

Tuesday, 19 April 2005

Dear Peter Golding,

Greetings in the Beloved Son!

I am writing again to reiterate my warm thanks for the help and stimulation I have received from your book on Covenant Theology. It's been an invaluable bird's eye survey of a mass of theological writing and thought.

I also want to clarify that I don't seek to controvert your writings, but rather to explore with you solutions to some of the problems you raise.

I value your analytical response – short notes or comments will be fine, and pointers to helpful works would be invaluable. You will find me very hard to offend, I prize candour highly. Forbear my brevity and shortcomings.

My apologies for the lengthy delay in forwarding these fragmentary thoughts –but Covenant issues have come very much to the fore with the dangerous and deeply heretical New Perspective on Paul (although its objections to the Protestant roots of Nazi anti-Semitism are not altogether invalid) and also with the rising and contentious issue of the Land promises, which have distracted my reading and thoughts.

May the Holy Spirit glorify our Blessed Lord God in His Eternal Son as we proceed.

Contents:

1. **Comparison of Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants**
2. **What took place at Sinai?**
3. **The διαθήκη problem - Testament or Covenant?**
4. **The Divine Covenant and imputation**
5. **Some eschatological implications**

1. Comparison between Sinaitic and Abrahamic Covenants.

Similarities.

I trust these will appear self evident, therefore I don't labour them.

Both were administered graciously – God's participation not necessitated by man's merit. (Deut.4.37; 7.7; Exod.19.4)

Both contain law as integral part, in particular as evidenced in that:

(Gen.26.5; Deut.5.2-22)

1.Both contain stipulations with which compliance is strictly required.

(Gen17.11; Lev.26-1-4)

2.Both contain penalties for noncompliance.

(Gen.17.14; Lev.26.15-6)

Both require some form of faith as an integral part of obedience.

(Gen.15.6; Deut.32.20)

Both recognize the blessing that results from the merit of compliance.

(Gen.26.4-5; Deut.11.26-7)

Both aim supremely at establishing real, lasting communion between God and His people.

(Gen.17.1; Deut.7.21-13)

Both are deeply intertwined and interdependent. The Sinaitic covenant is founded on that with Abraham (Deut.7.8,11; Exod.2.24, 3.15,17, 20.2), and in a deeper sense the Abrahamic Covenant is founded on the substance of the Sinaitic, as we shall see.

The two covenants are also sharply distinguished.

Distinguished by the Pentateuch

Deut 5.2-3 Distinct and qualitatively different covenants.

Lev.26.25a,42 The quarrel of the Sinaitic covenant is at last only relieved by reference to its predecessor.

Distinguished by the Prophets

Jer 31.32 Although the Abrahamic covenant is not mentioned, the Sinaitic is specifically referred to as the covenant

to be replaced.

Ezek. 16:59-62 The passage is complex, first the marriage covenant with all Israel (Sinai) which is contested in the whole chapter from v 8, and pronounced violated in v 59, an earlier one made in infancy is hinted at in v.6 but explicit in v.60, an everlasting covenant, distinct from the Sinaitic though cut in fond memory of it, which is also to be made with her Gentile sisters, v 61.

Distinguished in the writings

2 Ki 13:23 Abrahamic covenant, not Sinaitic, given as the reason for God's gracious forbearance.

Distinguished by the Psalms

Ps 105 The covenant with the 3 patriarchs is specifically named as the perpetual and everlastingly confirmed covenant.

The Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants are also qualitatively separated in the NT:

Compare Gal 4:24 with 3:15-16, The Messianic Covenant is founded on and derived from Abrahamic covenant not Sinaitic.

2 Cor 3:6,9 the glorious Sinaitic covenant was in essence a means of death and condemnation

Rom 4:19,20 the core promise of the Abrahamic covenant brought life out of death.

Heb 6:13 The anchor of our souls is His covenant oath to Abraham, when God even condescended to do that which He has subsequently forbidden to us. More abundant, immutable and strong, sure and steadfast, our refuge and consolation.

Heb 8:5-8 The covenant of Moses is superseded by a better one, a better mediator, on better promises.

Heb 8:9,13 The covenant made during Exodus is decaying, waxing old and ready to vanish away.

One is frequently spoken of as broken, the other is never.

Sinaitic covenant broken Lev.26:15, by failing to keep the Law.

