much larger significance here than the Judaistic ordinances of “touch not, taste not”. It goes to the very heart of the covenants, which are all **earthly** in their nature. Go back a few pages and review some of what Jeremiah 31 promised to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah”.

But wait, there is more from Paul’s pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) on the subject of a Judaized faith –

“(an overseer) adhering to the faithful word according to the doctrine, so that he may be able both to encourage with **the sound teaching**, and to convict those contradicting *it*. For there are many both insubordinate empty-talkers and mind-seducers, especially **those of the circumcision**, whom it is necessary to silence, **who overthrow whole households**, teaching what they ought not for the sake of a disgraceful gain.” Tit.1:9-11

“Those of the circumcision” can only mean Messianic Jews, because what other Jew would be welcomed into a Christian household to teach? And their teaching amounted to an “overthrow”, a toppling of “the sound teaching”.

And further –

“...rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith, not adhering to **Jewish myths** and commandments of men, being turned away from the truth. But **all things are pure to the pure**, but to those having been defiled and faithless nothing is pure, but of them both the

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mind and the conscience have been **defiled**. They profess to know God, but by the works they deny *Him*, being **abominable** and dissuaded and disapproved for every good work.” Tit.1:13-16

Apparently Judaistic Christians at this late stage were still trying to teach Mosaic concepts of ritual purity. At this time, unlike his care for the weaker brother in Romans 14, Paul had only sharp rebuke for the teaching (“Jewish myths”) of such abominable teachers and God-deniers. “Abomination” was an OT word reserved mostly for idols, and here Paul was putting legalistic Christian worship on a par with idolatry. Again, does this sound like “the Jew first” to you?

Then there is also this short word of caution –

“But keep away from foolish debates and **genealogies** and **law-battles**, for they are profitless and empty.” Tit.3:9

The nature of these “law-battles” is not specified, but they seem to go hand-in-hand here with “genealogies” and an argumentative spirit. More follows on genealogies, law-teaching and “myths” (described above as “Jewish”).

Roughly contemporary with Titus was the publication of 1 Timothy –

“...so that you might command certain ones not to teach-otherwise - not to adhere to **myths** and **endless genealogies**, which bring forth speculations, rather than *the dispensation* (or ‘stewardship’) of **God which is by faith**. But the aim of the command is love out of a **pure heart** and a good conscience and unhypocritical faith, of which some having missed-the-mark, have turned away into empty-speech, desiring to be **law-teachers**, understanding neither what they say, nor concerning which they confidently assert. But we know that **the law is good, if one should use it lawfully**, knowing this, that law is not set for a righteous one, but for lawless ones and for insubordinate ones, for irreverent ones and for sinners, for unholy ones and for profane ones, for patricides and for matricides, for murderers, for sexually

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immoral ones, for homosexuals, for enslavers, for liars, for perjurers, and if anything other opposes the sound teaching” 1 Tim.1:3-10

Note here how the lawful use of the law deals not with ritual purity, but with grievous acts committed against men and God. To a large degree this application of the law is for civil authorities to exercise. The antidote again is “the sound teaching”, a keynote of Paul’s Pastoral Epistles.

And 1 Timothy also dealt with the “touch not, taste not” version of Christianity –

“But the Spirit says expressly that in later seasons some will desert the faith, heeding deceitful spirits and **teachings of demons**, lying speakers in hypocrisy, having cauterized their own conscience, hindering to marry, **to keep away from foods** that God created for reception with thanksgiving by the faithful, even those having recognized the truth. Because every created thing of God *is* good, and nothing cast off, being received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and supplication.” 1 Tim.4:1-5

Judaistic ordinances have now become “teachings of demons”. Any idea of a Jew being first has completely disappeared in the post-Acts revelation of Paul. And Paul’s previous, tender regard for the weaker brother who eats only herbs (Rom.14:1-8) is nowhere in sight.

Why have I committed so much discourse to the issue of Gentile blessing? Because distinctions must be drawn between what applied during Acts and what applied afterward. We must rightly divide these issues of the truth (2 Tim.2:15), or we will end up trying to follow the wrong truth. That is precisely what Jews today are doing – synagogue worship cannot even begin to satisfy the fullness of Mosaic Law. And a Judaistic Christianity may be even worse off – as Christians they have the fullness of Christ already, but they are trying to drag aspects of a presently deficient religion into their faith. This is “minding earthly things”.

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Finally, what can we sum up about the status of blessings under the covenants – and Gentile blessing in particular? Here are a few points -

1. Noahic Covenant

- given to all the sons of Noah, i.e., all mankind, all nations
- unconditional promise of no more world-wide flood
- 3 commandments, 1 permission issued

2. Abrahamic Covenant

- unconditional promise of blessings for Abraham and his posterity
- and through him, blessings for “all the families of the ground”
- passed to Isaac and Jacob after him
- then passed to all of Jacob’s posterity – the premier nation
- so first came a narrowing down, then a building up of the covenant assembly
- a single commandment to circumcise the flesh of all males
- an understanding of what divine justice means

3. Mosaic Covenant

- conditional promise of blessings for the whole nation
- liberal blessings also for the resident alien
- over 600 separate laws to keep
- this was added to the Abrahamic Covenant, but did not supersede it (Gal.3:17)

4. New Covenant

- unconditional promise “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”
- until the apostleship of Paul, open to Jews only (Acts 11:19), with a single exception (Cornelius’ household)
- then Gentiles brought in to provoke Israel to jealousy
- “the Jew first” was his status throughout Acts

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- things Jesus taught took the law to a higher level than before – emphasis of heart-law over rote-law
- after Acts 15, the Gentile had 4 “ordinances” to keep, as an accommodation to the weaker brother (Jewish Christian)
- Mosaic Law was not rescinded; it just shrank as to the merits of keeping it.

5. Since the beginning, God’s moral law has not changed. Its essence has been to love both Him and our neighbor.

So where does that leave us today? Should we be accommodating those who choose to follow Mosaic Law? Read the next chapter to see “what is the dispensation of the secret” (Eph.3:9).

What Is a Dispensation?

What Is a Dispensation?

“Dispensation” is a translation of the Gk. *oikonomia*, which means literally a state or condition of “house law” (*oikos* + *nomos*). It also translates as “stewardship”. Thus a “steward” (*oikonomos*) serving in another man’s house would be governed by his master’s “law”, and he would help execute that law. Stewardship in the house of Master A would likely differ in some respects from the “law” governing the house of Master B. Some stewardly attributes would be the same in every house, such as honesty and respect for the master. But others would differ, depending on the role of the steward and the personal disposition of his master. Recall how, in the parables of Ten Minas (Luk.19:21) and Talents (Mat.25:24), the profitless servant declared his master (*kurios*) to be a “hard man” (“hard” is *austēros* in Luke, *sklēros* in Matthew). This complaint against him was not good stewardly behavior, regardless of the rigor of his stewardship.

Although “dispensation” is a NT word, it has Heb. equivalents that are tied to Gk. usage in the *LXX* –

“Thus said Adonai Yahweh of armies, ‘Go, proceed to this steward (Heb. *haššôkên*, *LXX oikonomia* – only 2 occs. in *LXX*, here and below), over Shebna who is over the house. ... So I will cast you from your station (Heb. *matstsâb*) and He will throw you down from your office (Heb. *ma`amâd*). And it will come to pass in that day, then I will call to My servant, to Eliakim son of Hilkiah. And I will clothe him *with* your robe and your sash. I will strengthen him, and your dominion (Heb. *memshâlâh*, *LXX oikonomia*) I will put in his hand. And he will become a father to those inhabiting Jerusalem and to *the* house of Judah. And I will appoint *the* key of *the* house of David upon his shoulder (Heb. *shêkem*). And he will open and no one *will be*

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shutting. And he will shut and no one *will be* opening. And I will drive him *as* a peg in a secure place, and he will become for a throne (Heb. *kišše* ') of glory to *the* house of his father.” Isa.22:15,19-23

Look at this large array of related Hebrew words here in Isaiah 22 –

- “steward”, Heb. *haššôkên*, participle from the verb *šâkan*, lit. “the one serving” (*hapax* as a part.); cp. “Is an able man profitable (Heb. *šâkan*) to God, though he be profitable to himself, *as* one making prudent?” Job 22:2
- “station”, Heb. *matstsâb*; it is obvious from the structure of the passage that “station” is equivalent to “office” in the second clause; cp. “under *the standing* of *the* feet of the priests bearing *the* ark of the covenant” Jos.4:9 – these priests had their “standing” in the River Jordan by appointment, by commandment – this was their “station” while Israel crossed over that river.
- “office”, *ma`amâd*; cp. “and *the attendance* of his ministers”.
2 Chr.9:4
- “dominion”, noun *memshâlâh* (root *mâshal* – ‘rule’, ‘reign’); cp. “Abraham said to the old servant of his house, the one ruling (*mâshal*) over all that *was* his” Gen.24:2; “Yahweh, bless all His works in all places of His dominion (*memshâlâh*)” Psa.103:22 – this second Hebrew word, *memshâlâh*, translated as *oikonomia* in Isa.22 is much more frequent in the Heb. (17 occs.), than the *LXX* use of *oikonomia* (2 occs.), and the verb form *mâshal* is even more frequent (81 occs.). A second, related word “rule” (Heb. *râdâh*, 25 occs.) is translated frequently by the *KJV* as “dominion” – note esp. Gen.1:26, 28 and the Man’s “dominion” over the rest of creation – certainly this is a statement of “dispensational” importance.

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- “shoulder”, *sh_ekem*, cp. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government (n. *mîsrâh*) will be upon his shoulder” Isa.9:6 – the word for “government” here is found only in Isa.9:6,7. *BDB* (p. 976) derives *mîsrâh* from an unused root *s-r-h*. However, the first listing for root *s-r-h* (p.975) gives this verb the meaning of “persist”, “exert oneself”, and “persevere”. Thus it was used of Jacob “persevering” in his wrestling match with the Lord, and it became the basis for his new name Yisra_el. So this unique Hebrew noun “government” is Messianic and ties in with Jacob’s encounter with Yahweh in Gen.32 – where he first reminded Yahweh of His covenant with him. Then after wrestling with Him, Jacob secured a blessing and the name-change (an attribute of some divine covenants). I see no reason why “government” (*mîsrâh*) should not be derived from the first (used) root cited by *BDB*. Perseverance is certainly a characteristic of government – especially good government, seeing the obstacles it must overcome. That Messiah has overcome (a horrific death and rejection by His people) and will overcome (“all enemies under His feet” – 1 Cor.15:25) should brook no argument.
- “throne”, *kişše*’; cp. “as he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, he will write for himself a copy of this law” Deu.17:18 (from the “law of kings”)

These words in Isaiah relate to rulership and serving – i.e., the one who rules has only a derived, relative authority.

Thus, the related English meanings for *oikonomia*, “dispensation” (which emphasizes the ‘authority’) and “stewardship” (emphasizing the ‘responsibility’) should not surprise us. Even the king of Israel fell under a special law (Deu.17:14-20), which declared him to be God’s chosen (v.15), and he was himself under certain prohibitions, including “to not

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lift up his heart from above his brothers”. So the highest authority in the Land was also a servant of Yahweh and had responsibilities to fulfill.

The higher sense of *oikonomia* is one of rulership, but a rulership that was under the authority of Yahweh. That Ryrie and others (Darby, Scofield) have inferred 7 dispensations from the creation in Genesis 1 to the millennial kingdom is not surprising. A dispensational association with the Hebrew words for dominion and rulership are very strong in the OT. Seven dominions with various changes of rulership over the ages of man seem to describe things admirably, but I am not dogmatic about the number seven.

Another aspect to keep in mind is that, except for the very few *LXX* instances (2 occs.), *oikonomia* is a Lukan-Pauline word (9 occs.). It is found 3 times in the uniquely Lukan Parable of the Unjust Steward – even as *oikonomos* is found there 3 times, and the verb form *oikonomeō* (‘exercise stewardship’) once. Elsewhere, *oikonomos* is found in Luk.12:42. Apart from these, *oikonomia* and *oikonomos* are Pauline words (6 occs. each). Luke probably wrote his 2nd treatise (Acts) some time after the two years of Paul’s house-arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30-31). And I suspect his Gospel was written not long before this, because both were addressed personally to Theophilus (Luk.1:3; Acts 1:1) – it appears to have been written as one book in two volumes. As Luke was Paul’s ministerial companion through much of Acts, and afterwards, it gives a Pauline flavor to these words wherever they appear in the NT.

Paul’s was a unique apostleship (stewardship) and it came in two parts. The first declaration concerning it revealed only the first part –

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, because this one is a vessel of choice (or ‘election’) to Me, to bear My name before the nations, and also kings, and sons of Israel.’” Acts 9:5

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Now look at what Paul said about his own stewardship during Acts –

“But from those seeming to be something – whatever they were formerly makes no difference to me – God accepts no man’s person – but for me those seeming *to be something* added nothing. But on the contrary, seeing that I have been entrusted **the gospel of the uncircumcision**, even as **Peter *that* of the circumcision**. For the One having energized **Peter for the apostleship of the circumcision** energized even **me for the nations** – and having known the grace having been given to me, James and Cephas and John, those seeming to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas right hands of fellowship so that **we *should* go to the nations**, but **they to the circumcision.**”

Gal.2:6-9

Note this bifold ministry during Acts – Peter to the circumcision, Paul to the nations. These were two different stewardships, that were “ruled” somewhat differently. Thus we have 2 concurrent dispensations in effect, from about the time of Acts 9 to Acts 28. These had the common goal to convert Israel, but through Paul a **secret** mission was revealed –

“But to you the nations I speak, indeed thefore, upon the basis so much *that* I am **the apostle of the nations**, I glorify my ministry. If at all I will **provoke to jealousy my own flesh** (i.e., Israel) and will save some of them.” Rom.11:13-14

“For I desire you not to be ignorant, brothers, of **this secret**, lest you may be wise among yourselves, that a hardening in part has come to Israel, until when the fullness (i.e., ‘full number’) of the nations may come in.” Rom.11:25

But note, even within this ministry to the nations, the Jew was a privileged first hearer (Rom.1:16). And Paul demonstrated this priority throughout his Acts period stewardship, always visiting the synagogue

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first in every new city he visited. This priority for the Jews was rescinded at Acts 28:28, after a last pronouncement of the judgment of Isa.6:9-10.

“Therefore, be it known to you that to the nations was sent this salvation-bringing (Gk. *sōtērios*, adj. used as a n. – another Lukan-Pauline word in the NT) of God. They will even listen.” Acts 28:28

There is no more record of Paul going to “the Jew first” after this solemn encounter with the Jews of Rome.

