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The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



• Refusing the Cup • The God Who Keeps His Promises • The Third Plague: This is the Finger of God! • Looking Out and About
• Bible Studies on Jacob • Baptism, Election, & the Covenant of Grace (III) • NT Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (V)

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“And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.’”

(Judges 7:20).

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Refusing the Cup

They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He tasted thereof, He would not drink. (Matthew 27:34)

The Romans wanted criminals to be punished in a spectacular way in order to put fear into the hearts of men. Fear, they thought would be a deterrent to crime. No doubt they were right. Anyone witnessing the horror of a crucifixion would do anything and everything to avoid it.

The preparations for this particular crucifixion had been hastily made. It was, after all, the day of preparation for the Passover. The Sabbath would soon be here. Let us get it done with as quickly as possible. The three prisoners were about to be nailed to their crosses. But before they did, the criminals were offered something to drink. An odd drink to be sure; a drink that Jesus refused to accept.

A Cup of Kindness

It was customary in those days before the body was nailed to the beams of the cross to give the victim a drink which Matthew describes as wine mixed with gall. Gall simply refers to something bitter. The Gospel of Mark points out the drink was wine mingled with myrrh.

Myrrh was a very expensive, very precious commodity. Of all places for it to show up, it is here, just before the crucifixion of Jesus. According to Jewish tradition, myrrh was furnished by the women of Jerusalem who provided it and gave it to the soldiers that they might give it to the victims before the spikes were hammered into their flesh.

The addition of the myrrh to the wine would give it a peculiar taste. Some commentaries contend that this bitter and unpleasant tasting drink was offered to the condemned prisoners to add insult to injury. They were given this drink to humiliate them even further and to show them that even in the time of death, they were not worthy of a decent drink.

But there was another reason why this drink was given. This odd mixture was really a mild drug. It was given to the condemned men before their crucifixion in order to somewhat deaden the pain and stupefy their senses. On the part of the women that provided it, it was an act of mercy. They wished to ease the pain and make the suffering more endurable for those about to die.

The soldiers did not provide this drink, although they, no doubt, appreciated it. After all, it had to make their task a little easier to have the criminals somewhat drugged before hammering the spikes into their hands and feet.

The scribes and the Pharisees would not offer such a mixture to the perishing. They were not likely to be so kind. They had worked so hard to put Him on the cross in the first place. They wanted their victim to suffer.

It was the women of Jerusalem who offered the victims this drink out of the tenderness of their

hearts. They took pity upon these poor suffering men and they would do what they could to soothe their pain and strengthen their nerves for the ordeal through which they were obliged to pass. Whether this custom was followed in every crucifixion we do not know. Whether it was offered to the criminals that were crucified with Jesus we do not know. Very likely it was.

Some believe that this mixture would render the criminals unconscious. If it did produce unconsciousness, it certainly did not continue long because shortly after the thieves are nailed to the cross they join in with the crowd to hurl their insults to Jesus. Very likely it was not intended to produce unconsciousness. It was an anesthetic, but a very mild one similar to the morphine one receives in the hospital today. The intent was to blunt the senses and somewhat lessen the pain.

Before Jesus was nailed to the cross, He was offered this mixture of wine and myrrh. No doubt, at first He accepted it gladly. His lips were dry. The fact that He took the cup and put it to His lips shows us that He was eager for a drink of something that would refresh Him.

He lifted His lips to the cup with eagerness. He wanted to drink from this cup but when He tasted it, He laid it down and refused to drink. He refused it even though He knew that the next few moments—indeed, the next several hours—would mean excruciating pain and unbearable torture. No matter what the pain may be; no matter how intense His thirst may be, Jesus resolutely and heroically sends this cup away.

He rejected the cup of the devil because He wanted to drink instead the cup which His Father had given Him to drink.

A Cup of Temptation

We must understand that the offer of this cup came to Jesus as a temptation and thereby instead of easing His suffering, in reality, it increased it. Although it was provided by the tender women of Jerusalem, it was actually offered to Jesus by the evil one.

Some have suggested that possibly Jesus did not like the bitter taste and because of that there was no inclination on His part to drink. If that were true then it really would not have been a temptation. But it was. Almost any drink would have been welcome at such a time.

Jesus was burning with thirst. He had stood for long hours before His judges. He had been scourged. A crown of thorns had been pressed upon His brow. He had been abused and mistreated, struck in the face and cruelly mocked. After that, He had walked the mile from the scene of the trial to the place of execution. Part of the way the weight of the beams of the cross were upon His shoulders.

And now hours of torture awaited Him. Soon, He would feel the sharp pangs of the nails pierce His hands and His feet. His garments would be stripped from Him and He, the Son of God, would hang naked on the cross exposed to the morbid gaze and taunts of the crowd.

One could hardly have blamed Him if He had taken the stupefying

drink. For such an ordeal we certainly would have chosen unconsciousness or at least semi-consciousness. It would have been so much easier to bear. But our Savior refused to drink the drug-filled, mind-numbing drink.

He rejected the cup of the devil because He wanted to drink instead the cup that His Father had given Him to drink. He had prayed earlier that the cup that the Father had poured for Him could be removed from Him. That cup He did not want to drink. But drink from that cup He must, for it was the Father's will that He should suffer. "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief" (Isaiah 53:10).

Jesus had to suffer and die in full consciousness with an unclouded intellect. He needed to bring a willing sacrifice in obedience to the Father. Jesus had come to save sinners, but He cannot save them unless He experienced the full terrors of death and hell for them, bearing fully the wrath of God upon that sin. Jesus wanted to drink every bitter drop in the cup of woe that sin had brought upon the human race. He wanted to empty that cup so that there would be nothing left for His people to drink—nothing left for His chosen people to have to face.

The people whom Christ came to save must be set free—entirely free. No punishment must remain upon us. Our debt had to be paid in

full. Know this to be true: there were no unnecessary drops in the cup of Christ's suffering. But all that there was, every drop in that cup of suffering, Jesus was going to drink. He did not want to drink one drop less than that which His Father willed. He did not escape any of the suffering that would have fallen upon us. He drank all that was necessary to pay the awful debt of sin and satisfy the righteousness of God.

The Cup of Death

There will be no wine mixed with myrrh in hell. There is nothing there to mitigate or moderate the pain and the torment of the reprobate. There is nothing you will be able to do in order to diminish your anguish. The rich man in the parable cried out for a little water with which to cool his tongue, but it was refused.

There are no sedatives, no narcotics in the place of the doomed. No one there will be able to bury his troubles in liquor. They will have to endure the pains and the terrors of hell without comfort or relief.

Their minds will be clear, their consciences will be alert—alert enough to remind them of their rejection of the Christ who died on Calvary's cross. The sinner will see with fearful clearness how he rebelled against the Maker and trampled underfoot the cross of the Redeemer.

From such a horrible end our loving Savior has saved us. He died the second death for us. He entered the lake of fire as all the billows and waves of God's wrath rolled over His being. He experienced all the terrors of death and hell. With full consciousness and unclouded intel-

lect, with a clear perception of the justice of God and the righteousness of the Law, with steadfast and devoted love to those whom He came to save, Jesus went to the cross. Jesus paid the price in full for the sins of His people.

It is well for us to remember the price our dear Savior paid for our redemption. He gave Himself for us. His great love made Him refuse the cup of temptation so that He could drink the cup of His Father and empty it down to its very last dregs so that there would be nothing left for us but the cup of joy.

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The God Who Keeps His Promises

In ancient times covenants were made in a way very different from our time. We sign papers with ink and keep copies. If a document is very important we have the signature witnessed and even notarized. We use pens, but the ancients also used knives. To show a covenant was serious, it had in it a threat of death for breaking it. That is where the knife and blood come into the picture. When a covenant would be ratified in a ceremony, they called it *cutting a covenant*.

One of the most graphic and intimidating of all covenants was the covenant-making ceremony where animals were cut in two and placed in two piles. If a strong king had defeated a weaker one in battle, he might let him live as his subject, but he would force on him a solemn agreement. This covenant would be one where the weak one promises, for example, to send so many sheep, so much olive oil, or gold and silver to the other king every year. He would promise never to take the side of any other ruler on penalty of death. He covenanted never to rebel. He would always be subject to the great king.

To show what will happen to the one promising loyalty if he defects, that poor soul was forced to walk between the carcasses. On his right was half of a cow and the other half on his left. This was scary stuff! The message was clear. It was: "You break your covenant

with me, buddy, and you will end up in two piles yourself, with one leg over there and the other here. Do you understand?"

In Genesis 15, Abraham slaughtered a young cow, a goat and a ram, plus two birds, according to the instructions of the Lord. Probably in his mind Abraham expected that he would be walking between the piles!

This covenant-making ceremony in Genesis 15 was precipitated by God making a promise to Abraham that the land he was standing in would be his. When he said to the Lord, "How shall I know this?" God's response was not, "Because I said so!" Coming from God, that would have been a very proper reply. But it pleases God when we believe Him (Hebrews 11:6), and He wanted to make so clear to Abraham how very serious He was about His promise that He would add something to His word. God did this for Abraham's encouragement and assurance.

On another occasion God uttered an oath swearing by Himself that He would bless Abraham (Genesis 22:16-18). God making an oath! No one has any right to require of God that He make an oath, but He made one anyway. Here in Genesis 15, He wanted to show Abraham that He would keep His promise, so He did something to bolster Abraham's faith, and assure him of His great

The Great God Who is accountable to no one would bind Himself to His promise to a mere man of flesh and blood.

faithfulness. God does not know how to break His word; He has no experience in it, no desire for it and no temptation to do it. When others break their word, it is repugnant to Him.

Abraham said, "How am I know to know that I shall possess this land?" And God said, "Bring me a heifer." After it and the other animals were cut in two, a deep sleep came over Abraham. The Lord repeated His promise to him, adding some detail to it. But what of the two piles of dead animals? It was then that Abraham saw a flaming torch passing through them, and the light from it made the smoke and firepot of hot coals visible. It was the Lord holding the torch and the firepot. It was the Lord Who passed through the animals. It was the Lord and not Abraham.

By such a ceremony God was saying, "Abraham, if I break my word to you, may I be cut in two!" It was God saying, "May I be damned if I break my pledge!" When people speak that way it is profane. When God acted that way He was showing His utter seriousness. No one takes His word more seriously than God (Psalm 138:2), and therefore we may rest in all He says.

I am certain Abraham was staggered in amazement that God would do this. The high and mighty Lord was showing His commitment to the low and weak. God made a wonderful promise to Abraham and then in this way He underlined it,

highlighted it, and put it in bold print. He did this to let His little man know that He knew what He said and would remember His promise. The Great God Who is accountable to no one would bind Himself to His promise to a mere man of flesh and blood, a man lower in rank than all of God's millions of angels, a man whose very breath is a gift from God, but a man God loved and called His friend (Isaiah 41:8). Abraham was a man to whom God made a commitment. In Genesis 15 it was a solemn commitment.