Deut 31:16,20,26 a strong triple prophecy that Israel will shortly shatter the Law covenant.

Judges 2:1 'I will never break', but what is this that you have done? Exodus covenant invoked.

1 Ki 11:11 Solomon rebuked for violating the Covenant (and unlike David he is not a natural progenitor of Messiah through Mary, Luke 3:31).

Jer.11:4-6,10 Delivered into a covenant of commands from the iron furnace, Judah has broken it.

Jer.31:32 Despite kindness and tenderness the Exodus Covenant has been smashed by all Israel's house.

The replacing Covenant will begin with pardon, and empower and ensure eternal obedience.

Ezekiel 44:7 The covenant of the sanctuary violated by fellowship with the truly uncircumcised.

Inviolable Covenants

Compare this with Davidic Ps 89:28

In spite of grievous disobedience and failure, v 30-4, the Covenant will **not** be broken or altered.

A reiteration of the Divine self binding found in v 35.

In v 39-51 Ethan pleads the dissonance of present visible reality with God's immutable promise. He could not do this if like Sinai the covenant with David was contingent or liable to human weakness – hence his triumphant blessing at the end of the psalm, v 52

Or Jer. 31:35-37 (disobedience in view v 17) Where again Israel's vicious disobedience is not sufficient reason for termination of God's purpose towards the nation.

Or with Jer.32:40-44, despite evil and its punishment, God will supply the fear and establish His oath.

Or, in Jer. 33.20-26 the strongest possible confirmation of kernel of Davidic and Levitical covenant, (the latter in distinction from Sinai as we'll see.)

(Relation of Law to Covenant (serious mistake to say covenant greater than Law, as though it invalidates the other – covenant itself is the most serious and weighty legal form, it is law, albeit condescendingly and benevolently administered, and binds both parties, just as law is established (and often was in Near East) in form of covenant. How this might lead to a covenant of unmerited grace we will examine, in this sense when the Psalmist pleads for mercy *according* to the Law Ps 119.29 (the Hebrew is clearer than the AV, 'be gracious to me – your law') – he wants to be certain he has mercy, but it must be on a lawful basis, perfectly commensurate with God's justice and holiness).

[Of course situations when a covenant is lawfully overruled by a command, or a command lawfully overruled by a covenant occur – e.g. of first, Ezra's agonised reproof of idolatrous wives, requiring breaking of the covenants of marriage. Strict legal requirement was execution of men and their wives, Deut.13 – divorce was a mercy to both. Example of second situation later.)]

2. What happened at Sinai – the Levitical reiteration and the Moabite covenant.

The essence of Sinai was a strict and perfect covenant of Law, in effect a fuller orbbed repetition of Eden's probation: It was a statement of God's sovereign right over His people.

The covenant **was** the Decalogue, to be amplified and explicated in the succeeding statutes. Deut 4.13, Deut 9.9,11, 1 Ki. 8.9, though founded upon God's gracious deliverance, Deut.5.6, the kernel of Sinai was a covenant of work, largely framed as prohibition of sin. Perfect unblemished obedience was strictly necessary to life, Deut.5.33; 27.26, James 2.10.

It was glorious but terrifying, even for Moses, a glimpse of the ultimate Day of Reckoning.

The parties were God and the people, although in their terror they immediately and properly request Moses to mediate as a spokesman Deut.5.27. It was ratified and then confirmed in blood, Deut.5.27, Exod.24.3,7,8.

The Apostasy

There is an almost immediate breach of terms by the people. Almost all of the commands were broken by Aaron's seduction by the people into flagrant idolatry Exod.32.1-6 (commands 1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9, probably 10). This entailed a full breach of covenant. God was perfectly justified on the basis of that covenant to require the immediate destruction of all but Moses and Joshua. He threatens to do exactly that, Exod.32.10.

In absolute terms the Sinai Covenant had failed – it was broken on receipt.

Representation of covenant: but on different grounds

Moses perceives the deeply uncircumcised state of his evil people, but pleads with God for mercy.