More confirmatory Scriptures concerning the early Pauline ministry include –

“But I wrote to you more boldly in part, as reminding you, on account of the grace of God which *is* having been given to me by God, for me to be a Temple-server (Gk. *leitourgos*) of Christ Jesus **for the nations**, acting priestly (Gk. *hierourgeō*) for the gospel of God, so that **the offering** (Gk. *prophora*) **of the nations** might become acceptable, having been sanctified by *the* Holy Spirit.” Rom.15:15-16

Note the words implying a spiritualized Judaism-like liturgy behind the scenes of this stewardship – although the nations were exempt from all the purifying encumberments of Mosaic Law.

“Thus, let a man reckon us as subordinates (lit. ‘under-oarsmen’) of Christ, and stewards (Gk. *oikonomos*) of *the* secrets of God. Here, moreover, it is sought in the stewards (*oikonomos*) that one may be found faithful” 1 Cor.4:1-2

“For if I preach the gospel (lit. ‘evangelize’), there is no boasting for me, for necessity is laid upon me. For there is woe to me if I should not evangelize. For if I accomplish this willingly, I have a reward. But if unwillingly, a stewardship (*oikonomia*) I have been entrusted.”

1 Cor.9:17

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Recall the Lord Jesus' parable about servants in Luk.12:41-48 and the reward of being made ruler over the master's household, or being punished with a beating – and its conclusion in v.48 –

“But the one not having known, but having done things worthy of blows will be beaten with few *blows*. But everyone to whom much has been given, much will be sought from him. And to whom much has been deposited, much more they will ask from him.” Luk.12:48

What these stewardships have in common is –

- something given by a master to his servant – a trust
- in the case where God is Master, a sacred trust
- the prospect of reward, or punishment, for the service rendered (and note: few or many “blows” is how this punishment is described during Acts)

Therefore, the house-law of God's dispensations are the conditions that He lays down for each household. And all households are not the same. Although some may be inclined to view the Acts period as our unique dispensation, it covered two households – “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom.1:16), and they had different sets of rules to abide by – and two different apostleships to rule them.

Just look at the exceptional treatment of the Gentile at that time –

“Therefore, I judge not to trouble those from the nations, turning back upon God, but to write to them to abstain from the pollutions of the idols, and the sexual immorality, and the strangled things, and the blood.” Acts 15:19-20

Note how the latter two of James' house-rules for believing Gentiles was a repetition of prohibitions given to Noah (Gen.9:4). In effect, during Acts we see a sort of sub-dispensation within a dispensation, given the

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house-rules that divided these households of Jews and Greeks. But the unifying theme was that these believers among the nations were a branch grafted into Israel (Rom.11:17). Thus they shared in New Covenant blessings, including the hope of New Jerusalem. In a sense, their future service in New Jerusalem will be a reversal of Joseph's service as a minister under Pharaoh.

And note that this is the same James, whose epistle declared "faith without works is dead" (Jam.2:20), much to the consternation of those later Reformers who were taking their lead from Paul – "righteousness by faith" (Gal.5:5). Although these messages do not actually conflict, they do show a different emphasis exercised by the differing dispensations of Paul and Peter, James being a fellow "pillar" of Peter's.

The second part of Paul's stewardship was only hinted at before the close of Acts –

"But arise and stand upon your feet. For I appeared to you for this *purpose*, to appoint you a subordinate and a witness both of the things you saw *concerning* Me, and **of the things I will appear to you concerning.**" Acts 26:16

Here at the end of Acts, Luke finally lets on that a future task awaited Paul, one which he had a hint of at the beginning of his calling. And my hunch is that, as of the time that Acts was published, the details of that task had already been revealed to him. But to Paul alone it was given to write the word of God concerning this great "dispensation of the secret" (Eph.3:9), although he had helpers in speaking this gospel and distributing copies of the inspired word concerning it. Thus, Luke's "Acts" does not reveal the great secret – that was not part of his particular stewardship.

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During Acts, Paul was master-steward of the gospel of the uncircumcision. After Acts, he was master-steward of the dispensation of the secret as a whole – there was no “Jew first” after Acts 28:28. Paul was God’s vessel of election to carry both of these messages, each in its appropriate season. One of the distinguishing features of a dispensation is that it has a peculiar season when it applies as God’s word. A dispensation may also have a peculiar people. Above all, God seeks obedience to His word that He has called you with. An ignorant man cannot serve God effectively, because he does not understand His calling. A cursory reading of the Bible will only enlighten you so far. The chronologically last word that God revealed was 2 Timothy – not Revelation, as implied by its arrangement in most Bible portfolios. The arrangement of individual “books” is man-made, and not God-inspired. This last word of God to us in our dispensation contains some distinctive truths, and commandments, such as this –

“Be diligent to present yourself approved (‘tested’) to God, an unashamed worker, rightly dividing the word of the truth.” 2 Tim.2:15

If you fail to obey this commandment, you will reap confusion, because God has revealed His will and committed stewardship in various seasons to various of His callings. Here, at the very end of His revelation, it was extremely relevant for Him to command this “right division” of His word.

Where Do We Stand Today?

If you have failed to take note of the stark contrast between Paul’s accommodating attitude toward “the Jew first” during Acts, and his utter repudiation of Judaism in Philippians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, then I urge you to go back and read the section on **The New Covenant**.

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We live in a dispensation which is decidedly for Gentiles. If Christianity can be said to have flourished, it has been outside of Israel and Judaism. I do not mean to say that a Christian might not come out of Judaism – but he must leave his Judaism behind him to fully grasp his blessings today. These are emphatically NOT covenant blessings – i.e., of the earth, even if much of New Covenant blessing was spiritual in nature. As I have shown, even the New Covenant kept the stigma of a curse for covenant-breakers – even “beatings” for dishonorable stewards. There is no curse on apostate Christians today – their reward, or lack of reward, awaits a future judgment at Christ’s *bēma*. That is not to say that certain perverse activities will be without contemporary earthly consequences. Solomon had much to say along the lines of “and stripes for the back of fools” (Pro.19:29, *KJV*). But that would not be a covenant curse, such as Ananias and Sapphira experienced it (Acts 5:1-11).

Yes, there is one common Savior of men, and one King will reign over them – i.e., Jesus Christ. But multiple things were accomplished at the cross of Christ – some earthly, and some heavenly in nature. All gifts from God, whether heavenly or earthly, are gifts of grace. Men in every dispensation, except the brief period before Adam’s fall, have been crippled by sin. On our own, we were hapless, hopeless and helpless. We have all needed God’s gracious salvation. But not every gospel message is the same gospel, just as not every “calling out” (lit. meaning of Gk. *ekklēsia*, commonly translated “church”) is the same calling. Stephen obviously had OT saints in mind when he spoke of “**the church** in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, *KJV*).

Today’s dispensation is described in three different ways by three texts from Ephesians. In many ways, Ephesians lays the foundation which other post-Acts epistles build upon (Colossians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon). Here are the principal texts –

“which (grace) He superabounded to us in every wisdom and understanding, having made known to us the secret of His desire,

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according to His (Father's) delight which He purposed in Him (Christ), for **the dispensation of the fullness of the seasons** to sum up all these things in Christ – the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth” Eph.1:8-10

“On account of this, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you the nations, seeing that you heard **the dispensation of the grace of God**, which is having been given to me for you, that according to revelation He made known to me the secret, even as I wrote before in brief (i.e., in Ephesians chapter 1), for which you are able, reading it, to understand my insight in the secret of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as now it was revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. The nations to be joint-heirs and joint-bodied and joint-partners of the promise in Christ Jesus”

Eph.3:1-6

“To me, the far-least of all saints, was given this grace to evangelize the nations about the untraceable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all what is **the dispensation of the secret**, which *is* having been hidden from the ages in the God, Who *is* having created all these things, so that may be made known now to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenlies through the church, the manifold wisdom of God according to the purpose of the ages, which He worked by Christ Jesus our Lord” Eph.3:8-11

These three mentions of the “now” dispensation are like three tips of an iceberg – they are each part of great run-on sentences, where it was difficult to place a full stop because of the connectedness of thought. They all touch upon themes that are expanded upon in their greater contexts, and I will develop them in the rest of this section. So we have here three different expressions of the current dispensation –

- **the dispensation of the fullness of the seasons**, emphasizing its timing (but Eph.3:5 and 3:10 express these seasons as “now”),

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and also the two spheres of “things in the heavens (heavenly rulers) and the things upon the earth (this church)”

- **the dispensation of the grace of God**, emphasizing His peak grace (but superabounding grace at Eph.1:8, and untraceable riches at Eph.3:8) and applies it to the nations – Israel not even mentioned
- **the dispensation of the secret**, emphasizing its hiddenness from the (previous) ages (but His secret desire at Eph.1:9, and the secret of Christ not made known in other generations at Eph.3:5), and twin blessings for the nations (the church) and the heavenly rulers – again silence concerning Israel

Do you see how the threads of these revelations tie together? Take note how Israel is absent from all these expressions of dispensation. And note the emphatic use of all the definite articles in these expressions – this doctrine is *very* specific.

Some would prefer to put off “the fulness of the seasons” to a future time, but all the blessings mentioned are available “now”.

And further, some have mistakenly related this secret to Romans 16, which uses somewhat different language to express its secret –

“But to the One being able to strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to **revelation of a secret**, silenced in age-times, but manifested now through the prophetic scriptures, according to the command of the aionian God, for obedience of faith, having been made known to all the nations...”

Rom.16:25

God has His timetable for revealing *various* secrets. The “silenced” secret of Romans 16 was also hinted at in the prophetic scriptures. *This* secret must be gleaned from context. I referred to this secret also in the chapter on **New Covenant** –

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“For I desire you not to be ignorant, brothers, of **this secret**, so that you may not be wise among yourselves, that a hardening in part has come to Israel, until which the fullness of the nations may enter. And so all Israel will be saved, even as it has been written, ‘Will come out of Zion the One delivering. He will remove irreverence from Jacob.’”

Rom.11:25

This was a secret “silenced”, yet revealed in the prophetic scriptures. And it looked forward to *the salvation of all Israel*. However, “the secret” in Ephesians and Colossians was “hidden from the ages”, not revealed to the sons of men anywhere, at any time. It concerned the nations being blessed in their own right, not as second-class citizens to Israel, and not as a consequence of the Abrahamic promise (Gen.12:1-3), or Israel hardening their heart toward the gospel. In fact, in today’s dispensation Israel has assumed a role alongside the other nations, and without special privileges – the *same* grace applies to all of us. We are no longer in a “Jew first” dispensation.

Among “the prophetic scriptures” that Paul cited in Romans was Hosea –

“As even in Hosea He says, ‘I will call “My people” that which *is not My people* (Heb. *Lo-Ammi*), and her not having been loved, “having been loved””” Rom.9:25

But look what else God says in Hosea –

“For many days, sons of Israel will dwell – no king, nor prince, nor sacrifice, nor sacred pillar, nor ephod or terraphim.” Hos.3:4

Apart from preserving them through this barren period without government or religion, there is no hint what God would be doing to forward His plan of the ages during Israel’s *Lo-Ammi* period of “many days”. What was *not* revealed by Hosea is the truth of the completely hidden revelation that Ephesians announces. And note that the revelation of “the dispensation of the secret” makes no mention of Hosea’s *Lo-*

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Ammi (“not My people”) prophecies. Those prophecies had Israel center-stage. Romans 9 and 11 brought the nations onto that stage as secondary players. Today’s stage is altogether new. One might infer from all this that covenant-Israel is in a *Lo-Ammi* condition today, but non-covenant-Israel is a potential partner in today’s blessings. Then what is *our* hope today?

What Is Our Hope “In the Heavens”?

Here is where both covenant and dispensational teachers today stumble. They do not make clear distinctions between “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20) and our hope today. Here follow some pertinent Ephesians texts –

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One having blessed us with every spiritual blessing **in the heavens** by Christ...” Eph.1:3

This introduces two superlatives, “every spiritual blessing” and “in the heavens” (Gk. *en tois epouraniois*). Both expressions are unique to Ephesians, with the latter occurring 5 times. Yes, there were spiritual blessings conferred under the New Covenant – the ability to fulfill heart-law was certainly such a spiritual blessing. But in Ephesians it is “every spiritual blessing” – furthermore, these blessings are “in the heavens”. Now don’t read that as meaning “from the heavens”, which would be a subtle distortion of God’s word. Such a view could include New Jerusalem, which will descend out of “the heaven” to earth (Rev.21:10). It would also include the “spirituals” (Gk. *pneumatikōs*) of 1 Cor.12:1, which were the Spirit’s outpourings from heaven into the earth. These are not the spiritual blessings “in the heavens” that we enjoy.

And what exactly are “the heavens”? Gk. *epouranios* is an adjective, often used as a noun in scripture. It is composed of *epi* + *ouranios*, and might be rendered literally “up-heavenly” or “above-

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heavenly” – i.e., it is more emphatic than merely “heavenly” (*ouranios*). As I hope to demonstrate, Ephesians is full of such superlatives. Some of our spiritual blessings are mentioned in the continuation of Eph.1:3 –

“even as He (Father) chose us by Him (Christ) before the overthrow of the world, us to be holy and blameless before Him, in love having predestined us for sonship for Himself through (or ‘by’) Jesus Christ...” Eph.1:4-5

Now generally, “sonship”, election and predestination are not suddenly introduced with “the dispensation of the secret”, but the time aspect “before the overthrow of the world” is new in terms of when this divine decision was made. I have translated Gk. *katabolē* as “overthrow”, and not “foundation”, as many translators do. “Foundation” has its own word, *themēlios*, while *kata-bolē* is literally a “down-throw”. If one were to “throw down” a foundation how would a building stand on such hasty work?

This “overthrow of the world” is a reference back to when “the earth became waste and void (Heb. *tohûw wa-bohûw*), and darkness was upon the face of the deep” (Gen.1:2). Heb. *tohûw wa-bohûw* is indicative of judgment – search these words in a Hebrew concordance and see for yourself. Moses did not reveal, and probably did not know what happened to bring about that “overthrow”. But immediately after God put the heavens and earth back in order, He created Adam. And shortly after that, Satan appeared on the scene to overthrow his new competitor for earthly dominion. Whatever Satan and his crowd had been up to previously in the earth must have been as evil as the earthly scene in Noah’s day, when another such watery overthrow took place. This “before the overthrow of the world” also helps explain the full import of blessings “in the heavenlies” – the heavenlies were also spoiled by Satan, and we the body of Christ have been called to be his competitors *there*, as well as here. Because of the spiritual nature of our blessings, we already have a foot in that heavenly door. And Satan must surely see the writing

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on the wall where “the heavenlies” are concerned. He has lost whatever dominion he once had there – for good. Recall that a dispensation includes a dominion. But more on this later, when we get to Ephesians chapters 3 and 6.

