

## THE MESSIANIC COVENANT

K. M. CAMPBELL\*

The story of the Bible is the account of the accomplishment of God's eternal plan, despite the fall, to form a people for eternal communion with Himself. That plan, of course, centers on the work, in time and space, of God's own Son, who before the foundation of the world offered Himself as an obedient Son to redeem His chosen people. He who was eternally God the Son was born the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah), the head of his people (Paul), the representative of the new humanity.

The Messianic covenant was established in order to undo the consequences of the breaking of Adam's covenant, by restoring man to fellowship with God through identification with the second Adam in his death and resurrection. By union with Christ, the great covenant keeper, man may again experience union and communion with his Maker and Redeemer.

Already in the delay of final judgment<sup>1</sup> on Adam and his seed in Genesis 3 we observe the grace of God in operation. This 'common' grace of God is the prologue to the proto-evangelium in Genesis 3:15, which offers the first intimation in Scripture that God will intervene and Himself provide another Adam—the Son of Man, the Last Adam.

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul draws an analogy between the first and second Adams. He declares that Adam is the federal head of the human race, and that 'through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, for that all sinned' (Rom. 5:12). Sin was imputed to all men because all sinned in Adam. However, 'if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many' (Rom. 5:15). 'So, then, as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men unto condemnation, even so through the one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous' (Rom. 5:18-19).

Paul's argument is patently clear. One man, Adam, was appointed representative head of the human race; he sinned, and by this one act

\*Graduate student at Westminster Theological Seminary.

1. Adam began physically to die, but eternal death was withheld in the grace of God 'in order to lead man to repentance.' (Rom. 2:4).

of rebellion, all who are in him are accounted guilty and condemned. Similarly, Paul says, one man, Christ, was appointed representative head of a new race; he was obedient—even unto death; by this act of obedience all in him are accounted forgiven and righteous.

The analogy is perfect. There are two representative men<sup>2</sup> and two acts of Imputation. As Murray has so cogently expressed it: "These two heads of humanity and the two parallel yet opposing complexes bound up with them are the pivots on which the history of humanity turns!"<sup>3</sup>

However, the analogy must be properly understood. In the first place, the individuals represented by each head are not identical. Adam is the head of all natural-born men; Christ is the head of all supernaturally born men (the elect). In the second place, the birth and environment of each head is different. Adam was created by God in a magnificent context and lived his life in the beauty of the prelapsarian creation. Christ entered a sin-sick world groaning with corruption, and lived his life in obscure and adverse circumstances. Thirdly, as Paul noted,<sup>4</sup> the abundance of the *gift* of Christ is not to be compared with the just sentence on Adam's posterity. Finally, while the general terms of the covenant remained the same for both representatives (whole-souled obedience to God), the specific terms were different. Adam had simply to refrain from one act of disobedience. Christ, on the other hand, had to be obedient unto death—the ignominious, unnatural death of Calvary where He propitiated the wrath of God by enduring the curse of Hell on behalf of His people.

The covenant obedience of Christ, therefore, must be understood as being infinitely greater than that demanded of Adam. Like Adam, He had to live 'by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). But in His case that word required total self-denial, suffering and pain *in the place of* those whom He represented. The union and communion which He enjoyed with His Father would be shattered as He died in the place of His people on the cross. The work of Redemption involved for Him not merely maintenance of the *status quo*,<sup>5</sup> as in Adam's case, but revocation of all those privileges and prerogatives which were His nature and by right (Phil. 2:5-8), and the voluntary acceptance of inconceivable self-sacrifice for the sake of those who were completely worthless.

The whole of the above may be subsumed under the category of

2. Verse 14 declares explicitly that the one is a 'figure' (tupos) of the second. Cf. also I Cor. 15:45—"The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit."
3. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, I, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 207.
4. Rom. 5:15-17.
5. 'In order to introduce the covenant of grace, Christ had to, and actually did, meet the conditions originally laid down in the covenant of works, by His active and passive obedience', Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1963), p. 280.

Christ's Mediatorial Work.<sup>6</sup> As *mesites*, Christ's role on earth is twofold: He represents God to man, demonstrating what God is truly like—'most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin';<sup>7</sup> also He represents man to God, reconciling us to Him in His atonement and interceding for us in His righteousness.

The Scriptures everywhere testify to the perfect and total consecration of Jesus in covenant-devotion and humble obedience to the Father. To the question—'which of you convicteth me of sin?' (John 8:46), there is no answer.

In the Old Testament, there are hints and allusions to the one who is to come: 'Then said I, Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart;' (Psa. 40:7-8) 'Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession'; (Psa. 2:7-8). 'I will set up thy seed after thee . . . and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son' (II Sam. 7:12-14).

These references are clarified in the New Testament. In Acts 13:33-35, Paul cites some of the above texts,<sup>8</sup> and then applies them to Jesus Christ: 'Be it known unto you, therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins' (Acts 13:38).

Over and over, Jesus himself declared—'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish his work' (John 4:34). This was true from his youth: 'Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' (Luke 2:49). He was completely and entirely 'faithful to Him that appointed him' (Heb. 3:2). That 'I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me,' (John 5:30. Cf. also John 8:29; 15:10) was evident to all his followers. As Berkouwer says, 'His whole life is the ultimate opposite of autonomy.'<sup>9</sup>

When the Prince of Darkness approached him, as he had approached the first Adam, to secure Jesus' treachery to God and allegiance to himself, he was repulsed (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13). The terms of Christ's covenant were submission to, and dependence upon

6. It is remarkable, that Berkouwer's book, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), contains scarcely a reference to the Mediatorial Work of Jesus. 7. *Westminster Confession* II, 1.