It is instructive to consider what the five declared grounds of this plea and its answer were:

- ✚ God's own reputation and name before the Egyptians Exod.32.12., Deut 9.28
- ✚ God's graciousness towards Abraham and his seed, expressed as an oath (Exod.32.13, Deut 9.27)
- ✚ Grounds of the patriarchs' own merit, as a shadow of the legal basis on which they themselves were justified (Deut 9.27, Gen.26.4-5)
- ✚ Grounds of Moses own personal merit and standing with God (depicting a greater) (Exod.32.32-33). He ties his righteous soul with theirs.
- ✚ Intercession of Moses for mercy and grace for the sin of the people (Aaron in particular), and the immediate destruction of the sin. (Deut 9.19-20, 21)

Ultimately none of these contained a fountain of real merit to secure favour, except the second in an as yet undeclared way.

Reiteration

The covenant is reiterated, but veiled by mediation, not by a prophet only, which Moses has already been, but now also by a priesthood and its apparatus. This entailed a symbolic provision for some but not all transgression (largely sin as a result of ignorance or inadvertent uncleanness e.g.: Lev.5.3, Ps.51.16)

Although there were priests separated and appointed before the Apostasy, Ex.19.22, they do not appear to enjoy the special privileges of access granted to Joshua, an Ephraimite, v.24. They appear at this time only to be young, zealous men appointed to special sacred duties, Ex. 24.5, presumably from Amram's family. It was the plain, original intention of the Covenant that the whole nation enter the Priesthood – Ex.19.6. An intention that had to be postponed with its desecration.

The most immediate indication of this change is the Ark, patterned and revealed on the mount before the Apostasy, but only necessitated by it afterwards, Deut 10. 1,2. The Law is restored - but in a protective coat, borne on poles by a separated tribe, to be guarded in a veiled enclosure. In every respect the Law's holiness needs protection from the people, and they from it. This is a profound transformation of the Covenant, and this is reflected even in the words of the Decalogue itself.

Some changes in the wording of the Decalogue that accompanied its reissue:

(Exod 20 representing the text prior to the apostasy in its historical order, Deut 5 in Moses' review of the remaining text prior to his departure, there are 22 differences in the Hebrew text between the two, 19 consonantal).

- ✚ A linking of the commands of the second table together by use of 'vau', to make them one organic whole and to underscore the necessity of each part.
- ✚ Intensification of fourth, esp. the emphasis on its provision even to bond slaves, as reminder that rest from works is essential to the Covenant. (6 of 22 changes in this command alone).
- ✚ A change of motive for keeping the Sabbath, not only to remember and emulate Creator, but recall redemption from Egyptian slavery, (by far the most significant change of all).
- ✚ A trap for wilful idolaters, by changing the wording and sequence of the tenth, to enable Roman and Orthodox concealment of the second. Rope with which to make a noose.

Levi

However the most obvious demonstration of change in the administration of the covenant was the separation of a whole tribe for priestly function. Deut 10.8 (at the reissue of the tablets).

The work of the Levites was separated from the rest of Israel, on pain of death (Num 1.51; 3.38).

The priests' work is separated on pain of death (Num 3.10).

The high priest's work is separated on pain of death (Lev 16.2).

- ✚ Levites stand for the redeemed first born – redemption of deficit in number. (Num.3.12-3,45-6)
- ✚ Levites become a kind of living sacrifice for the people by hand laying substitution. (Num.8.10-11)
- ✚ Levites inherit communion with God, have no land portion (except in the cities) (Num. 18.20)
- ✚ Levites inherit sacrifices and tithes. (Num 18.21,24)
- ✚ Levites to interpret, judge and execute the Law for Israel. (Mal.2.6-7 the idealised Levite, with Moses and Aaron in mind - not Levi)

There is manifold evidence that this mediation was symbolic, not actual:

- ✚ Aaron the chief of the rebellion (albeit under constraint) appointed as head of the system of priesthood, not Moses. However it was Moses who was in fact now the mediator of the Covenant (Gal 3.19), not only as its revealer, but also as its sustainer (Exod. 33.13-4, Deut 10.10), by acting as a kind of surety for his people (Exod. 32.32).
- ✚ Moses himself debarred from entrance to the promised land – since even he was not sufficient as true mediator. (Intriguingly in Jude 9 his later entrance probably at transfiguration mystifies and infuriates Satan (he then has a bodily tabernacle as does Elijah) the means of this miracle became the substance of the mountain conversation, (Sidney Norton pointed me to Manton)).
- ✚ Incomplete nature of atonement, necessity of repetition, and many other proofs also found in Hebrews.
- ✚ Prophecies of Levites being drawn from gentiles Isa. 66.21.
- ✚ The Levitical covenant corrupted and about to unravel, Mal 2.8,10, and its priests purified Mal 3.3
- ✚ The apparatus of Levi torn and irreparably modified, Mat 26.65, 27.51.