Our next text is –

“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in recognition of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, for you to know what is the hope of His calling, and what the wealth of the glory of His inheritance **in the Holies**, and what the surpassing greatness of His power toward us, those believing according to the energizing of the might of His strength, which He energized in Christ, having raised Him out from the dead, and having seated Him at His right **in the heavenlies**, up above every principality and authority and power and lordship, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in the coming one” Eph.1:17:21

This text continues at some length, but I want to summarize a few points first –

- here are some of those spiritual blessings: wisdom, revelation, recognition, enlightenment
- wealth of glory
- inheritance “in the Holies” – not the earthly holy of holies, but the heavenly – Note, if Gk. *en tois hagiois* is translated “in the saints”, then it flips the inheritance and emphasizes a blessing, an inheritance He receives from us, and not our spiritual blessing, which is the import of the majority of Ephesians 1.
- God’s might and strength energizing us
- “in the heavenlies” here is to be found at the Father’s right hand, a place of supreme honor

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- Christ is “up above” all heavenly authority, but as we shall see our place is up there too

And the spiritual blessings continue –

“And He subordinated all things under His feet, and gave Him *as Head* (Gk. *kephalē*) over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of the One filling all these things in all.” Eph.1:22-23

This subordination of all things to Christ is not a new revelation (see also 1 Cor.15:25), but the headship of Christ over all things to the church *is* new. There is **a body of Christ** revealed under New Covenant doctrine, and it is also said there that “the head of every man is Christ” (1 Cor.11:3). But this was stated individually, not collectively. In fact, Paul’s argument for unity in that body included –

“But the eye is not able to say to the hand, ‘I have not need of you’, or again the head to the feet, ‘I have not need of you’”. 1 Cor.12:21

Headship in that earlier body, if we can even refer to such headship, was more like a human simile, than the body metaphor for our church today and the unity of Christ with this church. Our unity today is described in the most binding terms, and Christ’s headship is collective toward us as “**the** body of Christ”, not simply “a body of Christ” (1 Cor.12:27).

Extraordinarily, Eph.1:23 implies this church is a “fullness”, filled by the Head. This is not “the fullness of the nations” (Rom.11:25), that we saw under the New Covenant secret, but a fullness supplied out of Christ’s headship. I used the word “extraordinarily” above, because elsewhere, in Colossians, “all the fullness” is used to describe the deity of Christ (Col.1:19; 2:9). It is God-stuff, as it were, that is filling us. Is it any wonder that the chapter would open with “the One having blessed us with every spiritual blessing”? By the way, this unique Headship of Christ was already alluded to in my previous quote from Eph.1:10 –

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“for the dispensation of the fullness of the seasons, to **sum up** (Gk. *anakephalaioō*, also in Rom.13:9 where the Law is summed up) all these things in Christ...” Eph.1:10

Note how the verb to “sum up” contains within it a “head” (Gk. *kephalē*). Based on the context here in Eph.1:10, some have translated this to “head up”. And this summing up or “heading up”, as applied to the ages, brings us to “the fullness of the seasons”. Even so, Christ the Head is now filling His church. “Seasons” (Gk. *kairos*) is a word that might also be rendered “opportune times” or “appointed times.” We are currently at the pinnacle of God’s appointed times, and His highest dispensation. I say “highest” deliberately, because you can get no higher than the Father’s right hand and that is where we, **the body of Christ**, are “in Christ”. Needless to say, “in Him” we are also “up above” (Gk. *huperanō*) those heavenly “principalities and authorities” – whatever their role in heavenly government, our role is even higher, “up above” that. But this is only vaguely revealed to us for now. If you cannot take that leap of faith into an unseen, unknown heavenly dominion today, then don’t expect to reign there with Christ when he assigns to us our stewardships “up above all”.

The position of the church at the Father’s right is described as a current reality –

“But God being rich in mercy, on account of His great love which He loved us *with*, we even being dead to the (our) faults, He enlivened us together (Gk. *suzōopoieō*) with Christ – by grace you are saved – and He raised us together (Gk. *sunegeirō*) and **seated us together** (Gk. *sugkathizō*) **in the heavenlies** in Christ Jesus, so that He might point out in the ages which *are coming* the surpassing wealth of His grace in kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.” Eph.2:4-7

Here again is a unique blessing “in the heavenlies”, one part is a present accomplishment and another part to be revealed in the coming ages. So today we are walking by faith concerning that yet-to-be-revealed part. It

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is certainly unclear what constitutes heavenly government, except that it was first entrusted to heavenly creatures – i.e., the angels.

The believer's spiritual identification with the death and resurrection of Christ began under the New Covenant, and it continued as a spiritual blessing into the current dispensation. Here are the elements of that spiritual reckoning –

- suffer with Him (Gk. *sumpaschō*, Rom.8:17)
- crucified together with Christ (Gk. *sunstauroō*, Rom.6:6, Gal.2:20)
- died together with Him (Gk. *apothnēskō sun*, Rom.6:8; Col.2:20; *sunapothnēskō* 2 Tim.2:11)
- conformed to His death (Gk. *summorphos*, Phi.3:10)
- planted with Christ (Gk. *sumphutos*, Rom.6:5)
- buried together with Him (Gk. *sunthaptō*, Rom.6:4; Col.2:12)
- conformed to His body of glory (Gk. *summorphos*, Phi.3:21)
- enlivened together with Him (Gk. *suzōopoieō*, Eph.2:5; Col.2:13)
- raised together with Him (Gk. *sunegeirō*, Eph.2:6; Col.2:12; 3:1)
- live with Him (Gk. *zaō sun*, 2 Cor.13:4)
- live together with Him (Gk. *suzaō*, 2 Tim.2:11)
- your life has been hidden together with Christ (Gk. *kruptō sun*, Col.3:3)
- glorified with Him (Gk. *sundoxazō*, Rom.8:17)
- **seated together in Him** (Gk. *sugkathizō* only Eph.2:6)

and the future hopes:

- **manifested with Him** (Gk. *phaneroō sun*, Col.3:4)
- **reign together with Him** (Gk. *sumbasileuō*, 2 Tim.2:12)
- “they will live and reign with (Gk. *basileuō meta*, Rev.20:4) Christ a thousand years”

I have **bolded** the future aspects of our identification that apply uniquely to us.

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When we “put on the new man” (Eph.4:24), we find ourselves positioned on that seat of government with the heavenly vantage point. The average Christian believes he will die, then go to heaven. But the spiritual Christian recognizes that he is already there through the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead.

Back to the doctrine of Christ as Head, we find this Headship expressed in multiple ways –

“And He subordinated all things under His feet, and gave Him *as* **Head** (Gk. *kephalē*) **over all things to the church which is His body**, the fullness of the One filling all these things in all.” Eph.1:22-23

“But speaking truth in love, we might grow into Him, Who is **the Head, Christ, out of Whom the whole body**, being joined together and united together, by every fastening of the support, according to *the* in-working in *the* measure of each single part, makes *for* itself the growth of the body, for *the* upbuilding of itself in love.” Eph.4:15-16

“a husband is head of the wife, as even **Christ is Head of the church, Himself Savior of the body** (i.e., the church).” Eph.5:23

“He is the Image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation, because by Him were created all these things in the heavens and upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, **whether thrones or lordships or principalities or authorities**. All these things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and all these things by Him stand together. And He is **the Head of the body, the church**, Who is the Principality, firstborn out from the dead, so that He might become in all things being first.” Col.1:15-18

“because in Him down-dwells all the fullness of the divinity bodily, and you are made full by Him, Who is **the Head of every principality and authority**.” Col.2:9-10

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“and not holding fast **the Head, out of Whom the whole body**, by the fastenings and the joints, being fully supplied and united together, grows the growth of God.” Col.2:19

Five of the above texts demonstrate Christ’s headship of the church, and His role in its growth. The sixth text speaks of His headship over “every principality and authority”, which may seem a bit odd considering the shape that this earthly world is in today. But the fourth text shows that this includes both heavenly and earthly authority. For now, that earthly authority extends primarily over the church, which is His body. But there are restraints in place over both heavenly and earthly realms, even where the kingdom of God is not yet evident. The text of 2 Thess.2:3-8 deals with a future “man of sin” not yet revealed, because he has been restrained from acting. I believe that similarly God’s unseen hand restrains evil within certain limits, and He has been restraining it so that it does not completely overwhelm us. Whatever evil our eyes may have witnessed in our generation, I doubt it yet matches the evil that Noah saw before the Flood, or that men will see in the time before Christ’s return to earth.

Look how often “all things”, “all these things”, “every” and “the whole” appear in the previous texts – not to mention “all the fullness of the divinity”. Among those “authorities” subordinated to Christ in this dispensation are the heavenly. In addition to the two “principality and authority” texts above, Paul’s prison epistles add these –

“for the dispensation of the fullness of the seasons, to **head up all these things** in Christ – **the things over the heavens and the things upon the earth**” Eph.1:10

This speaks only generally of the two realms, but it must be seen to include the governments of them both. The best that our understanding can grasp of heavenly government now is to treat it as an analogy to

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earthly government. The details will have to wait until we are “manifested with Him in *the* glory” (Col.3:4).

“Up above **every principality and authority and power and lordship**, and **every** name being named, not only in this age but also in the coming one” Eph.1:21

Note again the “every”-ness, or fullness, expressed in these wonderful texts. It applies generally to authority, and it spans present and future ages. This all goes to explain the extent of our “every spiritual blessing” in Eph.1:3.

“and to enlighten all what *is* the dispensation of the secret, the one having been hidden from the ages in the God, the One having created **all these things**, so that might be made known now to **the principalities and to the authorities in the heavenlies**, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages which He worked by Christ Jesus our Lord” Eph.3:9-11

This brings the heavenly realm and the earthly realm together in a synergy that is accomplishing “the purpose of the ages”. It also sheds contextual light on other texts dealing with Christ’s authority in this dispensation.

“Put on the panoply of God, for you to be able to stand against the schemes of the devil, because there is not for us the wrestling against blood and flesh, but **against the principalities, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual things of the evil in the heavenlies**.” Eph.6:11-12

So, the church’s demonstration of God’s wisdom to these heavenly authorities only comes with great opposition. In fact, that opposition is part of God’s demonstration through us. There is a spiritual contest here between heavenly and earthly realms, and it can hardly involve the earthly, secular authorities, who are largely ignorant of heavenly authority. Although not very descriptive, “this darkness” seems an

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obvious reference to the condition of things in this present world – and it is a condition dating back to the judgment that led to the “darkness” and *tôhûw wa-bôhûw* (“waste and void”) of Gen.1:2.

This battle, or “wrestling”, is “not against blood and flesh”, so this is one of the distinguishing characteristics of today’s dispensation. Contrast this with the great battle of the devils and their human followers against flesh and blood Israel in Revelation 12. However, Paul also taught a spiritual warfare during Acts (e.g., 2 Cor.10:3-6).

Another rulership text is here –

“having stripped **the principalities and the authorities**, He (Christ) exposed them in *the* open, having triumphed over them in it (i.e., the cross)” Col.2:15

Now the newly resurrected Christ appeared openly to only a few men (1 Cor.15:5-8), but not to triumph over them. Thus Col.2:15 must refer to some of those heavenly rulers. Further, this was not revealed to men until the appropriate season – post-Acts.

Col.1:16 and 2:10 were already quoted previously and they round out the picture of our battleground. It is perhaps noteworthy that Rom.8:38 distinguishes between “angels” and “principalities and authorities”. This may indicate a distinction between a group of spiritual envoys (“angels”, i.e., “messengers”), and a hierarchy of spiritual rulers (“principalities and authorities”). The only place that “angels” as such figure in Ephesians-Colossians is the warning against angelic worship in Col.2:18, which is a repudiation of Judaistic worship (see also Acts 7:53; Heb.1:13-14; 12:22). Elsewhere, 1 Tim.5:21 refers to “elect angels”, which may include the enlightened principalities and authorities. I would not assume that all the heavenly principalities have fallen, despite Eph.6:12. Nor would I assume that all the principalities in Eph.3:10 are being taught benign lessons. As with any group of individuals, some are likely bad, and some good. It would be interesting to listen in on their conversations

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about us, but that is not one of our spiritual blessings – yet. Job chapters 1 and 2 allow us to eavesdrop on conversations between God and Satan over Job’s righteous life. Perhaps that may give us insight over the bad things being said about us behind our backs.

Another reference to the multi-faceted creation is here -

“On account of this I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Whom **every family in *the* heavens and upon the earth is named**” Eph.3:14-15

If they are named from Him, it shows His ownership of them – “created by Him and for Him” (Col.1:16). This is also the “every name named” that we saw previously in Eph.1:21.

So then, what is our hope? Well, it is –

- spiritual in nature
- heavenly in nature
- involves an earthly component (the church) locked in a contest with heavenly darkness – and note, described in both athletic and combat terms (“wrestling” in Eph. 6:12; “panoply” in Eph.6:13; while 1 and 2 Timothy use the metaphors of “combat” and “soldier”)

Is “the Heavenly City” to be identified with “In the Heavens”?

Not at all. Let me show you how to “try the things that differ” (Phi.1:10). The Acts period Epistle to the Hebrews is full of heavenly talk, such as –

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“From this, holy brothers, partakers of a **heavenly** (Gk. *epouranios*) **calling**, consider carefully the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus.” Heb.3:1

There is nothing about priests or priesthood in the post-Acts epistles. Christ is the Head of the body, His church today, and *not* its High Priest. Israel’s New Covenant calling was “heavenly” because it introduced the possibility for Overcomers to attain “the **heavenly** Jerusalem”.

“For *it is* impossible to those once having been enlightened and having tasted of **the heavenly gift** and having become partakers of holy spirit, and having tasted the goodness of God’s word, also powers of a coming age...” Heb.6:4-5

The gifts of holy spirit that began at the Pentecost of Acts 2 were **heavenly** in origin. Each New Covenant believer was endowed with some gift (1 Cor.12:4-11). Those gifts did not continue beyond Acts. For example, after Acts, Paul the healer (Acts 19:11-12) could not heal the sickness of his friends Epaphroditus (Phi.2:25-28), and Trophimus (2 Tim.4:20).