Our faith rests on the integrity of God. Years ago I heard of a pastor visiting a dying woman. He asked of her faith in Christ and after hearing her confession and testimony of faith in Christ, he asked her a strange thing. He said, "And what if after believing in Jesus, you should die and go to hell?" Her classic reply was, "Oh, that would be very bad for me for I would lose my soul! But it would be far worse for God, for He would lose His honor!" She saw clearly that the Lord Who had made a promise to her as a believer in the gospel could not break it and still be God.

Blood on the People

At various times God made covenants with man and warned of death for breaking them. This is the way it was in Genesis 2:16,17 when God warned that eating the forbidden fruit would bring death. There was no formal cutting or blood sprinkled before their eyes as a

sober witness of death for covenant breaking. It was just a verbal warning.

There was a time later when God did make a covenant by bringing on blood. Blood was actually sprinkled on the people. It would take quite a volume of blood to sprinkle the entire nation, yet that was the way it was. Hebrews 9 says,

For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, *he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,* saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.' And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.

(Hebrews 9:19-21).

When those people went home, they had to clean the blood off their clothes and skin. That sprinkling was a solemn warning to them of the danger of death if they broke the law of God. This is obviously a situation quite similar to the first warning in the Garden of Eden. Disobedience would bring death. Sin is disobedience; the wages of sin is death. The blood on the people was applied "*when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people.*"

A ceremony like that puts both obligation and a threat on the people. It was a great burden they could not bear, because they were sinners. At the same time the Lord

showed His gospel mercy by calling for sacrifices of innocent animals in their place. But this covenant in Moses' time when the law was given carried a heavy obligation. THEY had to obey or the penalty was upon them. This situation was in force while at the same time it was alleviated by the provision of God. He taught them of a substitutionary sacrifice, and that all who trusted and looked for salvation in His promised Messiah would be forgiven.

There is no escaping that the old covenant made a genuine threat of death. Centuries before that covenant was made obsolete, God specifically assured the people in the Psalms and in Isaiah that the Messiah would die for His people. They had the gospel preached to them. Genesis 15 says, "*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*" While they were never saved by their law keeping, the old covenant still required their death for their sin, and the good law of God never enabled them to obey the law they had covenanted to keep. They were in great need of a better covenant, one to lift these burdens from them and show them more fully God's great salvation.

The New Covenant

The people surely needed a new covenant. Sinners unable to keep the old one needed someone to keep covenant for them; needed someone one to accept the penalty for their sins, and needed a real obedience to be produced in them. The salvation of the Lord came in the Lord Jesus and in the new covenant He brought. In the Old Testament this better cov-

enant was promised; in Jesus, it arrived.

Any covenant of any kind that brings salvation must address the matter of sin. Since this covenant was one of salvation, the issue of death for sin was included. When it was inaugurated by Christ in the most simple ceremony imaginable, He would set the blood of the covenant before their eyes. Thus Jesus said,

This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is *the new covenant in my blood ...*

(Luke 22:19,20)

This was the ratification of a covenant. This was another covenant being introduced because Jesus said so. It even had the blood of the covenant present on the table. But at that moment there was no knife, no cutting and even no literal blood. The cup of wine stood for the blood. The real blood would be shed once only and very soon, in fact later that day when daylight came and Jesus was taken to the cross.

Unless it was a covenant of promise as in Genesis 15, every other time a covenant included the blood of the covenant, the blood served as a warning of death. That meant of

course a death deserved by anyone violating it. This death threat was standard in cutting covenants that oblige people to obedience. If Jesus had indicated that this covenant ceremony for some new covenant had their blood in view, they would not be surprised at all. Their instincts and old covenant background would prepare them well to suppose that God was demanding such of them too, and that death was in order for rebellion. (Isn't death always appropriate for covenant breaking?) They would all promise like Peter that they would be faithful. In unison they would say, "We will lay down our lives for you." (See John 13:37). It would be like Exodus 19 all over again:

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "*We will do everything the LORD has said.*" So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

(Exodus 19:7,8)

If the disciples spoke as this, they would be promising, just like their fathers, contrary to their ability to keep their word. On that night Peter would break his promise to lay down his life for Christ. Before it was over, in his weakness he denied his Lord.

The new covenant is a different kind of covenant. It is not a binding

Any covenant of any kind that brings salvation must address the matter of sin.

***It is a covenant of what God does for His people,
a covenant where we gain all the benefits simply
believing/trusting that God will do all He has
said for us.***

by God of us to do our covenantal duty with a hoped for reward of eternal life. It is a covenant of what God does for His people, a covenant where we gain all the benefits simply believing/trusting that God will do all He has said for us.

**Wonderful Surprises in the
New Covenant:**

1. The Lord Jesus said that this was a covenant *in His blood!* That is a great surprise and a glorious angle in this new covenant that we must not miss. The Lord, who cannot sin, cannot be punished for sin since He cannot commit any. Yet this Lord was saying that in this covenant the blood is His! This is unheard of! All the sacrificial animals in the Old Testament were innocent, and did not deserve to be slaughtered, so the gospel truth was always there, but here at the Last Supper the Lord was speaking of His death. The Mediator of the new covenant, a Mediator without sin, would die for those who were sinners.

2. In the first communion service no blood was sprinkled on them, but the blood of the covenant in the form of the cup was *given to them to drink*. There is no death threat there; we do not take our food and drink to die but to live! The disciples would not wear the blood of the new covenant in a sober warning, but receive it in nourishment of their souls, as they trusted in Christ as

their forgiveness. This covenant at its inauguration turns away from somber threat to the promise of life. It could only switch from death to life because the full penalty for breaking the covenant will fall on the One who obeyed God and not on those who sinned.

3. This is an odd and wonderful covenant. It is like a man becoming a co-signer. The Scriptures warn about making a rash commitment that may well entail a loss. "*A man lacking in judgment strikes hands in pledge and puts up security for his neighbor,*" (Proverbs 17:18). Jesus became our Surety, not pledging to God for us hoping no harm would come to Him, but putting Himself under the threat of death for sins He knew we had committed.

No one becomes a surety for a person already in default! To do so aware of the situation is just a way of volunteering to pay for the debtor. The same day Jesus gave them the cup of the new covenant in His blood was the day He shed His blood for us faithless sinners. Jesus signed on for us knowing full well the obligation of death He was incurring. Only days earlier Jesus had said, "*Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour,*" (John 12:27). He saw clearly whose blood would be the blood of the new covenant; it would be His.

4. This new covenant is not a covenant of law for us to do. It is a gospel promise of what God will do for us. All other covenants where God required anything of humans have been violated by man. Here is a covenant where a Person Who is the Son of God was sent from heaven to become a man. Here on earth He was tested and proven to be a righteous man. He was sent to represent His people before God, not just represent God to us. In other words, Jesus was more than a prophet to us; He became a priest for us. Now in Jesus we have it made! Finally, finally there is real obedience! And finally, after centuries of animal blood, there is a sacrifice that really takes away sin!

It used to be that covenants were God on one side and man on the other. Now we have the Lord on both sides. God is still in the role of God, but now we also have God standing in the place of man. Nothing can improve on that. God is faithful as always to His covenant as God, and the Jesus as a man was faithful to God. Divine faithfulness was (for the first time) matched by human faithfulness in Jesus. This is what a covenant should be – faithfulness all around. So now that this is so, we are invited by the gospel to enter by faith into all the benefits of this new covenant. Only blessings are promised. Concerning our sins, only forgiveness is extended with no wrath to those in this covenant. The wrath our Lord has already taken on Himself. Because of the faithfulness and mediation of Christ, the God Man, we enter a new covenantal arrangement with God that cannot fail.

5. But what of our obedience? There IS something about our obedience in the new covenant. It says, *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people,”* (Jeremiah 31:33). This is not a statement of obedience being required of us, it is all about an obedience promised to us, and produced within us. Our obedience is not a condition of this covenant, it is a blessing given to us in it. The requirements were all met by Christ for us, and the blessings are all a gift to us in Christ. To twist this around to suppose that the new covenant requires obedience of us is to deny one of its great benefits. It is also to diminish the work of Christ. God has given in Christ what He required of us in Adam.

One day long ago, God used a solemn covenant ceremony to show Abraham that He was serious about keeping covenant. At that time, and by that solemn promise, God was in no danger. It is impossible for Him to lie, and so He would never be cut in two as a covenant breaker. He would not end up like the animals He passed between. With Jesus everything was different. He was acting as a Mediator for sinners, sinners He came to save from their sin. For forgiveness to come to them, death must come to Him. And so He spoke of His blood as the blood of this covenant. Jesus was the Lord in the place of man. He would take on the charge of our sin; thus the penalty of death would fall on Him. Jesus took on our danger.

And so long ago, on the night He was betrayed, our Savior announced that this covenant was

now in effect. Its ultimate bloodshed would occur on the same day this covenant was announced. It would be fulfilled and activated in His death. Shortly after His resurrection and ascension the promised obedience in us included in this new covenant would be the effect of the Spirit Jesus would send to us.

In Luke 22, the only Man ever to keep covenant was the one in danger of death, AND the blood of the covenant was not a blood on the people, but a blood shed for the people. It was the blood of the One Who was by nature a lifelong covenant keeper.

We need to see what the new covenant is not. It is clearly not: you sin and you die. It is to put it bluntly; we have sinned and He died. There is no covenant like this one. The divine wrath fell on the Righteous One. The new covenant neither has nor threatens the bloodshed of any sinner brought into it. Who would ever make up such a crazy covenant that would backfire on God rather than the deserving covenant breakers? God made it, because He is that gracious. He wanted to do this, and did it out of the love of His heart. He put Himself in the ultimate danger, a danger only God Himself could bear. He did this to spare us the danger of His own wrath. Thus, the wrath of God for the covenant-breaking people of God, fell on God. There is no other god like ours.

So when we hear the words of Jesus in Luke 22:20, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood...”* Let us remember that it was His blood, not ours, though which we are graciously given benefits that do not rest on our obedience any more than they rest on our bloodshed. Let us come before the Lord with joyful and grateful hearts, and also with understanding that we are in a covenant that cannot fail because God is faithful as God and Jesus was faithful as a man. Everything God has required for our eternal life has been accomplished by Christ, and given to us in Him.

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It used to be that covenants were God on one side and man on the other. Now we have the Lord on both sides. Nothing can improve on that.

The Third Plague: This is the Finger of God!

