

COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 8)

23. *In redemptive historical terms, the Old (Mosaic) Covenant was weighted toward the ministry of the Law ("the letter") whereas the New Covenant is weighted toward the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3).*

This is a highly confused statement. To start with, the label "redemptive historical" remains undefined (Why isn't Dispensationalism or NCT historic-redemptive or redemptive-historical??), so we do not know what the "terms" would be. Presumably it is just a codeword for "Covenantal." Then, "weighted toward" is not really meaningful language about these two covenants (Why isn't the Old Covenant "weighted toward" national obedience? Why isn't the New "weighted toward" the Second Person's ministry rather than the Third Person's?) This thesis is impressionistic fluff because it's so arbitrary. Besides, the contrast between letter and spirit in Rom 2:29 and 7:6 and 2 Cor 3:6 is about inner versus outer conformity to God's commands, and not to how the two covenants are "weighted," as if it were simply a matter of emphasis. The letter kills because it condemns, while the Spirit gives life as the *pre-condition* of obedience, not as a result which the flesh can imitate (think Pharisees). If we want to talk about the weight of emphasis, it would be better to take Paul's advice and contrast the two *principles* of Law: "This *do* and you will live" (Gal 3:10-12), over against *Faith*: "If you are in Christ, therefore let not sin reign, *etc.*" (Rom 5:1 and 6:12 *fol.*). This thesis is just another expression of the idea that the historical covenants are simply different emphases of "administration" of an essentially unified "covenant." That's what we deny.

24. *The New Covenant is the fulfillment of the promise made to Adam (Genesis 3:15) and the (Abrahamic) covenant of grace.*

The New Covenant through the ministry of the incarnate Coming One, does fulfill earlier promises, but it also contains additional predictions in the form of promises about the future continuity of the Jewish People in their Land that had not been made before, and confirming those in the Abrahamic Covenant not yet finally fulfilled. Compare Jeremiah 31:35-40 with 32:37-44 and 33:14-22, all implying a future People in their Land. The promises about the Land are wholly integral with the promises of national and individual salvation. They are correlative, and both stand or fall together in the same literal sense. Further, we know that Ezekiel accepted Jeremiah's predictions at face value, because he repeats their language in such passages as Ezekiel 16:60-63, 28:25-26, 34:20-31, 36:22-28, 37:22-28. When the predictions about the restoration of a regenerated People to their Land are completed in chapters 36-39, then Ezekiel begins the famous City-and-Temple chapters 40-48 which are so wholly unaccountable on anything but a future earthly Kingdom (*Ha'aretz*) basis.

There is no question that the New Covenant is the climactic covenant of the series, but that hardly justifies treating the provisions of the previous covenants as if they are not to be understood in the straightforward terms in which they were originally given. Literal interpretation does not mean "fleshly" or "unspiritual," despite polemic assumptions of the allegorical treatment of so much OT prophecy. The NT revelation may well add further spiritual meaning or implications, but it cannot deny the original sense of the words.

25. *The New Covenant is the reality typified by the pre-incarnational types and shadows (2 Corinthians 1:20, John 6:32, Hebrews 7-9).*

This is correct as it stands, but if so, this means that the predictions of the coming New Covenant describe the future literal substance to fulfill the “types and shadows.” 2 Cor 1:20 states that God will indeed fulfill his promises, John 6:32 teaches that the manna of Moses day represented Christ as the final provision of food from heaven, and Heb 7-10 explains in great detail how completely the types of the Mosaic Covenant were fulfilled and replaced by the salvation provided by the New Covenant. The break is radical and complete; the Mosaic (not the Abrahamic) Covenant was set aside, former, weak and useless, needing repetition, not as good, fault-finding, national, but containing a faithful Remnant, obsolete, old, ready to disappear, made with hands, producing dead works, and incapable of perfecting anyone. The New Covenant is afterward and forever, effective, untransmissible, better, perfectly sanctifies, forgiving, made with Gentiles as well as Jews, but only with the regenerate, is in force now, new, continues forever, not made with hands, guarantees faith-obedience, and perfects forever those who it is sanctifying. These contrasts are not the account of a slow evolution, or a minor transition in a temporal “administration” of some unified meta-covenant. They are the language of someone who saw a complete and radical replacement of one covenant by another. The New is not just a Revised Standard Version of the Old, but a wholly fresh redemptive departure on a wholly different historical basis, for the Coming One of the Old has now come, and will come “the second time” to complete the saving task (9:28, 10:37).

Jeremiah 31:31-40 is the premier prediction of the New Covenant in the OT text, and is treated as such in Hebrews. It states that the New Covenant is “not like” the former because, unlike the previous *conditional* covenant (“which they broke”), the New will be *wholly unconditional*, being made by one Party only (like the Abrahamic!!), and *with regenerate believers only*, who “know the Lord.” In verses 35-37 God invokes his natural covenant with the physical universe (the regularities of the sun and moon) to show that he will never abandon National Israel despite all their sin and apostasy. To confirm this, physical details about the City in verses 38-40 are picked up by Zechariah later in 14:10. This is only confirmed in 32:37-44, and later again in 33:14-26, where many details are again picked up and repeated by Jeremiah in the exact same terms they were earlier given in. There is no way to mistake the Prophet’s meaning, and neither Ezekiel nor Zechariah could possibly have mistaken his meaning.

In the Upper Room, Jesus announced this New Covenant “in his blood,” and publicly ratified it within twenty-four hours on the Cross. It is now the only basis for the salvation of God’s Elect, as the Mosaic Covenant is “obsolete” (Heb 8:13). In that room were representatives (the Eleven and other disciples) of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (“the House of Israel and the House of Judah”) who would eventually judge the twelve tribes in the coming Kingdom (Mat 19:28, Lk 22:28-30). This group represented the Remnant into whom Gentiles would also be grafted to form Paul’s “new mankind” of Ephesians 2:15 and 3:16. Thus the promise to Abraham that in him would all the families of the earth be blessed continues to be literally fulfilled in the present state of Kingdom progress.

For Jeremiah, it was the *dis*-continuity with the Old that most characterized the New Covenant. It would only be with the Elect (regenerate Remnant), and not with the whole fleshly Nation. No “sign” of the New Covenant is identified by Jeremiah, but Jesus identified the elements of the Lord’s Supper as the sign of the New Covenant, a sign for believers only, in Luke 22:14-20. Under the terms of the New Covenant, the sign of the Old Covenant was circumcision, and the type was replaced by the anti-type, the concrete substantial reality of the New Birth, not by baptism, another symbol. New Covenant Theology demands that every detail of each covenant be allowed its own meaning, and that we not be satisfied with blurring the details of the historic covenants under an imaginary meta-covenant in a Platonic upper storey. The New Covenant is made with believers only, with those who “know the Lord.” The visible Church is a mixture of tares and wheat, but God’s Elect Remnant is not.