“If indeed, then, He (Christ) were upon earth, He would not even be a priest, *there* being those *priests* offering the gifts according to law, who serve as a model and shadow of **the heavenlies**, even as Moses has been divinely instructed, being about to complete **the Tent** (Gk. *skēnē*), for ‘See, He says, you will make all things according to the type which was having been shown you on the mountain.’” Heb.8:5

This teaches that the earthly worship instituted under the priesthood of Aaron had a heavenly equivalent and origin. But nowhere is there attributed to the post-Acts church a heavenly priesthood, nor is Christ described as our High Priest in the heavenlies.

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“*It was* necessary, therefore indeed, the models of the things in the heavens (Gk. *ouranos*) to be purified with these (i.e., blood of bulls and goats), but **the heavenly things** with stronger sacrifices than these. For not into the made-by-hands **Holies** did Christ enter, copies of the true ones, but into the heaven (Gk. *ouranos*) itself, now to be manifested in the presence of God for us.” Heb.9:23-24

Again, this speaks about a heavenly Tent, where sacrifices, or gifts, are offered. But this is not our center of service “in the heavenlies”. We shall see shortly where that heavenly Tent will be pitched, ultimately.

“For he was expecting **the City of the Foundations**, whose architect and builder is God” Heb.10:10

This City of the Foundations is the New Jerusalem, and “the bride of the Lamb” depicted in Rev.21:9-21. Its foundations will consist of the stones of the breastplate of Israel’s high priest, and they will be named for the Twelve Apostles. What have we, the body of Christ, to do with Israel’s brideship, or their high priesthood, or the Twelve Apostles of the circumcision? Our “building” is spiritual in nature, consisting of the saints themselves, who are built upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph.2:19-22). This is the Pauline group of apostles and prophets whom Christ gave specifically for the upbuilding of our church (Eph.4:11-13).

“These all died according to faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them from afar and having welcomed *them*, and having professed that they are foreigners and sojourners upon the earth. For those saying such things manifest that they seek a **homeland**. And if, indeed, they were remembering that from which they came out, they would have had an opportunity to return. But now they stretch out for a stronger (i.e., homeland), that is a **heavenly one**.

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Therefore, God is not ashamed of them to be called upon *as* their God, for He prepared for them a **city**.” Heb.11:13-16

Thus, the heavenly and “true” Tent will be in a heavenly homeland, which is also a heavenly “city”. “Heavenly” continues to be used in Hebrews to indicate origin, not destination. Our post-Acts hope is nowhere called either a “city” (Gk. *polis*) or a “homeland” (Gk. *patris*). Again, I encourage you to “try the things that differ.”

“But you have come to **Mount Zion**, even *the city* of *the* living God, **heavenly Jerusalem** and myriads of angels, to a meeting and church of firstborn ones, enrolled in the heavens, and to God Judge of all, and to spirits of righteous ones having been perfected, and to Jesus Mediator of a new covenant, and to blood of sprinkling speaking stronger things than *that* of Abel.” Heb.12:22-24

This text goes on to speak of the quaking of both earth and heaven (12:26) and God as a consuming fire (12:27), which are references to “the day of the Lord”. My friend, that will become Israel’s great day too – i.e., for “the Israel of God.” The post Acts epistles mention a “day of Christ”, in which those who “try the things that differ” will find themselves pure and blameless (Phi.1:10), but no quaking and no “day of the Lord”. The whole book of Hebrews is about “things that differ” from our hope “in the heavenlies”. There is no mention of a city, homeland or tent concerning our hope today – and no Jerusalem or Zion of any origin. Further, we the church are the current Temple of God and fellow-citizens of the Holies (Eph.2:19-22). We have no idea of the size or location of our “Holies”, and if these “Holies” happen to include New Jerusalem for the present, the part does not encompass the whole. And my idea of the whole is very much grander than a single city, however grand that may be for Israel’s Overcomers.

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The heavenly Jerusalem is described in some detail in Revelation. Its features include –

- The Overcomer will be made a pillar in God’s **Temple**, where the name of **New Jerusalem** and Christ’s new name will be written upon him, at Christ’s coming again (Rev.3:11-12) – NOTE: Gk. *nikaō*, meaning “overcome” or “conquer”, is not found in any post-Acts books. We are said to “wrestle” against principalities and authorities today (Eph.6:12), but we are not commanded to “overcome” them.
- When a new heavens and earth are made, the sea will be gone, and “**the Holy City, New Jerusalem**” will descend out of the heaven as a bride; God’s **tent** will then be with an earthbound mankind (Rev.21:1-3). The “bride” characterization is what we might expect for those in covenant relation with Yahweh (e.g., Isa.62:5), Who was their Husband throughout the Mosaic dispensations (and that includes the New Covenant dispensation).
- The bride the Lamb’s wife, the Holy City Jerusalem, will descend out of the heaven as a walled city of marvelous stones, and gates named for the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and foundations named for the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb (Rev.21:9-14) – NOTE: Christ as “the Lamb of God” was the quintessential New Covenant sacrifice; “bride”, “Twelve Tribes”, “Twelve Apostles” and Christ “the Lamb” are all absent from the post-Acts books.
- New Jerusalem will be a fantastic size, with enormous walls, but still measurable with a measuring reed (Rev.21:15-17). Neither size nor measure is specified for “in the heavenlies” or “in the

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Holies”. The previous covenant yardstick does not apply to our dwelling with God. Come to think of it, space and time are characteristics of the physical creation, and our concepts of them are likely to be completely different when we are clothed with resurrection bodies. This likely explains why there is no description of “the heavies” in our epistles. How could we even begin to comprehend them in our present state?

- The twelve stones of the twelve foundations will be the same stones that adorned the high priest’s breastplate (Rev.21:19-20). The body of Christ has neither priest nor high priest.
- The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are **the Temple** of the city (Rev.21:22). But in “the Holies” we are God’s temple (Eph.2:19-22).
- The kings of the earth (and the nations) will bring their wealth into the city (Rev.21:24,26). But we have “the wealth of the glory of His inheritance in the Holies” (Eph.1:18).
- A river of water of life will flow out from God’s throne in the city; on either side of the river, a tree of life will produce its fruit twelve months a year; the leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations (Rev.22:1-2) – NOTE: all of this is *of the earth* – restored Eden and the tree of life, which is how the Adamic earth began.
- The curse (i.e., of the covenants) being removed, the throne of God and the Lamb will be there, enlightening His servants (Rev.22:3-5). For the church today “the eyes of our heart having been enlightened” already by wisdom, revelation and recognition of our hope (Eph.1:17-18), we have no need of a greater light.

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This heavenly Jerusalem, and all the blessings associated with it, are of the earth – they will be enjoyed when Christ returns here, to earth.

On the other hand, look how differently our hope is described –

“If then, you were raised with (Gk. *sunegeirō*) Christ, seek **the things above** (Gk. *ta anō*, like Christ our Head, ‘up above’ [Gk. *huper-anō*] all governments), where Christ is sitting at the right of God. Be minded on **the things above** (*ta anō*), not on the things upon the earth. For you died, and your life has been hidden with (Gk. *sun*) Christ by God. Whenever Christ your Life may be manifested, then also you will be manifested with (*sun*) Him **in the Glory.**” Col.3:1-4

There is nothing of the earth in this latter hope – in fact the text rather abnegates the earth. All is of the earth during Acts: city, New Jerusalem, walls, foundations, gates, homeland, river, tree of life, its fruits and leaves, restored Eden. However, for the church, the body of Christ, blessings are **in the heavenlies, in the Holies, the things above, up above every principality and authority, and in the Glory.** Do you begin to see now why we must be “rightly dividing the word of the truth” (2 Tim.2:15), and trying “the things that differ” (Phi.1:10), in order to be unashamed workers and worthy of that heavenly reward?

And here is another distinction, the Gospels, Acts and Acts period epistles deal with –

- “the kingdom of the heavens” (“heavens” indicating its origin) – found 32 times in Matthew
- the emphasis of this expression is God reigning **on** earth, but doing so **from** “the heavens” (via empowerment by the Holy Spirit), as He did during Acts – this in distinction from the Millennium, when the focus will turn to Christ’s throne on earth

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But this lone expression is found post-Acts –

- “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and will save me into **His heavenly kingdom**, to Whom *is* the glory for the ages of the ages. Amen.” (2 Tim.4:18)
- this is His kingdom *in* the heavenlies, and it includes the seats of heavenly principality and authority

In 2 Tim.4:18 Paul was not seeking refuge from persecution, for the Lord had already revealed to him how greatly he must suffer for the gospel (Acts 9:15-16). No, this was preservation of his spiritual stamina, to endure to the end and to attain his crown – that is what concerned him most toward the end (2 Tim.2:11-12; 4:8).

Some time earlier than 2 Timothy, Paul was not yet sure of this crown:

“But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered loss on account of Christ. But, therefore, indeed I consider all things to be loss on account of the Surpassing Knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of Whom I have lost all these things, and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is out of *the* law, but that through faith of Christ, the righteousness out of God upon the faith *basis*, to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed (Gk. summorphizō) to His death, if somehow I may arrive to **the out-resurrection** (Gk. *exanastatis, hapax*) out of *the* dead ones. Not that I already received *it*, or already have been perfected. But I press on, if also I may lay hold upon that which I was also taken hold upon by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I myself do not reckon to have taken hold of *it*. But one thing, the things behind indeed forgetting, and straining forward to the things ahead, I press on toward the goal for **the prize of the above-calling** (Gk. phrase anō klēsis is *hapax*) of God by Christ Jesus.” Phi.3:7-14

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This is *not* “the heavenly calling” of Hebrews, but it is “above” even that. And note the singular use of “out-resurrection”. Revelation mentions only a “prior” and a “second” resurrection, because that is all that had been revealed to the sons of men during Acts. This “out-resurrection” is part of the “secret” that distinguishes our dispensation. The implication is that it will be first – out from *all* the dead. Then the “prior” resurrection will be out from the rest of the dead. And finally, the “second” resurrection will include “the rest of the dead”.

Without much detail to distinguish it, this next 2 Timothy text says something about that “out-resurrection” –

“I solemnly testify before God and Christ Jesus, the One about to judge **living and dead**, both His **appearing** (Gk. *epiphaneia*) and His kingdom, preach the word, be at-hand in season, out of season, rebuke, admonish, encourage with every forbearance and doctrine. For a season will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine, but according to their own passions they will heap up to themselves teachers, tickling the ear. And from the hearing of the truth, indeed, they will turn away, and they will be turned aside toward the myths.”

2 Tim.4:1-4

I already discussed “the myths”, and especially “the Jewish myths” in the earlier chapter, **New Covenant**. Christ “about to judge living and dead” at “His appearing” does resemble some covenant truth. For example, here –

“For if we believe that Jesus died and arose, thus also God will bring with Him those having fallen asleep by Jesus. For this we say to you by *the* word of *the* Lord, that we the living, those left behind until **the coming** (Gk. *parousia*) **of the Lord**, will in no wise precede those having fallen asleep, because the Lord Himself with an outcry, with voice of an archangel and with trumpet of God will descend from heaven. And the dead in Christ will arise first. Then we the living,

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those left behind, will be seized by the clouds for encountering the Lord **in the air**. And so, we will always be with the Lord.”

1 Th.4:15-17

This “coming”, the *Parousia* of Jesus Christ will be upon the earth, and meeting Him “in the air” will precede their landing here. “In the air” is not “the things above” (*ta anō*, in Col.3:1) or “in the Glory” (Col.3:4), where today’s believer should be turning his mind. These are “things that differ”. Also, Christ’s *Parousia*, with its shoutings and trumpets can be seen across the pages of Revelation. The Lord of our meeting is said to have simply “His appearing” – Gk. *epiphaneia* means a “shining forth” and it is a key word in Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, which form part of today’s revelation of the great secret.

But there will also be a “shining forth” (an *epiphaneia*) connected with the *Parousia*, and this is specified at –

“And now what is holding back you know, for him to be revealed in his own season. For **the secret of the lawlessness** is already at-work. Only *there is* the One holding back just now, until He may come out of the midst. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will take away by the breath of His mouth, and He will render idle by the **appearing** (*epiphaneia*) of His **coming** (*parousia*).” 2 Th.2:6-8

This is a very specific aspect of Christ’s appearing – it may suggest an appearing in stages, first in “the aboves” (i.e., “in the heavenlies”), then later “in the air” on His return to earth for His *Parousia*. Although Paul has many harsh things to say about false-teachers and false-teachings in his post-Acts books, there is not a word in them about “the apostasy” inspired by “the man of the lawlessness”, “the son of the destruction” (2 Th.2:3). Nor does he mention anything in them about “the secret of the lawlessness” – this is not connected in any way with the secret of today’s dispensation. Nor does Paul mention Christ’s *Parousia* in his post-Acts.epistles. These things he rightly divided out of his prison ministry

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gospel. A word related to *Parousia* is the *Sunteleia*, or “end-time” – Mat.24:3, “the sign of Your *Parousia* and *Sunteleia* of the age.” This is another word lacking from post-Acts doctrine, and it denotes Israel’s second (latter) harvest (e.g., *LXX* at Exo.23:16, *KJV* “ingathering”), and the Feasts connected with the greater harvest (Trumpets, Day of Atonements, Tabernacles – Lev.23:23-44). But our dispensation has been *warned against* keeping sabbaths and feasts (Col.2:16).

And please remember: “things that differ” are not the same. How can you be led to your prize if you fail to discern God’s nuances in His word. These various things that distinguish Acts covenant truth from today’s secret, grace truth are why there is so much emphasis in Ephesians and Colossians on knowledge, discernment, and wisdom. We should be training for that wisdom, if we want to receive our reserved seats “in the heavenlies”, where those who endure in this life will be reigning with Christ in resurrection life. A “prize” or “reward” can be lost, but not the “we shall also live with Him” (2 Tim.2:11-12) aspect of our calling.