8. 'The complex of Old Testament citations in Acts 13:33-37 is not a random selection, but one carefully conceived on linguistic and theological grounds to show the Jews how God fulfilled his promise to David in II Sam. 7—namely by raising Jesus from the dead'—D. Goldsmith, 'Acts 13:33-37: A Peshet on II Sam. 7' *J.B.L.*, 87 (1968), p. 324.

9. Berkouwer, 'The Work of Christ', *op. cit.*, p. 315.

God, and Jesus refused to break them by exercising his inherent power illegitimately.

Thereafter Jesus went about doing works of righteousness and reversing the effects of Satan's rule over men, by healing their bodies and their souls. Finally, 'he steadfastly set his face to go towards Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51), where he voluntarily went to the cross to die (John 10:18). In his high-priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus could talk of his work being as good as accomplished (John 17:4), and finally on the cross he cried: 'It is finished' (John 19:30).

As a consequence of Christ's atoning work,<sup>10</sup> to those who are united to him by faith, the blessings of the covenant are imputed—forgiveness, reconciliation, perfect righteousness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable them to follow in the footsteps of their federal head and become renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. These blessings become truly *ours*, because they are given on the basis of the righteousness earned by Christ and imputed to us.

But what of our sins, and the curses earned by our covenant-breaking? They in turn are imputed to Christ. 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed' (Isa. 53:5). It is remarkable how the New Testament underlines the justice of God by carefully recording the covenantal curses imputed to Christ, who 'redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree, that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham' (Gal. 3:13). Fensham sums it up as follows: 'Curses were meant for the transgressors, but Jesus came in their stead and saved them by being cursed. . . Christ was regarded as the one who breaks the covenant *par excellence* and . . . as a result of all this the curses which accompany the covenant were executed on him.'<sup>11</sup>

Recent studies<sup>12</sup> have drawn attention to various ritual curse formulae employed in the Old Testament which were internationally common in the ancient Near East.<sup>13</sup> These include Hunger and Thirst (Deut. 28:48; Isa. 65:13); Desolation (Isa. 5:6; Zeph. 1:15); Poverty (Deut.

10. The traditional separation of Christ's atoning work into his *active* and *passive* obedience is somewhat artificial; as Berkhof declares, 'Christ's active and passive obedience should be regarded as complimentary parts of an organic whole.' (*op. cit.*, p. 380).
11. Fensham, 'The Curse of the Cross and the Renewal of the Covenant' *N.T.W.S.A.2*, (1966), p. 224.
12. Cf. D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, (Rome, 1964); F. C. Fensham, 'Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties and in the Old Testament,' *Z.A.W.*, 74 (1962), p. 109; F. C. Fensham, 'Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and *Kudurru*—Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah,' *Z.A.W.*, 75 (1963), pp. 155-175.
13. Fensham mentions some ancient Near Eastern and Qumran parallels to the above curses, 'The Cause of the Cross and the Renewal of the Covenant,' *op. cit.*, pp. 221-223.

28:31). The Scorn of passers-by (Jer. 19:8); Darkness (Isa. 13:10; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:15); Earthquake (Isa. 13:13; Amos 1:1); being 'cut off' from among the people (Ex. 12:15, 19; 31:14; Lev. 7:25; 20:3-6; Psa. 37:9, 22-38; Jer. 44:7-11, etc.). Death by hanging on a tree (Deut. 21:23); to the cursed one, the heavens will be as brass (Deut. 28:23); and there will be no help for him (Deut. 28:31; Isa. 10:3).

Reading the pages of the New Testament, we are struck by the frequent references to the suffering of Jesus, e.g. in hunger (Matt. 4:2; 21:18; Luke 4:2; Mark 2:25; 11:12). On the cross he cried 'I thirst' (John 19:28). 'And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ha!' and the priests also mocked him (Mark 15:29, 31). His very manner of dying, on a cross, was a cursed death (Gal. 3:13); he died alone, forsaken by his friends, including Peter, his most enthusiastic follower (Matt. 26:69-75); and as he expired, the heavens were as brass to his cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34).

The cosmic scope of the curse on sin is vividly portrayed especially by Matthew. The curse of *darkness* descended over the earth (Matt. 27:45; Cf. also Luke 23:45; John 3:4) and 'the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent' (Matt. 27:51). Such dire events affecting all of creation, not only exhibited the wrath of God upon the sin judged in Christ, they pointed forward to the great and notable day of the Lord, when the earth and the sea and death and Hades will give up the dead that are in them, and they will be judged every man according to their works (Rev. 20:13).

The terms of the Covenant of Life are incumbent upon all. Those who rely on their own unrighteousness will receive the curse sanctions of that covenant on that day described in the book of Revelation. The only escape is to be found in the gracious provision by God of the Covenant of Redemption, which offers us Christ the great Covenant-keeper, as our substitute in the fulfillment of the Covenant of Life (Rom. 10:4; Phil. 3:9). Those who trust in Him have their sins imputed to Him, and His righteousness imputed to them. He receives the covenantal curse, while they are freely and graciously given the blessing of the covenant in all their glorious fullness.