Moabite covenant

With Gill, I see a sharp distinction between Sinai with its reiteration by the flawed mediation of Levi and a simpler covenant made towards the end of Moses' life, and after the prediction of the sale of Hebrew slaves back into Egypt without price (Deut 28.68).

In Deut 29.1 a covenant is distinguished from Sinai, (Heb. Malvad - besides). It is based on deeper, stronger, broader foundations than Sinai.

The evidence for this claim:

- ✚ Water bearers, wood cutters and strangers (shortly to include the Canaanite Gibeonites) were parties, not just Israel.
- ✚ It allows for repentance after exile, which as the Westminster catechism reminds us, is a pure grace.
- ✚ Although the prior covenant has been made, the fatal lack of perceiving eyes and hearkening ears will find a remedy here, Deut.29.4,9.
- ✚ Its establishing and confirming power is directly likened to the oath made to the three patriarchs, not contrasted with it, unlike Sinai. Deut.29.13
- ✚ It will attain its aim of circumcision of heart, unlike Sinai. Deut.30.6
- ✚ This is expressed in obedience to the Law out of love, v.6,8 and will (not may) result in God rejoicing over His people, as He rejoiced over the patriarchs, v.9.
- ✚ The Apostle Paul here contrasts Law at Sinai with the grace of Christ Jesus, Rom. 10.5-6, citing Deut 30.11 for the latter.

Here is another foretaste of the Eternal Covenant of Grace.

John Gill says of the covenant of the plains of Moab, *"This covenant was different from that at Sinai, spoken of (Exod.24.8); being made not only at a different time, at near forty years' distance, and at a different place, nor Sinai; but when Israel were come nearer Mount Sion, and were actually possessed of part of their inheritance, the land of promise, that part of the land of Moab which the two kings of the Amorites had seized and dwelt in, whom Israel had dispossessed; and with different persons, that generation being dead, excepting a very few, which were at Sinai: but it was different as to the substance and matter of it, it not only including that, and being a renewal of it, as is generally thought, but containing such declarations of grace which had not been made before, not only respecting the repenting and returning Israelites, but the Gentiles also; for this covenant was made with the stranger, as well as with Israel, (Deut. 29.11); and relates to the times of the Messiah, the call of the Gentiles, the conversion of the Jews, and their return to their own land in the latter day."*

So was Sinai futile then?

Aside from its use as a revelation of Law for conviction of sin and for a rule of life for the regenerate later, neither of which necessitated the revelation of a Covenant that was bound to fail, what was its purpose?

Why especially in Leviticus 26.45, where Sinai is undoubtedly in mind, despite being shattered by disobedience, does God fondly call it to mind? In v 44 where the covenant with Abraham has been mentioned just before v 42 and with Israel at Sinai, just after v. 45, why is there an apparent conflation of the two?

Sinai clarified what a Covenant of Grace could not.

D 6:25 And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He hath commanded us.

Such a righteousness was never theirs, but it was the Servant's. Sinai revealed in sharp and distinct clarity that only perfect righteousness suffices, and such perfect righteousness will never be found Adam's natural seed.

Acceptable covenant righteousness must be worked not infused – only the righteousness of Another suffices.

Foundation of the covenant with Abraham never made explicit to him in Gen 15 or 17.

He was in a sense merely a spectator of the Covenant between Father and Son, sealed to him by the Spirit. The kernel of Sinai is the substructure of the covenant with Abraham.

Only a Covenant of works, worked out by a perfect man could suffice our sinful needs. Only Sinai could clarify this.

The foundation of our access must be complete and impeccable compliance with the Covenant of works. Were the works Covenant not clearly and sharply distinguished from the pure grace Covenant, grace would not appear distinctly as grace. Humanly attainable, but unattainable to us, reasonable, yet to us impossible, full of sacred value, but utterly undeserved. Otherwise God's glory would be amalgamated with our own vainglory.

3. Problem of διαθηκε – Testament or Covenant

You have nicely summarised this issue. The NT term for covenant is flexible and contains ambiguity, it is the term for which the two distinct English expressions Testament and Covenant are used.

Simple, concise definitions of both (modified from Miriam-Webster) clarify the distinction:

A human covenant is a formal compact between two [living] parties, guarded by severe sanctions for infraction.