Difference Between a Covenant and a Dispensation

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To recapitulate, a covenant is an agreement between two parties, and it may display any of the following features –

- possibly a unilateral promise
- often a conditional promise – blessings in return for obedience
- in the unilateral case, commandments are often added later
- the promises are typically earthly in nature, with a provision for defense of an embattled party
- covenant-breaking is a most serious breach – it breaks an oath to God
- covenant-breaking entails a covenant-curse, a covenant vengeance
- sometimes God effected a name-change to the human party, signifying a sort of new birth to the human covenanter
- God often bound His covenants with a sign – and even human covenants did this – the sign served for a remembrance
- covenants were often sealed with a sacrificial feast, with the sacrificial animals divided in two
- the governance of the divine covenants with mankind spanned from just after Adam’s fall to the end of Acts
- some divine covenants applied to the orderliness and stability of the material creation – obviously they continue today for the benefit of those living upon the earth
- the divine covenants were additive – for example, the Mosaic did not abnegate the Abrahamic, nor the Davidic the Mosaic

On the other hand, a dispensation is a rulership, governed by a “house-law”. Thus, it is also –

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- a dominion, with a rulership structure ordained by God
- a divine selection of a household
- a set of laws to govern that household

Therefore, the central difference between these two arrangements is the formality of enacting a covenant and the sanctions for breaking a covenant (an oath). Then there was also the earthly nature of covenants. The divine covenants also included some of that “house-law” that governed the dispensations – in fact throughout much of the OT and most of the NT you cannot separate the terms of the covenants from their respective dispensations. These two words look at the various periods of divine rule over men from somewhat different perspectives, but they are mutually compatible.

“But now”, a great difference was introduced after Acts 28. **Today** we have a dispensation, named three different ways, but without a covenant. That is why I entitled this book, “Why I Am a Dispensationalist *Today*”. Our dispensation is based on a gracious promise. Look how that promise is expressed in various places –

“for the dispensation of the fullness of the seasons, to head up all these things in Christ, the things over the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him in Whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been predestined according to *the* purpose of the One in-working all these things according to the counsel of His desire, for us to be for the praise of His glory, those **having prior-hoped** in Christ in Whom also you having heard **the word of the truth**, the gospel of your salvation, in Whom also having believed, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit of **the promise**, Who is the earnest of our inheritance, for the full ransom of the acquired possession, for the praise of His glory.” Eph.1:10-13

First note the “prior-hoped in Christ”, which might also be rendered, “having had the prior-hope in Christ”. The verb for having this prior-hope (Gk. *proelpizō*, *hapax*) could have a number of meanings, such as

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first hoping then receiving. But the context points strongly to the few verses before, where we were chosen by Him “before the overthrow of the world” (Gk. *pro katabolēs kosmou*, Eph.1:4), and our “having been predestined” (Gk. *proorizō*) for sonship. Our prior-hope was established by His predestinating election before He ever created Man.

Further, The Holy Spirit revealed this **promise** to men through **the word of the truth of the gospel**. I need not point out that not every gospel message is the same gospel. During Acts, “the gospel of the uncircumcision” was committed to Paul, while that of the circumcision was given to Peter (Gal.2:7). These were two different, but related gospels running concurrently. And note the precise expression at Eph.1:13 – **the word of the truth**. Whenever you see both articles present in genitive or adjectival phrases, you should sit up and take notice. Something very specific is being alluded to here. This text may sound generic, when it is taken without context. For example, the whole Bible is the word of truth – that is, it is all God’s word and the truth. “The word of the truth” indicates a subset of that whole truth – that is, “the dispensation of the secret” (Eph.3:9). When you couple Eph.1:13 with the other two expressions of **the word of the truth**, all spoken post-Acts, just see what comes from it –

“because of the hope which is being laid up for you in the heavens, which you heard already in the **the word of the truth of the gospel**, which is being present for you, even as it is in the whole world, bearing fruit and growing, even as also among you, from the day you heard and recognized the grace of God in truth.” Col.1:5-6

Like Eph.1:13, this sounds rather generic, but is not. It speaks of “the hope” “in the heavens” themselves – not a hope out of the heavens, like “the heavenly city” that Israel’s overcomers expected. This is also “the whole world” gospel – not a Jew first, then Greek gospel. It also

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emphasizes “the dispensation of the grace of God” (Eph.3:2) – the pinnacle of His grace toward men, a dispensation devoid of any covenant curse.

The final text really shows what we must *do* with **the word of the truth** –

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed worker, rightly dividing the word of the truth.” 2 Tim.2:15

This gospel truth, as revealed in Ephesians-Colossians, a worldwide nation-ward gospel (no “Jew first” any longer) must be rightly divided from other gospel messages (which are also truth), if we wish to stand “approved” before God’s judgment seat. Do you want to receive a reward? Then rightly divide this truth away from Acts period truth, which favored the Jew and centered on “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). This does not ignore the fact that there is much common ground between the Acts period faith and today’s gospel. But there are also differences that the “unashamed worker” must acknowledge.

Back to the promise of Ephesians –

“toward which (secret), *upon* reading, you are able to grasp my understanding in the secret of Christ, which (secret) to other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as now it was revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by *the* Spirit, the nations to be joint-heirs (Gk. *sunklēronomos*) and joint-bodied (*sussōma*) and joint-partners (*summetochos*) of **the promise** by Christ Jesus through the gospel” Eph.3:4-6

This promise was for the nations jointly, Israel being completely out of sight as the covenant-nation. In effect, it reverts back to God’s dealing with the nations of Genesis 10, before He called out Abraham.

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A contrasting text that takes another backward look must be rightly divided from the current promise –

“Remember that once you, the nations in *the* flesh, those called ‘uncircumcision’ by those called ‘circumcision’, in the flesh, hand-made, that you were in that season apart from Christ, **alienated from the citizenship** (Gk. *politeia*) **of Israel**, and foreigners of **the Covenants of the Promise**, not having hope and God-less in the world.” Eph.2:12

This far-away position of the nations was described also in Rom.1:28 as God having given them up to a reprobate mind. But the “mystery epistles” take us beyond the subordinating reconciliation of a few nationals in the Acts period, which had engrafted some of them into the root of Israel (Rom.11:11,17).

Note how the hope of Israel is summed up here in Ephesians in one succinct phrase “the Covenants of the Promise” (Gk. *hai diathēkai tēs epaggelias, hapax*). In one sweeping view, this takes us from the basic promise to Abraham concerning his posterity and “all the families of the ground” (Gen.12:1-3), through the successive covenants that added to this promise (Mosaic and Davidic covenants), up to the New Covenant that perfected the promise with its perfect sacrifice. Ephesians is sprinkled with these grand views of the divine plan, by which God not only revealed things to men, but also kept secrets from them.

“But now in Christ Jesus, you, those once being far away, came near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, Him making **the both one**, and **having broken the middle wall of the partition**, the enmity by His flesh, having nullified **the law of the commandments in ordinances**, so that the two He might create in Himself **one new man**, making peace, and **might super-reconcile** (Gk. *apokatallassō*) **the**

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two in one body to God by the cross, having killed the enmity by it. And having come, He evangelized peace to you the far-away ones and peace to the near ones. Because by Him the both of us have the boldness by one Spirit to the Father. Then, therefore, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but you are **joint-citizens** (Gk. *sumpolitēs*) **of the Holies and a household of God.**” Eph.2:13-19

This text is loaded with remarkable truths. The unity of Jew (the “near”) and Greek (the “far-away”) described above was not present during Acts. There was enmity between the two groups, and a distinction between “the law of the commandments” for believing Israel and the “ordinances” for believing nations. The Greek word I have translated “super-reconcile” is new to this “household”, this dispensation of God. It is an intensive form that prefixes the preposition *apo-* to the usual *katallassō*. *Katallassō* was used in the Acts period to describe the believer’s reconciliation to God (Rom.5:10-11), a wife’s reconciliation to her husband (1 Cor.7:11), God’s reconciliation of the world to Himself (2 Cor.5:18-20), and God’s reconciliation of the Gentile “world” to Himself by the stumbling of Israel (Rom.11:15 uses n. *katallagē*). That Jew-Greek enmity was symbolized by the middle-wall in the Jerusalem Temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the earthly Holies. The heavenly “Holies” have no such wall of separation.

Ephesians 2 speaks of the heavenly Holies as the place of His new household’s citizenship. And the text goes on to describe a new temple –

“having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being cornerstone, by Whom every building having been joined together, grows into a **holy temple in the Lord**, by Whom you are also built together for a habitation of God by *the* Spirit.” Eph.2:20-22

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The church today, this heavenly household, has become God's temple. This is a collective occupation by God, unlike the temple of the individual body, as expressed in 1 Cor.6:19.

Apokatallassō is a uniquely prison epistle word, and another aspect of this "super-reconciliation" is found here –

“He (Christ) is the Image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation, because by Him were created all these things in the heavens and upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, **whether thrones or lordships or principalities or authorities**. All these things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and all these things by Him stand together. And He is **the Head of the body, the church**, Who is the Principality, firstborn out from the dead, so that He might become in all things being first, because in Him All the Fullness was pleased to down-dwell, and by Him to **super-reconcile** (Gk. *apokatallassō*) all these things to Himself, having made peace by the blood of His cross, through Him whether the things upon the earth or the things in the heavens. And you, once being alienated and enemies by the mind in the evil deeds, but now He **super-reconciled** (Gk. *apokatallassō*) in the body of His flesh through the death, to present you holy and unblemished and blameless before him...”

Col.1:15-22

I have made this extensive quote because it shows the super-reconciled union of heavenly and earthly authority in multiple expressions. Here in Ephesians and Colossians are the only 3 occurrences of *apokatallassō*, a word of which Thayer (p.63) says, ‘Found neither in prof. auth. nor in the Grk. O. T.’, and Moulton and Milligan lack an entry for it (because not found in the papyri or inscriptions). This was truly a coinage of the Holy Spirit for our benefit, if we will take note of it and what it teaches about the nature of today's church. The Acts period church had no

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relationship, as we do, with the heavenly principalities and authorities. Note how Gentile alienation was expressed in Colossians as “alienated and enemies” (of God, implied), while we already saw in Eph.2:12 Gentile alienation from “the citizenship of Israel”. All this is leading us to our citizenship, our inheritance, “in the Holies” (Eph.1:18; 2:19; Col.1:12). Of this, Philippians also testifies –

“for **our citizenship** exists in *the* heavens, on the basis of which (citizenship) we eagerly await *the* Savior, *the* Lord Jesus Christ”

Phi.3:20

Since the Acts period, the Gentile went from being “also the Greek” after “the Jew first”, to a “but now” status of “fellow-citizens of the Holies” and “joint-heirs, joint-bodied, joint-partners”. Once “alienated” from things both earthly and heavenly, but now **super-reconciled** in both spheres.

The jointness of today’s church affects the character of our exalted inheritance also. We have already seen applications of that pre-verb “*sun-*” (and its variants “*sug-*” “*sum-*” and “*sus-*”) used to characterize a unity in the church today that was not a characteristic of the Acts period church. It will affect even our reigning in resurrection –

“Faithful *is* the word: for if we **died together** (Gk.*sunapothnēskō*), we shall also **live together** (*suzaō*). If we endure, we shall also **reign together** (*sumbasileuō*). If we deny *Him*, That One also will deny us. If we are faithless, That One abides faithful, for He is not able to deny Himself.” 2 Tim.2:11-12

This text shows that reigning with Christ, the highest reward, can be lost – but not eternal life itself. I invite comparison with a similar statement regarding the Acts period faithful –

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“and they lived and **reigned with** (Gk. *basileuō meta*) Christ a thousand years” Rev.20:6

“and You (Christ) made them to our God a kingdom and priests, and they will reign upon the earth” Rev.5:10

As for reigning with Christ, we have two groups who will reign with Him and two different prepositions to describe “with”. “*Sun*” depicts the most cohesive of all unions, while “*meta*” has a secondary sense of “behind”. What I derive from this is that Christ’s government on earth will have Him very prominently in front, with His ministers arrayed behind Him. Of His heavenly reign, I see Him in counsel with His ministers arrayed around Him. Which group do you think will have the greater authority to act for their Master?

Do you think this example is hair-splitting? Then why did the Holy Spirit through Paul urge –

“And this I pray, that your love may yet superabound more and more, in recognition and every discernment, for you to **try** (or ‘test’) **the things differing**, so that you may be pure and without offense until *the day of Christ*” Phi.1:9-10

As a Scripture literalist, I believe that God means what He says and says what He means. I know that I do not yet understand every nuance of His word, but I keep searching.

“A glory of God *is* to conceal a matter (lit. ‘word’, Heb. *dâbâr*), but a glory of kings *is* to search out a matter.” Pro.25:2

If you would reign as a king with Christ, then act like a king and search out what He has concealed. Further, it is also important to be guided by context, and not rip phrases and sentences out of their contexts. Cherry-picking your Bible texts will only lead to bad results.

God has offered His church today a place of authority at His right hand with His Son. This offer is both intriguing, and not a little

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intimidating. It places His church above a rulership that He established “in the heavenlies” thousands of years ago. It is a grace almost beyond imagining, and surely undeserved. All He asks is that we live up to it, and by His “every spiritual blessing” we are empowered to do just that.

Conclusion

Conclusion

To get back to the controversy between covenant theology and dispensational theology, I would describe myself as believing in both. When God dealt with men through a covenant, it did not negate that a dispensation was in effect. Most of the dispensations have been covenantal dispensations. The covenants provided specific measures for rulership in those dispensations.

What distinguishes my faith from the beliefs of the covenantal churches today is that the current dispensation has no covenant to guide its governance. Covenants are characterized by:

- being of the earth, earthly
- involving earthly dominion and dynasty – King Jesus as Son of David
- abounding in physical blessings for earthly families
- mediation of a priestly nation, Israel
- culminating in the Millennial age and an earthly throne, after the current dispensational “parenthesis” is completed
- then a Heavenly Jerusalem descending to earth and a restored Eden

On the other hand, “the dispensation of the grace of God” is:

- of the heavens and in the heavens, i.e., *altogether* heavenly
- involves heavenly dominion “in the heavenlies, up above every principality and authority...”
- in Christ, at the Father’s right hand
- offers “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ”
- gives direct access to the Father – i.e., through Christ, but not as our High Priest
- a superabounding wealth of grace – His kindness in the ages to come

Conclusion

- no city, but a temple “in the Holies”, which is ”the body of Christ” itself
- our appearing (Gk. *phaneroō*) with Christ in the Glory, at His *epiphaneia* and through the age to come, while during that same age He also reigns on earth with the Overcomers of Israel

That last bullet may cause some consternation – how can Christ be in two places at once? While I would not rule out His ability to be omnipresent, it need not be so. Would it be too astounding for Him to have two thrones and to travel between them? And seeing the many promises given to David personally (not “son of David”), a resurrected David may become a surrogate for Christ on earth when He is absent (Jer.30:9; Eze.37:23-25).

Considering the Holy Spirit’s sharp rebukes against a Judaized (i.e., covenantal) faith in Colossians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, how can I identify myself with those covenants?

