

The Doctrine of the Church In These Times

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1953

CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

Illinois

Chapter 1

THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF THE CHURCH

"If we are to understand the nature of the Church we must begin with the Old Testament," Clarence T. Craig (*Man's Disorder and GOD's Design*, Amsterdam Report, p. 32)

"The rootage of Christianity in Hebrew history is deep, and undoubtedly a continuing purpose of GOD runs through both," W. E. Garrison (*A Protestant Manifesto*, p. 95)

"Since the time of Marcion, in the second century, until the present, Christians have to a large degree preferred to remain aloof from Judaism and assert that the Christian Church is original and independent of previous influences." J. R. Nelson (*The Realm of Redemption*, pp. 3, 4).

"Professor Dodd (*The Bible Today*, p. 70) notes how the New Testament writers take up the ideal attributes of Israel and apply them to the Church. In Galatians, the Church is the '**Israel of God**' (6:16) In I Peter, it is '**the people of God**' (2:9, 10), whose members are a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). To Paul, Isaiah's righteous remnant (Romans 9:27), Jeremiah's people of the new covenant (II Corinthians 3:5, 6), Daniel's saints of the Most High (I Corinthians 1:2). This is not enthusiastic rhetoric. It is a deliberate reapplication of prophetic language. It amounts to an assertion that the people of GOD have now passed through its supreme crisis, and reached its complete and final form."

"The first Christian believers, as their words and actions in the accounts of Acts decisively portray, were thoroughly Jewish in thought and emotion. The religion and history they have received, to whatever degree of knowledge, were those of the chosen Israel. Therefore, they could not have known at the outset that their new faith in the risen CHRIST would eventually necessitate a divorce from the religion of their fathers, a break which none of them really desired." J. Robert Nelson (*The Realm of Redemption*, p. 9).

"While it is true that the Church, in the strict sense of the word, and as a corporate institute was not founded while the Lord was on earth, in another sense He was laying the foundations during the whole of His ministry." W. B. Pope (*Compendium of Christian Theology*, 3:262)

1. The Church was formed of the remnant of Israel.

In considering the Old Testament background of the Church and the early Christian Jews, we

must consider the Old Testament doctrine of the remnant which Paul carried over into the realm of grace. **"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace"** (Romans 11:5). The doctrine of the remnant is set forth in Amos, Micah, Malachi and especially in Isaiah.

The remnant is the Father's "little flock" in Israel, as the remnant was JESUS' "little flock" (Luke 12:32). The little flock of JESUS is the saved remnant, those who were looking for the MESSIAH, and formed the nucleus of the new community which would be constituted on the Day of Pentecost. It is clear from the New Testament that the early Christians considered themselves the believing remnant in fleshly Israel, the real Jews (Romans 2:28, 29). While JESUS did not directly connect the remnant of Israel with the Church He promised to build, the Apostles undoubtedly did (Galatians and Romans).

2. The Church was composed of the new people of GOD, in which there are no distinctions of race and nationality.

Throughout the Old Testament there is the concept of a people whom GOD has chosen to be His own in a peculiar sense. The Hebrews traced this election to the covenant which GOD made with Abraham, a covenant which included his descendents (Genesis 15:18; 17: 7, 8). They were to be a holy nation, a religious community faithful to the one true GOD, Jehovah. They were redeemed out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb and the outstretched arm of GOD. They were the people of GOD.

The New Testament clearly teaches that the Church is the new people of GOD (Acts 15:14; II Corinthians 6:16; Titus 2:14; I Peter 2:9). It is significant that Jesus, in gathering the nucleus of His Church, chose twelve men to be the patriarchs of the new people of GOD. In Romans 11 we see that GOD has not cast off His ancient people, Israel, but He has taken unto Himself a new people, redeemed by the blood of His Son and kept by His power. The background of the Church as the people of GOD, is the ancient people of GOD, and the Church has much to learn from their history.

3. The Church is a new fellowship, not based upon a common blood, but upon a common love for JESUS CHRIST.

"If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26, 27; Matthew 10:37, 38). Here JESUS announces Himself as the center of a new allegiance which would transcend all human loyalties of kindred and home, an allegiance that would upset old traditions and create new patterns of human and religious fellowship. This new allegiance was radical, transforming, revolutionary, and would in time create a new fellowship around it.

The ancient people, Israel, lost their spiritual pre-eminence. John the Baptist said to the Jews, **"God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham"** (Matthew 3:9). Paul said, **"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly . . . but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly"** (Romans 2:28, 29). The spiritual standards of the new fellowship became the criteria by which the ancient people were judged, putting them under the Messianic judgment. So even before the

Church was formed, we see the outline of the spiritual ascendancy of the new people of GOD, to the disparagement of Israel.

4. The Church, the new fellowship is to be motivated by a more radical ethic than the law, the inward ethic of the heart.

This inward ethic was prophesied by Jeremiah: "**Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they will be my people**" (Jeremiah 31:31-33). The early Christians believed JESUS to be the mediator of this new covenant (Hebrews 12:24).

JESUS gathered together the believing remnant as a nucleus for His Church, with twelve disciples to lead it. What kind of lives were they to live? By what rules were they to live? In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord made it plain that He expected His men to live beyond the humanly possible, thus requiring divine assistance which was promised through the HOLY SPIRIT. The disciple must live beyond the law, he must not only do no murder, he must not hate. He must not only refrain from adultery, he must be free from lust in his heart. JESUS intended to build a holy Church, composed of holy people, whose lives would be holy. The ethic of this new fellowship would go far beyond the ethical demands of the law; reaching into the hidden springs of life and demanding truth and holiness in the inward parts.

5. These people who were to form the new Church were given two ordinances and the charter and commission of the Church.

The ordinance of baptism, practiced by John the Baptist and later by the apostles, was given by example and precept before the Church was formed (Matthew 28:18-20).

The institution of the Lord's supper had its beginning in the solemn meal of JESUS and His disciples (Matthew 26:26-29) before the Church was formed.

The charter and commission of the Church, defining its power and authority, its world-wide field, its mission and its enduring assurance of divine aid, was given before the Church was formed (Matthew 28:18-20).

W. B. Pope (*A Compendium of Christian Theology*, 3:262) sums up this pre-Pentecostal period: "While it is true that the Church in the strict sense of the word, and as a corporate institute, was not founded while the Lord was upon earth, in another sense He was laying its foundation during the whole of His ministry.

"He left a large body of instruction concerning it which waited only for the Day of Pentecost to disclose its fulness of meaning. The germs and principles of all that is to follow in this branch of theology are to be found in the Gospels: indeed, we may be more bold, and say that nothing on

this subject, or any other subject, can go beyond the meaning of the Lord's own words. He spoke of the Comforter as the future Divine Presence in the congregation; but His office was only to glorify, expound and expand the sayings of the Redeemer Himself. We shall find that this holds true in a very remarkable degree concerning the doctrine of the new Church or kingdom. A large part of the Saviour's teachings in the four Gospels treats of its nature, of the methods of its spread, of the character of its subjects, of its relations to the world, and of the principles of His own government in it."

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