The third plague is unique; it arrives without warning. There is no audience before Pharaoh, as there was with the first two plagues. This is the first plague without any sort of introduction, it simply happens. Details like this often go unnoticed by the casual reader, but if you had been present at the time of the plagues you would have noticed that there was no warning prior to the this plague. In addition, an ancient reader of this narrative would also have been more attuned to some of these details than the average reader is today. The structure of the text is not haphazard. It reflects a pattern. The plagues are divided into three groups of three, with the tenth plague standing alone as an exclamation point; the tenth plague is a grand finale to all the other acts of judgment.

Each series of three plagues has the same pattern. Blood, frogs, and gnats make up the first series of three plagues. The first two plagues in this first series have a warning, but the third plague takes place without a warning. This same pattern is repeated in the second series; flies, livestock, and boils. Again in this second series of plagues the first two come with a warning while the third (boils) comes without a warning. In the third series of plagues, this same pattern is repeated again; hail and locusts come with a warning and the third plague, darkness, comes with no warning. Then after the three series of plagues are completed, the tenth plague comes with

a warning, preserving the same pattern that God has already established.

This pattern, at the very least, reveals purposefulness on the part of God. The plagues take place by design. They serve a didactic and theological purpose, not just a historiographic one. The author of Exodus is not interested in novel details alone; he is a theologian. The three series of three plagues hit Pharaoh like waves of judgment. The last plague in each series is a final, quick blow in response to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. "But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said." In response to Pharaoh's action Jehovah hits him with another blow; this blow comes without warning. The third plague in all three series of plagues takes place in the same way; they come in response Pharaoh's unyielding heart.

This is consistent with the statement in James chapter 4 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." As Pharaoh responds in arrogance, God opposes him with an unannounced blow.

The Finger of God

The third plague in the first series of plagues is the first plague that Pharaoh's magicians are unable to reproduce. This is an important detail, but before we reflect upon its significance, we need to examine the details leading up to this point.

In the NIV translation of the Bible, the third plague is described as a plague of gnats. In the NKJ version of the Bible the insects are described as lice. The identity of the insect has been the subject of debate because the Hebrew text is ambiguous. Most certainly the insects were some type of nagging pesky insect like gnats, lice, mosquitoes, or maggots. The significance of these creatures may have more to do with where they came from than what they were.

The first plague involved water and the second plague comes from the water, this is the first plague to come from the earth. Aaron is directed to strike "the dust of the earth and the dust will become gnats." Why the dust of the earth?

This is a common expression that was used for the sake of making an emphasis. For example, when God promises that Abraham will have an immense number of descendants he says they will be as "the dust of the earth" (Genesis 13:16). That same promise is made to Jacob in Genesis 28:14. The point is that the gnats will be innumerable. All of Egypt will be covered with lice, maggots, gnats or mosquitoes. "Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground, and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become lice."

The Hebrew terms for man and beast are frequently used in connection with all humanity and all the animal kingdom together. The scale of the third plague was so vast that no creature of the ground was left unscathed. The final clause makes this point "that all the dust of Egypt turned to

lice,” this statement highlights the severity of the plague.

But now there is another important difference between the first two plagues and the third plague. This time when the magicians try to replicate Aaron’s action, but they were not able. They were powerless in their attempt to nullify the plague or to imitate it. “And the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘it is the finger of God.’” The magicians had to admit to Pharaoh that they were being confronted with a power greater than their magic. Their powers had been exhausted, and they were defeated. Although the magicians appear again in the story, there is no record, that they ever tried again to reproduce another plague. It appears that they withdraw from the scene of the battle in defeat.

Although the magicians acknowledge defeat they do not credit their defeat to the finger of Jehovah but to “the finger of Elohim” (in the plural). Elohim can be used as a very general term for any deity or deities, the word is in the plural, meaning many gods. The magicians are not acknowledging that Jehovah is the source of this great power, but rather the gods in the plural. Even though the magicians admitted defeat, they did not repent and turn to Jehovah in faith.

The magicians are convinced that they are engaged in a spiritual battle, a battle that they are losing; yet there is no record that they acknowledged that the one true God was the source of the plagues.

Yet, there remains a contrast between the unbelief of the magicians and the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart. “The magicians said to Pha-

raoh, ‘This is the finger of God (the gods).’” But Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said.” The magicians admit to Pharaoh that they have been defeated by a superior power, yet Pharaoh is unwilling to acknowledge the obvious. The fact that Pharaoh continues to harden his heart is consistent with the word of the Lord. Jehovah has already spoken regarding Pharaoh’s heart. We see in Pharaoh how the hard facts of reality, the truth, do not change his heart. This is still true today, there are those who resist the truth of the gospel, and no amount of evidence alone will ever convince them that the God of the Bible is the one true living God.

Creation and Salvation

God could have used a variety of other means to judge Pharaoh and bring him to his knees. He could have used a foreign army as he did with Israel and Judah. But this was not the method of His choosing. Instead, God chose to fight with weapons that no one else but the sovereign Lord had at his disposal. Only the one true God has the powers of creation at His command. Nine of the ten plagues against Egypt involve creation. They are, as we have seen, the unleashing of God’s creative forces against the enemies of God’s people. The attack against Egypt through the use of creation removes any doubt regarding the question who is the one true God that rules over creation,

and who will prevail against the seed of the serpent.

Another reason why God may have chosen such means has to do with the nature of the crime that Pharaoh commits against Israel. Pharaoh claims to be a god; he competes directly with Jehovah, as a result Jehovah is making a statement that He is the only one true God over and against Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt. When the conflict is framed in this way, it is easy to see how the conflict between Pharaoh and God is the result of the two-seed principle of Genesis 3:15. Pharaoh represents the seed of the serpent and Moses represents the seed of the woman. Pharaoh takes on the spirit of anti-God, not unlike the anti-Christ in the New Testament. In Chapter 1, he decrees the destruction of the Hebrews, which is nothing less than a challenge to God’s creation mandate in Genesis 1. Also in Exodus 1, the language of creation was applied to the Hebrews. This sets the stage for a conflict between the Creator God and the anti-God.

In the Scriptures there is a close relationship between creation and salvation. When God saves, His saving work is often described as a second work of creation, a re-creation. This is why the Exodus event is presented in the Bible as a second work of creation. Salvation as an act of re-creation will become even more prominent as we continue in our study of the plagues.

The magicians had to admit to Pharaoh that they were being confronted with a power greater than their magic.

Creation is at God's command both to deliver His people and to destroy His enemies. The plagues represent a reversal of creation, whereby the natural order of creation is altered and turned against God's enemies. The Exodus narrative is not alone in linking creation and salvation. One has to look no further than the Genesis flood to see how creation is an instrument of salvation and judgment.

Another example is the sun standing still in Joshua 10:1-15. As a result of the extended daylight Israel was victorious over Adoni-Zedek. The enemies of Israel proclaimed, "Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel" (10:14). This is the same conclusion that the Egyptians arrive at in Exodus 14.

Closely associated with the Exodus is the miraculous provision of manna, quail, and water from a rock. The normal challenges that accompany desert travel, the lack of food and water, are no barriers to the God of creation. Just as He is capable of turning water into blood or dust into lice, He is able to make the skies rain quail, the dew of the earth bring forth bread, and water from a most unlikely source, hard rock. Like the plagues, these examples show that God is suspending the normal operations of His creation to show that He is Lord over all. Creation serves its master, and Jehovah is clearly the master over and against Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt.

Likewise, Jesus had command over the elements. He walked on water; He commanded the storms to cease; He provided a miraculous supply of fish and bread; He made a fig tree wither by the power of

His word. His authority over creation illustrates that He is the God of the Old Testament. He has creation at His disposal. The fact that Jesus is able to do these things is nothing less than a clear indication that the God of the Old Testament is walking among His people. Christ has the entire order of creation at His disposal. According to the apostle Paul "All things were created by Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16).

At the time of Jesus' death we see an inversion of this theme. The Gospel writers tell us that darkness came over the earth, the earth shook, and rocks split (Matthew 27:51). With the death of Christ, creation cried out signaling the salvation of God's people and the judgment of Jesus Christ. Jesus was judged as an enemy of God, a sin offering, whereby God's anger was unleashed against Jesus as He died for the sins of God's people. Jesus suffered the punishment that God formerly inflicted on the enemies of His people, such as Egypt and Babylon. With the death of Christ, God is on the move; He has brought His people out of a bondage greater than Egypt.

Even the resurrection of Christ takes on a new dimension when seen in light of this theme. The bodily resurrection is the ultimate re-creation act. Death and human mortality came through the curse of the Law and sin, but the curse of the Law and sin has been reversed through the resurrection and the

emerging of the new creation. Our knees should shake in the face of such power!

The victory of Christ will bring all of history to its final goal, a blessing that transcends Eden. John's vision in the book of Revelation is filled with allusions to plagues and the undoing of creation. At the end of time all men will know either God's judgment or His salvation. The seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls all allude to well-known descriptions of cosmic upheaval. It appears as if the earth is coming apart at the seams. It is no mere coincidence that the final judgment will bear a resemblance to God's other acts of judgment. In this sense the power that God displays in Exodus is a foretaste of the final judgment. Exodus is a down payment, an earthly depiction of the final judgment.

This is what the apostle Paul is driving at in Romans 8:19, when he describes the eager expectation whereby creation waits for the sons of God to be revealed. All of creation looks forward to the final judgment and the bodily resurrection of the people of God. This will be a glorious event. Even as their was a pattern to the plagues in the book of Exodus, there will be a pattern in the final judgment. Just as Pharaoh hardened his heart in the face of certain defeat, the enemies of Christ will grow hard and arrogant in light of God's judgment and the coming salvation. Just as judg-

Creation is at God's command both to deliver His people and to destroy His enemies.

ment is certain, salvation is just as certain for the people of God. In fact we are commanded to look forward to the Day of Lord; we are commanded to live in anticipation of this Day. By living in anticipation of this day we live as aliens on this earth, sojourners, pilgrims heading to a better land. We live with an understanding that we belong to Christ, and that we have been redeemed. As people that belong to Christ we should live holy lives, separate and pure from this world's way of thinking.