Yes, there were spiritual aspects of the covenants. Abraham’s righteousness was declared because of his faith – and further, he looked for that heavenly city, whose builder and maker is God. And although Rom.7:14 pronounces that “the law is spiritual”, that does not make its practice part of my spiritual legacy. Although 1 Timothy 1:8 admonishes “that the law is good, if anyone may use it lawfully”, I have explained earlier how the context of vv.9-10 points toward murderers, slavers and such, with their punishment left largely to the civil authorities. That is especially true today, as we have no Christ-delegated apostles and prophets (Eph.4:11) to levy punishment on the body, as was done during Acts. Our punishing “rod” today is the admonition of “the sound teaching” (1 Tim.1:10; 2 Tim.1:13; 4:3; Tit.1:9,13: 2:1,8) as delivered by faithful men and able teachers (2 Tim.2:2). This “soundness” that we are encouraged to keep is based upon the Gk. *hugiainō*, from which the English “hygiene” is derived. Thus, we are to practice a verbal and doctrinal hygiene that scrubs “Jewish myths” from our faith.

Conclusion

I believe such thought was behind the injunction in Eph.5:15 for us to “walk accurately” (Gk. *akribōs* – KJV “circumspectly”). Walking inaccurately would likely lead us into an accidental faith, a “shipwrecked” faith (1 Tim.1:19). While such a disaster might result from a casual approach to getting a proper understanding of our faith, the careful Christian will pursue his faith with all diligence. We all make mistakes, but mistakes due to a lackadaisical attitude will not get us to a position where we might expect to “reign together” with Him. If you were grooming yourself for an important job interview, I doubt you would leave the preparations for the last minute. Our life on earth is like a job interview for a Cabinet position “in the heavenlies”.

There are some who seem to treat this “dispensation of the grace of God” as if grace were all supreme, and what we do about it is only secondary. Well it is a very “high” grace, if you will, to place us in Christ “in the heavenlies up above every principality and authority” (Eph.1:20-21). But along with great gifts come great responsibilities, per Luk.12:48. So, because of this great grace shown to us, a life of good works is also expected of us –

“For by the grace you are saved through faith, and this not from you – the gift of God – **not from works**, lest anyone might boast. For we are His work, created by Christ Jesus **for good works** which God before-prepared (Gk. *proetoimazō*, another of those “before” words that distinguish our election) that **we might walk by them.**” Eph.2:8-10

There is much guidance on appropriate works in Paul’s post-Acts epistles. I have gathered all these “works” texts with comments in **Appendix B: The Place of Works in the Dispensation of Grace**. In our dispensation there is grace, surely, but there is also the race. The contest between God’s people and Satan has continued unabated since Adam fell from his place of grace. It would be a mistake to be complacent and to let your guard down.

Conclusion

Another point worth making is that at times we need to exercise a little boldness in standing up for the truth. This is especially true for anyone who aspires to leadership, as taught by 1 Timothy 3. I recall an occasion told me long ago by a preacher who was invited to lecture at a Pentecostal Bible college. But the administrators were unaware that this preacher had come to an awareness that the Acts period was a closed dispensation. When this newcomer took the college president aside and began to show him “the things that differ”, the president’s reaction was, “But, brother, I have a tiger by the tail here!” Thus, even seeing a truth that contradicted parts of his faith, he chose to ride the coat-tails of a movement. This was cowardice, and seeking the praise of men.

And one last thought – I have intended this book as a help, even if a provocative help, and not as an accusation against any.

“If we were discerning ourselves, we would perhaps not be coming under judgment.” 1 Cor.11:31

I have not meant it as a call to come out of the Judaistic churches, else who would teach those left behind? Either some will listen and be drawn to the truth, or none will listen and you will be invited to keep silent or leave.

Appendix A: Application of Mosaic Law to the Resident Alien

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The Mosaic Covenant was quite specific about the treatment of foreigners under the Law. Of the examples provided below, you will note how many times a principle of the Law regarding foreigners is repeated two or three times, for emphasis. Here follows an example that would put the foreigner on an equal footing with a son of Jacob, and it appears to create a proselyte of that foreigner –

“And when a **sojourner** dwells with you, and *he wishes* to accomplish a Passover to Yahweh. For him being circumcised all males, then he may come near to accomplish it. And he will become as a native of the land, and every uncircumcised will not eat from it. One law will come to *the* native and to *the sojourner* dwelling in your midst.”

Exo.12:48-49

“And when a **sojourner** sojourns with you, then he will accomplish a Passover to Yahweh, according to *the* statute of the Passover, and according to its judgment. Thus he will do. One statute will come to you, even to **the sojourner** and to *the* native of the land.” Num.9:14

The Passover requirement was conditional – but a resident alien wishing to keep it must also be circumcised. There was this one barrier to entry. This text shows that a “sojourner” (Heb. *gêr*) was presumed to be uncircumcised, and therefore a foreigner. So this could not include an Israelite coming back to his land after living abroad. It was a foreign sojourner. The second text is less restrictive in not mentioning a circumcision requirement. Perhaps there was a distinction between partaking of a Passover lamb, and merely keeping the sabbath of Passover.

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There were many other provisions of the Law that applied to the foreigner who did not wish to be circumcised, for example –

“But the seventh day *is* a sabbath to Yahweh your Elohim. You will not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your slave or your female-slave or your cattle or your **sojourner** who *is* within your gates.” Exo.20:10

“But the seventh day is a sabbath of Yahweh your Elohim. You will not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your servant, or your maid-servant, or your ox, or your donkey, or any of your cattle, or a **sojourner** who *is* inside your gates, so that may rest your servant, and your maid-servant, even as you.” Deu.5:14

Keeping the sabbath was an unconditional requirement for all those residing in Israel – native or foreign. The texts above may also have been a protection against the abuse of foreign workers, by allowing them the same “rest” as the native. That protection is more apparent in the next verses –

“And you will neither mistreat nor oppress a **sojourner**, for you became a **sojourner** in *the* land of Egypt.” Exo.22:21

“And a **sojourner** you will not oppress. And you have known *the* life of the **sojourner**, for you became **sojourners** in *the* land of Egypt.”
Exo.23:9

“Six days you will do your work, but on the seventh day you will rest, so that your ox may rest and your donkey, and may be refreshed *the* son of your female-slave and **the sojourner**.” Exo.23:12

A foreigner was no more to be mistreated than one’s ox or donkey. An Israelite’s relation to a foreign servant should be at least as kind as his relation to his domestic animals. I believe this gets to a principle that has been in God’s heart from the beginning – showing kindness, man to man. Then what about the opposite situation, where the Jew is considered the

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foreigner in other lands? Would not the same kindness apply to him? The treatment of the Jews by some calling themselves “Christian” makes me ashamed to be affiliated with them, if only by that name “Christian”.

“And a statute of an age will come to pass for you in the seventh month. On *the* tenth of *the* month you will humble yourselves and do no work at all, the native or **the sojourner** who is dwelling in your midst.” Lev.16:29

The special sabbath of the Day of Atonement was incumbent upon all dwelling in the land.

“And you will say to them, ‘Each man from *the* house of Israel or from **the sojourner**, who dwells in your midst, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tent of meeting to accomplish it to Yahweh, even that man will be cut off from his people. And a man from *the* house of Israel, or from **the sojourner** dwelling in your midst, who eats any blood, I will even set My face against the person eating blood, and I will cut him off from the midst of his people.’” Lev.17:8-10

“Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all sons of Israel, and you will say to them, ‘Anyone from *the* house of Israel, and from **the sojourner** in Israel, who brings near his offering for every one of his vows or for every one of his freewill-offerings, which they bring near to Yahweh for a burnt offering for an acceptance will be a male from cattle without blemish, from sheep and from goats.’” Lev.22:18-19

“And when a **sojourner** dwells with you, or whoever *is* in your midst for your generations, and he would make a burnt-offering, a sweet odor to Yahweh, as what you do, so will he do. The congregation *will be* of one ordinance for you and for *the sojourner* who *is* dwelling with you – an ordinance of an age to your generations. As you *are*, so *the sojourner* will come before Yahweh. One law and one judgment will come for you and for *the sojourner* who *is* dwelling with you.”

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Num.15:14-16

The native Israelite or a resident alien could offer sacrifices or votive offerings, but only at the tent of meeting (later the Temple). And the law against eating the blood repeated what God had instructed Noah, when he gave him permission to eat the animals.

“And in your reaping *the* harvest of your land, you will not wholly reap *the* corners of your field. And *the* gleanings of your harvest you will not gather. And you will not glean your vineyard, and *every* grape of your vineyard you will not gather. For *the* poor and for *the* **sojourner** you will leave them. I *am* Yahweh your Elohim.”

Lev.19:9-10

“And in your reaping *the* harvest of your land, you will not wholly reap *the* corners of your field. And *the* gleanings of your harvest you will not gather. And a gleaning of your harvest you will not gather. For *the* poor and for *the* **sojourner** you will leave them. I *am* Yahweh your Elohim.” Lev.23:22

“When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in *the* field, you will not return to take it. It will fall out to *the* **sojourner**, to *the* fatherless and to *the* widow, so that Yahweh your Elohim will bless you in all *the* work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you will not go over the boughs afterwards. It will fall out to *the* **sojourner**, to *the* fatherless and to *the* widow. When you gather your vineyard, you will not glean it afterward. It will fall out to *the* **sojourner**, to *the* fatherless and to *the* widow.” Deu.24:19-21

This statute put the care of an alien on the same basis as care “for the poor” of the land, and even ahead of orphans and widows in some texts.

“And when a **sojourner** dwells with you in your land, you will not mistreat him. **The sojourner** dwelling with you will become to you like a native out of your own. And you will love him as yourself, for

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you became **sojourners** in the land of Egypt. I *am* Yahweh your Elohim.” Lev.19:33-34

One justice for all – as for the native, the same for the resident alien. To “love him as yourself” drove the point home, as did Jesus’ second great commandment, to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mat.22:39). Combined, these two texts teach that a Jew was to treat a foreigner as a neighbor, and not as just “one of them”.

“Then you will keep My statutes and My judgments, and you will not perform any of these abominations – the native or **the sojourner** dwelling in your midst.” Lev.18:26

“And you will say to *the* sons of Israel, ‘Each one from *the* sons of Israel, or from **the sojourner** who is dwelling in Israel, who gives from his seed to Molech, he will surely be killed. *The* people of the land will stone him with stones.” Lev.20:2

“And one blaspheming *the* name of Yahweh will surely be killed. You will surely stone him – the whole congregation, as *the sojourner* so the native, in his blaspheming the Name he will be killed.”

Lev.24:16

Idolatry was forbidden to all, and certain capital offenses applied to all in the land.

“Will come to you one law – as *the sojourner*, so *the* native it will come. For I *am* Yahweh your Elohim” Lev.24:22

One law for all. And see below concerning the **foreigner** (a different word, Heb., *nâkrîy*)

“And when *one of* your brothers grows poor and his hand falls with you, then you will strengthen him as **a sojourner and a dweller** – then he will live with you.” Lev.25:35

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“And it will be forgiven for *the* whole congregation, the sons of Israel and *the sojourner* who is dwelling among them, because for all the people *it was* from ignorance.” Num.15:26

“The native from *the* sons of Israel, and for *the sojourner* who *is* dwelling among them will come one law for you, for one committing *sin* by ignorance. But the one who *is* doing *so* by hand, beguiling, from the native or from **the sojourner**, that one *is* reviling Yahweh, and that person will be cut off from among his people.” Num.15:29-30

An interesting duality – the implication is that the resident alien’s “people” is also Israel. This is a relationship of choice, and not of genealogy – like the choice that Ruth made.

“And the one gathering *the* ashes of the heifer will wash his clothes and become unclean until the evening. And it will become a statute of an age for *the* sons of Israel, and for *the sojourner* who is dwelling in their midst.” Num.19:10

“*The* three cities you will appoint opposite to Jordan, and *the* three cities you will appoint in *the* land of Canaan. Cities of refuge they will become for *the* sons of Israel, and for *the sojourner* and for *the dweller* in their midst. These six cities will become for refuge to flee there, when one *is* killing a person by accident.” Num.35:14-15

Even the Cities of Refuge were available to all, as long as they shed blood innocently.

“And I commanded your judges at that time, saying, to hear *cases* between your brothers, and judge righteousness between a man and his brother, or with **his sojourner**.” Deu.1:16

One standard of righteous justice for all.

“He (Yahweh) performs justice *for* fatherless and widow, and *for* him loving a **sojourner**, to give him bread and clothing. Then you will love **the sojourner**, for you became **sojourners** in the land of Egypt.”

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Deu.10:18-19

“You will love the sojourner” shows how strongly Yahweh was proclaiming one justice for all.

“You will not eat every carcass (i.e., not hand-slaughtered). To **the sojourner** who *is* within your gates you may give it, or to sell *it* to a **foreigner.**” Deu.14:21

Some of the statutes concerning being “clean” did not apply to resident aliens who were standing aside from the voluntary aspects of the law. Note how this text deals with “sojourner” and “foreigner” separately – it may indicate by “foreigner” one who is passing through the land to another place, or perhaps one who was sold as a slave to an Israelite.

“And the Levite will come, for *there is* no share for him nor inheritance with you – also **the sojourner** and the fatherless and the widow who *are* inside your gates – and they will eat and be satisfied, so that Yahweh your Elohim will bless you in all *the* work of your hand which you do.” Deu.14:29

“And you will rejoice in every good thing which Yahweh your Elohim has given to you and to your house – you and the Levite and **the sojourner** who *is* in your midst. When you finish tithing all *the* tithe of your increase, in the third year, *the* year of the tithe, and you give *it* to *the* Levite, to *the sojourner*, to *the* fatherless and to *the* widow, and they eat *it* inside your gates and are filled, then you will say before Yahweh your Elohim, ‘I have removed the holy *portion* from the house, and moreover I have given it to *the* Levite and to *the sojourner*, to *the* fatherless and to *the* widow, according to Your whole commandment which You commanded me. I have neither transgressed Your commandments, nor forgotten them.” Deu.26:11-13

Sharing the tithe with orphans and widows would seem reasonable, but note how the resident alien is put ahead of them in this command to share their bounty.

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“At the end of seven years you will perform a release of debts. And this is the way of the release – to release every owner of a loan in effect, who lends to his neighbor, he will not press it of his neighbor, because it is called a release of Yahweh – of a **foreigner** you may press it, but what comes to you by your brother, you will release your share.” Deu.15:1-3

The law of debt relief was different for foreigners, than for natives.

“And you will rejoice before Yahweh your Elohim – you and your son and your daughter and your servant and your maid-servant and the Levite who is inside your gates, and **the sojourner**, and the fatherless, and the widow who are in your midst, at the fixed-place where Yahweh your Elohim chooses to establish His name there.”

