

"A New Covenant ..."

"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 ..." (Heb. 8:8-9a). Jeremiah's prophecy, quoted here and again in part in Hebrews 10, is another of the things the writer has cited to show the superior nature of the religion of Christ over the Judaian order. Thus, to this point, Christ has been shown to be better than angels, Moses and Aaron and in this chapter His covenant is said to be superior to the covenant given by Moses.

In the past decade much controversy has centered on Jeremiah's prophecy. Those who teach that God has one covenant that is unchanged and they have labored much with this passage. These teachers insist that Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled in 536 B.C. when the exiled Jews were released from Babylonian captivity. According to this doctrine, there is nothing really new about the new covenant of Christ, contrasted with Moses' covenant and with the promise God gave Abraham. Of course they concede that the prophecy was fulfilled in a secondary sense when Jesus gave His law but they insist that the "new covenant" is new only in the sense that it has gone "through another cycle." They illustrate this argument thusly: "every month there is a 'new moon;' yet the moon is not really new. It has just gone through another cycle." They conclude their argument in saying that the covenant God made with Abraham when through a cycle when God gave the law on Sinai, then through another cycle when Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, then through another cycle when Christ gave His New Testament. This is an ingenious explanation and is wholly false.

There are two Greek words for "new" which the Holy Spirit used to describe the New Covenant God would make with "Israel" and "Judah." The first of these words is *kainos* and is found here in Hebrews 8:8, as well as in vs. 13 and also in 9:15. Those verses read, *"In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old ..."* and *"... for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."* The Greek word in these three instances is the same and "denotes new, of that which is unaccustomed or unused, not newness in time, recent, but new as to form or quality ..." (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. III, p. 109). This same word is found in John 19:41 where it is said that Jesus was buried in a "new" tomb. The tomb had likely been dug for some time, thus not new in that sense; it was new in that it was unused.

The second Greek word translated "new" is *neos* and its also was used by the Holy Spirit to describe the New Covenant God would make with Israel. That word is found in Hebrews 12:24: "*and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaking better than that of Abel.*" This Greek word means "new in respect of time, that which is recent; it is used of the young ..." (*ibid.*, p. 110). Mr. Vines says this of the difference in use of these two words: "The new covenant in Heb. 12:24 is new (*neos*) compared with the Mosaic, nearly fifteen hundred years before; it is new (*kainos*) compared with the Mosaic, which is old in character, ineffective, 8:18, 13; 9:15). (*ibid.*).

Jeremiah had indicated that the New Covenant God would make with Israel and Judah would be different from the first when he said "*not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers ...*" (Heb. 8:9). There are those who insist the New Covenant is not really different from the first save in time and place. We must disagree. Jeremiah had said that the New Covenant would not be according to the first and as Mr. Vine has shown by his definition of the words "new," it would be new in "form and quality." This newness will be discussed in next week's article.

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