A testament is a solemn instrument by which a person declares his intent as to the disposal of his estate and effects after his death.

Statement of problem

Whilst in the OT Berith is rarely used of Testaments thus defined (? Gen.47.31, Ex.13.19, Berith not used), in the NT it is unclear to what extent διαθηκε should be translated as covenant (as it obviously is in LXX) and whether its AV translation as Testament in a distinct and specific sense is legitimate. However perhaps help with the problem comes from a broader application of Berith than at first appears, though not quite in Kline's sense of a perpetuation of covenant by dynastic succession.

A solution approached at.

There are plainly instances where OT covenants assumed a testamental character, not as a bequeathal of goods, but of obligation or of benefit, the former continued to carry a sanction of death.

The plainest example of this is the covenant with the Gibeonites made in ignorance against the Law by Joshua (hence it is the example mentioned above (end sn. 1) of the second type of conflict between Law and covenant, this time where the latter lawfully overrules the former). When Saul violated this perpetual covenant, even after his death, the sanction required for its violation required the death of his 7 sons 2 Sam.21.5-7. This was divinely confirmed by the cessation of the famine v.14. Here a covenant became a lethal testament, a messenger of death. It is possible that Saul's seven sons all participated in the slaughter of the Gibeonites – it is likely that they did not protest it – but the due for Saul's transgression was certainly exacted from them.

A contrary and gracious example is found in the covenant between Jonathan and David. This covenant is a picture of condescension and an exchange of royal robes for commoner's – the condescension being Jonathan's. 1 Sam.18:1-4. The terms and sanctions are quite plain for both 1 Sam.20:11-17 (esp. 15). For them Jonathan faced the same violence from his father that David had before 1 Sam.20:30-34. The covenant concerns not only the men but their seed forever, 1 Sam.20.42. Jonathan was again faithful to the oath, at risk to his life, 1 Sam.23.16-18. Upon Jonathan's death, the covenant no longer bound him, but it did bind David. In a sense Jonathan's covenant with David had become his testament to his offspring, the party to the covenant had become its surety in faithful life and death and became a testator of David's benevolence to his family. This is most apparent in David's gracious dealing with Mephibosheth, 2 Sam.9:1-13, which persisted in spite of false accusations and Satanic malice, 2 Sam.16:1-4. Its full protective force comes into effect however in light of exactly the same death penalty which faced Saul's other sons, 2 Sam.21:7. In a strange way Jonathan had become Mephibosheth's surety, by virtue of a covenant, that now had a distinctly testamentary character. Against Kline, Mephibosheth is not in direct covenant with David, his relationship is quite different to Jonathan's, he is merely heir of the benefit of Jonathan's suretyship. It is interesting to note that Mephibosheth, known by his alias Meribbaal, appears in Chronicles with his descendants 1 Chron.8:34-40.

The main problem with Palmer Robertson's view that διαθηκε in Heb 9.15-17 means covenant not testament is not the great awkwardness of v.17a & b, but the introduction to the passage 'for this cause' He is the Mediator. It is not the initiation ceremony of the covenant that is in mind, but its legal culmination in the death of the surety, as is indicated by v.14. The analogy being the time at Jonathan's death.

Perhaps after Gen 22, Abraham too appreciated this duality. The Covenant, into which he had entered with God, was in reality a Testament (though he might not have recognised the term), that in order for his seed to inherit, the seed must first die. The true heir must also become the testator. Though the means of begetting was not only a natural one, but also a begetting from the dead, the womb of this generation being the grave itself. Certainly the context of Christ's claim that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, was a dispute over power over death, Jn. 8.51. Whether he saw this clearly or not, our new begetting into adoption and co-inheritance under the terms of the New Covenant is through resurrection after death, that of our Surety, the Testator, the Firstborn from the dead, 1 Peter 1.3, Jn. 12.24.

4. Relation of Covenant to imputation.

Here is the most difficult area of all by far, and I confess that much that is important remains obscure to me. John Murray and AW Pink have been my principle helps in the scripture.

Nature of imputation – statement of problem

There are three separate imputations, interrelated in character by scripture.

- ✚ The imputation of Adam's sin to all his natural posterity.
- ✚ The imputation of the elect's sin to Christ.
- ✚ The imputation of Christ's righteousness to his elect people.