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Looking Out and About

- Mr. Spencer Aalsburg, a 2005 graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, was ordained at the Hills United Reformed Church of Hills, Minnesota on the evening of February 9, 2007. Rev. Thomas Wetselaar, Pastor of the Immanuel United Reformed Church in DeMotte, Indiana presided. Rev. Patrick Edouard of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa preached the ordination sermon entitled, “*Sola Scriptura* in a Age of *Sola Cultura*” based on II Timothy 4:1-5. Dr. Mark Beach, professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, delivered the charge to the newly ordained minister, and Rev. Doug Barnes of the Hills URC charged the congregation. Rev. Aalsburg has accepted the call extended to him by the Hills church to serve the newly planted church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.
- Mr. Jeremy Veldman, a 2006 graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, has accepted the call extended to him by the New Haven United Reformed Church of New Haven, Vermont.
- Rev. Ananda Perera, a 1958 graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, who with his wife, Edna, spent a long a fruitful ministry in Sri Lanka, passed away on the evening of February 7, 2007. Rev. Perera was 78 years old. A memorial service was held on February 13th in Lynden, Washington where the Pereras have resided since retirement.
- Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Professor of Ethics and New Testament at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, traveled to Myanmar in February to teach at the Theological College of Myanmar and to speak at their graduation exercise.
- The RYS planning committee for the annual Youth Conference recently traveled to Southern California to continue preparations for the convention scheduled to be held July 30-August 3 on the campus of the Concordia University in Irving, California. The 2007 Convention, with the theme “Rooted in Christ,” anticipates a growing enrollment.
- Classis Western Canada of the URCNA meeting on January 11 and 12, 2007 in Winnipeg, Manitoba adopted an overture requesting Synod 2007 to approve the formulation of a new classis composed of several churches in northwest, USA.

Bible Studies on Jacob

Lesson 15: The History of the Older Brother, Esau

Read Genesis 36 – 37:1

Introduction

In many ways, Genesis 35 completes the circle of Jacob's life that began with his flight to Paddan-Aram away from his brother Esau (Gen. 28:1-9). Genesis 35 in many ways summarizes the key elements in Jacob's life, especially those things that God had introduced into his life. Genesis 35 closes with two things that prepare us for the next portion of Genesis. First, we read a list of Jacob's children, grouped according to their mothers (Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah). Second, we also read that Esau and Jacob together bury their aged father Isaac. The venom of ill-will between the brothers at the time Jacob deceived his father in Genesis 27 is gone. That prepares us to read more of what became of Esau.

Surprise! here's the family of... Esau

Actually, we may be somewhat surprised by the inclusion of such a long chapter devoted exclusively to Esau, his family, and the nation that came from him. After all, didn't God say that the "older (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob)"? And we know from Malachi 1:2-3 that God loved Jacob, but He hated Esau. So there must be a good reason for God to include this family history of Esau for us to read.

Genesis 36 is frequently skipped

over in most Bible reading and in many Bible studies. "What, another genealogy? All those difficult to pronounce names!" You can almost here it from family members at Bible reading time. Indeed, in the Old Testament at different points we meet a list of names of fathers, their children, and their grandchildren, and we may well wonder why. What does God want the community of faith to see and hear in these names? "All Scripture is breathed out by God," writes Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:16), and that would include the genealogies of the Old Testament.

Genesis 36:1 and 36:9 both include that phrase used in Genesis that periodically begins a new focus of interest. "These are the generations of..." or "This is the family history/record of..." the translations say. See Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9, etc., for instances of this phrase. We may think it rather odd that Esau and his family line get an entire chapter in Genesis... and one of the longest in the entire book, at that! Let's consider what God is saying to us readers.

Two seeds in the story line

Abraham had two sons: Ishmael, the son of Hagar (the Egyptian maidservant), and Isaac, the son of Sarah (the free woman). Abraham's death and burial are recorded in Genesis 25:7-11. Right after that comes an account of Ishmael's family descendants. Al-

though Ishmael is not the promised seed, God still says to Abraham that Ishmael would become a nation "because he is your offspring" (Gen. 21:13). God keeps His promises! So the text records—albeit briefly—Ishmael's family. It is like taking a brief turn off the main road to take note of a point of interest, and then we readers return to the main storyline. Once the text has glanced at Ishmael, it then throws the spotlight on the more important person at that point, namely, Isaac.

Something similar happens here in Genesis 36. Isaac has two sons: Esau, the physical firstborn, but the one whom God does not choose, and then Jacob, the younger son, the one whom God chooses before he is even born. God tells us about Isaac and Jacob, but before He tells us of what happened in Jacob's family, He first directs our attention to Esau. He tells us that Esau also fathered a nation, a people, and that he was very wealthy as well. Once we note that, then the story of redemptive-history gets back on the main route again to focus on the covenant people, the family of Jacob.

Beyond that, we are reminded that there are two seeds that are traced in history: even in a covenant home there is one son of God's electing promise and another son who is not the promised seed. This does not mean that the son who is not the promised seed is automatically on his way to hell. The question of personal faith is a different question. In fact, one gets a different impression of who Esau (Edom) is when we read the text closely. Earlier we have read that Esau was

very welcoming to Jacob, while Jacob was very afraid of his brother. Jacob had tried to soften the soul of his brother with wave after wave of gifts, but Esau says that this was not necessary. God has blessed him with wealth; Jacob could keep it all (see Gen. 33:9). Esau actually invited Jacob to settle together with him in the Mt. Seir region, but Jacob refuses. And the brothers bury their father together.

In the end it is clear that Esau is more than willing to “bury the hatchet”—and not in his brother’s head! In the end Esau is warm to his brother, and we should not miss that point. They do not die as mutual enemies.

Esau is Edom

Would such brotherly affection had remained in their children! Several times in Genesis 36 (verses 1,8,9,43, etc.) we read that “Esau is Edom,” and in this way the Bible is telling us about the future. From one man, Esau, came the nation of Edom (which means “red”). The names of his wives as given here differ from the names given in Genesis 26:14 and 28:9. Solutions to this question are not easy. Either Esau had more than three wives, or the names are altered in the text, or there may be another solution.

Amalek and Edom in the Exodus

In any case, Esau has three wives and five sons listed in Genesis 36, along with their descendants. We cannot comment on every name, but we draw attention to just this one person, Amalek. Genesis 36:12 tells us that Esau’s son Eliphaz had a son with his concubine. This son, Amalek, became the father of the

nation that attacked Israel after she was freed from slavery in Egypt. Exodus 17:8-13 records the first test that Israel had as a nation after the liberation. Joshua overcomes this enemy, but Amalek becomes the nation that is the paradigm of hostility against God’s people. The LORD is at war with Amalek forever. Israel must never forget this (see Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17-19)!

Later on, as the Israelites are getting closer to the Promised Land, they must skirt the land of Edom because the Edomites refused any brotherly kindness to God’s people (see Num. 20:14-21). Even Israel’s offer to pay for any water drunk by the animals receives a cold rebuff. “You may not pass through!” Edom says. National hostility has replaced brotherly hospitality.

Psalms 137 and Obadiah

Much later, while they are in exile in Babylon, the forlorn believers are homesick for Zion, the city of God. Part of this psalm from Babylon turns our attention to the Edomites. Psalm 137:7 reveals that the Edomites cheered the Babylonians on in destroying Jerusalem. “Tear it down!” they cried. In other words, “Destroy the city! Crush the church!” Even though Judah, the covenant people, was worthy of severe discipline, the attitude of Edom was a perverse glee to see Zion destroyed.

When did you last hear a sermon from Obadiah? The shortest book

of the Old Testament is focused on the day of the Lord coming against Edom, while the Kingdom of God would triumph. This is good news!

Hope for Edom in David’s tent (Amos 9:11-15)

The last Edomite known in the Bible is wicked king Herod (sometimes called “the Great”) in Matthew 2. This is the king in Jerusalem who wanted to kill Christ after the Magi from the east alert him to the fact that a new “king of the Jews” had been born. Actually Herod was half-Idumean, Idumea being the name of the nation in southern Palestine near where the Edomite kingdom had been. As a half-Idumean ruler, installed by the Romans and hated by his own people, king Herod was “great,” not because he was so good, but because he was so evil. He murdered members of his own family, and he feared any rival to his throne. He embodied the spirit of the great serpent, Satan, who was poised throughout the Old Testament era to devour the Child that was to be born to the mother, the Old Testament church. Revelation 12 pictures this so clearly for us. The insanity of sin becomes painfully obvious to us when we read that Herod orders a massacre of all male children in the Bethlehem region, two years and younger, in the hope that a quick thrust of a soldier’s sword might destroy this new “king of the Jews.” The Devil strikes out against the Christ

In the end it is clear that Esau is more than willing to “bury the hatchet”—and not in his brother’s head!

through the evil of Herod.

Herod reminds us in a very sobering way that throughout history there are two seeds existing, and there is enmity between them. They are in conflict with each other. Yet the most that the seed of the serpent can do is bruise the heel of the Seed of the woman. Satan cannot, he will not, win.

The Seed of the woman culminates in the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). And all who believe in Jesus Christ are children (seed) of Abraham, born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. Even Edom can find hope in Him. Amos 9:11-15 closes off a prophetic book that is nearly unrelenting in its condemnation of Israel's sins. But God's grace gets in the last good word. Amos says that a time will come when God will restore the fallen tent of David. The nations—even Edom!—will find shelter, home and security, in the restoration of the kingdom of David.

Now switch to the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. The council hears the wonderful news that Gentiles are coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ: this is what the prophets had earlier said! Christ has died and has been raised from dead. These saving events have changed everything for all the nations of the world. True, the two spiritual seeds still exist in the world, and they will exist in this world until the end of time. But the New Testament makes clear that we should never think in terms of the two seeds as a racial or national thing, but as a spiritual matter. God's electing grace and wondrous love reaches into all cultures, all tribes, all nations, and all peoples. Even people who are de-

Lesson 15: Points to ponder and discuss

1. In your Bible reading, have you ever skipped over the genealogies of Genesis 5, 10, and 11, or the long name lists in Ezra and 1 Chronicles (be honest now!)? Why or why not? If you have omitted them in your Bible reading and study, what were some of the reasons? Did you ever make a little extra effort to find out what the reason is for including them in the inspired Scriptures?
2. Esau and Jacob appear to be reconciled to each other in the closing years of their lives. The Edomites, Esau's children, become very hostile to the Israelites, Jacob's children. What might be the reasons to explain such hostility?
3. Edom rejoiced to see Jerusalem fall to the Babylonians. Do we see a similar kind of smug satisfaction on the part of non-believers when Christian churches as well as Christian leaders and people have shortcomings and sins, personal and public? Why is that so? What do we learn about human nature? What might God be teaching us in those times?
4. Christian missionaries have reached many nations and peoples in today's world. In some places such mission efforts may be only through radio broadcasting and literature distribution. In what nations today is there great hostility to Christianity, either on the part of the government and/or the society?
5. The "Voice of the Martyrs" is an organization that keeps track of the persecution of Christians in various parts of the world. What can Christians in North America do to assist such churches and these persecuted Christians? Prayers and letters? Political pressure? Physical and material assistance? How can your congregation become more aware of the suffering of fellow believers?
6. Read Deuteronomy 23:7,8. The Edomite is a brother, not to be abhorred, even though the Edomites remained hostile to God's people throughout history (see Amos 1:11-12). Is this an example of our Lord's teaching to "love your enemies"? If so, what does loving your enemies include?

scended from Edom can be reached by the power of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. God's grace is never chained, and it does not stop at political borders.

