

## **The Primacy of Israel in Jeremiah 31.31**

'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'

*The New Covenant announced by Jeremiah has primary significance for Israel's literal seed, with some distinctive and singular promises and consequences.*

Proposition:

**That the remnant of Jacob's literal descendants are the primary covenanting party in view in this prophecy, and that Gentiles are secondarily grafted into this grace also by sole mediation of Messiah.**

To even question the identity of the covenanting party in Jeremiah's prophecy is likely to have proven most curious to its human author.

After all, the promise is plucked from the context of the manifold rebellions and failings of the nation delivered from Egypt, the very nation Jeremiah was witness to, and whose whole life he strove against and for whom he pleaded repentance and mercy, with weeping and groans.

However for some commentators, the destination of travel so determines the means of arrival that the role of the Jewish nation in this arrangement in the future is of little or no concern at all. They have exchanged a local train for the express.

### **The Nature of A Covenant**

We need not travel far to see a covenant in action. In Jeremiah 34.8-9, a covenant is made between all the people of the city and God, at the instigation of weak King Zedekiah:

'King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; that every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free...'

It was a reaffirmation of the former covenant made between Israel and the Lord in Exodus 21-2-4, sealed in blood at Sinai. (Ex.24.7,8) Jeremiah reminds the people of this in v.13-14:

'Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, at the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee...'

This covenant reiterated and reemphasised the former covenant made with their fathers. It was entered under the duress of the approach of the Babylonian army, described in v.7, but it was strongly commended by the Lord in v.15, you had 'done right in My sight'.

What then was the form of the covenant? Its enactment and the participants are described for us detail in v.18-19:

'...the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf'

A sacrificial calf was divided into two parts, and the people walked between the divided parts of the animal. This is reminiscent of Abraham's great covenant with God in Genesis 15, though unlike Zedekiah he was not permitted to act the part of the one passing through the sacrifice, merely to watch. So cardinal is this dividing to the covenant concept, that Turretin argues its three letter Hebrew word (B-R-T) is a rearrangement of Hebrew letters for the word cleave (B-T-R). This covenant was ratified 430 years earlier than Sinai. (Galatians 3.17)

A covenant is a solemn binding agreement between two defined parties, with clear stipulations for compliance, announced by a representative who bridges both parties, who takes special responsibility for its fulfillment, as here by Zedekiah. Its violation results in sanction.

In Jeremiah 34, the nobles disastrously breach their solemn agreement, Zedekiah fails as a guarantor, they go back to their old ways and reenslave their Hebrew brethren. This is described in v.16:

'But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.'

The sanction symbolised by passing through the parts of the slain sacrifice witnesses to the solemnity and seriousness of this breach in v.17 and 20:

'Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.'

For those who specifically, 'which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain,':

'I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.'

The sanction of a violated covenant is death.

### **The Law Covenant at Sinai was broken on receipt**

So Zedekiah's covenant failed, and in this sense it was a perfect replica of Sinai which was broken on receipt, broken by multiple parties, including its mediators and broken completely.

#### **By the people**

Even before the written copy of the Ten Commandments were received by the people, almost all of them (with the possible exception of the 4<sup>th</sup>) were directly shattered. (Deut.9.9) By making and worshipping another god in the form of the golden calf, God had been severely insulted and His honour dragged through the mire. Nor was this an isolated incident Amos tells us idolatry was a continuous phenomenon in the wilderness. (Amos 5.25-6)

#### **By Aaron and the priests**

Aaron's own part in the making of the calf was so serious he too was under an immediate death penalty removed only by Moses' intercession. (Ex.32.4, 35, Deut. 9.20)

Aaron's own sons Nadab and Abihu were executed for disobedience to a basic priestly command.

(Ex.30.9) His other two sons were so affected that they and their father neglected another central duty, at which Moses was initially angry. (Lev.9.16-20)

Aaron's role as a spokesman and representative of Moses, was after all a Divine indulgence for Moses' weakness. (Ex.4.13-4)

### **By Moses**

Both Aaron and Moses were solemnly forbidden from the blessing they longed for, entry into Canaan, because of their own sin at Meribah. (Numb. 20.24; Deut.32.50-52) This was especially grievous to Moses, but the Lord absolutely refused his plea for mercy. (Deut. 3.26) There is a hint that the root of this prohibition lay earlier, at Kadesh. (Deut.1.37)

What plainer example can there be of the weakness of Sinai to bring access into the fullness of God's promise, when its own principle mediator *himself* falls under its condemnation?