The question is frequently and properly raised, even if by fierce opponents of Christ, what is the legal basis for this imputation?

It runs deeply against modern thinking, founded on autonomy and individualism, that such a federal solidarity could have sufficient legal weight as to justify death of a party not personally responsible for a crime.

However our concern is not with man's vain philosophies and barren theories, but with the mind of God.

Imputation

In its simplest form imputation may be seen as justly attributing blame.

This is evident in Deut.17.6-7. The witnesses to idolatry will impute guilt to the offender first, by laying their hands on them. They will take primary responsibility for the execution, then the whole congregation will confirm it.

Failure to do this might result in the destruction of a whole city or community, Deut.13.12-6, more strictly than God had dealt with the Canaanites before by the sword of Israel. The same procedure was applied to the blasphemer, Lev.21.14.

All our hope of salvation from a thoroughly justly deserved eternal death lies in imputation of another kind, foreshadowed in another laying on of hands, Lev.4.27-8, the offerer not the priest imputes sin to his offering.

But upon what legal foundation does the substance of such a shadow rest?

How can one legally die for the sin of another? Deut.24.16, 2 Kin.14.6.

The reality is that God frequently has required the lives of a whole family or unit for the sin of its head, often in circumstances where He could easily have singled out the offender for singular punishment. Korah, Dathan and Abiram with their wives and children are clear examples Numb.16. Achan and all his posterity, though not any ancestor, Pharaoh and all Egypt's firstborn are two others. Saul's seven sons is another particularly potent example of descendants being punished for the primary sin of their father, 2 Sam.21.5-7. I grant that in all these cases it is possible that most of the children were of age and had wilfully consented to and cooperated in their father's sin, thus making them complicit and therefore guilty of death in their own right. It is explicit however in the case of Korah, Abiram and Dathan, that little children were also slain, Numb.16.27. *(Although of course by God's mysterious grace not all Korah's posterity were slain, for some were numbered among the sweet psalmists of Israel, brands from the burning, Numb. 26.11, 1 Chron.6.22-31.)*

It also notable that righteous acts and obligations are also imputed to descendants, a notable example being the imputation to as yet unborn Levi of Abraham's tithe offering in Heb.7.9. God imputes to the posterity of the Rechabites the blessedness of their father Jonadab, although there is much grace and less justice here Jer.35.18-9.

The key text here is Ezek. 18.14, which against Israel's objections that they were innocently suffering for fathers' evil, pronounces pardon for penitent offspring. By implication this condemns the current generation for their own evil. Of crucial importance are the words 'when he considers', he shall not die – from which we may infer if the penitent son had not considered, if he had not changed the ways inherited from his father, he would have justly been punished, being in his father's stead.

A practical example here again is Jonathan's position with Saul with respect to David. He resist his father's evil intentions and so opposes them that he is prepared to face David's consequences. Jonathan 'shall not die for the iniquity of his father'. So there exists some form of seminal imputation until its cord is broken by opposition and renunciation.

Nor does imputation require genetic descent, but succession in office or act. In Matt.23.30-1,34-5 Pharisees and scribes despite protestations of innocence are warned they will carry full blame for an A-Z of past martyrs, 'whom *you* slew between the temple and the altar!' Here is childhood without natural generation. Whilst conceding a genetic lineage from Abraham, Jn.8.37-38, Christ says their real pedigree is revealed by their acts v.41 'you do the deeds of your father'.

How could Christ legally assume our sin? How could He lawfully die for our sin?

David, 1 Chron.11.3, upon his enthronement, elders of Israel established covenant with David as their head, by Divine appointment.

David kingship, 2 Sam.24.10, David' fault – people justly punished – David's anguish not at injustice but at his own impunity, v.17. 2 Sam.24.25 an altar and a sacrifice, technically quite beyond scope of Levitical law, but sanctioned and ordained by God – site of the temple, quite literally founded on the covenant promise with Abraham (Moriah), not the temporary symbols of Sinai, symbolising for the future a new administration of the priesthood.

Entering into covenant with Christ by obedience of faith in His call, we lay our hands on His sacred head, Isa.55.3-5. Acknowledging Him as our only, faithful and eternal Shepherd, He lays us on His shoulder and takes the sting of our sin, Isa.53.3-6, it was as our covenant Shepherd that though scattered, the sheep were not struck but Him, Zech.13.7, wounded by the sword of the quarrel of the Covenant of Sinai, Lev.26.25.

Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ to the Elect.

I am not convinced that the imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of His righteousness to us were either simultaneous or accomplished by identical phases of the same act. Plainly they were both fruits of the cross, Jn.12.24.

It does seem however that there is a disjunction between the two. One simple example is Romans 4.25.

One covenant, one work, but two aspects with different functions. It is again alluded to in Romans 5.10. It is also suggested in Rom.8.34 (rather = *μαλλον*).

I suggest that here the apparent dichotomy between a covenant and a testament is no longer theoretical, for the New *διαθηκη* is both a covenant like that between King David and His subjects, but also Christ's Jonathan-like testament of grace to His eternal seed.

How could this be, given as Palmer Robertson objects that believers are not dynastic successors, nor is this in view in Heb.9?

One of the central difficulties with the exposition of Rom.5.12-19 is that the nature of the imputation of sin from Adam to his posterity is by virtue of a 'realistic' union, that is a flesh and blood descent, whereas this does not appear with the Lord Jesus. Murray urges this lack of 'genetic relation or 'seminal union' as he puts it as a fundamental obstacle to imputation by virtue of this real descent. He also cites the lack of imputation of Adam's other sins to his posterity as evidence against a realistic union, although the first sin had the distinct character of being the first transgression of Law, as Paul reminds us in v.14, subsequent sins being generally against conscience and nature, not revealed Law.

As we have seen, not all 'children' by participation in sin are natural children, and not all imputation requires natural descent.

However there are weighty reasons for reconsidering this objection in the light of Psalm 2.7.

When is the day of Christ's begetting, when the LORD declares His decree?

This question has of course been a source of painful controversy, and can only be dealt with superficially here.

The first principle solution has been to view this as referring to the eternal generation of the Son, as in Prov.8.23-4.

In brief, this does little justice to 'the day', and fails to grasp the context of the Psalm – entrance into Kingdom.

The second solution is to refer it to the incarnation, either at Messiah's conception or less improperly His birth. This has dangerous and heretical overtones of a temporal Divine Sonship, and has rightly been opposed.

The third solution is by reference to the citing of the text by the Apostle in Acts 13.33, where unless the reference is to the resurrection it is inapposite. The citation of Ps.16 to confirm the incorruptibility of Christ in the following verse only strengthens the case that the day fixed was the day of Christ's begetting from death.

This illuminates the significance Christ's title as the 'prototokos' from the dead in Heb.1.6, in Col.1.18 and in Rev.1.5. Of course the description as first begotten, not only begotten strongly suggests a family to follow.

Christ does have seed, real seed, a real descent, it is referred to in Psalm 22.30, it is described in Isaiah 8.18, quoted in Heb.2.13, (language very reminiscent of the great Covenant prayer in Jn. 17). It is the sight of His seed which follows His offering for sin in Isa.53.10. The two concepts are beautifully intertwined in Ps.89 – v.27 the firstborn (one who is made thus - evidently not alluding to His Deity here) and His eternal seed v.29. In between stands the Eternal Covenant, a covenant of mercy, v.28, harking back to v.2-3.

Is it surprising then that the Apostle Peter attributes the spring of our regeneration not to the penal death of Christ but with His resurrection, 1 Peter 1.3? Paul does the same in Romans 6.4, being careful not force the distinction by separating the cross from the empty tomb in v.5. It is all one work, but with distinct aspects and distinct functions. The same thought is in mind in 1 Cor.15.22 and v.45 – Christ is the firstfruits! Afterwards every man in his order.

On rising from the tomb, Jesus spoke to Magdalene with those sweet words, ‘I ascend to My Father and your(pl) Father, my God and your God.’ The adoption is accomplished, the Covenant relation long foreseen established.

My suggestion then is that by virtue of a real, seminal union with Christ by regeneration, those who die with Him in Covenant, in repentance and by faith alone laying guilty hands on His head, do by the Spirit then rise with Him and as His seed enjoy the Father’s imputation of His Son’s righteousness as heirs and co-heirs of the Testament, and all the blessed consequences of full justification that follow. We are begotten by the Father, through the Spirit, with and to the Son, the children of God. This real seminal union properly explains the precision of the comparison with Adam in Rom.5.18 (AV marginal reading preferable and more literal).

Justice then requires imputation, in fact it demands it as a lawfully granted inheritance.