This is true today as well. There may be nations that are largely hostile now to the gospel of God, as Edom was hostile to Israel throughout history. Yet from those nations there will come an elect remnant, chosen to everlasting life in Jesus Christ and brought to saving faith by the Word of the Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bible Studies on Jacob

Lesson 16: Israel and Sons

Sojourn in Egypt

Read Genesis 37:2-11, 31-35

Introduction

The final section of the book of Genesis focuses on the story of the family of Jacob. What became of his children? This is the meaning of Genesis 37:2, where the last major section of Genesis is introduced. We notice again that though Jacob is mentioned in verse 2, the next chapters (Gen. 37-50) focus on Joseph, Judah, and the rest of the sons of Jacob. The inspired spotlight now falls more on the next generation of patriarchs. To be sure, Jacob is still in the story line, but he begins to recede to the background in these chapters.

Israel loves Joseph more (37:2-11)

The story line from Genesis 37 really now switches to Joseph (and Judah). Yet the Joseph story is all part of the account of Jacob (Gen. 37:2). God's work in Joseph's heart and life is *for His covenant people*, to save them all alive.

There are some striking parallels in the household of Jacob and that of his own father Isaac. Isaac had favored Esau while Rebekah had favored Jacob. Jacob had a favorite wife, the beautiful Rachel, and she born a son, Joseph, while the family was still in Paddan-Aram. He is a son of his father's old age, and Israel loves him more than his other sons. This favoritism does

not escape notice by the other sons, Joseph's half-brothers. Jacob even favors Joseph with a special coat, perhaps one with long sleeves, the kind worn by royal children. Later on, King David's daughter Tamar will wear a similar kind of garment (see 2 Sam. 13:18). Perhaps Israel (Jacob) is giving out a not so subtle hint that Joseph will be the son to inherit the leadership role in the family after Israel dies, even though he is not the oldest son.

God speaks through Joseph's dreams, and the dreams are well understood by the members of the family. Joseph will rule. But even father Israel finds it strange that the second dream (the heavenly bodies bowing to Joseph) indicates that the father will also bow down to Joseph. Does the father bow to the son? In verse 10, father Israel asks Joseph, "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" This gives Israel more to think about: what does this actually mean?

The story is well-known and often told. Joseph goes to check on his brothers, and they first imprison him in a well, and then they sell him to a traveling caravan of merchants who are headed for Egypt. They concoct a story of finding Joseph's special coat with blood on it. Here is another irony: just as Jacob used goat meat and goat skins to deceive his father Isaac in Genesis 27:5-13,

so now Jacob's sons use goat blood to cause their father Jacob to think that a wild animal attacked and then ate his precious son Joseph.

Jacob had received the "news" of the death of Joseph particularly hard. He refused to allow his children to comfort him. His favorite wife Rachel was dead, and now his favorite son was also dead. In his old age, Jacob experiences tremendous personal pain and heartache. To lose a child, any child, is always a devastating event. But when it is the favorite son of your favorite wife, it was crushing to this poor old man. Jacob does not allow any words or actions of comfort to soften his grief (verses 34-35).

Jacob sends his sons to Egypt (42:1-5, 29-38)

Jacob does not come back into the story until Genesis 42 when his family is becoming really hungry because of famine. Egypt had become the breadbasket for the world following the seven years of abundant harvests. But then famine strikes the Near East, and the land of Canaan is also affected. Jacob sends ten of his sons to buy grain in Egypt. He holds Benjamin back, because "harm might come to him" (Gen. 42:4). The text does not tell us this explicitly, but we readers may wonder if Jacob thinks that the harm may come from his ten sons! After all, Benjamin is the only son left of his beloved wife Rachel. He is willing to have his ten sons risk harm in Egypt, but he is still very protective of Benjamin.

At the end of the chapter Jacob comes back into the account when the brothers retell the story of what

had happened in Egypt, especially the fact that the harsh ruler of Egypt demanded that the youngest son come the next time. Jacob's grief continues. "Everything is against me!" he cries out (verse 36).

Yet in fact things were not against him. This will become apparent later on, but, as they say, hindsight is always "20-20." The perspective of faith is described in Romans 8:28ff. Many things can be against the elect of God, but in Christ, we are "more than conquerors." Indeed nothing can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Jacob, however, cannot see this at the end of Genesis 42. In his mind Benjamin is "the only one left" (verse 38). Jacob sees nothing but grief lining his final journey to death (Sheol).

Israel resends his sons to Egypt (43:1-14)

Desperate times call for desperate measures. The famine remains severe for people living in Canaan, including the members of the covenant household of Jacob. In this chapter he is called "Israel" (see Gen. 43:6,8,11; 45:28; 46:1,2,5), but then at Genesis 45:25,26, he is called "Jacob" again. Why is this done?

Israel (once called Jacob!) finally relents and gives permission to send young Benjamin along with the ten brothers to Egypt. How heavy

his heart must have been to see him leave on this journey. Jacob is becoming resigned to losing his sons, one after the other: Joseph, then Simeon, and now beloved Benjamin.

Good news revives the heart of Jacob (45:25-28)

Jacob finds the news of Joseph being still alive to be unbelievable! How could something that had been so certain in his mind before—Joseph's death—now be turned around? The NIV says in Genesis 45:26 that he was stunned; literally, it says that his heart was numb, even "cold." He went into shock and denial. "Where did my sons get such a crazy, tall tale?" But when the words of his sons cannot convince him, the physical evidence of Egyptian carts eventually persuades him. Israel's years of mourning and grief give way to joy as he anticipates meeting his beloved son once more before he closes his own eyes in death. When he believes the good news, his heart lives again and is no longer numb or cold.

An 'immanuel' promise in the night (46:1-4)

Once again God, as it were, holds Jacob's hands and encourages him on the road to Egypt. God speaks His Word so that Israel/Jacob can live and act in peace. Take note of the several parts of God's word to Israel during that night vision. First, God identifies Himself as the God of his father (cf. Gen. 26:24). The

Israel's years of mourning and grief give way to joy as he anticipates meeting his beloved son once more before he closes his own eyes in death.

same God is ours today, faithful in all generations of His people.

Second, God tells Israel not to be afraid. This same encouragement is often given in the Bible to people who are in a situation where fear is both understandable and present. Israel is about to see his son, he believes, but he is also entering the mighty country of Egypt.

Third, God reminds Israel that he will make him into a great nation. Verses 8-27 tell us that his family is already becoming sizeable! But there is more to come. God will continue to enlarge the covenant family until the word “nation” becomes the more fitting word to describe it.

Fourth, God says—again!— that He will be with Israel. God will accompany Israel and his family as they journey down into Egypt, and He will be with Israel to bring him out again. “God with us” is the meaning of that wonderful name “Immanuel,” one of the comforting names of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:22,23). Matthew 28:20 tells that the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead and given universal authority, is with His church until the close of this age. What a comfort we have in the midst of our calling!

Jacob blesses Pharaoh (47:7-12)

Joseph makes the arrangements for his father and brothers to meet Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Remarkably, this aged patriarch Jacob has an audience with Pharaoh. I call it remarkable because the Egyptians believed Pharaoh to be a living god. Twice we read that Jacob “blesses” the Pharaoh (Gen. 47:7,10). The word we translate as

Lesson 16: Points to ponder and discuss

1. You may have heard the saying, “The apple does not fall far from the tree.” In what ways do the sons of Jacob show something of the nature of their own father Jacob?
2. Trace the life of Jacob up to the point before the time he learns that Joseph is still alive. It has been a kind of roller-coaster of danger and blessing, times of fear and then faith. What have been the challenges to his faith that he has faced? In what ways has he grown in faith? In what areas of his life does he still need to grow? What difference has the grace of God made in his life?
3. Can you understand Jacob/Israel’s reluctance to believe his sons with most of their stories and explanations of things? When a person stops telling the truth, he becomes suspect in all his words. What do we learn here regarding words and actions of truth and integrity?
4. Why does God appear to Israel at Beersheba in Genesis 46:2ff? When Abram had gone to Egypt in Genesis 12:10ff because of a famine, that was a problem because of Abram’s deception. Later on in Genesis 26:1,2, there was another famine, and the Lord had not allowed Isaac to go to Egypt. But now it appears that going to Egypt is okay with God. Why? What might account for the difference?
5. Why does the man Jacob become named “Israel” more and more in the story? Could the text be making a subtle and gradual transition to having us think about the *nation* of Israel? How is the man *Jacob* giving way to the nation *Israel* in the progress of redemptive-history?
6. Settling in Goshen was a physical blessing. But is Goshen a good place to live, a fine choice for this large household? What positive qualities does it hold for Israel? What are the potential dangers for these people in Goshen and Egypt? What happens to church people when they lose their focus on their true and abiding home? How can “the best of this earth” become a snare to Christians?

God will continue to enlarge the covenant family until the word “nation” becomes the more fitting word to describe it.

“bless” can be understood as “greet,” but this is still quite an event. Quite a change from the time when Jacob slept out in the open at Bethel with nothing more in his hand than his staff! Now his own son is in charge of the well-being of Egypt, and he meets, greets (blesses) Pharaoh! Later on, when the Israelites would leave Egypt and its slavery, the Pharaoh would send them away with the request, “And bless me also” (Exodus 12:32). Pharaoh would be beaten, and he would admit that Israel and Israel’s God was greater than he.

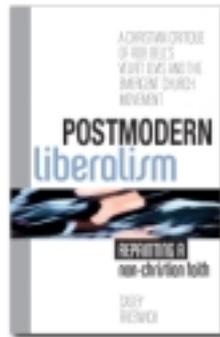
The word of blessing is one of the themes that runs through the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1 God creates the sea creatures and mankind, and then He “blesses” them so that they might be fruitful and abundant. In Genesis 12:1-3 God called Abram from his own family in order to make him a great nation. Whoever blesses Abram and his family would receive blessing. Through Abram’s family the nations of the world would be blessed.

Something of that is seen here. Because of Joseph, Egypt and many starving people receive blessing in the form of food, sustenance. Pharaoh recognizes this, and he in turn provides blessing to Jacob and his family in the form of the “best of the land,” Goshen, where Jacob and his entire household could settle with their flocks and herds.

Yet the speech of Jacob strikes as somewhat negative. He tells the Pharaoh, “My years have been few and difficult” (verse 9). He enters Egypt at age 130, and he lives another 17 years there before he dies. To us, 130 years are not a few! But have the years of Jacob been difficult? To be sure, everyone’s life has joys and sorrows, ups and downs. What have been Jacob’s particular burdens, and have they outweighed in number and severity the times of joy and prosperity that he has enjoyed?