### **As Sinai was made peculiarly with Israel so when broken, it is avenged particularly upon Israel**

Sinai was a distinguishing covenant, particular to Israel. It was founded on their national deliverance from Egypt, a consequence of the promised blessing of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but not other descendants of Abraham, like Ishmael, Esau or Keturah's children. (Gen.17.20-1) The Covenant at Sinai was enacted in the wilderness only with Israel, and not with other nations. (Exod.19.5,6)

This was terrible privilege. The blessings promised upon obedience were matched by specific and dreadful curses for neglect. (Lev.26.3-12 vs. 14-39 and Deut.28.1-13 vs. 15-68) The culmination of these dismal warnings, Deut.28.68 finds historic corroboration in Josephus' words, Titus 'put [1000s of] them in bonds and sent them to the Egyptian mines' (Wars of the Jews, 9.2), a certain death sentence, there being no lighter servitude reserved for them. This 'quarrel of the covenant' was expressed with a ferocity and horror not known by other nations that had not enjoyed their light. (Dan.9.12)

### **An earlier covenant was made - to which God and Moses often allude**

However the covenant at Sinai often alludes to an earlier covenant, one made with the three Patriarchs. The Law covenant is sharply distinguished from an earlier one made with the fathers at its declaration, 'The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us.' (Deut.5.3a)

### **This earlier covenant is the foundation stone of the New Covenant**

Speaking of the promise made to Christ, Paul writes:

'...that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law [under Sinai], which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.' (Gal.3.17-8)

So even the violations of the Law, the curses of Sinai, and the Divine vengeance that pursued them, could not remove either the efficacy or permanency of God's covenant with Abraham.

**This earlier covenant is a constant ground of appeal for mercy and preservation in apostasy, finds echoes throughout the Jewish Bible and again is singularly focussed on Israel's literal Seed.**

'Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self' (Exod.32.12)

'Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land...and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' (Deut 9.5)

'The LORD had said he would destroy you... I prayed therefore unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' (Deut.9.25-27)

'...He will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.' (Micah 7.19)

**Mary the Lord's mother recalls this earlier, primary covenant, not Sinai, as the grounds of redemptive hope,**

'...in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.' (Luk. 1:54-5)

**So does Zechariah, John the Baptist's father,**

'To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham' (Luk. 1:72-3)

**Although Ishmael participates in its sign, he is refused as its primary beneficiary of the covenant in favour of his half brother,**

'Thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him...but my covenant will I establish with Isaac...' (Gen.17.19-21)

**Moses cites the Abrahamic covenant as the foundation of redemption from Egypt**

'But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.' (Deut.7.8)

**The blessing confirmed in the Covenant with Abraham was not the Seed, which Abraham had already believed, but his desire for certainty about the Land promise.**

'Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, 'Take me an heifer...' (Gen.15.5-9)

'He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.

Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac;  
And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance' (Ps.105.8-11)

**Two texts make plain that the way the covenant of promise to Abraham would be fulfilled when the covenant of Law was fully kept.**

'Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers:'  
(Deut.7.12)

(The fathers mentioned here hark back to v.8 and an oath that was made before Sinai,  
'because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand'.)

'Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O LORD.'(Jer.11.4-5)

The reference to an oath about the land 'flowing with milk and honey' alludes to the earliest references in Exodus to an oath made long before Sinai, first cited to Moses, but actually undertaken earlier to the patriarchs.

For example see this reference immediately after the Passover, when the Lord refers to an oath 'which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey'. (Ex.13.5)

**Without proper and perfect obedience then how could either covenant be fulfilled? The covenant of Law at Sinai, or the covenant of promise to Abraham?**

The simple answer is it couldn't. So the Son of God came to fulfill it Himself.

'Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,  
I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.' (Ps.40.7-8)

He is the perfect surety and guarantor of the Covenants. He is the hidden Angel Who redeemed Jacob (Gen.48.16), the fiery Lamp and smoking Furnace Who passed between the pieces on Abraham's behalf (Jn.8.56), He is the Witness, Leader and Commander, Whose perfection makes sure the everlasting mercies of the Covenant with David. (Isa.55.3-4) In fact he is described as being the embodiment of Covenant *itself* for God's chosen nation and to establish the Land. (Isa. 49.8) He is the Righteousness of His people (Jer.33.16) and thus becomes their Shepherd and the King, both David's lawful successor, the Branch, *and* his Lord. (Jer.33.17, Ezek.34.23,25, Ezek.37.24-28)

When Moses pleaded for Israel, on his account alone the whole nation, sometimes including Aaron, was spared from destruction (Exod.32.30-32, Deut.9.18-20, Num.14.12-20, Num.16.45-6). How much more when a perfect Representative with perfect righteousness pleads on their behalf an offering with infinite and eternal merit, namely the offering of His own Person and blood? '...by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.'(Heb.8.6)

This work, mediation of the covenant by David's seed, the Branch, is a priestly work, more than a kingly one, and establishes a more efficacious priesthood than Aaron's. (Zech.3.8-9, Zech.6.12-13)

**Now it is appropriate to return to our thesis, who is the primary covenant party intended in the New Testament, promised in Jeremiah 31.31?**

Gentiles naturally include themselves as the primary party, but this would have been an intense surprise to the human author.

The prophecy is embedded in chapters replete with the manifold rebellions and failings of the nation delivered from Egypt, the very nation Jeremiah was witness to, and whose whole life he wrestled with, the people for whom he pleaded repentance and mercy, with weeping and groans.

Is he then to wake in eternity to find to his astonishment that other peoples have taken their place and their promise, and the progeny of Israel he served and wrestled been left in the cold and dark perpetually in near entirety?

If a covenant is like a marriage, he would be more surprised than Jacob was to find Leah at his side not Rachel. Had God kept really His word in substituting another party for the one He named?

It is not that such a rejection would be unjust. Jeremiah the human source of Lamentations more than other prophet knew how worthy his dear people were only of death, exile and cursing.

The whole focus of this chapter and of the chapters preceding and following it, is Israel's specific rebellion and God's gracious remedy for that rebellion.

It is founded on God's future restoration of a wayward and rebellious nation to its land (v.8-10) a testimony not just to Israel but about Israel to all the nations of the world (v.10) that they too might find God's mercy, by legal means yet obscure.

Its focus on the sufferings of the Jewish mothers of Ramah (Bethlehem) has Messianic overtones (v.15-17), and anticipates enduring consolation and recompense from a struggle with Death itself.

The whole chapter has in mind the completion of the saving third of Jeremiah's solemn original commission.

'See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.' (Jer 1.10)

It is a commission and a promise repeated in this passage.

'And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.' (Jer 31.28)

The question is simple, who are the people whom the Lord has vigilantly plucked up, broken and thrown down, whom has He destroyed, for they must also be the primary chosen object of His building and planting in the next verses.

To change the object of the second from the object of the first would be not merely ungrammatical but

also a Laban-like deceit, which we may not charge Him with. It would be to set the children's teeth forever on edge for the sour grapes of their fathers in explicit violation of the grace promised in the next verse.

For if the object of a promise loved by free and unconditional election may later be transferred to another object altogether upon disobedience, that love is neither eternal nor free and the election no longer unconditional but contingent upon the depravity of men. Is it really possible that God has become changeable, His word malleable to circumstance, His glory tainted with the shadow of an uncertain variableness? For if such clear, repeated and explicit promises to one party may be transferred to another, named only by symbol, analogously, what ground of confidence is there for us or any other party, that the same transfer may not be repeated, in the light of our numerous transgressions?