Deu.16:11

This rejoicing at the Feast of Weeks was to show joy over the early harvest. Note how the resident alien is again mentioned before the native orphan and widow.

“And you will rejoice in your feast – you and your son and your daughter and your servant and your maid-servant and the Levite and **the sojourner** and the fatherless and the widow who are inside your gates.” Deu.16:14

This rejoicing at the Feast of Tabernacles, expressed joy in the latter harvest – same order of precedence: resident alien, then orphan, then widow.

“To a **foreigner** you may charge interest, but to your brother you will not charge interest, so that Yahweh your Elohim may bless you in all the outstretching of your hand in the land which you are entering there to seize.” Deu.23:20

Texts like this may also demonstrate a nuance between the **foreigner** (Heb., *nâkrîy*) and the **sojourner** (*gêr*). Many of the **sojourner** texts

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speak of him as “dwelling in your midst”, or “inside your gates”. And Heb. *gêr* derives from the verb-root *gûwr*, meaning “sojourn” or “dwell” (BDB, p.157). Both terms mean “foreigner”, but the difference appears to be that *nâkrîy* is a visiting foreigner, and not one who has established his residence in Israel. The resident alien was treated much like a citizen of the country. But even if this distinction is not correct, justice under the law was one set of scales. There were only a few exceptions of this “one law for all”, like this law allowing an Israelite to charge foreigners interest on loans. He was not permitted to charge interest of a brother Israelite.

“You will not oppress a hireling who *is* poor and wanting, from your brothers or from **your sojourners**, who is in your land inside your gates.” Deu.24:14

Oppressing a worker of any stripe was forbidden under the law.

“You will not pervert justice *for* a **sojourner**, *for* a fatherless, nor will you take as pledge a garment of a widow.” Deu.24:17

“Cursed *is* one perverting justice *to* a **sojourner**, a fatherless, or a widow.” Deu.27:19

“**The sojourner** who *is* in your midst will rise above you higher than you, and you will descend lower, lower.” Deu.28:43

This last text is part of a great section on the curse of the Law. The assumption is that the resident alien, normally of less social stature, will come to dominate the native Israelite if he falls under this curse.

“You, all of you *are* standing today before Yahweh your Elohim – your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, all men of Israel – your little ones, your wives and **your sojourner** who *is* in *the* midst of your camp, from one cutting your wood to one drawing your water, to go over into *the* covenant of Yahweh your Elohim, and into His

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oath which Yahweh your Elohim *is* cutting with you today.”
Deu.29:10-12

This was part of Moses’ address to the people about to cross Jordan. Note how this second covenant (29:1) applied also to those foreigners who had attached themselves to the Nation. Doubtless some Egyptians had accompanied Moses through the desert.

“And the after-generation will say of your sons who rise up after you, and **the foreigner** who comes from a far land, when they see the plagues of that land and its diseases which Yahweh has laid upon it, brimstone and burning salt, all her land is neither sown nor does it bear nor does it grow there any grass, like *the* overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which Yahweh overthrew in His anger and in His wrath. And **all the nations** will say ‘Why has Yahweh done thus to this land? What means this great heat of anger?’” Deu.29:22-24

Here we see an obvious parallel between “foreigner...from a far land” and “all the nations”. There appears to be no assimilation of the foreigner, only horror at what he sees has become of the Nation Israel.

“Summon the people – the men and the women and the little one and **your sojourner** who *is* inside your gates, so that they may hear and so that they may learn, and they may fear Yahweh your Elohim, and they may keep to observe all *the* words of this law.” Deu.31:12

Again, one law for all.

Appendix B: The Place of Works in the Dispensation of Grace

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As Ephesians makes clear, we were created for works – therefore, we should all be workers, not idlers –

“For by the grace you are saved through faith, and this not from you – the gift of God – **not from works**, lest anyone might boast. For we are His work, created by Christ Jesus **for good works** which God before-prepared (Gk. *proetoimazō*, another of those “before” words that distinguish our election) that **we might walk by them.**” Eph.2:8-10

This is part of the divine purpose for us in this dispensation of grace, and Paul spoke directly and indirectly concerning these works throughout his post-Acts epistles. “Walk” is another well-heeled metaphor for the *habitual* practice of works.

“Therefore I encourage you, the prisoner in *the* Lord, to **walk equal to** the calling which you were called.” Eph.4:1

The Christian life is also a calling, and the One Who called us has set its standard. To fall below that standard is to not walk “equal to” it.

“toward the mending of the holy ones, **for a work of ministry**, for edifying the Body of Christ.” Eph.4:12

This is another purpose statement, based on why Christ gave “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers” of Eph.4:7. These gifts were meant to build up the Body of Christ, and building requires exertion.

“Therefore I say this and testify in *the* Lord, you **no longer to walk** even as also the nations walk in the emptiness of their mind, being darkened in the understanding, alienated from the life of God on account of the ignorance being in them, on account of the hardness of their heart, whoever having become callous, they gave themselves

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over to the sensuality, for **a working** of every impurity for covetousness. But you did not thus learn Christ.” Eph.4:17-20

A great part of learning the new walk was to put the old walk, with all its corruption, behind them. This too requires effort.

“Therefore, become **imitators of God** as beloved children. And **walk by love**, even as also Christ loved us and gave Himself up on our behalf, an offering and sacrifice to God for a fragrant aroma.”

Eph.5:1-2

Becoming “imitators of God” is a pretty tall order. But walking by love, particularly a self-sacrificing love, brings it down to what we might call “do-able”.

“But sexual immorality and every impurity, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, even as is proper for **holy ones**, and obscenity and foolish talk, or crude joking, which are not suitable, but rather thanksgiving. For this you know, recognizing that every sexually immoral or impure or covetous one, who is an idolater, **has not inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God**. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for on account of these things comes the wrath of God upon the sons of the dissuasion. Therefore, become not partners with them.” Eph.5:3-7

Here is a list of some practices to avoid. The essential meaning of “holy” is “separated, set apart”, and the holy ones of God have been set apart from the old life of such practices, and they should not be partners with those who continue in them. Note how “inheritance in the kingdom” can be forfeited. We are “saved by grace”, but rewarded based upon our works. Inheritance can be lost, but not the salvation that we could never earn no matter how noble our works. Salvation is a free gift, inheritance a conditional gift.

“For you were once darkness, but now light in *the* Lord. **Walk as children of light**. For **the fruit of the light** *is* in every goodness and

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righteousness and truth, proving (‘testing’) what is well-pleasing to the Lord. And fellowship not in the Unfruitful Works of the Darkness, but rather even **reprove them.**” Eph.5:8-11

Everyone does a work of some sort, and a righteous work includes reproofing the evil works of others. Sitting on a fence is not an option for those who want to reign with Christ. “Children of light” are meant to cast their light, and just as light opposes darkness, we should oppose “the Works of the Darkness”. Every farmer looks for **fruit** from his crop, and it is no different from the One Who planted us (Rom.6:5). Paul was frequent in his use of this agricultural metaphor, “fruit”, in describing the believer’s growth in his faith. But this comes only with practice – i.e., works.

Even the works of the lowly slave were addressed –

“Slaves, obey the (your) masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in *the* simplicity of your heart, as to Christ, not according to eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, **doing the desire of God from *the* life** (‘soul’), **serving with kindness as to the Lord** and not to men, each one knowing that **whatever good he might have done, this he will receive from the Lord**, whether slave or free. And, masters, **do these same things** toward them, letting up on the threatening, knowing that the Master of them and of you is in the heavens, and there is no favoritism with Him” Eph.6:5-9

Every good deed done, every kindness shown is as to the Lord Himself, and He will repay to each one a just reward. Even a slave’s life might be well rewarded. No one is left behind in the race for the prize. Peasant and prince will stand equal before the Lord’s bar of justice.

Ephesians chapter 6 introduces the believer’s struggle with metaphors of the battlefield –

“Finally, be empowered by the Lord, and by the grasp of His might. Put on the whole-armor of God for you to be able to **stand against**

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the subterfuges of the devil, because there is not for us **the wrestling** against blood and flesh, but against the principalities, against the authorities, against the world-powers of this darkness, against the spiritual things of the evil in the heavenlies. Because of this take up the whole-armor of God, so that you may be able to **withstand in the evil day**, and **having worked out all things to stand. Stand**, therefore, having girded your loins with the truth, and having put on the breastplate of the righteousness, and having shod the feet with the preparation of the gospel of the peace, with all having taken up the shield of the faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the wicked one. And take the helmet of the salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is God's word.”

Eph.6:10-17

This wrestling in battle with spiritual foes requires spiritual armor, elaborated thus –

- the truth
- the righteousness
- the preparation of the gospel of the peace
- the faith
- the salvation
- God's word.

This is not an armor that grew on us naturally, like a rhinoceros hide. To be empowered with it, we must put it on, and take it up. But those are only the beginning – what is implied is that we must become exercised (“the wrestling”) with them, if we are to do anything useful. The text above continues into verse 18, which enjoins prayer – some have seen this as part of the armor despite no item of armor being mentioned. See Col.4:12 below. This wrestling with the heavenly principalities and authorities goes hand-in-hand with a demonstration that God wants to make of us –

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“so that might be made known now, to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenlies **through the church**, the multifarious wisdom of God” Eph.3:10

God is working out this wisdom through His church, when they walk like Job did, fearing God and eschewing evil – i.e., when they “walk the walk”, by His enablement.

“And this I pray, that your love may superabound yet more and more, in recognition and every discernment, for you to prove the things that differ, so that you may be pure and faultless for the day of Christ, filled by a **fruit** of righteousness that *is* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Phi.1:9-11

This ascribes the reason for the **fruit** to Jesus Christ. It answers to the earlier Ephesians text “created by Christ Jesus for good works”. Without the assistance of the Farmer, such fruit would not be possible. Some of this fruit is evidenced by our acts of love, and spiritual discernments (‘provings’) – yes, even our thoughts count as our “works”.

“Because, for **the work of Christ**, he neared up to death, having risked his life...” Phi.2:30

Paul spoke this of Epaphroditus, whom he also called his “fellow-worker” and “fellow-soldier” (3:25). A soldier’s life was especially hard in those days, and this was one of Paul’s favorite metaphors for the Christian life. Is your view of the Christian life a life of ease and of blessings to pamper the body?

“to know Him and the power of His resurrection and **the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death, **if somehow I may arrive at the out-resurrection** (Gk. *exanastasis, hapax*) which *is* out from *the* dead. Not that I received *it* already, or have been perfected already, but **I press on**, if **I may take hold upon** that which I was also taken hold upon by Christ Jesus. Brothers, **I reckon myself not to have taken hold of it**. But one thing – forgetting indeed the things

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behind, and **straining after the things ahead, I press down upon *the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.***

Phi.3:10-14

Even at this late period in Paul's ministry he considered himself not to have attained "the prize", "the out-resurrection", that is, the "reward of the inheritance" of reigning with Christ. So he pressed on, because a life of good works must be sustained until the end. Remember the expression, "quitters never win"? The Christian should be straining to win.

"Become imitators of me, brothers, and regard those walking thus, according as you have us *as* a pattern. For **many are walking, whom I told you often, but now even weeping I say, 'The Enemies of the Cross of Christ, whose end *is* destruction (Gk. *apoleia*), whose god *is* the belly, and the glory in their shame, those minding **the earthly things** (Gk. *ta epigeia*).'"** Phi.3:17-19

Here in the third chapter we find Paul's pressing for the prize, and his urging the brothers to imitate this walk, contrasted with his condemnation of an earthly walk and the destruction (or 'loss') that such belly-saints will experience. Note that this is an earthly walk, with no mention of the things commonly practiced among "the nations" (see Eph.4:17-20 above). I have devoted much space to the exposition of these matters in the post-Acts epistles, as a Judaistic worship and walk (see section above, **Then What Is Going on Today?**). The walk of Paul and his colleagues is to be imitated; the latter walk to be wept over. And we all have the power to choose which to follow. This concerns works of a religious nature, because Judaism was a religion.

"Not that I speak according to poverty, for I learned in what things I am to be content. I know both *how* to be humbled, and also *how* to abound. In everything and in all things I have been initiated both to be fattened and to hunger, both to superabound and to go wanting. I am

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strong *for* all things by the One Empowering me. Nevertheless, you did well **fellowshipping in my affliction** (Gk. *thlipsis*)." Phi.4:11-14

Although Gk. *thlipsis* ('affliction', 'tribulation') was rarely used in Scripture post-Acts, it does form a part of the Christian walk today. But the less frequent use of this word likely points to a life and walk today that will be easier than the physical hardships that end-time Israel will suffer during the Great Tribulation.

"Not that I seek after the gift, but I seek after **the fruit which is abounding toward your account.**" Phi.4:17

The Philippian church had long been generous in sending "gifts" to Paul and his entourage. Here he acknowledges their fruit-bearing works, and the account that God was keeping of such works. If God is keeping account of our works, then they must be important to Him.

"having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and **the love that you have** for all the holy ones, on account of the hope which is being stored up for you in the heavens, which you heard before in the Word of the Truth of the Gospel, the one **being present** (Gk. *pareimi*) for you, according as also in the whole world it is **bearing fruit and increasing**, according as even among you, from the day you heard and recognized the grace of God in truth." Col.1:4-6

This text looks at the God-side of fruit-bearing among them, but their love is also singled out. Note how the Gospel "being present" for them has a counterpart in the "Presence" or "Parousia" of the Lord. But here it is a Gospel "presence", and not the Lord's presence in the day of the Lord. And "the hope which is being stored up" must surely include rewards for our present works, because "being stored up" is a present participle.

"to **walk worthily of the Lord** for every good-pleasure, **being fruitful in every good work** and growing in the recognition of God." Col.1:10

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Some of the fruitful growth of believers comes from “the recognition of God” that comes with “walking equal (‘worthily’) to the Lord”.

“Now I rejoice in **the sufferings** on behalf of you, and **I am filling up instead** (Gk. *antanaplēroō*, *hapax*) **the things lacking of the tribulations of Christ** in my flesh for His body which is the church”
Col.1:24

This walk of suffering and tribulation are viewed here as an extension of Christ’s sufferings – because suffered in His body the church. This is quite a statement. The church’s trials round out Christ’s sufferings. And this not just Paul speaking for his own ministry, because he enjoined all to “become imitators of me”. In light of this, do you begin to see how important the works and walk of the holy ones is? These works are right up there with Christ’s works – at least He reckons them so.

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, **walk by Him**, having been rooted and being built up by Him, and being strengthened in the faith according as you were taught, superabounding in it (the faith) with thanksgiving.” Col.2:6-7

Although this highlights His work in our lives, it also demonstrates the fruit of a strong faith and thankfulness on our part.