Israel in Egypt: it sounds ominous! And it would become a serious threat to the covenant family of God later on as the story in Exodus would tell it. But for the moment, God has brought Israel—the man Jacob and his children—to a kind of oasis on the road back to Paradise. They live in the best part of Egypt, but this is only a sojourn, for God’s people do not have an abiding place in Egypt—or in this present world.

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Baptism, Election, and the Covenant of Grace

(Part Three)

Confessional Teaching

It should not surprise us to find that the same distinction that made by Calvin and the Reformed theologians appears in our confessional documents. In Q. 20 the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) asks, “Are all men, then, saved by Christ as they have perished in Adam?” The answer is, “No, only those who by true faith are ingrafted into Him and receive all His benefits.” Does baptism “ingraft” the baptized into Christ? Not according to the next question which defines true faith as

...a certain knowledge and hearty trust... which the Holy Spirit works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.

We confess that the Holy Spirit works faith in the elect through the preached gospel. We do not confess that the Spirit creates faith through baptism, nor do we confess that baptism makes one elect, united to Christ, justified, or adopted. Question 65 tells us how we are united to Christ:

Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, where does this faith come from?

The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the Holy Gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.

The divinely ordained means of bringing the elect to faith is not baptism but the preaching of the Holy Gospel. Baptism is a sign and seal of the preached gospel, but does not replace it in the administration of the covenant of grace.

The teaching of the Federal Visionists, that baptism makes us elect, united to Christ, and justified cannot be reconciled with the teaching of our catechism. According to Question 66, the function of the sacraments is not *to create* union with Christ, but to *confirm* union received through faith.

The sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals appointed by God for this end, that by their use He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the Gospel, namely, that of free grace He grants us the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.

According to the catechism, the sacraments serve as a visible gospel word to encourage believers that what they hear each Lord’s Day from the pulpit really is true for them.

Our confessional doctrine of baptism must be read in the light of the confessional internal/external distinction and in the context of the confessional distinction between the visible and invisible church. These distinctions are affirmed either explicitly or implicitly in all our confessional documents. For example, in *Belgic Confession*, Art. 29 we confess that there is a “company of hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it....” *Heidelberg Catechism* questions 54 and 55 make a distinction between the Holy Catholic church, which it treats as the church invisibly considered and the “communion of saints” which it treats as the church visible. It also speaks explicitly (Q. 81) about the presence of baptized members whom it calls hypocrites.

This distinction also illumines *Canons of Dort* 1.17 which says:

Since the will of God is to be judged from His Word to us, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but by the benefit of the covenant of grace, in which they with the parents are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt concerning the election and salvation of their children (*de electione et salute suorum liberorum*) whom God is pleased to call out of this life in infancy.

One proponent of the Federal Vision has argued that, unless we are willing to say that covenant children who die in infancy become elect by

virtue of their death, we must say that all baptized infants are elect by virtue of their baptism. If all infants are elect by virtue of their baptism, then all baptized persons are elect.

I respond, however, that neither this nor any other article in the Canons teaches that all baptized infants are elect or that all baptized persons are elect. In effect, this article is used as a lever against the internal/external distinction and as a way to create a confessional basis for the Federal Vision doctrine of temporary, conditional baptismal benefits.

Ordinarily, churches make a judgment about whether a person is a believer on the basis of their profession of faith. In the death of a covenant infant we face an extraordinary case in that we must make a judgment about the state of a covenant child dying without a profession of faith.

The Synod of Dort does not ask us to reason, in this case that “if baptized, then elect.” The article confesses that “the children of *believers* are holy...by benefit of the covenant of grace.” The background for this doctrine, of course, lies in 1 Corinthians 7:14. The children of Christian parents are holy because at least one of their parents *believes*. The basis for the judgment that some covenant children dying in infancy are elect is the parents’ profession of faith, not the baptism of the child. That is why the article

speaks of the “benefit of the covenant of grace.”

The term “benefit” was well established in Protestant theology before 1618. It denotes the benefits already discussed in this essay as “Christ’s benefits.” These benefits, however, are said to belong to *believing parents*. The adjective “believing” is essential to a right understanding of the article. The Federal Vision writers misunderstand this distinction because they confuse the class of those who have made a profession of faith with the class of those who actually believe. They are correct to insist that we deal with members on the basis of their credible profession of faith, but they are wrong to identify profession with true faith. This article does not say, “those who make a credible profession ought not doubt,” but rather it says that “pious parents ought not to doubt.” Indeed, believers ought to trust the promise of God, “I will be your God and your children’s God.” There is no promise here, however, that the baptized children of all professing members are elect. Neither is there an unequivocal promise that children who participate in the external administration of the covenant of grace, who die in infancy, are elect.

Article 17 must be read in the light of Article 16, which teaches that this promise does not apply to reprobates within the covenant of

grace. Article 16 defines the adjectives “believing” and “pious” used in Art. 17. Believing parents are those who have a “living faith in Christ and “a certain confidence of the heart” (language deliberately reminiscent of *Heidelberg Catechism* Q. 21). This class of members is plainly distinguished from “reprobates” and it is to this class of members that the promise applies.

One proponent of Federal Vision has assumed his denial of the internal/external distinction, and thereby confuses profession of faith for true faith, ignored the crucial role of true faith as the sole instrument of justification and that which distinguishes those who have Christ’s benefits from those who have only administration of the covenant, and he has read that denial into this article of the Canons. By doing so, he has constructed a universal benefit to all children of all baptized members without reference to their faith. Nothing in the *Canons of Dort*, read in context, supports such a construction.

IV. Pastoral Theology and Conclusions

There is a clear difference between the views being published and preached by the proponents of the Federal Vision and the doctrine taught by and confessed in the Reformed churches, it is not always clear what the Federal Visionists are saying. Sometimes they contradict themselves and they do not all say the same thing, at least not in the same way at the same time. Sometimes, despite the books they have published and conferences they have held with this title, they have even denied that there really

The Federal Vision writers misunderstand this distinction because they confuse the class of those who have made a profession of faith with the class of those who actually believe.

is a Federal Vision movement. Upon review of the literature produced by the movement it is apparent that there is real diversity in the movement, and yet there seems to be a genuine agreement among them that we are brought into the covenant by grace, with all its benefits, through baptism, and we remain in the covenant and in possession of those benefits by faith and obedience.

It is also evident that the movement is quite confused and confusing. For example, it is true that Israel was the national people of God temporarily and even conditionally — Paul speaks of the Old Covenant (2 Cor 3; Heb 8:13). It is distinctly unhelpful and even false, however, to speak of a historical, conditional election or to confuse an allegedly historical-conditional election with eternal election in the doctrine of salvation.

What are congregations to make of this controversy? Imagine a congregation wherein a minister preached and taught (e.g., in catechism classes) for a decade that the idea of a distinction between law and gospel is “Lutheran,” that there is no distinction between the covenants of works and grace, and that our covenant children became conditionally and temporarily elect, united to Christ, justified, and adopted by God in baptism, that infants are therefore eligible for communion, and that baptized persons shall retain Christ’s benefits if they cooperate sufficiently with grace. Imagine that he taught them and the entire congregation that they had better keep their part of the covenant or risk losing all these baptismal benefits by falling away.

There is real diversity in the movement and yet there seems to be a genuine agreement among them that we are brought into the covenant by grace, with all its benefits, through baptism, and we remain in the covenant and in possession of those benefits by faith and obedience.

Now imagine that this congregation’s next minister taught just the opposite, that relative to justification, the law says one thing and the gospel another, that the covenants of works (or nature) and grace are quite distinct, that baptism is sign and seal of the promises of the covenant of grace but does not itself confer all of Christ’s benefits even temporarily, that therefore one must make a credible profession of faith before communion and that election is only unconditional and eternal. Imagine that this minister preached and taught justification by grace alone through faith (defined as a certain knowledge and a hearty trust) alone, that the Christian life is lived in grace and out of gratitude for grace, and that according to Scripture none of Christ’s elect shall fall away. It is evident that our imaginary congregation shall have been taught two quite different and incompatible accounts of the Reformed faith and life.

Such scenarios are not entirely imaginary. Two ministers have already left the URCNA largely because of their sympathy with the Federal Vision doctrines. In one case a congregation was split over these doctrines. Other congregations, consistories, and classes have been troubled by these very issues.

It seems clear that the categories

(ways of thinking and speaking) and approaches to Reformed theology, piety, and practice of the classical Reformed tradition do not interest the Federal Visionists. They seem largely ignorant of anything in Reformed theology before the 19th century. They seem to be bent on re-creating Reformed theology in their own images, albeit using our vocabulary. It seems beyond doubt that the language and categories of the Reformed confessions, which, in the last analysis, must define what it is to be Reformed, do not control the Federal Vision theology.

This essay has demonstrated that the Reformed confessions know nothing of the Federal Vision definition of baptismal benefits of Christ and their denial of the two modes of communion in the covenant of grace. The refusal of the Federal Vision writers to distinguish between the two modes of communion in the covenant of grace, and their doctrine that baptism necessarily makes the baptized elect, united to Christ, and justified, had created not only theological but pastoral problems.

In the first instance the Federal Vision has fueled the growth in popularity of the doctrine of *paedocommunion* or infant communion, the practice and

theology of which is being ably refuted by Cornelis Venema in the pages of this magazine.

Reformed churches ought to reject not just the theology and practice of paedocommunion, but we ought to reject the root error of the Federal Visionists, e.g., their doctrines of baptism, covenant, and election, and in so doing we shall cut off the blood supply to their doctrine of paedocommunion. If there are two ways of being in the covenant of grace, and if baptism is the sacrament of initiation and the supper is the sign of profession, then we cannot simply assume that infants or even very young children are necessarily eligible for the supper simply because they are baptized. For these reasons and others given in this essay, the confessional Reformed doctrine of baptism, covenant, and election, requires our consistories to hear credible professions of faith before admitting young people to the table.

Were the Federal Vision doctrines of baptism, covenant, and election correct, then Esau must have been at least historically and conditionally elect, united to Christ, justified, and adopted. Indeed, in defending their view, some proponents of the Federal Visionists have argued to me that Esau *was* historically elect, united to Christ, adopted, and justified and that he would have retained these benefits but that he lost these benefits by unbelief and disobedience. It is beyond me to see how such a claim differs materially from the views we condemned at the Synod of Dort. Therefore it seems to me that the Reformed churches have a solemn duty to protect our churches from the errors of the Federal Vision. How should we proceed? We should follow the model

of the great Synod of Dort (1618–19) for addressing this crisis.

Though the differences between the Remonstrants (Arminians) and the Reformed are clear today, they certainly did not seem so in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Remember that Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) was involved in controversy for at least seventeen years before his death and there was no definitive action by the Reformed Churches against his doctrine for another nine years after that. Thus, it took almost thirty years for the Reformed Churches to resolve this crisis.