A Covenant then is a binding and solemn agreement between two parties, often administered and sometimes guaranteed by a third party, a mediator, the violation of which carries the sanction of death. If a covenant was forged with Israel how can another party usurp its position? Does that not invalidate the covenant? Is it not altogether a different covenant? If I make solemn vows to God about faithfulness to my wife, thus entering a covenant with her, will the judges approve my substitution of her with another party during her life? God forbid! So why do we imagine God has done the same?

#### **Who then are the primary covenanting parties?**

The named parties are God and the two houses of Israel and Judah. We may legitimately ask what warrant do we have for extending the covenant beyond these parties, let alone completely substituting another party altogether?

#### **Can a covenant be transferred from one party to another?**

In Ezekiel 17, in a figure for the great powers, Babylon and Egypt, a strong and colourful eagle plants a lowly vine in the field, forging a covenant with it, that 'that by keeping of his covenant it might stand' (v.14). The vine turns its allegiance to another great bird. The vine is condemned for despising the oath and breaking its covenant. Should a national bond be treated with such seriousness, yet the everlasting covenant between God and Israel, be as malleable and changeable, without any charge or concern about betrayal? Jeremiah's New Covenant promises obedience not as a condition of entry but as an undeserved and gracious consequence of participation. Its conditions are met in the parties by grace, the works following and not preceding the gift, even the 'work' of desiring to participate - how then can the very disobedience it promises to abolish be grounds of its invalidation or its transfer?

#### **Contextual evidence the primary covenanting party is the disobedient nation of Israel and is particularly specified**

In Jeremiah 32, we have strong indication again that the everlasting covenant which is promised in the previous chapter applies to the same people and land that have borne the curse for their manifold disobedience.

'Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them' (Jer.32.37-9)

Again the promise is gracious and unconditional, but quite specifically directed to exactly the same

people that endured wrath, exile and the curses.

'And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.' (Jer.32.40-1)

The reference is focused like a laser on one people,

'For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them.' (Jer.32.42)

### **How then can a gracious and unconditional Covenant be offered to fulfil the promises of a law covenant, when the requirements of the latter have been comprehensively shattered?**

The answer comes in the next chapter, which again clarifies that the intended covenant party was the remnant of Jacob's literal seed.

'Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.

In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness..' (Jer.33.14-6)

The Lord will name His people by His own name, by His own Righteousness, by means of the promised Messiah the Priest-King descendant of David. He will keep the covenant, He will be its Mediator, He will be its Surety, He will *be* its Embodiment. Thus are fulfilled His gracious promises to David and to the Levites of an eternal and blessed succession in the enjoyment of Divine favour.

### **Other Prophets also taught the covenant was directed to Israel particularly**

Ezekiel is careful to reiterate the same promise:

'And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.

And I will make with them a covenant of peace...' (Ezek.34.23-5)

Surrounding nations are cursed and rejected, specifically those with evil designs on the ancient high places (Ezek.36.2), but despite the blasphemy and reproach Israel has caused for God by its disobedience, sure and eternal mercy and holiness is promised:

'And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.' (Ezek.36.23-7)

Not only is this grace to be visibly seen by the heathen around it includes a specific promise of return, in accordance with the promise of the broken Law, now kept and guaranteed by the King:

'And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.' (Ezek.36.28)

### **Why then does the Epistle of Hebrews apply this passage on the New Covenant to Gentiles?**

Hebrews is the only NT book to fully cite Jer.31.31, doing so both in chapter 8 and 10. Writing of the inadequacy of the older covenant to save, namely the Sinaitic covenant, 'in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt', the Spirit writes, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities' (Heb.8.8-12).

Similarly in speaking of the unique perfection of work of the Messiah, he show how it seals the New Covenant,

'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before,

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' (Heb.10.14-7)

Yet it is surprising how scarce reference to the Gentiles is in Hebrews, it is after all a very Jewish book. There is no reference to Gentiles in the whole of the Hall of Fame of faith, except for the proselyte Rahab, which brings the history of witness right up to the Maccabees. There is a closing reference to the circumcised Gentile Timothy, 'our brother'.

When we look at other parts of the New Testament, we find other evidence that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was firmly maintained right up the cross, even if sometimes only as means of reproof to Jewish faithlessness.