“Let no one **defraud you of the prize** (Gk. *katabrabeuō*, *hapax*), desiring by the humility and religion of the angels, intruding on what things he has seen, vainly being puffed up by the mind of his flesh, and not holding fast the Head...” Col.2:18-19

This warning followed hard after “Let no one judge you by food and by drink ... feast or new moon or sabbaths.” (Col.2:16). So the prize may be forfeited by succumbing to the influence of others in following a Judaistic religion – “the earthly things” of Phi.3:19 (see above). Acts of worship also form part of our collective works, and they are being recorded in His heavenly register.

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“Therefore, put to death the members which are upon the earth – sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the covetousness which is idolatry, on account of which things comes the wrath of God upon the sons of the dissuasion, among whom also **you walked once**, when you **were living among them**. But now put away all these things – anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy speech out of your mouth. Lie not to one another, having stripped **the old man with his partices**, and having enrobed the new, the one being renewed for *the* recognition according to the image of the One having created him”

Col.3:5-10

The wicked works identified here were those of “the old man with his practices”. Putting these things to death and stripping the old man are couched in (or coupled with) verbs in the imperative mood. That is, these are commandments for us today, and they constitute part of “the good works ... before-prepared” for us.

“And **everything that one may do**, by word and by work, all things *do* by the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father-God through Him.” Col.3:17

One’s deeds fall into these two categories – the “word” (or intent behind the deed) and the “deed” itself.

“Whatever you might do, **work it from *the* soul**, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from *the* Lord you will take up **the recompense** (Gk. *antapodosis*) **of the inheritance**. You serve the Lord Christ.” Col.3:23-24

“Recompense” words, as derived from *apodidōmi* (like the above), are neutral as to outcome, and the Scriptures deal with both good and bad recompenses. But the implication here is that working from the soul (i.e., from the ‘life’ – just as Yahweh had sought worship from Israel “with all your life” Deu.6:5) – would yield a good reward, “the inheritance”. But a

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bad recompense is also possible. A life of service has been enjoined upon us. But will we be good servants, or bad servants? The works will tell.

“**Walk with wisdom** toward those outside, buying up the season. Your speech *let be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, to know how you must answer each one.” Col.4:5-6

The walk toward “those outside” the faith is always important, as it may set a pattern to appeal to others whom God is calling.

“Greets you Epaphras, who *is* from you, a slave of Christ Jesus, always **agonizing on your behalf** in the (his) prayers, so that you may stand complete and fully assured in every desire of God.” Col.4:12

Not all prayer is agonizing. I am reminded of the Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane, as opposed to Peter, James and John, who dozed off. They had not yet received power from on high, to energize their prayers.

“**This command I deposit** with you, child Timothy, according to the prophecies going before as to you, so that you **might war** by them **the good warfare**, holding faith and a good conscience, which some having pushed off, have shipwrecked concerning the faith, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have given over to Satan so that they might be disciplined not to blaspheme.” 1 Tim.1:18-20

Here we find evidence of that foundation of apostles and prophets that the church was built upon (Eph.2:19-22). In this dispensation, Paul still had apostolic authority to deliver erring saints over to Satan for their correction. The presumption is that some form of physical or emotional suffering resulted from these temporal judgments. Also, Timothy’s evangelistic ministry had been conferred through “prophecies”. These were prophecies in the root sense of speaking for God, and they likely came with commands and words of encouragement to him. Paul’s current charge was couched in encouragement for Timothy to **war the good warfare**. He was expected to perform his evangelistic deeds as a warrior would. A lackadaisical warrior would be useless in battle.

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“but what is fitting to women promising godly-reverence, (adorning themselves) **through good works**” 1 Tim.2:10

Good works are here likened to an adornment of the faith professed by these godly women.

“Faithful the word: if anyone aspires to overseership, he desires a **good work.**” 1 Tim.3:1

So the edifying “work of the ministry” that we saw previously in Eph.4:12 is open to anyone desiring a good work. Not all may be apostles or prophets, but a good work of edifying the church is open to all who aspire to it. Would you call it an aspiration to let others do the work?

“being witnessed **by good works**, if she brought up children, if she gave hospitality, if she washed *the* feet of saints, if she helped *the* oppressed, if she followed after **every good work**” 1 Tim.5:10

“Every good work” may include even the most lowly of works. We are not in this for self-aggrandizement. Our life is a test, and we are not all called to the same station in life.

“The **elders ruling well** let be made worthy of **double honor**, especially those toiling in *the* word and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘An ox treading grain you will not muzzle. And **worthy is the workman of his wage.**’” 1 Tim.5:17-18

Paul’s Pastoral Epistles deal particularly with the good works of elders, pastors, and teachers (these are roughly equivalent roles). The teaching above is about some physical rewards for these works. However, I do not believe the intent was to provide a salary such that a “worthy” one would have only that livelihood. There are far too many today who are trying to make the gospel a paying proposition. I would call this a materialization of the faith. If yours is a materialistic faith, then you share this with the world at large.

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“likewise even **the Good Works** *are* evident, and those holding otherwise are not able to be hid” 1 Tim.5:25

This is contrasted with the verse before, where some *sins* are “public” (1 Tim.5:24, *NAB*) while others remain hidden from judgment.

“But you, O man of God, **flee** these things (money-love and its consequences), and **press after** righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance, humility. **Fight the good fight** of the faith. **Take hold of** the aionian life to which you were called and confessed the good confession before many witnesses. I command you before God, the One giving life to all these things, and Christ Jesus, the One having testified in *the reign of Pontius Pilate* the good confession, you to **keep the commandment** spotless, irreproachable until the epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ” 1 Tim.6:11-14

Timothy’s keeping the commandment would include all the preceding imperatives – flee, pursue, fight (or ‘agonize’) and take hold. Note that the faithful Christian has both a flight (defensive actions) and a pursuit (offensive actions). Although aionian life is our future hope, we are to take hold of it now. Thus Paul spoke of our being blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies” (Eph.1:3) in a past tense.

“(the rich) **to do good, to be rich in good works**, to be generous, sharing, **treasuring up** (Gk. *apothēsaurozō*) for themselves a good foundation for the coming *age*, so that they may take hold of the true life. O Timothy, **guard the deposit** (Gk. *parathēkē*), turning away from the profane empty-babblings and oppositions of the falsely-named ‘knowledge’” 1 Tim.6:18-20

This text reveals some insight into a future treasury where the good works of this age have been building a foundation for a future age. And note that *parathēkē* is what I might call a Timothean usage by Paul in the NT (1 Tim.6:20; 2 Tim.1:12, 14). It has a lexical linkage to “covenant”

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(Gk. *diathēkē*), which gets only a backward look from Paul after Acts (Eph.2:12).

Taking hold of “the true life” (or “the really life”, Gk. *hē ontōs zoē*) is an allusion to the next step of “reigning together with Him” – see 2 Tim. 2:12 below. And it also speaks to “the aionian life” that Paul had just commanded Timothy to take hold of (1 Tim.6:12). “The deposit” here appears to be synonymous with the truth committed to Timothy, as 2 Tim.2:1-6 below makes clear. To “guard the deposit” is a work we should all follow after.

“For this cause I even **suffer** these things, but I am not ashamed, for I know Whom I have believed and I have been persuaded that He is able to **guard my deposit** for that day. **Hold a pattern of sound words** which you heard from me, by *the* faith and love which *are* in Christ Jesus. **Guard the good deposit** by the Holy Spirit, the One indwelling among us.” 2 Tim.1:12-14

Was Paul alone to suffer for the gospel? I doubt any of our sufferings would match his, but a life of suffering is the norm for us. In this text “deposit” has two affiliated applications. The “my deposit” that God is guarding was Paul’s treasury of rewards for good works. The deposit that men should guard is a “pattern of sound words” – the untainted, uncorrupted faith. We guard the latter, while God guards the former.

“Therefore, you my child, be empowered by the grace that *is* in Christ Jesus. And what things you heard from me by many witnesses, these **deposit with faithful men**, whosoever will **be competent to teach others** also. **Suffer evil together** (Gk. *sugkakopatheō*, *hapax*) **as a good soldier of Christ Jesus**. No one **soldiering** involves himself in the affairs of this life so that he might please the one having enlisted *him*. But if also anyone **competes athletically**, he is not **crowned** unless he may **compete lawfully**. It is necessary for the **toiling farmer** to accept first of **the fruits**.” 2 Tim.2:1-6

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“The word of the truth” that Paul taught at that time was likened to a deposit (Gk. *paratithēmi*, see n. *parathēkē* use in 2 Tim.1:12) to be kept in trust by faithful men, endowed with the competence to teach. Paul’s command to Timothy to war the good warfare (1 Tim.1:18) was another such deposit (Gk. *paratithēmi*).

Suffering evil together as a good soldier brings to mind an army unit engaged in battle. The metaphor of an athlete obeying the rules of his sport (“compete lawfully”) is used to qualify the winners. “Crowned” would ostensibly be the olive wreath of the winning athlete, but here it is applied to “faithful men” who will reign with Christ. The context of the “toiling farmer” seems to align, not with earthly fruits for the workman worthy of his hire (1 Tim.5:18), but the spiritual fruits of his reign with Christ – i.e., his reward “in the heavenlies”.

“therefore if anyone may cleanse himself out from these (vessels of dishonor), he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for **every good work**.” 2 Tim.2:21

There is a certain separation required from dishonorable vessels (unworthy servants in a great house) in order to be “prepared for every good work”. But who were these vessels of dishonor? A text from Romans may clarify this, in a passage explaining the hardening of Pharaoh –

“Or has not the potter authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make the vessel for honor, and that for dishonor? And if God, desiring to point out the wrath and to make known His power, bore with much forbearance vessels of wrath prepared for **destruction** (Gk. *apoleia*).” Rom.9:21-22

While ours is not a dispensation of wrath, Paul did speak of some today –

“whose end *is* **destruction** (Gk. *apoleia*), whose god *is* the belly and the glory in their shame, those minding the earthly things (Gk. *ta epigeia*).” Phi.3:19

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This was only part of his condemnation of Judaistic religion in the dispensation of grace. Why did Paul speak so vehemently against these “unworthy vessels”, if works really don’t matter that much in our dispensation?

“Every scripture is God-breathed, and **profitable** for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for *the* discipline which *is* in righteousness, so that the Man of God may be equipped, thoroughly equipped toward **every good work**” 2 Tim.3:16-17

The “every good work” in v.17 is conveyed in that four-fold profitability of the word of God in v.16.

“But you **be sober** in all things, **suffer evil**, **do *the* work of an evangelist**, **fully accomplish your ministry**. For I am already being poured out and the season of my departure has come. **I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.** From now *on* is **reserved for me the Crown of Righteousness**, which **the Lord the righteous Judge will award me in that day**, but not only to me but also to all those loving His epiphany.” 2 Tim.4:5-7

Here the “work of an evangelist” included leading a sober life and suffering evil, whenever it may come. Paul had already suffered his evil and saw his end coming soon. Thus, he could lay claim to having fought the fight and having finished the race. The Crown of Righteousness which he had not yet attained when he wrote Phi.3:10-14 was now reserved for him. It only awaited “that day”, the day of the Lord’s epiphany for him to actually receive it. Paul’s life had only one more sacrifice to give, and he saw it as good as done at this point. I would draw a parallel with Jesus’ saying, “Now was the Son of Man glorified” (Joh.13:31), when He saw His death as imminent.

“Alexander the coppersmith proved a great evil to me (probably in Paul’s appeal before Caesar). **The Lord will give back to him**

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according to his works. Whom you also be on guard against for he exceedingly opposed our words.” 2 Tim.4:14

This was not a wish for the Lord to repay Alexander’s evil deeds, but a statement of fact. A works-based judgment is coming to us all. We have no hint as to what Alexander’s “payment” will be, but “according to his works” means it will be a just “payment”.

“They profess to know God, but they deny *Him* **by the works**, being abominable and dissuaded and disapproved toward **every good work.**” Tit.1:16

So you can confess God with the mouth, but deny Him by the works. The abominable, disapproved works that Paul condemned here were the evangelistic works of the Judaizers (vv.13-15).

“concerning all things, offering yourself an **example of good works**, by the teaching – purity, dignity, a sound word above reproach, so that the one from opposition may be put to shame, having nothing worthless to say concerning you.” Tit.2:7-8

This rather implies, by Titus’ example of teaching, that all should be teachers. And the manner and substance of teaching should also follow a pattern or “example”. It seems that opposition was to be expected. The enemy is not dormant.

“(Christ) Who gave Himself on our behalf, so that He might redeem us from every lawlessness, and might cleanse to Himself a people of possession, **zealous (or ‘jealous’) of good works.**” Tit.2:14

“Jealous” hardly conveys a laissez-faire attitude toward the works of our dispensation.

“Remind them to be subordinated to principalities, to authorities, to obey authority, to be ready toward **every good work.**” Tit.3:1

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The implication is that to be unruly or rebellious towards the powers-that-be would not prepare one for “every good work”. One might read the insubordinate, contrary state as “prepared for no good work”.

“Faithful the word: even concerning these things I purpose you to affirm fully, so that those having believed in God may be minded to **stand forward in good works** – these things are good and **profitable** to the men.” Tit.3:8

First we should believe all that God has informed us, then we might become ambitious about good works. There is a “profit” we might seek, but it must be worked for.

“And let them learn – even ours – to **stand forward in good works** for the urgent needs, lest they may be **unfruitful.**” Tit.3:14

Not standing forward in good works would lead to an “unfruitful” state. Every farmer looks for fruit from his crop, and it is no different from the One Who planted us (Rom.6:5).

We have already seen how the scripture (2 Tim.3:16) and the word “to stand forward in good works” (Tit.3:8) are both called “profitable” (Gk. *ōphelimos*), implying a reward for effort. One more Pastoral Epistle text rounds out that profitability for us –

“For the bodily discipline is **profitable** for a little, but the piety is **profitable** toward all things, having *the* promise of life which is now and the coming *one.*” 1 Tim.4:8

“Piety” is a manner of life – how we conduct ourselves. And its profit can be realized now, as well as in the future. I would venture that the full assurance of our faith must be part of the “now” profit. I once found it curious that this adjective “profitable” is found only in the Timothy Epistles, at the latter-end of Paul’s ministry – and also its Gk. *ōphelimos* is **the last word** in the NT Gk. lexicon. I doubt this is mere coincidence. We were meant to focus on the profitability of living a pious life –

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shunning all the corruptions of the wordly life as exhibited by the unregenerate nations.