Like the Remonstrants at the time of the Synod of Dort, the Federal Visionists claim to believe the Reformed confessions and like Arminius and the Remonstrants, not everything they say is false. Like Arminius and the Remonstrants, they insist continually that they are maltreated and misrepresented by their critics.

It is true that, as with Arminius and the Remonstrants, these are difficult questions, but it is also true that, as in the earlier case, these are questions of the greatest importance to our faith, to the gospel, to the churches and their ministries, and like our forefathers at the Synod of Dort, it is time for the Reformed Churches to take decisive action against the Federal Visionists for the peace and purity of the churches.

It is not as if nothing is being done.

Several confessional Reformed seminaries have taken public stands against the Federal Vision theology. Some of the denominations within North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) have also begun taking disciplinary action against the Federal Vision doctrines. At their 2005 General Assembly, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church restated their conviction that the historic Reformed doctrine of justification summarized in the Westminster Standards remains their confession. In 2006 the same assembly received a detailed report criticizing the Federal Vision and adopted recommendations to disseminate the report and its conclusions in the denomination and to take steps to prevent the ordination of Federal Vision supporters to the ministry.

The 258th Synod (2004) of the Reformed Church in the United States adopted a report highly critical of the Rev. Norman Shepherd's doctrines of baptism, covenant, election, and justification and presently has a committee studying the Federal Vision movement. Several sessions and at least one Presbytery in the Presbyterian Church in America have adopted statements condemning the doctrines of the Federal Vision and the 2006 General Assembly established a committee to report on the Federal Vision and the New Perspectives on Paul. In October, the PCA Standing Judicial Committee concluded that aspects of the Federal Vision "strike at the vitals

Reformed churches ought to reject not just the theology and practice of paedocommunion, but we ought to reject the root error of the Federal Visionists.

of religion” and are “hostile to the system of doctrine” and criticized the Louisiana Presbytery for failing to protect the peace and purity of the church when it approved the theology of a vocal proponent of the Federal Vision within the presbytery.

At Synod Calgary (2004) the United Reformed Churches in North America rejected the doctrine and practice of paedocom-munion declaring:

The confessions to which the URCNA subscribe (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort) accurately summarize the teaching of scripture in, for example, 1 Cor 11:24–25; 28. Thus our confessions, in harmony with the scripture, require that the Lord’s Supper be administered only to those who have publicly professed their faith, in the presence of God and His holy church.

Synod gave two grounds for this statement; first that, in our standards, “we confess the purpose, participants, and manner of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in such a way as to make clear that a personal and understanding faith is a prerequisite for coming to the Table of the Lord” and second, that “the church order applies our confessions by stipulating that those who partake must first express their faith via a public profession”

On a related question also touching the Federal Vision, in response to an appeal from two lay congregants, Synod:

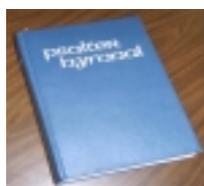
...affirms that the Scriptures and confessions (Heidelberg Q/A 59-62; Belgic Confession articles 20-23) teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, based upon the active and passive obedience of Christ alone.

Synod also declared that a sermon preached by a URCNA minister propounding doctrines related to the Federal Vision was “unclear and confusing on the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone” and advised the minister’s consistory to work pastorally with him to bring his

views into conformity with Synod’s declaration regarding justification.

This is a start, but much more needs to be done. The influence of years of the Federal Vision teaching remains. Let us hope that God will give us the courage to address these matters with integrity and compassion.

Dr. R. Scott Clark is Associate Professor of Historic and Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in California.



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The New Testament Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (Part Five)

At several points throughout our treatment of the biblical evidence that is relevant to the question of paedocommunion, we have noted that 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is the most important passage to consider. In the historic confessions of the Reformed churches, this passage is often adduced to prove that participation in the Lord's Supper requires the presence of faith on the part of its recipients. Since it is the only biblical passage that directly treats the issue of what is required for a proper or worthy reception of Christ by means of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it has obvious significance for the question of paedocommunion. The historic view and practice of the Reformed churches, which insists upon a public profession of faith on the part of children of believing parents before they are admitted to the Table of the Lord, represents an application of the themes of this passage. For advocates of paedocommunion, therefore, this passage requires special attention, as it presents an apparently insurmountable obstacle to their insistence that covenant children be admitted to the sacrament without a prior attestation of their faith.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Before we proceed to an exposition of this passage, however, we need to return for a moment to a passage that was briefly discussed in an earlier article in this series. This passage is 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

We need to consider this passage, since it is cited by some advocates of paedocommunion in support of the practice of admitting covenant children to the Table of the Lord. It is also regarded as a passage that sets a context and framework for the apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, which takes up again the subject of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

In the judgment of some advocates of paedocommunion, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 is a passage of particular significance, since it establishes a basic premise that undergirds the argument from covenant membership on the part of children to their reception at the Lord's Table. That premise is that the Lord's Supper represents in a most powerful way the unity and fellowship of the whole body of Christ, including all of its members. Speaking of the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul declares: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." In this passage, Paul sets forth a theme that runs like a thread throughout 1 Corinthians, the theme of the unity of Christ's body and the full participation in him of all members of the covenant community. The Lord's Supper, as this passage clearly shows, is a beautiful expression of the oneness

of the body of Christ and the fellowship that obtains between all members of the church. This theme constitutes the background to Paul's sobering rebuke to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11, where the apostle points out how their divisiveness in the way they celebrated the Lord's Supper was a sin against Christ's body, the church. For this reason, the judgment of the Lord had fallen upon some of them, just as the Lord's judgment fell upon the disobedient Israelites in the days of Moses (1 Cor. 10: 6-10).

The principle that the Lord's Supper belongs to and expresses the oneness of the body of Christ, which is summarized in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, is not an isolated theme in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Already in 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul has noted that the children of believers are "holy." Furthermore, at the outset of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul describes how believers of the old covenant were "all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," "ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink," and "drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (vv. 2-4). This description not only provides an Old Testament precedent for all members of the covenant community, including the children, having a part in Christ, but it also constitutes the setting for Paul's emphasis upon the "fellowship" or "koinonia" that all members of the church have in Christ. The implications of this for the question of paedocommunion is clear, according to some paedocommunionists. Any participation in Christ by means of the Lord's Sup-

per that inappropriately divides the congregation into segments (rich and poor, adults and children), and excludes some from full participation in the body of Christ, falls under the apostle's admonition of the Corinthians. The practice of excluding covenant children from participation in the Lord's Supper strikes at the heart of what the sacrament means for the unity of Christ's body.

Though this appeal to 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 appears to support the paedocommunion case, I am not convinced that it is sufficient by itself to establish the paedocommunion position. It is true that the Lord's Supper is a powerful witness to the unity of the church. The participation of believers in Christ, which the sacrament represents, has inescapable implications for the unity between all who are members of the body of Christ, the church. However, it seems rather premature to argue from the theme enunciated in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 to the claim that all covenant children should be admitted to the Lord's Table, lest the oneness of the body of the church be compromised. After all, the paedocommunionist appeal to this passage in support of the admission of such children can only be sustained, if the particular teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 does not stand in opposition to it. If 1 Corinthians 11 teaches what the Reformed churches historically have understood it to teach, then the paedocommunionist appeal to 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 will prove to be premature and unwarranted. No matter how strongly 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 associates the Lord's Supper with the theme of the oneness

of Christ's body, it still remains to be seen whether this demands the admission of all covenant children to the Table. Since 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is a passage in which the apostle Paul expressly addresses what is required for participation in the sacrament, it must retain its unique status as the single *most decisive* passage for determining whether such children should be admitted to the Lord's Table.

However, there are two additional considerations that should be borne in mind in response to a paedocommunionist argument from the principle set forth in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. First, this passage does not warrant the inference that the membership of children in the covenant community is jeopardized, should the privilege of being admitted to the Lord's Table be withheld from them for a period of time. It is instructive that the participation in Christ of which the apostle Paul speaks at the outset of 1 Corinthians 10, was inclusive of non-circumcised persons (and even animals!) who accompanied the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings. The meals that were eaten during this period of history did not require circumcision, and were not governed by the Deuteronomic stipulations that applied to the annual Passover meal. To appeal to these Old Testament observances, which the apostle Paul mentions at the begin-

ning of 1 Corinthians 10, as precedents for who should share the new covenant meal, the Lord's Supper, seems faulty for several reasons, not the least of which is that it proves too much. And second, the paedocommunionist representation of the historic Reformed position is needlessly prejudicial at this point. Representing the historic Reformed practice as though it "cut off" the children of believers from participation in Christ and the covenant community may seem to have merit, but it is a kind of "straw man" argument. Historic Reformed practice acknowledges that the children of believing parents are members of the covenant community and of Christ. This practice also acknowledges that such children should come to the Lord's Supper in order to enjoy the nourishment in Christ that this sacramental feast provides. But it insists that the way believers come to the Table is stipulated in Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

Whether 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 has the implications for the subject of paedocommunion that is sometimes alleged, therefore, depends finally upon how 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is interpreted. It is time, therefore, that we take up directly this passage and consider it in some detail.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

In our treatment of this passage, we will follow an outline that has often

Historic Reformed practice acknowledges that the children of believing parents are members of the covenant community and of Christ.

***He intends to issue a strong rebuke to them
because they were not following the tradition that
they had been taught regarding the meaning of
the sacrament.***

been recognized by previous interpreters. The passage nicely divides into four sections: verses 17-22, which identify the problem in Corinth that characterized the church's celebrations of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; verses 23-26, which contain the apostle Paul's summary of the Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper; verses 27-32, which provide instructions on the way recipients of the sacrament ought to receive the body and blood of the Lord, lest they participate in an "unworthy" manner; and verses 33-34, which return to the original problem that Paul is addressing in the Corinthian church and offer instruction on how the Corinthians should wait for each other when they come together to eat, lest they continue to experience the Lord's judgment upon them. Since the third of these four sections contains instructions that are most relevant to the question of the proper recipients of the sacrament, we will give it more extensive treatment.

**The Occasion for Paul's
Instructions (vv. 17-22)**

The particular occasion for Paul's instructions regarding the Lord's Supper in this passage is not difficult to identify. The apostle begins by noting that in the following instructions he does not intend to "commend" the Corinthians (v. 17). Rather, he intends to issue a strong rebuke to them because, in their

celebration of the Lord's Supper, they were not following the tradition that they had been taught regarding the meaning of the sacrament. When the Corinthians came together in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper, there were "divisions" and "factions" among them (vv. 18-19). Though Paul acknowledges that he knows this only upon the basis of oral reports, he regards these reports to be accurate and judges, accordingly, that their coming together was "not for the better but for the worse" (v. 17). He also identifies the source of these divisions as "evil men," and observes that God will use them nonetheless to achieve his good purpose. As he describes this purpose, "there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized" (v. 19).