The Samaritan woman was reminded at the well, that salvation is of the Jews. (John 4.22)

The Syro-Phoenician woman was reproved by the Lord, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel', and finally being told, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs'.(Matt.15.24-7) She rested content with the crumbs of His Almighty power.

Explicit instructions were given to His disciples, 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. (Matt.10.5-6)

When the Greeks came to Philip seeking a glimpse of the Messiah, He was prompted to say in reply only, 'The hour is come'. (John 12.23)

At the Lord's last Table, only Jews were present when he said, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood'. (Luke 22.20)

Even some years after the cross, uncircumcised Cornelius and Peter have a strong sense of the residual barrier which to their mutual astonishment was about to be torn down. 'Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation'. (Acts 10.28)

For though the Lord had promised that the sheep 'which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd' (John 10.16), it was to be quite a while before first the circumcised Samaritans, then the Egyptians and uncircumcised Greeks would be added to the assembly of believers.

### **A Wild Olive**

Paul describes this process as the grafting in of a wild olive tree. (Rom.11.17) An unusual practice this is for a botanist, for in grafting, the branch not the root determines the quality of the fruit. He warns us Gentiles that the root, the grace of God expressed in the covenant, bears us not the other way round (v.18), and describes the boasting that will result from forgetfulness.

His challenge to Gentiles, 'Be not highminded, but fear', is borne on the premise, that God is well able to graft the natural branches back in again, 'how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?' (v.24)

The very ground of our hope, the Surety and Mediator is Jewish. The Covenant Himself is Jewish, and was first given to the Jews. Are we in danger of behaving like a Prodigal returned who behaves as if the offended elder son would never come back? Are we guilty of reciprocating the behaviour of elder son to him, in spite of the depth and freeness of grace we have received? God forbid!

### **Means by which the Gentile partake**

*If the Gentiles are not explicitly included in the Old Testament/Tenach text, under what terms do they partake of the benefits of Messiah's covenant?*

How is it then that the middle wall of partition is broken down? That the far off, both those guilty of a violated covenant and those who never partook of Sinai's covenant, might both be made close? How is it that the enmity between a Jewish covenant breaker and His Sovereign King and the enmity between Jews and strangers to the covenants be slain in one act? How can access legally be granted to both? How is the nailing of the handwriting of the ordinances to the cross a means of mercy and blessing to both parties? By what forensic mechanism and upon what covenantal basis is the Lord Messiah's atonement effectual not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles? (Eph.2.13-19, Col.2.11-14) How are 'the strangers from the covenants of promise' called home that they might be strangers no more? (Eph.2.12) Or is there after all validity to the charge laid by Rabbinic opponents of the Messiah that Christians have dislocated their hope from the Tenach, are guilty of eisegesis and invented their own legal grounds for a Gentile substitution in Jewish covenants? Has God really changed His mind?

We may catch a glimpse of this in the Covenant revealed at the plains of Moab, shortly before Moses' death. (Deut.29-30) Here is a covenant, as Gill indicates, separate to but revealed alongside the Sinaitic covenant. With it is a promise of return and repentance, even of a circumcision of the heart, a plain reference to New Birth (Col.2.13).

It is introduced in Deuteronomy 29.1 as, 'the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, **beside** the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.' It was made as a provision for 'an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear' (v.4).

This covenant is cited by Paul in Romans 10,6,7. He alludes to its promise in Deut. 30.11-14, writing, 'Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)'. He places it in sharp contrast to the Law covenant, and calls it 'the righteousness of faith'. (Rom.10.6)

Interestingly, the Gibeonites though not specifically mentioned are prophetically alluded to Deut. 29 as servants, hewers of wood and drawers of water. (Deut.29.11, cf Jos.9.21,22) Whether the Gibeonites were formally circumcised is unclear, though it seems unlikely it was a part of the covenant they made with Joshua. (Josh.9.15) They were strangers, not proselytes. As such for example, they could be sold slain food not lawful to the Jews. (Deut.14.21) So as servants and acquaintances of the nation, they too could partake in the grace of this covenant, even if as uncircumcised Gentiles.