5. Eschatological conclusions

There are powerful and important eschatological conclusions to draw from a unity, whilst not an identity, between the Covenant of Abraham and the New Covenant.

Whilst many of our Puritan forebears delighted in Covenant Theology, (your quote from Oliver Cromwell is especially delightful, I have often savoured it) they did not consider it a dispensational innovation to expect a return of the Jews to their Land. Iain Murray documents the extent and strength of this blessed conviction in ‘the Puritan Hope’. Curiously the primary focus to Abraham’s covenant was the land promise, he had exercised faith to the imputing of righteousness before, but sought strong confirmation of God’s later assertion in Gen.15 v.7. This led to the revelation of the Covenant.

Whilst opponents assert that the land promise was transient, a shadowy foreshadowing of Heaven and the cosmos, and seek a comparison with the effete apparatus of the Levitical Covenant, they do greatly err.

As Isaac himself was an object of covenant promise and a foreshadowing of a far better to come, he did not somehow disappear into oblivion, but himself became party to the same covenant in due course, Lev 26.42. So the white hot relevance of the Land to the present Middle East hardly relegates the focus of Abraham’s covenant to prehistory.

Beyond all doubt inheritance of the land symbolised more than mere possession of Canaan.

Heb.11.16 The hope of the patriarchs was a Heavenly country not only an earthly one

Is Land Inheritance abrogated by arrival of Gospel, superseded by promise of Heaven?

Rom 4.13 Abraham hoped to be heir of the world (created order), not merely a small sliver of Middle East.

Yet the literal nature of the promise and the duration of the wait for it also obliges us not to neglect its immediate scope. Reasons why literal promise is still applicable today, and why the Jews, though enemies of the Gospel, being beloved for their fathers' sakes have returned. A strong token of their future conversion to the Christ, they bear primary responsibility for crucifying.

1 To the coming of the Lord Jesus as He departed, Acts 1.11, on Mount Olives, the land of His life, ministry and death.

2 The restoration of the Jews as a believing people (in large part) Rom 11.25.

3 The fullness of the Gentiles and the end of literal Jerusalem being trodden under foot. Luk.21.24

4 The preservation of the Jews despite their apostasy as an identifiable nation (not just a people) in accordance with God’s repeated cast iron promise Jer.31. 35-37, 32.36-41, 33.24-26, 30.10-11, Ezek.37.21-28. The fullness of these

promises is vainly ascribed either to return from Babylon, or the Gentile church alone.

5 The primary focus of Covenant at its issuing was land, whilst Abraham looked for more than literal possession of Canaan, Rom.4.13 (cosmos), his great care with Sarah's and his own burial site suggests strongly he did expect a literal fulfilment at his resurrection.

6 Both Jacob and Joseph specifically pledged their bodies to the land promise, a fact recorded as one of Joseph's supreme acts of faith in Heb.11.22. Joseph called Canaan the land of the Hebrews even while in an Egyptian prison Gen.40.15.

7 Israel is Immanuel's land Isa 7.14, 8.8,10 (Immanuel in Hebrew in v 10). Land forever bound up with the Lord Jesus Himself. Secured by Christ Himself. His obedience is *the only possible ground of legal merit* for gracious re-entrance of Jews to the land since 1850.

8 Prophecy of Jews interacting with believing gentiles, therefore prophecies don't apply just to believing Gentiles on their own. Isa 45.14, 49.6, 22-23, 54.2-3, 60.3, 5, 7(Arab nations- not yet fulfilled), 15-16, 61.6

9 Explicit literal references to perpetuity of land promise Ps 105.8-11.

If one generation 25 years, then 17 generations waiting for fulfilment of promise (in fact of course 4 for Moses), 60 in enjoyment of promise, and 73 till repossession of Judah (Judaea, southern W. Bank).

10 The fulfilment of OT and NT prophecy re Armageddon (Ezek , Gog and Magog and the Antichrist, all of which are still in the future, Ezek.39.25-29, Ezek.38.17 (Rev.20.8), 2 Thess. 2.4 etc).

I have touched on many areas of important and controversial doctrine, I have not developed or expanded any one of them at length.

As yet many of these thoughts are embryonic, but I would value simple notes and pointers in response, from an older brother with a wide grasp of the scripture and of the pertinent literature.

Yours sincerely in the Beloved,

Charles Soper