Before considering the apostle Paul's description of the way this divisiveness in the Corinthian church was expressing itself, it is important to observe that the divisions that he identifies in this passage are different than the divisions that he mentioned earlier in his letter. Though the apostle uses the same word ("schism") in this passage as he used earlier in 1 Corinthians 1:10, the earlier divisions that he identifies in the Corinthian church displayed several characteristics that are absent from his description in 1 Corinthians 11. In his previous description of

divisions in the Corinthian church, the apostle spoke of a party spirit, which gave birth to "quarrelsomeness" and "jealousy" within the congregation (1:11; 3:3-4). Nothing is said about such quarrelsomeness and jealousy in 1 Corinthians 11.

Furthermore, the divisions noted earlier in his letter were between at least four parties, each of whom favored one apostle, or even Christ himself, over the others. The schism in the Corinthian church involved a spirit of opposition to the apostle Paul on the part of some members, and was rooted in the differing allegiances of the church's members to their spiritual overseers. Unlike the divisions that Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 11, the divisions that Paul characterizes in the earlier portion of his letter were not of a sociological nature (between rich and poor), and did not express themselves in the context of the gathering of the covenant community for the purpose of worship and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Though there may be a broad connection between these distinct forms of factionalism in the Corinthian church, the particular focus of the apostle's comments in 1 Corinthians 11 is different than in the earlier portion of his letter.

In his explicit description of the divisions he has in mind in this passage, the apostle notes that they were exhibited in the context of the church's "coming together" in order to participate in the Lord's Supper.

When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, an-

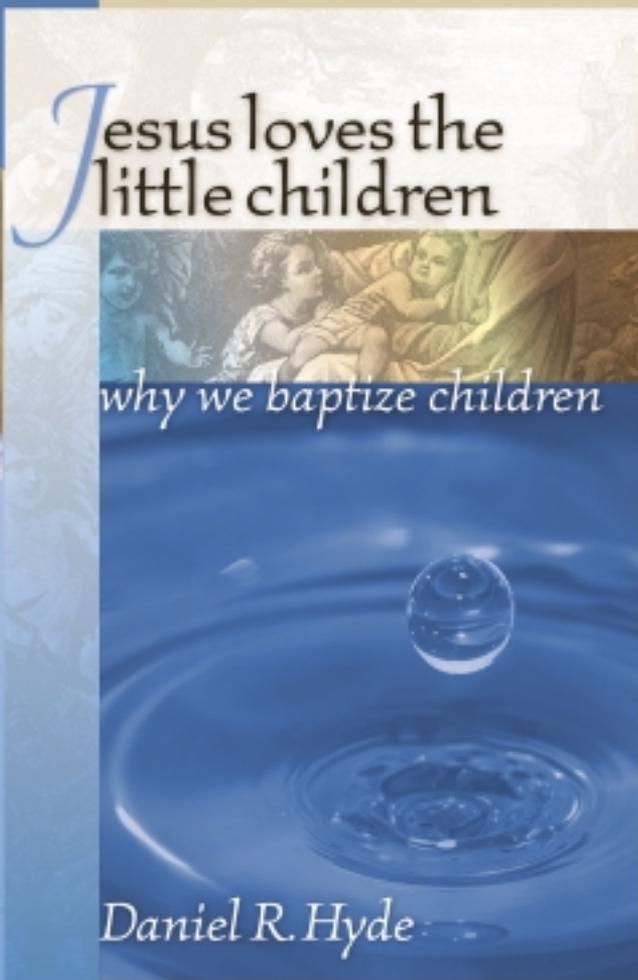
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Daniel R. Hyde is the
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other gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. (Vv. 20-22)

The language of the apostle in these verses is sharp and severe. When the Corinthians come together for the purpose, among other things, of participating in the Lord's Supper, there are divisions among them. These divisions are evident in that some members proceeded to eat and enjoy "his own meal," ignoring other members who were poor and remained hungry. The conduct of some of the Corinthians amounted to a reprehensible dividing of the one body of Christ, since some members enjoyed a personal feast in the presence of other members with whom they did not share their plenty. Since this divisive and unseemly conduct occurred within a setting that included the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the apostle goes so far as to say to these members that their celebration of the sacrament was not an eating of Christ at all.

Because their divisiveness struck at the very heart of the communion or participation of all members of the body in Christ, which is represented so powerfully in the sharing of the sacramental meal, it falls under the strongest condemnation of the apostle. We should not conclude from this that the apostle is condemning all members of the Corinthian congregation, or suggesting that the Lord's Supper was not being celebrated by any of the Corinthian believers. The language Paul uses makes clear that he is speaking directly to those in the

Corinthian congregation who were guilty of the kind of behavior he describes. These members are clearly distinguished from others who are presumably not at fault for the divisions that obtained in the Corinthian church at its gatherings for the celebration of the sacrament.

The significance of this occasion for the apostle Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church in this passage remains to be seen. Advocates of paedocommunion tend to argue that this occasion limits the application of what the apostle says subsequently about the Lord's Supper to those who may be guilty of the same conduct as some in the Corinthian church. They also appeal to this occasion for a particular understanding of what Paul goes on to say about a proper "discernment" of the Lord's body. Because Paul is admonishing the Corinthian believers for an abusive practice that wrongly divided between different segments of the Lord's body, some proponents of paedocommunion argue that the one over-riding imperative of this passage, which must govern any celebration of the Lord's Supper, is: make no distinctions between members of the covenant community (whether between rich and poor, or between adults and children), lest the meaning of the sacrament as a Table of unity be undermined.

I do not have any objection to an emphasis upon the context for Paul's

teaching in this passage. Context is always of special importance to the interpretation of any Scriptural passage. What I object to in this case is the use of context to override the clear particulars of a passage. In my judgment, it is a premature and unwarranted use of this context to conclude that any restrictions upon participation in the sacrament violate the principle of the unity of the body of Christ. We will have to determine, when we treat the more relevant sections of this passage, whether this is so or not.

The Institution of the Lord's Supper (vv. 23-26)

Immediately after the section that describes the abusive practice of some of the Corinthians in their celebration of the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul turns to the "tradition" regarding the sacrament that he received from the Lord himself. In this section, the apostle wants to remind the Corinthian church that the Lord's Supper belongs to the Lord, and not the Corinthian believers. Their celebration of the Supper, accordingly, must be governed by the teaching of the Lord Himself and the terms set forth at the time of the sacrament's institution.

In his summary of the institution of the Lord's Supper, the apostle emphasizes especially the two purposes for which the sacrament was ordained: first, to "remember" Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross; and second, to "proclaim"

It is a premature and unwarranted use of this context to conclude that any restrictions upon participation in the sacrament violate the principle of the unity of the body of Christ.

His death until he comes again.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Whenever believers participate in the Lord's Supper ("as often as you drink it"), they do so in obedience to the Lord's command to remember Him and His sacrifice for His people. The bread that is eaten and the wine that is drunk signify the body and blood of Christ, and the new covenant that is based upon His sacrifice upon the cross. Furthermore, the act of partaking of the sacrament is a divinely-appointed means of proclaiming the death of Christ. The sacrament is a public declaration of Christ's work, and fosters in believers the expectation of Christ's return, even as He promised.

The usual interpretation of these words of institution is that they require an active and responsible participation on the part of recipients of the sacrament. Those who eat the body and drink the blood of Christ must do so, not in a witless or uninformed manner, but as believers whose remembrance and proclamation of Christ's death requires the "mouth of faith." However, in their handling of these words

of institution, some paedocommunionists argue that we should translate the language, "do this in remembrance of me" (vv. 24-25) as "do this unto my remembrance." In this view, the remembrance in question is not so much a subjective act on the part of the believer who receives the sacrament, but an objective act on the part of God (and the believing community) in which the sacrament's observance is itself the memorial. In this connection, an appeal is made to the language of Leviticus 24:7 and the general Old Testament theme of "remembrance/memorial." On analogy with the Old Testament usage of the language of "memorial" in connection with the appointed feasts (cf. Num. 10:10), the Lord's Supper is itself an objective memorial/remembrance of Christ's death.

When Christ commands those who partake of the Lord's Supper to do so in remembrance of Him, therefore, he is not setting forth a requirement for participation in the sacrament but declaring its purpose. If this is the sense of the words of institution, then it is no longer permissible to appeal to the language of receiving the sacrament "in active remembrance" of Christ to exclude immature and non-professing members of the covenant community.

At the level of the grammar of the passage, the question this raises is whether "of me" in the original language of the text is an "objective" ("remembrance of me") or "subjective" ("my remembrance") genitive. Though it is possible to take it in the latter sense, as some paedocommunionists suggest, it is instructive that English translations of the text usually take it to be an "objective" genitive. Within the setting of

Christ's words of institution, and the imperative addressed to the recipient of the sacrament ("do this ..."), this seems to be the likeliest translation. To quote the common words employed in the administration of the sacrament, recipients of the sacrament are summoned to "take, eat/drink, remember and believe" The point of the Lord's words of institution is that the participant in the sacrament is placed under the obligation to obey the Lord's command, to act in a way that expresses an informed remembrance and believing proclamation of his death. In the historic understanding of the Reformed churches, a public profession of faith on the part of a covenant child is the ordinary means whereby the presence of that kind of faith is confirmed.

Conclusion

Since we have not yet treated the most important section of this passage (verses 27-29), we are not in a position to draw any firm conclusions regarding its implications for the subject of paedocommunion. All we may conclude at this point is that the apostle is addressing a particular problem in the Corinthian church's celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The problem is that some members of the church were acting divisively in the context of their reception of the sacrament. Rather than sharing their food and drink with more needy members of the congregation, they were eating and drinking (to the point of drunkenness!) while others remained hungry and forgotten. In this context, the apostle chooses to address the subject of a proper reception of the sacrament. In order to provide a framework for his instruction, he begins by appealing to Christ's words at the institu-

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(continued from pg 31)

tion of the Supper. The Lord's Supper is Christ's, and it must be celebrated in accordance with Christ's command.

So far as the question of paedocommunion is concerned, these words of institution seem to place the recipient of the sacrament under the obligation to partake in the way of an active faith, which is capable of remembering and proclaiming the sacrificial death of Christ. In the historic understanding of this language, it has typically been argued that this requires an attestation of faith on the part of those who are admitted to the Lord's Table. Advocates of paedocommunion, however, argue that this is not a necessary inference that must be drawn from the language the apostle uses. Since the most decisive section of the passage remains to be considered, we will resist the temptation to draw any more definitive conclusions at this juncture.

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