This covenant in the plains of Moab gives a view of the foundation of our hope, not just for the Jews after violating Sinai, to whom it was proclaimed, but also for Gentiles too, by which they are grafted into Abraham's benefits and promise through the perfect and efficacious keeping of the Law by a better Mediator, the Branch. Here is the promise of heart circumcision, hallmark of the New Testament.

There is another intriguing insight into this partaking of the Gentiles in the grace of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 16. After the most dire description of Israel's manifold apostasy, God promises mercy not only to the Nation, but also to her less shameless companions, Samaria and Sodom. The covenants of Law and Grace are carefully distinguished:

'For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant [Sinai].

Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth [Abraham], and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant [Messianic].

Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant [Sinai].

And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.' Ezek.16.59-62

The Gentiles are given to Israel not as sisters, but as daughters, not by *her* covenant, the one which will in substance be established to her, not by her merits, but the merits of her King, but all parties benefitting from the everlasting grace of the Covenant in which they share.

### **Dubious supercessionist hermeneutics**

#### **Sadly it is all too common to find inconsistent interpretation of the Old Testament**

##### *Cherry picking the blessings but discarding the stone*

In Jeremiah 34 the solemn covenant is broken, but by no analogy is the whole or even part to be applied to the Gentiles, why is grace taken from but curses left to the Jews? What hermeneutic governs this double standard? Doesn't this evidence a dubious inconsistency? Sadly other examples abound in the writings of [O Palmer Robertson](#) for example.

##### *Allegorising but only to exclude*

Some commentators, the masterly [Hendriksen](#) among them, depict Biblical prophecy especially in the Tenach (Old Testament) as a double mountain, the larger being silhouetted behind the closer but smaller. The return of Israel from Babylon partly fulfils God's glorious promise in the coming of the Messiah. However it is strange that the same principle is eschewed when the prospect of a second

return to the land is proposed, and one in association with the restoration of many Jews to their Messiah after this return.

### *Arguing from the conclusion*

Entire regeneration is promised in Jeremiah, and is sometimes used as a reason for interpreting it exclusively as the existing overwhelmingly Gentile church, since this is the only place it may now be witnessed, however imperfectly even in the NT. This should however by no means preclude its future fulfillment in predominantly Jewish churches in the land of promise.

These and other hermeneutical techniques employed in Replacement Theology argue a symmetry with the hard heartedness of Jews who rejected the Messiah themselves. The Parable of the elder son is as applicable to us now as it was to the Pharisees in Christ's day, if we will not pray and yearn for the salvation of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They are on our Master's heart and especially His Apostle to the Gentiles' heart, should they not also be on ours, who lie so completely in their debt? The essence of Replacement Theology is appropriation of the New Covenant for ourselves alone, without reference to its historical context, its fulfilling relation to Sinai, and its sealing of the great land promise given to Abraham for his literal seed. There are distinctive and important elements that apply specifically and particularly to the remnant of literal Israel, much as yet unfulfilled though plainly in the process of being fulfilled, as our [forebears not only saw but laboured for](#).

If we neglect this, is it not perhaps a root of the fulfillment in us of the curse, 'Ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it'? Britain's role as the Mandatory Power in the League of Nations, a role that survived the League, and its tragic and repeated subsequent betrayal of its undertakings to the Jewish Nation and even collusion with Arab violence, saddle Christians here too with a particular painful culpability for the many hundreds of thousands of deaths that resulted.<sup>1</sup>

Our great task as beneficiaries of the eternal covenant is to provoke to jealousy, the people of the prophets, apostles and Messiah who brought it to us. Let us daily plead and pray for them, for it will be life from the dead for us. Where are our regular, tender pleadings for our Lord's own lost kin in our meetings before Him?

### **The Messiah came to give 'light to the Gentiles',**

and 'that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.' (Isa.49.6b) However His first mission was to 'raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel'. (Isa.49.6a)

He has saved the first to the last and blessed us who were last that we might be His first. Where is our zeal to fulfill then this His remaining task and avoid the disparaging of that which is so dear and central to His purpose? It will be to us, them and Him [the miracle of Cana remade](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, A Durable Peace, 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, 2000, Warner Books.